

ROBERT (Bob) SMITLEY

Date: May 7, 2015

Damian Macey Interviewer

Transcribed by Donna Duzan, January 2017

D: I am at the home of Robert ...I call him Bob...Smitley, on Pine and Third Street in Marshall. And I am here to record his oral history. So, Bob, tell us a little bit about your childhood and whatever you what to tell us about your early childhood in Marshall.

B: I was born April 5, 1941 in Washington, D.C. My parents were Robert L and Helen Frazier Smitley. I have two brothers, Joe and Jim and two sisters, Patricia Nave and Mary Zachary. I moved to Marshall in the summer of 1942. My dad was originally from here and then he moved back to Marshall in 1942 after being in Washington DC for a few years. When we first moved back we lived with Grandma Smitley on South 8th St then we moved to 915 Locust. In 1959 we moved to 811 Ash St. I have lived in Marshall for 73 years.

D: You said in 1959 you moved to 811 Ash, that was with your parents. And where did you go to school?

B: South school for Kindergarten through 6th grade. Then to the junior high and on to high school.

D: Do you remember any of your teachers?

B: Yes, first grade was Helen Jane Fredenberger, second grade was Ruth Fredenberger, third grade was Irene Manhart, fourth grade I don't recall, fifth grade was Myrtie Melton, and sixth grade was Bill Arney (Steve's brother).

D: Do you have a favorite memory of elementary school?

B: Well, one thing, we always played the north school in the sixth grade in softball. That was always a big thing.

D: Who was the winners?

B: I don't remember that.

D: The old South School, I always thought was a beautiful building and I kinda hated to see it torn down. Anything in particular that you remember about that structure?

B: No, of course in the summer, the windows were always up.

D: No such thing as air conditioning then.... OK moving on to high school...did you have a favorite subject?

B: Wood shop...

D: And who was the teacher of that?

B: I don't recall.

D: And what year did you graduate?

B: 1959

D: And then from there...

B: I worked at Joe Smitley's grocery store for a couple of years. Then at TRWwell, it was Formalite back then...

D: Yeah, Formalite....I think of it as a coiling business back then did you work on a production line?

B: I worked in quality control.

D: What did that entail?

B: Basically, the coils have so many windings of wires on there ... I had go through and take a test to make sure the number of wires were right... there was a space in there that you had to check.

D: Have you been in TRW lately?

B: I haven't been back since I left in 1963.

D: TRW is such an automated factory now, so sophisticated now, I thought you might make a comparison to then and now. And how long were you with Formalite?

B: About two years....then I went to work for Uncle Sam in the Army.

D: And what were some of your experiences there?

B: Well, going to Vietnam was the main experience.

D: Good or bad or both?

B: Good and bad both. Made a lot of good friends there in the military.

D: Do you still keep in touch with some of them?

B: Well, Billy Ray Ulrey...he just lives over in Martinsville. We were together the whole time we were in. Another friend is in Wisconsin I see him about once a year.

D: Were you in Vietnam the whole time?

B: No, I was in Fort Benning, Georgia for a time.

D: And what was your position there?

B: Combat engineer.

D: Was Fort Benning generally training?

B: Yes, I took basic training in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

D: What time of year were you at Fort Leonard Wood?

B: The winter, it was cold.

D: And did they still have the old wood or coal furnaces?

B: No, we were in the new brick barracks. I think we were the first group to be in there. They were actually very nice.

D: I'm sure you were glad to be out of Uncle Sam's clutches.

B: Oh, yeah.

D: Did you come back to Marshall from the service?

B: Yeah, in 1965.

D: And what happened then?

B: Well, I just kinda took a break....I had a couple part time jobs working down at the Legion home as janitor down there and I helped Jack Mallory on the trash route and I helped Uncle Joe down at the Checker Station across from Kirchner's.

D: Was that Checker's just a gas station or did they have groceries and stuff too?

B: They had gas and a few groceries.

D: You mentioned your Uncle Joe's grocery....where was that located?

B: On North Second Street.

D: That was pretty much a full service grocery store.

B: Yeah, and they had delivery. That was one of my jobs.

D: That would be an interesting experience.

B: It was.

D: I bet you found that people were not always upbeat.

B: Most people were very cordial.

D: So from the grocery delivery job, what was your career path?

B: After that job is when I went to TRW. Then I went to work at Quality Lime in 1966.

D: And your position there was

B: I worked in the office on the scales.

D: And where was Quality Lime at that time?

B: It was where Golf Lakes Subdivision is now.

D: About how many people were employed there at that time?

B: About twelve.

D: Was the gravel pit operational from there at that time?

B: Yes, that is what made the lakes at the subdivision.

D: Who were the owners at that time?

B: Van Tarble

D: And then his son Martin?

B: And now it's in the next generation...Jerry and John Tarble.

D: That one of the few local generational businesses left.

B: Yes, they have been there.well they were at Clarksville at one time.

D: What was their primary ...I know it's Quality Lime...but they sold a lot more than just lime.

B: Ag lime and then also road rock, several different types of road rock.

D: Did they have their own delivery trucks?

B: No, they just hired local trucks.

D: What are some of the highlights or working there?

B: Well, I met a lot nice people, truck drivers.

D: Any that stand out in your mind?

B: No, there were so many it would be hard to

D: With your experiences with the Tarble Family, you got to know them quite well too I'm sure.

B: Yes, they were very good to work for.

D: Have they become more sophisticated over the years, their operations? What are some of those changes?

B: Everything is bigger, trucks, excavators.

D: That would a business where you would have to keep spending more to keep updated. What about the scales? Where they automated? I know my dad's you had to lift and keep moving along.

B: We were still doing hand tickets when I left. I retired in 2003 and then we still wrote hand tickets. We entered information into a computer to do the billing. But now it all automated, you punch in the customer number and weight and all the info and you get a billing amount.

D: So you saw major changes in that way.

B: Yeah, a lot of changes in billing. Everything still just keeps getting bigger.

D: Is there some disadvantage to that too?

B: I don't think so.

D: What about the bigger equipment....is it harder to operate?

B: I don't think so.

D: Did you ever have any desire to be out driving one of the trucks instead of working in the office?

B: No, it was pretty nice in there.

D: So you retired in 2003?

B: Yes

D: How many years were you there?

B: Not quite 37 years.

D: Did you look forward to retirement? Did you say to yourself 'I can't wait till retirement?'

B: Exactly

D: So you never regretting it?

B: No, I did go back and worked a couple weeks for someone taking vacation, Travis Speros.

D: Let me ask you this, did you ever feel bored after retiring?

B: No

D: I didn't think so. I know you have a work shop here, is that kind of a hobby?

B: No, not really. I really don't have the tools to do anything.

D: What are some of your hobbies?

B: Well, grandkids mostly right now. I have 7, 5 here in Marshall and 2 in Indianapolis.

D: Five here in Marshall. Is that Indianapolis proper?

B: Carmel

D: So, if that is your hobby, you see them here in Marshall.

B: Of course I've still got some in grade school, so I take them to school and pick them up in the evening, take one to preschool three times a week. And then I help my son Rob mow yards in the summer.

D: Oh, I didn't realize you were doing that.

B: Yes, its good exercise.

D: So Rob still does some yard mowing?

B: Yes, he does.

D: I remember long ago he did a lot of mowing.

B: Yeah, he does four yards right now.

D: And Rob son you call Robby?

B: Bobby.

D: And how many yards does he have?

B: He doesn't have any now, he got out of the yard mowing business.

D: Did people have their own equipment?

B: No, we hauled by truck and trailer. I mowed lawns after I retired. I did Irene Low and Mary Frances Harper's for a couple summers. And Granny Smitley, I was still working when I did that one.

D: You just mentioned a name that was a fixture in the community ...Granny Smitley.

D: Would you tell us a little bit about her?

B: After I mowed her yard she would always bring me a glass of ice tea...boy you talk about sweet tea... it was about as sweet as you could get !! It was about like drinking syrup. But you had to drink it ... she would stand right there in front of you .

D: Did that just make you more thirsty?

B: Yeah, Granny was quite a lady. She had eleven children...my dad being the oldest.

D: What were some facts about her life? I know she loved music.

B: Oh yeah, she did. She played the piano.

D: So she was your grandmother.

B: Yes, my dad was her oldest child.

D: What else did she enjoy? Did she like to cook?

B: She loved to cook...with eleven children... She worked at the courthouse at one time, in the treasurer's office for Mr. Tarman. One story I remember about her in her later years, she was going to the beauty shop and she had a little fender bender.... the police came and she told them she didn't have time to fill out any paperwork because she was going to be late for her beauty shop appointment and away she went.

D: That just kinda sounds typical.

B: She lived in the big house south of the bowling alley and a couple times in the summertime we would all go up there and have homemade ice cream.

D: Did she make the ice cream?

B: Oh yeah.

D: That was quite a gathering ...

B: Yes, it was.

D: With the memories of Granny, does the family have a reunion?

B: Yes, the last one we had, we had 125 people there. We had it down at the American Legion.

D: When families get so scattered out it gets hard to get together.

B: She was very much a supporter of your church, wasn't she?

B: Oh yeah, she is the reason we all are Catholics. She was a catholic but her husband wasn't.

D: Did she walk to church?

B: I really don't remember.

D: What do you remember about some of the foods that she cooked?

B: Well, everything she fixed was good.

D: Since she liked her sweet tea, was her specialty sweets?

B: All the Smitley's like their sweets.

D: Looking back to some of those childhood days...did your family have a pet?

B: Yes, we had a dog. She was part bull dog and something else. In fact, it was Granny's dog and when moved from her house, the dog moved with us so we kind of inherited the dog.

D: What was the dog's name?

B: Trixie

D: Well, there was a young lady I saw here a few minutes ago...where did you meet her.

B: We were neighbors ... just a couple blocks away from each other. She lived on South Tenth south of Archer and we lived on the next corner.

D: So Marilyn was your neighbor...did you just know her from the neighborhood?

B: No, I was two years older than her.

D: And what was her maiden name?

B: Quick

D: And what year were you married?

B: 1964, December 26th.

D: So you have celebrated a very important anniversary...

B: Yes, 50 years.

D: And over those years, you have lived here?

B: We lived on 115 N 9th for seven years, and we have lived here 43 years.

D: Well, it seems like home then.

B: Exactly

D: What has been your biggest memory of home ownership?

B: When we paid the mortgage off.

D: That is an important item. Is there an important person in your life that has really made a difference in your life? Someone you feel was most important?

B: (inaudible)

D: And you have had some children...

B: Yes, three children, two sons and a daughter.

D: Where...I know you mentioned Sarah lives in Carmel, IN And the two boys are here in Marshall...Rob and Michael.

D: Did they live outside the community at any time?

B: Michael did. He lived in Indianapolis, I don't remember the years. He was just there a couple years.

D: He decided Marshall was a pretty good place to live?

B: Well, he got a chance to interview at Marathon for a job and he got the job, so he moved back to Marshall.

D: And was he married at that time?

B: Yes.

D: Where does his wife come from?

B: She is from Martinsville, IN

D: And her name is Nancy?

B: No, Jen.

D: Oh, okay, Rob's wife is Nancy.

B: And she is from Hutsonville.

D: Did they meet in school?

B: No, how they meet is, Rob was janitor up at the post office and Nancy's mom was working there and she thought he was a pretty nice guy, so her mom got them together.

B: And Michael's wife is Jen? She's from Indiana.

D: I'm sure you are glad to have them close by.

D: Are there some historical events that really stand out in your mind.

B: Yeah, I was thinking about that. The Kennedy Assassination.

D: Do you recall what you were doing that day and that time?

B: I had just gotten my draft notice about a week before that.

D: And how did you react to that?

B: I was really looking forward to him being president, a young man.

D: Did you hear it on TV or hear it on the radio?

B: I don't remember.

D: I happened to be in a barber shop. Did you have a chance then to watch some of the funeral and ceremonies?

B: Yes, I did.

D: And that really was an unbelievable event that took place in our lives. With the modern conveniences that we have today, is there some invention that you thought changed your life and you felt that you couldn't live without?

B: Well, central air and heat. Of course when we were kids we had coal stoves. I remember when mom got a gas stove that was really a big deal. Of course there was bottled gas at that time.

D: I know what bottled gas is but a young person today would not even know what that is. So what is your explanation of that?

B: Well, its propane gas in a small tank. Of course it set outside your house and a line went into our stove. I think people...when I was a kid...I tell people that and they don't know what that was. I used to sell corn cobs...at that time farmer had corn cobs because they picked by the ear...when you had a coal stove you needed something to get it going and people would use cobs to get their fire going. I'll never forget...I would get my wagon and put three burlap bags in it and sell the bags of cobs for ten cents.

D: Now those were not soaked in oil or anything.

B: No, you did that before you put them in the stove.

D: I remember my grandfather kept a can, it was just a bean can with the top cut out, and he always kept coal oil in that and he would three or four cobs soaking in that all time and that is what he used to start the fire. Kids today would have no idea about any of that. Times have really changed. So you really like air conditioning?

B: Oh, yes.

D: If there is a tool that you couldn't get along without....what would it be?

B: No, well, a power lawn mower. I've done a lot of yards with the old push mower.

D: Do you recall what you charged when you did lawns?

B: Two dollars...it you got two dollar that was big.

D: If you were to be in a foreign country and someone asked you about your town and why it is a good place to live...what would you tell them.

B: It's a great place to live...everybody is friendly, it's a clean town, a good place to raise a family, good schools, you would have a hard time getting me out of Marshall.

D: Well, you have been to other parts of the world, but you think Marshall is a pretty good place.

B: Yeah, I do.

D: Do you remember anything from your childhood days that was different in Marshall?

B: Well, of course back then we bought everything pretty much in Marshall, in our neighborhood we could play outside until dark every night, play "kick the can", your neighborhoods were friendly, didn't care if kids played in their yards.

D: How has the neighborhood changed where you grew up?

B: Mainly there aren't many kids around there anymore.

D: Do you think our streets around town are materially different now?

B: No, not a whole lot.

D: I think that that is part of the reason why we are a quaint little village.

B: We do have more street lights than we used to.

D: Any I don't think in some neighborhood there were any street lights. There is a big difference in the appearance of the high school.

B: In fact, when we went to Junior high it was over in the old high school.

D: Well, it has been very interesting to talk with you, Bob, and perhaps someday someone will wish to read this history that you gave us.

B: And I do think that our town has a very nice library.

D: Yeah, it's not just used for books, either. Well, thanks again, Bob, and we wish you good times in your retirement.