

Interviewees: R.D. and Euzelle Smith

Interviewers: Alexander Stephens and Alex Biggers

Interview Date: January 20, 2011

Location: Chapel Hill, NC

- 0:01 Euzelle teaching farm kids in South Carolina and earning about \$500 per year; reflection on difference between SC and Newport News, VA; R.D. graduated a year ahead of Euzelle at Hampton College
- 1:55 Introductions: Alexander Stephens and Alex Biggers interviewing R.D. and Euzelle Smith
- 2:26 R.D. joined the military in 1944 after they were married in 1943; stayed in service 26 months; discusses his trip to the Pacific and back
- 4:00 Explanation of his assignment in the military with a 933rd anti-aircraft unit; story about his first night with that group and their expertise in destroying a plane—"They were crack shots. Crack shooters...Nobody got by 'em;" story of commanding officer who helped him get back home
- 6:10 Getting home and buying a car and building house for himself and his wife; "I built this house from the ground up;" moved there the first Saturday in Nov. 1950; the sitting room in which the interview took place was an attached garage so he could drive in and not get wet, but he needed place for his daughters to entertain at night so he and Euzelle could go to bed if they wanted
- 7:20 The sitting room cost more than it did to build the house; he had that room built, but he built the rest of the house; using a book about how to build a house, and reading it over and over again; it took about one year to build; how he got friends to help him build it—"I had about 20 guys with hammers and saws working on the top of this house in one night."
- 8:50 Asking about his nickname at Lincoln High—"the master;" his mission was to make a difference in the lives of the kids he taught; Euzelle explains he did much more than teach, such as driving the activity bus and training bus drivers because students drove the buses then; the students chose him to supervise transportation; only teacher in NC at the time to teach kids to drive straight shift cars
- 10:50 Asking if his nickname had anything to do with his craftsmanship; Euzelle explains students started calling him that when he drove the activity bus; getting the "Tiger Bus" for Lincoln High; people were proud of the "Tiger Bus," named that for the Tiger on the front wheel

- 13:00 Asking if most of what he learned about building a house came from the book from elsewhere; most of it came from his curiosity and watching trade students in carpentry and other trades; Euzelle's brother, an electrician, wired the house; R.D. had a friend from church do the plaster on weekends; had a plumber come in and watched him do it to learn; the maximum mortgage he had on the house was \$129.90/month with North Carolina Mutual in Durham
- 15:20 The house was paid off in three or four years; he was the highest paid teacher in the school system, making \$125/month; R.D. sent Euzelle \$50/month while he was in the army to buy furniture; she saved it all; how teachers rented rooms in houses—they lived in a house next door when they got married; the point system in the army and coming home
- 17:30 R.D. scored high enough for promotion to officer but refused it because he wanted to go home to Euzelle, as they'd been married for only a number of months; Euzelle on working at Orange County Training School while R.D. was away with the army; explains the raising of the graduation grade from 11th to 12th and the problem with kids not being able to find a job
- 19:50 What became Northside School was originally O.C.T.S. but "training school" had a negative connotation, so they changed the name to Lincoln High but then Lincoln moved to what is now Lincoln Center, and it became Northside Elementary; the front part of Northside was demolished; description of the architecture of the building
- 21:40 Euzelle's first year in Chapel Hill she had too many students for the size of the classroom, which was on the porch; R.D. had his shop in the basement, which was only about half the size of their living room; discussion of new school that will be called Northside; the former Northside school may be a pre-school now
- 23:30 Discussion of Potter's Field; not sure of why it's called that; where Euzelle came from, Potter's Field was a slum area, so she never told her parents that she lives in Potter's Field in Chapel Hill; asking for a walkthrough of what they would have seen in Potter's Field when they first moved there; the physical space hasn't changed that much, but the homeowners have changed; much more rental properties now
- 25:30 Their house on Caldwell was not within the city limits; they didn't have paved roads; one summer there was a grass fire in the field by their house, and a fire truck came but the firefighters did not even get out because they didn't qualify for city services; Euzelle wasn't angry about it—"That was just the way things were. You accepted it, you know."

- 27:20 Got paved roads some time in the 1950s after R.D. came out of the service; before that they used to sprinkle motor oil in the streets to keep the dust from flying up during the summer time; there wasn't much traffic at the time but now R.D. says it's like a thru-way sometimes with cars going through Chapel Hill to Carrboro; traffic increased after they annexed Caldwell St. into the Town; houses were converted to rentals as older people died
- 30:15 (Their grandson Sean walked in)
- 31:10 "Are you close with a lot of your neighbors?" no, because a lot of them are tenants; Euzelle is fine with students as neighbors because they're peaceful and don't disturb the community; some of the people next door are foreign; "Peaceful neighbors—they don't mingle, but they don't disturb you either;" before they used to do a lot of things with their neighbors, the Caldwells and the Hargraves; R.D. is from Goldsboro and a woman who taught him shorthand, Arlena Rigsby, used to live down the street
- 33:20 Euzelle explains that a lot of people on their block were related when they first moved there—named for the Caldwell family; across the street was Wilson Caldwell, Ed Caldwell lived down the street and his wife lived across the street, on the end of the street were the Foushees, Maggie Cray was Euzelle's landlady
- 35:00 "Do you miss that?" not at our age; we don't get out that much; their daughter lives a couple of houses down, but other than that there's not much interaction; a lot of friends and relatives were involved in the construction of the house; "You know that Smith Middle School is named for us?" (moving to other room)
- 37:00 Showing an aerial view of the Smith Middle campus and explains that because of its proximity to Chapel Hill High School and a branch of UNC, it's a K-16 campus; R.D. shows pictures of his parents, the "Over the Hill Gang," who were four students of them; one of them committed suicide, but the other three always come by on special occasions to see him; the room with the pictures is where R.D. spends most of his time
- 40:00 The living room was a garage, and the room R.D. spends his time in was a deck; showing pictures of their children, and also of the extended family; looking at the fireplace, which they use for heat if they lose power; most of the materials for the house came from Fitch Lumber Company in Carrboro; he had an account there—they would send over whatever he needed and he'd pay later; it was the only place you could buy lumber from in the area; R.D. still shops there even though it changed ownership
- 44:20 R.D. adjusting fireplace; Euzelle doesn't like fireplaces; they had one chimney fire there once

- 45:30 Euzelle explains that on one wall of the house, everyone had an award, but she's been trying to get the children to take theirs; her favorite part of the house is probably the living room; R.D. pointing out family members in photographs on the wall; showing their diplomas from Hampton College
- 47:40 R.D. explains that when their first daughter was born, his mother stopped her work as a nurse to come to Chapel Hill and take care of their children while they were at work; "Ain't nobody gonna take care of my children except me;" she lived in the house across the street from them and would come over every morning to take care of the children; there was a daycare center over at what is now Hargraves Center, but they didn't take infants
- 49:15 Euzelle explains that her mother-in-law didn't want the kids in daycare, but she wanted them to mingle with other children; their twin girls took a full year at daycare before they talked with other children, and she wonders what would have happened if they had waited to put them in daycare; Euzelle doesn't like the kitchen because she's never liked to cook; "When I got married I had never cooked a full meal...for family"
- 50:30 Euzelle and R.D. were self-help students at Hampton, which they used to call work-year students; people were credited money in an account for working in order to pay for school; "When I graduated from Hampton, Hampton owed me money," R.D. said; he worked in the kitchen, and Euzelle had many different jobs; Hampton was almost self-sufficient because they had a farm with livestock and vegetables, they had a cannery
- 52:30 They were paid \$.25/ hour and they never saw the cash; it was just credited to an account; "Is there a part of the house that you are particularly proud o building?" (Phone rings; recorder runs out of memory)

--End of Interview--

(The interview continued for about twenty minutes after this in which Euzelle told some stories from her work as a teacher.)