

Elin Langholm
November 15th, 2001.
Introduction to Oral History.

Interview # 2

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT: The history of East Carolina University.

NARRATOR: Frank Saunders.

INTERVIEWER: Elin Langholm.

PLACE: Saunder's home in Greenville, North Carolina.

DATE OF INTERVIEW: November 13TH. 2001.

Field notes

I have kept in touch with my first narrator, Pia Leahy, over the phone. When we spoke to each other a while ago, I asked her if she knew about someone else who could be a good narrator for me. I was interested in someone else with an international background.

However, one day she calls me and tells me about Jo and Frank Saunders. She told me that this married couple was good friends of her, and that they both worked at ECU for many years. Dr Leahy had already told the Saunders about me, our oral history project and that I needed someone else to interview. From what I understood, they were both very interested in talking to me. Pia Leahy did not know that I wouldn't conduct interviews with more than one person at the time, so I had to explain this when I called the Saunders. Jo Saunders answered the phone and we had a nice and interesting conversation. She told me she was a professor in dance, and that she had many stories I might find interesting about the history of ECU. I decided that this was a person I would like to talk to, and we decided on a date and time to meet. I was welcomed to come to her home Tuesday 13th of November at 3 o'clock. I did some planning and research for

the interview, and developed many potential questions I wanted to ask her.

Unfortunately, my planning did not help me out very much this time

I got a call from Jo Saunders Tuesday morning a few hours before the scheduled interview. She asks me if I would mind talking to her husband instead. I told her that I didn't mind, but I was of course thinking about the preparation I had done for an interview with her. However, because of "time-pressure," I took the chance and decided to interview her husband, Frank Saunders. I did not have time to go to the library or do much background research. I went on the Internet, and I was able to find some information, and also a picture of him on the ECU-web site.

When I arrived at their home, I got a feeling that Jo Saunders cancelled her appointment with me in order for her husband to be the narrator instead. Both of them welcomed me warmly, and guided me in to the living room. We sat down by a small table with two chairs. I told him about our project, and about the interviewing. While we talked about these things, I set up the equipment. I did bring an extra power cord, but before I had time to take mine from the purse, Mr. Saunders disappeared into another room and came back with one.

He seemed very interested in the whole project, so we started to interview just a few minutes after I came there. His wife went out in the backyard, the house was quiet and there were no disturbances during the interview. The interview lasted for a little over one hour. I wish we could go longer, but the power suddenly went out in the house and down the whole street. (I should have brought batteries! But who did think about that?). Even though the tape recorder went dead, we continued talking and ended the interview naturally like I would have done if the tape were still running.

We had already talked about his background, education, teaching, ECU, sports, Greenville, etc when the power went off. The most interesting parts of the interview are on the tape. However, I went home and took some notes of what I could remember from the last part of the interview. I just want to mention that Saunders told me a lot about the importance East Carolina University has had for this area, about what ECU meant to him and many others. I asked him how he felt about retiring after so many years. He said that it was very special, something he had looked forward to, and at the same time something he was scared of. He told me he enjoyed it, that he and his wife try to travel out of the country at least 3-4 times a year. He told me he was an active golf player and sports fisher, and that he enjoyed doing these things he never had time to do before. However, he said: ".....Golf and raking leaves in the yard gets old after a while.....I need to keep busy...I like to interact with people.....Sometimes the days get long".

I believe Frank Saunders enjoyed the interview. I know I did. All in all it was a very positive experience for me, and he was a very nice and "human" old man. He thanked me for listening to his story, and he said: "...I can't believe one hour went by so quickly....well, that is how I am when I start memorizing about the old days". I could still hear these words in my head when I was sitting in my car on my way home. It became very clear to me that there are so many stories and perhaps so many people that we forget about. I felt that there is a need to continue this project, because there are always more people to interview and more stories to listen to. People's stories are important, and I believe oral history has an important role in telling these stories. I will further reflect on this issue in my final paper.

Self -critique

There are some problems and thoughts that occurred in this interview that I would like to reflect over. The first problem I discovered was that Dr. Saunders could not hear very well. I was not aware of this in the beginning. When he went into another room, his wife came over to me and told me about his problem and told me to talk loud. Knowing this, of course I did try to ask loud and precise questions, and this went well. However, he misunderstood my questions on a couple of occasions. This was a difficult situation for me and I was not sure how to handle it. I should have tried to stop him, and ask him the question one more time. The problem was that he did not ask me to repeat the questions; he just started answering what he thought I had asked him. I had a feeling there were so much he wanted to tell me during that 1 hour.

Example of misunderstandings that occurred due to this problem:

- Questions- “ What did your parents do when you grew up? What kind of job did they have?”
- Answer:” Well, I had an offer to go with the Government.” He tells me why he started teaching.
- Question: “Did you see many changes on campus during your years here?”
- Answer:...”I saw the biggest changes in elementary school..... where kids just to got whipped.....The kids didn’t question the authority”.

I tried to ask him over again, but I had a hard time interrupting him when he was talking. He was very clear in the way he spoke and I sensed that he liked to finish talking about what he started. He wanted to follow his line of thought to the end. On the other hand,

this also allowed me to ask many follow-up questions. It also led me to some very interesting issues that I didn't know about, and would never thought about asking.

Dr. Saunders was a great story- teller. I started out asking him about his place of birth and background. I chose to ask a very open-ended question to see where he would take me, and how he responded to the interview situation. I think he felt very at ease with it, and his response to this first question ended up being a lot longer than I expected. He actually guided me through and gave me an overview of his background, education and working life. This was of course very valuable for me when I didn't get a chance to do much research on his career beforehand. It also enabled me to go back and ask more detailed questions about parts of his story that seemed interesting to me.

All in all, I was satisfied with the information I got and I was also happy that the interview went as good as it did without much preparation. It was tougher to be an interviewer when I didn't know so much about him beforehand. I had to be a very good listener in order to grasp his story, ask follow up questions and guide him to parts that I wanted to hear more about. However, I had time to type up some questions before I went to Dr. Saunder's house, and these notes were very helpful for me. Although the interview was very dynamic, the typed up questions helped me get the conversation back on track.

I think that every interview-situation is different. Good planning is of course crucial, but at the same time you have to be open to changes that might occur. Things are almost always different than you believe they are! These are issues I bear in mind in the preparation for my fieldwork in Dominica.

I did not feel that issues of "power" were very apparent. I was a little concerned about this before the interview. I knew Dr. Saunders had been a Professor in Mathematics

for so many years, and I wondered how I could respond to that. Mathematics is definitely not my strongest side. I decided to be a “human being” first and foremost, and we did get along very well during the interview. The whole interview situation and “power-issue” will be very different in my fieldwork. Here, I have been interviewing people that have worked in academia for many, many years, and the narrators can perhaps be called “high-status”. The situation in my fieldwork will be completely different concerning: gender, race, status, etc. These are issues I will reflect further over in my final paper.

<u>Initials</u>	<u>Side</u>	<u>Counter Number</u>	<u>TOPICS OF DISCUSSION</u>
EL	1	001	<i>Introduction</i>
EL	1	006	<i>Background:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Born in Reidsville, North Carolina on September 27th, 1922. - Education: UNC- 1940 > 1945: Degree in Mathematics. United States Naval Academy for two years. Left UNC ABD.
EL	1	100	<i>South Carolina:</i> A professor at Coker College in Hartsville, South Carolina helped Saunders to get a teaching position at that University in 1949 where he taught for 12 years.
EL	1	144	<i>East Carolina College:</i> A colleague told him about the available position at ECU and Saunders contacted Dr. Jenkins who were the president of ECC at the time. Saunders came to ECU as a full professor in 1961.
EL	1	190	<i>Marriage:</i> Frank Saunders met his wife Jo when he worked for Coker College. She was an associate professor in dance, and they got married in 1951. When the couple arrived in Greenville in 1961, they had a son, Frank, who was 8, and a daughter, Mary Jo, who was 6. Dr. Saunders retired when he was 70 years old in June of 1993. He taught one more course in the spring of 1994, but started to say no when they asked him to step in after that. Dr. Saunders said it was like having a full time job because there were so many things you had to get involved in.
EL	1	266	<i>Why Mathematics?</i> He always did well in Mathematics and that was what he was interested in.
EL	1	334	<i>Parents:</i> His father was in the Tobacco business and an insurance salesman. His mother taught 5 th and 6 th grade. They both supported him to go to college, but it was his decision.

EL	1	352	<p><i>Arriving in Greenville:</i> The first impression of Greenville was not so good when they came driving down Dickinson Avenue. His wife wanted to go back to South Carolina. They later agreed to stay because of the benefits Dr. Saunders got at the University. He also hoped that situation with de-segregation would be better in his "home-state" than what the couple experienced in South Carolina.</p> <p>Changes in Expectations of student and Professor.</p>
EL	1 & 2	550	<p><i>Sports:</i> Dr. Saunders was a member of the Athletics Committee at East Carolina University for many years. He was also in charge of the Cheerleaders, and responsible for getting money for different purposes, for example so the cheerleaders were able to go with their football team to games in other areas of the country.</p>
EL	2	205	<p><i>ECU is important for Greenville:</i> Dr. Saunders believes that ECU has been and will continue to be extremely important for Greenville and Eastern Carolina. The university tries to keep in tune with the region, and tries to emphasize their programs in areas that will enhance the living conditions in this area. Dr. Saunders has enjoyed working at East Carolina University for all these years. He further argues that Duke and Chapel Hill does not give the chance to many students who are less fortunate, because of their high tuition and standards. Many students graduating from ECU is competitive with students from colleges with a higher reputation. There are so many children who deserve to go to college, and everyone should have the chance.</p> <p>The power went out when conducting this interview- that is the reason for the sudden ending of the tape. After the power went out, Dr Saunders continued telling me about his life as a retired professor.</p>

Elin Langholm
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Greenville, NC 27858

Frank W Saunders
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Greenville, NC 27858

December, 3rd. 2001.

Dear Dr. Saunders,

First of all, thank you so much for telling me your story about your life and work here at East Carolina University. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to listen to your fascinating story. It was a very valuable and enjoyable experience for me, and I learned a lot. Also, I am very happy that Dr Leahy suggested you as a good potential narrator in my work. I am glad I listened to her, and took the opportunity to conduct this interview with you. She was right, you had some great stories to share!

Your interview will be kept in the Special Collections at Joyner Library, together with many other interviews my classmates conducted the fall of 2001.

Again, I am grateful for your time, for the interesting conversation we had, and for the important information you gave me about the history of East Carolina University and of Greenville.

I will use this opportunity to wish you and your family a happy and peaceful Christmas.

Sincerely,



Elin Langholm.