

50/100 Interview Transcript

GremmelsRuth.doc • Page 1 of 10

TRANSCRIPT

TIMECODE

Ruth Gremmels: Ruth, you'll have no problem spelling that.

Q: No.

Ruth Gremmels: Abigail, A-B-I-G-A-I-L, Gremmels, G-R-E-M-M-E-L-S.

Q: I'd like to start talking about your personal history and how you came to the area in the beginning. So you met Jim at college you were just saying but how was it that you came to central Minnesota?

Ruth Gremmels: There was a teaching/coaching job at Glenwood High School that opened up and my uncle was on the school board and he called Jim and said, "You've got to apply. We want you." And at the time Jim was in graduate school at the main campus in Minneapolis, Minnesota and that's how we came to be here.

Q: Do you remember how Jim came to hear about the opportunity at UMM?

Ruth Gremmels: I think it was in the Minneapolis Tribune that he saw that the campus was going to open at Morris and he came home from high school and he said, "I'm going to apply for this job, Ruthie." I said, "Great." But I said, "I won't move. I want to stay in this house." Well he said, "I think we could do that." So off he went to apply and he was called for an interview and somehow he had written down the wrong day so he went to Morris to meet with Rod Briggs [ph?] and Rod wasn't in his office because the secretary said, "You were supposed to be here yesterday, Mr. Gremmels." So they had to reschedule the appointment.

Q: Do you remember Jim's early impressions? I mean was he impressed by the campus? What did he think about UMM?

Ruth Gremmels: He had been on the campus when it was a, yeah, what was it called, the agricultural college for farm boys and girls so he knew about the campus as it was then, didn't have very many buildings but he liked it, thought it was a nice place.

50/100 Interview Transcript

GremmelsRuth.doc • Page 2 of 10

TRANSCRIPT

TIMECODE

Q: Did you have any reservations with the fact that UMM was a new institution?

Ruth Gremmels: Well it was shaky at the beginning because we were told that it was an experiment and it might not last long but the original faculty was determined to make it work.

Q: Who do you remember of that original group? You are talking Jim was one of the originals. They call them the original 13.

Ruth Gremmels: Yes, yes.

Q: Do you remember who he got along with and who he spent time with?

Ruth Gremmels: Well, of course, with people in the English department, Donald and Evelyn Spring [ph?] and then there were teachers that were at the high school that also were brought along on the faculty. I remember one in particular that taught English was Ted Long [ph?] and his wife Toni. Some of the faculty members on the university faculty were not very friendly with the former ag school faculty.

Q: Interesting. Why was that?

Ruth Gremmels: Well they just felt I suppose superior to the high school teachers.

Q: I can imagine. I can imagine. We've talked to some people who were here in the early days and they talked about the fact that, as you said, UMM was an experiment and they talk about having to kind of scrounge for materials.

Ruth Gremmels: Oh, yes.

Q: Talk about that.

Ruth Gremmels: Oh, yes. Jay Rochelle [ph?] was in the science department. In fact

50/100 Interview Transcript

GremmelsRuth.doc • Page 3 of 10

TRANSCRIPT

TIMECODE

he was the science department and he would take trips to the main campus to get equipment for the biology department or chemistry department, kind of borrow from the Minneapolis campus.

Q: How about English do you remember talking about that?

Ruth Gremmels: Well Jim carried a heavy load. I think he had three sections of freshmen or was it four? I think it was three plus he was the basketball coach so he didn't get home very much during those first years, Jim in particular. He was a good German man and drank lots of beer. They would shop around. This would be Spring _____ and Clyde Johnson I remember and they'd take turns after they found the cheapest liquor store and then they'd load up a station wagon with beer and then deliver it to the various faculty members and they would pay their amount. Sometimes the case of beer would be under \$5. Some local breweries wanted their business so they would charge very little for a case of beer, bottled beer.

Q: I understand another part of the story was that the Morris liquor store, the guy refused to carry it, is that right?

Ruth Gremmels: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: So how did that—

Ruth Gremmels: They were little stores. For instance, do you know the city of Johnson? Well they'd go out to Johnson to the Bear's Den it was called, get 25 cases or something, yeah.

Q: So you mentioned earlier that Jim started his teaching three classes. He was also the basketball coach but he only did that for a short time. Why was that?

Ruth Gremmels: Because Jim was not qualified to teach basketball. He didn't have the five credits that were needed, although he had taken the Glenwood team to the state tournament when there was only one state tournament and there were eight teams out of the whole state that went to the state. But he didn't have the proper accreditation for teaching. And also in those first years I think there were nine young men out for basketball so in order to have a scrimmage Jim would suit up and be the

50/100 Interview Transcript

GremmelsRuth.doc • Page 4 of 10

TRANSCRIPT

TIMECODE

fifth person on the scrimmage team.

Q: I imagine in those days he probably still played pretty well.

Ruth Gremmels: Oh, yes, yes.

Q: Well he was a fixture. I remember when I first came to Morris he was still coming to noon ball on occasion.

Ruth Gremmels: Oh, yes, yes, yes and he loved to play horse up until his last days I think.

Q: And he always was a very big advocate for student athletes I know.

Ruth Gremmels: Oh, yes, yes.

Q: There's a massive list of former athletes who will talk about Jim.

Ruth Gremmels: Yeah.

Q: Why do you think that was important to him?

Ruth Gremmels: Well he felt that that was a perfect learning experience for life. The things that you learned on the court could carry over into your life in the big, bad world.

Q: That's true. I completely agree too. He was the longest reigning faculty member. It doesn't have to be one thing but what do you think he loved most? When you were having a hard day, I remember when I was having a hard day I would go into the parking lot and I'd see that car with the maroon gold stripe. I was like Gremmels is here and if he can come every day and do the work he does, I can do it right?

Ruth Gremmels: At his age, yeah.

50/100 Interview Transcript

GremmelsRuth.doc • Page 5 of 10

TRANSCRIPT

TIMECODE

Q: Right. Why do you think he loved it so much?

Ruth Gremmels: He loved teaching and at the end he wanted to teach one more year and he taught for one week and he came home on a Friday and he said, "I can't do it." And that's when he just went into a tailspin.

Q: He was also a big motivator of local politics on campus.

Ruth Gremmels: Yes, yes and statewide too. He was so proud that he could be an elector and vote for Obama.

Q: He was a staunch DFL-er.

Ruth Gremmels: Yes.

Q: Why did he believe in the DFL Party so much?

Ruth Gremmels: He felt it was the people's party and they were always on the right side as far as education and the environment. And he got his start in politics when I think he was six years old when he started handing out leaflets and pamphlets with his grandmother.

Q: Is that right? Wow.

Ruth Gremmels: She was like a ward boss in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Q: Do you remember at the time, I mean you lived in Glenwood, what was the reputation of UMM in the early days among local folk?

Ruth Gremmels: Oh, it was good.

Q: It was good. How so?

50/100 Interview Transcript

GremmelsRuth.doc • Page 6 of 10

TRANSCRIPT

TIMECODE

Ruth Gremmels: Well the original students were nearly all the first ones in their families to go to college. They were all close to the school and the people felt it was their college.

Q: You're right. I remember those original classes. Everyone came from a 35-mile radius and it truly was.

Ruth Gremmels: And to be the first child to go to college was really important.

Q: And you've had your children and grandchildren who have graduated there as a parent, as a grandparent.

Ruth Gremmels: I graduated from there.

Q: You did? Tell me about that.

Ruth Gremmels: In 1971. Jim was one year ahead of me at Augustana and when he graduated I left and put him through graduate school. He had used up his GI Bill so he needed me to help him.

Q: What's your degree?

Ruth Gremmels: I was trying to get a history major finished up but I had a year left. I was a junior. Jim was a senior. And I couldn't get the required credits but I switched to elementary ed and managed to cram all those credits in a year and a summer so then we ran off together the two of us.

Q: But then you said you graduated from UMM in '71.

Ruth Gremmels: Yes.

Q: What was your degree? What courses were you taking?

50/100 Interview Transcript

GremmelsRuth.doc • Page 7 of 10

TRANSCRIPT

TIMECODE

Ruth Gremmels: I took elementary then to finish up and then I taught one year in South Dakota and 25 years here in Glenwood.

Q: I know that you personally— I'm a big sports fan and I got but you are a fixture. You are a fixture at the games, same seat, top row.

Ruth Gremmels: Yeah.

Q: Why do you enjoy it? I mean obviously Jim's involvement is one reason but what else do athletics add to the campus?

Ruth Gremmels: What do they add?

Q: What do you enjoy about going to the games? Maybe that's a better way to ask it.

Ruth Gremmels: Oh, I'm always disappointed when I go. There are so few students there. That upsets me. Well, it adds a great deal to the environment of a campus. I'd like to see them cheering their team up but they don't often come. I guess I started to really study the game when Jim was in college and, of course, I'd go to all of his games and he taught me too a lot about the game, the intricacies.

Q: And Jim really was, he was sort of the embodiment of a scholar/athlete where he could treat the game as an intellectual endeavor as well as a physical endeavor.

Ruth Gremmels: Yeah. And he was in the process of writing a basketball book and he was going to call it the Orange Manual which I thought was clever.

Q: Over the years what are your favorite things about being associated with UMM, not just through Jim but for you? What have you enjoyed most about it?

Ruth Gremmels: I think the culture, getting to hear good music and good speakers, authors that's important. And in the early days the faculty was so close. We were like one big family and we all had similar problems and little children and young marriages

50/100 Interview Transcript

GremmelsRuth.doc • Page 8 of 10

TRANSCRIPT

TIMECODE

and lots of parties. We had a good time.

Q: I heard there was a pretty active social life.

Ruth Gremmels: Very active.

Q: The dance parties.

Ruth Gremmels: We were all pretty poor and so we made our own entertainment.

Q: Do you remember what Jim's starting salary was?

Ruth Gremmels: Yes. He would make \$2,000 more a year than high school and I think it was \$5,000 was his beginning salary.

Q: At Morris or at the high school?

Ruth Gremmels: At Morris.

Q: And that was for the teaching and coaching duties?

Ruth Gremmels: Yes, yes. So it was a lot of skimping.

Q: What do you think UMM has done for the area? How has the area of west central Minnesota benefited from UMM's presence?

Ruth Gremmels: Oh, I think it would be impossible to measure. I think it did so much for those students that first came for instance. Of course the economy in Morris was greatly improved with all these young faculty people. The bankers were very happy to get all these young families in. When Jim bought his white Mazda he came home and he said, "I'm going to have the local body man put stripes on my car." I said, "Stripes? I think it looks nice the way it is." "No," he said, "I want a maroon and a gold stripe running up the front and all the way down the back." I said, "Kind of weird but go

50/100 Interview Transcript

GremmelsRuth.doc • Page 9 of 10

TRANSCRIPT

TIMECODE

ahead.” So he did and a few weeks later I think it was Johnson that was chancellor then, David Johnson, he said he got a call from a concerned citizen that Mr. Gremmels in Glenwood is using a university car for all his traveling.

Q: Using people’s tax dollars.

Ruth Gremmels: Yes. My tax dollars are being spent.

Q: But I think that car was such a great symbol of what a fan he was.

Ruth Gremmels: Yes, of course it was.

Q: There’s a lot of people who say they love UMM but there’s not a lot of people who would paint their car.

Ruth Gremmels: And he traded that car in and bought a pickup and he had the same thing done to the pickup, the maroon and gold.

Q: You wouldn’t happen to have any pictures of that car would you?

Ruth Gremmels: Boy, I don’t think so. I don’t think so.

Q: It was such a great symbol.

Ruth Gremmels: I could look. If I find one I could give it to you.

Q: If you do come across one we’d love to have it. To me Jim was not only the longest faculty member but he was the number one fan and really who would do that? Who would paint their car with a big maroon?

Ruth Gremmels: I thought it was going a bit far but he didn’t mind and he always parked in the same place that north parking lot.

50/100 Interview Transcript

GremmelsRuth.doc • Page 10 of 10

TRANSCRIPT

TIMECODE

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