

GHS 62

Interviewee: Seymour Block

Interviewer: L. Perry

Date: Unlisted

C: Your name is?

B: Seymour Stantin Block.

C: How old are you?

B: I am fifty-three.

C: What is your position at the University right now?

B: I am a professor of chemical engineering.

C: How long have you been living in Gainesville?

B: I have been living in Gainesville twenty-seven years.

C: Twenty-seven years, which would put it at 1944?

B: Yes.

C: Where were you living in Gainesville prior to coming here?

B: We lived at 629 Southwest Ninth Street.

C: Here in Gainesville?

B: Yes.

C: I am talking about prior to living in Gainesville.

B: Prior to living in Gainesville, I lived in Louisville, Kentucky.

C: Why did you move here?

B: I moved here because I got a job at the University. My parents had moved here. My mother used to live here--not in Gainesville, but in Florida. It was a nice place to live.

C: What was your position then back in 1944?

B: I was assistant professor.

C: Of what?

- B: Chemical engineering.
- C: How large was the University then?
- B: The University, when I came here, was right at the end of the war. We had only 700 students. That was not the usual size of the University. Prior to the war, it was larger than that. During the war it was larger. Just at this time, the training classes they had at the University had been cut out. So it was probably a low point in the enrollment at the University.
- C: Do you have any idea what it was prior to the war?
- B: Yes, it was around 3,000.
- C: You are involved in the ZPG. Is that correct?
- B: That is correct.
- C: What is your position?
- B: I am currently a member of the National Board of Directors.
- C: How long have you been in ZPG?
- B: About three years. It is about the length of time that ZPG has been in existence.
- C: That is when it started out right? Three years ago, what was the reaction at first to a zero population move?
- B: It was strange. People could not understand it, and some resented it. Most people did not see the need for it.
- C: How do you compare that to now?
- B: I think it is quite well recognized today, particularly since both houses of the Congress have a resolution before them sponsored by many senators and representatives. One is a representative from Florida. [They want] to make zero population growth a goal for the United States and the world.
- C: When did you first start considering this? Had you thought about this prior to this?
- B: Yes. I had read a book dealing with the subject of population and the environment. It came out back in the early 1950s.
- C: When did you start becoming not just concerned yourself, but involved in ecology

and population control?

B: It went back about the time I started the ZPG.

C: About three years ago?

B: Yes.

C: Before that you were not involved?

B: I was involved in a different way. Not as a citizen, but I was involved professionally. For example, I had a project for five years in which I was concerned with taking waste materials--garbage, sewage stuff, and sawdust--and trying to convert that to useful materials. In this case, I was trying to convert them to mushrooms, and using it as a compost to grow mushrooms, which we did quite successfully.

C: When was this project actually formed?

B: I started work on producing mushrooms from waste materials. Before I did that from the garbage and sawdust, I did that from the citrus waste. I did that back in 1950.

C: Was this more an economic or an ecological project?

B: I think it was largely an economic problem rather than ecologic problems.

C: Was there any concern? Was it ecological at all, or was the majority of it for economic reasons?

B: I think it was essentially for economic reasons. We had not awakened at that time to the problem of the ecology.

C: How long was this project continued?

B: Five years. It was more than that. I started it about 1950, then I stopped for a while. I would say that I worked on it for a period of ten years.

C: During the majority of this time it was for economic reasons?

B: Yes, that is right.

C: What was the earliest project that was more ecological than more economic? Have there been any that you were involved in?

B: No. I am now in one that is strictly ecological. It was on the desulferization of

coal. So that we could rule out air pollution from the coal. It was from the sulfur dioxide, which is the major pollutant of air. It was major in the sense that it was not ecologically important, but because of health injury. It had certain economic importance too. It was derived from coal, although we can get it also from oil refinement. Most of it comes from coal, so that if it was eliminated from the coal, it would reduce it in the air considerably.

- C: When was this first started?
- B: We started this in December. Of course you must understand my ability to work on this project depended on not just my desire to work on it, but also my ability to get governmental agencies to fund my work. In other words, to get money to be able to do it. So while I may be interested in it and wrote the proposals some time ago, it was only in December that the federal government was able to fund me.
- C: Prior to your becoming involved in zero population growth and the environment three years ago, did you attempt to get anything started at all?
- B: No. ZPG was something that I actually did get started here at the University. I started the population group before I had even heard of ZPG. Then when I heard of ZPG, I joined them as a group. We were one of the first chapters to join ZPG. They started in Connecticut and reached out to California. I did join the Sierra Club, which is interesting. It is an organization for conservation of ecology.
- C: You said there were not really any programs at the University involved in ecology?
- B: No. There were programs involved in ecology. They were teaching ecology at the University for many years. Ecology was a science. People were taught ecology. It was not what they call the environment today, which is the application of ecology to problems in civilization. It was ecology instead of ecology of plants and relationships to how they live--plants and animals of the forest. That is ecology. There are lots of things ecologists study. The mushroom project back in the early 1950s was not ecology. He was a mushroom expert who was interested in where the mushrooms grew, what time of year they grew, and what were the other things that grew around them. That was ecology of the mushrooms. What you are talking about is the problems of the environment.
- C: When was actually the first program or whatever at the University started?
- B: It really is difficult for me to say. I do not doubt that people involved in various problems as old as this University is. You might say there are ecology related

problems. Anytime anybody would worry about where to put the garbage, that was an ecology problem, you see--about what to do with it. When they had the old garbage or refuse dump, they would burn the paper in an incinerator here on the campus. They got rid of that because of the smoke. That was an environmental problem. So I think what you are referring to is when was the considered movement a popular movement. Is that right?

- c: Yes. That is more or less what I mean. Is this just recent?
- B: This is recent as far as I know. The formation of EAG, the Environmental Action Group, ZPG, the Zero Population Growth, the natural conservation council, and the Sierra Club chapter here at the University of Florida and in Gainesville are all things that are recent vintageship within the last three years.
- C: More or less the problem or popular things of the environment and zero population growth are all recent.
- B: That is true.
- C: That is all I have to ask on that subject. I want to ask you a few questions about Gainesville back when you first moved here. How large was the town then?
- B: The town [size] was 20,000.
- C: How does it compare to now as far as size, not just population-wise?
- B: Do you mean the geographical area?
- C: How were the areas built up now back then?
- B: This area was pretty much wilderness. The golf course was there, but this was country out here. West of here was all country. I live on Twenty-Ninth Street and the corner of Newberry Road. East of town was pretty undeveloped out towards Newnan's Lake. The area of Thirteenth Street was all undeveloped. When you went up north of the University past Sixth Street it was undeveloped. Out beyond Archer Road, there was a little bit of development, but not very much.
- C: Were the majority of the people living in Gainesville then directly connected with the University, or was there much business? Now there is a lot of commercial business in Gainesville.
- B: There was a lot of business not connected with the University at that time. The University [population] was 3,000. The town total was 20,000. That is a small percentage of the total population than it is today. The University is now 23,000

and the town is 70,000.

- C: How large was the faculty, or people employed by the University?
- B: I do not know the number exactly. I believe it was something like 400 or 500.
- C: Actually the University was not a major part of Gainesville. I mean as far as the way the town was.
- B: Yes, it was. It was where all the action was. It was a purposeful part of Gainesville. Agriculture was important here. We had a \_\_\_\_\_.
- C: Where is that?
- B: We had a wood treating company. We treated coals and railroad tires. We had a company that made charcoal and pine tree pistoletes and turpentine. We had people that took the Spanish moss and made an air furniture tree. The box company made wooden boxes.
- C: Now the majority of the people directly connected with the University are in some sort of a commercial business, some kind of store or something like this.
- B: Which surprised the University.
- C: What about then? Was the town more industrial than commercial and part of the University?
- B: I think it was pretty much the same. I think the University now has a bigger share. Since the number of students are so much greater, the number of people supplied to the University in one way or another is greater than it was before. Agriculture played a bigger part in the development of the importance of the economy of Gainesville percentage-wise.
- C: I guess that is about all I have to ask. Thank you very much.

[End of the interview.]