

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
NANCY JEAN SMITH MOSS

24 MARCH 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY LANI SPIGOLON
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW #QMS.016

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Albert Gore". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

ALBERT GORE RESEARCH CENTER

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT



**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
NANCY JEAN SMITH MOSS**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.016

SPIGOLON: This tape is designated as Q.M.016 it is part of the Quintin Miller Smith Oral History Collection. This interview is being conducted by Lani Spigolon. Today is March 24,1995. The tape of this interview along with a transcription will become part of the Quintin Miller Smith collection and will be available to the public. Future researchers may include portions of this interview in their publications. What are some of your memories of living in the house or just playing out in the yard?

MOSS: Well, my memories are of roller-skating on the sidewalk on campus school, which I loved. To get out and roller-skate on the whole campus and sell Girl Scout cookies in the dorm, it was just like a big home. We climbed all the trees in the front yard. I always knew it was a big house, but we were just kids at the time.

SPIGOLON: Were you aware of the importance of your father?

MOSS: That was always present, I guess. Looking back on that now gives you a different perspective on what his impact was. I'm very impressed with his talent. You just don't realize it as a child. It's just your dad. He was certainly busy and involved. Education was always important to him. He wanted education to be available to a wide range of people, and he was very concerned that they have access to education. He was multi-talented for that day and time. I wasn't aware that he was into as much as he was but, I remember going with my mother to meet him at the Hermitage. We would go to Nashville and shop with her. And then the meeting place would be the Hermitage, which he must have been with the legislature during the day and doing whatever he was doing there which was probably trying to get funds for MTSU. But I really didn't know as a child. We had a lot of parties at the house. I remember my mother entertained. That was her role pretty much, pretty traditional role. There weren't caterers. And there weren't a lot of restaurant to go to, so they had these huge parties at that house. She worked very hard too you know, flower arranges. I was always in the kitchen. I liked to be hiding in the kitchen, so we would be upstairs and watch people. My brother and I would be upstairs. I remember watching this big sea of people in the parties when they entertained. There was a college student that lived with us that went to school here, but she also took care of us when we were real small.

SPIGOLON: Where is your brother? Where is he?

MOSS: He lives in Wilmington, North Carolina. He is retired from the military and living there. His name is William P. Smith.

SPIGOLON: Well what did you do?

MOSS: I'm a nurse. I worked as a nurse in different capacities. Now, I am a case manager for a company in Nashville.

SPIGOLON: And did you think anything about all these things you had until you saw the appeal from the neighborhood?

MOSS: No, in fact that's when I called Dr. Neil. There really hadn't been any. I didn't know there was a collection, and some of the stuff is lucky. I mean this stuff has been moved and moved and moved several times. And I said, "I'm lucky it's not mildewed and molded or burned in a fire or something." But I am delighted that they are interested in this, and I'm glad to make it available. And there are some real surprises here. I've never taken the time to really go through them. I don't know when I would.

SPIGOLON: What's been the most surprising thing to you that Regina has found going through?

MOSS: Most exciting. Well, what we really looked at was my stuff. She has other things that I have never seen. I think this little commencement announcement from the first class. I found a scrapbook that looks like what everybody does. They start out with neat and then you get busy and just throw it in. So the newspaper clippings and all are getting very brittle and will deteriorate and rot if they aren't Xeroxed or copied. Only people that appreciate history like this kind of stuff. I mean you can stick it fifteen places and nobody cares.

SPIGOLON: I think it is really interesting for anybody who went to school here. See the impact that he had.

MOSS: People could care less. Well there are some people that care about it.

SPIGOLON: I do. I think every student should really. I mean I am sure there are some who don't know who the president is now.

MOSS: Right, you do what you can. And there are some people that knew him that are still living in Murfreesboro that were associated with him and would like to probably see this sometime.

SPIGOLON: How long has it been since you've been on campus since you came?

MOSS: This time, oh I have some friends I see over here occasionally. I have been around here, but I have no reason to come specifically very much. I have never seen this

building. I came for the 75th anniversary and rode in one of the cars. They called me at the last minute. John Hood was one of the president's family. That was the last time I guess. I was really involved.

SPIGOLON: A lot of changes since you were here as a little girl. I really enjoyed looking at the photographs of the buildings and the grounds. It's just unbelievable. Were you still here when the buildings your father proposed were built? Were all of them completed?

MOSS: I don't know how many. After he left you mean.

SPIGOLON: That he proposed.

MOSS: A lot of them were built. I would have to sit and look at that time line 'cause I left to go... I went as a student here for two years in pre-nursing. You might be interested in that. My brother graduated from here, but my father retired right before I came. There weren't that many people here. Then I went to Memphis to nursing school at UT Memphis. That's what I wanted to do. I finished down there.

SPIGOLON: You should visit the nursing building.

MOSS: Yeah, I had heard about that. It's a new building.

SPIGOLON: I don't think you could get to it right now with all the fences up.

MOSS: Yeah, now that surprised me- the fences.

SPIGOLON: They put it up when they are working on a certain area- a lot of plant lines and stuff there working on.

MOSS: Oh it's just for construction. I didn't know if it was permanent shut off.

SPIGOLON: One day we came into work, parked in back were we always do, came out, and there were fences around us. We couldn't get out. You never know when they are working. They try to let us know. Anything else in particular? Any of the parties?

MOSS: No, I mean it was a difficult childhood. I guess from being, you know, in girl scouts or whatever you want stuff related to the university primarily. I am trying to think.

SPIGOLON: Your father? The way he was at home? What kind of father was he? What kind of parent? His relationship to you after being so concerned with the university? Were you born here?

MOSS: In Murfreesboro. He was about 50 when I was born, so I was a second family. You see he has another son from his first marriage. Then he remarried. I was his second family. There were two children in the second family.

SPIGOLON: The son from the first marriage is he still living?

MOSS: No, he died. He died of cancer. He was about 18 years older than I was. I was kind of late in a family. All together that's done more now than it was then.

SPIGOLON: What was his name?

MOSS: Quintin Smith, Jr. He enjoyed his farm. He would take us out to the farm. He bought in the early 40's and moved to later on. I remember he really enjoyed that. The McElroy's were sharecroppers. Out there the farm was his therapy. I never knew what was happening at the university. He never talked about it at home. I think he left it at the office. We would do things- go to the farm. And we did some traveling. He went to these meeting in the summer, the Association of College Administrators. I remember as a child driving for days to Estes Park, Colorado. Looking back on it now that is how he was networking with other people. That was just a trip, a family vacation, and at that time we did nothing in the summer. Kids are different now. I sat on the front porch, played basketball on the screen porch. I enjoyed the yard. I liked environmental things also. I don't know if I got that from him or not.

SPIGOLON: The farm that he had was kind of similar to the way he grew up.

MOSS: Yeah and that was solace to him. He could go out there and get away. Worry about cows and hay and crops. He loved people. He would talk to anybody about anything. They had a big barn. As I got older, I would go with him and look at the cows.

SPIGOLON: How was it going to school here as a student after your father being president?

MOSS: Well, it was... I was... A lot of people knew me and two years was probably long enough. I was really glad to get to go away. And that probably should have occurred earlier, but I didn't want to. I liked being at home. So going to Memphis was far enough away. I could still get home. I remember one time the librarian would tell my mother when I was at the library. That was too close. She was a secretary at the campus school. But it was a way for them to keep an eye on me, and I was older I didn't want that.

SPIGOLON: Do you just have one child?

MOSS: Yeah, I have a daughter. She is thirteen. Her name is Kimberly. She will sometimes say my grandfather was president of MTSU. And I realized it was important to her. I have brought her to see the house were I grew up.

SPIGOLON: Does she have any plans of attending school here?

MOSS: Well I just talk in terms of going to college. You are going to college. That is kind of the way I handle it. That will be here decision. She is kind of intrigued that there is a connection. She will come home and say, "Didn't you say my grandfather was president of MTSU?" And I'll say, "Yes I did." And she'll say, "I just wanted to make sure." She hasn't known them at all, so it is something I have to make sure she understands. I am glad we have this collection here, so she can know. I'm delighted to have found a place here. I never really had a track of when he did what. He took me to Bradley County School where he was principal first. We drove all the way to Cleveland. Sometimes I get intrigued by how he moved out of real terrible poverty he grew up in and get to where he was. It was a lot of self-motivation and determination. We went to basketball and football games, the commencements. All through high school we participated in everything we could. The whole family was really involved in the schools function.

SPIGOLON: How old were you when he retired?

MOSS: Seventeen, I guess. He retired in '59, which was my first year to come here to school. I went to Campus School. My mother was full-time secretary at campus school later on. Just keeping the house straight was probably hard, but she had help. We always had a maid, but she would always help. She was avid about working. I guess they both had a very high work ethic.

SPIGOLON: When was it that your father passed away?

MOSS: He died in '76, and she died in '79. They moved out to the farm, and that is where they stayed. And he became involved with the bank here. And he was playing golf two years before he died. That was another reason for the farm kept him physically in shape.

SPIGOLON: You said you still have the farm. Do you? Is it a working farm?

MOSS: No, we have sold parts of it, but we still have acreage. I told my brother about this, and he may have some things too. He is very interested in knowing about the collection and how it will be put together. I would like for him to get the newspaper. He has moved **quite a bit**.