

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
HILARY PARKER

26 AUGUST 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW #QMS.076

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Albert Gore". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "A".

ALBERT GORE RESEARCH CENTER

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT



**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
HILARY PARKER**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.076

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the QM Smith collection, and is designated as QMS.1995.76. This is Regina Forsythe, I am interviewing Mr. Hillary Parker today is Monday August 28, 1995. The home is being conducted in the home of his sister, at 1417 Castle in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The tape of this interview along with a transcription of the interview 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. Is that all right with you Mr. Parker?

PARKER: Yes

FORSYTHE: What is your full name?

PARKER: Hillary D. Parker, the "D" is an initial only, but that is all my grandmother called me, "Hillary D". Her husband was Daniel and I am sure that the "D" was for Daniel.

FORSYTHE: So you really don't have a middle name just an initial. Your birth date?

PARKER: August 31st 1906. I will be 89 on Thursday of this week.

FORSYTHE: I was about to say, "Happy Birthday!"

PARKER: Look at the hair that his fellow once had!

FORSYTHE: A very handsome man there!

PARKER: Once upon a time. A lot of stories start with "once upon a time"

FORSYTHE: What is your birthplace?

PARKER: It was in Cannon county Tennessee, the rural mail route was Morrison Tennessee. That was a Warren county post office but that was our post office.

FORSYTHE: Your father's name.

PARKER: Robert L Parker

FORSYTHE: What was his occupation?

PARKER: He was a farmer, stock raiser, stock breeder and farmer.

FORSYTHE: Your mother's name?

PARKER: Myrtle E Parker, she was Swanger, S-w-a-n-g-e-r and that's an Alsatian name, French. France owns Alsaise now. At one time the Germans had it and that is a German type name. But all the Swangers in my family would want you to know they were French, not Deutch.

FORSYTHE: How do you spell her first name?

HX: Myrtle, M-y-r-t-l-e.

FORSYTHE: Her occupation.

PARKER: Just a housekeeper, I guess you would say.

FORSYTHE: The names of your brothers and sisters.

PARKER: I am the oldest of six and we are all still living as of today, 1995. The next child is four years younger than I am, 1910 Mamie Parker. She is now Mamie Parker Rogers, of Manchester Tennessee. The next was my brother Homer Parker born 1912, and his family lives in Cannon county, Bradyville, TN.

FORSYTHE: He graduated in 1940 didn't he? He graduated from MTSU?

PARKER: Yes.

FORSYTHE: I remember seeing that name.

PARKER: You do?

FORSYTHE: Yes, I have been looking for people to talk to.

PARKER: He graduated before I did because I was one of those teachers that, you'd get a permit to teach in two years of college and I just kept teaching and had a family and so and so. I was a year later than him graduating.

FORSYTHE: I remember his name. Okay, you got Mamie and Homer.

PARKER: The next was my sister Opal Jeanette born in 1916, she is Mrs. Opal Armstrong, a widow. The next was Robert Houston Parker, he was born in 1921. Two years later another brother, Kenneth Olaf Parker, born in 1923. Both Kenneth and Houston live on the old homestead. They have divided it and now there are two or three

homesteads, about one hundred acres each. Homer lives on it and Houston and Kenneth live on it.

FORSYTHE: What is your wife's name?

HX: My late wife's name, Clara Gilley.

FORSYTHE: What was her occupation?

PARKER: She was a teacher. She went to school here. She graduated from Austin Peay, not here. After our two boys were born she didn't teach anymore. We have two sons, Robert W. Parker who lives at 205 Blair Road, LaVergne and Morris E Parker lives 244 Blair Road. Morris is an architect and does a lot of work around Murfreesboro and Nashville. I can't point out any buildings but they are around there. He works to death all the time. He says that to hire any help would take all the overhead expenses and wouldn't leave the net, so he just had the overhead and keeps the net. I am fumbling along here taking up your time. Draw me back on track.

FORSYTHE: Besides you and Homer, who else went to MTSU? Any of your children or any of your other brothers and sisters.

PARKER: The other boys went to Cookeville.

FORSYTHE: Did that cause a problem with the rivalry?

PARKER: No, they were more interested in the courses they could get at a technical school, than what they offered here at that time.

FORSYTHE: Why did you choose to come to MTSU?

PARKER: Well I suppose it was one of the nearest schools to wherever you lived so for one thing, the distance. Part of the time we could drive from Woodbury, that was our county seat. Sometimes though I would stay in the dormitory rather than drive.

FORSYTHE: So you didn't live there all the time, just every once and a while?

PARKER: No, I lived in the dorm some quarters.

FORSYTHE: Well tell me about that. Which one was it?

PARKER: It was Jones Hall, it is an office building now.

FORSYTHE: I was in there the other day, I was interviewing Dr. Bob Womack and he has an office in Jones Hall.

PARKER: Well that is where we made our noise and ruff-housed. One of the cowardly, mean things to do was (the keeper of the dormitory and his wife lived downstairs), was to light a cigarette and light fire crackers. The fire end would gradually burn down and "wham" it would sound like a cannon went off and the fellow who did it would be downtown busy at a sandwich place or something.

FORSYTHE: So they would just leave the cigarette behind?

PARKER: Yes, in about four minutes the cigarette would burn down and set off the bomb. The poor keeper of the dorm would try to find somebody who set the thing off.

FORSYTHE: Do you remember his name.

PARKER: No I don't, I am losing the ability up there.

FORSYTHE: What other pranks were pulled in Jones hall?

PARKER: Right off, I can't tell you, but there were plenty of them.

FORSYTHE: Do you remember your roommate?

PARKER: I was in a single room and didn't have a roommate. I was going to show you something here.

FORSYTHE: What did students do for fun on the weekends?

PARKER: This has been called a weekend college because so many people went home on the weekends. There was not much to do in Murfreesboro because it was such a prim and proper town. You went to Sunday School and behaved yourself the rest of the time on the weekend for the most part. I guess that was the main reason that our student body went home on the weekend. I wanted to show you one fellow who was cashier at the cafeteria, McCrory, his nickname was "Ug," Ug McCrory

FORSYTHE: Why did they call his "Ug?"

PARKER: I guess they didn't want to put the other syllable to it. But he was a fine fellow, of course later killed in the Marines. He joined the Marines pretty quick after he got through here. He was killed not in Iwo Jima but one of the battles around there.

FORSYTHE: Was he one of the veterans that the Alumni Memorial Gym for?

PARKER: Is it McCrory?

FORSYTHE: I don't know, I know that there were 37 alumni that were killed during World War II, that the gym was named for.

PARKER: Well you will find his name there.

FORSYTHE: Okay, I will look that up then.

PARKER: Here it is Bill McCrory, "Parker you have the very quality of being able to adjust yourself to your environment, lots of success, Bill McCrory." But we didn't call him Bill we called him "Ug", he must have gotten that name back in his home.

FORSYTHE: Let me ask you about some of the faculty that were there. Dean Beasley

PARKER: Dean Beasley was Mr. MTSU in assessment. He knew more students and always tried to learn a girl's first name, not their last name, because he knew they would get married and he wouldn't know how to address them later on. He could just about name them all at one time. He was a straight forward, a model for all young men, a role model and I am so sorry that the administration building wasn't named Beasley Old Main it would have been very appropriate. He has a building named for him on campus, some dormitory, Beasley hall. He was so influential to the whole college it would have been very appropriate to have that Beasley Old Main. He was there a long time.

FORSYTHE: Everybody speaks highly of him. What about Mr. Ed Baldwin?

PARKER: He was a geography teacher. Geography was one of my major subjects so I really enjoyed having him. Mr. Cheek was here from Harvard and he was some what out of his element coming from Harvard to hillbilly Tennessee.

FORSYTHE: He didn't fit in?

PARKER: Not too well, asked questions that would seem redundant to us, you know regular hillbilly Tennesseans, but he became a known character on campus. Neal Frazier was a gentlemen's gentleman. An English teacher who not only taught English but much of what he had to offer was caught instead of taught from his manner of teaching, his attitude toward students, and his respect for each of us as an individual. In the words of a little first grader talking about his teacher once he taught us like we were gentlemen. This first grader said, "I like my teacher cause she teaches us just like we were real people."

FORSYTHE: What about Nooby Freeman?

PARKER: Well he was a happy go lucky fellow. His widow lives out near the Bradyville Pike, near what is the name of that store, FoodLand?

FORSYTHE: FoodLion, Oh Bradyville Pike, Foodtown.

PARKER: Yes.

FORSYTHE: Mary Frizzell

PARKER: She was a stickler for being correct in the teaching of reading and the primary subjects. I had one or two subjects with her, I had good grades. In one class with her my wife and I enrolled for the same course at the same time. I made an "A" and my wife made a "B." I said "Clara, the reason I made an "A" is that I didn't want to copy all of your notes in the notebook. I just cut it short and she appreciated it short, if you get what I trying to say. I think that she thought that just because I was a man, that would endear her so to speak, because there were not many boys in Miss Frizzell's class.

FORSYTHE: How about Dr. Golightly

PARKER: He was a philosopher, he was a graduate of Yale, and he got whatever divinity students get, I guess a Doctor of Divinity degree. One of the requirements for graduation was to preach a sermon to the faculty and when he got up to preach his sermon to the faculty he got his text and looked out over the audience and said "Ladies and gentlemen, I am going to preach to you just as I would to any other congregation of sinners."

FORSYTHE: How did that go over?

PARKER: He made a good grade.

FORSYTHE: What about B.B. Gracy

PARKER: I learned my landscaping and names of plants from him. I enjoyed his class a lot.

FORSYTHE: Miss Ollie Green

PARKER: World Geography, I enjoyed my work with her. She was a little bit stern with all of us. She had traveled a good deal and we enjoyed her sharing her experiences with us.

FORSYTHE: Miss Mary Hall

PARKER: Miss Mary Hall was down to earth not only in theory of education but she was in practical education. She had a lot of experience in teaching three or four years before she came to this school.

FORSYTHE: Baxter Hobgood

PARKER: I didn't have anything with him. He is still living down the street here.

FORSYTHE: I went to his house, he was a lot of fun.

PARKER: His wife was a high school Latin teacher, I believe. Baxter Hobgood came here from Roxborough North Carolina. I think he said he had an uncle that worked for the ice company, here of Nashville and offered to send him to MTSU. That was the reason he came over here, did he say anything about that?

FORSYTHE: Yes, your memory is just outstanding! Carrie Hobbs.

PARKER: I don't know that person.

FORSYTHE: Clayton James

PARKER: Mr. James tried to be very objective about everything. Some of us in class were in a little disagreement with him in regard to desegregation of the races. He had gone to school at Columbia where blacks and whites were sitting in the same classes of course as they did practically everywhere except in the south. He said, "One day it will all come together and we'll be just one brown race. " Most of us said, "Oh no, Mr. James, it won't come like that," and so it hasn't. We are not one brown race.

FORSYTHE: I think we are always going to have our own separate little colors.

PARKER: I said, "You don't have red birds and blue birds making a green bird and we want the races" that is how we came back at him.

FORSYTHE: How about Horace Jones

PARKER: I didn't have anything with him. He was a very popular man. Jones Field was named for him over here. He was the son of this R.L. Jones the very first president over here. R.L. Jones went on to Memphis to be superintendent of the Memphis city schools which was the highest education paying job in Tennessee at that time. Higher than the presidency over here.

FORSYTHE: What about Mr. Judd

PARKER: Mr. Judd, I had economics with him and we talked a lot in economics class. I had a good grade with Mr. Judd.

FORSYTHE: Dr. Sims

PARKER: Dr. Sims was a really outstanding teacher. If you were in his class, you would remember it. He was very forthright and blunt. One day a little timid girl, you know very timid, would take a breath if anyone would speak to her, asked if he would care if she changed one of her courses. He said, "Girl I don't give a damn what you do, do what you want to!" The poor thing. He always got the best of a joke. One time an old boy came in. He was one of those bulldozer types, macho. Dr. Sims was as bald headed as a billiard ball. As he came by and put his hand on Dr. Sims head and said, "fells like my wife's knee. " Dr. Sims says, "I'll be darn but

it does, doesn't it." I had no work with him but I liked to see him work with the band. He was the director of the marching band and the symphonic band too.

FORSYTHE: Did you know Elizabeth Schardt?

PARKER: I knew her but I didn't have any work with her. She was a very well respected foreign language teacher. I wish I had taken French with her, I never did take French. I took a little German and Spanish because in reading the newspapers you need to know a little bit about foreign language cause they will refer to them. This is an interesting man, Knox McCarin. He had a job going around to schools trying to evaluate them, see weak points and strong points and what we had to do, cut out, put in, and so on. I didn't go with him to this place in South Carolina but he was telling me an interesting experience he had in the South Carolina school. Back when segregation was still the order, he went to a Negro school in South Carolina. He said he saw that the principal at this South Carolina school was a man of the cloth. He had a little clerical collar, it was a little soiled but it was still a clerical collar. After he went in and looked around he got back out on the ground, McCarin said he came out and said "Mr. McCarin what did you think of my school?" He said, "I kicked around the dust a little bit and said I'll tell you it is awfully crowded in there. Why don't you move all those boxes out of there and give the children more room to be seated in the classroom." The other guy said "Oh those boxes, contain our food stuffs, I couldn't move them out" McCarin said, "Why not" the principal said, "If I moved all that out these children would steal all I got" McCarin said, "Well maybe that is your problem maybe you ought to work on that." Tthe principal said, "How would I do that?" McCarin saw his clerical collar and said "Why don't you try praying?" The principal said, "Mr., I'll tell you, prayers all right in church and Wednesday prayer meeting, but it wouldn't be worth a durn for me to pray for these children."

FORSYTHE: That is some preacher isn't he?

PARKER: Knox had a sense of humor.

FORSYTHE: You remember Bonnie McHenry?

PARKER: Yes, she was the secretary for two or three presidents, she was very well liked person and knew a lot about running the school. I believe it was said that one president, I don't remember if it was Mr. Smith or some other president, got a call from her. She said she was sick and couldn't come in today, and he turned to his wife and said, "There is no use in me going, if she is not there."

FORSYTHE: That is pretty good testimony. What about Catherine Monahan.

PARKER: Monohan Hall was named for her, she came here from Chattanooga, I believe. She was a good history teacher. She was Catholic in faith, and she knew a lot about the

turmoil's and troubles that Europe had over religion, each fighting the other, Christians spilling blood over their beliefs.

FORSYTHE: That never did make sense to me either.

PARKER: She would tell us a lot about somehow being a historian and being a member of the Catholic faith. It seemed that she would somehow wind it into her history courses, particularly the modern history courses (I mean Medieval). But she didn't want any holding hands in her class, she wanted everyone to sit circumspect. It is told, I don't know if it is true or not, that she failed a couple that was in her class because she saw them walking down the hall together swinging hands. What would she think today? Poor Miss Monohan.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Q.M. Smith?

PARKER: Q.M. Smith was a man set apart. His bearing and presence just exuded respect and admiration to the fellow. He was handicapped a great deal after his experience in World War I. He was gassed and he didn't get a gas mask on in time. His vocal cords were permanently.

FORSYTHE: Hard to understand?

PARKER: Yes. I remember one student saying he went to the same church he did and they called on him to pray. She said, "I am glad they called on him, he is the president and he will pray such a beautiful prayer." He had the same handicap at his prayer as he did in his every day speech, and she thought, "Oh my goodness what is wrong with him. " She later learned that it was the matter of his vocal cords being permanently injured by exposure to poison gas during the war on the battlefield of France. But in spite of all those things, he managed a good school at Cookeville, and here. When I was director of the Campus School, he asked me if I would mind if his wife (who had wanted and had been bothering him about work) could be secretary of the school, and of course she could be secretary of the school.

FORSYTHE: That is what you told the president right.

PARKER: You got it. So we had a pleasant relationship, and that is where I knew Nancy. She would come over so much, after her class at the high school, and hang around her mother, the secretary's office, till she was ready to go home.

FORSYTHE: What kind of lady was Mrs. Smith?

PARKER: Well she was the, I won't say the gushing type but always had something nice to say and was a pleasant personality. She had a smile and was all the time talking, but a good person. I went to see them both in the hospital in their last days. She was a very sick woman with some kind of a kidney problem. About two years later he

died with phlebitis or something like a clot in his veins, here at the hospital in Murfreesboro.

FORSYTHE: I want you to tell me the story you told me when I got here about him passing through here and going to Winchester Normal.

PARKER: He never made it to Winchester Normal.

FORSYTHE: Well tell me on tape what you told me before hand, I would like to get that on tape.

PARKER: Mr. Smith was brought up on Buffalo River, I don't remember the town or the county seat name.

FORSYTHE: It was Buffalo, the name of the town was Buffalo

PARKER: There was something that he wanted to get trained for as teacher and he came though Murfreesboro going to what was then the Winchester Normal (it was some sort of private school over in, is it Franklin County)? Yes I believe it is. Winchester in Franklin County and Franklin, Tennessee is in Williamson County. It is confusing. Well, he stopped and talked to the newly established school here in Murfreesboro. R.L. Jones was the head of it and Jones influenced him to enroll in Middle Tennessee Normal school, which as we know got its name from the French name "Normal," being a standard school. After graduating the two year course, (it was only two years then), he went to Cleveland Tennessee to one of the larger high Schools to be the principal there. He made such a name for himself that he was asked to be the president of the Tennessee Polytechnic School, in Cookeville, TN and from Cleveland he went to Cookeville. After several years at Cookeville he came to Murfreesboro to be president of Middle Tennessee College, it was then. It was later upgraded to the university level. He made an outstanding contribution wherever he went, to the school and to the students of the institution. He was the type of people that you just don't forget. He remains in your repertoire of people that you have know and been influenced by. Some wise philosopher once said, "I am a part of all the men I have ever met and associated with" and you felt a little like that when you thought of Mr. Smith. You were a part of the influence that he had brought upon your association with him.

FORSYTHE: What years were you a student at MTSU?

PARKER: You might say from thirty to forty, ten or eleven years. I believe it was a well known practice that people who wanted to be teachers in the state of Tennessee to get their certification which you could do with ten years of work. I did that from the ten years of 1930 to 1940.

FORSYTHE: What were you teaching?

PARKER: I was teaching in the public schools of Warren county in Morrison, Tennessee and then of Cannon county, two schools I had there. They were three-teacher schools, they were rather large schools. In all I have had 46 years of teaching public schools in Tennessee. The first 15 years was this type of school I am telling you about, the small rural school. I never did teach in a one-teacher school, I kind of regretted that. The three or two-teacher was when I first started. After that I became a principal of large schools where the principal was a non teacher, just an administrator. The next fifteen years I was teaching there. One of the most different and challenging type of teaching I did was going to Oak Ridge Tennessee, a secret city, where there was to be eight thousand children the first year to be a school principal. I was principal of a large school, and we had about two thousand children in the one I was in called the Robertsville School. We had seven or eight first grade teachers and a little or less third grade teachers and on up through the eighth grade. It was a real experience to know how to manage that kind of school. In fact, for a little while we had to have double sessions, a morning and an afternoon session. I believe that at one time at this school at Oak Ridge we had ninety on the staff of this one school. Some were afternoon and some were morning teachers. Frequently children would get lost and they would tell me where they lived and we called their trailer. They had a government trailer there in Oak Ridge to live in, with a big long serial number. That is not much of an address about a nine digit serial number. There was some lady looking forlorn, sad looking face, out in the outer office. I stepped out from my office into the office where she was and I said, "Have you lost some children and are trying to find them?" She looked me in the eye and said, "No, I am one of your second grade teachers."

FORSYTHE: That is pretty bad!

PARKER: She and her husband had come from Texas to be in this Oak Ridge system in Tennessee.

FORSYTHE: What years were you there?

PARKER: I was in Oak Ridge from forty three to fifty four.

FORSYTHE: How did you find out about that job since it was a secret city?

PARKER: Well at that time I was working in Clarksville, Tennessee with Austin Peay in the teacher training business supervising student teachers. At the same time I was working on a higher degree at Peabody college in Nashville. While I was at Peabody College, there was a note in my graduate student mail box that a man from Washington was in the placement office was there and wanted to interview principals. His name was Alden Blankenship from Tacoma, Washington. He told me about the secret city to be built in Oak Ridge and how they needed school people. He had such a Pied Piper influence I just followed after him and went to Oak Ridge. The salary was double what I was getting at that time, that added to it. My wife hated to leave Middle Tennessee and the Nashville/ Clarksville area, but we

went and spent many pleasant and exciting years at the school system of Oak Ridge. When I left I was superintendent there. After this experience of handling this big school someone appointed me to city manager and left the office vacant. The first superintendent was Blakenship himself, the man who recruited me to go there. He left after two years and the next man was from Ohio, Fordice. He left after about a year and a half to a better job and by that time I was assistant superintendent. They thought lets get a Tennessean and maybe he will stay with us. So they appointed me in 1951, I believe, then I left in '54 to come to MTSU to teach here. I taught here for the last fifteen years of my forty-five.

FORSYTHE: So you went there in 1954.

PARKER: That is when I left Oak Ridge.

FORSYTHE: And you retired in 1969?

PARKER: I retired in 1973.

FORSYTHE: I am not a good mathematician

PARKER: Well my figures may not add up.

FORSYTHE: I am curious when you were in Oak Ridge when it was a secret city, what did you think was happening there. What did you all think was going on?

PARKER: We had no ideas but there were all sorts of rumors. I think it was the policy of the administration in Oak Ridge to start rumors so people wouldn't know and think it might be this or it might be that. We had all sort of rumors including some silly jokes. One joke was that they were making front ends to horses and after that they were going to send them to Congress to assemble the rears. Another rumor was that since Eleanor Roosevelt the First Lady of our land had such an affection for the colored people of the United States and the South in particular that she wanted to make a set of white skins for all of them. Those were some of the rumors. We had a lot of jokes. One problem in the Oak Ridge system was getting children to school. They gave us what was a truant officer in there in the military's term but we called it an attendance teacher to soften it up a little. So they gave us a retired Army sergeant, Sergeant Dempsey, Jacob Dempsey, he was from Blacksburg, South Carolina and he was a bare headed Irishman. Very politely he would go to government trailers and he would say, "Mam, I am so and so and I came to see why the children are not in school." As I say serial numbers were the only addresses we had for some of those children and this lady would come to the door with frizzled hair clutching her night gown and say, "Children, I don't have any and I don't want any, get out!"

FORSYTHE: Was the serial number on the outside of the trailer?

PARKER: Yes.

FORSYTHE: Okay, so somebody just wrote it down wrong.

PARKER: Mr. Dempsey came by and said, "Parker, I would fire those damn teachers, they don't know enough to give me the right serial number." So you see I had some interesting experiences at Oak Ridge. We had no idea what was going on but this sentence or saying did happen in the high school. One boy said, "I know what they are doing here, they are trying to make it scientifically possible to split the atom." Well in that room was DelGenio's son, DelGenio was of course the FBI head of that place, and his son told his daddy and the next day that high school teacher was fired. It was my job and the superintendents job to tell him he was fired and we couldn't tell him why. I have never seen a man so mad in my life and he was about to pick up a baseball bat and bash our brains in, but we couldn't tell him why.

FORSYTHE: Why did they fire him and not the parent that told the kid?

PARKER: They just didn't want him around. They offered him a better job in Oak Ridge with more pay but he said he didn't want because that was no way to treat a citizen. So he got a job somewhere in Louisiana.