

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
CHARLOTTE SMOTHERMAN

29 SEPTEMBER 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.111

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
CHARLOTTE SMOTHERMAN**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.111

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q.M. Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.111. This is Regina Forsythe. I am interviewing Mrs. Charlotte Smotherman. Today is Friday, September 29, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the home of Mrs. Smotherman located at 1020 East Lytle Street, 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 Mrs. Smotherman?

SMOTHERMAN: Yes.

FORSYTHE: What is your full name?

SMOTHERMAN: Charlotte Wiley Smotherman

FORSYTHE: What is your birth date and birth place?

SMOTHERMAN: April 27, 1919, Manchester, Tennessee.

FORSYTHE: What was your father's name and occupation?

SMOTHERMAN: John Drennon Wiley. He owned a furniture store, Wiley Furniture Company.

FORSYTHE: What was your mother's name and occupation?

SMOTHERMAN: Zora Mason Wiley. She was a homemaker.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any siblings?

SMOTHERMAN: I have one sister, Doris Rollins.

FORSYTHE: What is your husband's name and occupation?

SMOTHERMAN: Kelly Bealer Smotherman. He was a teacher at MTSU.

FORSYTHE: What are the names of your children?

SMOTHERMAN: Mark Smotherman. He went to MTSU for four years and then went to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Now he is teaching at Clemson University in Clemson, South Carolina. He received a good background in physics and math at MTSU. We are really pleased with his education. He did a really good job. He had a four point average and got a scholarship to the University of North Carolina.

FORSYTHE: Where did you attend school?

SMOTHERMAN: I went four years to Tennessee Tech from 1937 to 1941. I did my graduate work the next year at Peabody College. That was when they had vocational home economics.

FORSYTHE: Tell me what you remember about Q.M. Smith at Tennessee Tech.

SMOTHERMAN: I was a green freshman and he was a college president. I do not know too much. I know he gave my sister a job. It was during the depression and my father was having a difficult time keeping his business going, and she needed money to go to school. Q.M. Smith saw that she had a job. He also helped her get a scholarship to Peabody Library School. He was just a caring person. He hired me to come to the Campus School, it was called the Training School at that time. I was at the Campus School from January of 1943 until the Spring of 1947. Q.M. Smith hired my husband in 1950 and then gave him a leave of absence to work on his doctorate. Bealer came back to MTSU in 1952 and was there until 1977. When I left the Training School, I went to the University of Mississippi Demonstration School and stayed down there a year. I thoroughly enjoyed it, but I wanted to be near home. Then I came back to Murfreesboro in the fall of 1947. I started teaching at Central High School and I stayed there until 1966. I then went to MTSU to teach in the Home Economics department there. I left in 1979. I took early retirement because Bealer had retired and he wanted me to retire too. At the time I was at the Campus School, it had two years of high school. They asked me to stay and teach a seventh or eighth grade, and I said that I could not do it because it would not be fair to the children. I had spent most of my time teaching high school, and I did not think it would be fair to do that. That was why I went to the University of Mississippi. It was a wonderful experience.

FORSYTHE: What memories do you have of teaching at the Campus School?

SMOTHERMAN: I really enjoyed it. The teachers were all real nice. I was a younger one, I had just finished college. I went right into teaching. When I first started, I had student teachers who had been out teaching. I had not taught any. I was literally scared to death. Mr. Frank Bass was the principal at the time,

and he said, "Miss Wiley, remember that some experience could be worse than no experience." I enjoyed it.

FORSYTHE: Did you interview with Mr. Smith before you started teaching?

SMOTHERMAN: Yes, I went to his home. I had know them both, so it was real informal. When we were talking about salary with Mr. Bass, the teachers all made \$150.00 per month at the Training School, and I would not get \$150.00. I said I could not work then. They did not want to give me \$150.00 per month because I did not have the experience that the other teachers had. They had taught for ages, and I had not had any. It was sort of bad, I suppose I would have felt the same way. . . someone coming in without any experience and receiving the same salary as those with experience. Mr. Smith said, "You will get your \$150.00." I got \$150.00 per month, and that was in 1943. I enjoyed it. I know of one other teacher living, Andrena Briney Greene. She has moved to McKindor Manor. She and Mary Francis Snell McNeil and I, are the only three who are left.

FORSYTHE: What memories do you have of your fellow teachers at the Campus School?

SMOTHERMAN: Mrs. Scott Williams was just a mother to me. She was so good to me. Mary Frances Snell was good to me too. I did not have a car at that time, and she was always there to take me somewhere. She was a very close friend. Andrena Briney Greene was also a close friend. Mary Belle Jordan, who came later, I shared an apartment with Mary Belle. I had to manage the cafeteria, and that was the only part that I disliked about my job. I would be teaching a class, and the cookie man would come and want to know how many cookies I wanted. The potato chip man would also come, or something would happen in the kitchen, and I had to leave my classroom. I did not like that, it was not my cup of tea. That was part of the job, to manage that. I was assigned to buying things and making the menus out. You really had to do more than that. The department was in the basement of the Campus School. We had two rooms down there, and that was really nice. The music teacher, Elizabeth Stephens, was nice. When she did not have a class, she would ask me to open my door, and she opened hers, and she would play my favorite songs. . . "Rhapsody in Blue" and "Claire de Lune." It was the most pleasant experience.

FORSYTHE: Why did you start working in the MTSU Home Economics department?

SMOTHERMAN: I had just graduated from Peabody and my name was on the Peabody job hunting list. I did three months of substitute work at Tullahoma and then this vacancy came up. They got my name from Peabody, and I came here to do that.

FORSYTHE: What memories do you have of teaching in the Home Economics department?

SMOTHERMAN: Most pleasant memories. . . anytime you could help a student learn something or improve his or her home life or improve some method of how to do something. My philosophy of home economics was that of home improvement. I saw them do things and then saw them later in life, trying to carry out something that I had taught, such as table manners, improving their health, and their dress. We took field trips or would go to places to eat. We went to the Hermitage Hotel once. I will never forget the excitement. We did some things that were interesting or that they had not done. Just seeing them then and seeing them now, saying they make all their clothes or they learned this or that. Home economics is the improvement of family life to me. We had a good time. They enjoyed it and I enjoyed it. I think you have to enjoy it.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about your husband, What kind of man was he?

SMOTHERMAN: He was a wonderful man. He spoiled me. He did everything and took care of all the business. I did not want to fool with it, so he took care of it. I took care of the house and we had a woman who kept house for us for 35 years. She helped rear Mark while I was teaching. She came every day for a while, and then as Mark got older, she came fewer days. I asked Mark one time, "Did it ever bother you that I was not at home?" He replied, "No I had sis." Her name was America Litter. She was just a dear, she was part of our family. We just had a good life. I have often said that Bealer and I got along so well because he graduated from MTSU and I graduated from Tech. He was a Methodist and I was Presbyterian. He was a Democrat and I was a Republican. I think that is why we got along so well. He was just a very caring person, kind of like an old mother hen. I came first, whatever I wanted to do, we did. I tried not to be too much that way and think of him also. We had a happy forty years of marriage.

FORSYTHE: Did he tell stories about attending or working at MTSU?

SMOTHERMAN: No, I cannot remember any of them.

FORSYTHE: Did he ever tell you why he wanted to teach at MTSU?

SMOTHERMAN: He was superintendent of the schools in Rutherford County. He started out as a teacher, a coach, and a principal. He was then elected superintendent. I'm not sure of the dates. After he was elected, he had a leave to go to the Navy. After his service, he came back and finished his work as superintendent. In September of 1950, his job of superintendent expired, and he went to work for Laidlaw Book Company. That was a

traveling job, and neither of us were too happy with that. Mr. Smith called and asked him if he would be interested in teaching. Bealer had the background as a teacher and had come up the long way. Mr. Smith felt that he could teach some classes in administration. Bealer was really happy with that. I'm not sure where we would have been if Mr. Smith had not asked him. Bealer taught at the University of North Carolina for two summers, and then he taught at West Virginia one summer. They wanted him to come to the University of Mississippi, but neither one of us wanted to move. We wanted to stay here because his parents lived here in Murfreesboro, and my parents lived in Manchester. It just worked out really well.

FORSYTHE: Tell me what you remember about these people. Dean Beasley.

SMOTHERMAN: I do not know too much and cannot remember a lot about him. He went to church with Bealer, and Mrs. Beasley was charming. She was a real fine person. They had two sons. Bill taught over here, and I do not know where Ned went. Mr. Beasley was just tops, like Mr. Q.M.

FORSYTHE: Dr. Cope.

SMOTHERMAN: He would take a stand on things and that was it. There was nothing wishy-washy about Dr. Cope. He was a fine fellow, a good leader, and a good person to have in charge. If you asked him something, he did not say well that is your problem. He tried to help you with anything that you ever discussed with him. I will never forget the day that he had the faculty meeting and told us that he was leaving MTSU. There was just a hush and a stillness all over the room. We were shocked and very sorry to hear it. He was a good administrator.

FORSYTHE: Dr. Scarlett?

SMOTHERMAN: He was real fine. I went over there in 1966. Dr. Cope was there and then Dr. Scarlett came along. He was a likable person. He was so complimentary of our son. That always makes a parent feel good. He was a real fine fellow. He went with us on some of these trips over seas for the aerospace work shops.

FORSYTHE: Did Dr. Smith talk a lot at faculty/staff meetings?

SMOTHERMAN: I cannot remember. When Dr. Smith was there, I was at the Campus School, so I would not have been involved in faculty meetings at the college.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any other memories that you would like to tell me about?

SMOTHERMAN: I enjoyed my work at MTSU very much. I thought it was time for me to quit when I did, though. Bealer wanted me to, that was one reason. But I was getting to the place that I would agree with things rather than to disagree, so I would not have to make up a new program. When you feel like that, that is the time to stop. I enjoyed all my teaching. I do not know whether I could teach now or not, things are so different. My students in my methods class would go out and observe and they would come back and say, "What would you have done if this child acted this way." I said, "I don't know." When I was in high school teaching, if I told them to have their material ready, they had it. There was no question about it. Even though I had only finished teaching high school a short time before that, things had change so much. One of the greatest helps to me was the parents. If I had a problem with a child, I discussed it with the parent. The parent knew what I was doing, and I knew what the parent was doing. We made home visits when I was teaching high school. That cannot be done now. The greatest help in teaching is that relationship with the parents. I learned a lot from the parents. That was one of the nice things about teaching, especially in high school.