

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
WITH  
JANE WARNER

5 OCTOBER 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE  
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
INTERVIEW #QMS.114

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

ALBERT GORE RESEARCH CENTER

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MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT



**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH  
JANE WARNER**

**Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INTERVIEW #QMS.114**

**FORSYTHE:** This tape is part of the Q. M. Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.114. This is Regina Forsythe, I am interviewing Jane Warner. Today is Tuesday, October, 3rd, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the home of Mrs. Warner located at 411 Bellwood, in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. A 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. Warner?

**WARNER:** Yes.

**FORSYTHE:** What is your full name.

**WARNER:** Martha Jane Ketring Warner

**FORSYTHE:** Your birth date and place of birth?

**WARNER:** March 12, 1930 in Sumner County, well actually Davidson County, grew up in Sumner County.

**FORSYTHE:** Your father's name and occupation.

**WARNER:** Herschel H Ketring, he ran a grocery store.

**FORSYTHE:** Where was the grocery store?

**WARNER:** In Sumner County, Shackle Island. It was Ketring's Grocery

**FORSYTHE:** Your mother's name and occupation?

**WARNER:** Her name was Willie Patton Ketring, she taught school for probably seven years before I was born. After I was born she was a housewife.

**FORSYTHE:** What did she teach?

**WARNER:** Elementary.

**FORSYTHE:** Do you remember what school?

WARNER: No, I don't. It was probably several schools, it might have been Beech Elementary School, or it could have been another school in Sumner County.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

WARNER: I have one sister, her name is Sarah Ketring Wright.

FORSYTHE: Your husband's name and occupation?

WARNER: My husband's name is Jere M. Warner. He retired recently as director of instruction for the Rutherford County School system. He taught chemistry and physics at Central High School, and in McMinn County, for years before he went into the central office.

FORSYTHE: Your children's names?

WARNER: James M. Warner, and Suzanne C. Warner.

FORSYTHE: Did anyone in your family go to school at MTSU?

WARNER: Yes, my family goes way back to one of the first. I had some aunts that went to MTSU. I think my mother went to Peabody, I don't think she went to MTSU, but there were ten girls in her family. All of them were teachers except two, so some of them went to MTSU, in the first classes really. Then my husband graduated from MTSU with a master's degree. My son went two years then transferred, and my daughter graduated with a BS.

FORSYTHE: Why did you choose to go to MTSU?

WARNER: Well actually it was a state school, and it was fifty miles from home. Probably I would have gone to Western because it was the same distance, but we would have had to pay out of state tuition. So my father said you can go to MTSU, and since other family members had been there, that was the reason I suppose.

FORSYTHE: What years did you go to school?

WARNER: I started in 1948 and went two years, then I took a year off. I thought I wanted to work and be a business person. I worked at National Life and Insurance Company, and by the end of the month I was borrowing money from my father. I decided there had to be a better way. I couldn't live on what I was making there, so after a year I went back to MTSU. I went back in '51 and graduated in '53. Actually my sister went to MTSU too. She went two years, then decided to get married. She started the year that I came back, so I had to get a job. My father said, the two of you go but somebody needs to work. So I got a job on campus. I worked for Dr. Stark in the Ag. department for two years. I was a secretary. I took care of all of the farm records and took care of his correspondence and whatever. One thing that you might find interesting, and I have always been

appreciative to Dr. Stark for this. At the time, the going wage on campus was fifty cents an hour. When Dr. Stark hired me he went over to see President Smith and Mr. Woodmore, and told them that he was not going to pay me fifty cents an hour. If he hired a secretary, I would be worth seventy five cents an hour, or he wouldn't hire me. So, I made seventy five cents an hour on campus and everybody else was making fifty cents an hour, but he had to get the approval of the president and the person that was in charge of the finance. I always appreciated that meeting, it gave me a little more money. With that seventy-five cents an hour, and I think I worked twenty five hours a week, I made enough money to pay for everything, all of my tuition, clothes, transportation by bus back to home, and everything that I needed, that job took care of it. It was a really good job.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Dr. Stark?

WARNER: Well I thought he was a great person, we got along just fine. I was told when I took the job that I would have a hard time getting along with him, that he was hard to get along with. He expected perfection, and all this, but that was no problem at all. We became good friends, and after he died, the court appointed me conservator of Mrs. Stark who was still living, in a nursing home. She had Alzheimer's, so for probably four years, I was conservator for Ms. Stark. That shows we really were close friends, as well as being his secretary.

FORSYTHE: Did you meet Q. M. Smith?

WARNER: Yes, in working for Dr. Stark I met Mr. Smith on many occasions and talked to him on the telephone. I had a lot of experience with Mr. Woodmore who was a wonderful person.

FORSYTHE: When did you meet Mr. Smith?

WARNER: I think I met him at the job interview, after Dr. Stark decided that I was the one he wanted to hire. Then I think, the best I remember, I went to Mr. Woodmore and Mr. Smith, and Dr. Stark, the four of us met. That is when they decided that I was worth seventy five cents an hour since I had a little experience as a secretary.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Mr. Smith?

WARNER: I always had the impression that he was a very special man, he always carried himself with dignity, and you just looked at him and knew he was president of the college. You just sort of, well, he was like a god, he was the big person, but he was very friendly.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Mr. Woodmore?

WARNER: I just thought that he was a nice down-to-earth person, that I think anybody could have talked to. I liked him a lot. I knew him better than president Smith. He was from Hartsville, and that is close to Sumner County, so we had things to talk about. He knew some people that my father had known. I remember my early experiences with all of the top administrators. Of course working as secretary, even as a student, I had to handle myself in such a way to work with those people.

FORSYTHE: Did you live in the dorms?

WARNER: I lived in the dormitory, and back then of course I worked after dark, and the agriculture building was away from everything. I would walk down that lonely little road all the way to Rutledge Hall, never fearing about anything, there was nothing to be afraid of. So I would work over there after dark. I would be the only one in that building, and I was never afraid. At that time, in the Agriculture department, there was only Mr. Gracy, Mr. Jaggars, and Dr. Stark, just those three.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about Mr. Jaggars.

WARNER: He was a nice man, everybody over there was especially nice I thought. I had a lot of dealings with Mr. Jaggars because he kind of took care of the farm with Mr. Gracy. Then there was Robert Turner, who was, I guess you would call him the farm manager. He was just a nice person, stayed there for years and years as the farm manager, or whatever his title was. He took care of all the farm activities, and he would bring in the receipts each day. We had to keep up with how much milk the cows produced and how many eggs the chickens laid and all that kind of thing.

FORSYTHE: Where was the office located?

WARNER: It was a little, small, white building over sort of across from where the high rise dormitory is. The barn, I guess it is still back there. There is a new Stark Agricultural building that is sort of behind where this little building was located.

FORSYTHE: How big was the building?

WARNER: Well, you walked in the front door, and my office was on the right, and Dr. Stark's was on the left. To the back, you walked through two doors; and there were two or three classrooms, big classrooms in the end of the building, and some more little small rooms.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Mr. Gracy?

WARNER: He was just busy, all the time. Ms. Parks Gracy, he married her. His first wife was living when I was working there, but he was a fun person.

FORSYTHE: What can you tell me about the farm?

WARNER: Well I can't remember how many cows they had, but I know each cow had a name or a number. We had to keep up with each one and the milk production, because they sold milk and things from the farm. Of course, I was a farm girl from Sumner County but I shied away from the farm at MTSU and at home I stayed inside.

FORSYTHE: What did you do for fun?

WARNER: Well Fun Night was the biggest event of the week. It was on Tuesday night and everybody went and danced and just had fun. When I went to MTSU, there was Rutledge Hall and Lyon Hall, and the cafeteria was where the alumni building is now. The industrial arts shop or building was in that area, and the administration and the library set where Peck Hall is now. That was it. Jones Hall was over on the other side, and that was a boys dormitory. When my sister started, she lived in Jones Hall, it turned out to be a girl's dormitory that year.

FORSYTHE: Did your sister work on campus also?

WARNER: She didn't work on campus until after she married, then she worked for Dr. Kirksey. She worked for probably two years before her husband graduated, while he was still in school.

FORSYTHE: What can you tell me about the library building?

WARNER: Well of course at the time you thought it was great big but I am sure it wasn't big at all. I remember the beautiful trees, and the boys and girls would meet under those trees. There was a lot of courting done, under the trees in front of Rutledge and Lyon and the library. The campus was safe and very few students, so you knew everybody on campus. At the time I was there, all the veterans had hit campus, and so you just had a lot of guys on campus. I was one of those a little bit scared of the veterans, and I kind of kept my distance. But they were big names on campus. At the time they were a little more experienced, or that was the way I looked at it. They were a little too experienced for me, so I can't say that I dated many of them.

FORSYTHE: What did you do on the weekends?

WARNER: Went home, just like they do now. The only way to get home, there were no cars, if you ever dated a guy with a car, you were really up town, but very few cars. I rode the bus, usually hitchhiked to the bus station. You could just stand out on the corner, and somebody would come by and pick you up. You could ride with anybody and go to the bus station, or the taxi service. Then I would go to Goodlettsville. Someone would have to meet me, because I lives six miles from Goodlettsville.

FORSYTHE: Did you go to chapel?

WARNER: Yes, I forgot about that. That is another thing, President Smith was always there. We had an assigned seat, you just didn't miss. You were in that seat or you got some sort of demerit, I suppose. We had curfew at night, Sunday and Friday night, and maybe you could get out on Fun night. But you had to be in by a certain time, those doors locked and you did not want to get locked out. Ms. Pitts was the housemother at Rutledge at the time. She was a very motherly and very protective of her girls, just a really nice person that we all thought a lot of.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about Robert Abernathy.

WARNER: Well I worked for Dean Beasley after I graduated. Bob Abernathy was always telling jokes and you know, just fun. His office was across the hall from Dean Beasley's office. In the back of the administration building, when you walked in to the administration building, President Smith and Miss Bonnie were located to left side, and Dean Beasley's office was to the right, and straight back was Mr. Abernathy's office. He had a small office to the back, then his secretary had one there too.

FORSYTHE: What years did you work with Dean Beasley?

WARNER: I graduated in '53 and I worked for six months in Nashville for an attorney. Then Dean Beasley wrote me and asked if I would be interested in coming to work for him. Of course I had my eye on a young man, Jere Warner, in Murfreesboro. I said that would be a good move for me, so I came back to Murfreesboro. I started work for Dean Beasley, I think in January of '54, and I lived in the dormitory. I was a full-time employee, but I didn't have a place to live so they let me stay in Monohan Hall which was a new dormitory and not full. I had a private room there and I walked to work. By spring I found a roommate, someone that I had graduated with, and then we lived down on East Main. I still had no car, and one of the ladies that worked in the administration building, for Mr. Judd, picked me up each morning to go to work. I worked for Mr. Beasley until I moved to Athens, Tennessee in 1956, I believe in August.

FORSYTHE: What was your job?

WARNER: I was the secretary. I thought Dean Beasley was a wonderful person, he knew everybody on campus and everybody that had ever been on campus when he was there. He had a great memory for names. He was sort of an advisor I guess, as well as being Dean of Admissions. He had students that would constantly come into his office and sit and talk. He helped a lot of students that people didn't know that he was helping. Just a really nice and considerate man. He knew all about you, he knew your family, your name, and everything.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about Catherine Clark.

WARNER: She was the librarian and she ran that library like a library is supposed to be run. You didn't talk to anyone there. You sat down and you looked, but she was very helpful.

FORSYTHE: Robert Corlew.

WARNER: He was always one of my favorites. He was a nice history professor.

FORSYTHE: Buleah Davis

WARNER: She was the physical education teacher. I failed volleyball, probably the only person in the history of the school. The only class I failed in my life was volleyball. I was not very good at it but I did go to class every day, I felt like she had me mixed up with someone else in the class. Back then I wouldn't go and ask why I had failed, you just didn't do that. When I got my report card at Christmas, I cried and was not going back to school, that was it. I have always been a good student and was not going back and be humiliated because I failed physical education. My daddy said, "Go back to school," so I came back to school. I tried to take square and folk dancing and stay away from the volleyballs and the tennis, all kinds of athletic things.

FORSYTHE: Clayton James.

WARNER: Mr. James was the Dean of Students, and of course he was right down the hall from Dean Beasley's office. His door was always open to the students. Of course the school was so small, all the administrators knew all the students. The high school I taught in was larger than MTSU, so you didn't know the students there, and the administrators probably. But during that time at MTSU they knew everybody. Another thing I did when I worked for Mr. Beasley, I was in charge of the veterans' records. They all got a check each month so I had to keep up with all that and turn the report into the Veteran's Administration, or whoever it went to. It was a lot of work, you had to type up this big long report and if they didn't get their pay on time, they would come in. Although I didn't issue the checks, they were issued in the finance office, but I was responsible to make sure that all the information got in. You know, those checks were not supposed to be a day late, and if they were, they thought it was my fault. If they would wait another hour, it was probably in. But that was kind of fun. I got to know all of the veterans that were still coming back. They weren't so scary anymore.

FORSYTHE: Richard Peck

WARNER: He was a wonderful English teacher, I think he had a lot to do with my love of English. I did end up teaching English a couple of years at McMinn County, not really certified. I lacked three hours being certified in English. I don't know why I didn't get it. I guess I was afraid I would have to teach English full time, my major was business.

FORSYTHE: Wink Midgett

WARNER: He was responsible for me getting through my BS degree because we had to take two years of accounting. It was very difficult, all the boys were smart and the girls weren't too swift. Each quarter I would tell him that I wanted to change my major. He would tell me I was too far along and that I shouldn't change it, that I would make it. I thought that if he thought I could make it, I could. So he was responsible for me sticking with the business major. I was more of the secretarial type than the accounting type.

FORSYTHE: Henrietta Myers Wade

WARNER: She married the year that I was out of school. All of my typing classes and shorthand were under her, because there were only three, Ms. Wade, Mr. Midgett, and then Miss Stepp (later married Dr. Gerald Parchment) but I don't think I ever had her for class.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about the first black applicant.

WARNER: I was working in Dean Beasley's office as his secretary, and it was probably in the summer of 1956. We had known that there were black students that were applying for admission at various universities and colleges and we thought that probably sooner or later we would have one apply at MTSU. I remember one day I was in the office and this nice looking young black man came in, and asked for an application. I gave him an application, and then I asked him if he would like to see Dean Beasley and talk with him about enrolling at MTSU. That satisfied him, and he went in and talked with Dean Beasley. They had a long conversation and he was made to feel most welcome at MTSU. I don't know who that person was, but I know he did not enroll anytime soon. Whether he ever did, I don't know, but it was probably just at that particular time they wanted to find out what kind of reception and if they were going to be allowed to attend the university. I think they found that MTSU was most friendly and would be happy to have black students enrolled when that time came, which it did come shortly.

FORSYTHE: Did he fill out the application there?

WARNER: I don't remember where he filled it out. It would be interesting if MTSU still had it. They probably don't. Whether he ever turned it in, I don't know, but that was big talk around the administration building. Everybody knew that we had a black applicant, which was just most unusual.

FORSYTHE: Tommie Reynolds.

WARNER: She was really rough, real hard. I happened to make B's in her class because I did exactly what she told me to do. I sat on the front row, and I didn't look at anybody. I looked at the board, and I tried to learn what she was pounding into our thick skulls. I actually liked her. Most people thought she was very hard to

get along with and very hard to get a good grade. I was most pleased with my B's.

FORSYTHE: Charlotte Williams.

WARNER: She is the person that got me my first job. She knew who I was, because I worked in the Agriculture department. I had a little more contact with the faculty members even if they didn't know who I was. They all knew I worked on campus, and they knew who I was. At the end of the school picnic, she came up to me and told me that her father, Judge Albert Williams, needed a secretary in Nashville, would I be interested. I said yes, so that is how I got my first job, through that contact.

FORSYTHE: Did you student teach?

WARNER: Yes, at Central High School, and that is how I met my husband. He was a graduate of MTSU, but I did not know him on campus. Well I did know him too. He and his friends would drive their car across campus, and I thought they were a little bit wild. So back when I was a freshman, I wouldn't have gone out with him. Later I met him at Central High School, he was teaching chemistry and physics. I was doing my student teaching in typing. The students that I had in typing class would go up to his classroom and tell him what I said about him. I didn't even know him. Then they would come and tell what he had said about me, and he didn't know who I was either. That is how we got together. But I didn't like student teaching. The only reason I did it, was because of Dean Beasley. He was, as I told you before, the counselor, the one that saw everybody's life was going in the direction that it should. He told me, "You are going to marry somebody. Your husband may move and there won't be any other jobs except teaching, and you will need to get that certificate." So I said, "I will." You sort of did what people told you then, not what you wanted to do. So I did my student teaching and didn't like it, I never thought I would teach. We did move to McMinn County and there were no secretarial jobs that would compare with MTSU. I made \$225 at MTSU, but that was a monthly salary. It was a good salary. In McMinn county, there was no where to work except Bowaters Paper Company. I worked there for six months and didn't like it. I saw a note on the board for a typing and shorthand teacher. So that is how I started teaching, and then I taught for twenty five years. I taught two years in McMinn county. Then in Rutherford, I started at Riverdale when it opened and retired in '91. I did become a very good teacher, I think..

FORSYTHE: What else would you like to talk about?

WARNER: When President Smith, would come over to visit. . . when I talked to him on the telephone, I never had a bit of trouble understanding him, he talked just as clear as anything. But if he walked into the office, I think I panicked, from his speech, and I would have a hard time understanding what he was saying. It was just because I sort of panicked. He was just a really big person. The president of the

university was most important, and to even have a social conversation with him was kind of unheard of. But he was a very friendly man, and his secretary was wonderful, Miss Bonnie. She was just the greatest. She was very efficient, anything that went on in the president's office was top secret, she never discussed it. Miss Bonnie was a very special person. Then there was Evelyn Turney in Mr. Judd's office. They were in the records office and I can't think of who else was in there. Charlotte Hines and Carolyn Holloway worked there also.

FORSYTHE: Then there were the two student workers, Francis Carter Gill.

WARNER: She was my sister's roommate. I have forgotten who the other one was. A funny story about Evelyn Turney was that there was a little cloak room between the registrar's office and Dean Beasley's office. That door was always open, and there was a place where you would hang your coats up. One real cold winter morning I was sitting at my desk. I heard Evelyn come in, she always came in talking. She took her coat off, and I heard this scream. I turned around and there she stood with her sweater on and her slip and no skirt. She had put her coat on and had come to work without a skirt, so that tore the office down. Then one time when I was sitting in my office, Dean Beasley always had a habit of starting to dictate before you could get to your chair. He would yell, "Jane" and I would grab my shorthand pad and I would run into his office, because he would have four lines dictated before I could hit the chair. I rounded the door too fast one day and I had on a full skirt. It caught the gathers, they hung on part of the door and ripped my skirt off at the waist. Here I stood with half of the skirt holding up. I think he did stop dictating long enough for me to get some more clothes. But we had a lot of fun.