

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
NANCY JEAN SMITH MOSS

25 October 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW #QMS.135

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
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Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW #QMS.135

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q.M. Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.135. This is Regina Forsythe. I am interviewing Nancy Jean Smith Moss. Today is Tuesday, October 25, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the Albert Gore Research Center, Room 111 of the McWherter Learning Resources Center. The tape of this interview along with a transcription of the interview will become a 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 Nancy?

MOSS: Yes

FORSYTHE: What is your full name?

MOSS: Nancy Jean Smith Moss

FORSYTHE: What is your date of birth?

MOSS: 1/14/41.

FORSYTHE: Birthplace?

MOSS: Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

FORSYTHE: What is your mother's name?

MOSS: Laura Simmons Smith.

FORSYTHE: Her occupation?

MOSS: She was a secretary when she was working at the Campus School.

FORSYTHE: Do you know what years she worked there?

MOSS: She worked there after we were old enough to be in school and as long as I can remember. I don't know the exact years.

FORSYTHE: What is your father's name?

MOSS: Quintin Miller Smith.

FORSYTHE: What is his occupation?

MOSS: He was president of Tennessee Tech and Middle Tennessee State University.

FORSYTHE: How did your parent's meet?

MOSS: They met in Cookeville. She was a secretary.

FORSYTHE: Was she his secretary or a secretary at the school?

MOSS: I'm not real sure. I think she was his secretary at some point. My cousin informed me this summer that they met when she helped type his dissertation when he was in graduate school. I don't know when she became his secretary and how that evolved.

FORSYTHE: When were they married and where?

MOSS: At some point in Cookeville.

FORSYTHE: What is your brother's name?

MOSS: My brother's name is William Edward Smith.

FORSYTHE: What is his birth date?

MOSS: 12/13/43.

FORSYTHE: Do you have another brother?

MOSS: An older half brother, Quintin Miller Smith, Jr.

FORSYTHE: Do you know his birth date?

MOSS: No, I don't.

FORSYTHE: Do you know who he married?

MOSS: Lois Smith. I don't know her maiden name. She is 76 this year.

FORSYTHE: Do you know your brothers' children's names?

MOSS: My immediate brother?

FORSYTHE: Right

MOSS: Lucille, Carrie, and Courtney.

FORSYTHE: And your older brother?

MOSS: My older half brother had two children, Linda and Quinton, Q. M. Smith, III.

FORSYTHE: What is your husband's name?

MOSS: I'm divorced. I'll give you my daughter's name. Her name is Kimberly Crockett Moss.

FORSYTHE: Why Crockett?

MOSS: Crockett is a family name that goes back on my mother's side. It ends up being one of the descendents of Davy Crockett's brothers. It goes back to Crocktagne in France which I've traced back. Her father was, also, on the Crockett line to another brother of Davy Crockett. That's just a nice middle name. I liked that.

FORSYTHE: What is your occupation?

MOSS: I'm a nurse.

FORSYTHE: What was important to your father?

MOSS: I grew up in Murfreesboro at Middle Tennessee State. He was very dedicated to education. What I remember being particularly important, was that an opportunity for education would be available to the majority of students. He was very concerned that people be able to get an education. I think that comes from his knowledge of seeing the future, or he saw so many people were impoverished by an inability to get an education and lacking it. That was very important to him. He knew that would be important to peoples' future at that time. He also valued land. We had a farm in Murfreesboro. He had grown up on a farm and he liked animals and cows and farming. The whole industry of agriculture was important to him.

FORSYTHE: What was his attitude toward the family?

MOSS: I have very positive memories about my childhood. He was always around in the evening. We did things together as a family. We participated in the university. At that time it was a college. It was certainly not as active of a place as it is now. We went to ballgames here and participated in university events. There were a lot of parties and lots of things we had at home on the campus. So, we were always there. We traveled in the summer. We went to the Campus School. I grew up on the campus.

FORSYTHE: What was his attitude towards students?

MOSS: He was very involved and interested in students. I think he always had an interest in everything, like campus politics. He just wanted everything to run smoothly. As an administrator he wanted to have a pulse of what was going on all over. Of course, it wasn't as big as it is now. I think, there was about 1500. I don't know. He came after World War II for eighteen years. It was in a growth period, but it was an early growth period.

FORSYTHE: Did he ever talk about his time here as president?

MOSS: We were in it. That was not something that he reflected on with me personally, and I was young and probably could have cared less. That's something you do when you get older. I just know that he was very involved and probably hated to leave. I think he waited as long as he could to retire.

FORSYTHE: What were his thoughts on retiring?

MOSS: He got involved very quickly with the community and did some on public relations with a bank here. He didn't want to stop working. He retired when he was 65 (or somewhere in there), and he died when he was 84. He stayed very active up until two years before he died. That was almost 20 years of golfing and working on the farm. He was busy doing something all the time. He was a good role model for me to have as far as living well and getting a lot out of life that you could.

FORSYTHE: Do you know what happened to his voice?

MOSS: I never did ask him for sure. My cousin told me that it had always been a problem and got worse as he got older. He was very hoarse sounding. Somehow when he was young he slept with the windows open. I guess he got a problem with his vocal chords. The stories are that he was exposed to gas in World War I or something. I don't think that was true. Somehow he had damaged his vocal chords. Probably today someone could have helped him with that. It was never a handicap for him. He never discussed it, never mentioned it. My mother would comment that it would be worse when he was tired. He just kept going. It was like somebody had a problem with a limp of some kind. It was a handicap, but not to him. It was just something he had and he didn't let it bother his thinking or stop him from doing anything.

FORSYTHE: Do you know where we can find a recording of his voice anywhere?

MOSS: That's interesting that it's not available. We didn't have any video cameras or tape recorders. None of that was done. There was no word processors or copy

machines then either. My mother typed and she always had carbon paper. Typing perfectly was very important at that time. I don't have a tape of it.

FORSYTHE: Do you know why your father got a license to practice law? Had he intended to be a lawyer?

MOSS: I don't know. I think it just goes along with his loving to learn. I have a lot of this myself, of just wanting some kind of insatiable ability to get a lot of knowledge. Apparently though, Lois, Quintin's wife, told me that his first wife's father was a lawyer, a very well known lawyer in the area. I think a lot of his interest may have come from him. So he decided to pursue that.

FORSYTHE: I didn't know that.

MOSS: I don't think he intended to practice law. He just wanted it for knowledge which is what a lot of people do now, too. It helps you out, and keeps you out of trouble.

FORSYTHE: Do you know why he became an educator instead of a farmer?

MOSS: He wanted to be a teacher. He was a teacher. He had this will to learn. It was non-stop. Farming was not enough. He could have done both. He did do both very well. He was very knowledgeable about cows. It was his hobby or avocation. His strengths were in education and administration. People recognized that quality, and he was probably encouraged to pursue that. I don't know where it came from or how it evolved or anything else.

FORSYTHE: Can you tell me about your mother?

MOSS: She was very supportive to him. She was very much a worker and wanted to help him out. She did a lot of the household responsibilities. She did the entertaining. She had a strong work ethic also. She did a lot of the maintenance to the house or supervised that. She had a lot of help over. She would say if somebody came over to help wash windows she had to be there doing one side while they were doing the other, because they probably weren't going to do a good job. She didn't just let somebody come in and clean. She had to be right there cleaning with them. She was always worrying about a dinner or an event making sure it went just perfectly so that all the flowers were right. There was a lot of concern about that. She did a lot of the cooking herself. She did a lot of the entertaining, all family meals and whenever company came. The house was used a lot for events. It seemed like there was always something going on.

FORSYTHE: What is your earliest memory of your mother?

MOSS: One of my earliest memories is going on a train ride to Florida. I think someone had died. I was playing with paper dolls. I have no idea how old I was maybe 4 or 5. I lost my scissors, and everyone was trying to find them. She was there.

FORSYTHE: When and where was she born?

MOSS: I don't have her birth date off the top of my head. She was born in Winchester. She grew up in Winchester, Tennessee. She always talked about Dinah Shore being from the same place. She remembered her.

FORSYTHE: When did she die?

MOSS: In 1979.

FORSYTHE: In Murfreesboro?

MOSS: Yes.

FORSYTHE: Did she ever tell stories about your father?

MOSS: Nothing stands out. He died almost 20 years ago. She died three years after he did. I don't know any one particular thing.

FORSYTHE: Did your father do a lot of talking with his voice like it was?

MOSS: Yes. He made speeches.

FORSYTHE: I meant was he a quiet man.

MOSS: Oh no. He liked to tell jokes. He was very personable. He was always comfortable around guests and liked to be with other people. That's what I mean, the voice did not stop him from talking. He would always make people feel comfortable and entertain them. I think that was real important to him probably that he didn't intimidate them. He made people relax. He liked telling jokes and he was good at that. He would find simple jokes that people would enjoy and be comfortable very quickly.

FORSYTHE: I was just thinking of his voice, and I would be quiet.

MOSS: Yes. I would be embarrassed sometimes for him because I would know he was struggling or that other people probably couldn't hear. I was so used to it that I could understand him very clearly. I would just think how much better it would be if he could say it clearly. He didn't let it stop him. He just went right on, whereas other people might have backed up and been quieter.

FORSYTHE: What were your mother's hobbies?

MOSS: She cooked. She liked to cook. She had a hard time letting me in the kitchen because she wanted to control the kitchen. That was real important to her. So, I learned to sew because she didn't know how to sew. She couldn't tell me how to do that. She had some musical background. She played the piano. I have a picture of her with a french horn which I didn't know she played. She had some music background and enjoyed that.

FORSYTHE: What did she think about being the president's wife? Did you ever discuss that with her?

MOSS: No, not really. I think that was a role she played. We didn't really discuss it because I was a child, and it was all I really knew her to do. She never complained about it. That was something she wanted to do. She also, tried to go back to school at one time, I think. I don't know if she didn't do well or if she felt like it was over her head or what. She dropped out and went back to being a secretary at the Campus School. I think she had a B. S. degree, but maybe somewhere down the line she wanted to do some more work. She was very much into juggling children and our things, picking us up and taking us places as well as all the entertaining responsibilities and working. She liked being at the Campus School. She did a good job over there as secretary. I think she enjoyed that plus she had the summer off.

FORSYTHE: Did your father ever talk about Humphreys County?

MOSS: Some. We went down there to see his home place, where he grew up, and where his mother was buried. It's near Cuba Landing. It's not far from the interstate. In fact, when they cut I-40 through Humphreys County you could see his school house. I don't know if it's still there. That's in one of those pictures that I brought you. I looked for it and can't see it. I don't know it now. He was trying to find two gravesites at one time, and we went back to this real remote place. We went back up to look at these graves. They weren't marked and they were there. I don't know who they were or what they were. That probably became further and further from his life, because his life was in Murfreesboro. I've learned some through the letters he had that I found and so forth. As he got older, he did quite an extensive genealogy which I now appreciate looking at. At the time, I was in college, and they weren't working on that and I could have cared less. A lot of these things you appreciate as you get older. I have an extensive genealogy that now my daughter has for a project to look at a genealogy of her family. She's in the eighth grade. I told her about this. So, we're going to do a little bit of research. I told her teacher that I have so much I would have to condense it down.

FORSYTHE: What kind of farm did his family have in Humphreys County?

MOSS: The letters I have on that show that they sold a lot of wood. I don't know. I think his parents lived off the land. They were rural people. I'm not real sure if they

had animals. I suspect they did. The letters I have, talked about the sale of the wood from the trees that must have been very profitable for them and corn prices and that kind of thing. They grew their own vegetables and had pigs running around and that kind of thing. That's all I know.

FORSYTHE: Do you know if they were school teachers, also?

MOSS: I don't know that much about them. I don't remember anything said about that.

FORSYTHE: I think somebody told me that one of them, I can't remember which one, had taught.

MOSS: I may have some of that in those genealogy files. Their files are quite extensive. I remember somebody was from Ireland, that really goes back. I would have to study that. It's embarrassing to say that I don't know that much about it.

FORSYTHE: Do you know about his early education? Where did he go to school?

MOSS: He talked about walking two miles to the school, the little one room school house in Humphreys County where he grew up. He was in school somewhere. All of that would be in the information I brought to you. It has something about Ruskin College.

FORSYTHE: I'm still trying to figure out where that is.

MOSS: I don't know myself where all this was.

FORSYTHE: Did he talk about his first teaching jobs in Humphreys County?

MOSS: No. If I could talk to him today I would certainly learn more. I went with him one time when my mother was sick to Cleveland Community College in Chattanooga for an award or honor he got. I had to practically be dragged over there because I did not want to go. That's how the adolescent rebellion is. I don't know what that piece is either. I would certainly ask him lots of questions now and want to know lots of details. I wish he had done an oral history before he died. That would have been helpful. We just didn't do things fast enough did we? We weren't that clever. Now, we'll piece it all back together.

FORSYTHE: Did he ever talk about being a student here?

MOSS: No. That's another thing that I was not interested in at the time, not geared up to ask.

FORSYTHE: Did he ever talk about World War I?

MOSS: No, I have pictures and that is all.

FORSYTHE: Is there anything else that you want to bring up or talk about?

MOSS: Not anything I can think of.