

Methodist University Community Oral History Project
Methodist University
Fayetteville, NC

Ann Smith

Interview Conducted by
Peter C. Murray
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Interview of

ANN SMITH

Interviewed by

PETER C. MURRAY

0:01

MURRAY: And, looks like we're doing okay. So, I'm interviewing Ann Smith, and today is August the ninth, 2016, and we're at the Crown Auditorium, and it's approximately 1:35 in the afternoon.

0:27

SMITH: Yes, that's correct.

0:29

MURRAY: So, Ann, would you tell me a little bit about how you grew up, and about your biography?

0:37

SMITH: Okay. How long do you want? [Laughs.]

0:40

MURRAY: [Laughs.] Take your time.

0:42

SMITH: Okay. Well, as a child, I moved around quite a bit. My parents, you know, would just kind of move around. As my dad would find a new job, we'd kind of move around. But my roots were in North

Carolina, in Brunswick County, and with all the coming and going, that was basically my roots. And then in high school, in middle of sophomore year, I moved to Wallace, or to Teachey, North Carolina—went to Wallace-Rose Hill [High School]. Got married very young, got married at sixteen, and am still married to the same man, forty-four years later. [Laughs.]

1:21

MURRAY: Oh, congratulations.

1:22

SMITH: Thank you, thank you. And, let's see. We worked hard—both of us did, actually. I worked hard growing up, worked in tobacco, mainly. My mother remarried when I was in high school, and she married a man that was a farmer, so we continued to work on their farm, too, tobacco, mostly, for me. And, you know, I've had a couple of jobs over the years, not really anything to brag about, but it paid the bills. And then for probably, let's see, nearly—how long?—practically thirty-five years or so, my husband went in business for himself. He hauls topsoil and fill dirt and stuff. And so I did actually used to help a lot with that, breaking down dirt and stuff, but I keep the books and man the phone and those kinds of things, so—. We have two children: one is forty, one is thirty-eight. They are both in education. And I'm trying to think of what else.

2:44

MURRAY: Are they teachers in North Carolina?

2:47

SMITH: Yes. My daughter actually is not teaching at present, because she adopted two babies, and they're four now, so she stopped teaching at the time she was blessed enough to adopt two children. And my son is a educator in Duplin County. He doesn't teach in the classroom anymore. He's, you know, he works at the county office. He's, like, chief officer of a whole list of responsibilities, you know how that goes: like, five or six titles, you know. You have to spread it around when there's not enough manpower. But he loves it, so that's good. And I have four grandchildren.

3:24

MURRAY: Oh, well, congratulations.

3:25

SMITH: Thank you.

3:27

MURRAY: Tell me a little bit more about—. So, you worked as a child in tobacco, and of course that's one area of North Carolina that's changed a lot. Can you talk a little bit about what you've seen there?

3:40

SMITH: Oh, yes. I can. Back when I started, I started in about the fifth grade, because we had moved back to North Carolina. I worked for fifty cents an hour handing tobacco, and in those days you had a wooden tobacco barn, and you had, you know, of course the croppers, the (mostly) guys at that time, who brought the tobacco to the barn. And we strung it on strings on a stick, and it was hung up in a barn and cured in a barn, and that's the way it went. And as time evolved, when we got better equipment, we used what we called a sewing machine and sewed it on the sticks. It still went into the

same type of barn, and then later, the type that I worked in, we used what was called a butt-barn. And gone were the days of picking up three leafs of tobacco in your hand—you couldn't get too many to put each handful on the stick—you would grab it in big bulk. Arm, legs, and just throw it, you know, in big metal racks. And it was clamped and put in what was called a butt-barn, and cured. And then after that, I didn't work a whole lot—during that time, also, some people used croppers in a field. You know, it still took manpower, but you rode on a tobacco harvester and cropped it while riding. But the problem with that was, if it was raining and the fields were too wet, it could get stuck and it didn't end up working too well. And then, you know, over the years, the government bought the small farmers out. There was a tobacco buy-out. And so my family didn't farm anymore like that, not tobacco, anyway. They continued for a long time with corn and beans—soybeans and wheat, you know, and that kind of thing.

5:40

MURRAY: Is there any family farm today?

5:42

SMITH: Yes, the farm is still there. My dad still has a farm. He doesn't farm it himself; he leases out the property now, 'cause he's seventy-five, which is still pretty young, I think—[laughs] but the older I get, it seems young. But there is farming activity still going on on the farm.

6:04

MURRAY: And what do they farm now, do you know?

6:06

SMITH: Corn, beans, wheat. That's mostly what they farm. Back in the old days, too, my grandparents also had chicken-houses. You know, and then they farmed a few farm animals for their own personal use, but not in a industrial-type way or commercial-type way.

6:29

MURRAY: And when your father had tobacco, did you grow most of your own food, or did you largely just depend on the tobacco business to provide you [food]?

6:40

SMITH: Well, probably their best money-crop was tobacco, even though, you know, sometimes that was kind of iffy. But we did grow a lot of our own food. We had large gardens. And my grandma would actually go out and kill a few chickens and, you know, make a good dinner time at lunch time, you know, that kind of thing. And they killed their own hogs in the winter on a nice really cold day, and had lard and cut up the hogs, and we froze it and they cured it. They cured the ham and side meat, and they made cracklins. They even made, like, liver puddings, sow's meat—some of the stuff that I don't eat, but—but it was made. [Laughs.] And, so, yes, they did do a lot of it. But as time went on, they began to shop more and more at the stores. We actually, to this day, though, have salvaged a few seeds along the way, like I have some of my granny's okra seed and, you know, there's a few seeds along the way that we can still plant if we want to.

8:03

MURRAY: Okay, neat, neat. So, tell me a little bit about how you see America today, and what changes that you see are important for people to understand about America.

8:24

SMITH: Okay, let's see. Well, the morals that I support have gone way down, you know, over the years, particularly in the last few years, in my opinion.

8:41

MURRAY: Can you tell me more about those morals?

8:45

SMITH: Well, you know, it's a kind of like "anything goes, it's okay," you know, "we're so politically correct, we cannot"—. We're so afraid we're gonna insult somebody's special-interest group or, you know—. I feel like my rights, my right to speech, pretty much, has been quenched a little bit, because, you know, we can be persecuted so badly for speaking the way we feel about things. And I'm not about, you know, insulting people, but I am about speaking up for the things that I believe in and the things that in my heart I feel is right. And so, you know, and I'm not a hater—I don't hate anybody. So it's not about that; it's just me being able to freely stand up for the things that I believe in. That's one thing.

10:03

MURRAY: Okay. And have you always been interested in politics, or are you more interested in politics now than you used to be, or—?

10:15

SMITH: You know, I've always—. I'm not a politician by any means. I've always been somewhat interested. The older I get the more interested I am and the more closely I pay attention. And it could be because we have media so readily available, and social media, and, you know, everybody's got an

opinion, everybody's got a poll, everybody's got—. So, you know, you're hearing it all day long, so I think naturally I would become more interested in it, or at least more aware of it.

10:48

MURRAY: What do you read for information?

10:52

SMITH: Well, you know, I have my Facebook. [Laughs.] You know, and people—but, you know, a lot of people actually do a lot of research and post things, and I read a lot of it on both sides of controversies, and, you know, I watch news, which is probably not a great thing, but—. And we talk amongst our friends and, you know, people we know. And I'm always interested in hear[ing] what somebody's opinion is. So I guess that's what I listen to.

11:23

MURRAY: Yeah. Yeah. What do you think about America's position in the world?

11:31

SMITH: Hmm. Well—

11:33

MURRAY: Has it changed over time, or are you particularly concerned today?

11:37

SMITH: Well, I still believe we're the greatest nation in the world. I hope that other countries still view us like that. Certainly I believe that and will be—I will always believe that, because, you know, United States born and bred. I don't know. I don't want us to become a laughingstock of other countries. With some of the things that do go on, I do—I still think America's great. But I want to see it made greater. And I want to see us catapult into some good, healthy, strong, prosperous ways and ideas. And I think that—. I still think that we're feared by other countries, because I know that they know we're a powerhouse. We're strong. But, you know, I think we have to keep our military strong. I think that we have to work on our spending. You know, I think the little things would help get rid of some bulging spending on things that really impact our people on a local level personally, and—

13:03

MURRAY: What kind of things would you think should be cut out?

13:06

SMITH: What kind of things? Well, you know, sometimes I hear, "Well, we've got this money we've got to spend," like, even through the school system: "We've got this money that we need to spend," and— because it's been allocated for that. And if somebody really looked at the big picture, that money could be used for much better reasons, like to give us more teachers, to give us more educational materials and stuff like that. And you know, I'm sure there's a lot of money that's spent on a large level, too, that is just foolish, and we need somebody with a fine-tooth comb looking at things a little closer on those kinds of things. And maybe that same money could be used for a real purpose.

14:06

MURRAY: For your grandchildren, what would like to tell them about—what would you like America to be for them?

14:21

SMITH: Well, it is the land of the free. I want them to see that it is a great nation and it can be even greater, even though in the last few years we've seen a big change in lifestyles. I want to see people get back to work. I want to see—. Oh, what I want to tell the children: let me get back on track. I'm sorry.

14:46

MURRAY: You're fine, you're fine! Take your time.

14:54

SMITH: You know, I want them to know they need to get an education—and they're going in that direction already, even as young children—and to know they can make a difference in their communities and their states and in their country, even if it's on a small level, because it all starts with individuals. And I actually recently took a trip to Washington, D.C. for my first time, other than just riding through, with my grandson who was a fifth grader. And so I wish every fifth grader in the whole United States could take a trip like that, because it really, you know, shows the history: the way our forefathers came up with the ideas they had, the way they fought for our rights, and that it's just not a number on a page; they were real lives that sacrificed. And so I want them to know their history, for one thing. And I think that will help shape their future, when they see what our country has been through.

16:01

MURRAY: When you went to Washington, what were some of the things that were most moving to you?

16:05

SMITH: Oh, wow, let's see. Well, we did a lot in a short amount of time. 'Course, we went to several of the Smithsonianians. We went, you know, we went to the Capitol Building; we saw the White House from the outside—of course we didn't go inside. We went to Mount Vernon and saw George Washington's homeplace. Just, you know, we saw a whole lot of the national monuments that have been built and [are] there to teach and to show people what our great forefathers did for this great country. And I thoroughly enjoyed it, and I hope I can go back. [Laughs.]

16:54

MURRAY: Oh, good. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So, in deciding to come today, what were the reasons you decided you wanted to be here today?

17:12

SMITH: Well, I actually didn't even know about it 'til last night. And so, I said, "Man, I wish—I hope we can get a ticket." So we got tickets, my husband and I, and I just feel like I'm part of history in the making, and, you know, I want to show my support for my candidate, the best candidate, I feel, of what is running. And I don't know, I was just so excited to be part of history.

17:39

MURRAY: Were you pleased with the political process this year, or just, or you feel like this is the best of the available options? Tell me about that.

17:48

SMITH: Okay. Let's see. Well, I'm seventy-five percent pleased, and twenty-five percent maybe The Best of all the Options. But the way I feel about it, no candidate, nor any person, is perfect. And my son has this saying, "If you keep doing what you've always done, you're always gonna get what you've always got." And what we've been doing is not working, so far as my viewpoint, and I think it's time to try something different. That's probably the main reason I will be voting like I'm voting.

18:33

MURRAY: When Mr. Trump said at the Convention that he was the only person that could fix America, did that sound messianic to you?

18:44

SMITH: Well, yeah, I don't know that that is a completely true statement. First of all, no, in my opinion, it's gonna take, well, people on their knees and asking God to intervene. He might be—he may be the one that heads it up, but he's a smart enough businessman to know he has to have a team of people around him, and—[a phone rings] my husband keeps calling—a team of people around him, and with him being a businessman, I believe that if he doesn't know how to do it or doesn't know about something, that he will surround himself with people that do. And I'm hoping he's gonna get some new blood in there, with some new ideas and some new perspectives, and—. But no, I don't think any one person can do it. But he might be the one that leads the ship, so to speak. Let me pick up my husband. One second.

19:46

MURRAY: I'll just turn it back on, and just—

19:48

SMITH: You didn't know you were gonna get Chatty Cathy, did you?

19:49

MURRAY: No, that's alright! You're doing fine, and I really appreciate your giving me your time.

19:55

SMITH: Oh, you're welcome.

19:59

MURRAY: So, any last things you would like to tell me about yourself or the political process this year?

20:21

SMITH: About the political process, let's see. Well, sometimes I question the Electoral College-type stuff, you know? Sometimes I kind of wish it was—

20:38

MURRAY: Whoever got the most votes?

20:40

SMITH: Yes. That's kind of what I would wish at times. I guess it works, it's worked for many years, but sometimes I do question it. [Laughs.]

20:51

MURRAY: What about money in politics?

20:54

SMITH: Money in politics? Oh, you know, that's just rampant. It's just crazy, the amount of money. You know, because each person ups their game, the other one has to spend money, so it becomes crazy. But it is—. You know, when candidates accept money from big sources, especially sources outside of this country and sources that just tend to make money on it, and then they're swayed by ideas, I hate that part, you know? Another thing about jobs and stuff, I know on a local level, in our area, yes, jobs are hard to get. But I see lots and lots of people that won't keep a job! They will get a job at one of the local plants, and the first week, they don't show up, they lay out, they won't—you know—and so they're chronically unemployed. And, you know, if we keep—. I'm all about helping people, don't get me wrong, I'm all about helping people that need it. When people are able-bodied, we should not be giving lots of handouts.

22:15

MURRAY: During the Great Depression, one of the jobs programs—

22:18

SMITH: Was a work program.

22:18

MURRAY: —was a program aimed at young people so they developed—young men particularly, women couldn't participate—but it was young men eighteen to twenty-five, so they learned what it was to work.

22:29

SMITH: Skills—to work. Well—

22:31

MURRAY: And it was a popular program, because—

22:34

SMITH: Maybe that is one of the things we should go back to, you know. Well, I've said this many times: I say one of the worst things that happened to America—and I know what it was intended for, and the good things that it did do—but when we developed all these child-labor laws. And I mean, I know they were abused and all. But you know, I learned to work at a young age. By fifth grade, I was working in tobacco, and it was hard work, and I knew I had to show up, and I knew I had to do it. And I bought my own school clothes, that kind of thing. And so those work ethics, or work skills or whatever you would say, they taught me a good work ethic. And I didn't wait on my parents, who were working hard also, to do everything for me. And, you know, I incorporated that into some of my own children, when they were getting of age—not as young as I was, but they worked in tobacco or they babysat or they worked at the local restaurant on Saturday night, and those kinds of things. And I didn't just hand them a lot of money. You know, and they saved up to get a big item, and that kind of thing. And so we need to go back to teaching our young people a good work ethic, and I think it begins in the home.

23:54

MURRAY: Thank you.

23:54

SMITH: You're welcome.