

MARY LEE SMITH and Genevieve Carter

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Interviewer: John Turner

Tape 1 Side 1 (Mary Lee Smith)

JT: They live close?

MS: Yeah, the one son lives in Union Oregon, the other one lives over by Palm Springs and then my daughter lives in Pismo Beach.

JT: Oh.

MS: So we're spread all over.

JT: So you came to be close to your son that lives in Union?

MS: Well he knew about this place and he thought I would be happy here and he was right.

JT: Well I hope you like it.

MS: Because I was in another place that wasn't...I didn't belong there, it was...everybody had Alzheimer's except me, and there I sat. I had no one to talk to or anything, it was miserable. These people are lovely, really. I love 'em all, it's like a big family.

JT: Well you have nice surroundings.

MS: They're good people.

JT: You say you were from San Diego, is that where you and your husband...

MS: San Diego County. I was raised in _____ [?]

JT: And uh...where'd you go to high school?

MS: _____ [?]

JT: And was there any outstanding thing while you were going to high school that was an experience?

MS: No, I can't think of anything particularly. Nothing good, nothing bad, just school. And my friends but, that was...no matter where you are you have friends...activities. And then we went to North _____ [?]

JT: And what did your husband do?

MS: He was a plumber. And a plumbing contractor, he started out with plumbing contracting. And then he quit that and he went to work for um...oh he worked for a while just plain construction; and then he went up to El Diablo Power Plant in San Luis Obispo and that's the last place he worked was up there.

JT: And you raised your family in these towns that you're talking about?

MS: No I raised my family in North _____ [?] San Diego County.

JT: Oh, uh huh.

MS: We lived in two or three different places on the coast and inland. We preferred it inland.

JT: Did you...were you a housewife? Or did you work like some other mothers have?

MS: Well I did both. I just...seasonally I would go out and work at Christmas and Easter in places...in stores as a clerk. Then after that the kids got older and I went out and I had a job doing all kinds of various things. I just tried everything, I wanted to try. The funniest thing was the job I liked the most was budding avocado trees. We got to go out early in the morning you know. And you didn't have to dress up, you could wear your old slacks and bud these and then splice them onto the new little trees and see them grow. It was a very satisfying job. You didn't get much money but it was just fun.

JT: You like Avocado?

MS: Oh they're ok. I just liked the trees and the early morning and the fresh air and the whole business. That sort of "farmer thing". I don't know what it is, but I like it.

JT: Well that's kind of interesting.

MS: But I did a lot...I painted signs; I did a whole lot of things. Just to do something different. I wanted adventures. Because I had sat at home all these years taking care of children and I loved it. But they were grown now and I wanted to have some adventures. So I went and got different kinds of jobs and I'd work on 'em for a while and...They were all low level jobs. I worked in a sewing factory for a while.

JT: But they were satisfying.

MS: Yeah. Because I was doing something different; meeting different kinds of people. It was an adventure I consider.

JT: And what did your children become? What line of work?

MS: Well let's see I'm trying...my oldest boy went to work for a gas and electric company; stayed with them till he retired. And you know, worked his way up and he did very well. He bought stock in the company and he retired very comfortably. But then my daughter, she's done everything. She'll go to school and become...she was a graphic artist for quite a long time. And she did all of it, everything from lighting signs, you know advertising outside. To well, silk screening and that kind of stuff. She did all kinds of signs. She did the uh...more or less the designing of them, she didn't go out and hang the signs or anything. But she worked on a computer; I don't know what kind of signs those were. And you work on the computer and then behind you, there's a big flat surface and the sign takes shape back there. I don't know what you call that. Anyway she did all kinds, just the graphic arts, and she was very good but she didn't like the kind of people she had to work with. So she quit that and she went back to college for a while and she took uh restaurant management. She liked to cook, she took cooking classes in college and she learned a lot. And she learned enough about restaurant management that she didn't want to do that, so she quit that. And uh then she went into care, like caring for people around here. There's a place down in San Diego, she cared for them. And then she got work with a Trust Company. And they would send her out. That was...she took care of people but she didn't do housekeeping and stuff. She took care of them personally and she also was there to watch for the Trust Company and keep an eye, so somebody's ugly nephew doesn't come in and try to take money from them. You know the type...

JT: They take advantage.

MS: They do. And she had to be kind of sharp on those things too.

JT: And what does your boy in Union do?

MS: He's the gas and electric man.

JT: Oh he's the gas and electric. Then you have one other...

MS: The one out in the desert, he uh does everything to do with like...ok, laying brick, making fireplaces, patio walls, ornamental things, laying carpet, doing floor tiles, sink tiles, any kind of thing related to that, he does that. And he had his own business for a while. Now at the present time, he's working for someone else. He got his daughters through college; they're schoolteachers. And he decided he was gonna take it easy, just work eight hours and come home. So he's doing that now.

JT: _____ [?]

MS: Well who knows, they're sorta like me. They none...they want to have adventures and they...

JT: _____ [?]

MS: Yeah.

JT: Well good. It um...were there any aspirations during your late teenage, your early twenties that you wanted to do and didn't do?

MS: Oh sure I wanted to be an artist. But I realized when I was out of high school, I was 18. You realize in art sooner or later, you've got it or you don't. Sure I could draw things. But, you don't have that spark that means you are an artist or you're not. And I realized I did not have it, that's all. No matter how much I wanted it, I didn't have it.

JT: But you enjoy it.

MS: Oh I love it. Still do, I think. I had a seizure and this hand doesn't mind me, but the right hand still does most of the time. So maybe I'm gonna try again.

JT: Well, keep plugging it away.

MS: I'm going to.

JT: It uh...

MS: But that's what I wanted to be. An artist and decorator. And uh it didn't work out. Besides, I met Mr. Smith. I married Mr. Smith, and that was the end of that. Well it wasn't really the end. After I got the kids raised I did go out and do some work, take some courses and things. But I mean for the biggest part of my life, it was taken up with the children and family. Which is what I wanted, otherwise if I had wanted the other more I would have done the other.

JT: And is there any particular part of your life that you'd like to live over again?

MS: I don't think so.

JT: You wouldn't do anything different?

MS: Oh I'd do *LOTS* of things different. _____ [?]I wouldn't want to.
{Laughter}

JT: You know sometimes we might make more mistakes the second time than we would the first.

MS: Exactly. I figure I did what the Lord wanted the first time, and if I didn't, I'll find out.

JT: Did I ask you, was there any particular instance happened when you were in high school, grade school?

MS: Yeah. There wasn't.

JT: There wasn't anything?

MS: Well not that I can think of. So it must not have been too important if it did happen.

JT: And what happened during the war?

MS: Well my husband was in the service, so he went out and fought the war. I stayed home as a postal clerk. They needed postal clerks because the men were all gone, so...I volunteered, and I took the training and I became a postal clerk for three years. And I quit that because I was gonna have a baby.

JT: Uh huh. Well...

MS: It's all very...it's very boring it's just the story of...

JT: Nobody's life is boring.

MS: Well I enjoyed it. I wasn't bored, but...it's not the kind of thing you write books about.

JT: Well yanno, today there's so many dysfunctional families. It's nice to know somebody had a family and they enjoyed life and ...

MS: Oh. We did. The neighbor kids would always come to our house and say, we like to come to your house because you have a party all the time. We didn't have a party, we just were always laughing. I've got three kids that are very funny. They interact and it is like going to a party yanno. Cause all the time they're just laughing and joking and...they do take life seriously but I mean they have fun just being alive.

JT: Can't beat that.

MS: I don't think so.

JT: Well...I don't know...like I say I'm still new at this. If I miss something, I ...

