

Leslie T. Smith

interviewed by

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May 16, 1975

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I was born West of Grand Holstein in Grayson County on February 26, 1894. My parents were Benjamin Franklin Smith and Lou Rainey Smith. I had seven brothers and one sister. I remember my grandmother on my father's side. My daddy's father was killed by a wagon load of cotton which ran over him back in Alabama. My grandmother lived with us until she was 98 years old. I can't remember her given name. . .all I know is the Smith part of it. My mother's parents lived up here at Sunset on a farm, they owned a farm up there, and their name was Rainey. I went to country school, that is as high as I ever got. Regular country school where there was 40 or 50 kids in one room.

Was there a church close by?

No, no church near by. Oh, about 4 or 5 miles from us there was what they called a Nazarene Church and they just had a tabernacle with a dirt floor and a platform for their choir and piano, but there were some of the best preachers I ever heard in my life. Now that's where I went to church. I rode in a horse and buggy to church. I had a black pony. . .he could run just like a cyclone. And, school was just across the fence from our house. Kids played in our pasture because there was no playground around the school that was big enough to play on and they'd go through the fence into our pasture and play ball. The girls had to play on one side and the boys on the other. They didn't allow them to play together in them days.

What were some of the things they played?

Oh, mostly the boys' games were marbles, and the girls played Annie over and tag or one thing and another. But we boys played marbles and ball. That's about all of the fun games we had in school in them days. When I was a teenager I started to work on a farm, that's just as soon I was big enough to reach a stalk of cotton to pick it. I worked on a farm until I was about 20 years old. Then I went to San Antonio to an

auto school to learn a mechanic's trade. From there I went to South Texas and went in the garage business. I didn't marry until I was 22 years old. I married a lady in McKinney. Her name was Nancy Groves and she died after we moved here. Now I'm married to Gladys. . .it used to be Gladys Davis. She worked in the Post Office here for 33 years. I was in the garage business off and on for about 18 years. Part of that time I was in a Ford agency in McKinney. I ran the stock room there for 10 months and the balance of that time I was shop foreman for the shop. We'd run about 150 cars a day through that shop and 9 mechanics kept you going pretty busy. And after I left there in 1925, I went in the garage business for myself in McKinney and took on the Durant Car Agency and was in there until 1933 and the Depression broke.

What can you tell us about the Depression?

All I can tell you was that people who had been in big business went on the streets walking. A lot of them got out on the streets selling insurance. Looks like everybody that got out of a job started selling insurance. . .walking the streets selling insurance. Bankers would be on the streets selling newspapers or apples or anything they could do for a living. Chester May of the Lone Star Gas Company sent me over here to work for the Lone Star Gas meter shop here in Handley, which we had there by the depot at that time. I worked meters there for them for about 11 years. And when they moved the meter shop I went in the watch business, which I had been doing ever since I was 14 years old as a hobby. I never went to watch school. I picked it up watching my daddy. He could do anything no matter what was wrong. He could repair guns and make parts he had never seen look just like factory parts. I watched him and I could just pick up stuff. So, ever since I was 14 years old I've been working with watches and clocks as my hobby. While I was in the garage business I would work on them, and even at the Gas Company.

What can you tell me about the Scouts on the East Side?

I moved here in '36. I went into Cub Scouting in '39, and I was just a committeeman on a troop for about a year there and then the Scout Master quit. The First Baptist Church of Handley was sponsoring a troop and they gave it up and so I was president of the Men's Bible Class and I got them to sponsor it again and start it over.

What troop was this?

83. . .and a week or so after that the Scout Master of Troop 86, which was sponsored by the Methodist Church, gave that up and they came down and joined our troop and when it came time to register they asked us to keep them both registered, so we wound up with two troops. Twenty years later the attendance was around 135 boys at a time. No other troops out here and that's one of the reasons we had so many, with no other troops on this side of town, and we had a nice bunch of boys and we had a few bad ones. I'd say 98% of the scouts that we had have all made good men; businessmen, doctors and lawyers.

Do you remember any of the names of these boys?

Yes, Albert Browder and his twin brother Elmer. Elmer made a lawyer in Houston and Albert made a doctor in the State of Washington, I think. He died a few years ago. And little ole Wayne Christian is a professor in the University of Ames, Iowa. I run onto him a few years ago. Our son-in-law is teaching in Ames and that's where we made the connection. Found him there and he's a nice man with a family, teaching in a University and I guess he is still there. Another is David Hughes. He's in North Carolina. He's a doctor, not David, he's over here in Arlington. Don is in North Carolina. They are both doctors, both in the Hughes family. And another Hughes boy is with Texas Electric Company and the other one is over in Arkansas with the Government.

Would you tell us about the old depot?

Yes. . .we tried the longest to build a Scout hut and tried the longest to get them to give us the depot they had down there--they had quit using it--and they fooled around there trying to sell it but nobody would buy it, and they finally gave it to us. By that time we had started up a Scout hall with concrete blocks. Anyhow, they gave us the depot and we flew in and tore it down. We got enough lumber out of it to put the roof on our Scout hall and stacked up a lot of brick in back and people got to hauling them off and finally I sold what was left to keep them from stealing them all. People was just hauling them off to make flower beds and anything. Walter Darr had a troop--Troop 81--out here at what they called Tater Hill at that time.

Where was this?

That was across the other side of the lake, they called that Tater Hill. I got him to organize a troop out there and he had Troop 81 and they was going to build a troop house on some land he had there and he got about half of the brick. He never did build a Scout hut and the boys broke up and moved away and that was the end of that. I wish I could think of that boy that made a doctor over at Garland. He was an old boy I thought would never amount to anything, and turned out to be a good doctor over at Garland. You can't tell what a boy is going to be when he's growing up at Scout age, you think he will just be a kid of a boy all his life, but when he grows you'll find him to be a real man. . .turn out to be a gentleman and do well in business. Ben Gant was one of my Scouts and he is with Humble Oil Company in Houston now. He's got a high job and making good money, and one of the nicest boys you nearly ever saw. He never comes down that he don't call me. And if he has a chance, he comes to see me. He'll call me on the phone and talk for at least a half hour. Oh, there's thousands of boys, I couldn't go back and remember, fact is I forgot hundreds of them.

I run onto a boy now and then and he'll come up to me and say "Hi, Smitty, you don't remember me, I'm so and so, and was in your Scout Troop." Just the other day, one came to me, I had forgot all about him. But there has been so many hundreds of them, fact is they have run in the thousands. But the thing I would say to all parents and all scouts is: "There is nothing a scout can do, nothing he could belong to outside of his church work, there isn't anything on the face of the earth that has more benefit to a boy than scouting." If parents could know and see what I know scouts has made out of them, it's the program that makes scouts, and if it's carried out right, we have boys that come into scouting and the first few meetings they wouldn't want to play and if you crossed their path they wanted to fight, and after you take with them and counsel with them on their behavior and what scouts stand for. . .I had one of them call me back later, a year or so after he left this part of town. . .he said you wouldn't believe it but I'm doing church work, and he had never been in a church house until he joined scout troop. It's just wonderful what it will do for them.

Can you remember any of the activities that you did with the Scouts? Anything unusual?

Yes, we camped out in raining and freezing weather and things I could tell you about you wouldn't understand much about unless you would see it. Stuff we did in scouting camp, like building bridges across deep draws where some of the kids scared the life out of me walking poles from one split rock to another. Kids will take a chance and do anything. We camped out all over this country. We'd hold our own church services on Sunday morning and the kids conducted the church services and they always wanted to know when we could go back and do that again. That's where you raise up boys to really be men, where you teach them that there's a God who created all of us and to believe in the thing that there is a God creator.

Did you tell me that the Longhorn Council had honored you with an award?

Yes, the Silver Beaver, I have it in here, the Fort Worth Council gave me every award that the Council can give. I got the Eisenhower Award during the war, the Silver Beaver, Scout Master's Key and Veteran's Awards. And when I retired the scouts of my troop gave me a little statuette.

I'd like to read that. It's to Leslie T. Smith, in appreciation for long years of devoted service, Handley Scouts and Scouters, 1959. Well, Mr. Smith, I know from talking to you that your work with the Scouts has been just joy.

Well, it was a lot of joy, and sometimes you have a lot of heartaches. The way I always felt by my scouts was that they were my own boys. As long as they were in my troop, to me they were my own boys and I felt responsible for them wherever I went, and especially when they would get into something I would see that was so dangerous as I did see some of them do, that's when it frightens me. But if you care for your boys like I did, sometimes its not all fun, because there's a lot of hard work and you've got to chip in with the boys and work with them to get them to work. Some of them will work and some of them won't. You've got some that play, but eventually they'll all learn to work if you keep them busy.

What about the parents? Did you have any problems with the mothers and daddys?

No. Parents never bothered me, but a few times some of them raised cane about what they thought I ought to do. Like I had one parent call me up one night, wanted me to understand that when her boy left the Scout troop 'she wanted him to come straight home. I said, I'm not responsible for the boy when he leaves the troop, and I couldn't follow each one of them home to see that he gets there 'cause he had been delayed a little bit, playing around or something, and so things like that and sometimes when something comes up that parents wonder why I don't make the boys do this

or that for me without paying them, and if you didn't pay them pretty soon there would be some of them saying, "Yeah, if I had the boys do my work free I would be a Scout Master too." There's a lot of things that go wrong with scouting. Parents that really give a hoot, you know, about what the scoutmaster does. I've had a lot of them ask me, "Why don't you get paid for that job?" Where you going to get the money, the scouts don't have money to pay all the scoutmasters, den mothers and things like that. They just don't have it and in the first place it just wouldn't be right no way. We do it on a volunteer basis. I carried the scouts to Worth Ranch Camp for 23 years for a solid week each time and never missed a year in that 23 years, not one time did I get a parent of one of these boys in my troop to go with me and help me with them and I had 45 or 50 boys out there, all over them hills and hollers and bluffs and the river, rattlesnakes. You can see where it wouldn't be too much fun with that. Course as long as they were staying and behaving and the big boys watching the little boys like I trained them to do or tried to train them. The big ones in later years started up into Explorer Scouts and that way they took my older boys that I had to lead the younger boys and look after them. Usually you can send an older boy which would be an explorer and he would go with a group of kids here and another older boy would go with another group where they wanted to go and I could take it easy and then that's when I could have fun, see. It is fun being out, camping out. We had a lot of fun camping out in the woods around here, singing songs, campfires, kids telling jokes and laughing and singing songs. It was a whole lot of fun.

Did you ever take them to a camp outside of the area, other than Worth Ranch? No, I never did. That was my camp, Worth Ranch. I didn't care anything about. . . some people take their troops up into Oklahoma and Turner Falls, and places and Walter Darr took his up into Arkansas. I never did. . . fact of business I never did have time.

I just had a week of my vacation every year for 23 years, that was a lot of time. One that I was talking about, the people that would help me with Scouts, there was this one guy that I could always depend on, Earl Waddell, Sr. If I needed something in Scouting, especially if I needed some finance, I could go to Earl and tell him I needed so and so and there was no argument, he just handed it to me or a check. I remember one time the bank had a little old building down here and we wanted it for a warehouse and the bank wouldn't give it to me and Earl says I'll get it. He went and wrote me out a check for the thing and wrote it out to the Scouts and I just endorsed it and he just turned it back to the bank for the building. People like that make you want to go on and do all you can. Back during the war, we collected paper and aluminum. . .I've got an Eisenhower Award up there for collecting metal for the last World War. . .collecting metal and paper. That's where we got our money to pay the expenses of things we needed for the Troop, tents and stuff like that.

Now, you have a picture of a Mr. Lucas?

Wingate Lucas. He sent me a picture of the President and I didn't like the President we had at that time, so I wrote back and told him I'd rather have a picture of him, and that's the picture he sent me and that's the writing he put on it. It says: "For all the Handley Boy Scouts and their Scoutmaster Leslie Smith, with very good wishes, Wingate Lucas, Member of Congress, Washington, December 15, 1951."

When I quit the troop and I retired, I got letters from two or three Congressmen and two or three bankers in town congratulating me on the work I'd done in scouting. I want to show you a picture of an old man from England who worked with me for a while. This was an old Baptist preacher from London, England. He had the first Boy Scout Troop they ever had in London and he was Scoutmaster of it and he came here and was living

here at the time and he worked with me for several months in scouting here in Handley. He was one of the smartest old men I ever knew in my life. On his picture he has "To a grand Christian, Sincerely yours," it's dated 1953. His name was Quartly, He moved on from here to Dallas and over in Oakcliff. He died there. He was a Baptist and he got over there and joined the Methodist Church over there in South Oakcliff and he died there. We attended his funeral and he was buried on the South Side. I keep thinking that I'll write to the Boy Scouts of London and see if anybody in London would read it and remember him 'cause they put a brochure out on his troop, but it looks more to me like a magazine. It's Troop 1 and his name is mentioned all through it. I'd like to find out if there is any scout that he had then in his scouts that has moved on up to men and still living in the City of London.

Mr. Smith, I see a large picture on the wall there in a black frame of a man with a moustache. Could you tell us who that is.

That's my father. That picture was made from a tin type film in Chicago in the year 1900. When the man returned with the picture, he had a notation that came with it that the people who had made that picture said his head showed to be one of the most brainiest heads that they ever had a picture of. They said he looked like he was one of the smartest men's heads they had ever witnessed in all of the pictures they had enlarged.

It's a very good picture, very clear.

It was made in 1900 from a tin type and it's just like him. I never saw anything he couldn't do. That dad of mine never attended school but two weeks in his whole life and that was in Louisiana. The school house was a log house and the seats they had to sit on was a log split with the flat side turned up with pegs in the bottom for feet. He attended that school two weeks and he had to quit school to help make a living for the family. He said the rest of the studying he did by lying on his back in front

of the fireplace. They didn't have any electric lights and for light they used pine knots out of pine wood and put these on the fire in the fireplace. These would flare up and make a bright light for reading. I never saw a problem of arithmetic or anything else that he couldn't work.

Do you know why he came to Texas?

No, I don't. I guess just like other people they traveled West. They left Louisiana with several families by wagon train. It was cold as everything and all these people . . . the men were walking beside the wagon and the women were riding, women and children in the wagons, and the people in them days had stills and they always carried a jug of whiskey. He said it was cold and they drank whiskey along just to keep them warm and he never drank it in his life, but he pretended he was drinking and he turned the jug up and pretended he was taking a drink and didn't. He said he had them all drunk before night.

When company would come, everybody in the neighborhood would come in and visit. They had company one night and all the kids of the family were supposed to. . . each one had his chores to do and his chore was to go to the woods and bring up wood for the night for the fireplace, cookstove and what have you and this night he fooled around until it was dark and his parents made him go on into the woods and cut his wood and so he was down there chopping wood, chopping away and some neighbors across the woods were coming through the woods over there and just as he raised the axe over his head to make a lick on the log and chop it, this fellow was coming up and he didn't know it and he made some kind of a growling sound. He said he stopped and held the axe up over his head and about that time the guy made another growling sound and he said he put that axe back over his shoulders and hit the ground with a war whoop and ran over

bushes and jumped brush piles and everything and ran out of the woods clear to the house. The guy was trying to stop him and the more he tried the faster he would run.

Was your father married when he moved to Texas?

Yeah. I don't know how he met my mother. I've always wondered. Just the other day I was wondering how he met up with my mother, and her up here at Sunset, and they were married and come from Louisiana, 'cause my oldest brother and sister were born in Minden, Louisiana. A niece of mine and her husband lived in Dallas County. He got a job and was working in Minden for the longest time. That was the funniest thing, he was right back down there and met up with all the cousins that I never did see in all my life. However, when my daddy lived in Louisiana he ran a store and Post Office as well as farming. In them days, they'd have a little store and inside of it they'd have a Post Office and then on top of that he'd have a ferry boat that crossed some river. He built his own boat and ferried wagons and teams across this river and lot of times when he wasn't there my mother would go down and run the ferry boat across the river and take people across with their wagon and teams. My daddy's mother came from Alabama. She lived to be 98 years old and after she got old she was living with us and she would be sitting around and imagining that all her people were still living and she would say I want to go home to my people. I don't know, my daddy's daddy. . . the grandmother I'm talking about, her husband as I said was killed. He fell off a load of cotton and the wagon ran over him and killed him. That's all I ever knew about him and my daddy told me that.

The Rainey's up here at Sunset. . . I don't know if they were Texans or if they came from outside. They were part Irish. They may have come from some other place. I don't know why I never found out, but they may have come from Ireland. All I know is that they are part Irish.

There's another thing Mr. Smith. What would you consider has been your greatest hardship, as you look back over your working years?

Well, about the biggest hurdel I had to jump over was that Depression. I left McKinney with about \$18,000 on the books. . .and I couldn't get a job. If you were over 30 years old, nobody wanted to hire you. . .that's the reason Chester May told me he'd give me a job if he had to make it. He and I were good friends. He said he'd see I got a job if he had to make it, but a funny thing, after I had worked for that gas company out there for 11 years, I'd check back ever now and then and I've counted up about 11 or 12 or 13 of the same people that are all dead and gone. Nearly all of them that I worked with down here are gone. Chester May is gone and several of the men there, and good friends that worked with the gas company at McKinney and Corsicana, I was down there and found out that he is dead. His wife told me on the phone.

So, you've outlived them all.

About 5 of us left that I knew then. D. A. Hulsey was president of the thing at Dallas and Mr. Denning was the president. All of them happened since I was in there and all of them are gone. Well, while we're at it, I wanted to tell you about one of my other buddies as a standby as well as Earl Waddell. I call him Red Duncan. All the scouters that know him, the old scouters, called him "nutgrass" Duncan. He is one of my best standbys in scouting for all the years I was in there. As far as transportation, we could always depend on Red Duncan. We would haul kids to and from wherever it was to be and a lot of times he would camp with us. And I just wanted to mention that he is one man of East Side Fort Worth, which is old Handley that did more for young people than I guess anybody. He used to haul all the church kids on hay rides. Another thing I'd like to say about him. I've known him to move widow women clear out of the State of Texas, and pay his own expenses and never allow the women to pay him a dime. That's the kind of guy he is. Well, he lives right back over here on Beatty

Street, Beatty and Halbert, but he is just one of these all round good guys and his wife is just as good, fact is she is better than he is!