

Eva Claire Smith and Pete Watson: Listen, Laugh and Cry

ECS: Because we'll sit here and listen and we'll cry a little and we'll laugh a little.

[laughter]

PW: There's a lot of stuff you can think about later on, you know.

ECS: Yes, you know it's like I said earlier, when you prod your mind, you don't know what you remember until you start thinking. But seriously we do appreciate it.

Eva Claire Smith: I was Born at Home

ECS: Well, I guess the best place to start is to tell you that I am the daughter, the second child, of Ernest Hugh Lewter, Sr. and wife was Lou Alcie Maud Vickers Lewter. I'm so glad she only gave me two names. They were married in 1931. I was born in 1943. And I was born at home in a little area referred to as Newman Hollow, which would be west of Bryson, so it was included in the Bryson community. My dad had purchased a farm over there, and that's where I was born.

Eva Claire Smith: Moved to Wheelerton

ECS: By about 1952 my dad had bought a house and 8 acres at Wheelerton, TN and we moved over there. Now oddly enough, this is how my daddy did. We would live at the house and 8 acres and he would rent the farm to someone else to take care of, and when they didn't do it right after about two or three years, he would move 'em out and we'd move back in. so my life consisted of you know living on the farm and then not living on the farm. But the house and 8 acres, which was only, oh, 6-8 miles away, it didn't take you long to move. It was still out in the country and we still milked cows over there.

Eva Claire Smith: Lunch Money and Riding the School Bus

ECS: I remember riding the school bus, and I remember how much our lunches were. Our lunches were 10 cents, because every day Mama and Daddy would give me a dime and they would tie it in a handkerchief, Carolyn, in the corner of a handkerchief.

CT: You're kidding. Oh.

ECS: Tie it up so I wouldn't lose it. And as bad as it sounds, I probably blew my nose on the other end. [laughter] . . . The first thing I remember was, there was a boy on that bus. . . I don't know how much older he was than I was, but he seemed so big to me so he might have been in early high school. And he would take that handkerchief with that dime tied in it and throw it pass it, and I always remember thinking, if he keeps my handkerchief, I won't get lunch. And it just worried me to death. He played with it and he knew it bothered me and he'd throw it from the front end of the bus to the back of the bus. I do not remember the school bus driver but they never made him give me my handkerchief back until we got to school. And he would give it to me.

Eva Claire Smith: Water Cistern and Going to Bee Spring

ECS: For those who don't know what a cistern is, that is a, I guess it's a concreted container that's built, the ground is dug out and this is lined with concrete to build a holding place for water. And you had gutters and filter system on top of this thing to collect rain water. And that's what we had over there. And if it didn't rain, we went to Bee Spring and collected water. Dad had a big old tank and he would take it over there and just leave it. And that's what everybody did. They would take theirs over there and

if you went, you just lined yours up and hooked the hose to yours and when yours, you went back and yours was filled you'd stick it in the other one.

Eva Claire Smith: Water at Bee Spring

CT: So now, this was a good spring at Bee Spring.

ECS: Oh, a very good spring. It, as long as I can remember, I am now, will be 64 years old August the 19th, 1943, I mean 19, yeah, I was born in 1943, August 19th. And I will be 19, 64 this August 19th, 2007, and I have never ever seen that spring go dry. I've seen it slow down, but when I say slow down, it may hesitate for 3 seconds and then shoot out water for 5 or 10 and then so on. So that spring, for people in those days who did not have city water, as we know city water today, they were dependent on that spring. And it was certainly a great thing.

Eva Claire Smith: I Grew Up a Country Girl

ECS: And I grew up a country girl when we lived at Bee Spring, I milked cows, helped Dad on the farm, I never used the mules, but when he got the tractor, I did use the tractor, knew how to drive the tractor, helped him with that. So, that's a little bit about my childhood. I want to say this, I have grandchildren now, and grandchildren, for some reason, the oldest one is 16, and through the years I have helped take care of them. And they find themselves bored during the summer months. I'm bored, I don't know what to do. In comparison to my childhood, I did not even know that word existed. . .

I mean Mother and Daddy always had vehicles but Mama didn't drive until, until I was grown. We didn't run to town every day. We didn't run to, we just, we might go on Saturday, every other Saturday, but we didn't, it's so unlike it is now, we just didn't have to go, we weren't bored, and as I said, I didn't know what bored meant. I entertained myself by roaming in the hills, looking at the sky, there was just so much, we had a horse and I loved to horse, ride the horse. There was just things that, that I see my children now, or my grandchildren, they don't have access to, so they don't really know what it's like to have lived on the land.

Eva Claire Smith: Wheelerton Baptist Church

ECS: Our church was there, Wheelerton Baptist Church. I can proudly say that I'm the oldest church member there. I am not the oldest member, but the oldest church member. Because the church came into being in 1944 and my mother, my daddy, my grandmother, Eva Melissa Vickers, were charter members there. And of course I was just a little, I was a baby, I guess I was still, still being carried at that time, but anyway, the church was. They met in homes, matter of fact, until they bought this old church building from a black group that was going to tear it down and rebuild, or was going to build somewhere else, so our people bought, bought the church, dismantled it and brought it to Wheelerton and built it. And anyway, a lot of my memories is around that church, going to church.

Eva Claire Smith: Moving Back to Giles County

ECS: He retired in August of '75 and we moved back to Giles County, my beloved Giles County . . . I didn't want to buy anywhere except in the southern end of the county, and he got it, my husband got it in his mind that my children could go nowhere except to Elkton School because that was my alumni and I wanted them to go there.

Eva Claire Smith: Music Lessons

ECS: I guess I was born to play the piano. My mother played, my older brother, who is deceased, we called him Junior, he played the piano. We were always exposed to a piano. We had an old piano. . . I took music in the third grade for probably 4 or 5 months. My music teacher was such a nice lady, Mrs. Orlena George. . . She taught music at Elkton. And when she was teaching me, I had such an ear for music that she would send notes home to my dad, telling me that she couldn't teach me if I did not put away, that I had to learn to read the music and not put all my extras into it. And she sent those notes home enough that my daddy says, "Well if you're going to play that way, just play that way," and I quit taking music.

Eva Claire Smith: The Galatians

ECS: When my husband retired from the military in '75, we had only been here probably three or four months, and there was a singing group in Ardmore that called me and was interested in me playing the piano for them. Well of course I thought that was just grand, but our youngest child, Amber, was, like I said she was, she had lots of physical and mental disabilities and needed constant care. But my husband actually urged me to, that was kind of an outlet, and he urged me to play for them, and they wanted me, soon as I tried out. So, it was three girls, they were called The Galatians. They're no longer playing together now. But anyway, I played for them and we would go places on Friday nights and/or Saturday nights and Sunday afternoons. Churches, benefits, things like that, and I would play the piano for them. So, I think I became a little bit better, having played with a singing group.

CT: Umhm.

ECS: Because I was exposed to lots of groups, you know, that would be performing at the same time we did.

Eva Claire Smith: Farm and Home Store

ECS: There was a large store called Elkton Farm & Home Store, not as we know it today, there is a Farm Store today but it's on the west side of the Highway 31. This one was on the east side in what we'd call "downtown" Elkton. And of course there were several buildings there on both sides and I just remember this Elkton Farm and Home Store. I remember they had material, they had it in the upper level. . . But anyway, there's two things I remember about that store. You went in, it was a big, big building. It would probably be equivalent to about three stories today. But the long, long, wide staircase that went up to this, kind of like a mezzanine, and that's where the fabric was. And I remember that my mother would buy fabric there, but as a child there was a pair of overalls that had been specifically made for an advertisement, and they hung from the, oh the edge of that mezzanine up there and touched the floor. Those were the longest overalls, (laughter) they were just huge. I mean they weren't meant to, they were meant for advertisement and they were wider than I could outstretch my arms even now. . . But I remember the Farm and Home Store. And I don't know, this, I was already probably about the eighth or ninth grade because I remember what I wore that day. They had a barbecue, that was free to the community. And they had set up, some way, concrete block barbecue grilling pits.

CT: Pits, yeah, pits, right.

ECS: And they had, they had chickens on there.

CT: Oh.

ECS: And it was a big event because there was people everywhere. Of course, we went. I don't know if we always went to eat, but my Daddy believed in community events and he would always, that was our entertainment.

CT: UmHm.

ECS: Going to things like that. And I remember going. And I wore a dress that I had made. And the dress was high necked in the front and swooped down real low in the back. And it was in July, it might have been a 4th of July event, but I had on moccasins. They weren't leather, they were plastic moccasins. There was already pavement through there, because I remember walking, just walking, and walking and walking. I mean you just, that's what you did, you'd walk and sit under a tree, or you'd, you just visited with other people.

CT: Right.

ECS: And, I remember I melted the bottom of my new moccasins and blistered my back.

Eva Claire Smith: Woodmen of the World Cake Walks

ECS: Well, I remember the Woodmen of the World people, that's an insurance and I guess they still exist today, the Woodmen people. Of course my Daddy was a Woodman, or had insurance with the Woodmen, and I guess if you have insurance you become a Woodman, and I remember they would have events in that building. I don't, I thought it was on the top floor but it, it could not have been, but I remember going and having cake walks there. . . I remember one cold winter we went and I thought we would freeze to death because if they had heat, it must have been coming from the bottom. I just don't remember heat. But I remember how cold it was at that cake walk, and I wanted a cake so bad. I always did love to eat. [laughter] I mean if there was good food, oh I just always appreciated good food so much. But I remember the cake walks.

Eva Claire Smith: Skating Rink

ECS: And I also remember Tony Watson had a skating rink down there, but I believe it was, I just really don't remember which building that was in. And I also remember we went skating in the winter time and it was so cold we couldn't stay, so.

CT: Can you tell a little bit about the skating rink? I mean was it an open air, or was it.

ECS: No, it was closed in. Dark, I remember it being so terribly dark. Also, you know it's funny, I remember how it had a cold musty smell. . . . But it was in that stretch there between the Farm & Home Store and that other and that.

CT: On Main Street.

ECS: On Main Street, it was on Main Street. And I remember we went, as I said, we went one night and it was so cold. And from there, he didn't stay too long in Elkton with the skating rink. Ardmore had built one, and everyone then went to Ardmore for the skating rink. And that was the entertainment for the young people, basically in the fifties, late fifties and the sixties, because that was great, you know for us country folks, kids to go to the skating rink.

CT: So were you a good skater?

ECS: I could always skate forward, I could never skate backward. [laughter] Never could. And I always wanted to be able to skate and pivot and do all that, but I

couldn't. . . Joyce Dean Moore was also a school mate of mine, and her, she was just always a very good friend of mine . . . But anyway, the Moores lived there and Joyce had a pair of roller skates. And I remember spending the night with her and they would let us skate in the kitchen. The kitchen was so large and we could skate around the table. [laughter] I mean it was huge. And so that's probably where, if I learned to do anything special, it was skate around the table.

Eva Claire Smith: Senior Year

ECS: And I remember telling you one time how my senior year, how I cried the last three or four months the senior year, because it was just a sad, it was sad to think. I knew I was ending a part of my life. It was not like death, but I knew it was something that I would never bring back. And there were only 17 in our graduating class.

CT: Oh, OK.

ECS: And we just all loved each other. We were a family. And we, we knew the parents, we knew the brothers and sisters of all the students, and I don't know, it was just like they were going. I knew they were going somewhere, I knew I would probably see them occasionally but it wouldn't be like every day and to me, that was sad.

Eva Claire Smith: Peddler's Truck

ECS: But I think Elkton changed as, as all these other communities probably did, because what the community needed was located there and if it was not located there, there was a traveling store or a peddler that would come through.

CT: I remember the peddler.

ECS: And we had a peddler at Wheelerton. Of course remember I told you there was a store at the end of the road at Wheelerton. But that peddler, I think he came through more to cater to the blacks, because there was a lot of black people that lived across the railroad tracks, that was the area where the blacks lived. And oh, and we played with them too, by the way. We didn't know they were black. I mean they were just children and we all wanted to play so we all played, played in that road, and played around the store and we just had a good old time. But the peddler came and I think he probably went more for them because they would have chickens and eggs and stuff like that. Of course we would have chickens and eggs too, but we didn't have a whole lot of excess to sell. Now occasionally we would have extra eggs and Mama would, he would give her so much a dozen, the peddler man would. We might not have but a dozen. He might give her 50 cents, if that much, and then she would trade it out for something he had on the shelf. And the peddler was nothing more than an old school bus with all the seats removed. And he would install long shelves and with a barricade to the front of the shelf, like an extra piece of wood that would keep stuff from sliding off. And on the back, outside back, he would have cages, large cages, and he would always have chickens in them. So, basically I think, people that didn't have money, or that lived off what they had, they would trade. Of course he had money because he was selling you know canned products and stuff like that. But I do remember the peddler. We didn't trade with him an awful lot, because as I said, my dad would, he would pick up what we needed and bring it home.

Eva Claire Smith: Community Stores

ECS: I remember going to Bryson and buying fruit jar flats because we were canning

CT: Right.

ECS: When we lived at Bee Spring. And we would be canning and run out of flats,

CT: UmHm.

ECS: For the jar tops, and would go to Bryson and she would have them. So now the store's no longer there, as it's not in many places. You have to go to a town.

CT: That's right.

ECS: And as I said, you could go to Elkton and there would always, what you needed was there, until we progressed and the small stores are no longer in the communities like they used to be.

CT: UmHm. UmHm.

ECS: The skating rink or places of entertainment is no longer in that small area. So we're having to go further now than we did then to, you know, get what we need.

CT: Absolutely.

ECS: To eat or wear or whatever.

CT: UmHm. That's right.

ECS: Matter of fact, we have to drive to get gas.

Eva Claire Smith: Bus Ride to Nashville

ECS: As I said, when I went to Nashville, I had to catch the bus to ride to Nashville, because I would come home about every other weekend. And oddly enough, my Daddy would give me a twenty dollar bill. Twenty dollars would pay for my lunch every day in Nashville, it would pay for my bus fare, city bus fare in Nashville, and it would pay for me to get on this Greyhound Bus here in Elkton, which he stopped at what is now known as Riverside. That's where the bus would stop. And you knew the bus schedule. I mean, you could find the bus schedule. I knew the bus schedule before I came home from Nashville. I boarded the bus, I believe it was about Fifth, Fifth Avenue, ooh I forgot the other.

CT: And Commerce.

ECS: Commerce, that's right. That's where the bus station was in Nashville. And I don't remember how much a bus ticket was, but I do remember that I would buy, I always got a round trip from Nashville, and then when I boarded the bus down here, I already had the ticket. But that twenty dollars would last me for two weeks. Now I, granted I did eat a lot of Krystals. . . . But yes, there was a bus stop there and it was Grey Hound. Hm. I hadn't thought about that in a long time either. I remember one time my mother was selling Tupperware. And by that time I had begun to work at the Baptist Sunday School Board. And I had sold such a huge order of Tupperware, and had to take them back on the bus. And I remember, what she carried her stuff to the home parties in was two very large suitcases. It was not luggage, it was suitcases. They were big and thick and there was a certain way you packed all that Tupperware when you went from one, you know, when you took it apart from a party. And I had two of those, I had sold that much Tupperware for her at where I worked, and I had to get them on that bus. And they wouldn't go under the, there was a luggage compartment underneath the bus, but they were too big, and they had to ride on the bus. And I remember that bus driver was very nice, he didn't ask me what was in it. He didn't fuss but it just set in the aisle as we rode

back to Nashville, and every time somebody would board, he would pick it up and move it so they could get on.

Eva Claire Smith: School Basketball Games

ECS: I was certainly a basketball player. I loved basketball about as much as I loved my senior class. And I strived to be the very best. And I guess I was pretty good. But I was a guard, and to make the reader understand what I'm going to tell you, you have to know that girls' basketball was quite different from boys' basketball, in the sixties. Now somewhere down the road afterwards it did change, but women played half court. And I was a guard, and I'm very tall, I, but at that time I was probably about 5 foot 10, and skinny as a rail. I probably didn't weigh over a hundred and twenty pounds. I do weigh more than that now. I'm not as skinny as I would like to be, but that's neither here nor there. But I was a good ball player and I think girls and boys both were not as tall during that era as they are now. And I was extremely tall for the time. So, that gave me an advantage in playing basketball, because I had the height, and as I said, you know, you might have one out of every 12 or 15 girls that would be as tall as I was. But most of them that played ball weren't that tall, so that gave me the advantage of being good because I could stop.

CT: Right.

ECS: Most balls, basketballs. But, I was so thin, but oh did I ever love to play basketball. And I thought my whole family should love basketball. My daughter did play when she came up, but she was not as excited over it as I was, and by that time it had changed to full court and the girls played just as hard as the boys do. But I enjoyed the basketball. We would have basketball banquets at Elkton and school life was, I guess it was slower back then, but I think too because there were less children. There were schools, all communities just about had, had a, the bigger, the large communities had a school of their own. The nearest one to us was Prospect. Prospect had a school, had a high school, grade through high school is what I'm trying to say. Elkton had a school, and then over, the next closest I guess would be Beech Hill. Bunker Hill had a, through the eighth grade. There was, you get on further north, you had one in Pulaski, you had one at Bodenham, you had a school in Campbellsville, Lynnville, I hope I'm mentioning them all. And that's who we competed with. We competed within the county, not by double A, triple A, four A schools.

CT: UmHm.

ECS: We competed with our own county schools, and Elkton had very good basketball teams for both girls and boys.

CT: Always did have.

ECS: Yeah. And that's something that I think that has changed to, to lessen the size of our town. When the schools consolidated and made one high school, well you know everybody was not going to be able to play. And while the ball teams were at Elkton, that was such a social part of existence.

Eva Claire Smith: Plowing With Mules

I remember the tools that the farmers used in those late 40's and early 50's. My Daddy had two mules. One was named Red and one was Blue.[laughter]

Now isn't that, that was real creative. [laughter] And old Blue was actually a, I guess he was black, but he was so, he was shiny, and he did look blue, but Daddy called him that

Old Blue, Old Red. My Daddy was a small man, I'm, as I said, I'm a tall person. My Daddy was a small man, he was not near as tall as my mother was. I don't know, I'd say my dad was probably five foot eight or nine and probably weighed about a hundred and forty pounds. He was just a little man. And my mother used to get such a kick about watching Daddy work the mules. And that's what he used to work that first farm, and he used it at Bee Spring farm over there as well. But they were so fast, they were big, big old mules. And I can still see my dad behind a plow, a one, oh, just a wooden, two wooden handles with a plow, with a plow blade at the end of it, hooked up to those two old mules. And they would just run him to death. And my mother would say, she would laugh and say, "The mules is dragging your daddy across the garden," or dragging him across the field. [laughter] But he, that's what he used to plow the ground, and as I said, there was well over a hundred acres at that farm in Newman Hollow. And there was exactly 127 acres on the farm at Bee Spring, I remember that. But he did all that with those two mules.

CT: UmHm.

ECS: And a plow.