

ALETA KAY SMITH

Interviewer: Damian Macey

Date

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D: I am in the home of Kay Smith today to do an oral history for the Friends of the Library Project. And at this time I will turn it over to Kay.

K: My full name is Aleta Kay Smith. I was born April 20, 1946. And when I was growing up, my dad always told me he got my name from the comics, that was the end of that, that was all he said. And when I got older and got the internet, and there was another Aleta Smith out west somewhere, we have never met. And we were talking and I learned that she was named after someone from the comics, so we were talking about this, and she asked me if I knew who in the comics it was, and I said no. She said you are named after a princess, and I said a princess?. Well, back in the 40's when I was born there was a Princess Aleta and a Prince Valiant, now why my dad never told me that he just always laughed and said you were named after somebody in the comics.

My parents were Raymond E and Ina Fay Spittler Miller. Dad's parents were Elizabeth Clapp Miller and Francis Miller. They lived out around Clarksville. And my mother's parents were Sarah Saloma Kile Spittler and Herman Glen Spittler. I have one sister, Jacqueline Miller Titus, she is married to Gale Titus. I married Ken on June 4, 1967 and we have two children: Curtis Neal Smith and he was born March 22, 1970, and Chaundra Kay Smith, born December 22, 1971. She lives in Decatur and is a plant manager of the City of Decatur's Water Plant. Curtis lives in Marshall and works for the prison recreational system. Curtis has two children: Vanessa Kay, born February 19, 1998, and Nathan Curtis was born September 4, 2000.

I was born when my parents lived in the country out around Clarksville, then we moved when I was very small to Anderson Township to the old Kile house up on top of the hill. It belonged to my great-grandmother and from there we moved to Marshall to Ash Street, I was in third grade then. At that time we had the roller skates that you had the key to operate, we skated on the sidewalks, and we had pogo sticks which we jumped on in the middle of the street and bicycles and lots of kids in the neighborhood. We just played outside and didn't worry about anything. Except for one thing: when the fire siren went off, Jack Mallory lived across the street from us, and he was on the fire department and when that fire siren went off, all the kids ran to the nearest house and stood on the porch because when he took off, he was really driving fast. And that is one of the funny things I remembered about being a kid, when the siren went off you got up close to a house.

I went to the Ohio School building, the north and south schools, the jr high school and then to the high school. I graduated from high school, then I went to cosmetology school in Paris, graduated from that, did that ten years, then I started working as a social worker for the state of Illinois. I was doing Felicia Lowry's hair and she worked for the state of Illinois and she told me about a job that would be coming

along and I went and tested and got that job. I worked with Felicia and Margaret Turner, Janet Luce, and Fred Schaefer was the supervisor. And that was during the time that Opal Martin, I actually took her place, was diagnosed with cancer. And Emily Lee Mitchell worked there. I was pretty fortunate to get that job. It was kind of like being a hairdresser, you listen to life stories both places.

D: How long did you work at the Public Aid Office?

K: 30 years. Went to work there January 1, 1974. I was laid off during a time when the state was downsizing, I was off 11 months. And during that time I worked at the Baptist Church parsonage, and within a week of that job ending, I was called back to the state job. I just kinda felt like God laid me off to work at the parsonage, then put me back in the other job.

And I was 56 when I retired from the state job, whatever year that was. That was a long thirty years!! I really did enjoy working for the state. I had several different positions. I started out as clerical, and that was \$448 per month, that was in 1974. Then I was a case worker, a job coach, in which I traveled 8 counties and taught people about job applications and job interviews, then I was in Edgar County for two years as a case worker, then I came back down to Marshall and finished out my 30 years. When I was travelling, my base office was Charleston.

D: Did you have some strange or interesting visits in some of your counties?

K: Well, yes. When I first came in as a case worker, you go in and just think that you just can't sit down today, some of the houses were pretty bad, you could see flies eating out of dirty dishes and just basic filth. They don't even do home visits now. I went to one house and they wouldn't let me in, they carried the lady to the door and I talked to her through the door. I didn't really need or want to go in the house. One thing when I was a facilitator, I was in Mattoon the Salvation Army building, and they served lunches downstairs and they had a lot of men that were very obnoxious, men who didn't have jobs and had been put down a lot and it made you feel bad for them because they didn't want to be there, but they had to come there to get money and things to help their families. And there was this one guy, he was real sharp toned, and he was really getting nasty and I told him I would buy his lunch the next meeting we had if he did what he was supposed to do. He didn't think I would follow through but he didn't know that I did that with everyone.

The next month I saw him and said I was buying his lunch and he said "You really are?" And for some of the ones I dealt with that buying and eating lunch with them really made them realize that we care about them and made all the difference. So I didn't have any trouble with that group any more, they would help me carry in my stuff and every month I ate lunch with the same group that I was teaching upstairs. It made them more comfortable that I would socialize with them beside someone who just told them to do this and do that.

D: As a youngster growing up you mentioned a pogo stick and skates. Did you have other hobbies?

K: I was in a lot of activities. My mom and dad both worked, dad was a policeman and mom worked at Martin's Drug Store and so I was in quite a few groups. Janie Pearce, Doc and Lorene Pearce's

daughter, was one of my best friends, still is. And Lorene was a 4-H leader and so we joined 4-H when we were in about 3rd grade. She taught us sewing and cooking and then we got into fair projects. All of us girls that ran around together have stayed close which is unusual, there are about 13 of us. And we still get together. I graduated high school in 1964 and our class is a very close class. I think we have all grown up and gotten over the "I am better than you feelings."

I was also in Girl Scouts, did a lot of going to scout camps and all kinds of things like that. In high school I was in the sports activities, GAA, at that time we didn't have girls athletic teams. Ken and I went to a track meet for our granddaughter last night and when we were walking out I said "If they would have had this when I was in school I would have been right out there having a good time." I was an attendant twice for the Christmas Dances, I don't think they even have a Christmas Dance anymore. I was on the National Honor Society, and was in a lot of the clubs that we had back then.

D: Was there any dances or anything that was really special to you?

K: No, I went to all the dances and special activities. I tried to learn shorthand with Mrs. Bush, that was a disaster. I thanked Mrs. Hutchens every day for teaching me how to type. I thanked her many times while she was still alive for teaching us how to type.

After I became a mother, I became a girl scout leader, I was a boy scout leader, and Ruth Ann Anacker and I did those things together. I worked with PTA, I don't know if PTA even exists anymore. I have always sewed, I have made comforters, I do crocheting and knitting and one of my love was art and painting. And later on I went to photography class with my granddaughter, and she is very gifted with photography. Here is a picture of a beautiful road down in Florida.

One of the things that has changed so much is technology. When I started working we did have the electric typewriter, but then by the time I quit, we had computers. And I think the computers make everything so much easier. If they are working well and you know what you are doing. But when I get into a mess, I am very fortunate that I have two grandkids that can call and they come over and help grandma out.

Cellphones are the same way, I can mess them up too.

D: As a homemaker, what appliance do you think has made it much easier for you?

K: For me it's the microwave. Ha Ha. Now the refrigerator would be very important too. But I don't think I could do without my microwave anymore.

D: How about the car?

K: That is very important too, I have mine and he has his.

D: Is there an event that has happened in your lifetime that has really changed your life?

K: No, I have enjoyed every part of my life, each stage that I have gone through, I love where I am at now, I have no desire to go back to college or school. In addition to cosmetology school, I did attend

LakeLand and Eastern but I did not graduate from college. Ken and I both worked with the swim teams, seems like we spent a lot of time working with the kids.

D: How about being the wife of a politician and the mayor of our city?

K: That really did not affect me so much, I did a lot of "behind the scenes" stuff on that. And I always did volunteer a lot, whether at church or on different committees like with the school or with the swim team. Whatever the children were in, I was there supporting them. So I was very supportive of Ken and his job but I very seldom went into his office. If he needed something I could do, then I would do it. I worked many hours at Harlan Hall.

D: Have you thought of any political career for yourself?

K: No, I have no desire, no thank you. We did start the fund raiser at Harlan Hall that was the Christmas Bingo which is still going on. But I turned all that over to Jennifer Bishop at the Chamber and I help with anything that she needs.

D: You used the term "snowbird", you are now spending a great deal of time in warmer climates.

K: I usually leave the day after Christmas and then I don't come home until the first of April and I would stay longer if Ken would. He misses Marshall. But, yes, I am a "snowbird". We have a place in Okeechobee, its called Ancient Oak, its a gated 55 and older community. It's a regular little home down there. They call them park models and then it has a Florida room on it, it has 2 bedrooms, 2 baths, laundry room, storage building.

D: Well we spend a couple months in Florida, usually January and February, and people ask us "What do you do".

K: On my, there is bingo, there is horseshoe, billiards, card games, swimming pool, hot tub, I ride my bicycle a lot and do a little walking and I visit. There are a lot of Marshall people in our park, like Janet Huffington Crow, and the first year we were down there we were painting. And she said "isn't this fun, it like being teenagers again only we get a social security check". And I read a lot of books, we eat out a lot, we enjoy that. I just don't care for snow at all.

D: If you were say, in Europe some time and people asked you where you are from, what would you tell them about Marshall and why it's a good place to live?

K: We have been through Canada and on a cruise. And we met a couple from Australia, lovely couple, and we did explain our little town to them as one of the cleanest, nicest little towns there is, we have one of the best school systems, its just a real friendly welcoming community. We have alot of things going on now, with the nursing home and the assisted living facility, junior college satellite nearby. When you drive through and just see how clean and nice it is. I think that Street Scape has helped, and its just a beautiful little community.

D: And one thing I have had people tell me is that the homeowners keep their properties clean.

Well Kay I thank you on behalf of the Friends of the Library for taking the time to talk to me today.