

## Interview with Mrs. Laura Smalley, Hempstead, Texas, 1941

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### Interview with Mrs. Laura Smalley, Hempstead, Texas, 1941

Mrs. Laura Smalley: They tend to all the children. Tend to the children. Just like, you know, you bring a whole lot of children, you know, and put them down, you know, at one house. Well, there somebody have to look over them, you know and tend to them, that way. Just a house full of them children. And if one act bad, you know, they'd whup him. They'd whup him too, the old woman. And if the old woman didn't tend to the children, they'd whup, they'd whup her too.

John Henry Faulk: Hmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: You know to make her tend to the children, she wasn't doing nothing. Well she wasn't a cripted [crippled] woman like me, you know. She wasn't an old cripted woman, satisfied she wasn't an old cripted woman like me. And they'd whup her. And they had trays, I don't know where you see a tray. Wooden tray. Dug out, you know, all about that, that long. And all of them you know would get around that tray with spoons, and just eat. I can recollect that because I ate out the tray.

John Henry Faulk: Hmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: With spoons, you know, and eat, treat you like mush or soup or something like that. But feed them, you know, before twelve o'clock. And all them children get around there and just eat, eat, eat out that thing. And that old woman, you know, she would tend to them. Her name, Aunt Tishe. Yeah, I know what happen to her. Old woman, name Aunt Tishe. And she—

John Henry Faulk: Just like slopping hogs wasn't it?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: It, just like a tray, you know, just like a tray, you know, you have, it's made just like a hog pit, a hog trough, you know.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Hmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: And, and ah, of course you know they'd wash them things and scald them out for the children. I didn't see them scald but that what they told me, they scald them out, you know.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Uhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: For the children. And ah, them children eat out of that, that thing and, that's with wood spoon, if one would, if one reach his spoon over in the other's hand, over in the other's plate, he going hit him. Hit him, you know. Knock that, knock that there, s-s spoon back, you know, on his side. On his side. And, that's when we was children, you know. Wasn't able to, to, tend to no, tend to no other children. I had a brother though, he could tend to children. In the, you know, just sit them down in a corner and put this child, you know how little children, put this child in between his leg, and then hug his hand around this child, that's the way he nursed them. Couldn't stand up with him. Couldn't, you know, just enough, you know, shake him this way in the arms. I, I can remember that. I had a brother, name, Wright. And he just shake that child. Set him in the floor. And he—

John Henry Faulk: He was too little to pick him up.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, sir. And if that child kick much, he'd fall, kick him over too, you know, and the old woman come there and spank them and give him the child back in his arm.

John Henry Faulk: [*chuckles*]

Mrs. Laura Smalley: And they had certain times to come to them childrens. I think about this like a cow out there will go to the calf, you know.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Ahha.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: And you know, they'd have a certain time, you know, cow come to his calf and at, at, at night. Well, they come at ten o'clock. Everyday at ten o'clock to all them babies. Give them what nurse, you know.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Ahha.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Them what didn't nurse they didn't come to them at all, the old lady fed them. Them wasn't big, wasn't big enough to eat, you know. She'd ah, the old mother had time, you know, to come. When that horn blowed, they'd blow the horn for the mothers, you know. They'd just come just like cows, just a running, you know, coming to the children.

John Henry Faulk: Out of the fields.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Out of the fields.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: How long did they nurse a baby?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Ma'am? [*echo*]

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Couple years? How long would they nurse a baby, till it was big enough to walk, I guess?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes. Something or other like nine months, or something like that, you know.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Ahha.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: They'd nurse them till they be, get big enough, you know, to eat.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Ahha.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Ta get eat. And they come to, come to every time, come there and ah, nurse that baby, ten o'clock. Ten o'clock in the day.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: [During (?)] the day?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, ma'am. Ten o'clock in the day and three o'clock in the day. They come to that baby and nurse it.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Twice a day.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, ma'am, twice a day. Come there and nurse that baby. He couldn't eat, you know. But one could eat he would't come until dinner time. But little one what couldn't eat they'd come to it. That old woman had a time in there slopping them children. [*laugh*] Yes, sir. And I knowed that. And I remember, you see a scar right up in my forehead? Kind of a scar.

John Henry Faulk: Uhmm.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Yes. Ahha.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I was, I had slipped out in the ah, some boys was throwing and knocked this scar in, in ah, on my head when I was little.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Ahha. It's way up here. Right underneath your hairline. Ahha.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, ma'am. When I was little. Slipping off out there ah, Old Woman Slopping room. [*laugh*], I call it. Because you know that's [where she (?)] fed us.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Ahha.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, sir. And that scar, because a boy throwed a rock and hit me here. When, when, when ah, I was ah, young, you know, and hit me. When I was little. Coming on out there, I call it, Old Lady Slop Room.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Hmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: [What I'm tell was (?)] no slop room but there's a house, you know, where are feed all the children. I call that a slop room place.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Hmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Fed all the children.

John Henry Faulk: Now, who did the cooking for the plantation?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I don't know what the old woman's name done the, the cooking. A Miss Clemens did tell me not, not long ago, who done the main cooking. You know they didn't cook, cook in the ah, kitchen like here; they'd have a off, off kitchen. Off from the house.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: On the outside, ahha.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, ahha. And then pack the vittles, you know, to the kitchen.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Uh huh.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Pack it to the kitchen. They didn't have, they wasn't cooking in the, in the kitchen dining room. I was great big girl when I knowed the Mrs. Bethany and them had a, had a kitchen in the dinning room mixed together. I was a big old girl.

John Henry Faulk: [*laugh*]

Mrs. Laura Smalley: They cooked, you know, on the outside.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Uh huh.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Right in the yard but no they cooked it out, out there, and then brought it to the house. They always brought it to their kitchen, when I was a child.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: And they had some of the, some of the slaves who worked in the house and then some who worked on the yard, isn't that right?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No ma'am. They, they, they, ah, them work in, in the yard. Men work in the yard, some nights. But them there what, what work in the kitchen, they didn't have nothing to do it, in the yard. And they had one, [*someone makes a hush sound*] one, you know, to make up beds. Had one to make up beds, you know. And one to cook. And then the girls, had [*six at time (?)*] make up bed and then they go to field. And they had regular nurse, you know. Nurse you never did see Old Mrs. with the baby. Never no time. They had a regular nurse.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Uhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: It's like, you know, when you'd hire somebody's nurse, but it be a grown woman nurse. Tend to that baby. And they keep no can never did get, no, never did carry it to old mister. Now if it was hungry at night or day, and I doubt it was hungry, they carry it there to her. You tend to that baby. That baby slept with the old nurses and all.

John Henry Faulk: Hmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, has slept with them. Didn't have nothing to do. Carry that baby and uh, and ah, sit there until, ah, he'd till ah, he'd nurse. And then after he'd nurse, you know, then, you'd carry it back tend to it. You didn't have to, this, she tend to it, you know, and give it to you. You'd get, give it to her and nurse it, care how cold it is, and you'd carry that baby back on in that bed. That room where you was.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Hmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: And I know Mrs.—

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Well, did the mistress nurse the baby, or did she have a—

John Henry Faulk: Yeah.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: She, she nursed from the breast.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Ahha.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: But see, she'd she nursed this baby that, that it would be hungry. Well, this here, nurse would bring it to her, and let her nurse it. And then when she nurse she'd hand it right back,

night or day, you know. Had tend to that baby night and day hand it back her. And that baby any kind of sick that nurse had sit up there at night and tend to it.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Uh huh.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, ma'am. Well, more than—

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: You never did, eh?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Ma'am?

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: You never worked in care of it like that?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: What the nurse had to do?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No. Well, you see that's done now right here.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Ahha

John Henry Faulk: That's right.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Folks now done now right here. Oh, my niece at ah, granddaughter here, she take care of baby, and they can mother her a little take care and ??? do ??? slave time. *[laugh]*

John Henry Faulk: Hmm.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Yeah, I know it.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: She never do hardly let her take it.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: I know a lot of women [dealing someone (?)].

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, ma'am. Don't send to her, you know.

John Henry Faulk: Well, do you remember, remember any of the slaves being sold? Do you remember any slave sellers, you know, men that would just buy and sell slaves?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No, sir. I never did see it. Why I never, us children never did know that, you know. We heard talk of it, but then I reckon that was after, after slavery I reckon. We heard talk of it. I used to hear them talk about, you know, you putting them on stumps, you know. Or something high, you know and bidding them off like you did cattle.

John Henry Faulk: Hmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Bid them off like you did cattle.

John Henry Faulk: Well, none of your folks were ever sold then?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No, sir. None of them never was sold.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: You were born right there and never did leave? You were?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Born right there and stayed there until I was about nine, ten years old, maybe more. Stayed right there. We didn't know where to go.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Uhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Mama and them didn't know where to go, you see after freedom broke. Just turned, just like you turn something out, you know. Didn't know where to go. That's just where they stayed.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Uh huh. That's right.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Hmm. Didn't know where to go. Turned us out just like, you know, you turn out cattle. *[laugh]* I say. Didn't know where ta go.

John Henry Faulk: You remember when the Civil War was being fought?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Well, I, I can't remember much about it, but I remember this much: When uh, Mr. Bethany, was gone a long time. Look like a long, long, time. And I remember all the next morning, it when he, he got up. Now don't get, don't knock with that back there, Well, ah, he, he ah, we all got up and all of them went to the house. Went to the house to see old master. And I thought old master was dead, but he wasn't. He had been off to the war, and ah, come back. But then I didn't know, you know, until the war. I just know he was gone a long time. All the niggas gathered around to see the old master again. You know, and old master didn't tell you know, they was free.

John Henry Faulk: He didn't tell you that?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Uh-uh. No he didn't tell. They worked there, I think now they say they worked them, six months after that. Six months. And turn them loose on the nineteenth of June. That's why, you know, we celebrate that day. Colored folks—celebrates that day. [*repeats end of sentence*]

**END OF SIDE A**