

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

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Mrs. Laura Smalley: Well, I, I well I don't know about the church when it first started up, no more than the, you know, ah, when I was a child, you know, they used to didn't have no church, you know, in no house, you know, they always had it in the trees.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: In the trees?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Under trees. Under trees. Yes, ma'am. Under trees.

John Henry Faulk: Brush arbors?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, sir. Some, if they didn't have no brush arbors, they just had it under the tree. You see. Just had it under a tree. And I don't know, you know, the because of churches, you know, when you started. But I know when mama and them used to go to church it be under the trees, you know. Out and under, under the trees. And, and didn't have no church houses much then. Just like, you know, you get a big old tree but and clear all out from under it, and make a, dry stalk down, you know, and make benches on it, you know. That's what they have church, in—

John Henry Faulk: What kind of songs did they sing? Do you remember the names of any of the songs?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No. I couldn't. *[laugh]* I can't remember. I couldn't. You know I can't read, I never remember the songs. But they didn't sing songs like they sung now, you know. They'd sing them old song, you know, about *Amazing Grace* and how sweet it sound, and all like that. But you know I can't recollect all of them. I can't recollect them since I been grown.

John Henry Faulk: Well, I declare.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: ??? . *[Can't recollect them (?)].* That's what's mostly they sung, *Amazing Grace*, how sweet it sound, and all like that. And ah, I wouldn't know hardly all them old songs. Sometime I can bring off them old songs up again, again I can't.

John Henry Faulk: Well, did you ever hear one called, ah, *Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray*?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes. I've heard that.

John Henry Faulk: Was that one they sang way back then?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No. They didn't sing that way back in that time. Now, they sung an old song about the, the *Thunderbolts Rattling* and [*Four Sons Stand So Idol Son (?)*], *Lord I Got to Get Union In My Soul*.

John Henry Faulk: How does that go?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Let me see can, I sing a little of it.

John Henry Faulk: Seem like I remember it.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: [*sings*]

Thunderbolts Rattling

These thunderbolts is rattling. Poor sinners stand so high the sun. Lord I got Union in My Soul, ain't got long to stay.

John Henry Faulk: I've heard it!

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, sir.

John Henry Faulk: Can you sing the rest of that, that's a good. That's a sure find.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: [*continues singing: Thunderbolts Rattling*]

Lord I ain't got long to staaay. Lord I ain't got long to stay in the world. Ain't got long ta stay. God's calling me and I ain't got long to staaa-a-ay. Lord I ain't got long to stay in the world. I ain't got long to stay. Good-bye. And I ain't got long to staaay, Lord. I ain't got long to stay in the world. I ain't got' long to staaay. God's calling me and I ain't got long to staaay. Lord, I ain't got long to stay in the world. I ain't got long to staaay. Fare ye well, I ain't got long to staaay. Lord, I ain' got long to stay in the world. I ain' got long to stay.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I ain't got much a voice for singing.

John Henry Faulk: Well, you got, oh, you got a good voice.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: [*laugh*] I ain't ??? .

John Henry Faulk: Lord have mercy, child. I didn't know you could sing that.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: ??? .

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Yeah. That's very true.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I cain't [can't], ain't got no voice for singing.

John Henry Faulk: You remember a song called, *Go Down Moses*?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: *Go Down Moses*?

John Henry Faulk: "Tell old pharaoh let my people go?"

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I never did know that's one. *Go Down Moses*. Tell, that one, what it said go down. I heard talk of it. I heard it, some. *Go Down Moses*.

John Henry Faulk: You ever hear one called, *Deep Riva*?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No, sir.

John Henry Faulk: You ever hear that one they call, *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*? Did you ever here the folks sing that?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes. I heard the folks sing that, but I never did know it, about *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*, ??? going carry me home. I never could learn that. I, I know, know ah, one, one [ah (?)], one the song I [knew was (?)], all that I remember is now, "My ??? ." I don't know now about that song, but I know it though.

John Henry Faulk: How does it go?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I'm trying to think of it now. It goes about, about, about ah, on praying, praying to the Lord. Save my soul. But I could, I can't, get it together. You know I, if I can't get it together, you know, I don't want to, sang, sing it. I can't get it together.

John Henry Faulk: Uhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Because sometime, you know, that way I get them wrong. And they be sung wrong. [*laugh*]

John Henry Faulk: That's right.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, sir. Sung wrong.

John Henry Faulk: Ah, what about one of these songs ah, *Sinner Don't Let This Harvest Pass*. Did you ever hear that one?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No, sir. I never knowed that one, *Let This Harvest Pass*.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: What's that other one about, *Get On Board Little Children*?

John Henry Faulk: Oh, yes. That *Old Ship of Zion*. Do you remember that one?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I, I remember it but I don't know it all.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: [*sings*]

Old Ship of Zion!

I seen the oooo-old ship of Zion.

John Henry Faulk: [*joins the singing*]

Get on board. Get on board.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I don't know all the ??? . I just know a little of it. [*sings : Old Ship of Zion while the Unidentified Woman Interviewer hums along*]

Get on b-o-o-oard, little children. Get on board—

Mrs. Laura Smalley: We don't sing it, you know, that way.

John Henry Faulk: How do you sing it?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: [*continues: Old Ship of Zion*]

Old ship of Zion. Get on board.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I don't know much of that one. [*sings*]

I have got my mother going on the ship of Zion. Get on board little children.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I can't get that one together. I don't know many song. This here late and [also (?)] late song. I don't know many—

John Henry Faulk: Has church services changed much from the way they used to be?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

John Henry Faulk: How, and how, how have they changed?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Mhmm.

John Henry Faulk: I say how? How have they—

Mrs. Laura Smalley: They don't people the people done changed up from singing, you know, and played up from religion and everything, you know that way.

John Henry Faulk: Is that right?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, sir. Done changed up from the religion and everything that way. I'm trying to get that old, that song, song like, it don't look like I can't get it straight. [*pause*] He ah, well, you done, you knowed this one about been s-s, *Saved All Day*?

John Henry Faulk: No. I never heard that one. I'd like to hear it. How does it go?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: [*sings*]

Saved All Day

I've been sa-a-a-aved all daaay, no evil have I done. Been saved all day, no evil have I done. Been saved all day, no evil have I done. Sanctified and holy, no evil have I done. There is a love everybody, no evil have I done. There is a love everybody-y-y, no evil have I done. Good Lord, there is love everybody, no evil have I done. Sanctified and holy, no evil have I done.

John Henry Faulks: [*blurts—* "Good!" *in the middle of the song*]

Haven't lied on nobody, no evil have I done. Haven't lied on nobody-y, no evil have I done. Haven't lied on nobody, no evil have I done. Sanctified and holy, no evil have I done. There's a love everybody, no evil have I done. There's a love everybody, no evil have I done. Good Lord, there's a love everybody, no evil have I done Sanctified and holy, no evil have I done.

John Henry Faulk: Why that's a good one. Where did you hear that?

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: That's a good one!

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Oh, we learned that, we had sung that in our church, you know, up here.

John Henry Faulk: Ahha.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: We sung that sometime in our church.

John Henry Faulk: You can, can you remember any that the slaves sung? Could you, could you, or did they ever sing any songs?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No. Ah, I , you know I never [sang (?)] in slavery, but I heard them sing some after freedom, I know them, some. But I, you know, that was way back some. I can hardly sing none of them. And one of them, I can't seem to remember. My old stepdaddy used to sing it about the thunderballs rattling and about sinner standing so idol son. *Lord, I Got Union In My Soul, I Ain't Got Long To Stay*. Didn't, I told you that one ain't I?

John Henry Faulk: [*Speaking in concert with the Unidentified Woman Interviewer*] Yeah. I'd say that's a good one to hear.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: You sang that one for us, that's a nice one.

John Henry Faulk: [*a rooster crows*] Your stepdaddy. Stepdaddy.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, ahha. That old red man. He sung that all the time. [*laugh*]

John Henry Faulk: Ummm. Ah, what, what were the preachers like in those days?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I don't know, sir. I never remember no preachers [*rooster crows*] in slavery time. Never remember. Of course, you know, I wouldn't have been so old, but you I could remember some things. I wasn't say so old.

John Henry Faulk: Ahha.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: But I could remember some things. But I never remember no preacher. [*rooster crows*]

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: They never allow them to have preachers, did they?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I never remember none.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Uhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I never remember none.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Just get together and sing and pray, eh?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: That's all I head, would hear them sing. And you know, night come [*rooster crows*] I'd go and sleep ??? pretty [soon (?)].

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Uhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: These most that I sing, these here songs would sing, you know, after, after, you know, I'd be good big girl, you know. We use to go to church. Them arbors, you know, but they never did ah, never know—

John Henry Faulk: Well, they had preachers under the arbors, didn't they?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I know one of them. His name—

John Henry Faulk: Who was that?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Name, name Uncle Mark. I never will forget him.

John Henry Faulk: Was he good?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Oh, yes. A old man, name, Uncle Mark. He preached. Yes, sir. His name, Uncle Mark.

John Henry Faulk: Was he a good preacher [preacher]?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, sir. He's a good preacher. Name, Uncle Mark. And—

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Preach like they do now?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Ma'am?

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Did he preach like they do now?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: They did better. They preached better then, and I reckon, because you see they was ah [*dogs barking*] then, now they preaches by scripts most of the time. But then, you know, they just preach, preach by the spirit, [*rooster crows*] you know. Just as—

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Ahha.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: —the spirit, spirit let them, you know. And ah, they could preach good without a Bible because, you see, they'd, they'd have religion, you know, and ah—

John Henry Faulk: That's right.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: And, and the Lord'll teach them, you know.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Uhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Teach them what to say and how to say, you know. That's what he taught us then. But now you know, they preach us by scripts. You know, they don't preach by that. [*repeat*]

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