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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

MR. PATRICK D. SMITH
NATIVE MISSISSIPPIAN
AND PROMINENT AUTHOR

INTERVIEWER: DR. ORLEY B. CAUDILL

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ABSTRACT

The oral history recorded with author Patrick D. Smith documents the life of a Mississippian with a love of writing which combines with a compassion for the poor and downtrodden people of the world to make his novels ever more popular. The history opens with a discussion of Mr. Smith's life in rural Mississippi and his family heritage. His father was a political figure whose life was spent in public service; he served several terms as sheriff, others as chancery clerk and for twenty years was State Highway Commissioner.

Of his younger life, Patrick Smith recalls that "We all really lived in the woods, Boy Scouts and all that bit, but I always, in high school, also like to write." He worked throughout his secondary and higher education years on school papers, journals and for newspapers. His life in Mendenhall had a tremendous impact upon him because "I don't think I could have ever become a writer had I not been born at the time that I was born and grew up during those days..." His job at home throughout junior high and high school was caring for and milking the family cow and "The other brothers had various jobs and we just really learned the value of work."

Humorously, Patrick wound up at junior college on an impulse. He had left home enroute to the University of Mississippi in Oxford, but while delayed in Jackson for a change of buses he met some boys who attended Hinds Junior College, at Raymond, a suburb of Jackson. They convinced him he should go to their school rather than the university. The impulse was a sound one and "I'm tremendously glad that I did because at Hinds I had two English teachers that really took an interest in me." A happenstance was very influential in his entire life. After completing junior college he then matriculated at the university, but his education was interrupted by World War Two. He joined the Merchant Marine before graduation and his experiences in the service are discussed; as is the value of that experience to him as a writer.

At the university, Patrick Smith wrote fiction for the literary magazine, but more importantly he became acquainted with Professor A. Wigfall Green, who later on was to encourage him to send his manuscript for The River Is Home to a publisher. Of Professor Green he opines that "He was, I suppose, in writing at that stage of my life, my godfather." It is humorous to read Mr. Smith's first approach to a publisher. He was operating an automobile sales agency when he wrote his first book. On a trip to the university he asked Professor Green to review the manuscript and was told that it was publishable and should be sent to a publisher. He went to the library, picked up a book and got the publisher's name and address and

mailed the manuscript with a note that "Enclosed is a manuscipt of a novel called The River Is Home. I would appreciate your publishing it immediately." Publish it they did and author Patrick Smith was on the way to success. Interestingly, he recalls, "I wrote it really for my own pleasure. When I wrote it I had no idea of even sending it to a publisher."

The discussion then turns to Mr. Smith's writing techniques. He explains his system of taking notes, the virtues of outlines--he doesn't use them--and his technique of writing. Presently employed full time, he devotes intensive periods to his writing. Often he will work continuously from Friday evening until Monday morning writing.

Also he compares the necessity for research in some instances and not others. The books The River Is Home and The Beginning were based upon his life in Mississippi and practically no extra research was required. On the other hand, his books about the Seminole Indians and the migrant workers of Florida were totally new subjects to him. So he went to the Everglades, studied the locale and got acquainted with the Indians for the book. In preparation for Angel City he visited and lived in migrant workers' camps, becoming familiar with it at first hand.

The sources for such things as characters' names and place names are discussed also. Mr. Smith finds an ordinary road map an excellent source for names of places in his stories. And he places much emphasis upon picking names of characters which reinforce the roles that they will play--a sinister sounding name for an evil character and vice versa.

All of Mr. Smith's novels are based upon people and how events have affected them rather than the events themselves. This derives from his experiences during the great Depression when "so many kids would come to school without any shoes, walking through snow on occasion. Kids would come to school with nothing to eat...Seeing all that sort of thing had an effect on me. I've always felt a real sorrow and a sympathy for the underdogs in life, the underprivileged people." He sees clearly what he wants to write about, and it is the writing he loves rather than the attention and prominence from publishing.

Nevertheless, success has changed Patrick Smith's life. The demands are great for him to lecture, to listen to the story plots of those who can't write, and to perform a myriad of public services. These aspects of his increasing prominence are discussed. He summarizes his situation in these words "What I would like to do in the future, and I hope that this comes about in the next two or three years, is write full time...If I could just have all the time to write, I've got the subjects that I want to write about."

BIOGRAPHY

Patrick Davis Smith was born in D'Lo, Mississippi, October 8, 1927, because that was the nearest hospital to his home town of Mendenhall. He is one of three sons of the late Mr. John D. Smith, Senior, a politician, and Mrs. Nora Eubanks Smith. Young Patrick attended Mendenhall schools; Hinds Junior College, in Raymond, Mississippi; and the University of Mississippi at Oxford. His education was interrupted when he joined the United States Merchant Marine for service in World War Two, and among his voyages were trips to North Africa, Scandanavia and Europe.

After his service career, Mr. Smith returned to Ole Miss and completed his work for the B.A. degree in 1947. He won the Masters degree in 1959, also at the University of Mississippi. During the years 1948-56 he operated his own automobile dealership and a cattle ranch in his home town of Mendenhall, but interrupted that career to report on the Korean War as a freelance war correspondent. After several years in the automobile dealership he turned to a career in public relations, serving with the Vickers Division of Sperry Rand Corporation (1956-58); Hinds Junior College, (1959-62) and the University of Mississippi (1962-66) before joining the Brevard Community College, in Cocoa, Florida, in 1966, as director of college relations, a position he still holds.

While serving as director of public information at the University of Mississippi he was in the center of things during the traumatic events of the James Meredith integration crisis. As public information director he was the focal point for attention of hundreds of media representatives, demanding information and assistance. He also was victimized by the tear gas used during the crisis. He recalls that "I couldn't get out of the building when they started firing that tear gas and guns. People fired through the window of my office." His exposure to the tear gas was serious enough that it had long term adverse effects upon Mr. Smith's eyes.

Patrick Smith has aspired to write at least since he was a youth. While in high school he was the columnist for the Simpson County News, the local newspaper, reporting on high school activities. He recalls that he wrote for them on all of the sports events, such as football and basketball and "I wrote kind of a high school gossip column."

He was encouraged and stimulated by two English teachers at Hinds Junior College and was appointed editor of the college paper at Hinds. When he went on to the University of Mississippi he continued writing and wrote fiction for the campus literary magazine. After college, and while operating

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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

MR. PATRICK D. SMITH

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of the University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Mr. Patrick D. Smith, a native of Mendenhall, Mississippi, now living at Merritt Island, Florida. Mr. Smith is the author of a number of books, some of which have been--and others are being--made into motion pictures. The interview is being recorded at the home of Mr. Smith's mother in Mendenhall, October 8, 1980. The interviewer is Dr. Orley B. Caudill.

Dr. Caudill: Mr. Smith, will you say a word?

Mr. Smith: Thank you. I'm happy that you're in Mendenhall this morning.

Dr. Caudill: Thank you. Mr. Smith, thank you very much for taking time to record the oral history with us. We're delighted that you're back home for a visit. I'd like to start off with some reminiscences of your youth and your early life. Tell me a little bit about your family background. When did the family come to Mississippi?

Mr. Smith: My grandfather on my mother's side came to this country from Ireland and, of course, I'm half Irish. My father's family was in this state so long that nobody is really sure where they came from. My great-grandmother Smith when she died was 113 years old.

Dr. Caudill: Oh, was she really!

Mr. Smith: Yes.

Dr. Caudill: Did you know her?

Mr. Smith: Yes, I knew her before she died. At one time they had a picture of her on her 105th birthday down in the courthouse here. They had been here so long she originally lived in a log cabin here in Simpson County. I have never traced that part of

the family.

Dr. Caudill: Now your father was a politician?

Mr. Smith: Yes. He was a county sheriff several terms and chancery clerk and then he was a state highway commissioner for twenty years.

Dr. Caudill: Was that sort of a tradition in the family? Were they mostly farm people?

Mr. Smith: Farm people, yes.

Dr. Caudill: You were born in Mendenhall?

Mr. Smith: I really wasn't but I say that I was. I was born in D'Lo simply because D'Lo had the only hospital in Simpson county. I never lived in D'Lo. I used to go on a TV program or something like that and say I was born in D'Lo and immediately they would write that I'm "a native of D'Lo." So I spent one day--when I was born--in D'Lo but I'm a native of Mendenhall. Sounds confusing, doesn't it?

Dr. Caudill: Yes. Well, you were born in October so you just had a birthday.

Mr. Smith: Today is my birthday.

Dr. Caudill: Today? Well, happy birthday! This was unplanned, I didn't notice that I was taking part of your birthday for the oral history.

Mr. Smith: I had nothing planned!

Dr. Caudill: Well, that makes it more important for us. Let us reminisce a little bit about your early life. You went to school in Mendenhall schools?

Mr. Smith: Yes.

Dr. Caudill: How many children were there in your family?

Mr. Smith: There were three.

Dr. Caudill: A brother and [sister]?

Mr. Smith: All brothers, yes.

Dr. Caudill: All brothers!

Mr. Smith: Of course, my youngest brother was not in school at that time. He was six years younger than myself--my older brother was just a couple of years older--so my youngest brother really wasn't in school at the time that I went through high school

Dr. Caudill: Now you went through high school here in Mendenhall?

Mr. Smith: In Mendenhall.

Dr. Caudill: You went to Hinds Junior College?

Mr. Smith: Yes.

Dr. Caudill: And then you went to Ole Miss?

Mr. Smith: Yes.

Dr. Caudill: At Mendenhall, were you athletically inclined?

Mr. Smith: Yes. I played football and basketball and did all the things that kids would do when they grew up back in the 30s. We all really lived in the woods, Boy Scouts and all that bit, but I always, in high school, also liked to write. I started out [then].

Dr. Caudill: You began that early?

Mr. Smith: Yes.

Dr. Caudill: What did you do in high school in terms of writing?

Mr. Smith: I worked all through high school as a columnist for the Simpson County News, which is the local newspaper here. I wrote all the sports events: football, basketball, for them. And I wrote kind of a high school gossip column.

Dr. Caudill: Oh, did you really!

Mr. Smith: About who was dating whom and all that sort of thing.

Dr. Caudill: You knew where the bodies were buried?

Mr. Smith: Yes, I knew where the bodies were buried.

Dr. Caudill: Now, what did the Depression do to your family? Your father was a public official so it may not have impacted so much.

Mr. Smith: It didn't. We were never what you would call poor or hungry or anything like that. We didn't have any money to spend or anything but I think it did me a tremendous amount of good. I don't think I could have ever become a writer had I not been born at the time that I was born and grew up during those days because we all had to work.

My job all through junior high school and high school, was milking a cow; keeping the family cow. The other brothers had various jobs and we just really learned the value of work.

Dr. Caudill: Did you get paid for the column that you did for the local newspaper?

Mr. Smith: No. They didn't pay. [laughter]

Dr. Caudill: That's what they call "added prestige with no increase in pay?"

Mr. Smith: Right, that by-line was what it was for.

Dr. Caudill: With great satisfaction. Looking back from your graduation at high school, what would be the most memorable part of your life. Now Mendenhall has to be considered rather rural.

Mr. Smith: Yes, it's a rural town.

Dr. Caudill: Did you feel a little bit like a Tom Sawyer or something like that?

Mr. Smith: Yes, I did. You know, when you grow up in a very small town and you're not really all that sophisticated--and I certainly was not--you have some doubts about going into a university or a college or [anything] like that.

I left home with the intention of going and enrolling at the University of Mississippi as a freshman. I got to Jackson and there was a delay on the bus going to Oxford and I met a bunch of boys that were students out at Hinds Junior College and they said "Aw heck, don't go to Ole Miss--

come on, go to Hinds." So I crawled in the car with them and I ended up at Hinds Junior College. [Laughter]

Dr. Caudill: That's what you call an impulse, isn't it?

Mr. Smith: I'm tremendously glad that I did because at Hinds I had two English teachers that really took an interest in me. One of them made me editor of the college paper over there. They really drilled English grammar into me, which, to me, is absolutely essential to a writer, to have a good background in English grammar.

Dr. Caudill: Those drills have been broken incidentally.

Mr. Smith: Probably if I had gone straight from here, you know, to a university I would have not done nearly as well as I did over there.

Dr. Caudill: You consider that really was a very formative part of your life's work actually at Hinds Junior College?

Mr. Smith: It really was. Those two particular teachers I had at Hinds Junior College really made an impression on me.

Dr. Caudill: They're not there any more I suppose.

Mr. Smith: No, they're not, they're both dead now. But they took an interest and they encouraged me and they forced me to study. I didn't want to study, you know. I thought, just like all the other kids, that English grammar was silly. I didn't want to spend much time with it but they pounded it into me anyway and I think it's one of the most fortunate things that ever happened to me that I went over there to school first.

Dr. Caudill: Gee, that's great, isn't it--and such a chance--a chance event, chance happening, I mean. The fact that your father was in politics meant that you were in a sort of a limelight, a prominent position. Did that impact upon your life very much?

Mr. Smith: No, it didn't because people didn't feel that way here back in those days in Mendenhall. I mean nobody cared who you were. There wasn't any big society and low society or anything like that and it really

didn't have an effect.

Dr. Caudill: In high school here, what would you do when you had a date?

Mr. Smith: One thing: go to the Star Movie, downtown Mendenhall. Usually that was on a Saturday afternoon when it cost a dime to get in. Then you'd buy one of those old big Black Cow suckers for a nickel that would last for hours and sit there and watch the cowboys and the Indians.

Dr. Caudill: And have about three features for your dime, too?

Mr. Smith: That's right.

Dr. Caudill: Did the progression go that you graduated from Hinds, then went into the merchant marine?

Mr. Smith: No. No, I went from Hinds to the university.

Dr. Caudill: I said merchant marine--it was the coast guard, was it?

Mr. Smith: No, it's the merchant marine.

Dr. Caudill: No, it was the merchant marine. But you finished your college, did you, before you went into [the service]?

Mr. Smith: No. After I left Hinds--that was in 1944--I was at Ole Miss in 1944 and 1945, then I joined the merchant marines. I came back and graduated from Ole Miss in 1947.

Dr. Caudill: Having had this good experience at Hinds, on the grammar and things like that, when you went to Ole Miss were you pretty well sure what you wanted to do with your life?

Mr. Smith: Yes. I was pretty sure that I wanted to continue writing even if I couldn't do it professionally--you know to make a career out of it and make a living out of it. When I got to Ole Miss, all the time I was there, I wrote fiction for their literary magazine and I did some work on the newspaper there and once again had a fortunate experience there. I met a professor there, a Dr. Wigfall Green and he took an interest [in me].

Dr. Caudill: A. Wigfall Green?

Mr. Smith: A. Wigfall "Bill" Green.

Dr. Caudill: Wrote Bilbo The Man?

Mr. Smith: Yes. Yes and he really took an interest in me. He was, I suppose, in writing, at that stage of my life, my godfather. It was really due to him that I ever sent the first novel that I wrote off to a publisher. Probably you would want to hear about that later?

Dr. Caudill: Oh yes, yes. Yes, later. At Ole Miss, in around 1945, most of the boys were away. What was the environment there?--who was the Chancellor?

Mr. Smith: Butts.

Dr. Caudill: Dr. Butts. A. B. Butts, as I remember his name, was the Chancellor? Looking back on it, are you such a confirmed Ole Miss man that it tears you apart when they lose at football?

Mr. Smith: It used to, but not any more. After you go fifteen years without seeing a college football game, as I've done up until last Saturday, to see a Southern--Ole Miss [game], you get out of that. I'm not gung-ho any more.

You know, when I went back and worked at Ole Miss as public relations director there, from 1962 to 1966, I had to work at the football games and that kind of took the fun out of it. I had to be in the press booth and help the radio announcers and the reporters and all that. It's a different situation when you're working in a game rather than sitting down in the stands cheering.

Dr. Caudill: Oh yes, yes. Now, as I read your biography, you finished college--you didn't quite finish. You didn't graduate--you went into the merchant marine, came back and graduated, then came back here and went to work as an automobile dealer/salesman.

Mr. Smith: Yes, a dealer.

Dr. Caudill: What would be the important experiences that you had--other than these that you've mentioned--Wigfall Green and the professors at Hinds--through your college years the most memorable and formative things.

Mr. Smith: Well, when I was at Hinds--I graduated from high school I guess, too early. I was only fourteen years old when I was at Hinds--in 1943 I wanted to be eighteen instead of fourteen or fifteen. That was back when times were so different from what they are now. Now, you know, the kids all want to dodge the draft and we all wanted to get in the draft.

It hurt me that I was in school, in college, even though I was far too young. Then, a lot of my friends were in the service, and it was an experience that has made an impression on me all of my life--being that age at that time--because, as you probably remember, too, at that time everybody wanted to get in and they wanted to be in the service.

The war was a real thing that they cared about. It wasn't like a Vietnam, or something like that, and those of us that were just a little too young felt like something was kind of missing in our lives. That made an impression on me.

Dr. Caudill: What was the environment at Ole Miss at that time? Most of the boys were gone, weren't they?

Mr. Smith: Oh there were no people there hardly at all. I think the student body was less than 500. In 1944 I went out for the football team at Ole Miss and I only weighed about a hundred and forty pounds. Nobody was on the football team except a few 4-Fs [draft classification] and a bunch of young kids 15, 16, 17 years old. There were ten girls for every one boy.

Dr. Caudill: This can be strenuous itself!

Mr. Smith: Yes, that was strenuous. [laughter]

Dr. Caudill: You got married then after you got back from the merchant marine.

Mr. Smith: Yes, after I had graduated from college.

My father-in-law was the military commander of all the forces at the University of Mississippi during the war.

Dr. Caudill: Oh was he! An active duty officer on duty there?

Mr. Smith: Yes. He was in charge of all the ROTC programs and all. You know, they had a naval medical program up there and several other programs. He was the head of all those programs and I was an officer in the ROTC.

Dr. Caudill: What led you into the merchant marine then?

Mr. Smith: Reading books like Moby Dick and all those things. I had always been fascinated by anything about the sea and I just wanted to get on a merchant marine ship and go out and see if there really was a white whale out there somewhere.

Dr. Caudill: And you didn't find him?

Mr. Smith: I didn't find him.

Dr. Caudill: Were you glad to get out of the [merchant marine]? Was it a good experience?

Mr. Smith: Yes, it was a good experience. I saw some parts of life in there that I had never seen before anywhere, you know. There were some bad characters in that merchant marine in World War II, and I suppose still are, and it was an interesting experience.

Dr. Caudill: Did you get pretty much around the world?

Mr. Smith: Yes, I did. I went to North Africa, Algiers. Then another time I went to Sweden and Europe. Later on during the Korean War I went to Korea.

Dr. Caudill: You were recalled, were you, and went back in?

Mr. Smith: No. No, I went back as a [correspondent].

Dr. Caudill: You went back as a correspondent?

Mr. Smith: As a civilian.

Dr. Caudill: That's right. I'll ask you about that in just a minute. The crews that you were

with--you mentioned that there were unusual characters and rough characters, I'm sure? On a ship like that, would there be a great deal of conflict. Would it be held down? Would they fight when they got in port?

Mr. Smith: Well, not really. There wasn't too much conflict. Most of these people in the merchant marine that were old timers--you know, not young kids like me who went in just because of a war or something like that--they were so beaten down in life they didn't have the energy to fight. Once they'd get into a port, or come back to this country from some foreign port, they'd just take their money and stay drunk till the ship left again. They would fight among themselves, but they wouldn't fight with other people.

Dr. Caudill: This is really quite a lesson for you from the standpoint of a writer, I assume?

Mr. Smith: It was. As I say, I saw a lot of things that I didn't know existed in life by being in that merchant marine.

Dr. Caudill: And most of the ports that you would go into, unless you break out of the port area, are pretty rough areas themselves?

Mr. Smith: They are very rough.

Dr. Caudill: Now, you came back and became the owner-operator of an automobile dealership. That must have been a very hard era, because cars were just getting back into production and things like that.

Mr. Smith: It was extremely difficult. There were no cars to sell, as you say. Later on when I was in the automobile business here in Mendenhall there were several big failures in the economy. One year a huge sawmill failed and one year there was a tremendous cotton failure. When you're in the automobile business in a small area, when the people lose their jobs in a sawmill or their cotton crop goes down the drain because of bad weather or rain, they can't pay for their automobiles. It was a difficult time, it really was.

Dr. Caudill: Did you like that business? Or was it

something that you were casting around?

Mr. Smith: I didn't particularly like it, no.

Dr. Caudill: Did it require quite a bit of money to get into it?

Mr. Smith: Not back then it didn't; not anything like it would now. The reason, really, that I got into it was that my father had constructed this building here in Mendenhall and after he got it built he didn't know what to do with it so we said, "Well let's get in the automobile business."

It was another one of those chance things. We could have just as well said "let's get in the grocery business, or the tractor business, or whatever" but we decided we'd to into the automobile business. That lasted with me about seven or eight years.

Dr. Caudill: Was it a successful dealership or did you look back and say it was marginal?

Mr. Smith: It was marginal.

Dr. Caudill: I can imagine the complexity of one of them. You have to have people work for you who are good maintenance people. You're constantly struggling with the people you're trying to sell cars to.

Mr. Smith: Yes, and the credit part of it was what was so bad back then.

Dr. Caudill: Did you have to give credit?

Mr. Smith: Oh yes!

Dr. Caudill: I was under the impression that mostly the dealers sold the paper.

Mr. Smith: They did, but if the person failed to pay for their automobile...

Dr. Caudill: It was your paper?

Mr. Smith ...you had to pay for it.

Dr. Caudill: Oh, I see. Yes, I can see that that would be a difficult thing--especially when the economy would suffer.

Mr. Smith: In a weird sort of way being in the

automobile business is what started me out as a novelist.

Dr. Caudill: Is that right!

Mr. Smith: Yes. I was in the shop one day and there was no business, it was a slow week, and just for the fun of it I sat down and started pecking out a few words on a typewriter. The next day I pecked out a few more and this is what eventually turned into the first novel that I ever published, called The River Is Home.

After about two days of pecking I'd written two paragraphs. I said "Well, you know, I'm going to see if I really can write a novel." So I just left the business and I went down to Florida to my in-laws, my wife's home, and in ten day's time, working all day and all night, I wrote that little novel, The River Is Home.

Dr. Caudill: Did you really! The River Is Home. I think I've got it with me, I've got it out in my car. That's really hard work. I'll come back and ask you about that because I've got several questions. The biography mentions also that you were in the beef and farming business.

Mr. Smith: Oh, I used to trade automobiles for cattle, that's how I got into that.

Dr. Caudill: That's one way of selling an automobile, I guess, isn't it?

Mr. Smith: Yes, a lot of farmers--you know, they wouldn't have the cash to pay down on it and they would want to trade a few cows. One time I had accumulated, oh, maybe fifty.

Dr. Caudill: Did you really--that many?

Mr. Smith: I kept them on a place in D'Lo that my mother owns, some land over there. I had an uncle who was retired from working for the railroad and to give him something to do I let him run the little place. At one time we had quite a few cattle and after I had traded for a few then I started buying a few Polled Herfords, you know good blooded cattle, for putting in there.

Dr. Caudill: Do you still do any of that?

Mr. Smith: No. No. After he died--my uncle died--I didn't have time to fool with that so I sold them.

Dr. Caudill: Let's take a minute and give me your self appraisal about that period of time. In many instances a painter thinks of nothing but painting. Faulkner, I think, thought only of writing. What sort of a young man do you look back and think you were from the standpoint of introspection and interests and things.

Mr. Smith: Well, I know that I never took myself seriously as a writer back in those early days, like William Faulkner did. I know it was almost an obsession with him to become a writer. But I wasn't that way, I really wasn't sure what I wanted to do.

I knew that I enjoyed writing and some day I'd like to try it. But I had absolutely no idea of ever becoming successful as a writer. I did a lot of it for my own amusement and I had more interest in things, back then, like hunting and fishing and trying to make a living than I did in being a writer.

Dr. Caudill: In some instances, I guess, there's just such a hunger for them to do these things that nothing else matters, like in Faulkner's case.

Mr. Smith: That's true. And I've known many, many writers like that. I've been on the professional staff of writing conferences at different places now for quite a few years and I've known writers who are just obsessed. That's all that they can think of. That's all they can eat, drink, and sleep. But I've never been that way. In fact, I don't write just to produce volumes of work. I write only when I get a subject that really interests me.

Dr. Caudill: That's real interesting. Now you did other things. You worked for Sperry Rand.

Mr. Smith: Yes. I worked for the Vickers division of Sperry Rand in Jackson.

Dr. Caudill: Is that in the public relations [field]?

Mr. Smith: Yes, public relations.

Dr. Caudill: You began to move into public relations work, did you?

Mr. Smith: Yes. After we sold this automobile business here in Mendenhall is when I went to work for Sperry Rand in public relations. I had been doing it--not on a professional basis but I had all that period of time. When I was in the automobile business I was writing constantly for the Clarion-Ledger and for the Jackson Daily News in Jackson.

Dr. Caudill: On a stringer sort of basis?

Mr. Smith: Sunday features on a stringer basis, never as a full time employee. I would write articles about different state parks and tourist attractions and things like the Natchez Trace--so I really never stopped writing. That experience led me into the public relations field.

Dr. Caudill: What does public relations really mean to you? What is your major role as a public relations man. Now you're still involved in that to a certain extent. I say to a certain extent, you're still actively involved in that.

Mr. Smith: It's basically promotion: promoting the image of an institution, whatever it be, whether it's a plant like Vickers, that manufactures aviation parts, or whether it's a college or university that manufactures students.

Dr. Caudill: You were at the University of Mississippi as their director [of public relations] at the time of the Meredith incident were you?

Mr. Smith: Yes.

Dr. Caudill: Did that give you a little bit of a headache?

Mr. Smith: Oh, that was the most difficult experience of my life, that was.

Dr. Caudill: Sort of reminisce about that--the developing pressures.

Mr. Smith: This was after I had gone back to Ole Miss,

you know, and earned a Master's degree up there, in English, in 1959. Then I worked for Hinds Junior College, as public relations director, until 1962. Then I took that job, that summer, at Ole Miss, the summer before that incident happened up there in September, of 1962.

It was really, really bad. No matter what we tried to do to save the university, somebody didn't like it. At one time the legislature here in Mississippi accused us of leaning one way and they were mad. Of course, President Kennedy was mad and Bobby Kennedy was mad. Everybody was down on us and we were doing everything in the world we could just to survive.

It really hurt the university. Hurt it really bad. For two or three years after that it received nothing but negative press, you know. I'd go off somewhere to some convention of college-university public relations people and [they would ask], "where are you from?"

"Mississippi"--and it just wasn't just the University of Mississippi, it was <u>all</u> of Mississippi...

Dr. Caudill: No, it was the whole state.

Mr. Smith: "Well, if you're from that state you're bad news."

Dr. Caudill: What did you see of that confrontation? I assume that you were [right on hand].

Mr. Smith: I saw it all. I was in the Lyceum Building that night when it all started, you know. I couldn't get out of the building when they started firing that tear gas and guns. People fired through the window of my office.

Dr. Caudill: Oh did they really!

Mr. Smith: I spent some of the time on the floor under a desk. Because of that I couldn't get out of the building. [They were] shooting tear gas in there and finally, when I did get out, I was blinded. I couldn't see and I stumbled out across the campus and some people helped me so I could find the apartment where I was

living.

Dr. Caudill: Did you have any lasting effect from that? That gas is pretty [strong].

Mr. Smith: I did with my eyes. I've had trouble ever since that happened with my eyes.

Dr. Caudill: That must have been a rather terrifying thing.

Mr. Smith: It was very, very terrifying. Things that happened up there, you look back on it now and it seems unreal. There were people coming into Oxford there with truckloads of rifles and shotguns, from Alabama, from Louisiana, from Tennessee, Arkansas--to start a war. That's what they wanted to do, wanted to start a war.

Dr. Caudill: In fact, I think General Edwin Walker was up there.

Mr. Smith: Yes, he was there.

Dr. Caudill: Well, I assume that you were under great pressure from the press also to answer questions?

Mr. Smith: I was under tremendous pressure from them. There were something like 600 press people from all over the world that actually registered through my office there, and a lot of them that didn't. They were constantly wanting some things that I couldn't provide. Anytime anyone would come there and want to do some interview with Meredith it was my job to go to him and tell him who it was and if he consented to do this interview to set it up, you know. There was just tremendous pressure from the press.

Dr. Caudill: What kind of a person did you find Meredith to be?

Mr. Smith: I think that's one subject I might best not go into.

Dr. Caudill: All right. He has been a little bit of a loner in recent years. He will campaign--declare for an office--on one ticket and then the next and everything like that. Did you get personally acquainted with him well?

Mr. Smith: Yes, I did.

Dr. Caudill: What was your position on the race situation prior to that and did that change you any?

Mr. Smith: No. Of course, I grew up, as we've already talked about, in a small rural town. My father at one time was a sheriff for two or three terms here in Simpson County but he was never what you call a racist. When you say your father was in a law enforcement job in Mississippi in the 1930s, some immediately think of somebody getting a black guy on the ground and beating him up with a pipe.

My father was totally against that. Always, when I was growing up, [we] had a black woman, what did they call them--nannies?--that lived in a little cabin right behind where this house is here now. I was raised [by her] practically, because my mother worked in the courthouse here. I was raised by a black woman and I never in my life had any hatred for blacks.

Of course, being a Southerner back in those days I'm absolutely sure I was prejudiced in many ways. People have said that "it was paternalism," that "you didn't really love these black people." But I did. I never had what I have seen come out in that situation in Oxford, never had hate. I've never wanted to take a gun and kill somebody because they're black. But when you get caught up in something like that that happened up there, at the time, your sympathies are going to be with your white friends. Since that incident still I have never been a prejudiced person, I don't believe.

Dr. Caudill: Did that show you how mindless a mob can be?

Mr. Smith: Oh yes! This novel that I wrote, The Beginning, is in a way an offshoot of that experience that I had at Ole Miss. It has nothing absolutely to do with that incident but it goes into why the white people and the black people were trying to kill themselves here in Mississippi back in the sixties, and the different levels of society and how they were trying to work it

out and thing like that. I saw so [many] different types of emotion in that University of Mississippi thing that it made a profound impression on me as a writer.

Dr. Caudill: Yes, I'm sure it [did]. I've got some questions about The Beginning. We've done some interviewing about Philadelphia [Mississippi] and I'd like to relate them. At the time that you were the director of information at Ole Miss, did you get well acquainted with the chancellor?

Mr. Smith: Oh yes! I worked very closely with the chancellor.

Dr. Caudill: In the Meredith affair, were his hands pretty well tied?

Mr. Smith: Yes they were tied.

Dr. Caudill: The governor really took over the university?

Mr. Smith: Yes.

Dr. Caudill: Did you leave there with a higher respect for the top leadership--the chancellor and others?

Mr. Smith: Yes I did.

Dr. Caudill: And you knew Hugh Clegg very well?

Mr. Smith: I worked for Hugh Clegg.

Dr. Caudill: There was a man that was there and I think he left before you came, Will David Campbell, do you know him?

Mr. Smith: No.

Dr. Caudill: He was the director of religious life, a very interesting man.

Mr. Smith: I don't think so.

Dr. Caudill: In college public relations, did you find that one of the major jobs was fund raising?

Mr. Smith: No, it wasn't up there because they had a different department up there that did the fund raising. We supported the fund raising but we were not directly involved

in it.

Dr. Caudill: That would be enough to turn me off.

Mr. Smith: No, I don't particularly care for that either.

Dr. Caudill: I'm sure that the Meredith affair overshadowed everything else at Ole Miss but looking back upon your relationship, why did you leave in 1962--that position?

Mr. Smith: Well, I had been there four years--do you mean why did I leave in 1966?

Dr. Caudill: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Smith: I had been through four years of constant pressure up there.

Dr. Caudill: Was this all related to the race question?

Mr. Smith: Yes. The pressure didn't end with the riot, it stayed there for years.

Dr. Caudill: In fact some people say that Ole Miss really hasn't recovered yet from that.

Mr. Smith: It probably hasn't. Then my wife's parents were living in Florida and her father was very ill at that time and she wanted to go back to Florida. I knew of a position that was open at a university in Florida at the time. Back then if you were in public relations, there were very, very few jobs in Mississippi.

Public relations was just something the universities had, or maybe some industrial plant would move in here from up north, but it was probably the poorest state in the nation to try to get work in public relations.

Everybody that I knew had left the state--I mean that stayed in public relations but changed jobs--had to leave Mississippi. You know, there have been different professions over the years that, if you want to continue them at the time, you had to leave Mississippi. That was one of them. So that's when I made a decision to move to Florida.

Dr. Caudill: Where did you go then? Is that when you

went to the Brevard, Brevard [struggling with the pronunciation].

Mr. Smith: I left Mississippi, I accepted a job as public relations director for Florida Technological University--they called it Florida Tech--in Orlando. When I got down there it was a new university and they weren't even going to start building the campus for two years.

Dr. Caudill: Is this what is Florida [A & M]?

Mr. Smith: It's the University of Central Florida.

Dr. Caudill: Yes, I know what it is.

Mr. Smith: It would have been a case of sitting in an office in downtown Orlando for two years waiting for a campus to be built. I was told that this job--Brevard, they pronounce it Brevard--was open so I left Florida Tech.

Dr. Caudill: Well it's [not easy] to public relate if you haven't got an institution, is it?

Mr. Smith: No, it's not. I didn't want to sit there and twiddle my thumbs for two years in an office in a bank building in Orlando.

Dr. Caudill: Well, that's very interesting. What have been, outside of these things that we've discussed, major impacts upon your life. You've done quite a few things. You've been in the merchant marine. You've had the automobile agency. You were getting into the cattle business. How did you want your life to go, if you can define that?

Mr. Smith: At one time I kind of wanted my life to turn to politics.

Dr. Caudill: Were you thinking about this area?

Mr. Smith: Yes. When my father first started in his first campaign for that office of highway commissioner, I was his speech-maker. Some people said I was a pretty good political speech-maker. Then I made talks in his campaigns for every time he ran, until I moved away from Mississippi, and I enjoyed it.

Back then it was so much different from politics today. Today you win office on the television tube. Back then it was eyeball to eyeball.

You'd go to the picnics and get up on the back of a truck and speak and all that sort of thing. I thought of it, at sometimes in my life, but I knew there was no possibility of two people in one family to be in politics, so I just gave that idea up and went into public relations.

Dr. Caudill: Yes, that problem does exist I think for John Hampton Stennis doesn't it to a certain extent? But you were thinking about elective office yourself?

Mr. Smith: Yes, at one time; but I never ever came close to actually getting into a race for myself.

Dr. Caudill: How much would it cost your father for a campaign--like for the highway commission? I think [Bob] Joiner and [Shag] Pyron must have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars each this time.

Mr. Smith: Oh, I'm sure they did. But the first time that we ran--he ran--for that office I think we made the race on a shoestring. We'd go into some little town and buy one hamburger and split it four ways. We had one automobile, that's all--one automobile with a speaker on top.

I doubt seriously in that entire campaign that he spent more than five thousand dollars; but at the time he was getting out of it, as you say, and now, with this television advertising--hundreds of thousands of dollars it takes to run.

Dr. Caudill: Did you campaign for John Bell Williams when he was running?

Mr. Smith: No. I never campaigned for other people because I was campaigning for my father. You can't mix politics.

Dr. Caudill: Have you got a magnum opus, a great work, on politics in you someplace that you're going to write?

Mr. Smith: I have thought about it several times,

about writing a novel about Mississippi politics--not as it is now but as it was when I was active in it. There are a lot of weird things that go on--did go on. There was a lot of vote buying and a lot of threatening and all kinds of fun and games back then.

Dr. Caudill: What was the most unusual thing you ever saw. You observed, I suppose, Bilbo and some of the old timers. Did you see things that would be outrageous now?

Mr. Smith: Oh yes! Many, many things and especially back then when there was no television and very little news reporting following candidates around. A candidate would get up, say like in Mendenhall, and make one speech and promise them he'd keep the courthouse. Then he'd go down to Magee and make a totally different speech and say he'd move the courthouse from Mendenhall to Magee. Then he'd go into Hattiesburg and make one speech and say he was going to move the entire gulf coast up to Hattiesburg and then get down there and say "I wouldn't put a dog house in Hattiesburg, you know, I'm going to move it down [here]," that sort of thing. They couldn't get away with that today.

Dr. Caudill: No, you have to be fairly consistent today.

Mr. Smith: You have to be consistent.

Dr. Caudill: In your work as public relations person for the various colleges, who has been, or who have been, very memorable people that you've worked with?

Mr. Smith: Oh, one of the most memorable was George McClendon, who was president of Hinds Junior College when I was there and had been president [a long time]. He was a very memorable character.

He was the old time educator, there aren't any more like him left I don't suppose. He was a good man but he was a strict man. We would have faculty meetings at seven o'clock in the morning and if you weren't in the faculty meeting at seven o'clock in the morning he'd send somebody out to your house to see why you were not in the faculty meeting at seven in the morning.

[laughter] He was a real character and he was an educator. He's retired now, of course. He's been retired for [a long time] but he made a big impression on me.

Dr. Caudill: Did you emerge from the automobile business and then subsequently the cattle business--at least as well off financially as when you went into them?

Mr. Smith: Broke! [laughter]

Dr. Caudill: That can be a very trying thing, because they're very tricky obviously. I don't want to get into personal things but that can be an extremely discouraging aspect of it.

Mr. Smith: I pretty well came out of that just as I went into it--with nothing.

Dr. Caudill: But weren't in debt too much?

Mr. Smith: Well, not in debt, no. I say "nothing." I had a home here in Mendenhall that was paid for, and an automobile. I wasn't broke but I had certainly not made any money.

Dr. Caudill: Well, that's interesting. You married. Give me your wife's full name and your children.

Mr. Smith: Iris Doty.

Dr. Caudill: D-O-T-Y?

Mr. Smith: Doty. D-O-T-Y. And then our daughter is Jane, she's the oldest. Our son is Patrick, Junior.

Dr. Caudill: They live in Florida do they?

Mr. Smith: They both live in California.

Dr. Caudill: Oh, do they? Let's turn to your writing. You published The River Is Home in 1953 and then The Beginning in 1967. What did you do in the meantime?

Mr. Smith: Between those two novels?

Dr. Caudill: Yes.

Mr. Smith: Well, I wrote.

Dr. Caudill: Shelby Foote, for instance, worked for twenty solid years on his trilogy.

Mr. Smith: I wrote a novel between those two novels that has never been published. It was a story about the merchant marine in World War II. The title of the novel was The Seas That Mourned: you know that's a line out of the Rubiyat. I started writing that novel shortly after The River Is Home was published in 1953.

I wrote constantly on it when I was coming back from Korea on a ship. You know, I'd been over there doing free lance writing. When I came back to Mendenhall, in October of 1953, I suppose I was about maybe 35 percent finished with that novel.

I went to a high school football game here the Friday night after I came back from Korea, and I was helping the Jaycees broadcast the game. Something happened to one of the speakers and I went up on a pole to see if I could fix it. The ladder broke and I spent the next two years in the hospital.

Dr. Caudill: Oh did you really!

Mr. Smith: I had seven bone grafts trying to save my right arm. Of course, during that two year period of time, when I was having all that problem, the only way I could write was pick typing with my left hand so I got a real setback in my writing because of that accident. When I finally got all right--and they did save my arm and I got the use of it back--and finished that novel, by that time the market for World War II novels was just at a glut.

Everything had been published like Battle Cry and The Caine Mutiny and From Here To Eternity and all those books. There was no market for World War II books so I sent it off and off and off and I got the same thing back every time, that "the market had run out on that type of novel."

I kept the thing and every year or two I'd put it out and revise it. I must have rewritten that novel at least a dozen times but I haven't even shown it to a publisher now in more than fifteen years. I just

finally put it away.

Dr. Caudill: What caused you to go to Korea?

Mr. Smith: Curiosity. At the time I went to Korea--and this sounds a little bit like stuff out of a novel, too--but it was right after The River Is Home had been published and I had been on the little talk circuit here in Mississippi and going to teas and drinking all this hot tea and eating tuna-fish salads and everything and I started getting a stomach ache.

I went to a doctor and he said I had a duodenal ulcer. He said "You have got to get away from all that stuff and take it real easy." So, to get away and take it real easy I go to Korea to a war! [laughter]

Dr. Caudill: What experiences did you have? Now you were there or at least you came back just before or right around the time of the truce.

Mr. Smith: Yes.

Dr. Caudill: Did you go up to the front? Did you visit the air units and things like that?

Mr. Smith: Yes.

Dr. Caudill: Whom did you represent or were you free lancing?

Mr. Smith: I was free lancing. I worked some for the old INS, International News Service, and I wrote a long series of articles for the Jackson Daily News from over there and different sources.

Dr. Caudill: Was that an unusual experience?

Mr. Smith: Yes, it was very unusual. In Korea, back when I was there, you more or less had to attach yourself to some unit. [There] wasn't any hotel or dining hall for civilian correspondents and you more or less had to get out and get some Army company, or something like that, to adopt you and feed you. I was there when they started that prisoner release and that was a very interesting thing to watch.

Dr. Caudill: Oh, were you at Panmunjom when they

brought the American prisoners back?

Mr. Smith: Panmunjom, yes. I spent most of my time at Inchon, when I was in Korea.

Dr. Caudill: Gee, I guess you saw a lot of human interest in those prisoner exchanges didn't you?

Mr. Smith: Yes, I sure did.

Dr. Caudill: Some of them were in rather bad shape when they came back.

Mr. Smith: They were, in very bad shape. I saw the old general that they released, I can't even remember his name now but he was the highest ranking officer they had captured in that Korean War, I cannot remember his name.

Dr. Caudill: Yes, Major General [William Kean]. I'll put it in here. I know it very well. He was captured very early in the war. That's very interesting.

Well, let's turn to your writing then. Tell me how you go about writing a book. Let's take, for instance, Angel City, which--you left me hanging, I want to know what happened to the people [laughter]. So you've got another book there.

Mr. Smith: Well, yes. It could be. I have had to totally change my writing technique, and writing style and everything, since leaving Mississippi. The first two novels that I wrote, The River Is Home and The Beginning--of course, I did no research for either one because in those books I was writing about people that I grew up with, places that I had actually seen. Even though you change people in fiction, they're real. You base them on someone you've known.

I just wrote those novels and everybody in them was based in one way or another on someone or some thing that I had known. But when I moved to Florida and decided I would write some Florida novels, I got myself into some real trouble.

The type of novels that I write are [social] novels. As you well know if you've

read any of them, nature plays a great role in the novels that I write, and the underdogs in life. I've always written social type novels and in every one of them there are people who are underdogs and who really have a rough time in life--am I being too long with this?

Dr. Caudill: No, go right ahead.

Mr. Smith: So I floundered around in Florida for a year or two trying to find something to write about because I really didn't know that much about the state. Then, one day, I saw an article in a newspaper down there about what the newspaper said was "the impending death of the Everglades," in Florida, because of development. [They said] that that whole area down there was in danger of dying.

That caught my attention as a writer. I wondered if that vast area really did die down there what would happen to all that wildlife? And what would happen to those Seminole Indians? And, really, was it true? Was it exaggeration? So I started going into the Everglades and really looking at that place, going into the swamps.

I knew in order to write that book, Forever Island, which is about the old Seminole Indian, I would have to really get to know those people and that took me over a year. I spent all the time I could get for a year living among those Seminole Indians.

They wouldn't have anything to do with me. They're very, very independent people. They don't like strangers. They don't like outsiders. When you go back and study their history, how they were treated in the past, you understand why.

Eventually I made friends with them and I wrote the novel Forever Island, which leads into this thing of Angel City in a roundabout way. But I had real doubts about that novel, Forever Island, after I had written it because the time it was published was in nineteen and seventy three, the novel had no sex in it, had very few profanity words. You know, I didn't think anybody would want to read it.

Dr. Caudill: Those are requisites today, aren't they, almost?

Mr. Smith: Oh yes, but it's the novel that has made me more recognized world wide as a writer than anything I've ever written. It ended up now it's in twenty-six foreign countries.

So I said, at that point, "I'm not going to ever do a thing like that again in order to write a novel. I'm not going to go out and live with Seminole Indians, give up a year of my life and go wading through these swamps with alligators and snakes and everything."

Then one day I picked up a newspaper again and I read a case in this newspaper about a man who was an independent labor contractor down in south Florida. He had been accused of enslaving these migrant workers for a period of two years and not paying them. When his case came up in court the people were afraid to testify so he got off scot-free. Again, that caught my attention as a writer.

I couldn't believe that that sort of thing really went on. I thought slavery ended with the Civil War. So I started researching newspaper files. I went to Miami and I went back into all those old files of the Miami Herald and I didn't find one case, I found dozens of cases, of people being actually enslaved in Florida.

Then I started finding cases where this has happened in Pennsylvania, it happened in the Carolinas, it happened in New York State, Texas, Arizona, California. It was a pattern, not an isolated incident but something that evidently was pretty common.

So here again, in order to write a novel like Angel City [I had to research].

At that point. so far as I knew, I had never seen a migrant worker unless I passed one on the street and didn't know it. So I knew I would have to go and live in those migrant camps, disguise myself and actually live the life of a migrant farm worker, and that is what I did.

Dr. Caudill: Did you actually do the work? You lived in the camp?

Mr. Smith: I did the work. I lived in the camp. In fact, the movie of Angel City was filmed in the very camp--the same camp--that I lived in when I lived the life of a migrant worker.

Dr. Caudill: You found it very, very inhumane? I didn't realize there was a pattern. I've seen the isolated cases but you found that there is a whole pattern of that sort of slavery?

Mr. Smith: Oh yes.

Dr. Caudill: It's outrageous, isn't it?

Mr. Smith: Yes, it really is. Some of these independent contractors like that, they do exactly what I put into that novel. They actually enslave these people. They will threaten them and actually kill them if they try to get out of those camps and they don't pay them.

Dr. Caudill: Now were you in a camp that actually had the fence and the gate and everything? Or did you have a little more freedom?

Mr. Smith: No. I didn't go down there to make a martyr out of myself or get myself killed. When I would make friends with migrant workers I never told anyone I was a writer. Never! I didn't say why I was there, but in conversations with them they would tell me "stay away from this camp over here cause if you get in there you won't get out."

So I never stayed in any of those camps where they enslaved these people. I didn't want to get myself killed or something like that, but I stayed in camps where the living conditions were as bad as you could possibly imagine; you know one building with 200 rooms and one toilet.

Dr. Caudill: And the food--they would have a can of sardines, like you describe and something like that?

Mr. Smith: The food was very, very bad.

Dr. Caudill: Now once you do the research, how do you go about writing the book?

Mr. Smith: Well, from Forever Island and up through Angel City and this novel Allapattah, the first thing I do is to sit down and play with the names of the characters. I think naming a character is very important in a novel. [I] try to make that name sound like either he's a good guy or a bad guy or whatever, you know. Like in Angel City, Silas Creedy--to me that sounds evil.

Dr. Caudill: Yes, it does. Right on the verge of being a creep.

Mr. Smith: Yes. So I try to name the characters. I've got a pretty good idea of whoever character a novel's going to be. When I wrote The River Is Home, I did no plotting, no outline, anything. I just sat down and it just came to me as I went along. But in the beginning--I've never made an outline for a novel but I sit down and make little notes to myself about some major things that I want to happen. And in the case of this novel, The Beginning, I wrote the last chapter first.

Dr. Caudill: Oh did you really!

Mr. Smith: I knew how I wanted it to end so I sat down and wrote it. Now I make notes to myself. Like I want this to happen somewhere in the novel, this to happen, and write those notes. But I don't make any outline or something like that. And I don't really know any writer that does, except people who write formula fiction.

Dr. Caudill: We had a history with Erskine Caldwell and essentially he says that he never knows how his books are going to come out so he writes them to find out how they come out.

Mr. Smith: That's about the truth of it, except in some instances where you know how you want it to end and rather than lose your thoughts you sit down and write it and get it down on paper. Then if it turns out that way, [you're right].

Dr. Caudill: Let me ask you about your writing technique. In the volume of The Beginning

that I have here, on page 65 and 66, it's the castration sequence of the young man. The writing interested me a great deal because you have long passages, two thirds of a page or a page, with punctuation and reiteration. How do you work to get this flow, to get exactly what you want on these pages?

Mr. Smith: I did more style experimentation in that novel, The Beginning, than I ever attempted in anything [else]. Looking back now, that's been so long ago I'm not sure exactly how I did that but I know some critics said that I used sort of a "whiplash" style in some places in that book, where I would write in this manner. I know it was very difficult for me to do it.

Dr. Caudill: I can imagine it would be.

Mr. Smith: It was very difficult.

Dr. Caudill: It would seem to me that you would take a day, maybe, just doing this one page to get the [flow].

Mr. Smith: I did. In this novel--I would spend more time writing one or two pages of this than I'd spend writing an entire chapter of the last three novels that I've written. But I thought so much of this, The Beginning. You know, it had to be told in a style like this.

After I wrote this novel I used a little bit of that kind of style in Forever Island and the publishers made me cut every bit of it out of there. They said "if you're writing about a fairly simple thing, like this old Indian, you have to use a very simple style. Keep it simple." Keep it simple, that's what they kept telling me all the time.

Dr. Caudill: Otherwise you get away from the character himself in the writing style? Yes, I hadn't thought about that. That's logical, though, isn't it?

Mr. Smith: There were so many things I was trying to do in this novel, The Beginning, as a writer that I switched all through the novel. Different styles. I was trying to

[experiment]. I don't know, it was a hard, hard novel to write.

Dr. Caudill: How long did it take you to bring that to completion once you began? How do you write?

Mr. Smith: It took about a year to do that novel.

Dr. Caudill: How do you manage your days then when you're writing?

Mr. Smith: When I really get into the writing of a novel--you know, I still hold down an eight-hour a day job--I write all night. Sometimes literally all night. Maybe sleep an hour or two and work non-stop from a Friday afternoon till Monday morning. It's bad on the health...

Dr. Caudill: Yes, it sure would be.

Mr. Smith: But that's the only way that I can do it. I can't drag something out for years like some writers do. In the case of Forever Island I wrote the entire first draft of that novel in two weeks.

Dr. Caudill: Did you really! And then how do you go about revising it then?

Mr. Smith: I do all the finish typing myself. I don't hire a typist and when I'm going back and doing the finish typing of a manuscript I constantly revise it all the way through. And I've never written anything that has been printed exactly the way I wrote it. I've had to do tremendous amounts of editing that the publishers would say "make these changes--make that" you know. That's a fallacy that they do it for you. They don't. They tell you what to do and [you do it].

Dr. Caudill: There are some people who say that they won't make those revisions. Are there some who don't make them?

Mr. Smith: Well, I imagine James Michener could get away with saying that he wouldn't make any revisions and probably William Faulkner in the last part of his life, you know. But if you're still a writer struggling along to gain your place in life, if you tell a publisher you won't make a revision...

Dr. Caudill: He says "I won't publish...?"

Mr. Smith: "I won't publish your book." I'm not talking about major things you know, where they tell you you have got to do something that's going to change the entire meaning of your work, but I've known people like that.

I know a history professor who has written six novels that were fairly good that needed tremendous editing and he refused to do it. You know, he says "I wrote this; therefore it's good. Therefore, I will not change one word" and therefore he has never been published.

Dr. Caudill: And there is a wee bit of ego involved there, isn't it?

Mr. Smith: Yes.

Dr. Caudill: Let me ask you then about The River Is Home. I sort of equated it to Honey Island Swamp. Is that the setting of it really?

Mr. Smith: The setting is down around what was then a little town called Log Town.

Dr. Caudill: Log Town?

Mr. Smith: On the Pearl River, but it's no longer on the face of the earth. I think it was removed when NASA put that facility down there.

Dr. Caudill: It's right down in that vicinity then?

Mr. Smith: South of Picayune.

Dr. Caudill: How did you get the feel for the snakes in the trees and the alligators and things like that?

Mr. Smith: That is where growing up in a little town like Mendenhall back in the thirties was just of a real value because I knew the woods. I knew the river, you know, and I had been down to that lower Pearl River many times camping and fishing when I was a kid. All of those things I had a lifetime experience of being in the woods and on the rivers.

Dr. Caudill: Now the manner of talking of the people. You spell the words as they would be pronounced. How did you know that they talked that way? Do they really talk that way?

Mr. Smith: They did then. Sometimes I go back and look at a passage in that novel, The River Is Home, and I'll say "my goodness! I didn't write that, did I?"--that heavy, heavy dialogue in there. But that's the way they did back then. Back in those days when you wrote you were supposed to use language people really spoke. That wouldn't get by today, that heavy, heavy [dialogue].

Dr. Caudill: What would you have to do today, now, if you were going to use the same plot and write the same book but in the context of today?

Mr. Smith: I would make them speak more like I'm talking right now rather than with that heavy, heavy language they used.

Dr. Caudill: And you'd have to put more sex and everything else in it, wouldn't you?

Mr. Smith: Probably.

Dr. Caudill: My wife suggested I write a book and showed me one that she thought would sell, that she was reading, and I told her I didn't know if I knew all the words to [write it].

Mr. Smith: That little novel, I wrote it, really, for my own pleasure. When I wrote it I had no idea of even sending it to a publisher. So it sat in my house for a year after I wrote it and I never sent it off to anyone.

Dr. Caudill: Is that the one Wigfall Green encouraged you to send in?

Mr. Smith: Yes. I went up to Oxford visiting one time and I took the manuscript along and I left it with him and asked him to read it.

He read it and he said "that's a pretty good little novel. It's publishable. You ought to send it off to a publishing house." So I came back home and I was so stupid

back then about the publishing business that I went to a library and I reached up and picked a book off of a shelf and opened it up and it said "Little, Brown and Company, Boston, Massachusetts."

So I wrapped the manuscript for The River Is Home--and it wasn't even double spaced, it was single spaced. I wrapped it in a brown sack, tied some string around it and I wrote a letter and I put in there:

> "Dear Little, Brown and Company:
>
> Enclosed is a manuscript of a novel called The River Is Home. I would appreciate your publishing it immediately."

And mailed it to Little, Brown. [laughter]

Dr. Caudill: Do you have a copy of that letter so I could put it in here?

Mr. Smith: No, I don't. That was a one in ten thousand shot. A couple of months later I get an airmail letter from Boston with little royalty advance check and [a note] "we are publishing your novel," all this.

Dr. Caudill: Is that right! A most welcome letter then?

Mr. Smith: Yes. And I thought that's the way it would be from that day on, that this writing novels is a big piece of pie. But I have never had that kind of luck again. It's been a struggle.

Dr. Caudill: When did you feel that you had become successful as a writer? Some writers, now, have a relationship where they can say to the publisher "I'd like to do a novel like this."

They say "Fine, go ahead."

Have you gotten to that? I'm sure it's not that simple--but when did you become successful?

Mr. Smith: Well, a lot of doors opened for me as a writer after Forever Island was such a tremendous success because you know it got into Reader's Digest Condensed Books. And

it was a best seller in most of the parts of this country. It has been a very popular novel all over the world. As I said, it has been published in twenty-six foreign countries.

The film rights have been sold for it. They've never gone into production, they're still saying they're going to. After that I started getting letters from agents wanting to represent me and before I couldn't even get an agent, you know.

Dr. Caudill: Did you try to get an agent?

Mr. Smith: Yes, I tried to get an agent and they've got a rule that unless you have published, unless you made ten thousand dollars a year before, they won't take you on.

Dr. Caudill: Oh, is that the way they do it?

Mr. Smith: Yes. Everything turned around with the success of that novel.

Dr. Caudill: Did you accept an agent then or hire an agent?

Mr. Smith: Yes.

Dr. Caudill: You almost have to have someone to represent you in that respect?

Mr. Smith: They are very helpful.

Dr. Caudill: Worth the [commission]?

Mr. Smith: In fact, I'm represented now by two different literary agencies: The William Morris Agency, out in California, for film rights and another agent, in New York, for literary rights.

Dr. Caudill: What do you have to do then when you have this relationship? The agent works to get your books published and you decide "yes" or "no" and do the work. Is that the way it goes?

Mr. Smith: Yes.

Dr. Caudill: Do they come back to you and say "Could you do a book along these lines?"

Mr. Smith: Oh yes. An agent will very often ask you

to write a certain book that they think will sell, that there is a market for.

Dr. Caudill: Have you done one of those?

Mr. Smith: I have not done that yet. I have an agent in New York right now that's been putting a lot of pressure on me to write a book for her, that she says that she's sure she can sell. But I'm into a novel right now that I want to write for myself, so I'm going to try to finish it before I take on writing something that she wants written.

Dr. Caudill: How do you--and this may be a little difficult to describe--in your daily living and travelling, is there in the back of your mind constantly a search for plots or topics or something like that. Or, are there a number of subjects that you're so interested in that you [just want to do them].

Mr. Smith: Oh, there are a number of subjects that I'm interested in. I've got two or three ideas for Mississippi novels that I want to eventually come back and write; and one or two more in Florida. The trouble after you get fairly well known as a writer is that you get too much material, you know.

You have people come in to your home and sit down and say "Man, you got to write this novel about my life" and sit there and tell you their life history and it's boring as the devil.

I get letters and telephone calls from people saying "oh you've got to write this novel--I've got a great plot" you know. They come in and unload all this on you; so it's not a case of not having enough [ideas].

Dr. Caudill: You get to the point where you can't really afford the time to listen to them?

Mr. Smith: You just can't do it, you know. I'm not the type of person to ever be rude or anything like that to someone, but you just can't sit down and listen to everyone's life history.

Dr. Caudill: Yes I can understand that. Once you published <u>Forever Island</u>, how did it change

your life and how did your life continue to change when they began to buy movie rights and make the movies?

Mr. Smith: Well, Forever Island changed my life in one way with the lecture business I've been doing. I had done absolutely no lecturing at all in Florida and after that novel was published and it got to be so well known in Florida, I started getting a lot of requests to come and speak to various groups about the research that I did among the Seminole Indians and in the Everglades.

In a period of just two years I made more than four hundred lectures. Now it's up to eight hundred. It got me on a lecture circuit, which was a novel experience in itself. Of course, the filming of Angel City has brought a great deal of attention to me that hadn't been there before.

Dr. Caudill: Is it ready for release?

Mr. Smith: Yes, it's finished now. It will be run sometime in the middle of November.

Dr. Caudill: You'll go to a premiere someplace for it?

Mr. Smith: No, it's going to be shown on CBS television.

Dr. Caudill: Oh, is it for [TV]?

Mr. Smith: It's a two hour television release.

Dr. Caudill: Oh, that's good. We'll look forward to seeing it then.

Mr. Smith: Then they're going to release it all over the world as a theatrical movie after it runs on television. But none of this--or all of this--has really changed me personally. You don't know me very well, but nothing gets to me. I don't care about the fame and all that business. Nothing has changed [me personally].

Dr. Caudill: It did make a substantial difference in your financial well-being, I assume?

Mr. Smith: It made a difference in that and...

Dr. Caudill: And your tax basis?

Mr. Smith: And my tax basis, yes. It made a difference in my life style for the fact that I've been out so much doing this lecture bit. After Forever Island, then I started getting invitations to be on the professional staff of writers conferences, which I've done. That's been an experience.

Dr. Caudill: Well, let's see how you structure your week. Now you're still working a five day week, eight-hour day. Are you going [to retire]? Have you got so much time invested that you need to go on for retirement purposes?

Mr. Smith: Yes, I have. I would be, in a way, foolish to leave that job when I'm so close to having enough time put in that it could be a retirement.

Dr. Caudill: It's a good insurance policy then.

Mr. Smith: The president of the college is very liberal with me about giving me time off to do things, like these lectures and research, because he thinks it's good for the college.

Dr. Caudill: Oh, I'm sure it is. So you work your regular work week. You mentioned how you wrote, you'll sometimes start Friday night and write on till Monday morning. How do you sandwich in and prepare for the lectures, or do you do much preparation?

Mr. Smith: I don't do any preparation for lectures, thank goodness, or I never would get them off the ground. I don't even make any notes. I just get up really and speak from the heart. If they ask me to lecture on my experience living with those Indians, that's what I do.

If they want a lecture on living with those migrant workers and why I was motivated to write that type of a novel, or one like Allapattah, [I do that]. In fact, I've been back here to Mississippi several times and lectured.

Last year I was a keynote speaker for this organization called "The Mississippi Junior College Creative Writing Association" over in Natchez. And I made several other talks and TV appearances. One year the

Mississippi ETV taped a thirty minute program, an interview-type thing, and we used no notes, we [just talked].

Dr. Caudill: That's one of the "Conversation With" series?

Mr. Smith: "Conversation With" series.

Dr. Caudill: Now you have to make these things compensate you for the time. Your time has become much more valuable, I assume?

Mr. Smith: For years I didn't even get enough out of it to pay the gasoline money, you know. I'm a hard person to say no. Some college group, or some church group, or some ladies club, or American Pen Women, will call me up and say "Now we sure would love for you to come speak, but we're not a club with any money. We can't pay you" and I'd go and do it. I must have done it a hundred times but it gradually built up to where sometimes they do pay a reasonable fee for it.

Dr. Caudill: It keeps you busy, doesn't it?

Mr. Smith: It keeps you busy, but you know everytime you do something like that you get a little bit better known as a writer and that's what opens the doors.

Dr. Caudill: What are your future goals? What do you want to do with your life now? Assume that you're getting increasingly busy, do you have to get away from it all for a period to sort of catch your breath?

Mr. Smith: No. What I would like to do in the future, and I hope this comes about in the next two or three years, is write full time. I feel that if I could devote all my time to writing I could turn out, I'd say, three novels a year, compared to what I'm doing now.

If I could just have all the time to write, I've got the subjects that I want to write about, I pretty well know what I want to say. But it's a matter of time, trying to find the time, to do these things.

Dr. Caudill: Yes, I can see that. With the demands on your time. Maybe the solution to that is

to be a writer-in-residence at a university some place.

Mr. Smith: Yes and not have to observe office hours. It's very difficult to write. You know, sometimes you come home at night, as you probably well know, and you've been in a job for eight hours and everybody's been fussing at you, especially in a public relations job, then you've got to try to psyche yourself up to write and it's just difficult.

Dr. Caudill: What do you like to do to refresh yourself and refresh your mind?

Mr. Smith: Oh I used to do a lot of boating and fishing in Florida. I live in what they call a "waterfront house," you know, I have a waterfront, a boat dock in the back yard...

Dr. Caudill: At Merritt Island?

Mr. Smith: Merritt Island. When I can I like to do that. If I lived here in Mississippi I'd like to get out and just walk in the woods. There is not much woods left in Florida to walk in, unless you want to walk through condominiums and apartment houses.

Dr. Caudill: That's true! How do you feel now, when you put a year or two on to a project and you've made all the revisions and the publisher says "that's it--now we're gonna put it on the presses." What sort of a feeling does that leave you with?

Mr. Smith: Death! [laughter]

Dr. Caudill: Just about, I guess.

Mr. Smith: Yes. You feel like you just died. It's really hard to wind down, it is for me. You've lived with these characters and they've become real. With me, every character that I invent in fiction becomes just as real as a child, you know. In fact, I assume their identity.

When I was writing Forever Island I was actually that old Indian. You go around and you think all day long "well, how would he do this? How would he react? What would be his feelings?"

I get so absorbed in what I'm writing about that there is no reality, just this little world that I'm creating. Then, when it's all over, all the revisions done, and you know that's it, and it's in the publisher's hand, it's real hard to psyche yourself out of being Charlie Jumper or out of being Jared Teeter or whoever.

Dr. Caudill: I can imagine. Did you go up to West Virginia to get the feel of the place?

Mr. Smith: No. No, I didn't. One of my favorite tools in writing is a road map; so I took a road map of West Virginia and I found some little towns that I thought had quaint names like "Dink" and "Big Otter"...

Dr. Caudill: Is there a "Dink?"

Mr. Smith: Yes. [laughter]

Dr. Caudill: You put it on--no you got it off of--a map, didn't you? And then put it on the map. How many revisions, would you say, do you go through on your own before you submit?

Mr. Smith: About three.

Dr. Caudill: So by the time you make any changes that they wish you've been four or five times through it.

Mr. Smith: Yes. I usually write a first draft and then go back and make revisions into that rough first draft. Then, when I type a final in draft from the rough draft that has already been revised, I make constant revisions doing that. Then whatever the publisher says--for instance like in Forever Island I had to cut a hundred pages out of that manuscript.

Dr. Caudill: Did you really!

Mr. Smith: I had gotten on the soap box and that's out in fiction today. You know, the author himself does not get on a soap box and say "this is good" and "this is bad." There were a few cases where I did that, talking about environmental things and the destruction of nature and all this --Indian rights. So they wanted all that cut out.

They wanted that entire novel to be centered on that one old man, Charlie Jumper, not have too many additional minor characters, which I had packed it full of. And after, when they wrote me and said "we want you to do this. Eliminate this and eliminate that chapter entirely" and then "weave this thing"--I got real mad, as all writers do, and say "I'm not going to do it" and then you sit down and you think about it and you look and they were right! Everything they asked me to cut out of that manuscript was tripe.

Dr. Caudill: You were so involved in it that you couldn't really judge that thing then?

Mr. Smith: I couldn't judge it. I think one reason, too, that some writers don't want to do revisions and editing is the fact that they've been through this whole creative process and they're so tired of this particular work that they just want to get away from it. They don't want to have to go back and do all that typing and all that work and everything again.

Dr. Caudill: Yes, I can imagine that also. What does it do then to you--I mean, in terms of having to readjust or rework--when they make a motion picture script. Did you do the screen play for your Angel City?

Mr. Smith: No, I didn't do the screen play for two reasons really. I don't belong to that Screen Writers Guild. You have to belong to it to write a screen play. The second thing is that I have no experience doing that and the company that filmed the novel didn't want to take a chance on me learning.

Dr. Caudill: It's a highly technical thing, I assume?

Mr. Smith: Oh man, it's technical! But I did all of the revision of the script on location. I was in Homestead and any time they would come up and say "Well, we don't like this, we want it changed," I was there and I did the revision. And I rewrote several scenes in the movie for them. And by doing this, the work that I did, I learned an awful lot about screen writing.

Dr. Caudill: Did you find--you'll see occasionally that

someone will write a book and they'll buy the screen rights and then change it completely and they will be highly upset.

Mr. Smith: Oh yes!

Dr. Caudill: Did you have any problems in this respect?

Mr. Smith: No, I really didn't. There are some things in the movie that are different from the novel. They left out several parts of the novel, but I can understand why because they had to hold it to a two hour time frame and there just wasn't enough time. And, too, they changed the ending of it to make it not quite so much without hope, like the novel. I felt in ending that novel that I couldn't end it in a happy situation.

Dr. Caudill: Not without another hundred pages, could you?

Mr. Smith: No. So I ended it pretty well without hope. You didn't know what was going to happen to those people, you know. Just kind of like in Forever Island, it really has no ending. You don't know whether that old Indian found his utopia or whether he didn't find it. But in the ending, the movie ending, they have given some hope to where they've made it a little more [cheerful].

Dr. Caudill: In real life I would sort of anticipate that there wouldn't be hope, because normally there isn't.

Mr. Smith: The first version, the first ending of the novel, it wasn't quite as hopeless as it turned out in the end. But the past few years I've got to be a pretty good friend of Richard Boone, you know the actor. I feld something wasn't quite right with the Angel City manuscript at one time and I let him read it.

He said "well in the end of that novel you're going to have to--in my opinion--have somebody come out of that experience almost a total vegetable. There's no way those real naive, innocent, mountain people are going to come down out of West Virginia and go through an experience like that without somebody in there cracking up

and just going and turning into a vegetable."

Then, I rewrote it and had the wife, Cloma, she really just really psyched out, and the daughter too.

Dr. Caudill: You mentioned your relationship with Richard Boone. I would assume now that once you became successful as a writer, and began to be regarded as an author rather than just somebody working in public relations, that your circle, your social circle and your acquaintance circle, would change.

Mr. Smith: It does, very considerably, and not just the success of a particular book, you know. When you get on the staff of a lot of these writers conferences you meet a lot of more famous writers today. You really get to know them, not as some big mysterious person up there in New York. I've been on the staff of so many of them, like Richard Bock and Allen Drury and people like that.

Dr. Caudill: What do you do when you go to one of those conferences?

Mr. Smith: I usually lecture on how you create a novel, [that] is what they always ask me to do--about different things, research and that sort of thing.

Dr. Caudill: Who have become your good friends, let me say, among the writing fraternity?

Mr. Smith: I don't have any really because there is no association in Florida of writers. I come together with them. I have got to know a Mississippi writer real well because of being with him on the staff of a conference in Florida--Borden Deal, you know.

Dr. Caudill: We interviewed Mr. Deal, yes.

Mr. Smith: I was on the staff of the Sun Coast Writer's Conference with Borden last year and I got to know him real well. I had never met him when I lived here in Mississippi. He had been gone. But you don't really become what you call close, personal friends because you don't see them

again for another year or two. One, Erskine Caldwell, I know him. I know his wife real well. We correspond. He made some very good remarks about Angel City that were printed on the jacket, I reckon.

Dr. Caudill: Yes, that would be something that he would like.

Mr. Smith: Richard Boone, the way I became acquainted with him, he called me at home one night at Merritt Island. He said he had read Forever Island and he really thought it would make a tremendous movie and would I come up and talk to him about it. He lived in St. Augustine at the time. That's the way I met him.

At one time he wanted to produce a movie from that himself and also play in it. He wanted to play the part of the old fish camp operator. He never got his project off the ground, but if they do make a movie I'm hopeful that he will play that part in it.

Dr. Caudill: Are you at a point that you would produce a movie now from one of your books?

Mr. Smith: No way! I wouldn't attempt it even if I had the financial backing because there are so many complicated things about movie making that I learned from Angel City that I wouldn't want any part of it.

Dr. Caudill: Who do you like to read? If you're just going to read for pleasure what would you read?

Mr. Smith: I subscribe to two or three things that I keep up in short form. I don't have time to read all the novels that come out, but I take Book Digest, which has a good many condensations of books. I take Reader's Digest Condensed Books.

Several novels that have been real popular in the last few years I've read because the novel that I want to do now is one that I've never done before. It crosses generation lines, so I read Thornbirds. I've read all of the novels, the late novels, of James Michener.

Dr. Caudill: How do you go about reading a book, when

you're reading, say for pleasure?

Mr. Smith: Well, I don't read totally for pleasure any more, unfortunately. I enjoy reading books but I'm constantly looking at how a person did this. If it's a generation line crossing, how they made that transition, from say, eighteen and forty to eighteen and sixty without just saying "twenty years just passed" or something like that. Looking at their styles and the way they handle the sentences and paragraphs and things like that.

I think one of the best ways for a person to learn to write is to learn to read because you can learn more about writing by reading other writers' work than you can by going to school.

Dr. Caudill: Does that go back to your Hinds Junior College education there?

Mr. Smith: Yes.

Dr. Caudill: One of the problems I've noticed in students is that not only do they have difficulty reading, they don't like to read.

Mr. Smith: Yes, I know. That's real unfortunate, too, because that's one of the things that growing up here in this little town in the thirties really helped me. Because back then one of your main forms of entertainment was reading. I always loved to read and I read all those old Hardy Boy books, do you remember the series?

Dr. Caudill: Yes. I read them.

Mr. Smith: I read all of James Fenimore Cooper's books and Moby Dick and The Red Badge Of Courage. By the time I got to high school I had read everything I could get my hands on and enjoyed it. I'm sure that that eventually helped me as a writer.

Dr. Caudill: If you had, all of a sudden, without any advance planning, the next month totally free, with no commitments, to do as you wish, what would you do?

Mr. Smith: I would work as much as possible on this one novel that I would like to do right now, that I've done all the research

that's necessary to do. A novel. I'd put all that time into that project.

Dr. Caudill: Do you make notes when you're researching?

Mr. Smith: Yes, volumes of notes.

Dr. Caudill: Do you really? You would end up with a large amount of [notes]. How do you write them? What do you do, make very brief notes?

Mr. Smith: Very brief notes: [such] as "Eighteen and sixty this happened." I had to do a lot of research, it doesn't appear that I did, but in a novel like Forever Island you have got to go back and research what happened to those Seminole Indians way in the past that would make them so bitter now towards the white race, you know.

Where did those people come from? They weren't natives of Florida. I even went out in the Everglades doing that. And I went to Everglades National Park where they've got all these little trails where tourists walk along and they've got signs on all the trees and the bushes telling you what they are.

I'd walk along and write in a notebook and I saw so many things I'd never heard of, like a Gumbo Limbo Tree is native to the Everglades. And a Lancewood Tree, a Cocoaplum Bush. I didn't know that Mahogany was a native tree. I didn't know that there were crocodiles in the Everglades.

Dr. Caudill: Mahogany is a native tree in the [Everglades]?

Mr. Smith: It's a native tree in the Florida Everglades.

Dr. Caudill: I didn't know that.

Mr. Smith: [I would] just make many, many notes. In some instances, in doing research in Florida, I would go into these little towns, like Immokalee--I knew a scene was going to take place there, or Everglades City--and park the car and just walk down the street and write descriptions of what the street looked like: here's a little cafe, Gert's Cafe or whatever; here's a little

grocery store and there's a service station and that sort of thing.

Dr. Caudill: Are these arranged in a way then that when you're writing [you can find them]? You mentioned that you didn't make an outline--how do you reach what you want?

Mr. Smith: When I come to a certain scene in the manuscript, I just whip through those notes and find where I have made notes about that one particular thing, you know.

Dr. Caudill: [It] becomes a pretty systematic thing, I guess.

Mr. Smith: I don't think I've ever had to make so many notes as I have had to make on this novel that I have not written yet that I'm just getting into. As I say it goes back and covers a period from around eighteen forty to nineteen eighty; so when you're doing that kind of research you go back--eighteen and fifty something major happened, and eighteen sixty something happened. I've learned a lot of things. Those early pioneers in Florida, for instance, one of their staples foods was rice and they grew it in pure sand, without water.

Dr. Caudill: Is that right!

Mr. Smith: Yes. And you find all kinds of funny things like that. In that state, too, it was in nineteen and thirty-seven when you could still drive a herd of cattle from the east coast of Florida to the west coast--from the Atlantic to the Gulf--and never run into a fence. Just many little things like that: who built the first railroad, and who planted the first citrus tree.

Dr. Caudill: [What was] the clothing that the people wore?

Mr. Smith: The clothing that they wore, what kind of guns, you know. You can't be writing along something in eighteen and fifty or sixty and have some guy that is firing a nineteen seventy model Winchester rifle. Somebody will call your hand on it.

Dr. Caudill: And that destroys your credibility, too,

in something like that.

Mr. Smith: And in Forever Island I wanted a lot of old legends and superstitions of those Indians woven into that novel and I would have to talk to these old people--I finally got to the point where they'd talk to me--and find out if an owl comes and lights on a chiki at night that's a sign of very bad evil.

I wove more of that kind of stuff into this novel Allapattah, which is another novel about Seminoles, a tremendous amount.

Dr. Caudill: Did you get an interpreter to go with you or were they able to speak enough English to answer you?

Mr. Smith: Most of them that I talked to could speak English. A lot of Seminoles cannot yet speak English, but the ones that I talked to could.

Dr. Caudill: Is there some place in one of your novels, for instance, sometime that you'll have the conflict over cattle dipping or something like that in Mississippi?

Mr. Smith: Yes. There was the same thing, I found out through all this research, that happened in Florida, too.

Dr. Caudill: Oh, did it really?

Mr. Smith: Yes. In fact they had a regular war down there over cattle dipping. They didn't want to do it. When a cattleman would refuse to dip his cattle they'd go and kill them.

Dr. Caudill: Oh is that right!

Mr. Smith: They would shoot them.

Dr. Caudill: They settled the question, didn't they? You learn a tremendous amount of history, then, just doing your research, don't you?

Mr. Smith: I really have. It sounds kind of ironic--and funny in a way--but I'm considered in Florida now as being an authority on the history of the Seminole Indians, which I am not. [It's strange] that some Mississippian could come down to Florida and in

a number of years could learn more about Seminole Indians in some phase of history than Florida writers know. But all it takes is research, if it's the thing that you set out to do and you do it.

Dr. Caudill: Well, your novels are verging on historical novels anyway in that respect.

Mr. Smith: They're all based on real things.

Dr. Caudill: Real facts?

Mr. Smith: Real things that have happened.

Dr. Caudill: Are you thinking in terms of working in real history that is in not a novel approach?

Mr. Smith: No. No.

Dr. Caudill: Your forte is always going to be the novels?

Mr. Smith: Novels. This novel, I say I've done all this research in history. I don't intend to make it a historical novel at all. It's going to be another novel about people, not events. Events will happen but how these events affected these people.

Dr. Caudill: You're very humanistically inclined then?

Mr. Smith: I've been accused of it.

Dr. Caudill: Yes. What in your background was the major influence that caused that?

Mr. Smith: Going to school at Mendenhall High School during the Depression. Of course I was not in the really poverty stricken class, but there were so many people back then--so many kids would come to school in the winter without any shoes, walking through snow on occasion. Kids would come to school up here with nothing to eat.

This was back before the government gave you a hot lunch and I've seen poor kids come with one biscuit and they'd stick their finger in it, you know, and put syrup in it or have maybe one baked potato to eat all day. Seeing all that sort of thing had an effect on me. I've always felt a real sorrow and a sympathy for the

underdogs in life, the underprivileged people.

Living here and seeing those things first-hand gave me a background of knowing how those people think and everything, knowing how they live, and it helped me tremendously in writing about such underprivileged classes as Seminole Indians and migrant workers.

Dr. Caudill: Now these are white people you're talking about, though, in the thirties that didn't have this?

Mr. Smith: The blacks, too.

Dr. Caudill: Of course, you had the blacks who lived maybe even more meanly than still the Seminoles.

Mr. Smith: I know at Christmas here, in Mendenhall when I lived here, many a year I wouldn't have any money to spend on Christmas presents, but I would go out and buy a ham or a turkey or something and take it to all the black friends that I had and there was a sharing, I meant.

This isn't recognized in many circles about the relations of whites and blacks back then in small Mississippi towns, but there was a tremendous sharing. If some black family got in real trouble somebody would come and help them. Again we get into that paternalism thing.

Dr. Caudill: Yes. Yes. I can see that. I've just about used up the questions I have. I'd like to ask you if there's any area that we haven't gotten into that you would like to bring on a tape of an oral history.

Mr. Smith: Oh, we've covered a lot.

Dr. Caudill: [laughter] We have, actually! What I'd like to ask you to do is, if possible--we have discussed your writing, your research and your notes. If we could have, say, copies of some of the notes and copies of a couple of pages of one of the manuscripts, we'd like to do that.

Mr. Smith:: I'll be glad to.

Dr. Caudill: To put in here and I'll be in touch with you on that. [Note: See Appendixes A and B].

Mr. Smith: I think one thing that might be of some interest to some people listening to a tape is why a certain writer writes the type of novels that are basically based on the underdogs and things like that. I've been to writers' conferences and I'll tell some of these other writers "I'm fixing to go live with migrant workers. I'm going to write a novel about migrant workers."

They say "Man, Pat, you're crazy you know. You ought to write formula fiction. You ought to write sex books. You ought to write cops and robbers and all that stuff and make a lot of money--that's where the money is."

I think that all writers, they come to some point--there have been points in my career, when I've had it really rough--that you have to come to a decision of which you want to do. Do you want to turn over here, you want to be a commercial writer? Do you want to write what the publishers say will sell or do you want to write what you want to write?

You reach a point--and I reached that point as a writer and said that "I am not going to be a commercial writer. I'm not going to write the porno books. I'm not going to write science fiction. I'm not going to do this. If I can't make it as someone trying to write novels based on real life situations and novels that have some social value and might, just might in some way, help give these people a better shake out of life, I just won't do it."

Of course, that was a basic motivation and the only motivation I had for writing a novel like Angel City, just hoping that maybe it would catch on. Maybe it would be made into a movie. Maybe it would be bringing a lot of public attention to that situation, putting enough pressure on it to eliminate it.

Dr. Caudill: Some books have been very influential. Upton Sinclair for instance, in the early part of the [century]...

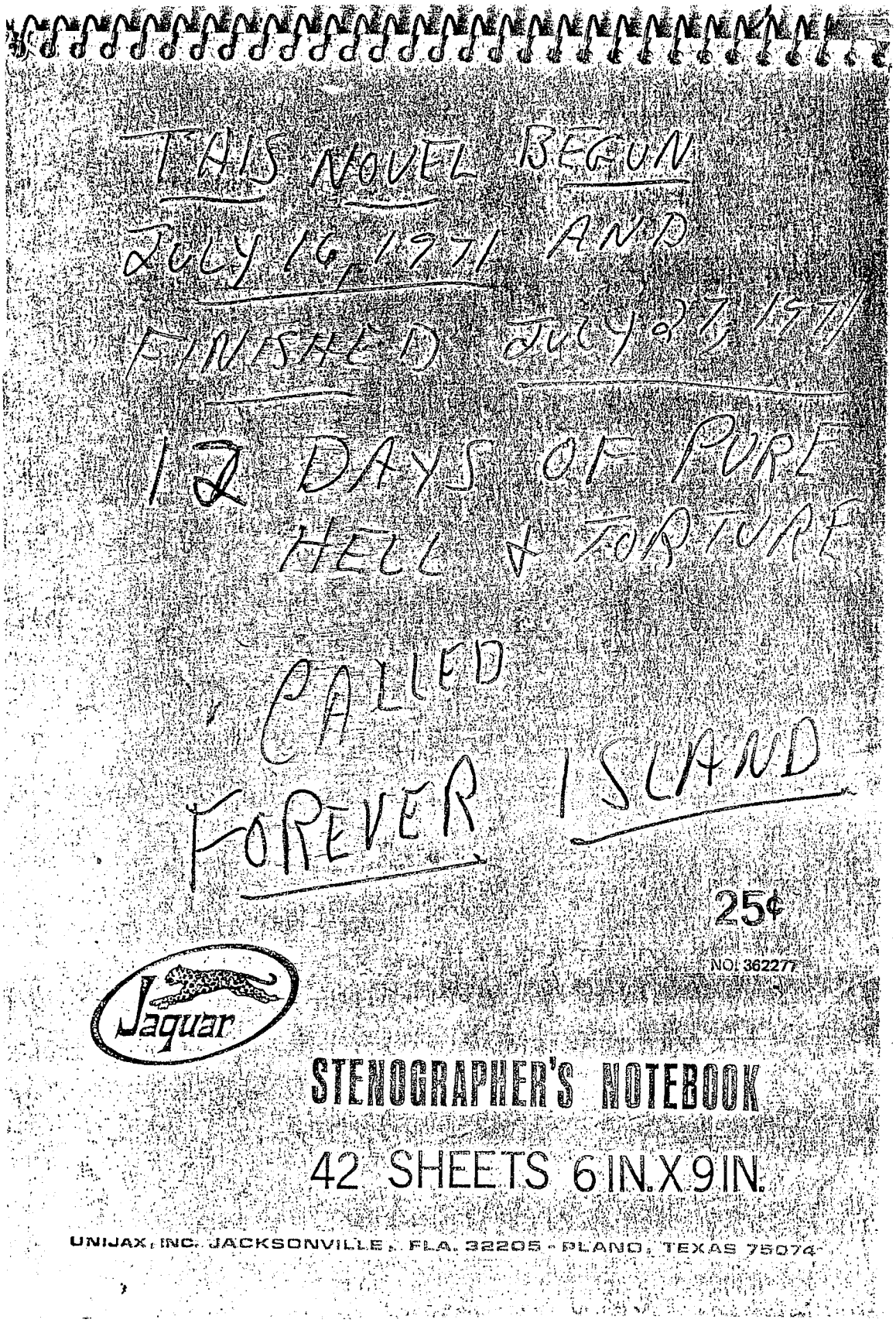
Mr. Smith: You make a choice of what it is you want to do as a writer and you either stick with it or you quit.

Dr. Caudill: We hope that it goes exactly as you wish and we're delighted at your success. We will be following you and maybe it will call for a part two to this history one of these times. Let me thank you on behalf of the university for taking the time with me.

Mr. Smith: Thank you. It was enjoyable.

APPENDIX A

From the research notebook for Forever Island, published in hardcover in March 1973 by W. W. Norton & Company of New York; published in the summer of 1974 by the Reader's Digest Condensed Book Club; published in paperback in 1974 by Dell Publishing Company of New York; also now published in 26 foreign countries including Russia.


THIS NOVEL BEGUN
July 16, 1971 AND
FINISHED July 28, 1971
12 DAYS OF PURE
HELL & TORTURE
CALLED
FOREVER ISLAND
25¢
NO. 362277
Jaguar
STENOGRAPHER'S NOTEBOOK
42 SHEETS 6 IN. X 9 IN.
UNIJAX, INC. JACKSONVILLE, FLA. 32205 - PLANO, TEXAS 75074

July 15, 1971
~~[illegible]~~ 2 P.M.

ALLIGATOR ALLEY

BUY A MINI-FARM
WATCH THIS LAND GO UP + UP

ENJOY + PROTECT OUR WILDLIFE
FED
CENTRAL + SOUTHERN DISTRICT

L-Y IN REALTY — SKINNUM REALTY
AURIRE REALTY
Dartmus [illegible] [illegible] - $20 down
call Miami 862-[illegible]

Dwarf Cypress + pines
no animal life
Canals + roads
fire
vultures + Crows
dead Coons on highway
Marsh + Cabbage palm islands

STOPPER TREE - smells like skunk

MEDICINE VINE
STRANGLER FIG
MUSCADINE
VIRGINIA CREEPER

Holes in limestone hold water in dry season

PIGEON PLUM
LANCEWOOD TREE
HIPPOCRATEA VINE
STRAP FERNS - covered fallen tree
POISONWOOD TREE

GUMBO-LIMBO TREE
Cold medicine brewed from inner bark - "chicken gumbo soup"

PICKERAL WEED (BLUE FLAG)
water plant with spikes of purple flowers - grows thickly around pond

small white spheres are eggs of a large water snail

BUTTON BUSH
grows in water - thick around pond - has small balls on stems

COCOA PLUM BUSH
PLUM like fruit - insipid taste - white & dark purple - inner kernel looks like almon - mild narcotic - seeds allay hunger & thirst

when hammock burns it will not come back - takes years - unlike pine & palm land

Night hawk - eats mosquito
Minnow eats mosquito
Heron eats minnow
gar eats minnow
alligator eats gar
Coon eats fish
bass eats minnow + small fish
frog eats mosquito eggs
minnow eats mosquito eggs
ect.

~~PA-OKEE~~ -
PA-HAY-OKEE - River of grass

ON HWY 94
Don's Barbeque
brown line in school bus

Everglades City
Rod + Gun Club
Tropical Lounge
Little barber shop next door
Dilapidated Everglades women's club
Everglades Community Church
Everglades Supermarket
2 story City Hall - white
rails on front stairs
four microwave telephone towers

abandoned Captain's Table Rest.

Cypress is called "wood eternal"
the oldest living thing on earth

Big Cypress
Turner ~~River~~ River (east of Copeland)
Copeland Prairie - open pine land
& Turner River Divide

Indian Stump Canal
runs from Reservation to alligator
alley

Copeland - Jones Rest +
Jones Store - J. W. Jones
Memorial Scenic Drive
old lumber mill
colony of duckens live across
the highway from store

~~FOREVER~~

Charlie Jumper
Billie Jo Jumper
Lillie Tiger Jumper
Timmy Jumper
Golda Jumper
Tamanda Jumper

Seth Thompson
Slim

Fred Henderson - game warden

~~al Cranston~~
Albert Tyler - newspaper & lawyer

Ken Riley - realtor

Sheriff Tate
Shorty Brown - deputy

Willie Gopher
Jimmy Cypress
John Okeola
Sam Billie
John Tiger
Billie Bowlegs

* Billy Joe goes to work

* Charlie + game warden + birds

* Seth & Charlie go after frogs

~~Real estate~~

* Charlie shows books to Jimmy

* Real estate agent talks to Lyles

Real estate agent talks to Billy Joe

Seth & Charlie go after bones

Billy Jo talks to Charlie

Super with make signs

Seth theater worker

Billy Joe goes to [illegible]

The deer hunt

Sixth qtr start

the wedding

Family dies

Court trial

APPENDIX B

From the original manuscript of THE RIVER IS HOME published in March 1953 by Little, Brown & Co. of Boston

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It was not long before all traces of the flood were gone. The wind blew the drifts of trash and leaves from along the river bank, and the sun dried out the low places of ground. Buzzards flew along the bank in search of the dead animals, and, when found, devoured them. The winds still blew, and sometimes it was cold, but the days were more sunny than cloudy. When they had rain, it was gentle, and the sun was setting later in the west.

One day Skeeter found a group of small, blue violets growing in the clearing, and a few days later he saw a robin, and they knew spring had come again. It could be felt in the air, on the river, and even the trees seemed to sense it and sway in anticipation of the new coat of leaves they would get. The marsh grass was turning

green again, and the ducks were flying away to the north. The trees were covered with small buds. The sky was filled with great white clouds, mixed with patches of deep blue, and the sun was beginning to feel warm and pleasant. The thick wool jacket did not feel good during the day, the shoes would soon come off, and the water of the bayou would soon be warm enough to swim in.

Each day the tiny buds on the trees grew; the snakes and turtles came out to sun themselves on logs; and the grass turned greener. The squirrels came out early in the morning, played in the trees all day, and the baby frogs began to bellow in the swamp at night. The katydids chirped at sundown, and the fireflies filled the night with thousands of small diamonds sparkling in the darkness. The tiny buds of the trees grew until they burst, and everything was splashed with green. Spring had arrived with all ~~its~~ her glory, and the river was beautiful again.

Gone were the bare limbs that raised themselves in solemn submission to the black clouds of the sky, and gone were the cold winds and rains that burned the face and chilled the spirits. The minnows swam in the bayou, the birds sang to the air, the animals rejoiced that the dark days were behind, and the sky was filled with light.

The clean, black ground of the garden was broken into rows, and the seeds were covered with the cool soil. The sun would warm them, the gentle rains would quench their thirst, the rich black soil would nourish them, and they would burst from the ground in appreciation of spring.

It was a wonderful time for the birds of the air, the animals of the woods, the reptiles of the swamp, the plants of the ground, and the humans of the clearing. All were glad to be alive, and they drank of the sun and air until they were drunk with the intoxication of spring.

The trips to town were pleasant again. The trees and vines were beautiful, and they could see the small animals at play. Birds sang to them, crows shouted at them, squirrels talked to them, and the turtles paid no heed to them. Everything looked different except the water of the river; it kept it's muddy color even though everything else had changed. There could be sun, or rain, or it could be winter or spring, but the brown water of the river stayed the same. If it was low, or if it was raging across the marsh flats and into the clearing, it made no difference. It paid no heed to what was going on around it; it was unchangeable in its ways. It seemed that God made it to be muddy, and muddy it would be, regardless of what came or went, of what travelled up and down its far reaches, or of who was caught up in its currents and sent to the bottom to lie dead and be pushed and battered and filled with the brown mud. The river was mightier than everything that lived along its banks; man could not change its color. It could destroy the animals of the woods and the reptiles of the swamp. It could wash away the trees and the vines and change the appearance of the land about it; man could die, the animals of the woods be killed, the birds of the air lose their voices forever; the sky could be filled with clouds, or with sun, and the wind could blow, but the

river paid no heed; it rolled steadily along towards the sea--always brown, always muddy - unchangeable except by God.

The days rolled on, and the fishing stayed good, and sometimes Pa and Skeeter had to make two trips to town a week to sell the fish. This turn of good fortune made the family happy, and there were no flashes of temper or ill feelings among them. The days seemed more sunny than ever, and the sky was bluer to them than they had ever known. Finally Pa decided that the savings were enough for the new boat and to keep him at the clearing all summer; so one morning they rowed up to the Hookers to see about the supplies to do the building. The old man saw them coming and met them at the landing. They exchanged greetings and went to the house.

"You ain't goin' to Fort Henry airy time soon, air you?" asked Pa.

"Why shore," said the Old Man. "We's goin' the fust of the week. Hit's the fust time we been up this spring, and we got a big load to run up. Air they somethin' we could git fer you?"

"Yes," said Pa, "if'n you don't mind. The fishin' has been good, so me and Skeeter has saved up enough to git the stuff to build us a new boat. That old one air jest about shot, and we wants one that air bigger and kin haul more stuff. I knowed you was mighty good on buyin', and you knows more about buildin' boats then airy man abouts here, so I'd shore appreciate hit if'n you would git the stuff fer me."

"I'll shore be glad to do hit, Abner," he said. "I'll git the best stuff I kin find, so'es you will have as good a boat as airy

man on the river. When we gits back, me and the boys will build hit up to the house and bring hit down to you. We kin git it done in a day."

" That'd be mighty nice," said Pa, " but we shore willin' to help with the building '. We ain't askin' fer you to do it all."

" I knows you ain't," said the old man, " but we'd right well enjoy hit, and then it would be a good surprise fer you when you first see hit."

" Well, they's one more thing," said Pa. " Skeeter here wants the boat painted, so git enough paint to do hit and one of them breshes to put it on with."

" Whut color you want?" asked the old man.

" Red," said Skeeter.

" Then red it will be," said the old man. " That'll shore make a purty lookin' boat."

Pa gave the old man the money, and they went back down the river to home. They were both excited the rest of the week and could hardly wait until the Hookers got the material and the boat was finished. They didn't even enjoy their Saturday trip to Milltown for thinking about the boat. It was the only thing on their minds, and they could have no peace until they saw the finished boat. Ma and Theresa were excited too but not so much as Pa and Skeeter. It would not mean as much to them as it would to the men.

One morning the first of the week Pa was at the landing and saw a boat with three men in it coming up the bayou, and he watched as it came towards the landing. The men were dressed in fancy hunting clothes and carried guns, so Pa knew they were not swamp folks. When they got closer, he recognized them as the three Smith brothers and could see that they were drunk, and there were several empty jugs in their boat. They pulled the boat to the landing and walked up the bank, one of them bringing his gun.

" Howdy," said Pa. " Glad to see you fellers done got friendly and come a callin'. Come on in and sit a spell."

" Shet yore goddam mouth," said one of the brothers. " We ain't come callin'