

**Oral History Interview of  
Jan Smith Taylor**

**Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson  
March 12, 2014  
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:  
*General Southwest Collection Interviews***

© Southwest Collection/  
Special Collections Library



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

**Southwest Collection/  
Special Collections Library**

15th and Detroit | 806.742.3749 | <http://swco.ttu.edu>

## Copyright and Usage Information:

An oral history release form was signed by Jan Smith Taylor on March 12, 2014. This transfers all rights of this interview to the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Texas Tech University.

This oral history transcript is protected by U.S. copyright law. By viewing this document, the researcher agrees to abide by the fair use standards of U.S. Copyright Law (1976) and its amendments. This interview may be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes only. Any reproduction or transmission of this protected item beyond fair use requires the written and explicit permission of the Southwest Collection. Please contact Southwest Collection Reference staff for further information.

### Preferred Citation for this Document:

Taylor, Jan Smith Oral History Interview, March 12, 2014. Interview by Andy Wilkinson, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

*The Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library houses over 6,300 oral history interviews dating back to the late 1940s. The historians who conduct these interviews seek to uncover the personal narratives of individuals living on the South Plains and beyond. These interviews should be considered a primary source document that does not implicate the final verified narrative of any event. These are recollections dependent upon an individual's memory and experiences. The views expressed in these interviews are those only of the people speaking and do not reflect the views of the Southwest Collection or Texas Tech University.*

*The transcribers and editors of this document strove to create an accurate and faithful transcription of this oral history interview. However, this document may still contain mistakes. Spellings of proper nouns and places were researched thoroughly, but readers may still find inaccuracies, inaudible passages, homophones, and possible malapropisms. Any words followed by "[?]" notates our staff's best faith efforts. We encourage researchers to compare the transcript to the original recording if there are any questions. Please contact the SWC/SCL Reference department for access information. Any corrections or further clarifications may be sent to the A/V Unit Manager.*

## Technical Processing Information:

The Audio/Visual Department of the Southwest Collection is the curator of this ever-growing oral history collection and is in the process of digitizing all interviews. While all of our interviews will have an abbreviated abstract available online, we are continually transcribing and adding information for each interview. Audio recordings of these interviews can be listened to in the Reading Room of the Southwest Collection. Please contact our Reference Staff for policies and procedures. Family members may request digitized copies directly from Reference Staff.

Consult the Southwest Collection website for more information.

<http://swco.ttu.edu/Reference/policies.php>

### Recording Notes:

*Original Format:* Born Digital Audio

*Digitization Details:* N/A

*Audio Metadata:* 44.1kHz/ 16bit WAV file

*Further Access Restrictions:* N/A

### Transcription Notes:

*Interviewer:* Andy Wilkinson

*Audio Editor:* N/A

*Transcription:* Cecilia Morales

*Editor(s):* Jason Rhode

*Final Editor:* Andy Wilkinson

## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Jan Smith Taylor, who discusses her experiences as the daughter of former Texas governor Preston Smith.

**Length of Interview:** 00:28:30

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
View of Smith as politician	8	00:05:06
Importance of Smith as West Texan	10	00:10:15
Smith and education	13	00:15:36
The pets of the Smith family	16	00:21:46

© Southwest Collection/  
Special Collections Library

### Keywords

Politics, education, Preston Smith, Lubbock, Health Sciences Center, fly fishing

**Andy Wilkinson (AW):**

Well, I had this—let me stop that while I—

**Jan Smith Taylor (JT):**

It makes sense, however.

AW:

And I'm going to preface this by saying it's Andy Wilkinson with Jan Taylor, and it's the twelfth, is it not, of March?

JT:

Yes.

AW:

I better check my phone.

JT:

Yeah, it is. Because we leave on the thirteenth, and that's tomorrow.

AW:

Good. And it's the year 2014 and we're in Jan's beautiful home. I'd like to get just a couple bits of information for our cataloguers. The one everybody hates to hear asked, but what's your date of birth?

JT:

February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1945.

AW:

And I noticed—wasn't your dad's birthday this month?

JT:

Yeah, the eighth. He would have been a hundred and two. I know.

AW:

That's hard to imagine. Were you born where?

JT:

In Lubbock.

AW:

In Lubbock? And I'm assuming that you grew up here?

JT:

I did. I lived in Austin off and on because—

AW:

For your father's work?

JT:

Yeah, Daddy's first term in the legislature of the House of Representatives was 1945. When I was born, he was in Austin. And the war was winding down. I don't think he saw me until I was a week or so old because he couldn't get back.

AW:

That must have been very interesting. So really your whole life you've been connected with politics.

JT:

I just thought everybody did the things I did. It never occurred to me it was unique.

AW:

So you went to—where'd you go to grade school?

JT:

I went to Roscoe Wilson and Pease Elementary in Austin.

AW:

Where is Pease?

JT:

It's on Twelfth Street. Not far from the Capitol. In fact, I used to walk to the Capitol after school and come home with Daddy.

AW:

How many years were you in elementary school in Austin?

JT:

Just the sixth grade.

AW:

Sixth grade. That had to have been very unusual, too. Although I guess maybe there were other kids in your class that—

JT:

A lot. In fact, Cross Daniel's [?] son Houston was my age. We were good friends and still are. And his oldest son Price was my brother's age. So we were in and out of the governor's mansion because they were friends as well as—and of course, Daddy knew Cross Daniel for many years.

AW:

So when you're there and then back to Lubbock for junior high and high school? And where?

JT:

J.T. Hutchison [Junior High] and Lubbock High.

AW:

And then after high school, where did you—

JT:

I went to Tech.

AW:

And majored in?

JT:

Elementary education. Taught second grade after school.

AW:

Where did you teach?

JT:

At Hardwick Elementary here in Lubbock. And then when Daddy was elected governor and went to Austin.

AW:

And did you continue to teach?

JT:

No. I worked on his campaign office and just did other things until our oldest son, Robb, was born. Stayed home with him.



AW:

So how would you describe living in a household that's got to be both a household, but it's still part of—I mean, you're still in the limelight of politics, especially the positions that your father held?

JT:

I didn't think too much about it because I was just sort of born into it. Until really my junior year in high school, he was elected lieutenant governor, and I was about to go to Stardusters Dance, and I had a date and I was getting ready, and I looked outside, and all these TV trucks were out there. My bedroom faced the north and the street side, and it suddenly occurred to me, this is—something's going on here. And you would've thought I would have figured that out before. But I couldn't even enjoy the dance. I finally had my date bring me home. I wanted to know what was going on.

AW:

Was that election night?

JT:

It was election night. The primary. You know, they've changed the primaries so much, I'm not sure, I want to say it was May and then the runoff was June. But I'm not sure.

AW:

And that was a tough battle, too.

JT:

Yeah, there were—oh, Dolph Briscoe was in that race, and Don Yarborough—

AW:

Crowded field, and of people who then went on to do things themselves.

JT:

Waggoner Carr was in that race. He was attorney general at the time, I think.

AW:

How did you see your dad as being a combatant, as it were? Having to fight through these elections, and then later—or actually, when he was—before he got statewide office, he was still having to wrestle with other politicians about bills and that sort of thing.



JT:

He was *such* a people person. And he made such good friends. And I think there was an element of trust back then that I'm not sure there is now. And they trusted each other, and they listened to each other's point of views and they were able to compromise. That's really how I saw him. Somebody had to do something *extremely* mean-spirited for him to ever not like you. He just had an inherent like of people and loyalty and trust, until you proved him wrong.

AW:

Yeah, I didn't know him well at all, I just met him a few times, but he always struck me as being way too nice to be in politics. (laughs)

JT:

Exactly. And sometimes it was to a fault, through business or other things. Sometimes he stuck way too long with somebody when he should have gently moved them on. But that goes in with his staff as well. He kept his—I guess it was his secretary back in the day, it would be his personal assistant now or something, administrative assistant—Faye Penn, they had a long, long relationship.

AW:

F-a-y?

JT:

F-a-y-e P-e-n-n. And her husband's name was Dick and he worked for the state. She was Daddy's secretary for many, many years. In fact, her daughter is a freshman at Tech this year. Audrey. Her granddaughter, I'm sorry. He kept a lot of his staff for a long time.

AW:

Was it hard for you as a family to transition when he wasn't in politics anymore? Or were you glad?

JT:

No. I enjoyed the people so much that I knew that would disperse. You know, everybody would go on and find other jobs and do other things. And that was the hardest part for me. And I never lost contact with a lot of them, but just knowing on a day-to-day basis I wouldn't see those people anymore, which is kind of sentimental, I suppose.

AW:

What about your mom? I would think it would be especially hard to be the wife of a governor and a lieutenant governor and a politician of any—

JT:

She never wanted that life. When she and Daddy met, she was engaged to a Methodist minister. And honestly, she would have been the perfect minister's wife. A little white-picket fence, a little parsnip somewhere. She loved to entertain, she would have taken good care of her flock. She didn't want any part of all this. And I do remember heated discussions about that when he would run for reelection or want to go for a higher office.

AW:

What drove him to do that?

JT:

Who knows? He loved doing things for other people. And I just think he thought he could do good, that he would do the right thing and could make a better life for this part of Texas and the state. He never had aspirations to go any farther than governor.

AW:

Well, you just mentioned something that I think is very important, is how important he is to our part of the state. First West Texan, I guess, to be governor.

JT:

Maybe the only one that will ever be governor.

AW:

I think you're right. That's right.

JT:

--the way the demographics are going.

AW:

Exactly. And was he the first to be lieutenant governor? There weren't many.

JT:

From this part of the world? I think probably so. In fact, he's the only man who was ever elected to the house, the senate, lieutenant governor, and governor in a progressive order.

AW:

And I know the first and maybe the only to go straight from lieutenant governor to governor, which is also quite a feat. And a feat, as people don't remember in today's world, that in that time, the Democratic primary was the big contest. But it was so hard-fought, as you said. So

that's really an achievement. Was the uniqueness of his representing this part of the world, was that something that was a thing that you thought about or occurred to you?

JT:

Not really at the time. I think he realized it, and that's why it was so important for him to get people working for him in the other parts of the state. Even in his later years, we'd be driving somewhere, and we'd go through different counties, and he could remember who his campaign manager was in Dickens County or Bear County or wherever. He had that grassroots kind of campaign and I think that's what he knew he needed because he wasn't known. Lubbock was pretty far out here at the time.

AW:

Yeah. And that is interesting that he was able to develop that. So it was with a grassroots organization.

JT:

Very much.

AW:

And you would probably remember some of this at least. That kind of campaign usually involves a whole lot of hours.

JT:

Oh, a lot of hours. We would travel with him. The first stop he would make usually would be the newspaper, and then right after that would be the barbershops and beauty shops because everybody had to get their hair cut.

AW:

Was that interesting to you?

JT:

Uh-huh. It was very interesting to me. I really liked going with him.

AW:

Do you think maybe you're a little different, too? Maybe you should have run for something.

JT:

Oh goodness, no. I don't have any inclination whatsoever. I was always interested in history, and I always was interested in—and we had so many friends in the political world that I just—like I

said, I kind of grew up with it. It was just a part of me, I suppose. And I loved listening to him. I loved being with a group of men when he was talking.

AW:  
Why?

JT:  
Because they had so much more to say than the women did. So much more interesting.

AW:  
Were they funnier?

JT:  
They were funny, they were bright, they just could see through—a lot of them had such a vision that a lot of people—I don't think your average person has. That's why the average guy doesn't go into state government.

AW:  
I'm glad you mention that because one of the things that I think is also interesting about him is not just he was a first from our part of the world, but he was the first to do that. Of course, those things are notable, but I know that he was interested in some topics that weren't—they were ahead of their time. Like water. Can you talk a little bit about that? That would have been later on in his career, but you would have known his interest in that.

JT:  
I just heard him talk about it. I never knew much about his plan. But a good friend of ours, Mike Field, had done some research and all that, and he brought it up one day—oh, it's probably been a couple of years ago, but he had no idea Daddy was so involved in a water plan.

AW:  
I'm going to call Mike and see what he learned. To me, that's—

JT:  
And I hope my memory's not failing me, but I think it was Mike.

AW:  
Okay. I'm going to have to ask. What, other than being funny and personable, what was your dad like for you?

JT:

He was just a rock. He was so stable and if I got in trouble, he would be unhappy with me, but he would be more disappointed and he'd talk you through it. It wasn't just a big blow-up of anger. He made sure you understand what the problem was. It was just a great deal of respect.

AW:

What was it like transitioning back into private life?

JT:

I had no problem. I don't think I ever realized I was in public life, really. It just was life.

AW:

That's a great answer. Did you dad seem—did it seem to be troublesome to him?

JT:

Looking back, I think it was.

AW:

Because he lived a long time after.

JT:

He did. He lived a long time after that. I think it was hard for him to know what to do with his energy. He went into banking for a little while. He knew nothing about banking. I think it was Bill Clements who put him on the higher education coordinating board and, [he] loved that. That's one of the reasons he was able to help the Health Science Center out there. He always loved being a part of that. And then he went to work for Tech and that fit very well. But yeah, I think he floundered for a while.

AW:

There's a reason we have a statue of him. I mean, he's incredibly important to the history of Texas Tech.

JT:

Well, in education he was huge. Huge.

AW:

He must have influenced you, since you went into education.

JT:

It was important to him, because I think when he got a degree in—I believe it was 1935, there weren't that many people who had college degrees back in that era. Or none of his friends. He was the first of his family. His younger brother eventually got one as well, but out of the twelve children, he was the first and only one for a long time.

AW:

And he graduated from Lamesa, is that right? It just dawned on me that he beat a Lamesa guy to get the—

JT:

Kilmore property? Uh-huh.

AW:

I hadn't thought about that connection. Yeah, that is interesting that he's the first in his family to—

JT:

I think he realized that to have a successful life and to really do things beneficial to the rest of humanity, you need to have an education. And his mother pushed that as well. And my mother taught school. My aunts taught school, I mean, it was just all over my family.

AW:

You were stuck, weren't you?

JT:

It was easy for me to go into education. And I loved kids, so that worked out fine.

AW:

On a different subject, what do you see has been the development of our part of the world, West Texas, Lubbock, and the kinds of things that I think your father was really interested in, and seeing develop. How has that development appeared to you? Do you see it's going the right way, it's the way he looked for it?

JT:

Absolutely. And he would tell you, he had no idea what he was doing. He just saw a need and went after it the best way he knew how. He said if he'd had any idea how much trouble it would be to get a medical started, he probably wouldn't have ever pursued it because it's not just, "Oh, let's open a medical school." There's a whole lot more to it, and a lot of funding.



AW:

And a lot of people who would rather you not open it.

JT:

Exactly. Including a lot of the doctors here didn't want it. They saw it as competition, that bringing other doctors in would be too much competition.

AW:

Yeah, right, especially young doctors, who work cheap.

JT:

And competition is very good in a lot of ways. So it all worked out fine. Absolutely, I see a huge difference. We have a huge medical community we would never have had. The law school, I think, made a huge impact as well. We're one of the few campuses, I think, that have a medical school and a law school on the same campus.

AW:

Yeah. And in fact I can't think of one off the top of my head. Certainly not one in Texas. It's really unusual. And I didn't think about that for a long time. But it really is unusual.

JT:

But I think all that has benefited Lubbock, as well as the surrounding communities.

AW:

It's also a fact I think that Texas Tech is going to be an enormous part of the stability of our economy. Not necessarily all of it, but keeping it stable.

JT:

So I see a huge impact.

AW:

Yeah, I do, too. What should I have asked you about that I haven't? What else would you like to say?

JT:

I can't think of a thing. I'm glad you're doing this. I hope other people can learn from it.

AW:

Oh, I think they can. Gosh, I hope they can.



JT:

I'll probably think of a lot after you leave that I didn't say. I can't think of it right now.

AW:

Well, jot some notes down, and it's easy to come back out, follow up. And I still would like, when I get up to Colorado, to see your brother. In fact, it may not be when I go to Colorado, maybe when I got to Utah, be a little closer to that side.

JT:

And I would like for him to come back and visit with you. He doesn't come very often. Oh, goodness. Our little dog, Pergie. Come in.

AW:

Yeah, I've got dogs so that doesn't bother me.

JT:

She's sixteen and she's kind of—she's very deaf, but she can see pretty well. She still smells, so, she'll smell you in a minute.

AW:

Yeah, our little dog was not sixteen, but she started to—

JT:

Age.

AW:

Yeah, she can't jump up on the couch anymore.

JT:

Yeah. This one can't, either. There she is. She can't find us. Bless her heart. No, I have some things, I tell Maudie [?] that I have some things I need to let go of. It was hard for a while to—wasn't able to let go of very much. It's all here in storage, so I need to let you all have it.

AW:

Yeah, well when you're ready to do that, just give either one of us a whistle, and we'll be glad to come out and help. Pick it up, catalogue it, move it around, whatever.

JT:

Okay. There's some scrapbooks and then some photograph albums from inaugurations and different things.

AW:

Those are nice. Photographs are really valuable.

JT:

And Daddy had pulled some out for various things, and of course, they never really got put back in the right place, so it could be a jumble of stuff.

AW:

Well, we have a whole building full of people who put things back out of a jumble.

JT:

As quickly as they can, or as easily as they can. You can tell by some of the clothing in them, what goes with what in the photographs, which sequence it probably was, but they're a little jumbled. It's Ellie. Ellie needs to be brushed. And he loved dogs and cats. And children.

AW:

So you grew up with pets.

JT:

Oh my. I think at one time, we had something like six cats because one of them had had kittens, and three dogs and birds.

AW:

I can't wait to tell my wife. She is a cat fanatic.

JT:

Oh my goodness. My mother just died over the whole thing. We did it anyway. She liked the birds. It was the only thing she liked.

AW:

My wife's father was J.T. Alley, so he knew your dad well.

JT:

He was police—

AW:

Chief.

JT:

Chief, yeah.

AW:

Yeah, for forever. But my wife, I'm going to get home and see if I can tell her about the cats. She'll—

JT:

She'll appreciate that. I'm not sure the neighbors appreciated it.

AW:

No, I don't [inaudible] in house. (laughs)

JT:

But yeah, gerbils, we had hamsters, we had it all.

AW:

Now, this is very interesting, because thinking about your dad, he always had on a tie and a hat usually. The idea of him having a menagerie at home— (laughs)

JT:

He did. He had a cat I guess that was about eighteen before he—his name was Charlie—died. He and Daddy were sick off and on at the same time. Daddy died first, and Charlie died shortly after. No! *Charlie* died first and that nearly killed my Daddy. I guess about a month later, Daddy died. A Siamese. Sweetest cat. Just—I don't think of Siameses being very friendly, but this one was very affectionate.

AW:

We have a little part-Siamese that's—he's a kitten, but he's an affectionate cat. But I had relatives that had Siamese and they were like on the Disney movie. We didn't much like them. So what kinds of other interests did your dad have, besides public service?

JT:

Oh, gosh. One of his favorite things in the world is fly-fishing. And my brother will tell you all about that, because I never did fly fish.

AW:

Your brother is a fly fisher?

JT:

Big-time. Yeah, Daddy was a master fly fisherman.

AW:

Really? Did he tie his own flies and all that?

JT:

Oh gosh, yes. Oh yeah. And he would say that he would dream about this fly that was catching all these fish. And then he'd go try to find all the little parts that looked like this fly, put them together and he'd swear he could catch all the fish in the world from that fly.

AW:

Really? That's great. How does a person in West Texas develop an interest in fly fishing?

JT:

I don't know. I wish I had asked him that, and I wonder if he read about FDR or somebody fly fishing at some point. Because, really, I think even when my parents went on their honeymoon, or shortly after that, I think they went to San Antonio on their honeymoon. Maybe that next summer, they were in Taos, New Mexico, fly fishing.

AW:

So this is something he was interested in for a long time.

JT:

Oh, yeah. From his early to mid-twenties on.

AW:

That is interesting.

JT:

I admire his spirit. Even after my mother died, and my prayer was for him to have some good years after that, because he took such good care of her that probably that next summer he went on a river rafting trip from Durango down—I don't even know where it went. I think it was the Rio Grande. Does that make any sense?

AW:

From Durango, Colorado?

JT:

Or maybe it was Taos. I don't know. Somewhere in Colorado.

AW:

Yeah, Durango, he would have gone on the Green or the Yampa, I think. And those are—they flow into the Colorado, if I'm correct.

JT:

You're probably right. I just remember being horrified that he was going to that. And they slept outside in bed rolls. He had to be eight-eight years old.

AW:

I was going to say he would have had to be in his eighties.

JT:

He was happy, doing what he wanted to do.

AW:

And those are not easy rivers, any of them.

JT:

No. No. He might not have had very good sense, but he loved a good time. Yeah, he was good.

AW:

Fly fishing. That's very interesting. What other kinds of things? Was he a sports fan?

JT:

Very much so. Loved baseball. Loved—oh well, especially football. But as a little boy, I remember, he played baseball. I remember hearing stories about him playing baseball. But loved Tech. Just bled red and black. And always very offended if someone didn't, in an introduction, say that he was a graduate of Texas Tech. Probably his proudest accomplishment. Maybe even more than being governor, I'm not sure.

AW:

Yeah, well, it's really—again, coming from a family where you're the first one, it is a big deal.

JT:

Yeah. Well, and his family were poor tenant dirt farmers and had no money whatsoever. So it was important to get an education. That was his big priority.

AW:

Cool. All right. Well, I think—

JT:

Did we cover it all?

AW:

No, there's probably more but like I've known about the fly fishing if we'd stopped when we started to stop.

JT:

That's true.

AW:

I still love that idea. Again, people from our part of the world. And there are a lot of people out here who fish and like to fish. You think, gosh—

JT:

How did we develop that with no water around here? There's not any fly fishing around here, I don't think.

AW:

No, no. I mean, there's fishing. My father always liked to fish and I think—

JT:

Well, and he liked to bass fish as well. He would go down to different lakes: Amistad, Toledo Bend. He just loved being with people and doing that kind of thing.

AW:

Cool. Well, thanks very much.

JT:

You're welcome. Thank you. If you think of anything else, give me a call.

AW:

I will. And if when you get ready to think about moving some of this stuff out of storage, give us a whistle.

*[End of interview]*