

PREFACE

Juanita Price is an extremely interesting person. Although she came from Oklahoma in 1936 during the migration, because she is black she was not considered to be an "Okie." She lives with her husband in Bakersfield. Both are retired. Mrs. Price appears much younger than her years because she is very energetic. She has had no trouble dealing with the past and the difficult times she went through. She is a very wise person and has a philosophy of life which she has developed from her experience and which she expresses very well.

It should be noted that during editing, Sessions 1 and 2 were combined; therefore, there is no indication for the beginning of Session 2 or for Tape 2.

Stacey Jagels
Interviewer

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY
The 1930s Migration to the Southern San Joaquin ValleyOral History Program

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: Juanita Everly Price

PLACE OF BIRTH: Payne County, Oklahoma

INTERVIEWER: Stacey Jagels

DATES OF INTERVIEWS: January 26 and 29, 1981

PLACE OF INTERVIEWS: Bakersfield, Kern County

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INTERVIEWEE: Juanita Everly Price (Age: 64)

INTERVIEWER: Stacey Jagels

DATED: January 26 and 29, 1981

S.J.: This is an interview with Juanita Price for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Stacey Jagels at 1020 South Brown Street, Bakersfield, California on Monday, January 26, 1981 at 9:30 a.m.

S.J.: Why don't you tell me a little bit about your childhood?

Price: I was born in Payne County, Oklahoma in 1916. My parents were farmers. As I grew up and the Depression came my father lost all of the things that we owned--all the livestock and everything. Then we became just sharecroppers working with other people's farm implements. After a couple of years my father got sick. So one summer my older sister, my mother and I worked to support the family chopping cotton. Then that fall we picked cotton for fifty cents a hundred. As winter came on and the crops dwindled down to nothing we pulled bolls--that's the cotton that hasn't opened well--the last of the cotton on the stalk. We was only paid thirty-five cents a hundred. It was so skimpy that you could hardly make anything but we had to do it. As I grew up and went to school I just wished to be a school teacher to get away from farming, but I wasn't so lucky. At sixteen I married and I became the mother of one son but I lost the baby. My husband and I conceived another child, a son, and that's all I have now--just one son.

S.J.: I'd like to ask you a little bit about your parents. Where were they from?

Price: My father was born in Tennessee and his family moved to

Texas when he was seven. Then when he was seventeen they moved to Oklahoma. My mother was born in Oklahoma--in fact, she was born on the same ranch that I was born on later. It was called Indian Territory at the time. She was born before the turn of the century. My father was quite a lot older than my mother. He was thirty-two and she was fourteen when they married. And of that union was born nine kids.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit more about when you were a little girl and you worked in the fields?

Price: We had to work in the cotton fields and shuck corn--that's taking the ear of corn out of the husk. Different things like that. When school was going on we also had to work to help provide for each of us kids and our father and mother. All of us had to work to make ends meet. I can remember that when school began we had to be picking cotton. In the wintertime when the cotton was out we cut wood for a living--rick wood. That's cutting the wood stove lengths that you put in your stove and then you put it in what they call a rick area. And that rick is about four feet high and about eight feet long and that's an awful lot of wood. I think we was getting paid about a dollar and a quarter a rick for a whole lot of work. I can remember I could see other children going to school and I loved school but I just didn't have the chance to go. So whenever the kids would be coming past the area where we'd be working at I'd run off down into the field or somewhere as if I had to go to the bathroom just to keep from being close to those kids. I just hurt me to see those kids going to school when we had to work.

And food was scarce you know. I can remember when there was no work and in summer we was eating string beans and corn. My father finally got a little job that would pay him \$24 a month and that was to feed himself, my mother and eight children. Twenty-four dollars a month. We could buy a lot of groceries with that but we could buy nothing else.

The summer I was fifteen no one in my family had any work to do but myself. I had a little job working for a lady and I'd go in and help her clean up her kitchen. She sold butter, eggs, chickens and vegetables. Every day I would help her prepare this food to take to market. I was getting paid fifty cents a day. Nobody else in my family was working. The lady was a kind person and each time she paid me my fifty cents she'd give me a couple dozen eggs--for instance. Tomorrow probably she give me my fifty cents and a pound of butter and the next day probably she'd give me my fifty cents and a half a bushel of potatoes. And you know, I fed the

family that summer. It was a strange thing, but I fed the family. Soon after, when I was sixteen my mother and father separated. My mother went to Stillwater, Oklahoma, to the city. Us kids stayed there with my father because he wouldn't allow her to take any of us with her. That was in October of 1932 and I married in January of 1933. My older sister and I both married that same month. My little sisters and brothers was home and I would be back over to their house about every two or three days 'cause mother wasn't there. I would comb the girls' hair and help bathe them up. They were small 'cause I'm next to the oldest in my family. I was just sixteen so you know some of the rest of them was little. My sister-in-law and I would go over there, cook a big meal for them, comb their heads, bathe them and help clean up the house until finally we came to California.

S.J.: It sounds like you really had to work hard but did you have any time left over for leisure, for singing or going to church?

Price: Oh yes. We were a family that never worked on Sunday and I don't to this day. Never on Sunday. We'd have our nights free so I started singing in the church choir when I was twelve. The choir rehearsals were on Friday nights so we'd work hard all day, come home and clean up, and then we'd go to rehearsals. I just enjoyed that.

And there were suppers. Church suppers was a deal where everybody would come to the church and bring food and then they'd sell that food. They'd call it pie suppers if they sold pies. And they sold cakes, cookies, donuts or whatever. I use to enjoy that so much to get away from the monotony of our poor existence.

My older sister and I sang in the choirs. My sister just younger than I never did think she could sing and she wouldn't sing, so she missed a lot of the outings that we had a chance to go to. After we were married I still stayed with the choirs and I was singing with a group of four ladies up until the time I came to Bakersfield. And we just used to rejoice with that so much.

S.J.: Could you tell me something about school?

Price: I was promoted to the eighth grade. I went to school in the eighth grade two months and that was as far as I went. But since I came to California I took a California state I.Q. [Intelligence Quotient] examination and I have the equivalent of eleventh grade. I'm Abraham Lincoln the second. I'm self-educated. And I'm a reader. I love to read everything

and I learn a little bit here and a little bit there.

S.J.: Could you tell me why you wanted to come to California?

Price: We came to California because the dust bowl had just devastated all the crops. Everything was gone. You couldn't see half a mile. It was just horrible. So my husband had been working in Stillwater--that's the county seat for Payne County, Oklahoma--and the job was running out so we came to California and started working in the cotton fields out here. It was September 7, 1936 when we got here.

The dust storm was the major reason for leaving because it killed the crops and no work could go on. If a person worked for a construction company he couldn't even see the work. It was just awful. Then the water wells went dry. At the place where we lived the water was just down to a little mud so we had to go over on the next farm and get drinking water and laundry water and haul it back. That was terrible. I can remember when my son was about six months old. My husband at that time was working in Stillwater and he and the men that he worked with would get up early in the mornings and go over to Stillwater. I had to see to getting the water to do the laundry and bathe my son. When a child is small you have to wash every other day at least. I can remember carrying water and I'd have to tie a handkerchief over my face to keep the dust from strangling me while I'd be walking to get the water. Back inside of your house you'd have some dust but it wasn't like outside. It seemed as if it was real cloudy--the dust was so strong. I can remember seeing leaves up in the air blowing in that dust. They said that some of that dust came from as far away as Kansas and I was down into the center of Oklahoma. Oh, it was just terrible. The dust caused the white clothes that you had--like your sheets--to turn dingy looking. It was just a terrible thing. It swallowed up the crops so bad that even the cattle suffered.

S.J.: Could you tell me more about your husband's job in Stillwater?

Price: He was working on a state job and they were planting elm seeds for some specific reason. They'd go gather the seed from the elm trees and then they'd go to some other area and put them out. I don't know what it was all about but that's what he was doing.

S.J.: Was this a government project?

Price: Yes, yes.

S.J.: About what year would that have been?

Price: 1935 and the first part of 1936.

S.J.: Do you ever remember hearing about tractors coming to Oklahoma and taking over the work on the farms?

Price: No, not then. That was 1936 when I was there. I believe they had a tractor after I left there.

S.J.: They still used the plow then?

Price: Quite a lot. They were using some tractors but not an awful lot.

S.J.: Did you ever know why it became so dusty? Did you ever wonder?

Price: We all wondered about it but we didn't have any explanation. Only that it was from Kansas and Colorado. It had come across a couple of states and all up in the north. I think Nebraska had some of that dust. But we had all of it.

S.J.: Some people said that it was caused by the drought.

Price: It was. No rain--that's what it was from. Terrible. It blew and it was in the air all day and all night. You never had any rest from breathing that and many people had dust pneumonia.

S.J.: I've also heard some people say that the government had programs that paid the farmers to plow up their crops. Did you ever hear anything about that?

Price: Yes, I did. And also the government had some kind of program to kill off the excess beef that they couldn't feed or something. And people were free to go wherever they were killing them off at and get some of that beef which was terrible to eat. It had no fat. It was just awful. But the government had to get rid of them. I don't know why they couldn't afford to feed them because it seemed like even if there was a drought in a few of the states there should have been enough feed to ship in, but I guess conditions were too bad for that.

S.J.: Were there still people going hungry while they were slaughtering cattle?

Price: Sure, sure. Down to almost nothing much to eat. And people would walk for miles and miles. Many would walk twenty or fifty miles to be at those places when they butchered these beef to get some to take home. And we were there with them.

S.J.: What was it that finally made you decide to come out to California?

Price: My husband's sister and couple of his brothers had come to California already. And they were writing back to Oklahoma asking their mother to come out. She was afraid to travel by herself so she insisted that we please come and go with her. So we came on. My people still lived in Oklahoma and I really hated to go off and leave them, but for the sake of a better living I was happy to come. I cried when I left but then I also felt that there was a new day for us in California because wages were better. That's the main reason that we came--for better wages and steady work. Work in Oklahoma had got to where it was nothing.

S.J.: Had you heard much about California? Did people talk about what it was like out here?

Price: Oh yes. We had a lot of relatives here. My father had three or four brothers here and lots of cousins. And my husband had quite a few people here and we heard from them regularly. They were always telling us that conditions were better and schooling was better and everything was better. So to come out and see it was just the perfect thing. When we left Oklahoma coming out here we had the price of our bus tickets --we came on the Greyhound--and I had \$2 left over when we got to Bakersfield. Just \$2 to feed myself, my husband and my son and that's awful close. We went right on out to the ranch. The ranch was where my husband's brother worked and then after we got out there we started work the next day.

S.J.: You came out from Oklahoma on the Greyhound bus. Most of the people came in cars like jalopies with their mattresses and everything loaded on top. It's a little bit unusual to come out on the bus. Could you tell me a little bit about it?

Price: When we came on the bus we only brought our clothing. I don't think we had very much of anything else other than clothing. You could only carry so much on each ticket and my son wasn't old enough to have a ticket. He was just a baby so I just had a ticket for myself and my husband. We brought our bedding--our sheets and blankets--and packed them in suitcases and boxes. And we brought pillow cases and quilts. We had a lot of heavy comforters. We brought all these things and that was about all we could handle. It was quite a trip though. When we got into New Mexico we had a detour and I bet you we went 50 miles on a dirt road. It was September and it was hot and the dust just blew all over. When we got to Bakersfield we were filthy with dust settled all over

us. It was terrible. We sold a few things that we had in Oklahoma--the housewares and things. I sold my sewing machine, cook stove and bedsteads and things of that size before we came out. In fact that's how we scraped up enough money to come out here. I sold one thing that I hated to part with too--my auntie's sewing machine. It was sort of like an heirloom in the family but I sold it 'cause I couldn't bring it with me. I think I got about \$8-\$9 for it and it was a Singer sewing machine--a real good one.

S.J.: When you first came into Bakersfield on the bus do you remember what the Valley looked like?

Price: Yes. We came on Highway 66 and then we went into Los Angeles and then came over the Ridge Route. And oh, the mountains were just something else. I didn't like them really but I've learned to love them. I like it now. And then we came into the area south of Greenfield where there are all them palm trees along beside the highway and I thought that was such a beautiful sight. I was real tickled at my husband because he thought they must be sugar trees. We had a big laugh about that. I've never heard of a sugar tree. But we saw other crops growing and we felt more at home. After we came a good ways this side of the mountain, saw cotton crops and grain and we got to feeling better.

S.J.: How long did it take to come out on the bus?

Price: Two days and two nights. I think we left there the morning of the fifth and we got here the afternoon of the seventh of September.

S.J.: Do you remember seeing old cars along the way with people that might have been coming to California?

Price: Oh yes. Oh we saw that everywhere. Old cars with a whole lot of things tied on the sides and on the back and sometimes on top of the car with eight or ten or twelve people in the car. It was just pitiful. I remember one family that came out here right after we got here. They had gotten a truck and they brought their family. They had about ten kids, the man, his wife and they brought seven or eight other people with them in this truck, plus their chickens, all of their mattresses, bedding and everything. I just couldn't see how in the world they brought all that stuff with them, but they did. All of them travelers was something. But you know it was just a miracle how many people got here really. The husband that I have now come with some people to help them drive and there was a whole lot of them in the car. They took off with old tires on the car. They came from Oklahoma to Arizona and they started having tire trouble. They bought some old pieces

of tires and they made it. The car was just loaded down with people and their luggage and stuff. I'd be scared to leave here going to Los Angeles with the kind of cars I saw come out here. But people made it.

S.J.: On your bus trip to California do you remember anything happening at the border when you came into California? Did the bus have to stop?

Price: Yes. They went through everybody's belongings to see if you were bringing crop seeds from other states. I recall we had two or three apples and they told us they wouldn't take the apples but we had to eat 'em up right there. And I thought that was horrible so we started eatin' on 'em. I think we had about three. We couldn't bring anything that had seed from the southern areas that had infestation of bugs and stuff in the fruit that might contaminate California.

S.J.: Do you remember if the government officials were very pleasant?

Price: They didn't make no big fuss. They asked you nicely to open your own luggage. You had to turn over your things in your luggage. They didn't prowl into your things. They asked you to do it for them. It wasn't too bad. I didn't mind it.

S.J.: Were you disappointed or were you happy when you got here? Everyone said things were better. Did you find that they were really better?

Price: In some instances it was better. I think if I could have taken my mind off of my family I would have been much happier. But my husband's family was real nice to me so that helped. I was a young woman that had never been far away from folks, and I just thought it was the pits. But then I understood you gotta go wherever your living is. When I first got here a lot of things that we had heard was so. But we also heard that money almost grewed on trees. I knew you had to work anywhere. I had been taught to work so it didn't bother me. I do know that everything wasn't quite as it had been told to us. We heard that you could just get a job anywhere and any time. You could never be out of work. I remember when we came here and started to work during the crop harvesting season. It was fine, but after harvest there was nothing else to do. Then you had to string along until the crops come in again. So we wound up on the WPA [Works Progress Administration].

S.J.: Could you tell me about the first job that your husband had?

Price: We got here in September and the cotton was just opening so we

--my husband and I--started right on in to picking cotton. I used to carry my boy into the field. My baby was only a year and one week old when we got here. And so we'd take him to the field and I'd have to put him on my cotton sack and drag him along behind me 'cause he'd start crying if we'd go off and leave him.

S.J.: Did you live there on the ranch?

Price: Yes. We lived on the Pete Romara Ranch on Ashe Road between Pumpkin Center and Old River.

S.J.: Could you describe what your home was there? Did you have a house that was built or did you have to have a tent for a while?

Price: When we first came here we lived in a tent. That was in 1936 and into 1937. In 1937 we moved into the house. It was a house there on the place. Other people had lived in it and moved into Bakersfield so we got the house and we got out of the tent. In 1937 we moved off of the Romara Ranch to the Tune Smith Ranch south of Old River. We lived in a tent over there and the tent blew away. A storm came and blew the tent away. The storm blew away our washtub and almost everything else and tore up the tent. It was just terrible. We really went through something.

The storms used to come. They were terrible. We have little ones now but we don't have any big ones like we used to. After the dust storm came and blew our tent away the people that lived on the ranch had this small house and they said they'd move it in another area and clean it up for us. We moved into that. We stayed there about a year and a half. Then we moved into town over on Haley Street and I've been over in this district most of the time since then.

S.J.: What did you do for water and sanitation when you were living in that tent?

Price: We had an outdoor toilet. And we carried our water from a water supply system. The ranchers had towers and electric pumps that pump the water up into the tower, and you'd get it from there. That's what we did. There was no water right close to the tent so we had to carry our water from down at the rancher's house. After we had the storm and blew my tent away we moved in a little old small house they had on the ranch and then we got water from a cotton gin. The little house was close to the cotton gin so we had a water deal where we'd get it out all the time. It was a problem to carry water to drink, water to bathe, water to do your laundry, water for everything.

- S.J.: Did you know many other people that were in the same situation and worked in the fields?
- Price: Sure, sure. Many from the same area in Oklahoma that I came from came out here also and they were in the same condition.
- S.J.: After you came to California do you think you were any better off economically? Did you have any more money out here?
- Price: I think so. Just before we left Oklahoma my husband had a little job that finally played out. But it was just him working. After we came out here the both of us worked and I think it made it a little better for us.
- S.J.: Did you ever hear anything about the government camps? There was a camp out in Arvin. Did you know anyone that lived there?
- Price: I never knew anybody that lived in there but I remember when they had what they called migratory labor camps. I never personally knew anyone that lived in there but I knew where they were because we used to pick cotton out around there. At that time there were no blacks in the migratory camps. I don't know what the situation was but I know there were no blacks in them. They even had migratory labor camps up by Shafter. All white people--no blacks. I don't know what the cause was but I do know there were no blacks.
- S.J.: When you lived at Romara's and then later on at the Tune Smith Ranch were most of the workers you lived near black also?
- Price: Yes, all the people around there that lived on the ranches at that time were blacks because the black men did the irrigating and their whole families harvested the cotton crops and peas or whatever. A lot of black men hauled the hay and baled the hay that the farmers raised. There were not very many Mexicans or white people that worked on the ranch at that time. Since then there have been a lot of white people that worked on the ranch until finally they got so much modern equipment that they didn't have to have very many people work at all. Irrigating is not even the same. They can put out a whole lot of pipes and things and one man can irrigate hundreds and hundreds of acres of land. It used to be that you had to have a man to do that because if they run into areas where gophers would make holes in the ground and the water would break out then an irrigator would have to fill that place up and change the channel of water to make it go. Now they don't worry about that.
- S.J.: Did you feel that you were treated fairly by the ranchers that employed you?

- Price: Yes, yes I should think so because everybody had the same treatment. Even if other people--other nationalities--came and worked on the ranch we all got paid the same. So I think that was equal. I really do. I have no complaint to make. I do know that had it not been for the ranch work I don't know what we would have done. I really don't. I'm happy that we knew how to pick cotton. A lot of people are ashamed to mention it but I'm glad we knew how because we made a living. We chopped cotton also. A lot of people hoed cotton too. I picked peas and picked up spuds and picked grapes--I picked just about everything. We used to go on the seasonal jaunts to wherever the crops was being harvested.
- S.J.: So you didn't always live near Bakersfield?
- Price: Yes, we lived here. When we went up to Fresno and picked grapes we would stay up there for two weeks and come back.
- S.J.: And you kept a home here all the time?
- Price: Yes, all the time. We even went to Oxnard one time. My husband worked in the oranges down there. They had some kind of a strike and my husband went to Oxnard with my brother-in-law to work. My sister and I and our kids stayed here. During that time my house burned down. That was in 1941. The house burned down and I moved down to Oxnard for a couple of weeks. I went down there but we came right back because this was our roots. I've been here all these years. I like Bakersfield though because it's done something for me or I've done something for it--I don't know which. Since I've been here I've had the opportunity to go to beauty school and I've been a licensed beauty operator since 1957 but I don't practice the trade anymore because I have a heart condition. I had to quit. I was in the business for about eleven years and I just loved it. And I've taken several Bible courses--things that I probably wouldn't have had a chance to take if I'd stayed at home.
- S.J.: Where did you live when you went to the coast or north in the Valley?
- Price: Sometimes we slept out. You probably don't understand what that means. When we went to the Fresno area to work in the grapes we carried bedding but no bedsteads. We made pallets. We also cooked outside. And food is delicious cooked outdoors--like barbecuing all the time. At one place we slept in a shed. Whenever anybody got ready to take a bath everybody else would have to go out of that area while he got his bath. We had a part of a tin barrel drum that we used as a cook stove to heat water. Then we'd put a big tub of water on that and heat it

and we'd take another tub and put the heated water with cold water to be pleasant for bathing. It was terrible.

S.J.: When you went on these seasonal jobs did you work with white workers?

Price: Sometimes we would work with mixed crews and other times we worked with our segregated crew. One time I recall we were working up by Selma in the grapes and there was a white family there. They were from Bristol, Oklahoma. The little boy said, "My folks can do this work!", and I said, "Oh yeah!". He was about the same age as my son--about four--and I know he was saying what their people had told him.

It was Armenians that raised the grape crop and hired us on. The first night there was people out in the field. They finally came up to the camping area and two of the guys went and got some old piece of guns and they just marched around with them like they were saying, "We are bad and you'll see we are bad and you'll leave." And my husband that I have now, bless his heart, was just as mischievous as he could be. We had a thirty aught six Winchester and he brought it and set it beside the car. In the night after we got our dinner and everything finished and went to bed those people snuck away from there. I think they thought they'd scare us and we'd leave, but we didn't. They were real sad though. I mean I couldn't understand why they would quit a job but they really just didn't want to be where black people were.

S.J.: Did you work with other people that are considered minorities--Mexicans or Filipinos?

Price: They were never a problem. In a lot of cases we worked with Mexicans. And they were all right. They felt like they were sort of handicapped--as we were--trying to make it. There was never a problem. But there were problems with the white people. It was just their teaching. They were taught that they were better than blacks. So they had to wear that off, and some of them haven't worn it off yet.

S.J.: How about the Okies? Did they have that attitude?

Price: Yes. In Oklahoma when I was growing up white women didn't work in the field. If they had to go out to their garden to pick vegetables they had a long bonnet on to keep the sun off. They were afraid they'd turn black I guess. When they came to California conditions were so that everybody had to work to make it. 'Cause on one person's salary you just couldn't make it if you had two or three kids. I think that finally they understood that they was no better than anybody else 'cause everybody had to work. When the conditions were good in Oklahoma

the black men and some black women worked in the fields. Some black women worked for the white women in their houses. Then when times changed the white women had to work in the field with the black folks. I know that was a little hard on them because they thought at one time that they was a little different. But bad conditions will really make you get together.

S.J.: Did you find that because you had done farm work back in Oklahoma that you made more money than a lot of other people that weren't accustomed to doing farm work?

Price: Yes.

S.J.: Were you able to do a lot more work and make a lot more money than they?

Price: Yes. For instance, cotton picking is piece work and you get paid by the pound. Some of those people couldn't pick over 40 or 50 or 100 pounds. I eventually learned to pick 500 pounds so that's making a whole lot more money than the person that couldn't pick much. I remember when I was a child my mother never picked 100 pounds. She tried but she just was not a cotton picker. When us kids grew up we learned a little better and when we came to California I could pick 480 or 500 everyday if I wanted to. I tried to pick 475 or 480 in the last years before I quit picking because I knew I had to come home and clean house and cook and do my laundry. That reminds me of a time when a lady asked what I did and I told her that I pick cotton. The lady thought it was terrible. Cotton! And I told her, "Damn right, I make a hell of a lot more money than you can make on your job." 'Cause at that time wages wasn't like they are now and I'd make \$12 or \$13 a day everyday picking cotton. That's good money. My husband was making much more. He made \$14, \$15 or \$16 a day picking cotton. In fact, we got to where we would average \$30 a day the two of us picking cotton. And in those days that was good money. That was in the 1940s when we were doing this.

S.J.: So your standard of living was probably quite a bit higher than a lot of the other agricultural workers?

Price: Yes. Even my own relatives couldn't make as much as we did in the field because they just didn't have the know how.

S.J.: Were you and your husband employed most of the year?

Price: Yes, until the wet weather came. When wet weather came nothing can be done. We didn't have anything to do.

S.J.: Did you have savings to live on then?

Was it difficult to get by?

Price: Yes, it was penny pinching but we made it. In the fall of the year we'd buy up quite a lot of groceries like fifty pounds of cans of lard shortening, several sacks of flour, corn meal, spuds, and can goods of all kinds. During that time groceries was cheap and rent was cheap--if where we lived we had to pay rent. We worked hard to save up enough money to supply ourselves with food and to have enough change to pay our little rent all winter until the work opened up in springtime.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit about the way you cooked and the kinds of food you ate?

Price: Yes. For breakfast we love rice. Oatmeal or rice cereals. We really like cooked cereals better. And we use rice as a cereal. We put cream and sugar and butter on it. And I'm a biscuit cook so we had plenty of biscuits and bacon. For dinner meals we'd have vegetables or sometimes dry beans. Many times we had fresh green vegetables and we just loved them. I'm considered a good cook. I don't know why but I am. I think I can attribute that to the fact that during the Depression era groceries were real cheap and if you made any money at all you mostly invested it in food. Then you'd have a chance to cook a lot of different things and that's why I practiced cooking. And my first husband's mother was a top cook and I used to sit around her while she cooked and I learned to cook lots of dishes. It's just easy when you know how and I love to cook.

Most people think that the poor people eat food that's not nutritional enough. But that's a mistake. Beans have as much protein in them as meat does so you can have a little meat and much beans and that's good for you. All vegetables are good for you. Most people want to eat fried steak and gravy and that's not what the body needs. The body needs the boiled foods. And I'm glad that we poor blacks eat the way we do. That's why we don't have a lot of illness that white people have. Now we do have things like high blood pressure. That's from eating this strong healthy food that's just really too rich. I remember when I was in Oklahoma white kids had diphtheria, but not a black child in my neighborhood had diphtheria. One family lost three children with diphtheria and we could never understand that. But since I've grown up they tell me that it's a difference in how we eat.

They say that if you eat foods that prevent you from taking lots of colds you're better off than eating lighter foods that allow you to take a cold. And that diphtheria is something like a cold. I don't know what it is but it'll kill you. The type of foods that we ate had much to do with it. Corn bread, for

instance, keeps your stomach filled longer than white bread and it's also better for you. We ate a lot of biscuits and corn bread. My family was not a family for eating lots of gravies but my husband's family was a family that loved gravy and they were all big, fat people. And we were slender. So I think that gravy is not so good for you and makes you put on that weight. We did use a lot of vegetables and the juices from the vegetables. For instance, if you had a pot of beans with quite a bit of juice on the beans and you had cream potatoes, then you could put the bean juice on the potatoes instead of gravy. Gravy's nothing but a whole lot of flour and grease and that's nothing but fattening so we didn't use the gravy. We just used the juices from other foods and it's much better for you. It will prevent you from gaining lots of pounds and it's better for your stomach--for your digestion.

S.J.: Did you find that you had to do without certain foods because you simply couldn't afford to buy them?

Price: Yes. For instance, most people now have steaks and things like that but we didn't. We didn't have a refrigerator or a freezer so we had to get foods that you could keep--like side bacon or ham hocks. If we had a fresh fryer we'd buy it on Saturday evening and cook it Sunday for dinner because we didn't have the facilities to keep things frozen and it would have spoiled. Finally we were able to have a refrigerator and we could use almost any kind of foods that you could keep. We had had a little old ice box that wasn't sufficient to keep food really good. You know fresh meat would spoil easy.

S.J.: Did you ever keep any livestock like chickens or a hog or anything like that here in California?

Price: Yes, we've had chickens. No hogs.

S.J.: That must have helped out with the food bills a lot.

Price: It does because when we had chickens we had eggs a plenty and we also had chicken to eat occasionally. But you'd be surprised what a blessing it is to have eggs. I cook puddings and a whole lot of different things with eggs and that really helps out. And we can also have them for breakfasts.

S.J.: What did you do during the winter when you were out of work?

Price: I finally started doing housework for other people--house cleaning and laundry and other things like that. And my husband just did little odd jobs. For instance some fellas might have a fence they wanted put in or taken out. He did just little jobs that he could catch during the winter. Most of our money that we made and were actually living on was from the fields.

S.J.: Could you tell me about how you were paid?

Price: When we first came to California you got paid each weekend. You'd chop cotton all week for \$2.50 a day and then you'd get your full amount paid that week. It was the same way with cotton picking. I think they paid a dollar and a half a hundred. But I don't really remember. You didn't get paid till on the weekends. Later they started paying you by tickets. They had a little deal that each weight was put on a ticket and you could get your money right then if you wanted. So we worked a lot of times where we got paid immediately. When we were picking up spuds we had a card that they punched holes in every time they'd count the number of sacks that you had gathered. Then you got paid on the weekend. I don't think they ever paid everyday for spud picking.

S.J.: Do you remember the growers ever weighing the produce and then trying to cheat you or anybody else?

Price: Oh, I know a few times they didn't weigh it right. When you would hang your bale of cotton on the scales and if it was fifty-four pounds the owner would probably take it off the scales quickly and say fifty. And we'd fuss and raise sin and they'd have to put it back and weigh it again. But we never had no real big problem--no big problem. I do think that a few of the people that didn't read and write well got cheated 'cause they just had to take somebody else's word. I think that occurs everywhere. Where you can't defend yourself by knowing well I think you get cheated a little.

S.J.: Did you think the pay was very fair?

Price: We were getting what everyone else was getting but it was so terribly low. You have to satisfy yourself with that when it's the regular thing. We never got paid less than anyone else. We always got the same amount. When we lived on this Tune Smith ranch he paid us a little more. He worked at the oil fields out by Taft and he was some kind of a bank executive in Taft. He owned quite a bit of property. So I think he had a little different outlook on the working person. 'Cause while we worked on his ranch we got a few cents more than anybody else around there.

S.J.: Did you ever have much money left over?

Price: Never and that went on until after the War. My husband and I separated in 1944 so then I was a single lady then with one child to see after. He didn't help me provide for my son so I just did the best I could and I worked all the time. In the meantime I learned to drive a truck and I hauled potatoes, hay,

peas and everything in a truck.

S.J.: When you went to different places following the crops how did you know that work was going to be there? How did you hear about it?

Price: Other people that had gone up and worked there would come back and tell us that they were working in the grapes or onions or whatever. Then they would say that some more folks was needed so we'd go up there and work.

S.J.: Did you ever come too late or too early for the crop?

Price: And miss some of it? No. It worked out real good. We weren't getting paid very much. I can remember when we were cutting raisin grapes and they were three cents a tray. A tray was a sheet of paper about thirty by about thirty-six inches I believe. You'd spread the grapes on this paper to dry to make raisins and that tray would hold a whole lot of grapes. We got three cents a tray. That's just terrible. We used to go up every year to around Fowler and Fresno and do that--even since I've been with this husband I have now. But I tell you it's a struggle. A lot of people don't know what it is to just make fifty cents a day and survive. That's really something.

S.J.: Did you have any free time when you were working the crops here?

Price: Yes. If we managed well. When the crop was layed by--that's when the cotton chopping is finished and you're waiting for the picking of the cotton, we had time--about three weeks or thirty days. You'd have that for your own time. I used to do a lot of sewing and things like that.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

S.J.: Since you had to work and you had a son and a house to take care of how did you manage to get everything done?

Price: Each morning I'd get up and make breakfast. While I put my breakfast on I made beds and I'd clean my baby up and get everything straight to start for the day. Then we'd go and do a whole day's work and come home. I'd do my laundry at night. I'd wash one night and iron the next night. And many nights I wouldn't go to bed till 12:30 or one o'clock. I had to get up the next morning at 5:30 a.m. A lot of times we had to go a good distance. We lived on the ranches but if the work had finished on one ranch and we were working on another one then

we'd have to get up early to go and work somewhere else. And many times I've gotten up at daylight and fixed our breakfast and packed our lunches and everything and gone into the fields and worked all day. It was ten hours then. Everybody worked ten hours. I worked ten hours then came back home and cooked dinner and tried to cook enough stuff to make sandwiches and things for the next day. It was a problem. And thank God I was young enough to do it. I couldn't dare keep up with that pace now. It was wonderful. I mean we made it fine during that time. 'Course I look back on it and I just wonder how many young people this day and time could do what we did then. It's really amazing how we got by. But I'm happy I did. I've been blessed since I've been old. We have enough income to live half way reasonable. I just never would have thought there would have been a day when I didn't have to work everyday. I never thought that would be possible.

S.J.: Since you came out here on the bus how did you get around from crop to crop? Did you save some money for a car or did you get rides with other people?

Price: When we first came out here we moved on the ranch that we worked on so we didn't have to have any transportation. Other people that we knew did have transportation. After we were out here for a while we bought an old car and I think my husband must have paid something like \$12 for that old car. And we drove it probably two years and then it was so bad we got rid of it. We traded it in on another old car. I think we paid about \$49 for the next one. We drove it for a little while until my house burned. When my house burned down in 1941 the car was sitting beside the house and it burned it up too. So then we didn't have transportation anymore. We had a problem, I tell you. Sometimes we had to ride with someone else to the fields. We'd share the expense of the gas. At that time gas wasn't expensive but we weren't making much money either. But we made it. I can remember when we worked all week on jobs that you didn't get paid for everyday. Some jobs you got paid everyday. When we got paid at the end of the week we had to ride with these people all week before we could pay them for riding with them. But they trusted us. I'm glad of that.

S.J.: Was it a fairly tight knit community on the ranch?

Price: Everybody that lived on the ranches got to know each other pretty well. It was just like knowing everybody on your block where you live. You know most of the people on your block and they are all your friends. When we first moved on the Romaro Ranch there were about five or six families living on this ranch in just a little close knit area. Some of the little houses was on one side of the little road that went through there and some was on the other side--right beside the road.

People finally started moving from the ranch and many of them moved into town. That left just two families out there--my family and another family. Then we moved from the Romaro Ranch to the Tune Smith Ranch. My family, my sister and her family and this other family that lived at the Romaro Ranch with us moved to the Tune Smith Ranch. Three families moved over there and we stayed there about two and a half years. Then we moved up to Wible Road and stayed for about eight or ten months. Then we moved on Brundage Lane and stayed there about two years. I've lived in a half a dozen places before we got into Bakersfield. It was in 1941 when I moved into Bakersfield and I've been here ever since.

S.J.: Were there many blacks in Kern County when you first came here?

Price: There wasn't a whole lot of nobody here when I first came. I believe at that time the population in Bakersfield was 29,000. Throughout Kern County though there were quite a few people, but I couldn't say it was heavily populated. There was not a lot of blacks here then. Not very many. Many people came after we came during the dust bowl era. Some people started coming out here in 1935 and through 1936 and clear on up until now they're still drifting in slowly. During the period of 1936 and 1937 is when most of the blacks came.

S.J.: There were government aid programs for a lot of the Okies that came out because the times were so tough. Did you ever take help or know other people that got some help from the government?
[probably State Relief]

Price: We did. We got some of what was called CRE [Administration] or something--I've forgotten the initials for their concern. We got some kind of a permit that you get so you could get food and then after that you could get on the WPA [Works Progress Administration]. They would ask you if your children were born here or how long you had been here and to qualify you had to be here three years. It was about the second year we were here that we got help. My husband didn't have any work. It had been raining for three weeks or more. He went in one week to the Welfare Office and tried to get help and they refused him saying we hadn't been here long enough. I went in the next week and the lady that was interviewing me asked where my son was born and I said he was born right up there at Kern General and she never checked it out. She gave me a food order that day, thank God, and I took that food order and got \$16 worth of groceries. She also gave me a work order for my husband and that's how he got on the WPA. I told a lie to get it but it was either that or starve. So I don't feel a thing for telling a lie. It was just providential that we'd get it. My husband stayed on the WPA through 1941 when he went to Oxnard to work. When he came back we just stayed together and done field work of all kinds here until we separated. And then I just kept right on in the

fields--that's all I could do. Occasionally I did housework but I wasn't too fond of that. I don't like nobody standing over pointing out what to do. Just tell me what the job is and I'll do it. And that was the reason that I didn't like it. I finally went to beauty college in order to be my own boss because I didn't want nobody telling me what to do. After you've worked for a person for about a week you should know how they want their things done. But some people come back and tell you over and over again and that's belittling my intelligence.

S.J.: You mentioned that your husband worked for the WPA. Could you tell me about that?

Price: He helped work on roads. It was shovel work. There was no implements or big mechanical things. They used shovels to fill in graves, and I think the WPA had a little job up there in the mountains to help clean up a railroad or something. They cut a lot of wood out west on West Brundage Lane. There used to be a lot of wood along the river and they had a big wood cutting project out there. Guys cut wood out there for a year or more. Regardless of how good or how sorry you worked on the WPA, everybody got the same amount. It was a project just to help the people survive. A lot of the guys worked almost nothing--standing out on the job--then others worked real hard.

S.J.: Do you remember where you lived then?

Price: Yes. I lived at the corner of Brundage and Stine in a little two room house. Then I lived on the Robert Whitmore Ranch. It was a small ranch right off of Wible Road. We moved into town in 1941 and my husband was still on the WPA. Then he quit it and went to work in the oranges.

S.J.: Was the pay very good when he was on the WPA?

Price: It wasn't considered good according to the wages now but it was a living wage. We could make it. Rent was cheap. Food was cheap and you could get a lot of food for a small amount of money. People didn't pay over \$20 a month for rent. It was real cheap so you could make it.

S.J.: Did most of the other blacks that you knew in the communities on the ranches occasionally take help from the government?

Price: Yes, all of us did. The WPA was a government project. All of the people that were getting these food orders were getting them through the government. I've forgotten what the initials of the organization were that was helping, but it was NRA or CRA or something. I do know that most everybody at that time had to get on something because there was nothing else to do--nothing. Those that lived without having to have government assistance

were very fortunate and very few. It wasn't very many at all.

S.J.: Did that cause you to be disappointed in the life you had here?

Price: No. If it had just been my family that took help I would have felt terrible, but everybody else was in the same category-- black, white, Mexicans and everybody. So it was an overall thing and I just accepted it as our lot. I didn't feel bad at all. Now as I look back on it I'm grateful for having been in the dire straits of poverty and I'll tell you why. Your heart goes out to people that don't have much now and if you got anything you feel like helping somebody. But had we always had abundance it probably wouldn't phase me to see somebody poor or in a suffering condition. Now my heart goes out to them, I say, "There go I but for the grace of God." He just lifted me over that. I think so much of the needy because we had some great needs ourselves. A lot of the clothes we wore we bought in the second hand stores. We couldn't go to a store to buy a new garment. We'd go the second hand store, look for rummage sales and everything to try to make ends meet because we didn't have but a little bit to spend.

S.J.: Do you remember any attempts to organize unions in the fields then?

Price: No, that came quite a few years after we came. I remember they would go out on strike but that was in the late 1940s and 1950s. Back in the 1930s and the early 1940s they didn't have strikes.

S.J.: A lot of the Okies that came out here encountered some hostility from the local people. Did you find that because you were a farm worker competing for jobs people resented you?

Price: We didn't have any problems ordinarily, but occasionally we ran into something that was kind of different. I can remember one time, I think it must have been in about 1937 or 1938, we went out by Arvin. The general cotton picking was over and they were just pulling bolls, the last little dab of cotton that they pull. We went out there and it was all white people in the field. We drove up to where they was weighing cotton. There were about eight of us in two cars. My husband and my brother-in-law got out and went over to the guys weighing cotton. Half a dozen of the guys come out of the field and just stood around the scales where they was weighing cotton. Right away they started saying that they didn't need no help and they were going to pick all that cotton themselves. So the man that was weighing the cotton got kind of scared and he said, "I'm sorry. These people say they can pick it all so I guess we'll just let them pick it." They didn't hire us so we left. My brother-in-law got pretty hostile about it. He said, "Well hell, we got to live too." It wasn't nothing to get upset about because we went on and finally

got some more work. We run into a little hostility in different places but it was never nothing to be too concerned about.

S.J.: Do you remember any other incidents when you had trouble with whites?

Price: No, I don't think that we encountered that anyplace else. I remember one time I was weighing cotton on the Romaro Ranch and a white man that was picking cotton out there thought there was some mistake in his figures. I put each weight in the book and then at paying time I paid according to this book. Usually everybody was looking in the book when I wrote their weight. This fellow looked on also, but then come payday he started raising sin. Pete Romaro made him leave off the property. He said, "I don't know whether she's right or not." I don't think the guy could read or count or something. I don't know what it was. He was so upset about it but Romaro paid him by my figures and told him he couldn't come back.

S.J.: Do you think you ran into problems because you were black--not just because you were from Oklahoma?

Price: I don't think so.

S.J.: A lot of the people from Oklahoma that were whites found that other whites were very prejudiced.

Price: They looked down on them. But we didn't have that problem. The white people that we worked for never gave us a bad time. But I have heard some white people that we worked with refer to other white people as them "damn Okies" as if they was somebody that shouldn't even be alive. That's the way it sounded. The Okies was just people too. They said, "All these damn Okies just want to take over." I never did understand why they said that. It was a strange thing also that they didn't call the black people Okies. They call the white people Okies and I don't know why that was.

S.J.: You all came from Oklahoma at the same time for the same reason. The only difference was that you were black and they were white.

Price: That's right. We heard bad things about Okies so much. It kind of hurt to hear them say it because I'm from Oklahoma. It was sounding kind of as if they didn't amount to too much. I couldn't understand why they said those things because when we lived in Oklahoma we had no problem with the white people. We all got along fine. I'm from the sort of northern part of Oklahoma where there wasn't a lot of prejudice. Some people from down in the southern part of Oklahoma say that they had run into a lot of racial stuff but we didn't.

S.J.: Did you ever hear of any violent things that happened to the Okies? I've heard that sometimes there were fights and a lot of problems.

Price: Yes, I've heard of that. I can remember when a lot of people had come and was living down by the Kern River bridge where the bridge crosses over into Oildale. There were men, their wives and their children staying down there and a lot of the little children were sick and really needed a doctor's attention. Some guys would go down there and meddle them, throw at them, and chase them around. That happened out on Edison too. There was what they called a tent city out there at Edison. The people didn't have anything to live off of or build with and they just used cardboard and sacks and rags or whatever to build little shelters to live in. People would go out there and disturb them. It was horrible. There was lots of little children running around out there with half enough clothes. They had dirty noses and sores around their mouths from malnutrition. The county finally broke up that camp on Edison because they said there was too many sick children. But that was the best that people could do and they couldn't help it. It wasn't that they deliberately wanted to be filthy. It was that they couldn't help it.

S.J.: But you had a better standard of living than these people in the ditch camps.

Price: I should think so. And then there were some of the people that couldn't face responsibility and when things got tough for them they resorted to alcohol and things like that. Everybody can't make it under pressure. The men would be worried because their children didn't have the things other children had--like food and clothing--so they'd just go and get drunk. My first husband got to be an alcoholic too. I don't know what his reason was but he was an alcoholic and so I sympathize with the wife and the children of alcoholics because they suffered the results of their men being alcoholics. If they all made \$10 he'd take the \$10 and go throw it away for drink. That made it terrible--just awful.

S.J.: Do you think very many of the Okies were irresponsible like that? Was that a large percentage of them or just a few?

Price: I don't think it was a big percentage. I think it was just probably 25 out of 100 so that would be about a quarter, one-fourth of them. But the majority of them were somebody. I should think they were.

S.J.: Then they were just like everybody else?

Price: Yes, yes. They just had a bad break that's all you can call it.

S.J.: Did you or anybody in your family ever get sick?

Price: I did. I had malaria fever in 1937. On the ranch where we lived there was a water tower with a pump. They tell me that mosquitos and probably rats got in the water system. They cleaned it out every now and then but they did find some nasty things in it. I had malaria and a man who lived on the ranch had malaria also.

S.J.: Where were you treated for it?

Price: I went to a doctor and he recommended that I go to Kern General. I had to take treatment for about two months. But I finally got fine. I got fat. I had gotten so skinny that it was terrible. My hair shedded out.

S.J.: Did your little boy start school out here?

Price: Yes. He got all his schooling here in California.

S.J.: After you had moved here and settled in awhile did you feel pretty comfortable here? Did this begin to seem like home?

Price: Yes. I guess I adjust quickly to most any situation. Just to know that we had employment made it seem like home. I soon settled down. My husband would always mention that he wished he was back in Oklahoma, but I didn't. I liked it out here better because there wasn't bad weather. That's one of the things I'm grateful for because when you don't have a lot of heavy clothing it's better to be in a warmer climate.

S.J.: I'd like to ask you about your reception at churches, schools and stores. Did everything go smoothly or did you have any problems fitting into the community here?

Price: No we had no problems. We fit in very quickly in fact because all of the places that we usually went to were where friends of ours that were already here were. We went to the same places they went to and they had been accepted into different things so I guess we were just accepted as a part of that clan. I imagine that's the way it was. At the markets we were treated fairly. Only one time I had something that kind of upset me. I went downtown to Weills Department Store to buy shoes. I tried on several pair of shoes and they didn't fit. I have narrow feet and they were too wide for me. I saw a pair in a little glass showcase that I liked. I told the fellow that I wanted to try one of them on and he went back and got the shoe. Before he tried the shoe on me he told me, "These cost \$23," as if he meant that a black person couldn't afford \$23. And I said, "Who said anything about the price? I want to know if the shoe will fit." So he tried it on me and I paid for the shoes. This

wasn't in the first years we came here, it was several years after we'd been here. That was the only time that I had run into anybody that thought that because you're black you don't have enough money to pay for something you're asking for. And I thought that was just horrible. Why did he think I'd come and ask about the shoes if I wasn't able to pay for them? I got them anyway and I should have got two pair of them because the shoe did fit good.

S.J.: When you went into town to the store or a cafe or a theatre did you have problems? A lot of the Okies, the white Okies, had problems. Some signs were posted that said NO NIGGERS OR OKIES ALLOWED.

Price: Yes. There was a cafe on "L" Street called Tex's Bar. It had a sign on the door that said NO NIGGERS SOLICITED or something to that effect. Then there was a little bar on 19th Street that had a sign that said something that meant for black people to stay out. Blacks were unwelcome. Some colored fellas went into the place and kicked it all apart. They took that sign down. So they never had that anymore. And this guy that had Tex's place on "L" Street got into a fight with some fella. A colored man walked inside the place and the owner of Tex's Bar grabbed the guy and threw him out. The colored guy cut him up real bad and he had to close the business. He was never there no more. Someone else had it and anybody could go in. He got cut up awful bad.

S.J.: Did you or your family ever have any problems going into stores or public places like that?

Price: No. We'd go in and act businesslike. I think if you go in kind of acting silly you get treated as something silly. I think if you go in acting intelligent as if you come in for a specific purpose to buy a certain article they treated you all right. I didn't have no problems.

S.J.: When World War II came did you continue on with farm work?

Price: Yes. During World War II is when I started driving a truck hauling hay. I drove any truck. I worked in a the spud field some but most of the time I drove a hay truck. My husband did farm work too. We was all doing farm work. In 1944 is when my husband and I separated. In 1945 and 1946 I was driving a truck and working in the fields myself. I never did apply for welfare for my son until November in 1949. I got two checks and had them cut it off. I married this husband I have now in 1950. Some people just stayed on welfare over and over and over. I always worked --always worked. They told me that I could just leave my son on welfare, but I said, "No, I'm getting married. I'm cutting it off. I'll take care of him myself," and I did.

S.J.: Did your son ever work in the fields?

Price: Yes. He worked in the spuds, picked a little cotton and tried to chop cotton. He was a sorry field hand. But he did the work just the same.

S.J.: How about most of the other black families out on the ranches-- did their children also help?

Price: Yes. Everybody worked in the fields--even when the kids were going to school. In October when school started, the kids would come home from school and they would take off their school clothes, put on work clothes and go into the fields and work a few hours.

S.J.: When World War II came you were still doing the same sort of work, but did your life change because of the War? Did the situation seem to improve?

Price: The only change was that the price of labor went up a little bit. We got better pay and that's about the only difference that I actually could see.

S.J.: Did you keep some ties to your family in Oklahoma after you came out here?

Price: Yes. My mother, my father, my sisters and brothers all were there until 1937. My older sister came with her husband. None of the other folks came out until the 1940s. I was the only one of us here for over a year. And that really upset me. But after my older sister came I was happier. My mother came out in 1949 and my father came in 1951. Eventually all of us came here and have been here for a long time. I think if we'd stayed in Oklahoma we wouldn't have owned any property or anything. We might have but conditions would certainly have had to change an awful lot. But now all of us except two sisters own property. The rest of us own our own homes and I think that's wonderful especially considering where we came from.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

S.J.: Did you ever see The Grapes of Wrath or read the book?

Price: Yes. I read the book and saw the picture too.

S.J.: Do you have any thoughts about whether it was an accurate picture of the way things were or do you think it was wrong?

Price: It was stretched till some of the points were just outrageous.

For instance, an old man got real sick and they put a young girl in the bed with him to keep him warm. That's a myth. All that kind of stuff didn't happen. It's almost like teaching the little girl to be a prostitute before she got out of the baby stage putting her to bed with a man. I don't think people were that crazy. Then there was an old lady that would see after all of the food that was bought. The woman was kind of the boss over everybody. I don't believe that either. Because at that time when everybody was poor, everybody sort of pulled together and that's how we made it. It wasn't that one person dominated everybody else. It was everybody kind of living like one big happy family.

S.J.: Steinbeck tried to paint the people as being very, very ignorant. Everything they did was for a very practical reason and so sometimes their morals, if they had any, suffered.

Price: Yes. But that was just a writer's theory. That was not the way people really are. We lived around a lot of poor white people and I never witnessed that kind of life style ever. The book made it sound like the majority of the people were living in that kind of condition but that's a mistake, in fact, it is a lie. It was not so. We worked with a lot of poor white people in the fields and different places and that's not so.

S.J.: Do you think that the local people here in California thought that most of the Okies were that way?

Price: Yes. A lot of them thought so. That's why they kind of looked down on them as if they was nothing. I can't understand why. But I do know that all of the white people wasn't like that. We made friends with lots of them and they were just wonderful people--like us. I just could never understand why people wanted to make it sound like Okies was uneducated with low morals and just everything wrong with them.

S.J.: Do you think that maybe in 1936 or 1937 a white Okie had more trouble than a black person had?

Price: Sure. And I'll tell you another thing. When the white southerners came here, a lot of them got whippings from black people because the blacks were dominated by the whites in some areas in the south. The blacks had a little hostility in them and when they came out to California they thought the situation was different so they could just whip a white fella and forget it. And many fights went on. The blacks had said all their lives, "One of these days I'm going to whip me a white kid," and they'd whip one. It was just stupidity. If you could think, you could live above that kind of attitude in the first place. If a person called me a nigger, I know I'm not a nigger. I am about five different nationalities, that's

why I'm brown instead of black. Africans are black. My grandmother on my mother's side was Indian, Irish and Dutch, not black. My father's mother was Indian and black and my father's father was thoroughbred full-blooded African. I got my black from the African. The African, Indian, Irish and Dutch all mixed together makes me brown. And so I have no hostility against no white--none. 'Cause when a person says white's no good, that means I'm no good 'cause I got a little white blood in me. If they say black's no good, that means that I'm no good, I got black in me. It's no big thing to quarrel about what you are. I am reminded about a lot of people in the south--white people that have black blood or Indian blood and they think they are all white. If they actually had a way of finding out they'd find out that many black people are passing for white--marrying into white so that they get mixed over. So colors has nothing to do with what you are, it's just important to have love in your heart and sense in your head.

S.J.: Could you tell me about your son and what he does now?

Price: He grew up in the schools here in Bakersfield and since he's been married he's moved to Oxnard, California. He works for the Navy Department. He spent four years in the Navy. But he has been out as a civilian for some time. He went into the Navy at seventeen and he finished his last portion of high school in the Navy. Then he started taking college classes in the Navy and when he came out he went to Ventura College for a while. He quit that and worked in the labor union doing different things. He's a self-taught musician. He's done a lot of night club playing music as an organist. He's the father of two daughters. The baby girl is in Germany and her husband is in the service. The older girl is still going to college--West Covina College.

S.J.: After the War you went to beauty school and you became a beauty operator. Are there any other things that stand out since then?

Price: During the War my first husband and I separated. That's my son's father. I was single six years. Then I married the husband I have now and since that time he and I have traveled a little bit--not an awful lot. We have seen a few things. Not anything so magnificent as to be mentioned. Most of our time together we've worked a lot and we haven't had the chance to go much. Then I came down with this heart condition and that's why I had to stop my business. He has high blood pressure and he got terribly sick in 1970. I had to take him to the hospital everyday 'cause the doctor was administering medicine that he couldn't bring home. Then he got stronger but he's never really been able to go back in the union. He

was a cement finisher. He's too old of course so he's automatically retired. He's also a disabled veteran.

S.J.: In retrospect, when you look over your life in Oklahoma and then in California, are you glad that you came here?

Price: I am glad, yes. For more reasons than one. In Oklahoma after the crops were a failure and farming wasn't any good people that had a small education like we had couldn't go into the cities and get a good paying job. We had to go somewhere where we could still do farm labor. Coming to California helped us. And the weather was good. I like it because there isn't a lot of snow and sleet and things like we had in Oklahoma. And we don't live far from our church. In Oklahoma we lived three miles from church. The poor folks had to walk that far. That's kind of rough. We bought an old car but it was just an old clunker. I don't think he paid over \$7 or \$8 for that thing and it didn't last.

S.J.: So the expectations you had when you moved to California were fulfilled?

Price: Yes. At first I just hated the place but I learned to love it and right now I love Bakersfield. I really do. I like to go into the big cities and visit my relatives and come right back here to our little raggedy shack. I love it. We have been here now so long until we just know almost everybody in this area. And I really just love it.

END OF INTERVIEW

Edward B. Everly
b. 1881, Tennessee
[His parents from Tennessee]

Clara (Aris) Everly
b. 1897, Indian Territory
[Her parents Indian Territory]

Juanita Everly Price
b. 1916, Payne County,
Oklahoma
Education: 11th grade *
Church: Pleasant View
Missionary Baptist

m. 1950

George Price
b. 1911, Caddo County,
Oklahoma

[Her son]

Louis Eugene Hughes
b. 1935
Musician

[Her stepdaughter]

Ruth L. Lee
b. 1939
Housewife, writer, poetess

*See page 3 of interview.

INDEX

- California
 - First impression, 7
- Discrimination
 - On job, 12, 16, 21, 22
 - In community, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28
- Economics, 21
- Education
 - In Oklahoma, 1, 2, 3
 - In California, 3, 11
- Family Life
 - Entertainment, 3
 - Chores, 17
 - Cars, 18, 29
 - Cooking/Food, 2, 11, 14, 15
 - Marriage, 1, 25
 - Sense of community, 18, 24
 - Children, 9, 16, 24, 26, 28
 - Parents' heritage, 1, 2
- Farming
 - Income, 2
 - Methods, 5
 - Sharecropping, 1
 - Crops, 1, 2
 - Drought, 5
 - Dust storms, 4
 - Government policies, 5
- The Grapes of Wrath/Steinbeck
 - Objections to, 26, 27
 - Movie, 26
- Health
 - Diseases, 11, 14, 23, 24
 - Health care, 14, 15, 23, 24
 - Birth of children, 1
 - Alcoholism, 23
- Housing
 - Homes in California, 19, 20
 - Tents, 9
 - Ditch camps, 23
 - Grower-provided, 9
 - Government-provided, 10
- Migration to California
 - Attraction of California, 6
 - Reasons for move, 4, 6
 - Transportation, 6, 7
 - Belongings, 6, 7
 - Funds available, 6
 - Route, 6, 7
 - Border inspections, 8
- The New Deal
 - WPA, 4, 5, 8, 19, 20
- "Okie"
 - Definition, 22
 - Reactions to term, 22
- Oklahoma
 - Payne Co., 1
- Relief
 - Welfare, 19, 20, 21, 25
 - Type received, 19
 - Attitudes toward, 19
- Religion
 - Churches, 3, 29
- Violence, 25, 27
- Work
 - Migrant labor, 9, 10, 11, 12, 17, 18
 - Odd jobs, 15, 25
 - Employers, 11, 16
 - Unions, 21
 - Strikes, 11, 21
 - Wages, 13, 16, 17
 - During WW II, 25, 26
- Workers
 - Blacks, 10
 - Armenians, 12
 - Mexicans, 12