

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

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

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE:	Vera Ruth Woodall Criswell
PLACE OF BIRTH:	Seymour, Baylor County, Texas
INTERVIEWER:	Stacey Jagels
DATES OF INTERVIEWS:	February 24 and 26, 1981
PLACE OF INTERVIEWS:	Oildale, Kern County
NUMBER OF TAPES:	5
TRANSCRIBER:	Barbara Mitchell

PREFACE

Mrs. Criswell is an extremely shy woman and was very doubtful that she could contribute anything to the Project, but after she felt at ease, she provided a wealth of information. She was a "natural" for an oral history - she has an excellent memory, interesting experiences to recount and a natural feeling for what is relevant and what is not. Mrs. Criswell was concerned with the way she sounded (particularly her grammar) in the transcript and wanted corrections made. I made such corrections during editing.

Stacey Jagels
Interviewer

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INTERVIEWEE: Vera Ruth Woodall Criswell (Age: 71)

INTERVIEWER: Stacey Jagels

DATED: February 24, 1981

S.J.: This is an interview with Ruth Criswell for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Stacey Jagels at 601 Douglas, Apartment 215B, Oildale, California on February 24, 1981.

S.J.: Why don't you tell me when and where you were born?

Criswell: I was born on July 23, 1909 in Baylor County, Texas in a little town called Red Springs.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit about your childhood there?

Criswell: It was a typical farm child's childhood, I suppose. My father was a farmer. He'd been a farmer all of his life up until 1923 when we first came out here. I lived on a farm and I was the fourth of ten children. Of course, for part of my childhood there wasn't that many children. We lived in Texas until I was seven years old and my father bought a farm in Oklahoma. We moved up into Oklahoma. I had to work in the field after I got old enough to help chop the cotton and gather it in the fall. There were other chores around the farm. I had just a typical childhood. We lived in Oklahoma until I was thirteen and then my father sold everything we had and decided to come out to California and try his luck out here. He had lots of friends and neighbors that were coming to California so he decided to try and find out what it was like to work for wages for a change.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit more about the farm you lived on? You say your father had bought this so he owned it. How large was it?

Criswell: It was 160 acres and we rented others. He bought the farm with two other guys. It was a partnership. He was to farm it and they were businessmen. But then he rented other land around it. There

wasn't too much to farm. He had a three-way deal on the 160 acres with the other two partners. One of the partners was a lawyer and I don't remember about the other one.

S.J.: Was it large enough so that at certain times of the year he had to hire extra help?

Criswell: No, not with his family. In fact, with the business we were in a lot of times the neighbors would hire us. My oldest sister was married by the time that we moved up there but she and her husband moved with us. There were two houses on the farm and they lived in one of them and my brother-in-law helped with the farming. So it was just like having an extra farm hand. My father never really had to hire anybody. Later, we did grow a bunch of grain and harvested grain. He had to hire extra people for that. It had to be done in a very short time and with special machinery so he had to hire extra people to do that. But we did the work ourselves for the row crops like cotton and corn--maize or what we call maize. I think the Indians call corn maize and the kind of stuff that we grew was for food for the horses. It was a family operation. That's the way most farm families worked. Sometimes even my mother when she had extra time would go out and help in the fields. Most of the time she was too busy with her children in the house to do much in the fields.

S.J.: Could you tell me about your schooling?

Criswell: I went to a country school. It wasn't a little red school house, it was white. I went through the sixth grade there and then I went to school while I was in California. I went back in Texas again and I completed the first year of high school--that's as far as I got in school. I never finished high school. I went most of the time in Oklahoma. I went one year in California--the last semester of one year and the first semester of another year. I finished up in Texas.

S.J.: When you were first in school in Oklahoma did you ever have to take off school to help with the farm work?

Criswell: Oh yes, in fact, the schools turned out. In the farming communities the little country schools like I went to turned out. They'd take up early in August generally about the first week of August--that's about the time the farm families would have their crops all done or what we called laid by. They got the crops laid by. We just had to wait for the time to harvest. They would take up school for about six weeks and then they'd turn out for six weeks for the children to help with the gathering of the crops--that was the standard procedure there in that part of Oklahoma for the schools to let the children help with the gathering of the crops. Sometimes they'd have to stay longer. Almost every year I'd miss some school because we just wouldn't be through by the time they took up. I guess my father didn't think it was that important. He thought it

was more important to get the crops in, I guess, than for us to go to school for that little length of time. We always went back as soon as we got the crops in. They would turn out six weeks and generally from about the middle of September until the last of October. They would turn out for the kids to help.

S.J.: Can you describe some of the chores that you did on the farm?

Criswell: Oh my goodness! Generally, I did anything there was to do in the house. I can remember when I was five years old standing on the kitchen chair to wash dishes. I had to stand on a chair to reach the sink. My chores outside were to help feed the chickens and the pigs and sometimes the larger livestock. I was always so afraid of horses so my dad wouldn't make me feed the horses. From the time I was nine years old I milked the cows, I helped milk the cows. We always had at least two and sometimes as high as five cows that we'd milk at one time. My mother would sell the extra milk, butter and cream that we didn't use. I had to help with that. I had an older sister and it was our job to milk the cows until she got married. Then my younger brother had to help me milk the cows. Milking the cows morning and night was my main job outside the house. Before I went to school every morning I had to milk the cows and I generally did it before I had my breakfast--that was the first thing I'd do. The boys would generally take care of the livestock in the morning while we milked the cow. That's the way it was in our family. The boys didn't do too much of the milking.

S.J.: How about during the harvesting? Did you do a lot of field work?

Criswell: Oh, yes. I was in the field from sunup to sundown--most of the time we chopped cotton. At the time we didn't have machinery to gather the feed like we do now. We had the grain--we called it maize--I think some people have different names for it. Nowadays they don't gather it that way at all. I don't know exactly how they do it. They don't raise much of it anymore. We were raising it for feed for our stock and our chickens. We would just go along with a knife and cut each head off separately and throw it in a wagon pulled by a team of horses. We would get the corn the same way. We'd just take one ear at a time. Nowadays they have machinery for that. We had to work long hours to get that all in before winter. I picked cotton when I wasn't big enough to do anything else. Of course, nobody picks cotton by hand anymore.

S.J.: Did you feel that that was unusually hard work or did you think that everybody had to help?

Criswell: No. That was just an everyday occurrence. It was just something I'd done all my life and I didn't know any different. Most of my friends and everybody around me did the same things. It was a way of life in those days on the farm. It was just the way that people lived.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit about the farm house? How large was it?

Criswell: When we bought the farm the farm house burned. We moved there in January 1917 and the next November it burned down. It burned everything we had. We moved into the rent house on the farm and it was just one great big room and a smaller one for the time being. My dad built onto it the next year. It was just more or less a hodge-podge. He built a room here and a room there. He never rebuilt the main farm house as long as he had the farm. He just built onto this other one and we lived in that. By the time he got through with it it had about three bedrooms and the living room but there was no inside plumbing--it was all outside. When we moved into it there was just one big room which he later divided and made it one very large room and a small room. We stayed in that for a few months but then he started building onto it. It ended up kind of a rambling three bedroom house. He just did it himself and didn't hire an architect. So he built it when it was convenient.

S.J.: Do you remember how well off you were as compared to other kids? Do you remember if you were average or maybe a little bit better off than most people?

Criswell: I think when I was growing up we were a little better off than some of the other farm kids I knew and some were better off than us. My dad was a very frugal man. He was really a top notch farmer. I've heard so many people who knew him say that he was one of the best farmers. He really could make money. We always had anything and everything. We didn't have extravagant taste so we didn't have a lot of things but the money was always there for anything we needed. The table my mother set everyday for us was what you'd fix for company. We really lived good because we had so much of our own food. My dad would butcher in the fall of the year. He would butcher so many hogs and we would make a whole smoke house full of hams and sausage and everything. We had all the vegetables and other things that grew. We didn't know what it was not to have plenty to eat until we started working for wages. We got off the farm and we discovered it was a little different.

S.J.: How about little extra things? Did you live very close to a town that you might occasionally go to?

Criswell: Not a lot of the time. A lot of the time we were living where we were five miles out of town and in those days five miles out of town was a long way. We didn't buy our first car until 1922 when we came out to California. So to go into town meant a buggy or a horse drawn vehicle of some kind. Five miles was a long way to go. We generally went in on Saturday. Saturday was our day to go to town and buy whatever we needed or wanted to get us through the next week. We didn't always go every Saturday but most of the time we went in

on Saturday. There was no running to a store. One thing that my dad and mom were real particular about was Christmas. I knew kids that didn't get much--where Christmas didn't amount to much--but my dad and mom always saw that we had nice Christmases. We always had one or two things for Christmas--more than some kids. I've got no complaint about that because I didn't know what it was not to have Christmas when I was growing up.

S.J.: Even though you worked a lot you probably had some leisure time. Do you remember what you did for fun? Were there dances or parties or picnics?

Criswell: The parties were at least once a week, generally on Saturday night. That was after I got a little older. It was generally a party at someone's house. They called them parties. A lot of those folks didn't believe in dancing. The older folks, the parents, didn't believe in dancing. Instead of music they would have something called ring plays. It was nothing but a square dance without music. It was somebody calling them instead of playing music. Of course, they call in those square dances too but to music. We used to play the ring plays and there was no music. Somebody would call and you would just go through the motions of a square dance. Then they'd have different games that they'd play. About once a week somebody in the community somewhere would have some of the young folks home. They'd have a party and that was the main part of our social life and there was church. We'd have church socials and every once and a while several families would have ice cream socials. Everybody would get together and bring everything to make ice cream and make several freezers full of ice cream and bake a cake--just a get-together. Whenever they'd have a get together like that they'd always end up playing some of these ring plays--I call them square dances. That was the main source of enjoyment for the young people and the parents too. Whenever they had a party at a young person's house they expected the parents to be there to chaperone. Nowadays parents leave the house when children have a party. There was always at least one set of parents and sometimes two when they'd have a party like that at a person's house.

S.J.: You mentioned church socials--did you attend church regularly?

Criswell: Not in the wintertime. It was kind of a chore to get to church because we were out in the country and it was a long way to church. In the summertime we attended pretty regularly especially when they'd have revivals. We'd work hard all day and he'd come in and get bathed and changed. He'd say, "We're going to the revival." We'd all be so tired that I remember we'd sleep all the way home. Sometimes we'd go to sleep before it was over. We always attended the revivals. They'd go on for two weeks. Nowadays most revivals are only three to five days--Monday through Friday. At least the church I attended was that way.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit more about them? What were they?

- Criswell: The revivals? It wouldn't be the regular pastor. The revivals are generally held by an evangelist from somewhere else. Our church was in a school building when I was growing up because they didn't have a separate church building out in the country. We just used the school. The preacher would stay with the families in the communities. They would take turns here and there staying with them while the revival was going on. The services were every night and sometimes they'd have ten o'clock services in the little towns. Farm people could hardly get out to the ten o'clock services so they generally didn't have them in the country. Every night for two weeks they'd have the preacher preaching the revival sermons. They really were old hell fire and brimstone preachers. I knew quite a few of them. It wasn't only a spiritual thing or a religious thing with the people, it was a social thing too. Everybody could see everybody else that they hadn't seen maybe for months. On outlying farms people would be so busy that they wouldn't get together till revival time. Sometimes they'd get there way before it would start just to visit with the other people. It was a social thing with the farm people in those days as well as a religious and spiritual thing. I think it's a good thing.
- S.J.: Do you remember how often they held these revivals?
- Criswell: Each church, each demonination would generally have one every summer. Generally they were only a couple of demoninations. At that time my folks were Methodists. My mother was raised in a Methodist home. Her father was a Methodist preacher. Later there were mostly Methodists and Baptists in the community. The Baptists would have a revival but everybody went to whichever one was going on.
- S.J.: So the Methodists would also go to the Baptists' revival?
- Criswell: We went to all of them and most everybody else did too. They didn't just go to their church. They all used the same building. When they had the Sunday services the Methodists would have their services every other Sunday and the alternate Sundays the Baptists would use the same building. Of course, they could hardly get a preacher full-time anyway. We'd use the same building for the revivals. They would be about twice every summer. That was just the way it was in Oklahoma where we lived. I don't remember so much about when we were in Texas because I was too little.
- S.J.: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents? Had they grown up in Texas?
- Criswell: They both grew up in Texas. My mother was born and raised in the same house. She never lived anywhere else in her life until she married my dad. Her father was a Methodist minister and farmer. Of course, in those days they paid the ministers salaries. He had a farm too. He'd been a Confederate soldier. His first wife died in childbirth with their first baby. The baby died too. Then he

went to war and fought for the South in the Civil War. He had this farm when he married the first time and it was waiting for him there when the war was over. He married my grandmother and moved there. My grandmother died when my mother was only two and a half years old. She grew up without a mother on this farm where he had really lived with his first wife. He bought it when he married the first time. I don't know exactly how old he was but I think he was about twenty or twenty-one years old. He died there when he was seventy-five years old. He never lived anywhere else and he preached--that was in Limestone County, Texas--close to Thornton or Groesbeck, I don't remember which was the nearest town. Those are the nearest two towns where she grew up. My dad's family used to own slaves. Now, my mother's family didn't have anything to do with slaves but they were southern people. My dad's family had slaves before the Civil War and they had this big farm. I don't know if you'd call it a plantation. It was evidently a bigger farm than what my mother's folks had. My father's father fought in the war too but he came home and died. Depending on who you're talking to he either died three months before my dad was born or three weeks after. His mother married again. Of course, the slaves were gone by this time because the South lost the war. The guy she married done away with everything that my grandpa left. He beat my grandmother out of everything. He managed to sell everything and then he disappeared. He got it in his hands. Then women didn't have much to say about business. He done away with everything except one small farm and the last I knew about my dad's half-brother's son was still farming that little farm. I don't even know what size it is but it was just what was left of what they had.

My dad's mother died when he was a small boy--only two and a half years old. He grew up just here and there--sent to this brother and to that brother. Of course, he had some older half-brothers and sisters. It's awfully complicated. My grandfather--my mother's father--married a third time. My mother's mother died when she was small. When she was a little older--five or six years old--my grandfather married for the third time. The third wife was my father's aunt and that's how my dad got to know my mother. He went there to see his aunt when he was thirteen years old and met my mother. Then he came back again when he was sixteen and they started going together. They ended up getting married when he was nineteen and she was seventeen. She was raised by his aunt. His stepmother was his aunt. Her father and this woman had a girl who was Papa's half-sister. She was raised with papa's half-sister and his aunt. It all seems very complicated. It seems like they were related which they really weren't. They came from very different backgrounds. My dad was raised by his brothers and some of them were hard drinkers. One in particular was kind of an alcoholic. He was kind of kicked around. He was never taken to church. He didn't know anything about church or anything like that until he started coming to my grandfather's house. Because my grandfather

was a preacher they had to go to church every time the doors opened. He made them go to church. She said she was so tired of that. Kids get tired of having to go all the time. She said she used to think about how nice it would be not to have to go to church. Later she said that she wanted to go when she couldn't. My dad wasn't raised in a religious family like that. He was kind of kicked around. When they married they lived in Texas until I was about seven years old. Then they moved up to Oklahoma.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

S.J.: Did your parents move to Oklahoma for economic reasons? Did they think they would have a better life there?

Criswell: I really don't know. My folks moved to Oklahoma when I was three weeks old. I don't remember why. They moved up there for a little while--for a year or so. They were up there when my younger brother was born. I don't know why they moved. I was told that they left the place where I was born at Red Springs, Texas when I was three weeks old. I know they went back after my little brother was born when he was just a few months old. Evidently they were there a couple years farming. My dad was raised here and there and as I say always kind of had itchy feet. He didn't like to stay too long in one place. My mother held him down a lot of the time. He'd want to go and she'd say, "No." She would talk him out of it for so long. He was kind of a wanderer. He'd get tired of one place in a little while and want to move on.

S.J.: Why don't you tell me about the first trip you made out to California in the 1920s. You were about thirteen then?

Criswell: I was thirteen in July and we left Granite, Oklahoma in November. My older sister and her husband came with us. My dad bought this new car--a Ford touring car. I can't remember just how many children there were. My sister didn't have any children. She was pregnant with her first child. My dad didn't even know how to drive. My oldest brother was sixteen and he didn't know how to drive either but he learned very shortly. My brother-in-law was going to drive the car out. Then his uncle came along and two people could ride with them. They had an empty back seat so two people could ride with them. We couldn't have all gotten into that one car. We took three weeks to come from Oklahoma to Redlands, California. Of course, the roads weren't quite what they are today. In fact, they were terrible in some places and cars didn't travel the way they do today. They didn't travel at a very fast speed. We stopped whenever we wanted to. We took three weeks on the road out here. In Arizona, across the desert where there are concrete or paved highways there was one chuckhole after another. I'm telling you it was terrible. We broke springs on the car. He burned the brakes out coming over the Rocky Mountains. We stopped at Tombstone, Arizona and we were

there for three days putting on new brake linings. My brother-in-law was going to do it himself--that was the dirtiest, dustiest town I ever was in. I'd read about Tombstone. I was always a great reader. I'd read anything I could get my hands on. I'd read about Tombstone and it sounded very romantic and, good gracious, that was the dirtiest, dustiest little town! I was so disappointed in Tombstone after reading about it.

S.J.: Since it took you three weeks to get out here do you remember where you stayed along the way? Did you park along the side of the road?

Criswell: We camped beside the road when there wasn't any better place when we were caught out away from town. When we were in Tombstone, of course, we stayed in what was called cabins--tourist cabins. I remember a couple times I don't even know where we were, we stayed in what used to be called wagon yards. People who would go into town stayed at the wagon yard. They had a place for horses and all. Later on there was a great big room in the middle for the people to sleep. It was one big room with little cubby holes for a little privacy. I remember that we ran into one of them that had been converted. I think that was in New Mexico somewhere. It wasn't a wagon yard anymore but the people could stay there. They had a stove for them to cook on. I remember we stayed one night in a place like that. I don't know what they called them at that time. A big part of the time we camped by the side of the road and fixed a bonfire and slept in our bedrolls. We had a trailer behind the car, a little two-wheel trailer with our bedding and personal effects. We'd just unroll the bedrolls on the ground with a canvas underneath and sleep right there.

S.J.: Did you cook along side the road too?

Criswell: Yes, we cooked beside the road.

S.J.: Do you remember why your father wanted to come to California? You mentioned something about friends telling you about it.

Criswell: Oh, yes. He had a couple of neighbors. They had come out here and wrote back about what good wages they paid and what wonderful climate it was to live in and how nice it was. He, as I say, had itchy feet anyway and wanted to come. In fact, he'd intended to come the year before. He'd had a big auction and had sold all of our stuff. Right at the last minute when he was going to sell all the farm tools and livestock my little brother got real sick and so he held back a few things, enough household things, to get by on and enough farming tools to farm another year. He saw we couldn't go right then because my brother got sick with pneumonia so my father held back enough to farm another year. He did farm another year.

S.J.: Had the farm been doing badly? Did that have anything to do with why he wanted to go to California?

Criswell: Heavens no. When he had that big auction sale we had already sold our farm and he was renting a farm. We had a big two story house. It wasn't like most farm houses you see. It had been the owner's home. We had this big four bedroom, two story house. He planted acres and acres of grain that year and got good crops and good prices for them. Everything was going good. It wasn't bad at all. He just wanted a change of scenery.

S.J.: Did he bring very much money with him to California?

Criswell: I have no idea. In those days kids didn't know so much about their folks' finances--especially with my daddy, nobody knew. He had plenty though. We weren't in any danger of going without. It wouldn't have been his nature to have started to California if he weren't secure financially. When I think about all the stuff he sold, just the stuff he sold would have been a lot of money even in those days. Livestock was expensive and he sold so much livestock and farming tools. I heard my brother-in-law say there was enough farming tools for three men. He said my dad had three of everything. He had three sets of farming equipment and he sold two and kept one. He kept enough for one man to farm with the next year. He didn't farm a very big farm the next year. We moved to a smaller farm but it couldn't have been finances that made him not want to stay. He just wanted a change and wanted to see what California was like. A couple of his friends were out here. He would have stayed and never gone back the first time but my mother was so homesick. She was a very strong woman. I never saw her cry about anything until we came out here. She cried and cried. She cried all the time. I don't think my dad could take it. She left her oldest daughter in Texas--married with children. Of course, the other daughter was married and came out with us. She had never been away from our older sister before--no farther than from Texas to Oklahoma--where we'd run back and forth. She couldn't take being separated and besides, this was so different from anything she had ever known in her life. We were living on a fruit ranch. I don't remember how many acres it was up at Ukipa out of Redlands a ways in the foothills. They furnished us a house to work by the month on this fruit ranch. I can't think of any fruit they didn't have. They had some apples but they didn't grow them on the scale they did peaches, apricots and plums. They had their own small packing shed where they packed them. I worked some in the packing shed that summer. When they pruned the trees my brother and I would pile the brush. They let us thin the fruit too. We'd thin the peaches and they had quite a few apples because we thinned apples too.

S.J.: How long did you stay in California that first time?

Criswell: From November until the next October--we stayed less than a year. We started back to Texas and got to Blythe and my dad decided he wanted to stop there and pick cotton. There were acres and acres

of the prettiest cotton. He just wanted to stop. They still picked cotton by hand so we stopped in Blythe for about six weeks and picked cotton before we went on over into Texas.

S.J.: When you were working on the fruit ranch is that where your father also worked?

Criswell: Oh, yes, he was the main one--he and my oldest brother.

S.J.: Do you remember what his wages were? Were they very good?

Criswell: \$80 a month--I remember that very well. He and my oldest brother earned \$80 a month a piece and with the house furnished to live in and everything that was considered good wages. My brother and I were thinning fruit. We'd work after school and on weekends but mostly after school was out. When we got off the school we'd go to the car and change into our old clothes and go to work. I got forty cents an hour and he got thirty cents an hour because he was younger than I. He was only ten and a half by that time. At that time that was considered real good wages. Forty cents an hour was a man's wage. He said I did as much work so he paid me a man's wage.

S.J.: Do you feel that you were treated well by the ranchers?

Criswell: Oh, yes. I saw none of this discrimination that people later suffered who came from back there. At that time, it was very pleasant. They treated you real nice. There was no stigma attached to the fact that you came from Oklahoma.

S.J.: And your home was fairly comfortable?

Criswell: Yes.

S.J.: You said that you had a furnished home?

Criswell: After we were here for a little while--at first it took us a little while to get it. Still, we never really furnished it like we did when we were home because my mother didn't have her heart in it. She said she wasn't going to stay here so she was just going to buy what we had to have. So she never really furnished our house real well. It was a comfortable house. It was isolated. It was up on the side of a mountain. In fact, it was the most beautiful place I nearly ever saw--the most beautiful view. You couldn't drive your car clear up to the house. Down at the bottom of the hill was a garage. You had to climb steps up that hill to get to the house. My mother was pregnant with my sister who was born in April and I've often wondered how in the world she ever managed. She didn't get down very often. She stayed home most of the time and just left when she had to go to town.

S.J.: Do you remember if there were any other people from Oklahoma or Texas or Missouri who came out and worked on fruit ranches?

Criswell: There were a couple families that were working there on that ranch but they didn't come from our part of the country. They came from back there somewhere. I heard my dad talking about it. They didn't live on the ranch. They lived somewhere else and drove in. There wasn't that large an influx of people from back there at that time. [1920s]

S.J.: How about the other workers, do you remember whether there were minorities such as Mexicans? Were there just single men who picked the crops and went from one ranch to another?

Criswell: On that particular ranch--that's the only one I know about, most of the workers seemed to me to be irrigators. I remember guys irrigating who were Mexican and there were a couple of Mexican girls who worked in the packing shed. Where they lived I don't know. The first integrated school I'd ever attended was when we came out here--the school in the little town just outside of Redlands where we first settled. The one in Ukipa had Mexican children and there were Chinese or Japanese there. I just knew they were Oriental. There were no blacks at all in that part of the country at that time. I don't remember seeing any. There weren't any in our schools but then when we went back over to Blythe there were several, quite a few black children in the school. There were also some Chinese and Mexicans but that's the first time in my life I'd ever gone to school with anyone except just white children.

S.J.: Do you remember any problems?

Criswell: No, not with us. There was a little problem with my parents. They could hardly reconcile themselves to the fact. At first they didn't seem to mind so much about the Mexican and Chinese but the blacks bothered them. My parents grew up that way. I used to have a lot of arguments with my dad. He told me that a black woman raised him more than any other one person did. He said she and her husband had run away to get married when they came to his house. They rode two on one horse. She was riding behind her husband on the horse with her belongings in a flour sack. They'd run away and got married and they'd stopped there looking for work. My dad was living with his half brother who put them to work. They built a little house in his backyard. She'd work in the house and he'd work the farm. My dad said that her name was Nellie and she had a baby practically every year. He grew up playing with those children and being mothered by her. His sister-in-law just ignored him most of the time. She was a reserved kind of person anyway and she ignored him. He said that Nellie--until he was about thirteen years old--was the nearest to a mother that he had as he was growing up. She

mothered him right along with this brood that she was raising. I said to my daddy, "You tell me how you were treated so nice by this black woman and played with her kids and grew up with them. How can you be like that with black people?" He said, "Well, that's the way I was raised." Even being raised with them and all they just instilled in him that he wasn't suppose to be on a social level with those black people. I could never understand. I used to argue with him about it. He could hardly accept the fact that we were going to school with black kids. I said, "Good gracious, it's just like going to school with anybody else. What's the difference?"

S.J.: Were you pleased with California? Did you like it?

Criswell: Oh, yes. I liked it. I didn't want to go back but I had no say in what we were doing.

S.J.: What did you like especially about it?

Criswell: I liked the scenery and I liked the climate. It seemed to me like it was different. It was such a different life style than what we were used to. Up until we came out here we'd never gone to movies or anything. It was too far into town. Especially when we were at Blythe, we would go every time the picture changed. It would change about twice a week and we'd take in the movies all the time. I liked the different things we did. I liked the schools. It seemed like the schools were interesting. I liked them better than I did back there because it seemed like they did more things. They took more pains with the children and tried to bring out creative things. At the school I went to in Oklahoma they were more class conscious I think. When I was going to school in Oklahoma the teachers and everybody made so much difference in the way they treated kids and the business people's kids and the farm kids. We were discriminated against in the schools there as much as the minorities were discriminated against in some other schools later. Really, we were a minority. They always made you aware that there was a difference between the kids from the town and the businessmen's kids and the kids from the farms. Maybe it didn't bother other kids but it did bother me. I was very aware of it some places. Out in a little country school there's mostly all farmers' kids. When we were going to school in town the teachers were very prejudiced.

S.J.: So when you got to California the school teachers were very fair?

Criswell: I think so. They didn't seem to discriminate as far as I could tell. They didn't have a whole batch of kids coming in like when my kids come out here and started going to school in the 1930s. The country was full of people coming in from back there and the schools were getting pretty crowded. There was just one school that my kids went to where they were openly discriminated against. We found out we lived just across the road where the boundary was. We lived on the wrong side of the road. We weren't suppose to be going to that school.

I thought, thank goodness, so I changed their school.

S.J.: What made your father decide to go back to Oklahoma? Was it your mother?

Criswell: Mostly, also my older sister and her husband left earlier in the summer to go back. When Inez and Ike left Papa said, "Well, I knew that cinched it because I knew your mama wouldn't stay here any longer."

S.J.: That was about 1922?

Criswell: That was 1923. Sometime in March we moved up on the fruit ranch and lived there until about the last part of September. We lived right through the summer and then stayed at Blythe until the last part of October. Of course, we got there before school started and we worked. We all worked for a while. As soon as school started they'd come right out in the fields and if they saw any kids working after school started they'd have the truant officers. They went around and checked and my dad found out he couldn't keep us out of school.

S.J.: He could do that in Oklahoma but not in California.

Criswell: He could do that in Oklahoma but not out here. They went out twice where my brother was working. He told them he was sixteen. They told him he was going to have to come up with proof that he was sixteen. My dad said he didn't know how in the world he could prove that he was sixteen because he didn't have a birth certificate stating that he was born in 1907. He's two and a half years older than me. So they didn't bother him anymore. Just the younger ones had to be in school. I always loved to go to school. I was so glad for that part of it--not that I minded working. I worked all my life. I didn't know anything else but I just loved to go to school.

S.J.: Where did you go when you went back to Oklahoma?

Criswell: We went to Texas. We didn't go back to Oklahoma right away. We went to Texas. We stopped in the plains in Texas. My dad bought out this young fellow. He bought all his farming tools and livestock and everything and took over his rent or lease on his farm for the year. The man had rented this farm for the year and for some reason, I don't know why, he wanted to do something else. He sold all his livestock and farming tools to my dad and turned the lease on the land over to him. We stayed there a year and farmed close to La Mesa, Texas. We left there and went on down to Haskell County, Texas that fall where we gathered cotton. My dad went down there and spent another year working in oil fields. When he finally cut loose from farming and left he never could stay still very long. He decided then he wanted to try the oil fields of Texas after we

farmed the year up on the plains. He wanted to try the oil fields and we lived for a year going from one oil field to another. He decided that was definitely the wrong place for a family. So we moved back up to Oklahoma. I was married that fall when I was sixteen and a half years old. We went back up to Blair, Oklahoma close to where we'd lived before. I met my husband. He lived at Duke. He was born and raised at Duke but he was over in Blair at a party. He'd met some people over there. His sister lived over there.

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S.J.: Could you tell me about how you met?

Criswell: It happened that Halloween fell on a Saturday. That's when they had their parties because people worked so hard all week. Later, everyone was going to shivaree this couple. A shivaree is when a couple gets married and their friends know where they're staying and they would sneak up on them with all kinds of noise makers. They'd start yelling and beating and making all kinds of noises. Sometimes they would take the guy out and put him on a post or tree limb--on the rail as they called it. They'd take him down and dunk him in the horse trough. They were just having fun. Every couple expected to be shivareed if they had any friends. Some boys came in and said they'd found out where the couple was and they were going to shivaree them. It just ruined Beth's party because everybody left. They all jumped in cars and left to go shivaree this couple. It was just the three of us in there--my friend, her boy friend and me. A little ways down the road a girl wanted to know if I was in the car and if I had a date. They said, "No." So she said there was a guy that didn't have a date either so he came over. I don't know why in the world he let my girl friend drive. She wasn't used to driving a stick shift. She was used to driving a Model T Ford where you use your feet for everything. She thought she was stepping down on the brake and she gave it the gas and slammed into the back of another car which stopped abruptly and busted the radiator. We didn't get to the shivaree. We went into town trying to do something with the radiator. We didn't get to the shivaree but we got pretty well acquainted with one another before the night was over. It was seven weeks from that night that we got married. We really hadn't been together that long because he could just get over on weekends because he had to work. His dad was a farmer too and he had to work and I had to work too.

S.J.: Where did you live when you got married?

Criswell: We lived with his folks for five months. We moved in with his folks and when I married him I had never seen one of his folks before. But it worked out fine. After five months we moved out on our own.

S.J.: He was doing farm work then?

Criswell: Yes, that's what he did the first year. He was a cotton ginner. He worked at the cotton gin during the fall and then he did all kinds of things. He never really was too fond of farming. He'd been raised on the farm but there's a lot of things he'd rather do. When we came out here that's what he did for the rest of his life. He ran a cotton gin. I guess there was nothing about a cotton gin he couldn't do. In fact, he supervised the building of two right up here at Wheeler Ridge while he was working in Visalia. Our home was in Visalia.

We got married in 1925 and he didn't farm in 1926. He farmed with another guy in 1929. He would give my husband so many acres of cotton that would be his to gather and sell at the end of the year for working through the year. He also furnished us a house to live in and everything while we were there. He was a guy he had known all his life. I don't ever remember how many acres it was but it was a good start. That had to be the fall of the stock market crash and the beginning of the Depression. That was supposed to have set him up to farm on his own. We were really expecting to make good money that year if the stock market hadn't crashed. We would have. He just worked through and did everything there was to do on all the land that he was farming for this certain amount of cotton. We just barely got out with enough to get us through the winter and into the next year. There was one year where he farmed with his dad. I think that must have been 1930. At the beginning of the Depression is when he started trying to farm and it just wasn't enough. We depended on rain entirely and it was just drying up and making no crops. What they did try you couldn't get anything out of. The bottom fell out of the prices so it was no time to try farming. So he just worked at whatever he could find till we came out here.

S.J.: You didn't come out here until 1937?

Criswell: Yes. We lived part of that time in Texas. In the fall of 1933 we just gave up on Oklahoma and moved back down into Texas where my folks lived. My folks were living in Knox County, Texas and we moved down there. We were still doing farm work but he was working for somebody else. Everything had just simply dried up and his dad just went bankrupt. He had to turn everything that he had over to the bank just to take care of his half of the debt. He just kept hanging in there trying to farm when things were going worse and worse and he was in debt every year. Of course, the bank wrote off the debt for turning in all his livestock--everything he had except a milk cow and a few things to live on. At that time his dad only had one boy left at home who was fifteen years old. So they just turned everything they had over to the bank and moved into town. There were single boys living in Arizona working and they sent money home to their folks to keep them going. Down where my folks were there wasn't a drought. There was still work to be had so we moved down there and stayed until the fall of 1935. Then we moved back

to Oklahoma and work was opening up a little bit in public work. They were putting a big highway through there and my husband had done a lot of highway construction work. He worked through the whole summer. That's the way we saved the money to come out here. He knew the work was about over. So when we came out here we brought his mother and dad and his younger brother.

S.J.: It sounds like he had many different jobs during the Depression.

Criswell: He did. He worked at everything.

S.J.: Trying to find whatever work he could find?

Criswell: Whatever he could. He and a buddy of his grew up together. They were both jacks of all trades, masters of none. For instance, back in that part of the country they had cisterns to catch the rain water. The water was so terrible and was so hard because it had gypsum in it. These cisterns were dug in the ground and plastered. My husband and his friend would do the plastering on the cisterns. Everybody said they did the best plastering job. They used to do all the plastering work for everybody that wanted a new cistern dug.

S.J.: He did all sorts of jobs and had to move from one to another which must have been difficult economically for you.

Criswell: Oh heavens yes. It was terrible. We had some terribly lean years there. My third girl was born in June 1931. I think she was born with an ulcer. They do say they are born with ulcers now but at the time they hadn't figured that out. We just had staples. We didn't have the money to have really nutritional meals and we didn't have a cow for fresh milk. Half the time we couldn't buy it. His folks would have extra milk and they'd send us milk once in a while. I didn't have the food I should have had when I was carrying her. She was born sick. She couldn't digest anything. Her stomach was in such a shape that she couldn't digest anything. She wouldn't want to eat. She had a bad case of malnutrition. She looked like those pictures of little kids in foreign countries suffering from malnutrition. She was just so skinny and her stomach was distended all the time and her eyes--she had great big old eyes--sunk right in her head. We could not get that child to eat.

My neighbor had a milk cow and she sold their surplus milk. She insisted that I take a quart of milk everyday for her and she wouldn't let me pay her for it. If I'd scramble an egg and make her an egg sandwich she would eat half of the sandwich and that would be her nutrition for the whole day. I couldn't get anything down her. She was a direct product of the Depression. The doctor told my mother-in-law, "They shouldn't count on raising that child. She'll never live to grow up." Now she's fifty, she'll be fifty years old in June.

S.J.: So the Depression really hit you very hard.

Criswell: When the Depression was at its worst my husband would go out after the cotton had already been picked. It would take him all day long there was so little on the stalks. They had already been gone over. It would take him all day to get a hundred pounds and they were paying fifty cents a hundred to have it gathered. He did well to make fifty cents and that's what we would live on. Of course, fifty cents bought a lot more than fifty cents buys today. He would just count on about fifty cents a day. They didn't have welfare and all this sort of thing for people like they do now.

S.J.: It sounds like your family and neighbors did help you though.

Criswell: Everybody helped. If I had something that somebody else could use I gave it to them. If it hadn't been for people helping one another I don't know what we would have done. They finally got a Red Cross program at the little town where we lived. It furnished a few groceries including Ovaltine. I went down and got Ovaltine for this girl of mine. They believed if I put that in her milk--it had so much nutrition in it, it would help. It's much better than just plain milk and it did seem to start her on the mend. We also had two of the best neighbors in the world--the ones that gave us milk. He worked in the grocery store as a butcher. I would have been in worse shape than that but when he came home he'd come over to my house and he'd have some dried peaches or some dried apricots or something. He'd always say something happened to them like they weren't selling too good. I knew it was just his way of giving them to me. I wouldn't even have had any fruit if it hadn't been for him. Every once in a while he'd bring home two roasts and send one over to us. I just didn't ask any questions because he probably paid for the roast. Maybe he didn't. I know sometimes he didn't pay for his own meat because he did all the butchering for the market. Of course, meat wasn't like the piece of gold it is today. I mentioned something to his wife, Olive, one time. She said that it didn't cost him anything so why should I worry. I said I didn't want him doing it too often because it was costing the store.

S.J.: How about other people you knew at the time? The Depression was pretty rough on everybody. Did you feel it was any tougher on you than on other people?

Criswell: No. Our neighbors had a steady income. I think for a while his wages were \$60 a month. They had a two bedroom house--a nice house. They paid only \$10 a month. Anybody that had a steady income was definitely a lot better off than the people that had to depend on farming or wage work. They had two little boys and they lived well on \$60 a month. He could bring home meat and things and that helped out. Some of the farmers who were considered wealthy lost everything before it was over and they kept trying just like my father-in-law--trying to hold on to farming.

- S.J.: You mentioned your father-in-law's farm and how he lost it. You mentioned the drought.
- Criswell: I don't remember how many years they didn't make a decent crop. The cotton would get maybe twelve inches high and sometimes it wouldn't get that high. It would burn up. They wouldn't have half enough bolls on the stalk and of what they had some of them wouldn't even mature. It wasn't good cotton so they were just not making anything at all. They couldn't even get the money back that they put out to make it because the prices were so low.
- S.J.: Do you remember seeing very many tractors in the fields at that time?
- Criswell: No. There were very few tractors. One of the neighbors across the road from my father-in-law was one of the wealthier farmers and he had a tractor. I can remember a couple in the community there in the early 1930s that used the tractors for farming but mostly they used livestock.
- S.J.: I've heard some people say they were "tractored" out of a job--tractors came in on the farms and, of course, the tractors could do what twenty or fifty men could do so these men would lose their jobs.
- Criswell: By the time we left the tractors were taking over.
- S.J.: After 1937?
- Criswell: Before that. In Texas we were working for a big farmer. I don't know how much he had but he still had to have a lot of hands. Everything was going mechanized. He was going to tractors and all kinds of machinery but he still had to have people pick his cotton and lots of other things. The whole country from about 1933 on started going to tractors and machines.
- S.J.: So it could be true that some people did lose their jobs because of tractors?
- Criswell: I'm sure they did. The drought had eased up some by 1936. When we left there was a pretty good crop that year. The tractors were coming and taking over. In the late 1920s and the first part of the 1930s there were very few tractors around where we lived but by the time we left in 1936 they were all over the place. Everybody had tractors. I'm sure that a lot of people did lose their jobs on account of the tractors.
- S.J.: Do you remember many of the farmers blaming their misfortunes on Roosevelt and the programs he had?
- Criswell: To begin with they did. They were very upset about one thing. They couldn't see how he paid the farmers to leave some ground laying fallow, to not plant it, and give the farmers a little cash money.

One year he did that my husband was farming. We collected a little money for leaving out so many acres--a certain percent. We'd leave a certain percent of it unplanted. Killing the hogs and the young beef cattle really didn't set with a lot of them. They just thought that was terrible. He would pay these people for the hogs. They'd butcher them and put them in big trenches and bury them. They did the same thing with beef cattle. He was trying to drive the prices up to make the demand greater than the supply. The economy got better--now whether it had anything to do with those programs I don't know. A lot of the farmers were very bitter about it. The government man came out with the decree that if you had so many hogs, so many of them had to be killed. Even though they paid for them, some of the farmers took it real bad. The fact that the government was running their lives bothered them--telling them what they could and could not raise. A lot of the farmers were bitter about that. I don't know whether they really blamed him for the economy or not but they felt that he was doing some crazy things. I can see now that if you made the demand greater than the supply then naturally it's going to bring up the prices but then there were people going hungry while they were burying that meat.

S.J.: I've heard some people say that part of the reason that the drought came about was that the farmers had not used the land correctly and had not rotated their crops.

Criswell: Oh sure, that had a lot to do with it.

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Criswell: When I was growing up we'd pass certain places going into the town. As far back as I can remember I knew exactly what was going to be on each stretch of their land because it had always been there. If they grew grain on one it was grain every year. If they had cotton it was cotton every year. At the time I didn't think anything of it. My dad grew grain on the same ground for several years, I remember, but he used to always switch his row crops around. He grew sorghum too. Several of the neighbors went in together and bought this gadget where they would boil it. It grew real tall and great big around. Us kids would strip all the leaves off while it was still standing and growing. Then it was cut. I don't remember how they cut it. My dad had a binder who would cut and bind the grain into little shocks and tie them. He had the only binder around there for a while. He'd hire his binder out to the other farmers. I don't remember if he cut that cane with that binder or not. Then they would feed this cane into a thing that pressed all the juice out and then into a vat where they'd boil it into sorghum syrup. The neighbors went in together and purchased this equipment to make the syrup. I don't know what there was about that but he said he never would plant that a second year on the same ground. It must have drawn a lot of the stuff from the ground because I know

he always changed and grew it in a different place every year. I said something to him about it one time and he said, "It's not good for the ground to leave it grow. You have to change it around." Of course, that's all the explanation he gave me. That's the only crop I remember that he definitely wouldn't grow two years in a row on the same ground. He did switch the other crops around too. But it seems like if they ever started growing grain on a piece of ground they just kept it there. Maybe it didn't draw as much nutrients out of the soil. I don't know.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit about the dust storms?

Criswell: They were terrible. Our cotton would be about five or six inches tall and it looked like a fire had gone over that field of cotton. It would just kill it and then in a few days it would be dead. The leaves would all be dead because it would just blacken it. If it's young and tender it'd have to be planted over. You can plant over just so late in the year and then you can't plant again. I've seen it take out a whole big field of cotton just like that. We lived on the sandy land. The storms would start up in Kansas or somewhere. These local sand storms could sometimes could ruin your crop. The big ones that started up were worse. We'd see them come rolling down from Kansas. I think most of them started up there or in northern Oklahoma. They would travel clear down into Texas. They'd come just like a big old black cloud and they soon covered everything. It was such fine dust by the time it'd get to us it would just be settling down over everything. You could get in the house but you couldn't close it out. I'd just creep into every little crack and everything else that it could get in. It'd just be hazy looking across the room sometimes. Sometimes it would be in the babies' lungs. We'd put wet cloths over the children's and babies' mouths it was so bad. It generally wouldn't be that bad very long. You'd just dig it out, just sweep it out in piles after the storm passed. Especially if you lived in an older house that wasn't too tight, you could really have a mess. You'd try to eat and you'd find grit in your food. It was terrible, really. Sometimes this would wipe out a whole month's work. When it was gone you'd have to start over. A lot of the crops that were older it would just damage. You couldn't start over again. If the cotton was small enough you could start over again. It would just damage it so it wouldn't grow right.

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S.J.: When you left Oklahoma was there something, some final thing that happened that made you want to go at that particular time?

Criswell: Yes. My husband had two grown single brothers out in Arizona at

at that time. By the time we got out here one of them had come to California. My father-in-law lost everything he had. He was one of the homesteaders there in about 1899 or 1900. He'd lost his farm. We decided that we'd be better off if we brought his folks out where his other brothers were. His brothers didn't want to come back to Oklahoma so they said they would be glad to take care of their mother and dad if they'd come out to California. They weren't about to come by themselves. I had been trying to get my husband to make the change out here because I'd been here before and I knew it was better than what we had unless they had the Depression out here too. It was better than back there but it wasn't as good as it had been. There was nothing to look forward to in Oklahoma. There was nothing to work towards. Just working to exist from day to day is not very rewarding. My husband wanted to see if he could find a place where there was a better chance for his children. We decided the best thing to do was to come. My folks were planning to come anyway so we all came together.

S.J.: Did you hear much about California when you were back in Oklahoma? Did people talk about it?

Criswell: Yes. It was the topic of conversation. Nearly everybody had somebody they knew that left and came out here and they'd write back. Some of them said it was horrible and they'd go into these labor camps and had a horrible time. Others would say they found work and it was nice. You didn't know what to believe. There was an awful lot of talk pro and con. When we got on the road we discovered that there must have been fifty that thought it was better for every one that didn't because the road was just full of people coming this way. That kind of discouraged us to see so many people migrating out this way.

S.J.: Did you ever see any flyers that said there was work out here in California?

Criswell: No, I didn't. My husband was working doing some WPA [Works Progress Administration] work in Texas. He said there were some flyers distributed amongst the men over there. He didn't even bring it home so I never saw one myself and I don't know if very many of my people did. That seemed to be more around cities. I'd heard of factories that had closed down and so many people were out of work. That's where I think they distributed a lot of them. They said it was the farmers in California trying to get cheap labor out here. I don't know but that was what I was told.

S.J.: Did you ever consider going someplace other than California?

Criswell: We considered Arizona because my husband had a married brother who was there for several months before we came out. He had two single brothers who were there but one of them had already come to California

before we got here. We did think of Arizona as well but when we stopped in Arizona for three months it was a very unpleasant place. I didn't like Arizona at all. We stayed there awhile but we didn't like it. We never considered going anywhere except west.

S.J.: You had been to California once before so you knew a little bit more about what to expect.

Criswell: I knew about southern California but I didn't know about the central Valley. I'd never been up there. I knew about southern California but that's all. Everybody told us the Valley was more like the country we were used to. There was no agriculture down south at that time except citrus groves--acres and acres of citrus groves and olives. That was about the only agriculture in southern California at that time.

S.J.: What did you expect to find in the Valley here?

Criswell: Agriculture--that's what we had been told was there. We were used to agriculture. I guess that's one reason I liked Visalia--the fact that it is agricultural country.

S.J.: How about the way it looked? Did you expect it to look the way it does?

Criswell: I don't remember expecting too much about that. One of my sister-in-law's aunts lived in Visalia awhile and she came by while we were in Arizona. She told us quite a bit about Visalia and what it looked like. She thought that would be the best place for us because she'd been out here several years. She was on her way back to visit some of her folks and she stopped by. It more or less looked like we expected it to look because it had been described to us. When we were on our way in we came over the ridge and got to Greenfield some men stopped us and wanted to know if we were looking for work. We'd left Arizona almost completely broke. We were looking for work. We left his mother and dad in Arizona with one of the boys who had just gotten married. One of the other brothers came with us and with my mother and dad and their folks. They stopped us and wanted us to work. That was the last part of January 1937. That was when the Tulare Lake was flooding everywhere and it was all over in Buttonwillow. They were going to be forced to break the dams and the dikes and they wanted to get this cotton out before they had to break it. The water was backing up. There were men patrolling day and night to see if it started breaking through to get the people out. They were stopping everyone that looked like they were travelling to go and help get that cotton out. We went over and spent about four or five days. They had converted box cars into places for people to live. We lived in this converted box car for four or five days and helped them get their cotton out. They didn't have it all out when they finally said they were forced to break the dam so we had to leave. They broke it just as soon as we got out that morning.

It began to come through in little places and it was going to wash the dam out. I wasn't scared at the time but I think about it now--we were sitting there under that dam and I don't know if we could have gotten out of there or not. That helped us out because that gave us money enough till we could find work in Visalia. We drove up to Visalia then.

S.J.: You told me that when you first started out for California on the road there were so many other people who had the same idea to come to California. Could you tell me a little bit more about the journey from Oklahoma?

Criswell: My mother and dad had come out to a little town right outside of El Paso, Texas and stopped there and waited for us. It took us a little longer. We had some things we had to get rid of and we had to get his folks ready to come. We had to buy a car that was big enough for all of us. We had a little Model T Ford with one seat and a bed on the back. So we had to buy a car that would hold everybody. I don't even remember where we spent the night after we left El Paso. We stayed in motel cabins but I don't remember staying overnight on the road out from El Paso to Ely, Arizona. There was a labor contractor that talked us into stopping there for a few days. We wrote my husband's brother to tell him we were there. We were there two or three days and when he got the letter he came over. That was a horrible place. It was so hot. It was just like the desert. They were growing cotton out there and they were irrigating but it was just so dusty. The dust was like ashes. I said, "I'm not keeping my family here very long." My brother-in-law came over and said there were better working conditions where he was going. We hadn't signed a contract where we were. We just stopped. They would be at the filling stations stopping people trying to hire them and misrepresenting the conditions. Then we came to this little town close to Phoenix. It took us one day to drive over there. This was a labor camp. The only place to stay was in this labor camp. Oh, it was horrible. I never want to live through anything like that again. They had tents set up for people to live in. They had floors but they were still tents. They were put so close together that you could hear conversations going on in the next tent. It had some of the awfulest people. You'd hear such awful language. I had three little girls--the youngest was five years old and the oldest one was nine the day we crossed over into California. I said, "I just can't keep my girls in a place like this." That's why we just couldn't stay there. The work was all right, just picking cotton is what we were doing but we were used to picking cotton. That's all there was to do. My husband started looking around to see if there was a possibility of any other kind of job there. He didn't see anything he thought he could work at.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit more about the labor camp, about the conditions? How about sanitary conditions?

Criswell: They had out door toilets. You had to carry the water and my children all got sick. First, they took an eye infection. I think it was the dust or something in the ground. I said, "Now, if this is the way it's got to be I'll go back to Oklahoma." At least we had a decent place to live in Oklahoma.

S.J.: How about food? How did you cook then?

Criswell: We had a little stove. We had a little kerosene stove that we had taken along with us. Some of them would take oil drums and make a stove out of it and cook on that. Sometimes some of them would cook out on the campfires in front of the tents. You'd have to go rustle your own wood. They didn't furnish wood for you.

We had a kerosene stove, a little two burner kerosene stove that you could just put in the trailer and haul along and that's the way I did my cooking. My mother-in-law got one somewhere already fixed. It was made into an oven. I couldn't bake anything on my little kerosene stove but she had this oil drum fixed up into an oven so we could bake a little bit once in a while but mostly it was just whatever we could cook on top of the stove.

S.J.: Did you get paid very much for picking cotton?

Criswell: I don't remember. I don't remember the price at that time but I think it was about seventy-five cents a hundred pounds. Some of the time it was \$1 per hundred pounds.

S.J.: Were you able to save a little bit of money?

Criswell: As long as we were getting steady work we could but then it started to rain. That weather's so terrible in Arizona. I never had lived in a climate like that before. We'd get up in the morning and there'd be ice. The water would be frozen out in the little puddles and you'd bundle up in your warm clothes. By noon it was so hot you'd have to shed all those clothes. That's what kept all my children sick. They were sick all the time.

My little brother was the same age as my oldest girl and they were in the same grade at school. He fought all the time. He was a belligerent kind of kid. She'd come home and tell me about Wesley having a knockdown drag out fight with another kid right in the aisle of the school. The teacher just let them fight. I sent my youngest girl who was only five years old to school just to keep her out of the fields. I didn't want her to have to go out in the fields. It was nice and warm at school and I didn't want to have to take her out in the cold. I sent her to school and they didn't say a word. She wasn't old enough to go to school. She was old enough to go to kindergarten but they didn't have kindergarten in those days. I registered her in the first grade and sent her to school. They didn't say a word. At the time they must have had

the worst school system in the world. The kids would fight on the bus until I was afraid for my girls.

S.J.: The children who fought in the schools and on the bus--do you think they were migrant children?

Criswell: Some of them were.

S.J.: Or some were residents of Arizona?

Criswell: The ones my brother fought with were the farmers' kids. They'd make slighting remarks. They'd make remarks to him and he didn't care where he was he'd fight.

S.J.: These were remarks about being from Oklahoma?

Criswell: Yes, all kinds of slighting remarks. Sometimes they wouldn't even tell us what they said. They said they were just talking about us. So he fought all the time. They would say things to my girls too. They'd come home crying. We had a lot more of that kind of stuff in Arizona than we had here. It was much better in Visalia anyway. I think around Bakersfield is where they had the labor camps that you hear so much about.

S.J.: How long did you stay in Arizona?

Criswell: From November to February. The day we crossed over into California was February 9 because that was my oldest daughter's birthday. She was nine years old.

S.J.: So it was just a few months.

Criswell: Yes. I couldn't have taken it any longer. My father-in-law was having senile spells. He had an injury to his head and he would get spells and depression and then he'd be all right sometimes for a long time. He was depressed then. He said we'd have to live this way. I said I didn't have to live this way.

S.J.: What were some of the other things that you objected to? You said you didn't want to live that way.

Criswell: I was afraid for my girls to go out after dark. I wouldn't allow one of them outside of the tent after dark. I'd heard of rapes in the camp there. They would have gambling. At one place there was gambling going on all the time. We could hear them in there and the awful language they would use. They just used obscenities that the girls could hear. They couldn't help but hear. Every night they'd gather a bunch in there to play cards, play poker and drink.

S.J.: You said that you'd heard there had been rapes there right in the camp?

Criswell: Right in the camp.

S.J.: Do you remember what they did about that or how many you had heard about?

Criswell: There was a woman that told me to watch my girls. She said, "Don't let them go out after dark. If they have to go to the toilet after dark go with them." She said that there'd been a couple of girls that had been molested, had been attacked, as they were going to the restroom after dark. It didn't happen while I was there as far as I knew. She said this had happened just before we came there. It's terrible when you have to live that way. We just had to stay there long enough to get a little ahead.

S.J.: How large was that camp? Do you remember about how many people lived there?

Criswell: I don't know how many people but there must have been close to a hundred tents with families living in most of them. There were some single men just travelling around making more money with their gambling than anything else. There were several hundred people in there. It was a big labor camp. My husband's brother's wife's step-father was managing the camp. That's how come they were there. I said, "My goodness, he was the one that came over and told us there were better living conditions over here." He didn't think it was as bad as I thought it was. But it was so bad I didn't want to keep my family there any longer than I had to.

S.J.: Do you remember the name of the camp?

Criswell: No. It probably had a name. It was close to Buckeye and Perryville, Arizona several miles out of Phoenix. We went into Phoenix one time to do some shopping for Christmas and that's the only time I was in Phoenix.

S.J.: You said that some of the children had made snide remarks to your daughter and to your brother. Do you remember any adults ever making remarks about the migrant workers?

Criswell: Not really because there wasn't much there.

S.J.: You didn't have much contact with the growers or townspeople?

Criswell: No. The kids were encountering this at school. My sister-in-law's step-father was managing the camp and he was from Oklahoma himself. People who knew the owners came around once in a while. We'd see them when we'd go out to work in the fields but we had no contact with them really. The people we had contact with were right there in the camp. I was sending my little girl to school to get her out of the weather and I was sending her into worse things. The worst conditions that we ran into anywhere were in Arizona--not here. Now

I hear some people talk about some of the camps around Bakersfield and it sounds like the same kind of thing we have over there. We didn't stop here--only to help people out over around Buttonwillow when their place was going to be flooded. We went on up to Visalia and stayed in a little labor camp there. The Roeben Brothers has a farming operation there and they had a small camp. I don't think there was more than a dozen tents and little places to live in their little camp. We stayed there and went to work for them and then pretty soon we moved out of the camp into a house. My husband and his brother went to work for them and worked for several months through the next summer and the rest of that winter. We lived part of that time up at Hanford. They had some land up there and had a big nice house up there that they furnished their workers. There was one big labor camp out at Linnell close to Farmersville. They were houses. They weren't tents or anything like that and a lot of people lived there year round. We never lived there. We never even tried to get in there. We didn't want to. We'd rather have our own place. The big labor camp over there wasn't like that old labor camp over in Arizona.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1

S.J.: I want to go back just a little bit to your trip out from Oklahoma to Arizona. You said you stayed in tourist cabins along the way.

Criswell: That was at El Paso, Texas. That's where we got out of Texas--right on the line. My mother and dad had this place when we got there. They went ahead of us because they were all ready to leave and we weren't. My dad knew somebody over at Fabian outside of El Paso. He said he'd go there and wait for us at Fabian and write back and tell us their address. We went over there and we stayed two or three days and then we left. We all left together. It was a place with long little tourist cabins in a row. They were all kind of joined together with a space for a car in between. It was an old town but very picturesque. They had an extra one because they knew we would be there. They were paying rent on an extra one all the time but they were using it. They got one more than they'd had to so they'd have one for us when we got there. The place was full of workers. It was a little different from most of the tourist cabins they had along the way then. There would just be a whole cluster of little cabins and instead of motel rooms like they have now they'd each be separate little buildings, little cabins. They were more or less the same inside but they were joined together by carport in between.

S.J.: Along the rest of the way did you stay in these again or did you sleep out along side the road?

Criswell: I don't remember.

S.J.: How about other people who came out from Oklahoma? Do you think very

many of them had the money to stay in tourist cabins or did you see a lot of people sleeping beside the road?

Criswell: Oh, you'd see dozens of them sleeping beside the road. If they had the money a lot of them wouldn't spend it. They'd rather just camp out. We didn't have babies in our family but when you've got children you kind of hesitate unless the weather is good. Several times we woke up in the morning and there would be frost all over the bed covers. I'd cover their heads up during the night and the covers would be stiff in the morning. They were warm as toast in there but if it's raining or something you've got to get them out of the weather. You can't keep them out in bad weather. You'd see people everywhere camped beside the road mostly in New Mexico and Arizona. You didn't see that so much out here. We ran into trouble after we left southern California, something ruined the radiator on our car. It stopped up and we ran into trouble up on the ridge. It just vapor locked and we had to spend the night between here and Los Angeles and Redlands. There was absolutely no place to stop. There was a great big stone wall of what had been a building there and the wall was left. We drove around behind this wall and camped that night because there was no place to go. We got that far and we didn't want to try to travel after nightfall with the car acting that way. It would vapor lock up there in that altitude and we were having such a time. After we got over here into California people didn't camp out. Coming from Blythe over in the desert we saw some camping and in fact we camped out there ourselves.

S.J.: How about food along the way? Did you stop beside the road to cook? Did you ever stop at diners?

Criswell: No, we never stopped at diners but we would generally buy stuff for sandwiches for the noon meal. We'd have our breakfast where we left. If we were camped beside the road we would cook beside the road and we'd sometimes have soup and Mama's fried bacon or just oatmeal. We'd have a hot breakfast and we'd always have something we could fix for sandwiches at noon. Then when we camped at night if there was a place where we could make a fire we had a hot meal maybe canned stew or something like that. There wasn't too much you could cook. I fried potatoes on this campfire. You could fry potatoes and things like that.

S.J.: Do you remember how much money your family had when you started out?

Criswell: I remember how much money we had when we left Arizona to come over here. My husband and his brother pooled what they had and they had less than \$14. They had \$13 and some cents and that's when my husband said, "I just can't start with that little money." So my dad said, "I've got money if you run out. I'll finance the whole thing till we get to work." Working at Buttonwillow kept us from having to take any money from my dad.

- S.J.: Do you remember the cars that you saw along the way? I've heard that a lot of them looked like jalopies, that they were old dilapidated cars with mattresses piled on the top and pots and pans hanging out. Some people even had chickens in the back of their car.
- Criswell: Some you wouldn't believe. We had a Buick. I've forgotten what year it was but I think it was a 1930. It'd seen better days. We had to have a bigger car and it had a great big trunk on the back. I called it a turtle shell. My brother-in-law, the young one fifteen years old, had a German shepherd that he would not leave. The lid was off of this trunk and that dog rode all the way out here in that trunk. We had some other things in there too but there was a space saved for that dog. When we got up to Tulare she got run over by a car and killed after he'd brought her all that way. It was so pitiful. We had a trailer, a little two wheel trailer behind with our things in it. We didn't have things to put on top of that. I thought that was bad enough. You would see some Model T's with stuff hanging all over them. They'd tie it all over the top and everywhere else. They'd have chairs piled on top of their cars. We brought our personal belongings, some bedding, dishes and cook vessels that we could get by with but you'd see all kinds of things on the road.
- S.J.: A lot of people broken down?
- Criswell: Yes. You'd find them. Sometimes we found ourselves in that position. The radiator gave us trouble all the way out. It finally really gave us trouble after we got out here and you'd see us sitting beside the road every once in a while letting the thing cool. It would get hot and we'd have to stop to let it cool.
- S.J.: You said that once you got on the road you thought there were 50 people coming to California for every one that stayed in Oklahoma. There were so many people on the road. Did you feel like you were really part of a big migration?
- Criswell: I don't know. I didn't think about it that way. We didn't realize there were so many people on the road until we got out there. I was amazed at how many we did see on the road. I just remember thinking it's not going to be any better there if all these people go there. I talked to my husband about it. I said, "How in the world are there going to be jobs for everybody if so many people are going?" He said, "We're committed. It's all we can do now." We were kind of surprised at the number of people that we saw coming out this way and they were all over the place.
- S.J.: When you got to the border do you remember having any trouble coming into California?
- Criswell: Oh, they went through everything. We had some cotton sacks to pick

cotton with. We either had to throw them away or boil them before they'd let us bring them on in. They went through everything we had to see if we had any fruit or anything. They wouldn't let you bring any fruit or anything in. We knew about the fruit. People had told us they wouldn't let us bring in fruit but we didn't know about them making us boil the cotton sacks. They were pretty rude. The inspectors saw so many people I guess but they were kind of rude. They weren't abusive. They could have used a little more tact. It was aggravating to us to be held up so long. I guess it's just one of those things.

S.J.: Do you remember coming over the Tehachapi Mountains into the San Joaquin Valley?

Criswell: We didn't come that way. We came over Wheeler Ridge. We came from Redlands. That was the old road, not the way it is today. The road was a lot worse.

S.J.: Do you remember very much about the trip into the Valley?

Criswell: I remember a lot about that because the car was vapor locking every little bit and my brother-in-law would have to get out and siphon gas out of the gas tank and put it in the carburetor to get it to go. My dad's car was running just fine but he couldn't go off and leave us.

S.J.: Do you remember your first view of the Valley as you came down the mountains? Did it impress you?

Criswell: Not really. It's been so many years ago I really don't remember. The first thing I remember about the Valley was when the guys stopped us at Greenfield to work.

S.J.: When you first moved to Visalia you mentioned your husband's first job up there and the people he worked for.

Criswell: He worked for the Roebens. They had all kinds of fruit all around Visalia. They had peaches and plums and things like that. Up on the west side and on the other side of Hanford they had acres and acres in grain, wheat and oats, barley and stuff like that.

S.J.: How long did he work for them?

Criswell: He started to work there in February right after we got there and he worked through the summer. That fall he went to work at the cotton gin and that's all he did was work at different cotton gins.

S.J.: Do you remember women and children working in the fields then? Did you work in the fields?

Criswell: Oh yes, I worked. I worked right along side him until our fourth

child was born in the fall of 1938. I didn't work after that. When we first got here there wasn't anything to do. They were doing irrigation in the fields. I didn't work then but in the spring when the work that women and children did opened up I went to work and I worked through that summer picking fruit or whatever there was to do. Then that fall he went to work in the cotton gin but I went with my folks to the cotton fields to pick cotton. My kids were all in school.

S.J.: How did you know where to find work? Was it just word of mouth?

Criswell: Yes. Besides, you got out and drove around. There would be a contractor and he had to get the crew together. The contractor was generally out looking amongst people to get them for his crew. You'd hear that so-and-so has got a contract and he needs so many hands. You'd go and see him or he'd happen to come by. It wasn't hard to find the work.

S.J.: A lot of people have said they couldn't find work. They tried but they couldn't find work.

Criswell: That was probably around a place where they had a lot of labor camps. They had a lot more cotton around Bakersfield than they had around Visalia. There is quite a bit of cotton up there because they otherwise couldn't have kept the cotton gins busy all those years but there just wasn't that many people that migrated out here that went to Visalia. It's off the main highway and it's off of the main railroad for that matter. There's just a spur that goes through there. It's really kind of a backwater place. So not as many people went there as went to Bakersfield. There was just more people than there was work at places like that. Around Visalia there were a few times that we didn't have work. That first summer we would work a couple weeks and be out of work for a week or something like that. It was never long enough to amount to anything. For years and years my husband didn't know what it was like to have a steady job. I worked all the time even after I quit working in the fields. I worked at different thing. I worked at the laundry; I worked at the cannery; I worked as a sales clerk and all kinds of things. I worked because I was used to working and I worked when I found something to do.

S.J.: When your husband went to work at the cotton gin did he start making more money?

Criswell: He went to work there for 45¢ an hour. Of course, in a very little while he got a raise to 50¢ an hour. He didn't work very long at 45¢ but that was considered good wages. They worked twelve hour shifts. I was picking cotton and I went out with my mother and dad. My mother loved to pick cotton. She just loved to pick. She could beat me and so I'd go out with them and pick cotton. One woman out there said, "What are you doing out here picking cotton when your husband's making such good money?" Six dollars a day he was making

and that was considered good money. Why should I not work just because he's got a good job? Of course, after all the ginning was over he didn't have any work so he went to work for the ice company. He got a job with the ice company with an ice delivery route. Then a lot of people delivered ice. For several years until he worked up to a year round job with the ginning company he worked the summer for the Visalia Ice Company and the fall and winter with the gin. We could rent a good house. We had a two bedroom house which rented for \$17.50 a month. You can't rent houses like that now in proportion to your salary.

S.J.: It sounds like you had quite enough money to live on then.

Criswell: Oh we did. The first two years were kind of hard. The summer before my little boy was born my husband had a job. This was the same kind of work they called WPA [Works Progress Administration] back in Texas and Oklahoma. It was a county sponsored project working on roads. If you were out of work you could qualify. It was low paying, of course, they always do pay low for something like that. He had to work there for the summer. He couldn't find any work anywhere else. He worked on that until the ginning season opened up. It was kind of hard the first couple of years.

S.J.: How hard was it? Did you have enough money for food and for the rent where you lived?

Criswell: I don't ever remember not having food when we needed it. We had so much trouble till he got his first pay check to keep food on the table that he stripped that old Buick and sold it piece by piece. My dad was there with his car for transportation.

S.J.: Where did you live at that point?

Criswell: At that time we were living in this small labor camp at the Roeben Ranch.

S.J.: Was that cabins or tents on platforms?

Criswell: We were in tents and as soon as he got his first pay check he moved us out into a house.

S.J.: How long did you live in the tents then?

Criswell: I think it was through May. We lived there from February till May.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit more about them? Was this labor camp a lot more pleasant than in Arizona?

Criswell: Yes, because there were very few people in it. The living conditions weren't any better. We didn't have running water and we had outside

facilities. There was an irrigation ditch running close by so when we'd get ready to wash out clothes we'd take them down to the ditch and build a fire and heat the water in a pot and washed our clothes there on the edge. We'd wash our clothes by the irrigation ditch so we wouldn't have to carry water. The kids swam in the irrigation ditch all the time. I think half of their baths were taken in the irrigation ditch but they really wanted to. They really enjoyed jumping in there after it got warmer. It was warm even when we moved in there. It was warm for that time of year. It was a lot more pleasant than living over in Arizona. They weren't ideal living conditions by any means.

S.J.: But you did have enough to eat?

Criswell: Oh yes, we did after that first pay check. I think the regular pay schedule was every two weeks.

S.J.: Where did you move in May?

Criswell: We moved to the other side of Hanford to work in the grain. They had this nice big house there but he had about three families living in it. It was a big two story house. We had two rooms downstairs and then my brother-in-law had a bedroom upstairs. He ate with us, of course. I fixed all his food. There were three other families. One of them was in a mobile home. We lived up there through the summer and then came back. We rented a house before we ever came back. We lived in this little house for a couple of years. He built a new rent house and it was a brand new two bedroom house we rented for \$17.50 a month. Of course, it had indoor plumbing and everything. In 1941 we bought our first home in Visalia and then later bought land and built another house out on Lover's Lane out east of us. At one time we had the house in Tulare and a house in Visalia. We had sold the one in Tulare and moved back into the one in Visalia when my husband passed away.

S.J.: How would you compare your situation to other Okies and other migrant workers? Were you about average?

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 2

Criswell: I think our situation was about the same as the other Okies that cared. There were some that were satisfied with nothing. I think most of them had an opportunity to better themselves. Some of them were still living in just awful places, just the very cheapest way they could. They didn't have any ambition. I think there were some that did a lot better than we did but then my husband was the kind that didn't take chances. Several different times if he'd have taken advantage of some of the chances that were offered him he could have done a lot better. He just didn't feel like he could afford to take chances. As it turned out it would have turned out better for him. You'll find the kind that didn't care everywhere.

S.J.: You think they were probably that way back in Oklahoma too?

Criswell: Probably so. Some of them are still living around Visalia. They live from hand to mouth. They didn't try to accumulate anything. If their kids made anything of themselves they did it themselves. They weren't encouraged by their parents. When I was working so hard to keep my children in school and give them education some would keep their kids out every chance they could to have them work and make some money. They would make false excuses about why they were out of school. They didn't care if their kids got an education. Then there were others who really wanted the best and did the best they could. I think we were about average.

S.J.: A lot of people think that most of the Okies were the type who didn't care. They thought of them as ignorant, slovenly people. Just a small group of Okies gave all the Okies a bad name.

Criswell: That's what we had to contend with. My children started to school when we were in the tents. That's the only place in California where my kids were treated that way--discriminated against. My oldest girl would come home so mad every day she could hardly stand it. She had a fight a couple times with another girl. The teacher always called her in. She wouldn't call the other girl in at all. My youngest brother was in the same grade as my oldest girl. He came home with this envelope and said the teacher said for me to give this to the teacher over at Oak Grove. He didn't know what was in it because it was sealed. My mother said, "Well, I may get in trouble but this letter is not going over there until I know what it says." So she tore it open. You never saw such rot in your life. I had a sister who was thirteen and was going to school there. She was in the eighth grade and was an A student. My little brother wasn't much of a student but my sister was an A student and my second girl was an A student. The oldest one made good grades but she had to work real hard at it. The second one was ahead of where she was suppose to be in school. She was a grade ahead of her age group. In this letter she wrote she said that they were sending these kids over and they were obviously of low I.Q. [Intelligence Quotient]. They're Okies and Texans. I don't know just how to describe it. I thought it was the most obnoxious thing I'd ever heard of a teacher doing. She didn't send any grades. We thought she'd send grades along. She couldn't support what she said with grades.

S.J.: She couldn't back it up.

Criswell: She couldn't back it up with grades. My mother threw it in the stove and my brother like to die. He said, "Oh, I was suppose to take that to the teacher. Now I'll get in trouble."

S.J.: Did you ever talk to the teacher and ask her why she wrote those things?

- Criswell: No, we never went back to that teacher but I went to school when the kids went over to Oak Grove. I took them over and got them started in school. I told them that they'd been over to another school and I said some of them haven't been doing too good because there was so much trouble in school. They were harrassed and they were into fights every day. They hadn't been doing as well as they normally did. I was hoping that they'd have a better atmosphere over here. The teacher said that she didn't allow any of that kind of thing in her school. That was the best school. They never had another day's harrassment of any kind. We thought maybe the first teacher would contact the teacher over at the new school to see if she got the letter. Nothing was ever said.
- S.J.: How about this first teacher? Was there any more in the letter that would indicate to you why she would want to say things like that? Do you think she was just prejudiced and discriminated against Okies?
- Criswell: I think she was. She wasn't even my two youngest girls' teacher. She just lumped them all together. Margie had always been an A student. She brought home some of her papers that had been graded and Mama said, "Margie, why have your grades dropped? You are getting C+'s and B's on things that you used to get A's on all the time?" She said, "I think it's the teacher. I don't think she likes me very well." Mama said, "Now don't be laying things on the teacher. You just study harder."
- S.J.: How about the kids at school that harrassed Okie children? Did your children ever come home and tell exactly what they said?
- Criswell: They probably did but I can't remember now exactly. They started on my kids' name but kids will do that anywhere. They said that Okies ate worms or something. Just things that kids would think of and naturally, no kid with any self respect is going to take that all day. They're going to fight back.
- S.J.: How about this new school they went to? You said the teacher there didn't allow this to go on.
- Criswell: No, she didn't. There was a different atmosphere at that school. I think the faculty has a lot to do with how the kids behave. It was a mixture of the Okie kids and the other kids that had been there all the time and they got along just fine. When we moved into a house they didn't go to that school any more.
- S.J.: Were there a lot of transient kids coming in and out of the schools? They'd show up one day and be gone a few weeks later?
- Criswell: I'm sure that there were. I know there were over in Arizona. People were coming and going all the time. But I didn't hear so much about

that in the schools there at Visalia.

S.J.: How about your girls' health? You mentioned that when you were in Arizona they were very sick because of the climate and the dust there. How about when you came out to California? Did their health improve?

Criswell: Yes, it did. They had something called pink eye. I think it was in the dirt or something. One of my children got that and it's contagious they say. Every one of my children got that pink eye and was real sick. My oldest girl was sick all the time. She had a real bad kidney infection while we were over there [Arizona] because of the water. She was kind of prone to kidney infections anyway. It was a very unpleasant, very degrading place to live. They got better over here and then the next summer they took the whooping cough. They didn't inoculate them for whooping cough then. Now they have these combination inoculations that take care of whooping cough right along with diphtheria. They only gave them the diphtheria and the small pox. They didn't have the whooping cough inoculation at the time.

S.J.: How did you treat them? Did you take them to a hospital or a local doctor?

Criswell: In Arizona I treated them myself. I didn't take them to nobody.

S.J.: How about out here when they had the whooping cough?

Criswell: We had a doctor by that time, Dr. Neal. He delivered my last baby. He didn't deliver the boy. I had him in a hospital in Tulare.

S.J.: You were able to afford to pay a private doctor by that time?

Criswell: By the time they had the whooping cough we had the money for a doctor. My youngest girl had been sickly all her life. That whooping cough really hurt her. She was awfully sick. They didn't get to start to school when they were suppose to. When school opened they were still contagious with whooping cough and didn't get to start school right away.

S.J.: I've heard that a lot of the migrant children were sick more often than the native Californians. Do you think that that was true?

Criswell: I think it was probably true when they first came out anyway. They had been through quite a period of not having the right nutrition and a lot of the time we couldn't afford a doctor. Later if it got serious enough we got a doctor but a lot of times we'd doctor them ourselves. If we had had better finances they would have been to see a doctor. I think that they were neglected in nutrition and other ways. It took them a little while to get over that.

S.J.: The diets of many of the Okies were high in carbohydrates and low

in protein and vitamins and minerals. After you came to California did your diet change when you had more money?

Criswell: I guess it did. I kind of take a little umbrage about the protein because I don't think there's better protein food than beans and my kids at least had a lot of beans. That was a staple.

S.J.: I've talked to a lot of Okies who've said that they didn't have enough protein and vegetables.

Criswell: They had less green vegetables than they did protein--my kids anyway. The diet changed so much here because there were so many green vegetables year round that were reasonable. At some places you could just go and get them. You were welcomed to them. There were a lot of vegetables that we could just pick ourselves. They had a lot of fruit stands. We weren't used to having green vegetables year round. They didn't have them in the winter time. You just didn't get green vegetables even in the store in Oklahoma. Here they have them year round. Up around Visalia in the foothills you could go to the packing houses and get culls for little or nothing. Sometimes they'd just haul them away. You could get the culls. They were just as good but they couldn't sell them. Oranges were something that you didn't get too much of in Oklahoma. Their diet naturally changed. We were able to afford more meat too.

S.J.: You think that better nutrition did help the health problems?

Criswell: Oh, I'm sure it did, especially my youngest daughter. She was always such a picky eater. We couldn't get her to eat hardly anything. I've seen her take a whole day to eat an apple. I could get different things to tempt her appetite--things I just couldn't afford to buy before, special things to try to get her to eat.

S.J.: You mentioned before something about the large government camps. You said that you'd never lived in one nor wanted to live in one. Did you know very much about the government camps?

Criswell: Just stories I heard.

S.J.: Stories?

Criswell: I didn't think I wanted to.

S.J.: What stories had you heard?

Criswell: I had heard of people getting in there and they'd get them in debt to the store. They'd never be able to get out and they had to take jobs where they wanted them to work. We were afraid to even think about anything like that. We didn't want to give up our freedom. My husband used to deliver ice in there. He said some of those

places in the summertime were like walking into an oven. They had tin roofs. There's still a little settlement there that's called Linnell. I don't know if it's run by the government or what. They're all pretty good houses in there now as far as I can see. The rumors probably weren't true but then they weren't very good either. I know some people that lived in there and they said that it was true. If you ever started getting in debt to the company store you couldn't hardly trade anywhere else because it would take all your money to pay them. They charged whatever prices they wanted to and generally they charged excessive prices. That part I guess was true.

S.J.: How about the ditch camps where people would camp out beside the road or under bridges or beside ditches? Did you ever see any camps of people like that?

Criswell: I never saw anything like that. I don't really know.

S.J.: That may have been more common down here and along the highways.

Criswell: I have a son-in-law who tells about seeing bums building shelters under the bridges and living under there. But I never saw anything like that. I think one time I remember seeing a family that was living more or less in their car by a creek. They just had a tarpaulin spread up from a tree. Evidently they had their beds in under there. They slept in under that and they cooked out. They were just more or less living out of their car. I saw that family there several different times. They were by a little creek not a ditch. That was between Tulare and Visalia. It was just one family. It wasn't a bunch of them.

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 1

S.J.: You had worked in the fields with your parents and picked cotton. At that time you had your three girls and they were school age. How did you manage to keep a home, send your girls off to school, pick cotton in the fields and cook?

Criswell: It was a chore but I was used to it. You learn what you can do and what to let go. I was never one to let much go in my house. My girls helped. I didn't mind taking them out in the field. It was all right to take them out. When they had the whooping cough one of them would go with us and help us cut grapes. The other two stayed home. When I came home they'd have supper. I would fix the beans and put a pot of beans on to cook. She would fix potatoes and she'd slice up tomatoes and things like that. She would have our dinner ready for us when we came home at night after work. Of course, it was nothing at all for the older one. She could do it easily. They couldn't cook a lot of things but they could cook simple things. They would help that way.

S.J.: About what time in the morning would your day start when you were working?

Criswell: Four o'clock. I grew up on a farm and that was the time you'd wake up and get started doing all your chores. Even if you're just going to school you've got to get up early and get all these chores done before you can get to school. When we were working I would be up never later than 4:30 a.m. and have all this stuff out of the way. Sometimes I'd leave for work before the girls would leave to go to school. I'd have to see that they were dressed and ready to go. They walked over to school because we only lived about a half a mile away. Of course, they were old enough to know when they were suppose to leave.

S.J.: How about in the evenings? What was your time spent doing in the evenings?

Criswell: I'd take off a day when I needed to do the laundry and things like that. I'd just stay home that day and do the laundry. I didn't have a job I had to go to everyday. At night we didn't have anything to do but relax or play. The kids played games and after a while of course we had a radio to listen to. Our family was always a great one for reading so we always had reading material and we'd read or something like that. Of course, the kids had their homework to do.

S.J.: Did you go into town much on weekends or evenings for movies and things?

Criswell: On the weekends. During the week we were always too tired. On weekends we generally went into town. I'd take the kids. We'd go in to do our shopping for the week--our grocery shopping. I'd generally take the kids and put them in the movies. They always wanted to go to the movies on Saturday afternoon. Sometimes if we wanted to we would wait and all go at night. A lot of times we didn't care so much about going to the movies. We'd go see special ones.

S.J.: You said that your husband got a job delivering ice during the off seasons. Were there any off seasons where your husband was out of work and couldn't find any?

Criswell: Sometimes after the ginning season. The ginning season these days is very short. They've improved everything. They get the cotton picked faster and then the gins are improved so they can gin faster. It's not as long. Then, the ginning season generally would last through January. Sometimes during February and part of March they wouldn't need him at the ice plant. Sometimes there would be times like that that he would just pick up what he could here and there.

S.J.: Was that a problem? Did you have money saved or did that become a

problem?

Criswell: If he didn't find extra work things would get kind of lean. But it was never really serious. It didn't last that long. He was very seldom out of work after the first year we were here.

S.J.: Did you both feel that you were treated well by the people you worked for?

Criswell: Oh, yes. We had no complaints. There were so many nice people compared to the ones that weren't nice. There was a problem at that one school. My husband had been very aggravated and very upset applying for jobs. They would be very favorable until they found out he was from Oklahoma. They'd just turn him off.

S.J.: When he first came out here looking for jobs?

Criswell: He would come home so disgusted. They'd ask about experience and he had experience in a lot of things because he'd worked all kinds of jobs. Then they asked him where did he work. Where was the last job he worked on and he'd say it was in Texas or Oklahoma. They'd just turn him off. He'd run into a lot of that when he was applying for construction jobs. He was experienced at construction but when they found out he was from Oklahoma they didn't want him.

S.J.: How long did that go on before he finally found a job?

Criswell: When he got in with the cotton gin he didn't apply for anything else because he liked that kind of work. I say the first few months we were here.

S.J.: Did you or he experience any problems after that because you were from Oklahoma?

Criswell: No, not really. We had a kind of a bigoted boss. I shouldn't say that I guess. He was a manager of a Woolworth's store in Visalia and my second daughter and I both worked in Woolworth's as sales clerks. When something would go wrong he was very prone to throw the word [Okie] around and that was years after the migration. Anything he thought was kind of stupid he was prone to say, "That sounds like an Okie." That would kind of get our dander up.

S.J.: I've heard some people who worked in the fields say that one of the things that would bother them most was that a rancher would hire you to pick the cotton for a certain amount of time and he treated you very well and paid you well. As soon as the job was done he didn't want you anymore. If you happened to run into him downtown somewhere he'd act as though he didn't know you or he'd say something very snide to you. Do you remember ranchers acting like that?

Criswell: It didn't happen to me personally. I remember several people saying how nice and friendly and all they were while they were working for them. When they ran into them in town they didn't know them. I've heard that, yes. The Roeben Brothers were the only ranchers that we worked for. I went out and picked cotton here and there with different people but I didn't even know the farmers. I was working for a contractor. My husband and his brother were working directly for the Roeben brothers. There was no contractor involved. They were very nice and it didn't make any difference where or when they saw you. In May, just before we went up to work in the harvest, they took all the men and went up to San Francisco abalone fishing a whole weekend of camping and fishing for abalone. It was a big treat for some of the guys that had never done that before. They just treated all the guys to a weekend up there. They were very nice like that and as long as we lived there my husband considered them friends because they were friends.

S.J.: Do you remember hearing anything about attempts to organize unions?

Criswell: Yes, there were attempts at the gins, the cotton gins. I don't know about the farmers because pretty soon we weren't involved in any farm work. They came to the cotton gins when he first started working for them. They didn't even pay any social security and agriculture didn't pay any social security. They weren't organized. They weren't unionized and they came and tried several different times to organize the cotton gins. They didn't organize them but there wasn't any violence.

S.J.: Do you remember any strikes?

Criswell: No, not really. The reason why there wasn't anymore trouble was that they raised the wages. The managers raised the wages to compare to the union wages so the guys stayed on. They got as many benefits. So they didn't join, they didn't unionize the gins. I don't know if they have or not to this day. They did get into the social security program in a year or two. Social security didn't take in the agricultural work at the time. My husband came home talking about them trying to unionize the gins and having the union guys out there.

S.J.: It sounds as though you were pretty well off as compared to some others. Do you remember hearing about very many other Okies taking government aid? They didn't call it welfare then. Some got what they called commodities.

Criswell: Yes, they had the commodities. The only time we ever took any kind of aid was when my boy was born. While I was still in the hospital he started in his ginning season but it was just barely a living for him. We couldn't save up the money for the hospital and so they paid the hospital bill when he was born. I know they had the

commodities and I know they had this other stuff. I know some people personally that took it but we never did. We didn't need it.

S.J.: Do you think that a very large percentage of Okies did take government aid?

Criswell: Of the ones I know I think probably half of the families did but not for a long period of time. Just one time or another they did take government aid.

S.J.: Some of the native Californians accused the Okies of coming from Oklahoma and Texas and Missouri just to get on the welfare rolls. I've found that most of the people just took it when they absolutely had to. Did you know very many people that you think were on welfare consistently and perhaps did come out here just to get some free money?

Criswell: I know one family that was on it but they didn't come out here for that. The husband died and left her with four children and the youngest one was six years old. The oldest was fourteen and she went on welfare. He was a painter and he made good money. He had a perforated ulcer and died. She worked all the time as a cocktail waitress. The youngest boy was six years old when his father died and when he grew up and got married himself he didn't even know what it was like not to be on welfare. That was just a way of life with them. She fibbed and everything else about her working to keep them on welfare. He was only forty-four years old when he died. She raised the kids on welfare when she was making money enough to have raised them otherwise.

S.J.: Have you resented people like that that have given Okies a bad name?

Criswell: I wouldn't say I exactly resented them but I always thought we'd have an easier time if they had acted differently. I can't complain too much about our treatment. I've seen more growers abuse employees in some ways in Texas than here.

S.J.: You mentioned black workers. Do you remember seeing any black or Mexican or Filipino workers here in California when you were picking cotton?

Criswell: No, not around Visalia. Now in this field where we were getting the cotton out of the way of the water there were all kinds of people. There were blacks and Orientals. I guess there were Filipinos. They didn't look exactly like Mexicans but I wasn't well acquainted with Filipinos at that time so I think they were Filipinos. All kinds of people were out there working. In Visalia there were very few black people. There was one black family that had been there for years. They were well respected as any family in that town--the Piles. They had a business there and their girls went to school. They were

really well thought of. You wouldn't know they were black people by the way they were treated. There were two or three other black families. There weren't too many Mexicans but you'd see a few.

S.J.: Was there much hostility toward the Mexicans?

Criswell: Not from us there wasn't. I don't remember any being shown. Texas is as bad a place as you'll find for discriminating against Mexicans. They really discriminate against Mexicans and the Mexicans out here were much better treated than the Mexicans in Texas. It's a lot worse in Texas.

S.J.: When people used the term Okie back in the 1930s it had some definite connotations.

Criswell: Absolutely.

S.J.: Sort of an ignorant, unkept...

Criswell: And you didn't have to be from Oklahoma for them to say that.

S.J.: And now people still use the term Okie but it seems to be used in a different way.

Criswell: I notice it's even used in crossword puzzles. I do a lot of crossword puzzles and if it says migratory worker and it's four letters it's Okie. That's what they call a migratory worker now, an Okie.

S.J.: If someone called you an Okie or your child an Okie back in 1938 was that something that you really were insulted by?

Criswell: If they said it in that tone of voice. We were Okies. We were from Oklahoma so we didn't mind being designated as being from Oklahoma but it was the way they used the word. My husband was walking down the street one day and two men were walking right behind him. Two businessmen were out for lunch and they were talking about somebody doing something real stupid. My husband was just walking along and he couldn't help but hear them talk behind him. One said, "Even an Okie should have known better than you, you know." My husband could hardly hold his tongue. I said, "They had no idea you were an Okie." My daughter didn't like people to say things about Okies because she was an Okie too. One of the boys in the crowd said, "You might be an Oklahoman but you're not an Okie." She said that she didn't know there was a difference. He said that there was a big difference. It's just what people make out of it. They could use it in a friendly way or they could use it in a hurtful way--and they did, especially the kids.

S.J.: You described the problems you had at the schools. Did you attend church in Visalia and, if you did, did you ever have any problems?

Criswell: We didn't attend church for several years because we are Southern

Baptists and there weren't any Southern Baptists. They were just beginning to organize in the state at that time. We went to the First Baptist Church there in Visalia and realized that it wasn't a Southern Baptist church. It was an American Baptist church. We just went a couple times and they were very cold. They weren't very friendly people. I don't know whether they were that way to every outsider that came in or what. We didn't go back. It was several years before we attended church regularly. By that time, we had friends and we knew the people already and they knew us. I had no discrimination in churches at all.

S.J.: You mentioned that one incident where your husband was downtown and he heard a couple businessmen refer to Okies. Do you remember any other incidents happening in town in stores or places of business?

Criswell: Oh there probably were. I remember the times when he would go in to apply for work and they would turn him off. He came home so frustrated and so aggravated. It just aggravated him that they would take a whole bunch of people and lump them all under one category as being stupid.

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 2

S.J.: You saw The Grapes of Wrath. Could you tell me about your reaction to the movie?

Criswell: I thought it didn't coincide with any experience I'd ever had. I'd never seen anything like that. What made my daughter so mad was when the little children flushed the toilet and it scared them. They were girls nearly as old as she was. Oh, that made her so mad. She said that he would have you believe that we didn't even know what flush toilets were. I said, "He'd have you believe a lot of stuff." He took a little circumstance or condition that maybe happened to one person, maybe happened in a minor way, and he blew it into a great big thing and had it happening to everybody. I can't say that that kind of thing didn't happen to one or two people because I don't know what happened to all these other people but I think that he took an experience and built on it and exaggerated it and made it encompass more people.

S.J.: Do you think possibly a lot of people who weren't Okies and didn't know about Okies went to see this movie and then took that as the truth? That they drew a stereotype of the Okie from it?

Criswell: I think so. I really think they did. I think he did a disservice to an awful lot of people. He took a little grain of truth and made it into a mountain. Also, he had this character that Henry Fonda played, a parolee from prison, and that brought in a subtle way a criminal aspect to it.

S.J.: Do you think you ever knew any people that were similar to that?

- Criswell: No, I don't think so. I saw some awfully ignorant seeming people in that labor camp over in Arizona that seemed not to care about the living conditions or their children or anything. They just didn't seem to care. I don't think that kind of thing had been going on long enough. You could get conditioned to anything, I guess, but it hadn't been going on long enough for them to get any different if they cared to begin with. I did see one or two families along the road that I thought would probably fit into that kind of situation.
- S.J.: Not the vast majority?
- Criswell: No, very few.
- S.J.: Did the language they used in the movie bother you? Did the suggestion that these people were sexually promiscuous and immoral bother you?
- Criswell: They had every baser thing in human nature all combined in one family. They would have you believe that was the norm for those people that came from back there. Sure, they had things that would make you sympathetic to them. You couldn't help but be sympathetic to some of the things. At the same time they had this suggestion of immorality. They used language that was never used in my family. I really feel like he did a disservice with that book. He could have written an interesting book without all that.
- S.J.: Your first trip to California in 1922 and 1923 was quite different than when you came out the second time in 1937.
- Criswell: The circumstances were different.
- S.J.: Could you draw some comparisons?
- Criswell: I lived in two different parts. This part of California is so different from the southern part of California. It could be a different state really. I didn't know anything about the central valley the first time. The work situation is different and the climate is different.
- S.J.: You had an idea of what California was like from that first trip. Were you disappointed when you came back in 1937?
- Criswell: Yes, I was because in a way I didn't know what to expect up here. It didn't seem like my idea of California, what I'd seen of it. Of course, we were over at Blythe for a while and that's more or less desert country over there. It was just like a different place. It didn't seem like the same place that I'd lived in before.
- S.J.: The first time you were here in California the word Okie probably didn't even exist.
- Criswell: No. I never heard of such a thing.

S.J.: So you had no problems about being from Oklahoma then?

Criswell: No, not really because you know we were very few. Maybe you saw one or two families. I don't remember another family in that town that had just come out from the midwest, Texas or Oklahoma or anywhere like that. Now we lived just across the alley from a Portuguese family. They had a girl about my age and we got to be real good friends. We visited back and forth at one another's home. They were just fascinated with us. We would tell them things about Oklahoma and Texas. They'd never known anybody that lived back there before. The mother I think came from Hawaii when she was young and her husband had come over from Portugal. They were fascinated to hear all about our life back in Oklahoma and Texas.

S.J.: But the second time you came out there was hardly anybody interested except to say snide remarks.

Criswell: They were just wishing we'd go back to Oklahoma.

S.J.: Did you ever wish you could go back to Oklahoma?

Criswell: Not really because by that time I didn't have anything back there to go to.

S.J.: Your whole family was here?

Criswell: Our whole family was here except for my oldest sister and she's never left back there. Her family still lives in Texas. We had had such a hard time of it financially the last couple years we were there. Conditions got to where I didn't care if I ever saw it again. I didn't see Oklahoma for 25 years but then I never really wanted to go back. I just wanted to raise my children in a decent way. It bothered me that people at first seemed to hold it against them because they were from Oklahoma. I didn't know how I was going to teach them the things I wanted to teach them when other people were doing like that.

S.J.: When World War II came your husband continued working in the gin?

Criswell: Yes.

S.J.: And you lived in the Visalia area? Did World War II have much of an effect on your lives?

Criswell: I lost a brother and he lost a brother. It took a brother out of each one of our families. He was at the age that he would have been called up in the next draft. He had his 38th birthday but if they needed any more he could still have been called up until his 38th birthday. After that he couldn't. He wasn't 1A because that would have been somebody without any children. He had children. I forget just what

he was classified now but he would have been drafted but he wasn't. He had two brothers in the service and all of my brothers that were old enough and one that wasn't old enough got in there before in was over. One lied about his age and joined. He was only sixteen years old. My husband didn't feel that he needed to volunteer because he had a family and he was doing work that needed to be done. It had to be done by somebody. He said if they drafted him he would go. It had a big impact on our family because it took all the young men out of the family. My second daughter went to work when she was fifteen years old because they were looking for people to work. They couldn't get help.

S.J.: Did you go to work then too?

Criswell: I worked some, not much. I went back to work in the cannery. They needed the workers in the cannery. The older men were taking the jobs the boys used to have. Some of the women had to take over the jobs that the older men used to have. I went back to work in the cannery for a while because they needed to get the food stuff out. That's all the work I did during the war.

S.J.: How about after World War II? Did your husband continue working in the gin?

Criswell: Yes. By that time he was full time the year round with the ginning company. He was working for Coverly West Ginning Company and they had gins down here in this part of the country. He came to supervise the building of two new gins at Wheeler Ridge. The company was bought out. They started laying off people and laid off those getting close to retirement. He got laid off in 1966 and he died in 1968. He wasn't even quite 62 when he died. He lacked a month of being exactly 62.

S.J.: So you moved down to Bakersfield after that?

Criswell: First I went down to San Bernardino to take care of my mother. My father died in 1962 and my mother was 87 years old and she was still living in their home. I stayed with her for two years or the biggest part of two years until she died when she was 89. Five months of that time I went over to Germany to be with my son. I stayed with her because she needed somebody and I didn't know what I wanted to do with myself right then so I stayed with her until she died. Then I moved back up here because all my girls had come to Bakersfield and my boy was in the service. He spent 21 years in the Army and so he still was in the service in Germany or Japan. He was everywhere. I didn't see any sense sitting up there by myself in Visalia when all my girls were down here and all my grandkids and everybody was down here.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit more about your kids?

Criswell: I had five children. I had one boy and four girls. I had three girls and when the youngest one was seven and a half I had the boy and it was just like two different families. Then I had a girl two and a half years later. He was born in 1938 and she was born in 1941. The three girls were grown when the other two were still small.

S.J.: Did all your children graduate from high school?

Criswell: All except the oldest girl. She got married before she got out of school. She never really liked school that well anyway. My youngest girl will be forty years old in June and she has just graduated from Bakersfield College. She got married before she got out of high school but went ahead and finished high school. She had raised her family. She's got a 21 year old daughter. She went back to school and she's got her degree now and her permit to teach pre-school. She can manage a pre-school or she can be a teacher's aide.

S.J.: Do your other daughters work?

Criswell: My oldest daughter and her husband manage an apartment complex over right off of New Stine Road. He works for Tom Kelly, Property Management who is a part owner of these apartments here. They were managing here when I moved here. They worked for Tom Kelly for about six or seven years. My husband taught my son-in-law the ginning business and he used to work in the gins all the time himself. It's just so much dust and that's one thing that caused my husband's death. He died of lung cancer. They put so much pesticides on the cotton and it was in the dust too. He wanted to get out of the ginning business so he started working for Tom Kelly. They manage the West Side Village Apartments. My second daughter is a bookkeeper for Midas Muffler for both shops. Her office is in the one over on Brundage. My son retired from the service. He went back to college in Texas and always wanted to be a teacher. He was going to get his teaching degree and then they kept telling him that he was going into a glutted market so he finally changed over to business administration and he went three years. He says he may go back and finish sometime but he got so tired because he was working and going to school at the same time. He works for the big general hospital there in Wichita Falls. I'm going back to visit him the last of next month.

S.J.: Have you been pretty proud of your children?

Criswell: Oh, I've been very proud of my children. I couldn't get any of them to go on to college when they got out of high school. My son went to college when he was in the service some too. I don't think he lacks too many more credits to get his degree if he'd go ahead. He probably will sooner or later but he's 42 years old. My oldest girl wasn't too much of a scholar. She never liked school

very much and when she got married that was all she wanted to do was raise a family. She raised two children. She never worked until he decided to get out of the ginning business.

S.J.: Do you think your kids have been better off here in California than they would have been back in Oklahoma?

Criswell: That's hard to say because we have some of my husband's relatives back there. I do too in Texas, not in Oklahoma. Maybe they weren't in quite as strapped circumstances as we were at the time. They held on and stayed there and their children seem to be prospering. Their kids all got good educations. I don't know if we could have held on there. I just don't know. I think Oklahoma has a good educational system.

S.J.: Are you glad you came to California?

Criswell: I'm glad that I came. I think they've had a more pleasant life than they'd have had back there. I think this is a more pleasant place to live. You can find a lot of people that don't like it here but I think your life is more or less what you make it.

END OF INTERVIEW

James Edwin Woodall
b. 1878, Freestone County,
Texas
[His parents from Georgia]

Laura Etta Herod
b. 1881, Thornton, Limestone County,
Texas
[Her parents from Tennessee]

Vera Ruth Woodall
b. 1909, Seymour, Baylor Co.,
Texas
Education: 10th grade
Church: Southern Baptist

m. 1925 →

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Oklahoma

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Apartment manager/
homemaker

Anna Ruth Ferrell
b. 1931
Homemaker

Linda Joyce Robinett
b. 1941
Pre-school teacher/
homemaker

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b. 1928
Bookkeeper/homemaker

Albert Riley Criswell
b. 1938
Military, retired; now
finishing education

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