

## CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

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

## Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: Elizabeth May Garber Day

PLACE OF BIRTH: Lone Star, Douglas County, Kansas

INTERVIEWER: Stacey Jagels

DATES OF INTERVIEWS: May 2, 1981

PLACE OF INTERVIEWS: Oakhurst, Madera County

NUMBER OF TAPES: 2

TRANSCRIBER: Barbara Mitchell

## PREFACE

Mrs. Elizabeth Day and her husband live in the mountains near Oakhurst, California, in a modern home. Mrs. Day provided an interesting contrast to the other interviewees. She is from Nebraska, insists she not be grouped with the Okies. She used quite strong language in discussing the Okies. Later in the interview she seemed to regret her comments and remembered some Okies who were "good people" and wanted to give them the benefit of the doubt.

As for Mrs. Day herself, she was traumatized by living on welfare for four years while she was in high school. She seems to have coped with that and has a very comfortable life now. Her children are successful which seems to have been her goal. Mrs. Day added many comments and recollections when she read through the transcript. She also did most of the editing of the transcript.

Stacey Jagels  
Interviewer

## CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

## CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY

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Oral History Program

## Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: Elizabeth Day (Age: 59)

INTERVIEWER: Stacey Jagels

DATED: May 2, 1981

S.J.: This is an interview with Elizabeth Day for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Stacey Jagels at 50913 Cedar Ridge Creek North, Oakhurst, California 93644 on May 2, 1981.

S.J.: I thought we'd start out first with when and where you were born and perhaps a little bit about your childhood.

Day: I was born in Lone Star, Douglas County, Kansas. We lived there just a year. Then we moved to Nebraska so, of course, I don't remember Kansas. It was January 20, 1922 so my childhood was in Franklin, Nebraska until I was about eleven, when we moved to Bakersfield.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit about your parents? Where they were born?

Day: My mother, Elizabeth Cynthia Morse, was born in Dawson County, Nebraska on October 13, 1886. My father, John Wilburt Arthur Garber, was born in Franklin County, Kansas on April 17, 1884. They were married in Overbrook, Kansas on December 29, 1907.

My mother was in an orphanage and was adopted at the age of eleven which is quite old and it definitely had a psychological effect on her. There were five of us children in the family and she said over and over again, "I just want to raise my children. I don't want to die and leave them orphans like I was." This was a very prominent thought in her mind and in her life. My daddy was from a family of German people in Kansas, just a farm family. Other than that, I really don't know that much about them because they were middle age by the time I came along.

At one time in his youth, my father "rode the rails" to Oregon where

he stayed and worked for a short time for a doctor. I don't know in what capacity, certainly not professionally, because he'd not had more than a grammar school education. My mother also was never educated beyond grammar school.

S.J.: Do you know why they moved to Nebraska?

Day: My uncle had a farm and we moved there to run the farm but what the arrangement was I don't know, if it was sharecropping a percentage of the crops, I don't know. My uncle lived in Lincoln, Nebraska and was a civil servant. I think he worked for the Veteran's Administration in a hospital. My dad and mother operated his little farm. It was a small farm. I don't know what they did in Kansas. Before my time there were three older children in the family and they were born one right after the other. My mother contracted tuberculosis so they moved Kansas to Colorado for her health. She did recover in Colorado Springs. They went back to Kansas. I suppose whatever background they had had was out the window because of the expense of moving and the illness and all of that. I don't know what they did in Kansas before they went to Nebraska and ran the farm in Franklin for my uncle.

S.J.: Did they run that same farm until the time you came to California?

Day: Yes. The farm was so unproductive that my uncle put it up for sale and we rented a house in town, Franklin, for about three years before moving to California. My father did whatever day labor he could find, which was very little. That income was supplemented by my older sister's income as a school teacher. She was living at home. My brother was sending us some money from California whenever he could. Our house rent was \$25 a month for a two story, six bedroom frame home with basement. There was an oversize lot in which was planted a garden and some fruit trees.

S.J.: You say there were five children?

Day: Yes.

S.J.: And you were the second youngest?

Day: Yes.

S.J.: What were the children's ages?

Day: The first three had a year or a year and a half between them and then there was ten years until I came along. Three years later my younger sister was born.

S.J.: So you were the baby of the family for a while then?

Day: Yes, for three years.

S.J.: Do you remember how large the farm was?

Day: No. It was small. Acreage-wise I have no idea.

S.J.: How about extra help? Was it large enough so that occasionally, say at harvest time, your father hired extra workers?

Day: No. At harvest time all I can remember is the big harvesting machines coming in and doing whatever it is they do at harvest time. My mother cooked for the crew and fed them all but as far as having a hired hand per se, no, I don't think we ever did.

S.J.: Did your older brothers and sisters help your father?

Day: Not much I'm afraid. The oldest boy, when he was a teenager, started running away from home which he did regularly every year or so. He was more interested in fun things than helping out at home. Then a girl was next, she taught school. She got her degree I think at the University in Lincoln. She taught school and helped the family financially. The uncle who owned the farm lived in Lincoln, Nebraska and gave room and board to my sister and financed her college education. Then the third child was a boy. Once out of high school he went to work for the little bank in Franklin and helped the family financially until pastures looked greener in California. Then he came out ahead of the family, probably due to the influence of the older boy. He had run away and come home and been a cowboy in Colorado. At one point he joined the Navy so that took care of him for four years. So he was in California and I suppose that was the first family contact with California, his glowing letters which he sent home. So the younger son was wooed to California, then the rest of us came out.

S.J.: It sounds as though your father was doing just about all of the work on the farm then. When you were old enough to help out a little bit did you have some chores that you did?

Day: I don't think so but I remember being in the garden with my mother. She had a huge garden. I suppose I probably picked apples and pulled weeds. I remember picking tomatoes, have you ever picked tomatoes? The plant makes you itch like crazy, I remember that. I don't remember any routine chores I had. I think I was just a general helper where and when needed. Actually, it was never a burden.

S.J.: Did your mother work in the fields when your father needed the help?

Day: No, she didn't work in the fields. As I remember she was always in the garden or in the orchard or in the house cooking or sewing clothes for us. That type of thing. She never worked in the fields.

S.J.: Did you have livestock? Pigs or chickens or something like that?

Day: Yes. Chickens, pigs, cows, horses and a couple of dogs. That's all I can remember. We didn't have sheep or fun things like turkeys or ducks

or anything like that.

S.J.: Were most of the other children in school also children of farmers?

Day: Yes, they were.

S.J.: Was it a country school that you went to?

Day: A little red one room school house on the hill. [It] had a great big wood stove in the back of the room. I think there were probably eight grades. There couldn't have been very many of us, maybe two or three youngsters in each grade. The first thing in the morning the first grade would go up to the benches in the front of the room and recite their lessons, then the second grade would do theirs and so on through the day. It is a very pleasant memory.

S.J.: You liked to go to school?

Day: Yes. My memory of my childhood is pleasant. I can't say like a lot of people, "Oh, I had a wonderful childhood." I don't feel that way about it but I don't feel any pain either. I didn't realize, until in retrospect, how poor we were. Somehow or other my parents were able to shield us from anything negative like that.

S.J.: They never discussed finances in front of you?

Day: No. The only thing about finances I can remember is that right inside of our door, on the wall, we had a hook and we charged the groceries at a little grocery store which was a grocery store and shoe store and had nicknacks and all that type of thing, a cracker barrel and a pickle barrel. Our grocery tags were always hung on that little metal hook until the crops were in and I can remember my folks taking those tags down and figuring up how much we owned at the store, but we were never hungry. We were never ragged. I suppose we were just like most of the families around there. There were the few professional people in town who were spoken of perhaps not very kindly. "Mr. Beehaus has the meat market and charges outrageous prices and lets his little girl go to school in the wintertime without any long underwear on and it's a wonder she didn't catch her death!" In other words, there was a division there of the haves and have nots. My folks didn't mean to be malicious but perhaps it would be just like I would talk about Rockefeller and all his money, with that tone of voice. These were things that I remember. I wondered why the little girl didn't catch her death of pneumonia because she didn't wear that long underwear that we'd pull down and fold over at the ankles and then pull up our long stockings over it. We had that cumbersome necessary winter clothing.

S.J.: But you always remember having the necessities?

Day: Yes.

S.J.: Did you have extras occasionally?

Day: Our extras were on Saturday night. Like everybody else we would go to town and all the cars were parked along on the street. Two or three women would get together and sit in one car and visit. The men were out on the street corner visiting and we kids would go to the drugstore which was also the ice cream parlor where they had all day suckers for a penny, this was our treat. We got our Saturday night penny lollipops and that was about the extent of it.

I do remember school "extras". I'd been sick and absent from school one time and the next day when I went back the teacher said, "I'm going to loan you a dime." It was for an assembly. I think it was Shakespearean actors which must have been entirely over the head of grammar school youngsters. Occasionally a magician or something like that would come and present a program in the auditorium at school. We were charged a dime to see it. This happened in the city school which was first through twelfth grades after we had left the farm and moved to town. I entered the town school in the fourth grade and left after seventh grade. That was about as much as was ever spent on us in the way of extracurricular things. Once a year Barnum and Bailey Circus came to town and we kids got 25¢ each to spend on whatever we wanted. Somehow the folks always managed to scrape up the admission to the big tent.

S.J.: But you don't seem to think you were really deprived at that time? Looking back on it you might say you were very poor but at the time you didn't seem to think you were. Were most of the other children in the same situation you were in?

Day: There was one thing that had a very strong influence on me. One of our family friends who had a more prosperous farm than ours had a little boy who was just a year younger than I. He got a tricycle. I wanted a tricycle in the worst way. I would have given both legs for a tricycle. That has stayed with me and I have never forgotten that. If a child is capable of making a vow, my vow at that time was that my children will never be deprived of a tricycle. It did have an influence on me. That's one thing I remember, how passionately I wanted a tricycle. But of course, I didn't ever get one. We couldn't afford it. My husband and I have two children and when they were each old enough to have a tricycle they had a tricycle. When they were old enough to have a bicycle they each had bicycles. When they were sixteen and old enough to have a car, they each got a car. I think this is a direct result of me being deprived of that toy that I wanted so passionately.

The only other thing that I remember that left a poverty mark on me was that if one of the youngsters in my class at school would have a birthday party I'd bring home the invitation and my mother would say, "Oh no, not another present to buy." I got to where when I'd get an invitation I wouldn't even mention it to my mother and didn't go to the party either because I didn't want to hear my mother say that. There was a little newspaper which was published once a week and it always mentioned so-and-so's party and who had attended. My mother must have thought, "My poor

Elizabeth. She's not popular. She never gets invited to these parties." Those are the two outstanding "poverty" things that have stayed with me and probably have influenced my life down through the years. Other than that I didn't feel the pinch of being terribly poor.

S.J.: Did your family place a lot of emphasis on religion?

Day: Yes.

S.J.: Did you go to church?

Day: Yes, every Sunday morning and evening and Wednesday prayer meetings.

S.J.: What religion was that?

Day: My parents were Church of the Brethren which is called the Dunkards. However, in the little town of Franklin there was just the Methodist Church and the Congregational Church. We went to the Methodist Church. The siblings older than I left the Methodist Church when they grew into teenagers and went to the Congregational Church. Looking at it now, it was not a matter of what one church teaches or what the other one teaches because I'm sure they were very, very similar. They were both Protestant Churches. Rather it was just, "I'm exerting myself and I'm not going to that church anymore. I'm going to pick this other church and go there now."

S.J.: Did your parents encourage you to go to church to begin with or was that something you had to do?

Day: We had to. That was just a matter of having to go. It never crossed our minds not to.

S.J.: Did you continue going to church later on in your life?

Day: Until I had my own family I was in and out of a study of all the religions. I'm now either an agnostic or an atheist. I tend to be more agnostic than atheistic although in my early adult years I was declaring that I was an atheist, but I've tempered that a little bit as I've grown older and wiser with the experiences of life.

S.J.: Did the church you went to have a lot of social events? Some churches have pie suppers or dances or things like that.

Day: No dancing, that was definitely a taboo. On Sunday you didn't do anything but sit around and rest and cook big dinners. If the rodeo came to town and it was a Sunday we could never go. There wasn't much except the church suppers. I don't know what the occasion would have been for those. I suppose if a visiting minister was there then all the ladies brought their dishes and we had a church supper.

I do remember the country school house. They had what they called the

box suppers where the young ladies made cakes and sandwiches, made a little lunch, put it in a shoe box and decorated it as if it were a gift. I wasn't old enough to participate but my older sister did. On a specific night this "box social" was held at the local country school house and all the young ladies participated. There was an auctioneer and he would stand up and hold up one of the lunch boxes and say, "What am I bid for this box?" This was a way of raising money. It was at the school house so I suppose it was for the school or church. The young men would find out which girl had decorated which box so the fellow who was sweet on her would out bid the rest of them and get the box. The young lady who prepared the lunch and the boy who bought it would go off somewhere and eat the goodies. That was a fun time.

S.J.: Were there many other social events?

Day: The young people did have outdoor summer parties where they played group games and ate homemade ice cream and cake. In the winter they had in-house taffy pulls and played parlor games.

S.J.: If you did have some leisure time in the evenings or on Sundays what did you do?

Day: We were a somewhat musical family and often would sing hymns around the piano which my sister played accompanied by a mandolin or guitar, violin or banjo played by my younger brother or father. Apparently God was never blamed for our adversity!

My mother always wrote a letter on Sunday to my one runaway brother if she knew where he was. When my other brother left home he too was included in the Sunday letter writing which she did not like to do. We kids just played. I think the summer evenings were pretty much shortly after the sun went down and supper was over, then it was time to go to bed. The adults played cards. Their favorite card game was rook, especially in the wintertime when they couldn't be outside and the days were short. A neighbor couple would come over and they would play cards. Sometimes just a group of four men would play cards. I remember getting up in the morning in the winter when there wasn't field work to do, and my daddy and three other neighbor farmers would still be sitting at the kitchen table playing cards. They would have played rook all night long. The women rarely played except as couples with the men. I think the men liked to do it because they figured it was daring to stay up all night long.

S.J.: Since you had neighbors who were also farmers did they help each other? If one had an unusual amount of work to do would they help that man then another time he would return the favor?

Day: I believe so. I don't think it was that big of a deal. It wasn't anything that was exchanged on a regular basis that I recall. If there was an emergency or an unusual circumstance I'm sure they did because my recollection is that we were on friendly terms with all our neighbors

and with a helping attitude.

S.J.: Was there much more of a community atmosphere there than there was when you moved to California?

Day: Oh yes, very definitely. When we moved to California we were aliens in an alien land until we learned our way around. When we came to Bakersfield my father had no trade so the older children in the family helped out financially.

S.J.: Several people have told me that during the Depression you might have had enough food but no cash money. A lot of times they had to resort to bartering. Do you remember any of that going on?

Day: Not on a large scale. We did our own butchering. We had our own meat and eggs and milk. I don't remember that we had an excess or a garden supply that we bartered. My mother canned all the produce. I also don't recall dollar bills floating around either so maybe this was just something that was a part of my life that made no particular impression on me.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit about the house that you lived in?

Day: There was a big wood stove in the kitchen and in the wintertime when I'd come home from school there was the very pungent odor of woolen blankets strung around on the backs of the chairs by the stove drying on wash day. If the weather was bad, my mother would wash and have to bring them in to dry. The smell of wool drying was very pungent. That was the kitchen.

There was the front room where we ate our meals on the dining table rather than in the kitchen although my mother did have a little work table. We had water in the house from a pump but no bathroom facilities. There was an outside privy. There were four bedrooms of which we used three. The fourth one was what we called the "north room". It was shut off from the rest of the house in the wintertime and was deadly cold. In there we had the milk separator and I don't know what else we used it for. We stored some food in there because we didn't have a smoke house. Apparently it was like a cold storage room in the wintertime. That's about all I remember about the house.

S.J.: Do you remember it being a comfortable house?

Day: Yes. There was a big potbellied stove in the front room and it was not an unpleasant house. It was awfully old and run down but we never had junk laying around. My father was always tidy. We didn't have old farm machinery or old rusty stuff laying around. He kept the place up so that though poor it had a nice appearance.

S.J.: You weren't very old when the Depression began. Do you have very many memories of the Depression? When it hit or perhaps your parents

discussing how times were becoming increasingly difficult?

S.J.: I remember that Hoover got blamed for the Depression but my folks said they were going to vote for him anyway because they, "weren't going to have that Roosevelt in there because he was going to make whiskey legal and that would be the end of morality," so they would not vote for him. The irony of it is that after we came to California my father was forced to work on Roosevelt's WPA [Works Progress Administration] so, although he didn't vote for the man, the man provided his livelihood in later years. No, I don't remember any talk of what we were going to do or that times were getting really bad. I don't recall that.

S.J.: How about outward appearances? Did you still seem to have enough food and clothing?

Day: Yes. Of course, enough clothing didn't mean a closet full but my mother must have done an awful lot of washing because I'm sure we didn't have but a few changes of clothing. We always had clean clothes. Every morning we put on clean clothes so I suppose what few we had she kept mended and washed so that we didn't feel deprived of enough clothing. We always had coats and, frankly, I don't know how they managed to keep us in shoes.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

S.J.: The drought did affect Nebraska didn't it?

Day: Yes.

S.J.: The weather wasn't cooperating?

Day: No, never. That's one reason they could never make ends meet. It was always too hot, too cold, too dry, never too wet, insects and locusts. The only insect I remember being detrimental to our crops was the locusts. There was hail, of course, which often stripped the wheat or corn. When it was time to harvest the wheat it was always with an eye on the sky to hurry and get it in before the rains came, or the hail, or something to ruin the crop. It was almost as if the cosmos was trying to kick us out of the area because for years it wasn't conducive to prosperous farming in any way.

S.J.: Did your father use the horse and plow?

Day: Yes.

S.J.: Were there any tractors in the area?

Day: No. I don't remember any farm that was mechanized.

S.J.: Do you know much about the way the farmers used to plant? Some people

have said that most farmers didn't practice crop rotation or any of the other more sophisticated farming methods to conserve the land.

Day: I don't know that the idea of crop rotation had even been advanced that long ago. If so, we either didn't know about it or it was a "new fangled thing that somebody up at the university had come up with." I remember the corn field was always the corn field and the alfalfa field was always the alfalfa and the wheat field the same way. There was never crop rotation. Of course, we couldn't let the land lie. We had to plant every year or we certainly would have starved to death. No crop rotation or preservation or fertilization that I knew of.

S.J.: So it's quite possible that part of the problem was with very unsophisticated farming methods at that time?

Day: Definitely, probably farming like my grandparents farmed, certainly no progress or advancement.

S.J.: Did you ever hear anything about some programs that President Roosevelt had? One of them paid farmers to shoot their cattle and pigs so the market prices would rise. Do you remember hearing anything like that?

Day: Vaguely, nothing specific, just an uneasy feeling when you mentioned it. I just had an uneasy feeling that something like that was going on but what it was I don't know.

S.J.: How about another program where he paid the farmers to either plow under their crops or not plant at all?

Day: Yes. I had heard about that but it was not in our area. It was not prevalent probably because the farms were all too small.

S.J.: But you had heard of it?

Day: I had heard of that, yes. I hope I'm not confusing something I heard afterwards. I am vague on it.

S.J.: When you left in 1934 was there any one thing that made you decide to move?

Day: Probably. My father ran for county sheriff. The county sheriff was a friend of ours. He was actually a shirtpail relative. My father used to like to go with him when he'd try to round up the bootleggers or chase the bad guys. For my father this was a daring and exciting diversion.

Once a year when Franklin had the county fair there would be automobile races. The sheriff liked to drive in these races each year. One year he had an accident on the race track which killed him. There was a lot of talk about gangsters doing him in. It was whispered that he had

been after a bootlegger or somebody that was on the other side of the law. There was talk that he was possibly shot when he was on the race track. So Cliff Garrett was dead. He died in an accident and they buried him. There was no coroner in town and there was no investigation into it. My father, because he like the thrill of that life and was a good friend of Cliff's, campaigned to be elected sheriff but lost the election. Although I don't remember them saying, "Now's the time to move to California," I expect that that was probably the final straw.

S.J.: And his farming was not successful enough to support the family?

Day: Not at all. When he'd hoped to win this election and be the sheriff and when the votes showed that he wasn't that popular I expect that just about broke his heart. He was a man of great potential had he not had to work his life out. He was a smart man. Perhaps he didn't break out of the mold and do something else. He did have the potential and could have had he not been saddled with a family of five children.

S.J.: When you decided to leave Nebraska was there any question about where you'd go? Was it always California or did you consider going other places?

Day: No, it was always California. The third child, the brother who was ten years older than I, had come to California and gone to work in the Kress Five and Dime Store in Bakersfield at that time. An uncle managed Kress and he offered my brother a job. So my brother came out and went to work there. He was the one who'd worked in the bank and always helped the family financially, almost depriving himself. As I recall, he always brought his pay envelope home and gave it to the folks and really spent very little on himself except for an occasional date with a girl. He urged the family to move to California.

S.J.: He wrote letters home?

Day: Yes, because he was sending home money to Nebraska and said, "Why don't you come out? You're just getting dug deeper and deeper into a hole back there." He was just a young man of about twenty at the time. If I was eleven he was 21. He urged us to come out which is why we came to California because he had a job and he was contributing. My older sister, who was teaching school in Nebraska was contributing financially, came with us. She didn't ever get her teaching credential in California so that income was cut off. My daddy was able to pick up a job here and there. We left Bakersfield and went to San Diego after about one year where he worked on the WPA [Works Progress Administration] at North Island.

S.J.: When your brother wrote these letters home do you remember anything specific that he said that was so great about California?

Day: The climate, the weather, all the things we brag about now!

Plenty of food, citrus. We had no oranges in Nebraska. We did grow grapes back there but they weren't sold for ten and fifteen cents a bucket like the glowing terms he'd write in his letters. He didn't exaggerate. The comparison between the two states was just like the difference between Asia and South America. There was really that much difference. It was like an entirely different world.

S.J.: Did people in Nebraska talk about California? Were there any rumors that you had heard among your friends or other townspeople that were also considering coming to California?

Day: One family came to California but before we came out they came back. I don't remember what the father's occupation was. I don't know why they came back. There was a boy my age and he always spoke of it. It was a great thing, "When we were in California we'd go down to L.A." We thought that was ridiculous that he didn't say Los Angeles, but it had been a great adventure for him. I won't say we really looked up to him. We laughed at him because he was such a braggart but we were envious of him because he'd been to California. Like I say I don't know why the family came back. I suppose they couldn't make it in California. Other than that, I don't remember people ever talking about, "Let's go someplace else and do something."

S.J.: It was unusual for you to leave there?

Day: Yes it was. At that time it was unusual for us to leave.

S.J.: Do you remember if you had any expectations of what California would be like? Whether you expected a great deal more than there really was there or whether you were pleasantly surprised?

Day: I think we expected much more. It's human nature that you take your problems with you. You can't blame everything on the locale and I think my father was bitterly disappointed that he couldn't just pick up a job and provide for his family. I think for my mother it was fine because she was relieved of the drudgery of being a farm wife. She had only a house to take care of. We lived on a lot like everybody else in a "normal" house. It wasn't 24 hours of toil, toil, toil. I think for her it was Utopia even though there still wasn't enough money. For myself, no, I don't recall. At eleven years old it was just a new school, the dread of a new school, this type of thing.

S.J.: Was it an adventure for you? Did you find it exciting to go to a new place?

Day: Yes, the trip out was exciting too.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit about that? First, you probably had to sell the things that you had on your farm.

Day: Yes. We sold everything at a public auction for whatever we could get and, of course, I have no idea how much cash we had. My brother who'd come to California and wrote for us to come had a car, an old Chevy which he left when he went to California. We had a car that was called a Whippit. We drove the two cars when we came to California. My brother's boyfriend whom he'd left behind in Nebraska came out with us to drive my brother's car. Along the way we would stop at places to stay. They didn't call them motels. I don't know what they called them.

S.J.: Tourist Cabins?

Day: Yes. We carried our own bedding and enough dishes to cook with and our food so that it was just a little place with a mattress and bed and kitchenette. It had a stove of some kind. When we would stop at these places it was, "Take in the bedding, take in the pots," this type of thing. My mother was so afraid that we would get bed bugs. To her it would have been worse than getting syphilis or gonorrhea because just poor white trash had bed bugs in Nebraska. We never had them but that was always a fear that we'd get bed bugs. So she would be just panic stricken until we finally got to California because it was putting her blankets on those mattresses where other people had put their bedding. We never did pick up any bed bugs but to her it was a real traumatic thing to have to put her bedding where someone else had put their bedding. The trip was several days of course. I remember it was a happy time for my father because he thought he was going to a new and better life. The trip itself was a drag on my mother and, of course, we kids were like kids are when you travel. They get bored but it wasn't particularly unpleasant. It was just a long, long trip.

S.J.: Do you have any idea how much money your father had with him?

Day: I couldn't venture a guess. It couldn't have been very much. I would say less than \$1,000 surely.

S.J.: But it was enough for you to pay for rental at these tourist cabins which was a lot more than some people had.

Day: Yes.

S.J.: Did you ever see any people camped out along side of the road on your way out? Which way did you come through?

Day: We came through Colorado, northern New Mexico, Santa Fe. I don't know what highway that would have been. I don't remember seeing any people camp out.

S.J.: When you came to the border of California was that through Arizona?

Day: It must have been Arizona.

S.J.: Do you remember anything about the border coming over? You were stopped and inspected?

Day: We were stopped and inspected. I'm trying to remember if we had to leave anything. I don't believe we did. But I do remember that there were some inspectors overseeing the burning of some people's bedding, why I don't know. I can remember my mother saying, "How sad. Those people didn't have hardly anything and there they were destroying some of their property." Whether it was infected with some kind of vermin, I have no idea but we did have to open all of our stuff. We did not travel like the proverbial Okies because we had nothing on top of our car. We had a little trailer that was hitched behind one of the cars and we had all our stuff packed in that trailer so we made a nice compact little package.

S.J.: Did you have any furniture?

Day: No. We brought no furniture, just personal items and the necessities.

S.J.: The cars were not very crowded then since you had two cars.

Day: My older sister and my brother's boyfriend rode in the one car and my younger sister and I and my parents were in the other car.

S.J.: When you first came into California where did you go? Was it directly to Bakersfield?

Day: Yes. When he came out and was working at Kress, my brother had taken a room in a home of a widow and her daughter and granddaughter. When we were coming out he had rented a house across the street from where he had this rented room so he had the house ready for us. He ended up marrying the daughter where he rented the room!

S.J.: So he had a house already for you which was quite nice?

Day: Yes, and partially furnished.

S.J.: Was your older brother with you then?

Day: No. He was off running around.

S.J.: So your father went out looking for work?

Day: Yes.

S.J.: What happened with that? You said he had great difficulty.

Day: I don't remember any specific job that he ever had. I think he did day labor and odd jobs, what he could find and when he could find them. Most of the time he didn't work. He didn't have work.

S.J.: Was he looking for field work or just anything?

Day: Just anything. He wasn't a shirker. He would have done any odd jobs, anything that he could find that anybody had the money to hire him to do.

S.J.: You had a car so he probably drove out to the fields to look for work?

Day: It's possible although I don't remember that he did in Bakersfield. For one thing, I remember that the heat was quite an assault. Although it gets hot in Nebraska, I remember that we had to acclimatize ourselves to Bakersfield. This in itself might have prevented him from going out into the fields looking for work.

S.J.: You came out in the middle of summer then?

Day: It was the end of summer because we started school in September and I think I went to Emerson Junior High School.

S.J.: How long did you stay in that house that your brother rented for you?

Day: We probably stayed there for a year then we went to San Diego.

S.J.: Could you describe that house to me? What was it like?

Day: It had three bedrooms in a line, a front room, a dining-kitchen room and a back porch and a bath, very small and compact little house.

S.J.: Could you compare it to the house you'd grown up in in Nebraska?

Day: Newer, later built. It wasn't a new house but it wasn't old. It was just like a low income city house that you see around town.

S.J.: Did you feel it was a step down from the house you lived in before?

Day: No, because the farm house was just an old farm house and the in town house was just an old house. I don't know that the old farm house was ever painted, probably just weathered wood. No, this was a town house and it was a nice house, nicer than the farm house that we'd lived in. In spite of my daddy not being able to get work, it was a step up for us because it was out of the rut that just keeps pulling you down and pulling you down.

S.J.: Then you started school.

Day: Yes. I think it was Emerson Junior High School but because my daddy wasn't able to get steady work then we went to San Diego. My older brother, the one who was in the Navy, was living in San Diego at the time. That's where he settled after he got out of the service. So we went down there and it was along about then that Roosevelt instituted

the WPA and my father was able to get on that in San Diego. He used to have to take the ferry out to North Island. However, the income was supplemented by whatever type of welfare program there was then. I don't remember what it was called.

S.J.: They usually called it Relief.

Day: I guess that's what it was.

S.J.: Then you could get what they called commodities which would be equivalent to our food stamps. You could go in and they would give you some staples. Is that what you had?

Day: I think they brought food to us. I know they brought some kitchen towels, just very cheap ones. They were probably flour sack kitchen towels but my mother never got over taking charity. It was the most devastating thing to her. After the joys and hopes of leaving the poverty of the farm then coming to a new life and find out that things were no better money wise, as a matter of fact, they were worse. They had to go on relief. It was devastating. You're right, that's the phrase that was used and whenever the worker would come around they always came with an "I am God" attitude. It was bad enough to have to be on relief without being treated like dirt which is what they did. I was a young teenager then but I was mortified seeing it reflected in my mother's face but we had to have the help.

S.J.: How long did this go on?

Day: Probably about four years.

S.J.: You stayed in San Diego from 1935 to 1939?

Day: Yes, because in 1939 I graduated from high school, that's right.

S.J.: What did this do to your father? If your mother was extremely upset he must have been at least as upset?

Day: Yes. Whenever the relief worker came around my father was always sick and angry, always angry. I suppose the accumulation of anger. He never made a scene but as soon as the worker would leave he would just explode, not at us. It was just the frustration. It was always anger with him and with my mother it was humiliation. Yes, I think about four years. We had enough to eat, though, I don't ever remember being hungry.

S.J.: Do you remember what your father did on the WPA? Perhaps it was a series of jobs wherever they needed him?

Day: I think they were doing land leveling or whatever it was they were doing on North Island. It's the Naval Base there in the Bay in San Diego.

They were doing work for the Navy on the air strip there. What he actually did was probably pick and shovel work.

S.J.: He was not excited by the work he did then? He didn't find it challenging or a job he would have chosen?

Day: Not by any means. It was a matter of bread and butter and we didn't actually live in San Diego. We lived in Pacific Beach which is around the Bay so it was a long commute for him. He had to go to San Diego and catch the ferry and go out to North Island and then back home again.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

S.J.: Do you remember the house you lived in there?

Day: Yes. It was an old store building that had been converted into a house. There was a main part across the front with a big wide porch. It apparently was an old store building and across the front was the room which would have been the main room of the store with the living quarters in the back. It had all been turned into a house. Part of the time we were living there my brother who was the oldest in the family had a flower business. He specialized in growing dahlias and my father helped him with his little flower ranch. Sometimes my father would take the flowers out and peddle them door to door over in Loma Linda and in some of the nicer areas around San Diego. That was a source of income that helped. The house was just a converted old store building. By then I was old enough that I was very much embarrassed and ashamed to be living in an old store building rather than a nice house. I was in high school and I apparently had inherited a lot of pride because I was aware of being poor and ashamed of it which had a bearing on my social life. I was hesitant to ask anyone to come to my house because I lived in an old store building. I'm sure that had a bearing on my adult outlook on life although I've come to terms with life now after all these years.

S.J.: But at the time you were sensitive to this. Other high school students weren't cruel to you or teasing you about this this was just your own sensitivity.

Day: Yes. I suppose maybe the years of poverty when I didn't know we were poor somehow came to my awareness when I was a teenager. "My goodness we're poor and we've been poor all our lives." I was ashamed of it but no one ever said anything. I had friends, close friends but I was careful and very selective. Lots of times I would meet my friends rather than have them come to my home which is sad as I look back but it's the way of youth.

S.J.: Did you know other kids who were in a similar situation?

Day: Yes, my number one girlfriend. Her folks were on relief and she was as proud as I was because for two or three years I didn't know she was on relief. There was a kind of work program through the high school

we attended where you could work in the office and earn a little bit of money. We lived in Pacific Beach and we caught the bus to La Jolla High School. When it was made known at the high school that there were work hours available I made application and my girlfriend did too. I said, "Well, what are you doing that for?" Then it came out that her folks were on relief too. So she'd been just as embarrassed about it as I. As far as anyone ever ridiculing me, no, the embarrassment was all within myself. How many people knew of our poverty I don't know, but certainly a lot more than I was aware of. Those things are just known.

S.J.: You were from Nebraska and you mentioned that you didn't like being grouped with the Okies. Can you remember a time when you were? Did this ever come up or were you thinking that because you were on relief you might be associated with him?

Day: Yes, because we were from the midwest and on relief. We set ourselves apart because my mother was scrupulously clean, like I told you about the bed bugs. In our minds the Okies were dirty and lacking in morals. This was an objective view of course because we didn't have any friends amongst the grape picker migrants and I'm sure we did them a disservice in our minds but there was the distinction. They also followed the crops which we didn't. We might have been better off had we done so. We were a step above them in our own minds.

S.J.: When you were in Bakersfield that one year from 1934 to 1935 do you remember meeting a lot of other kids who were from Oklahoma, Texas and who might have been called Okies?

Day: No.

S.J.: It was a little bit before the big influx?

Day: Yes. Actually my first hand acquaintance with the Okies was after I graduated from La Jolla High School in 1939. I came back up to Bakersfield where my brother, the one who'd originally come out here, was still living and lives there still today. He'll be 70 years old this July. I stayed with him and his wife and worked, got a job in a bank in Oildale and this was where I had acquaintance with the Okies. They'd come in and ask for loans so this was on a one-to-one basis. I never went out into the migrant camps or anything like that but I was in the loan department at the bank and I knew what their financial situation was. They would come and ask for loans and, of course, there was no way that the bank would loan them money. We did used to drive by the migrant camps just to look at them, slumming we called it.

S.J.: The first time in 1934 did you ever see any ditch camps where Okies pitched tents or put up shacks beside the road or under bridges beside rivers?

Day: I don't think so. The only place where I knew Okies were was out around Arvin and Cottonwood, in that area.

S.J.: But the first time you hadn't had much contact with them? It wasn't until you came back which was about 1940.

Day: Yes. I graduated in June 1939 and then came back about 1940. Then my folks came to Bakersfield and my father got permanent work. He went to work for an agricultural pump company and worked until he retired or I should say he quit. He was old enough to be on social security and my mother contracted leukemia and died so my father just quit work and drew social security.

S.J.: What year was that?

Day: It was 1949 when my mother died. I lived and worked in Bakersfield at the bank. I met my husband in Bakersfield and we were married in 1941.

S.J.: In 1935 and again when you came back to Bakersfield, although your father wasn't working out in the fields, did you have any knowledge of the people who were working in the fields? Any friends of the family or parents of school friends?

Day: No. No contact at all with the agricultural community.

S.J.: So you probably didn't know about anything going on there, what sort of work they did or how they were treated?

Day: No. I surely didn't.

S.J.: Do you think that very many of the Okies drew government aid from what you could gather? You said you felt you might be associated with them because you were from the midwest and taking aid. Do you think very many of them really did take aid?

Day: In looking back I can't think of any specific instance at all.

S.J.: But you had the stereotype in your mind?

Day: Yes, in my mind. Looking back it seemed like they just made do. They arrived with ten or twelve in one car and they harvested the grapes then moved on up the state to harvest whatever was there. If any one of them became ill they went to the county hospital. As for actually being on relief where they received a check or any kind of regular assistance, I have no knowledge of that at all and I'm inclined to think that they didn't. I'm only speaking from the outside. I don't know.

S.J.: Since you mentioned health I wondered if your family had any health problems during this time that you were on relief in the late 1930s.

Day: No. We were very fortunate. In view of the fact that now we think everything is stress related, how could they not have been ill? Perhaps it was the fact that we lived on the farm and the food that we had was fresh and wholesome.

S.J.: How about when you came to California? Was there a great change in your diet?

Day: Probably there was. When I think about what we ate in Nebraska I remember all the things in season, the garden things in season, the farm products. When we came to California and lived in Bakersfield it seems to me that we had potatoes and eggs and eggs and potatoes around the clock, and of course, grapes. That's one reason we came to California to get some of those good grapes. We had the grapes and oranges. They were always plentiful but as for the rest of the diet, we probably didn't have as much of the green produce as we had when we lived on the farm. My mother didn't can any California food.

S.J.: You probably didn't have quite as healthy a diet as you did on the farm.

Day: It was just day to day, whatever was cheapest and in season.

S.J.: One thing that can separate the "Okie culture" from others is the way of cooking. Do Nebraskans have a particular way of cooking? Is there anything different?

Day: Totally bland, everything was totally bland. I don't think my mother even knew what garlic was. We didn't raise it, none of the farmers raised it so she didn't cook with it. Nothing was seasoned except for salt and pepper. None of the spices.

S.J.: It was more of a midwestern way of preparing food then?

Day: Yes, I think so, just mashed potatoes with butter and salt and pepper.

S.J.: What was the most common method of cooking? The Oklahomans seemed to fry everything. Was there any special way that you prepared the food?

Day: There were a lot of fried things and a lot of things out of the oven. I won't go so far as to say casserole dishes because here again things were very plain. You didn't mix things up together. There were a lot of fried things. The potatoes were fried or boiled. My mother baked a lot of desserts. We made donuts and made our own mince meat and this type of thing so she made her own pies, probably most things were fried or baked. Of course, when we butchered we'd have the roasts and that type of thing would be in the oven in the wintertime. In the summertime we didn't use the wood stove. We had a coal oil stove which didn't have an oven. It had little burners. It was a little narrow stove. I think it was probably coal oil that they cooked on because it wasn't nearly as hot. It seems odd that we would feel the difference in the heat in Bakersfield because Nebraska is hot in the summer. During the summer often my sisters and mother and I would go down in the cellar where it was nice and cool. We had a cellar door that was open and we had some kind of coal oil lamps, some self-contained lamp which we used in storms. My mother stored canned goods there. When

we lived in town we would go in the basement and my mother and older sister would embroider, fancy work. That's the way we spent a lot of our daytime summer hours.

S.J.: When you came back to Bakersfield you seemed to have more opportunities to meet what people called Okies. Could you tell me something about the local hostility toward the Okies at that time?

Day: We laughed at them. We thought they were the scum of the earth. They were no better than pigs. I think that was prevalent. There was no charity as I think back. I don't think I'm just drawing on my own lack of charity in my nature. I think we didn't want them there or if they were there we just looked at them with ridicule and that type of thing. We were very uncharitable.

S.J.: Did you ever encounter people who you knew were Okies, perhaps their accent gave them away but they did have clean clothes? They seemed to be just like you or me or anybody else. Did you ever run into Okies of that sort?

Day: Not that I recall. It seems to me that you recognized an Okie by the way he looked. There were several Okie families who were not migrant crop workers and with whom we became acquainted when they came to our church, Holy Rollers. They were honest, God fearing, clean, hard workers who took menial jobs as janitors or domestics. They arrived in California several years after we did, immigrants of the true Dust Bowl era. But even this type of Okie was recognizable by a certain look about the eyes, defeatism, perhaps, and, of course, their Okie grammar when they spoke.

S.J.: In which case, it's quite possible that a man from New York could look like a man from Oklahoma and you might call that man from New York an Okie because he was dirty.

Day: Yes, except for the accent. They had that twang in their talk, that midwest Okie twang and it's very likely that there were some Okies who were clean and just like we were. We just didn't recognize them or didn't put them in that class.

S.J.: Some of them worked very hard to lose their accents too.

Day: I'm sure they did.

S.J.: So when they went in public places, banks, schools, stores, churches, do you think that people recognized them as being Okies and perhaps didn't treat them in the same way they would treat other people?

Day: I would say definitely. That was my experience.

S.J.: Did you have any other reason to think these people were undesirable

aside from the way they looked and the general stereotype? Did you ever have any experience where they did things that offended you?

Day: I think the fact that their children were always runny, snotty nosed and just sort of left to shift for themselves. We shouldn't have judged their morals but of course that is in retrospect. They were a new breed and we thought they just didn't add anything to the community.

S.J.: Do you remember the sorts of things that people criticized them for? For instance, people didn't think it was right for them to use Kern General for free and then have the Kern County tax payers pay the bills. Do you remember anything like that?

Day: No.

S.J.: Some other people didn't like them in their schools with the other white children.

Day: There was that because you felt that they were dirty and they'd contaminate you. When you were around them you always had this feeling like you wanted to draw your skirt up around tight so that you didn't come into physical contact with them. It was definitely a stereotype thing. Of course, we just fed each other this type of thing so I'm sure that much of it was totally unfair.

S.J.: But when there are a few who are that way it gives reason for a stereotype to begin in the first place. You'd said you'd read The Grapes of Wrath and that the stereotype Steinbeck created there you found to be true?

Day: Very, very accurate, yes. I think from what I had seen and heard I think he hit it right on the head. I think it was an excellent representation.

S.J.: The way they talked for instance?

Day: Even the family unit like grandma and grandpa, you didn't see that so much in other people but they brought the old folks with them. I guess they couldn't leave them back there to die. I think he hit the nail right on the head from what I saw of the 1940 Okies in Buttonwillow.

S.J.: Then when World War II came you were still living in Bakersfield?

Day: Yes.

S.J.: You married about that time?

Day: Yes. We were married a month before Pearl Harbor.

S.J.: How did the War affect you? Was your husband in the service?

Day: Yes. We were married in November and Pearl Harbor was in December 1941.

He was not drafted until June and then he went to San Diego to Camp Callon for his basic, then to Los Angeles to radio school and I stayed in Bakersfield and continued to work and saw him on the weekends and when I could. From there he went to Stuart, Florida for two or three months or a little bit longer, then to El Paso, Texas. I went to Florida with and lived with him there and didn't work. I came to El Paso with him and then he went overseas to the Pacific and was gone for three and a half years. I came back to Bakersfield and went back to my job and worked until the war was over.

S.J.: You and your husband remained in Bakersfield after the war?

Day: Yes, until 1951 when we moved to San Diego.

S.J.: A bit more about the Okies, in 1935 or 1940 the word Okie was a pretty serious thing. If you were called an Okie that was reason to fight. It carried the connotation of a dirty, slovenly person with loose or no morals. Do you think the connotation that it carries has changed over the years? If someone called someone else an Okie now do you think that it would mean the same thing as it did back then?

Day: No. I think the knowledge and the sting and the full implication is gone. For instance, to you because you're so much younger Okie wouldn't be the insult that it was had you lived then. If someone called me an Okie then why I probably would have beaten the heck out of them. Even in all your research there's an intangible that is gone because the era is gone and that first hand energy, negative energy, is the best way I can describe it, it is gone. I can sit here and describe to you what it was like but you don't get that negative, almost revulsion, that we felt for them.

Something else has come to mind about the Okies, I almost forgot. My mother changed her church affiliation. This was after they went from San Diego back to Bakersfield and were living out at Greenfield. This would have been in the late 1940s. It was after the war and she joined a Pentacostal Church which was called the Holy Rollers. Those were basically immigrants, the Okies. I knew a lot of them. They were moral, Christian people who had come from Oklahoma, Arkansas, not to follow the crops but they just came because there was nothing back there and they came just like we did but at a later time. They were poor as could be but they were moral people and clean people.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

Day: When I think of the slovenly people that Steinbeck wrote about I forgot about the good people. That doesn't speak well for me does it?

S.J.: The undesirables stand out a lot more. That's what sticks in anyone's mind about any people. That's why we have stereotypes about Mexicans, Italians, Dutch, stereotypes about everybody. When World War II came

and things changed for most people did the stereotype of the Okie change? Do you think more of them prospered and perhaps brought themselves out of these poor circumstances they had in the late 1930s? Or do you feel that the stereotype persisted?

Day: I think some of them may have gotten jobs but my thought would be that it was a culture that just sort of ran its course. I realize there still are the indigent Okies but I don't know if the war had a bearing on it or not. I would be inclined to think that it would have in an indirect way simply because everyone was more prosperous, not that they necessarily went to work at a defense plant but there was just a whole change in the economics and the attitude of people. We quit biting each other and tried to pull together for the good of the country and I think perhaps we just sort of absorbed them. I have no first hand knowledge so I'm just giving a generalization.

S.J.: If you wanted someone to hate we had the Japanese and Germans to hate, not Okies.

Day: Right. We weren't nit-picking. There was something greater. Those little irritations, we didn't have time for that.

S.J.: Has your life changed a great deal since that time in the 1930s? Do you feel like this is just a whole other world from the time you were in San Diego and on relief?

Day: Yes, of course. A lot of it is maturing on my part because I've raised a family in the interim but yes, it seems long ago and far away.

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

Day: Oh yes.

S.J.: Did you ever have the inclination to go back to Nebraska?

Day: Never. My older sister went back and raised her family back there, in poverty. There was an old farm there that her husband inherited but it was just a hand to mouth existence and she's in her seventies now and retired. She's a widow but she still lives in Franklin and she doesn't want to come to California.

S.J.: Do you think life is better here than it would have been if you'd stayed in Nebraska? You've got your sister for an example.

Day: Oh yes, definitely, it has been but of course once you grow up you make your own life. Five of us came from an impoverished background in the middle west. I'm not too well to do. We have enough. We have retirement and we own our home. My younger sister is quite well to do. She lives down in Sherman Oaks in Los Angeles. My brother

who lives in Bakersfield doesn't have very much. My sister in Nebraska has nothing. We made our own lives.

S.J.: Your father's story sounds very sad.

Day: It is to me when I think about it too. The both of them, even though my mother worked and struggled and raised five children the burden falls on the man. It does in our society even today. The man has the responsibility. He's got to keep the income coming in. The wives work. I worked and enjoyed it and I helped my husband but when the chips are down it's the man's responsibility nonetheless. When you have children and you're not having an income it's the father that carries responsibility and it must be terribly heavy. I wouldn't trade places. I wouldn't be a husband for anything. So I see in my father the struggle, struggle, struggle to make ends meet, to feed his five gaping little mouths. It's very sad.

S.J.: How many children did you have?

Day: Two, a boy and a girl.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit about them?

Day: Yes. My boy is a junior executive. He's very successful. He's 30 years old and he's with Hewlett Packard in the Bay area. He has one son who is ten and his wife works. They're a normal young couple. He has a lot of potential. He was a straight A student through college. He served a term in the Navy during the Vietnam War. He had a low draft number and would have been drafted and I said, "I will send you to Canada." I was working for an orthodontist. I said, "I will get the doctor to put braces on your teeth. They won't draft you. You are my only son and I don't want to see you go to that war." My son said, "No way." He said, "That's my responsibility. I won't shirk it." So rather than being drafted he joined the Navy and served his term at sea.

S.J.: Then he went to college after he was out of the Navy?

Day: Yes. My daughter is an artist. Everything you see around here is hers in any media. She's a free spirit and a child of nature. She's into holistic medicine. She just married in December. She's 27. She kept going to college to get a degree but she is such a free spirit and life was such fun that she would take off a year to do this and then a year to work on the John Muir Trail high in the mountains. Last summer she went to Nevada City and cooked health food at a Quaker school for a company that was teaching how to build your own home. She's done a little bit of everything. Life to her is just one big abundant love affair. She rushes forward for every challenge, a real warm sweet person. She met this young man at Cotati which is near Sonoma

State College. He was in body therapy, postural integration, and she went to one of his classes, met him and fell in love with him and married him. In April they went back to Maine where he has property and they are harvesting kelp during the summer and selling it to the health food stores. Then probably along about October they'll come back out here and he can teach this body therapy, massage and healing work is what they do. He and she can both teach it out here.

S.J.: You sound like you're pretty happy with both your kids.

Day: Yes. I feel very blessed, very fortunate.

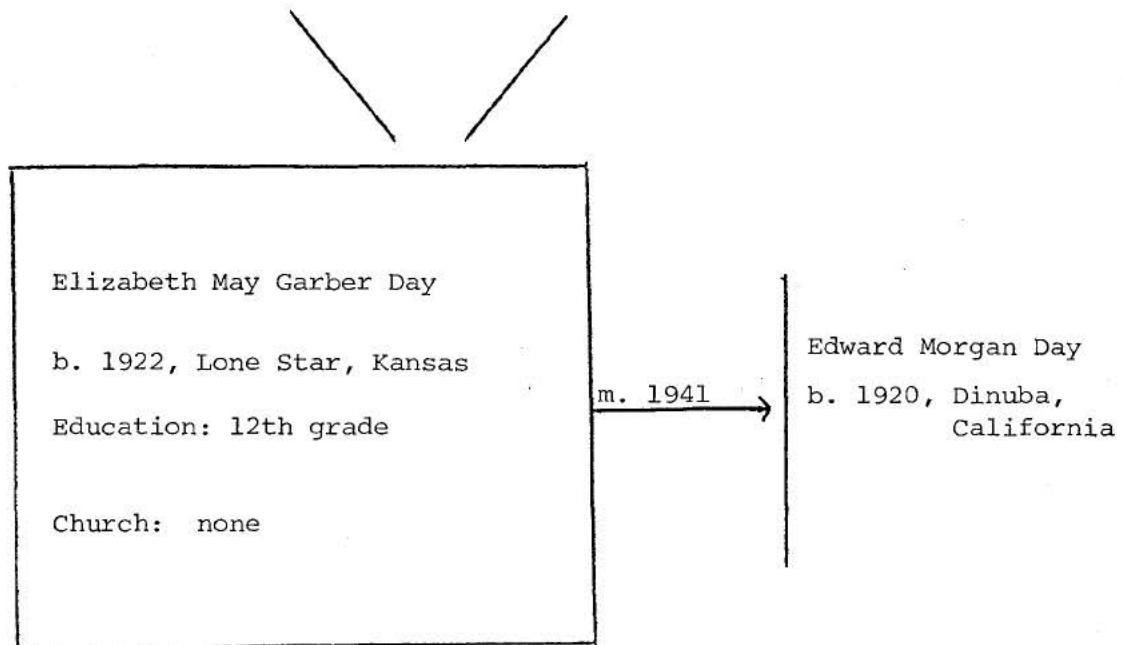
S.J.: Things have come a long way from your father's despondency when he was on the WPA in the late 1930s to your kids graduating from college and going out on their own.

Day: Yes. It's just a whole different world.

END OF INTERVIEW

John Wilburt Arthur Garber  
b. 1884, Franklin County  
Kansas  
[His parents from Tennessee]

Elizabeth Cynthia Morse Coleman Garber  
b. 1886, Dawson County,  
Nebraska  
[Her parents from Massachusetts]



David Alan Day  
b. 1951  
Computer research engineer

Jan Denise Day Hanson  
b. 1954  
Holistic medicine

## INDEX

- Art/Music, 7
- California
  - First impression, 12
  - Treatment in, 8
  - Bakersfield, 8, 14, 18, 23
  - San Diego, 11, 15, 16, 23
  - Greenfield, 23
- Crime/Law Enforcement, 10, 11
- The Depression, 9
- Discrimination, 21-24
- Education, 2
  - In Nebraska, 4-6
  - In California, 12, 15, 17, 18
  - College, 25
  - Discrimination, 22
- Family Life
  - Entertainment, 5-7
  - Chores, 3
  - Cooking/Food, 6, 7, 20
  - Marriage, 19
  - Sense of community, 7, 8
  - Problems, 1, 3, 7
- Farming
  - Income, 2, 9, 11
  - Methods, 3, 9, 10
  - Drought, 9
  - Government policies, 10
- The Grapes of Wrath/Steinbeck, 22
- Health
  - Diseases, 2, 19
  - Health care, 19
  - Causes of death, 19
- Housing
  - Homestead in Nebraska, 2, 8, 20
  - Homes in California, 12, 14, 15, 17
  - Ditch camps, 18
- Impact of Experience, 17, 24
- Kansas, 1
- Migration to California
  - Attraction of California, 3, 11, 12
  - Reasons for move, 11
  - Shelter, 13
  - Belongings, 14
  - Funds available, 13
  - Cooking, 13
  - Route, 13
  - Border inspections, 14
- Nebraska, 1
- The New Deal
  - Roosevelt, 9
  - WPA, 9, 11, 16
  - Politics, 10, 11
- "Okie", 18, 19
  - Definition, 21, 22
  - Reactions to term, 23
- Relief
  - Type received, 16
  - Attitudes toward, 16-18
- Religion, 6
  - Churches, 6, 21, 23
- Work
  - Permanent jobs, 18, 19
  - Odd jobs, 14, 17
  - During WW II, 23