

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

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

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: Alvin Bryan Laird
Rosie Lee Harlas Laird

PLACE OF BIRTH: Frederick, Oklahoma and
Cloud Chief, Oklahoma

INTERVIEWER: Judith Gannon

DATES OF INTERVIEWS: January 19 and 24, 1981

PLACE OF INTERVIEWS: Porterville, Tulare County

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PREFACE

This is the account of a very closely knit family which worked in migrant labor in the Imperial Valley and the San Joaquin Valley. They continued to follow the crops until the children were of school age. From then until their retirement in the 1960s, the Lairds continued to work as farm laborers. They recount in fairly great detail working and living conditions during the 1930s. An added dimension here is hearing the accounts of both a husband and a wife speaking of their common experiences.

Judith Gannon
Interviewer

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INTERVIEWEE: Alvin Bryan Laird (Age: 73)

INTERVIEWER: Judith Gannon

DATED: January 19, 1981

J.G.: This is an interview with Alvin Laird by Judith Gannon of the California State College, Bakersfield, CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project at 754 East River, Porterville, California, on January 19, 1981, at 9:30 a.m.

J.G.: Let's start with your telling me about your childhood in Oklahoma.

Laird: Well, to be frank with you it was rough. It was rough in Oklahoma. Most of it was because I was left without a mother when I was less than five years old and my daddy kept us by himself until I was thirteen. Then he remarried again. He farmed most of the time, but we changed from place to place so that us kids got very little schooling. There was five of us--only brothers, no sisters. My father married the second time and had two children by her--boy and a girl. As us boys growed up we all left home--just like ants--on account of our stepmother. We just couldn't get along and all. I stayed in Oklahoma the majority of my life until I was sixteen years old. I was in Texas some. When I was sixteen we came to Arizona and stayed there until December of 1924. During that time I went back to Texas and back into Oklahoma and stayed there about six months and made another trip back to New Mexico and Arizona. Then back to Texas and back into Oklahoma and stayed until 1929. In 1929--the year Rosie and I married--we went to Barstow, Texas and stayed out there about eighteen months. We farmed out there. We had no water to irrigate with like we should have had and didn't make no money. That was in 1930 and 1931. You had to haul water--had to pay a dollar a barrel for it --not just drinking water--that's all water.

Have you heard of the tail end of creation? That was it. Her sister passed away, and we went back to Oklahoma in 1931. We went back in 1931 and in 1932 I worked for wages. In 1933 I farmed again--made a little money in 1933--had a good crop. Didn't get no prices like we do now, of course, but we made a little money. Then in 1934 I farmed again but had a drought. If you never lived in that country, you don't know what a drought means. We got hail in June. It hailed the cotton out and we had to plant it over and didn't see another drop of rain--not a sprinkle--until in September. You can about know what the crop was--no feed. I picked six bales of cotton off of 80 acres. There's people down three miles from me on higher ground--I was right down in the river bottom--that didn't pick a sack in the field. There was nothing to pick. It got so it was harder to rent land so we had to do something. Two of my brothers was out here at that time. So my wife's father and her mother and her uncle and her youngest brother all loaded up. They had no money and what little I had was what I got out of that crop. We sold two cows and a six-month old heifer calf for \$23. Imagine that now for \$23.

J.G.: That's what you started to California with was \$23?

Laird: No, \$59, but I had to pay \$56 for a truck --a Model-T truck. Anyway, they had no money and \$59 is what I had. The first day we left there we landed at her aunt's house at Wellington, Texas and stayed all night there. We headed south next day and two days later we was in Abilene. She had an uncle that lived there so we stayed there that night and the next day with him. Then the next day we left and headed for Pecos, Texas. My father lived in Pecos--that's east of El Paso--220 miles east of El Paso. We stayed there a couple of days with them, and we didn't stop anymore until we got to Buckeye, Arizona and we'd got down to some \$10. There we was--we had two babies and her expecting another one and her mother and daddy and uncle all to feed. Well, there's plenty of cotton to pick around Buckeye, but the grass burrs [are bad.] A grass burr isn't a goathead--it's a thing that grows up on grass and it's got a burr about this long and maybe about as big around as your finger and just solid with burrs. When they'd get matured they'd stick in your finger and they got little hooks on them and break off in your fingertips.

There was so many people there. This may be hard for you to believe, but this outfit, big company outfit, J. C. Pennington had this big farm cut up anywhere from 20 to 40 acre blocks. I seen pickers on both ends of them fields take up every row. You'd start across there and the field foreman would go across and say, "How many rows do you want? How many you want?"--just sang the same old song to you. "Don't leave no cotton on these rows--don't leave them tags in them burrs--if you do you won't get no more work;" and he meant it too. Seventy-five cents a

hundred. I was a good cotton picker. I picked 500-600 pounds of decent cotton. But a 150-200 day was all I could pick, and her mother and daddy and uncle couldn't pick nearly as much as I could. We stayed there two weeks and still had \$10--that's all we had.

J.G.: What was the problem with the cotton that you could only pick such a little bit?

Laird: Grass burrs and then little old knotty stuff--just couldn't pick it. When you went up on the trailers to dump your sacks, you climbed up on the board and then had to pick yourself to keep from carrying out four or five pounds worth hung on your britches because of those grass burrs. And they tell you, "Don't bring no burrs--don't get no burrs." And they meant it. They'd fire you just for nothing. That went on for two weeks and so her uncle had been over in Yuma back in the early 1920s. He said if you think you can spare enough money, he'd catch a ride to Yuma with some people he got acquainted with for a dollar or two to help them pay for the gas. Her uncle thought we could find something better over there. So I said to Mama, "We're going to starve to death here. We got to do something." So he went away and come back and said, "yeah, I found good cotton and a place to live in a tent there."

J.G.: You mean in Buckeye you were living in a tent?

Laird: Buckeye, yeah.

J.G.: Did your wife work in the field too?

Laird: No, the wife didn't but her mother did. But this camp in Buckeye had maybe a hundred or more tents in it. That's besides the people that come in from everywhere else. We loaded up the next morning and headed for Yuma. Cotton was good over there. We got \$1 a hundred there and no grass burrs. We got through and then went to work in the lettuce. In them days they loose-packed it in the field, and it rained so much that the water was standing in the furrows about half-knee deep. Well, some of us pulled our shoes off to keep from ruining your shoes carrying mud all the time. There was so many people out there that they couldn't keep up with them, and the foreman would get up on the back of the truck and when you quit for the day he'd just call out your names and you'd answer and he'd put you down--twenty-five cents an hour. But you'd pack that lettuce--it'd take two--one on each end of the box to carry it out to the road. Then they'd put it on a truck or take a tractor and pull it out onto the highway. It was too muddy. I done that until February. Well, I told Rosie three of my brothers was in Calipatria--that's in Imperial Valley. Well, on the fourteenth of February I told my father-in-law, "You move me and Rosie and the kids up

to where my brother is and you can keep this truck and you come on later." He did. Well, we got up there and went to packing lettuce again--same kind of work only for thirty cents an hour. That's a nickle more.

J.G.: That's in 1934?

Laird: That's in 1935. 1934 was when we were in Arizona. This was in 1935--fourteenth day of February when we crossed the border there. You talk about nowheres to live. If there had been we wouldn't have had the money to rent it. The only place you could find to live was down in colored town. Now I'm not against colored people but we never have been used to living that way. There's other white families down there besides myself. I wouldn't go down there by myself. We rented this house from a colored guy. He was janitor at the school. His name was Tate. Nice fellow. Five dollars a month. You paid your own lights and water bill. He couldn't have paid them on that \$5 a month. I stayed there until July. In the meantime I got through packing lettuce and went to work on a ranch--\$3 a day for twelve hours. I worked there till July and oh, it's terribly hot down there. So we packed up and went to Sunnyvale up by San Jose. My older brother was staying with me at that time and we picked apricots and pears and worked in the cannery. When the cannery was over we came back by Earlimart and picked cotton. Nobody but me to pick because the wife had three babies. You couldn't do nothing with three babies. So we stayed there until December and went back to Imperial Valley and I stayed there until 1937.

In 1937 I got a job on the All American Canal, and I worked there three months until they was shutting down--finishing up, and I come back up here between Porterville and Tipton. I stayed until 1939 and then went back down to the Imperial Valley and stayed until 1940. In 1940 they had that bad earthquake. The transformers, power lines, and dam busted. The alfalfa mill I was working in shut down. We got thirty-five cents an hour for the first 84 hours--that's for seven twelve-hour days you know, and you got fifty cents for the other. Well, they shut down for two weeks and I went out and worked in the peas. You pick them right on the ground. They ain't up on a pole. They're right on the ground. Maybe this is hard for you to believe young lady, but I seen a picker on every row of 80 acres on each end of the field. That's how many people there was. They had two sets of scales and you lined up sometimes as far as that corner down there--two deep--and sit there and gradually move up as you get weighed. I went out there--had to do something because we had five children at that time. Had to do something. And the only reason I got on out there was because I knew the people. I worked for them before. They fired a young fellow there one day. You think about the way they treat people. It's a terrible way to treat them. If you done anything out of line a little bit they would fire you. Well, of course, there's

a half a dozen begging to get on anyway. They fired this young fellow and the row boss brought him out of the field and told this guy that was doing the weighing, "Get this fellow here and check him out." This kid said, "If you fool with me I'll check you out." The row boss hit him and he hadn't ought to have done it. That kid turned him every way but loose. The grade boss that was grading the peas was one of them smart characters. He run in and this kid flattened him. Well, he runs over and gets him a piece of timber. Two old men --they was as old as I am now--they take it away from him. Well, there was a colored guy sitting right beside of me in the next line. He said, "White boy, what's the matter? Ain't that white boy got no friends?" I said, "Well, so far he hasn't needed any." Well, I was getting close to the scales all the time and the boss' boy--the one that was in charge of the peas--gets up on the truck and wasn't going to pay this boy. What happened he had lost his number. When you get a job you get a little piece of square pasteboard like that with a number on it. And they weren't going to pay because he'd lost his number. Of course, that's very easily done. He said, "You're going to pay me or I'll pester you all day." So this kid up on the truck said, "Get out of the field. You're fired." He said, "Maybe you think you can put me out." He just made a run and jumped off this big old high International truck right astraddle of this kid and his eight knocked him down. He caught this other one on his feet. He throwed him over his head just like you'd toss a football and he fell flat on his back in a dry ditch there. Well, he's on top of him before he could get out and he was just whaling the whey out of him. Well, here come this kid's mother and sister-in-law. They scratched that poor boy and pulled his hair and tore his shirt off of him. In the meantime, I'd got off my hamper and was standing right over them.

Well, about that time old Blackie Thompson--he was the one he knocked down--he was the grade boss--he runs up and grabs the kid by the hair with his left hand and has a ball-peen hammer and was fixing to knock that kid in the head. I was a lot younger then and didn't like to see that so I just snapped that hammer in that fellow's hand like that and give it a twist and he said, "Give me back that hammer." I said, "I'll give it to you between the eyes if you don't get back. What do you want to do--kill somebody over a two-bit job like this? Now you know you're wrong." He got back out of the way. Well, they paid him. All three of them left. So after a while one of the row bosses come out in the field and said to me, "Alvin"--I worked with him before--"don't let them know up there that you had anything to do with that up here a while ago." He said, "Roy will fire you." He's the one whose boy got the worst of the whipping. So I said, "You go up there and tell that character if you want to just exactly what I had to do. I didn't touch him but I would have touched him. If he wants to fire me all right. I ain't married to this job nohow."

But if he told him, I don't know. He didn't fire me. But that's just the way they treated them now. I worked that outfit for three years and the pea picking box was bigger square than that and about that deep (gestures) and you put it up on that old platform scale like they used to keep in them grocery stores to weigh potatoes. You know, like you see around feed stores. Well, they had those scales balanced on ten pounds and each time you'd go up there if you wasn't watching--and most of them wasn't--they'd dock ten pounds for that box and the scales were set back ten pounds. That way you lost ten pounds on everything you weighed up. If you didn't have a full hamper, well they'd cut it down a little bit. Well, her own uncle--he's dead now but it's the truth--him and the rest of the bosses stole them poor people blind. One time there the foreman come along and said, "Hugh," he said, "them Filipinos--there's four of them--lost their number and I found it. Just keep it quiet and on payday we'll split this what they made." They did. I told them both that ain't right. I was working around here and that ain't right. Them Filipinos just because they don't understand English and don't know your rules and system--that's still their money. They kept it anyway. That was the foreman over the ranch. That wasn't a pea field boss but the foreman over the ranch. His nephew was the owner of the field of peas. Now this is disgraceful--the way they treat them people. It was disgraceful. They had a tarp oh, it was bigger than this whole room, and if the peas didn't suit them--if they was overripe or wasn't filled out--they would make us canvas them and grade them over. And you done it or else they'd run you out of the field. That's the way they treated them. Fruit's the same way. I seen people live on canal banks. I seen that plum up into the 1960s in the orchards--no lights, no stoves, no beds--right up there in Stockton--right here in California. I thought it was bad in Oklahoma. It was worse here.

J.G.: So you picked peas in the Imperial Valley and then you'd come up and work the orchards and fruit in California?

Laird: Yeah. After the kids got into school, well I quit and went to work steady. I come up here in 1942--the year Joy was borned. She was the only one that was born in the hospital out of the bunch and she was born in Porterville. I went to work for a fellow that year and then the next year I went to work for another guy. I worked fourteen years for him.

J.G.: Doing what kind of work?

Laird: Farm labor, drive a tractor, irrigating--everything like that and that's all I've done since. I did work fourteen seasons in a cotton gin. That's just seasonal work, you know. And that's what I done up until I retired. It's been a rough life, but we made it.

All my kids finished high school--except two and they could

have finished if they had wanted to but they didn't. I told them they thought they knew more than the teacher did.

J.G.: You had seven children?

Laird: Seven children, yeah. That's right. Four girls and three boys.

J.G.: They were all born and grew up here in Porterville?

Laird: Two of the oldest boys was born in Oklahoma and my oldest daughter was born in Imperial Valley and the next one was born in Imperial Valley and the next daughter was born between here and Tipton and my youngest boy was born in Riverside County and Joy was born here in Porterville.

J.G.: Move back a little bit for me--your wife mentioned that the reason it was hard to rent land in Oklahoma during that time was because of the government.

Laird: Well, you don't understand maybe the farm program that came out. I don't intend to get involved in politics because I get upset sometimes when I do, but here's the problem. The problem first come out under what they called the Bankhead Act. Well, the Bankheads--two of the Bankhead brothers was two of the biggest plantation owners that there was in the state of Mississippi. By plantation I mean thousands of acres all worked by sharecroppers--most of them colored people. Okay, the government come in and said, "We'll give you so much money per acre to plow this cotton. Plow it under." Of course they did. Well, all them renters got half of that payment if they's working sharecrop--that's the best they got was half of it--and if they's working third and fourth that means a fourth of the cotton and a third of the grain. The big plantation owner said, "Heck, we can make more money getting rid of them renters. Then we get all that money." And they did. Well it got to where you couldn't hardly rent a piece of land at all. And that's what happened. The first year it wasn't compulsory. It was volunteer.

Well, here's the idea. This river divided two counties and across the river they had the highest yield per acre, and they paid them \$14 per acre to plow it up. The county I lived in paid \$11. Well, the \$3 difference made me do like I did. I said, "No, I can't see no point in destroying something when people are going naked and hungry." So they sent around a committee to find out whether you was willing to plow it up or not. They said it wasn't compulsory. So I was working on my cultivator and they asked me if I was going to plow up any. Me and my brother and my wife's cousin had a plenty good acreage rented. I said, "No, I don't intend to." Well, why? I said, "I don't see any point in destroying something when people's going naked and hungry." They was killing off cattle

also. Some places they'd let them eat it. Most places they didn't. I didn't see none of it done. I heard they did. Put oil on the cows and burn them. They also did grain, wheat, oats, and milo maize. You could turn around and plant anything you wanted to back on that ground but you weren't allowed to sell it. You could feed it to your own stock. If you fed a few chickens you could eat the eggs, but you couldn't sell them. You couldn't sell your milk or butter and you couldn't fatten the beef and sell it. So long as you used it for your self-consumption it's all right. But the next year it was compulsory. You had to leave it out or be penalized--fined. That's why it got to where you couldn't rent land hardly at all. Because as I said most of that country back there where I growed up either belonged to the banks, doctors, or insurance companies. They had got that land back during the Depression days through money that they loaned. The people couldn't pay the loan so they just take it over and rented it out, you know. Well them doctors and bankers and lawyers well, they didn't want to farm nohow --if they could get all that money from letting it lay there and not touching it at all--more money to them. And that's what's created the problem right today --the reason so many people's on the tramp in the ghettos in the big cities and got nowheres to go. They don't want them out there. They're in the way. See the point I'm making?

Well, look how many people could make their own living on that land if they had the opportunity. The idea is them renters wasn't making no money but at least they wasn't on welfare. They was living and they're on welfare now, ain't they?

J.G.: So you had buildings and a farm where you rented in Oklahoma. How many acres did you farm?

Laird: Well, the last time I farmed there was when we had 80 acres, but the year before that I had my brother and her [wife's] cousin and we had around 200 acres. Some of them was pretty good size. Fact of the business--her uncle owned and controlled together better than 1,000 acres. Some of them had a section, some of them had 160 acres, and some of them had bigger acreage. Her father and mother and her uncle and baby brother come with us.

J.G.: So you sold what you could sell?

Laird: Everything we had to sell.

J.G.: And you all got in your truck?

Laird: Model-T truck with a Dodge transmission in it. Now people didn't used to think you could do that but they cut the frame in two and extend it. Made the frame longer with the transmission in there. It was fine and dandy. You had lots of

power, but don't let it slip out of gear 'cause you had no brakes if it slipped out of gear. Going over Globe Mountain she [meaning his wife Rosie] tells us she walked all the way over Globe Mountain. I bought her a brand new pair of oxfords before we left Oklahoma and she had walked holes in the soles when we got to California. She'd get to the top of them hills and her and her daddy both was afraid to go ahead. But her uncle would do the driving and I'd sit there and hold that thing in gear. Did you ever see The Grapes of Wrath? I told a lot of people we were right close to that. And we camped--we stayed one night in a motel--one night in Las Cruces, New Mexico. The rest of the time we always camped beside the road. We weren't the only ones. Lots of people did and it was disgraceful the way you had to live and it was disgraceful the way a lot of people was treated. People in this country didn't have much use for us Okies.

J.G.: It was a bad time for a lot of people?

Laird: It certainly was. They had no use for us. No.

Mrs. Laird: Let me say a word now. Tell her about them stopping us for the pink slip.

Laird: Yeah, back there in Oklahoma we called them bill of sales. So we stopped at Duncan, Arizona just after you come out of New Mexico. It was just pouring down rain. They had an inspection place and they'd inspect you for cotton and cotton sacks and anything connected with cotton and the first thing he said was, "Where's the pink slip?" and my wife's daddy he was doing the driving. He was just like I was. He'd never heard them called pink slips before--just bill of sales. And this guy said, "Well, it may be something else to you but we call them pink slips," and my father-in-law said, "You mean the title?" Yeah, that's what he meant. He said, "Rosie, where's that bill of sale for this truck?" "In the bottom of the trunk." Under everything we had. This guy looked us over and he said, "Well, move on. It's wet, it's raining--move on. But you better have it out the next place you come to." They stopped us again in Lordsburg. If you had any cotton sacks or anything homemade--cotton pillows--then they'd take and make you boil them to fumigate them. And they weren't too happy to see you. For a while down here in Yuma I was working on that canal and I know this to be the truth--if you didn't have a job or a car they'd turn you back--wouldn't let you come across that line--didn't want you over here. I had a brother in Yuma, Arizona and him and his girlfriend they just walked across the bridge there. They had a job on the dam then--they was putting in a new dam up above Yuma. They wouldn't let my brother cross because he had no proof that he had a job. So he went back downtown and was talking to a taxi driver and he said, "You

got fifteen cents?" "Yeah, what do you mean?" "I'll put you across that bridge for fifteen cents. They won't stop me. They can't stop me and as soon as you cross this bridge into California they got no authority over you." That's the way he got across. They turned them back by the hundreds -- people that had no proof that they had a job.

J.G.: So that was at the California-Arizona border?

Laird: Yeah.

J.G.: Was it the border [police] or sheriffs?

Laird: Government officers. When I was working on that canal I was off two days a week. Me and her uncle would go down to the border station and sit around just for the amusement of it. They had two long tables as long as this whole house and people come in there with nice cars and had money--you know. Naturally the women didn't want their things went through, but if they didn't say nothing much--didn't get mad at them--they wouldn't bother them. They'd just open it up and maybe lift up some of their clothes. But if they raised any fuss about it out on that table it'd go and they'd tell you to pick it up.

J.G.: All of this inspection was supposedly because they were checking for cotton goods coming into California?

Laird: And insects--bollworm, boll weevil.

J.G.: Did you serve in the military?

Laird: I didn't have to go. They called me up for a physical and I didn't know that they'd changed the law. I was past 38 and it didn't matter if you had fifteen children--they'd take you if they wanted you. I got one deferment. The guy I worked for got me one deferment. I was up there and this guy at the draftboard got smart and wondered why I didn't get another deferment. I said, "Listen fellow, I didn't ask for the first deferment. My boss got me the first deferment and it was six months." I said, "Now if you want me--if the Army wants me--just go ahead and take me. If you think it's cheaper to feed my wife and seven children--fine and dandy." Well he said, "You're past 38." I said, "You knew that before I come up here. You had my age. You had my record." He just wanted to get smart and I was mad and got just as mad as he did. But they didn't bother me. I did have one brother that went.

J.G.: What were the schools like in the Imperial Valley?

Laird: They had two grade schools. The colored school was all colored for grade school children. Once you got to high school everyone went together. They only had one high school in this little old town--Calipatria. The school principal come along one day when I was working twelve hours a day--seven days a week--in this alfalfa mill. He told my wife we had to start our children to the all-colored school. Our two oldest boys were the only ones going. I don't know whether she told the principal but she told me, "I ain't going to send my children away to that school." In a day or two they showed up again and caught me at home and told me the same thing. I said, "What's the issue?" They said, "Well, you're a transient. All transients have to send their children over there to the colored school." I said, "I was raised among colored people and I got nothing against them, but I don't believe in intermarriage and intermixing with them. I don't mistreat them." I said, "My children ain't going to go over there." They said, "Oh, yes they are." I said, "No, I won't." I said, "I am permanently employed out at this alfalfa mill. I work twelve hours a day for seven days a week, and you ain't about to send my kids down there or make me send them over there. I ain't going to do it." So they didn't bother me any more. After that we come back down here to Tipton. All my kids but Joy and some of the younger ones went through grade school in Tipton.

They had a bunch of cabins out there where they send what they call transients and slow learners. Well, my second boy--nothing wrong with his mind--was ornery. So they stuck him out there in that cabin. So my wife went down and raised Cain and they put him back in the regular class. They put one of my nephews out there too. One of the teachers told Rosie so she went down there and jumped on the principal. "Why," he said, "Mrs. Laird, you don't know what you're talking about. They got the same teaching out there." She said, "Oh, no, Mr. Stewart one of your teachers here told me that they didn't--that all they do is let them do what they want to." And that's exactly what they done. This nephew of mine--after she got him straightened out back in the regular school--said, "Aunt Rose I'm mad at you." She said, "What for?" "Well," he said, "they make me work. At that other school I didn't do nothing."

Well, here is the unfairness. If you was in here and wasn't permanently located or living on some farmer's ranch, the schools would give you a hard time. I had a friend and they tried to send his kids to Pixley one time. He lived 300 yards from where his boss lived and his girl was going to Tipton. The Tipton bus would come up there and turn around at his yard and take his daughter back. He lives 300 yards south of there and kids had to walk a mile south to catch the Pixley bus.

My friend said, "Why, what's the idea?" He [principal] said, "You're in the Pixley district." I'm right here on this ranch where my boss lives and 300 yards from him." "Well, you're still in this Pixley district." He was a working man. Yeah, that's the unfairness of it. Now they don't get away with that too much anymore. But they did at that time.

J.G.: You said that in the 1930s people lived in ditch camps and on the ditch banks. What were the conditions like for them?

Laird: Well, it was just filth. I did have a tent one year up there but I got a cabin when I could. But me and Rosie didn't follow the crops while the kids was little. Only time I went up to Sunnyvale to pick fruit was when the three was little and we lived in a tent for awhile. Then we got a cabin. Now think of this--that was in 1935--\$4 a week for a cabin, lights and gas furnished--\$4 a week.

J.G.: Who owned the cabins?

Laird: The man who owned the camp there. We had the cabins and all the open space in between was tents. The children was little. My oldest daughter was just a baby. She was just six weeks old when we went to Sunnyvale. We didn't start working in the fruit until after the kids all got out on their own.

J.G.: So the ditch camps were mostly for the fruit workers?

Laird: Yes, for the fruit workers.

J.G.: And you worked cotton mainly?

Laird: Yeah, I worked cotton. That's what I done.

J.G.: And you generally managed to get a cabin. What were the cabins like that the growers provided?

Laird: Well, some of them had pretty nice places and some of them didn't. We picked pears up in Lake County for one grower in 1961. He had 47 acres--that's a big orchard. You think 47 acres ain't much but for pears that's a big orchard. We picked pears for him seven seasons. He had one-room cabins. It was nice. Didn't have water inside of them--didn't have flush toilets--but he had shed showers and electric lights and plenty of shade with big old trees all around. We had no rent to pay and no light bill to pay. But some of them didn't have them that nice. But the last year we worked there, here comes the Health Department and says, "You got to put flush toilets and you got to put hot and cold water in them cabins."

J.G.: What year was that?

Laird: The 1960s. And the grower said, "Well, Christ that will just run my taxes up." Which it would run his taxes up. He said, "Three or four weeks is as long as I use them cabins"---'cause that's how long pear picking lasted. He said, "Well, I can't hire you back." Hired Mexicans. Mexicans. I used to go see him every year. We'd go up there picking for some other place. I'd go see him 'cause I liked the man. And Mexicans were in there but they wouldn't allow people like me in there.

J.G.: The grower wouldn't allow the white people in?

Laird: The Health Department wouldn't.

J.G.: But they wouldn't do anything about the Mexicans in the cabins?

Laird: No. They lived right there in them cabins. Ten or twelve of them in one cabin--think of that. And the last two or three years we went up there and picked for another guy just north of there and he had hot and cold water inside the house and had electric stove--but just one room. The wife and I would always come to eat dinner when we was close enough and we usually was. We come in and eat our lunch one day--just her and I--and we started back and a fellow drove up with a badge on his shirt here and said, "You live in that cabin?" I said, "Yes, I do." "Would you mind me going in and inspecting it? I'm an inspector for the Health Department." I said, "Well I ain't got nothing to do about it. I don't own it, but as far as I'm concerned you can go right on in there. Nothing in there you can carry off that belongs to me." He got through there in a little bit and he come back and the light cords--you know they had them drop chains that we'd tie to the wall or bedside so you could turn the lights on at night--he said, "That's illegal. You tell the owner he'll have to take that out and you tell him he'll have to put a petition between--you're not allowed to sleep in the same room where you eat." Well, it was only me and my wife--no children to see us getting up and down. Well that's the law.

So I went down and told the field boss what he said and this guy that owned the orchard said, "I'll fight them through every court in the state. I built them cabins up to specifications and I ain't going to do nothing else to them." They haven't made him change them yet. But that's the pressure they put on them and that made it hard on the workers as well.

J.G.: Now that was in the 1960s. Do you think the Health Department and some of the other government agencies put pressure on the growers back in the late 1930s and early 1940s?

Laird: They put it on them worse in them days. Back in the early 1930s and early 1940s very few camps were to be found except tents. They lived in the orchards right along the ditch bank anywhere they could get water and they went to the toilet

anywhere they could get out of sight. You can imagine what that was like. I seen them right up there in Stockton in the orchards--cooking on an open fire and eating whatever they could get a hold of to eat and sleeping on the ground or in their cars even with little children. I never did drag my kids around that a way. Her [meaning wife Rosie] and I both said we wanted our kids to at least get more education than her and I got. So they could live above what we lived. Well, they did get enough education so they could get something else. Now Joy has worked in a hospital ever since she got out of high school. The other girls did too--one of them still works down at the Good Shepherd Home and the others all worked in hospitals. That is what they is qualified to do. I didn't get out of the fifth grade. I think I did finish the fifth grade and I think Rosie did finish the eighth grade and that's as high as we went. You have got to have something besides that to get any kind of job besides manual labor. Of course it's a good thing you're supposed to have a little education but if you didn't have a chance to go, it's impossible for you to get it. And that's what I tried to pass on to my children. It wasn't no trouble to get Joy to go to school. It was for part of the rest of them, but one of my daughters and one of my boys--they had a mind of their own and they didn't want to go.

J.G.: When your kids were growing up, where did you settle and live?

Laird: I worked for a fellow just several miles out of town. I worked for him a year. That's where Joy was born--here in Porterville. Then I moved out five miles west of Poplar which was near Tipton and we stayed there a year and a half and then we moved into Tipton, didn't we? Well, I still worked for the same man. Then I stayed there about a year and a half and he rented some land besides the 420 acres of his own that he had. He rented some land off a Portugee [Portuguese] and he had a big old house that had ten rooms in it. He hired someone to fix it up the Portugee did. I had to buy new linoleum for it. Our living room was eighteen feet by twenty feet. I liked to never find linoleum big enough. We put linoleum on it and it looked decent and we lived there three years on that lease. When that lease was up he rented another place from the same man and we moved just about a quarter of a mile west of there in another house. We didn't live in tents and stuff like that when we was growing the kids up.

J.G.: So you moved within the same area?

Laird: Same vicinity, yes.

J.G.: And you worked for the same man?

Laird: Same man for fourteen years and what time I wasn't I worked for

somebody around close. I worked for Pinkney Mills for fourteen years and for Morehead one year. He's still got boys farming out there yet. After the kids all got married off, well me and my wife went to picking lemons and oranges out here by the State Hospital. We picked oranges and lemons out there during the fall and winter. We done that for seven seasons up till both of us quit. That was so close you know. You worked whatever hours you wanted to whatever hours you want to, and when you want, you quit and go home.

When I was working in the orchards picking oranges, I lived in Woodville for fourteen years. I was there fourteen years but the kids were all gone except my youngest son. He went into the service when he was eighteen and stayed in the service three and one-half years. He stayed--how long Joy did he stay home after he come back before he got married?

Joy: He was 26 when he got married.

Laird: He stayed about three years. He got married and moved up to Ukiah and he worked for the State in the timber. He got a good job and if he hadn't had high school he couldn't have got that either. My oldest boy is back in Clovis, New Mexico. He put in twenty years in the Air Force. My other boy works in Porterville. He put in six and one-half years in the Air Force. The other one was in the regular army--the youngest one was. All together they put in 30 years between the three of them. They weren't drafted. They wanted to go. I said, "Well, they're going to be drafted anyway," and so I said, "If you want to go in you might get a better break than to wait till you're drafted." Well, the oldest one made a career of it and the other one would have but him and his wife had trouble and that causes problems you know.

J.G.: I think you talked earlier about the scales being weighted and all of that kind of thing. There is a lot of talk that the growers took advantage of the workers. Can you talk a little bit more or think of any other examples of times that you know of?

Laird: They did. They did. They certainly did. Well, I seen them do that same thing in the cotton -- picking cotton. In them days they had an old beam scale. You ever seen them old beam scales?

J.G.: I'm not sure what that is.

Laird: Well, it's a piece of steel. At the back here they got a hook. You put a chain or a rope or whatever you want to hang your sack on and you hang it up to a three-prong fork. Then you have a pea which is a weight that hangs on the scale. It is

a piece of steel that's hollow. Well they put lead in there to make it heavier than it is, see. So they gained weight and those old beam scales were what I used to do a lot of weighing for the colored people back in Oklahoma. I can't explain how bad they've been cheated. Very seldom you could ever get it on even balance. It's either up a little bit or down a little bit. Well, if you get down on weight--very much down on weight--you'd lose on your scale if you didn't have your pea loaded. I told her cousin I worked for a lot, "They know you're doing them people like that? They are black but they're still people like we are." He said, "Well we don't believe in cheating them. We give them a good weight." But when it was up a little, they'd say, "Come on there Alvin,"--they didn't call me mister as they called all the whities--"Come on Alvin, give me that up weight. Don't give me that old down weight."

I'd say, "I can't." But once in a while they'd be on. They would be happy as long as they got money.

After they got them spring scales they would let you hand up your sack there. Well, if you wasn't looking directly at them they would call it so and so and jerk it off right quick. They would cheat you again for five or ten pounds. One time at Woodville me and my wife's father were to start picking. I guess there's 100 people out there picking. So we got a sack of cotton picked and carried it about a quarter of a mile and stood in line another fifteen minutes to get to the scale. I hung my sack on there and I had a chain hanging down here and was just reaching to get the chain and put it on our sack and hang it up there. I never did like to pick my sack up again after it hits the ground because it's just dirt and you throw it on your leg and everything. The man weighing said, "Fifty-nine." Just put it in there and kicked it off. I was watching him. I said, "Buddy, I had 63 pounds and I want it. I don't want you to kick that sack off there no more." I picked it up and hung it back on there. "Now you give me what I got coming and you be sure," and I cussed him, "and don't kick my sack on the ground anymore." And the guy that owned the cotton there said, "Give it to him. He earned it." But that's the way they do you. If you wasn't looking directly at them they'd cheat you if they got a chance. If you didn't stand up to them they would cheat you. I seen a man take a pistol down there in Imperial Valley--he was one of the row bosses--I was working around the scales loading trucks. Two colored guys come out there--to show you how they treated them and even the white people the same way if they could get away with it--and the row boss told me, "Now you see them two niggers out there?" I said, "Yeah." "They won't be here long." I said, "What you going to do with them?" "I'm going to fire them." "On what grounds?" "Well," he said, "the main boss sent them over here." The main boss told them they could top some trees for him and he'd give 'em a job picking peas.

Well, they topped them trees so he sent them over and told his row boss to hire them. He come out at one of them and found something that didn't suit him and went back and got the other one --come back with the second and the second one said, "I know what's wrong with you white man. You just don't like a colored man." Well, here is the answer he give him: "I don't know what you mean by colored man but I don't like a damn nigger." That's just the words he used and the colored guy started to hit him over the head with a hamper. It wouldn't have hurt him--hitting him with a newspaper is what it was like. He jerked that pistol and when he did the colored guy run. He shot four or five times under his feet just to scare him you know. The colored man he fired first was sitting there on this hamper and he said, "Come on back here man and get your money." He said, "He's not going to hurt you none." He said, "I'm not coming back." They'd do a white man the same if a white man would take it.

J.G.: So the growers really [took advantage]?

Laird: Taking a big advantage of the worker!

J.G.: And it didn't matter particularly if they were Filipino or colored?

Laird: No, the only reason they did it to them was they could get away with it better. I told you about this boy jumping off the truck. His father was a boss and his name was Roy Schaffean. There was a big old eighteen or nineteen year old redheaded boy and his daddy. They were desperate. They said to Roy that they had to have some money. Their wife and little kids was home with nothing to eat and they said they would like to draw some money. "This ain't payday. Saturday's payday." "Well, couldn't we draw up a few dollars?" "No, I ain't going to pay you nothing until Saturday." And this old kid come out with his pocket knife and old Roy he backed up on the ditch bank and he said, "Don't come up here boy. I'll kick you under the chin." He said, "Just kick. You'll draw back a stub anytime you do." He kept going and he run his hand into his pocket and said, "How much do you have to have?" That's how quick he changed his mind.

Now if it was a white man or a colored they wasn't afraid of him--they was afraid of the law. That's what they dread. A colored man and nigger and Mexican or Filipino were no more afraid of the white man than we was afraid of one another. But they were afraid of that law. The poor white man don't get much justice in court either. Now they'll tell you that everything is equal in justice. It isn't so, young lady. No it isn't. You've probably lived long enough to know that and see it. It's disgraceful and I don't like it. I always

believed in treating people right and I want to be treated right. I don't want to push no one around and I don't want to be pushed around. No, I don't. Doesn't matter who is [doing it].

J.G.: So did you work seven days a week?

Laird: Seven days a week, yeah. Most of the times.

J.G.: Sounds like you didn't have much time for recreation.

Laird: I didn't have no time. Well, when my children was growing up I'd leave for work the biggest part of the time before they woke up and sometimes they'd be in bed when I got in. Not all the time--Sundays and all. I'll tell you another deal that happened with my children in Tipton. This oldest girl of mine and the one just younger than her and the next one were going to Tipton and this oldest girl of mine and one of her cousins and some of the big farmers' daughters done something and broke the rules on the bus. The fellow driving the bus--his name was Christler--he kicked her off the bus and I didn't know anything about it. Like I said, I was going to work every morning before daylight and coming in after dark and she wouldn't tell me and her mom wouldn't either. I found it out and so I had taken off Sunday. The man went to church--he had about as much religion as that cat's got out there--and I went down to the church and waited for him to come out. I said, "Mr. Christler, I want to find out what the problem was between you and my daughter--why you kicked her off the bus." The other two girls were walking with her now about three miles to school. "What's the problem?" "Well, she done this, that and the other." I said, "Well, just a minute now." I said, "My niece and three more girls also broke the rules--they was doing the same thing my daughter was doing. They didn't walk, did they?" "Well now, you don't understand," he said. "Now them other girl's mothers belong to the ladies' club and the ladies' society and I can't afford to have them kind of women jumping down my throat." Well that made me mad. I said, "Let me tell you something buddy. I'll be down your damn throat and it won't be no woman either." I said, "Now Monday morning that girl of mine is going to ride that bus."

Another time there was a colored guy in there--a big old boy--and every time she'd come by going up to her class he'd flip her skirt up with his foot. He'd take the end of his shoe and flip it up. So one day on the bus he done something to her and she slapped him and called him a black son-of-a-bitch. Well, the principal sent me word that she wasn't going back to school until she apologized. Well, down there I went taking her with me and I just happened to catch him in the hallway before school started and said, "Mr. Stuart, I want to tell you something.

You sent me word that my daughter was going to have to apologize to that nigger boy." "Yeah, that's right. I don't think she had no right to call him that." "I'm going to tell you something. You don't understand what happened." I said, "He was acting like a nigger. He wasn't acting like a human at all. I'll tell you another thing--if he don't leave my daughter alone I'll have one of them boys of mine to whoop him so you won't know him when he comes to school." And I said, "She's going to come back to school or I'm going to come down and see you." The principal said, "Well, I didn't know that he done that." "You didn't make no effort to find out." This colored kid worked for a big farmer. Now that's the difference. Now that man sent me a Christmas card. This is the first year we haven't got a Christmas card, isn't it Rosie? And I haven't seen him in 30 years.

J.G.: So that was in the early 1940s?

Laird: Yeah, the early 1940s.

J.G.: Did you ever hear of or know anybody you lived with in the government camps?

Laird: Oh yeah. It's a little more decent now that the farmers have taken it over. They got more decent places to live. Better living conditions. I ain't saying they're treating them any better. They used to have what they called tin shelters over them. The wall was tin. The top was tin. You'd freeze to death in the wintertime. My wife had kin folk that lived over there and I knowed friends that lived over there and you'd burn up in the summertime.

J.G.: Now this is in a government camp?

Laird: Government camp, yeah, just north of Cotton Center. Sits up on the west side of the road. But they made a big improvement in it. A big part of it now is Arabs and Mexicans.

J.G.: What did the people who lived there back in the 1930s think about that?

Laird: Well, they didn't build that until 1940-- this one. They had them down in Imperial Valley made out of tents. They would put down floors and put up tents and all. Back in 1935 they come along and inquire you know--I was working steady on the ranch--and wanted to know if I would consider moving in them. I said, "No, I wouldn't live in no place that the government's got somebody to tell me what to do and what I can't do." I said, "You have all kinds of riffraff people of every type was in there. I don't want nothing to do with them." And I didn't move in there. No way, I didn't. Same way they had one up there at Hollister. We picked apricots up there about ten or

twelve years for a contractor. Well, about a hundred yards from where we lived a man had his own camp -- nice camp. You could put up a tent or a trailer house if you had one. Well, he let me and my wife put ours under his tool shed. He'd move his tools out and there was plenty of shade and it was cool. One time we was up at Stockton and my wife's brother and some of his friends said they's going to get in a labor camp near there. At that time it belonged to the government. I said, "Go ahead but you'll be sorry of it." Well, they were ahead of me so when we come to this place I pulled in and started working. They went on up there and pretty soon they come back. My wife's brother and this other guy their chins all dropped down. "Hey, what's wrong with that government camp, fellows?" "Why, they don't let a white man in up there." "What's the matter?" "Nothing but Mexicans. Nothing but Mexicans let in there."

J.G.: That was in the 1930s?

Laird: That was in the 1950s.

J.G.: What was it like in the 1930s?

Laird: They didn't have any at all. No labor camps at all in the 1930s.

J.G.: I thought that some of the ones around Lamont and Arvin were government camps.

Laird: Well, I was down around Lamont and Arvin. If it was it was made out of tents. Now they had them down in Imperial Valley and they had them in Beaumont. They made them of tents though. Tents and floors and walled up a little bit.

J.G.: I know you didn't live there, but do you know what it was like to live there?

Laird: It wasn't decent. Well, it was dirty and little old kids were running around half hungry and naked with it. And some of them went to the bathroom wherever the pain hit them. That's exactly what they done. That's the way they probably been raised and wasn't no place to go anyway. They just had one big restroom and 40 or 50 people using one bathroom. It was disgraceful.

J.G.: So what I am hearing is that you lived mostly in grower-owned homes.

Laird: Yes, I did. When I was working where they had camps, I wouldn't get in the government camps. As I said, I respect people if they're worth respecting. But you run into all types of people. When we lived up there in Sunnyvale you'd hang some clothes out on the line in that camp and leave them

there after dark. If you did, you wouldn't have no clothes left. We worked in the cannery working sixteen hours a day. That's in 1935. My wife, my brother and I was driving five miles to work. Well, they had a shower--nice shower--but the camp boss came before dark come and locked it. Working in that cannery you'd get filthy dirty and even if we was Okies we liked to keep our bodies clean. So we come in one night and he had this door locked and he was gone so my brother--he was a little bit ornery anyhow--so he just taken him a tire tool and pried the lock and hinges off and throwed it down there and we went and took us a shower. The next day he had it the same way so that night he tore it off and throwed the lock away.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

SESSION 2 January 24, 1981

J.G.: Okay, Mr. Laird when we finished up last time we decided we'd start out this time by talking about some of the experiences that you or your brother had when there were attempts to organize the field workers back in the 1930s.

Laird: Well, the first experience I had was in the cotton strike. I wasn't directly involved in it but to show you how overbearing people can be--in 1938, we was getting seventy-five cents a hundred. Well, if you stayed out in the field and picked and people was out on strike, they might take you out and beat you up or burn your house down on you. You either quit or taken your consequences. Well, me and one of my younger brothers was out west of Tipton just driving around and looking things over. We looked across the field and there come a couple of guys in a dead run toward the fence. My brother said, "I wonder what those characters want." He thought they was going to give us a whipping. And you've seen cattle haven't you that went up to a fence and stopped right quick? They ran up to this fence and just stopped and used some foul language, "You so-and-so hunting trouble?" I said, "No, we ain't hunting no trouble." Well they said, "If you are, you better call the undertaker before you get over this fence because you'll need it." I said, "Hold on a minute buddy. I'm not coming over that fence into your field. You're not going to come on this highway either, are you? You come over this highway and we'll exchange the insults. But I'm not about to come over to your field."

Well, we drove on. Later I heard the growers had the strikers arrested and put in jail and kicked around a little.

J.G.: When you went back to Imperial Valley, what year would that have been?

Laird: In 1939 I went back the second time. We was living on this fellow's place between here and Tipton and he had a small crop that two of his brothers-in-law and I was picking. Anyway, there were about 50 to 100 strikers in the road hollering and cussing so I just picked up my sack and walked out. Well, his brothers-in-law did too. The farmer come over mad and wanted to know if I was going to pick cotton. He said, "[Your] father-in-law and two brothers-in-law won't go back unless you do." I said, "Well, now they can do what they want to. But I'm not going back. I've got a wife and five children here and I want them raised and I want to live to raise them." And I said, "I'm going to move out of the house I rented from you. You can have your house." I didn't have no problem with it. So I hired a fellow to move us back to Imperial Valley. And that was in September of 1939. Well, this alfalfa mill I referred to the other day--you worked twelve hours a day and seven days a week. There were no shutdowns. And as I said, we got thirty-five cents an hour for the first seven days which amounted to 84 hours and the next seven you got fifty cents. Well, that was high wages but it was awful hard work. I mean awful, physically hard work, and you got a break of five minutes every hour. I worked there nine months until August when they shut down. In late July or August whenever it got over 80 degrees it was too hot and it scalded the crops. So we moved up to Beaumont in Riverside County.

J.G.: So you went from the Imperial Valley to Beaumont?

Laird: Yeah, in August of 1940 we went from the Imperial Valley. Well, I picked peaches and apricots--whatever I'd get to pick. Then when that was done there wasn't anything else to do.

One Sunday I was out weeding a small grape vineyard and these guys come along and hollered, "Hey, you want to go fight fire?" I'd never seen fire fighting in my life. I just shook my head and they went on. In a few minutes they came back. In the meantime, my older brother come along and he said, "Alvin, let's get in that truck and go." We did. Way back there in them mountains.

J.G.: What mountains?

Laird: I don't know--back in there south of Riverside. I don't know what the name of it was. I don't remember. Anyway, there was about 30 of us in this old independent bobtail truck which

broke down. The forest ranger come along with his wife and daughter. He said, "Where you fellows headed to--the fire?" I said, "Yes, sir that's where we're headed." He told his wife and daughter to get out and said, [to the men] "Get in here. We sat on top of one another--that's the way we went. Up to this camp. We had no dinner and nothing to drink. They rushed us in there--what's your name, what's your address, where do you live--that was it. They gave you a canteen of water and a little miner's light to put on your head. Then they loaded everyone into the truck and over the mountains we went. Nothing to eat. They fixed up a little knapsack of sandwiches. There were some young boys anywhere from sixteen to eighteen years old. I never liked to see a kid go hungry. When we got up there the ranger that was in charge said, "You fellows want these sandwiches now 'cause that's all you're going to get till morning? That's breakfast." Well, them kids said, "We want ours now." I said, "Well, give what I got to them boys. They're hungrier than I am." Well, he divided them up--half of a sandwich around--to them.

We hiked back in the mountains several miles from nowhere up-hill all the way. It got dark and we put them headlights on. The ranger was leading us. What we was doing was going along the trails where they'd already put the fire out to see that none of it had jumped back over. We walked all that night until eight o'clock the next morning when the rangers came in after, but we still had to hike out again. We finally caught a truck to go back. There was a big CCC Camp [Civilian Conservation Corps] with about 1,500 boys in there. We rested in the CCC Camp. They give us a good meal and covers and said, "Now here's a blanket and there's a tree out there--that's where you're going to sleep," said, "no telling when we'll wake you up." At twelve o'clock they woke us up and back to the mountains we went. We done that for two days. By that time the fire had got so far back in the mountains that it was too far to haul us in. After they couldn't haul us in, they started bringing in water trucks. We'd take fifty-foot fire hoses and fit the joints together and start them downhill to put the slow-smoldering fires out and keep them from recurring. I was just about to give out dragging them hoses down that mountain. I was a young man at that too. So when the ranger says, "Can anybody in this bunch cook?" I said, "Yeah, I'm not no professional but I can cook." He said, "Well come on. Pick out some of these kids here. They ain't no good nohow." Some of them didn't have no shoes and their feet was worn out from hobbling around on them rocks and briars and things. I picked up four or five of them and I said, "How about taking my brother with me?" I had an older brother. "Yeah, take him." They had a camp established and had a stove made out of rocks and metal that they'd built themselves. The last four days I was up there that's what I done. I cooked for those rangers

and everybody for thirty cents an hour. I was glad to get it.

When that was over, I got a job back home picking apples for thirty-five cents an hour.

J.G.: And what year was that?

Laird: That was in 1940. And we picked every day--Sunday and all--nine hours a day. They wouldn't work you any more than that. The first day of December the man that had bought the apples off of the grower said, "I want you and the two friends you ride with to quit picking and go down and work in the packing house where the women was grading and shipping them out." We did. The rest of them finished picking the middle of December. It was snowing by that time. We had to go up every morning and push the snow off the road -- about eleven miles up in the mountains north of Beaumont. We worked until the fifteenth of January doing that.

Well, they had one welfare office there in Beaumont--it was in the lobby of the hotel. Every so often you had to go up for an interview and that was something that degraded my pride. I was ashamed of it. They only had two women in there. The head woman's name was Miss Summers. I forgot this other one's name. This tall blond said, "Have you been looking at anything to do? Any kind of work?" I said, "Lady, I'm sorry but there's nothing to be found. I haven't been looking for anything." She got real nasty. So Miss Summers walked over and called her by her name and said, "Let me tell you something. Mr. Laird is telling you the truth." Said, "There's nothing in this town and nowheres else in this valley and you know it and if it weren't for people like him, you'd be tramping the street wearing your shoes out too." Well, she tucked her tail and away she went. From then on every time she'd see me coming she'd go the other way. I was only there a short time and they sent me over to Riverside to a WPA [Works Progress Administration] job. That's fifty cents an hour. I worked there a week.

At that time the farm work had started up and I got a job baling oat hay in a old stationary baler. The baler set right down on the ground. It was powered by a team of horses. You fed the bundles by hand and you tied it by hand. Well, my job was feeding it. We worked at that about a month. One of my brothers, my wife's cousin, a friend of mine, and a couple more guys was running the baler. You had to throw the load off at that owner's house. Now those got long you know, and piled up there and when we finished the owner said, "Well, I'll go to the house and get you boys the money to pay you." While he was gone they said, "Alvin, you've been feeding this thing a long time. I bet you a sixpack of beer that you can't choke this baler down." Well, I'd worked on old balers half of my

life. I've never seen a baler I couldn't choke down if I wanted to. So I just picked up all the oats I could get and throwed it in there and the old plunger said, "Whoom!" It had what they call a bullwheel on the side that keeps the balance that just busted plumb off the shaft. We lacked about a ton of having it all baled. Well, there it was. He come back and he said, "My, my boys you just ruined my baler." Well, I was ashamed to tell him what we'd done.

But anyway, I left Rosie and the children--we had six children at that time, didn't we? [asks his wife] I went up to Sunnyvale and worked in the fruit and in the cannery.

J.G.: So that was in 1941?

Laird: Yes, that was in 1941. Anyway, worked up there all summer and sent Rosie back enough money to survive on. Now believe it or not we was paying \$5 a month for rent.

J.G.: You working in Sunnyvale--or your wife?

Laird: I wasn't paying any rent at all. I was staying with my brother and my stepmother. That's what she was paying--\$5 a month. We had to pay all our utility bills which wasn't very much. But when we first moved up there we lived in a house right by the school. I was very proud to get that close to school as I had two children in school at that time. But the fellow come along and sold the place. We had to move and paid \$12 a month for that house. Think of that now--\$12 a month. Pretty decent house, wasn't it Rosie? Better than we're living in now.

J.G.: So your wife and kids stayed behind in Beaumont while you went to San Jose to work in the fruit?

Laird: Yeah, that's what I did. Anyway, the landlord said, "Well, I'm going to sell this place. Now there ain't no big hurry, but move whenever you can find a place." Well, during that time a lot of people left Beaumont to go into the defense plants in Los Angeles and there were lots of empty houses. I told Rosie, "There's no use in being in a hurry. There's houses empty all over town." But about a week or two before I was supposed to move out, I went looking and everywhere they asked, "How many children you got or do you have any children?" We said, "Yes," and they said, "You can't rent it." The people that owned the places to rent give orders not to rent to anybody with children. In some sense I can see the reason for that. Sometimes children are destructive if you allow them to be. Anyway, we couldn't rent one. So just when it was time to move a friend of my brother said, "My son-in-law's got a place just out of the city limits and he'll rent it. There

isn't no one living there nohow--just sitting over there empty." We rented that in 1940, didn't we? And stayed there until December 1941. And then we moved to Porterville in 1942.

J.G.: So you left Beaumont in 1942.

Laird: We came back up here and went to work for this rancher which I'd knew before and I had worked for him some back in 1937.

J.G.: A rancher around Porterville?

Laird: Yeah, seven miles northwest of town here. He had 247 acres of cotton and 40 acres of alfalfa and about 50 or 60 of milo maize. I was the only hired hand he had except for a one-arm nephew who was just as helpless as he could be. He paid me \$120 a month. That was top wages. I don't say it in bragging, but as far as labor was concerned, I got as much or a little more than most of them got. The people that knew me would pay it because there wasn't anything I couldn't do because I was raised on a farm. \$120 a month and a house furnished. Well, in the meantime he hired another fellow younger than I was. He didn't have any children at all. So we worked a couple of months and one day he said to me, "Alvin, I got a raise. Did you?" I said, "No, I didn't. What's he paying you?" And he said, "\$120 a month." Well, I'd been getting that all the time -- but I didn't say nothing. What had happened awhile before was that me and this fellow had got into a discussion and I said, "If a man does the same work, he should get the same wages. Me and him got into a discussion about it. And we got into a argument and he got mad and I did too. He said, "Well, I'm the boss and I was shop foreman in a big garage for years. I know some men are worth more than others. I said, "True enough they are. But," I said, "If a man goes out here and does the same work I do I'm worth just as much as he is." He got mad and I did too and so we finally walked off before we got into some blows. There was no more said about it. I guess his conscious got to bothering him and he raised his wages.

In 1937, young lady, I chopped cotton for five cents a row-- half a mile rows. Between here and Tipton for five cents a row is what we got. My brothers and my stepsister and the old mother-in-law, half brothers and uncles--we all chopped cotton for five cents a row. Can you imagine how much you made? We were living in this little cooling room where my third daughter was born. The doctor come all the way from Strathmore to Tipton to deliver her for \$35.

I want to give you an example of the way we raised our children. We were a little rough on them sometimes, but my youngest boy was pretty ornery for a kid--he was twelve or thirteen years old. When we were living in Woodville there was a television

man sitting on my doorstep waiting on me. He said, "Mr. Laird, that boy of yours broke my windshield out of my station wagon." "Well, I'm sorry it happened." I said, "If he did, what do I owe you?" He said, "Twenty-five dollars." I said, "Okay, I'll pay you," and I paid him. I didn't think the boy needed a whipping and I said, "Boy, now I ain't going to whip you, but this fall whenever cotton picking starts I'm going to make you pay that \$25. I'm going to make you pick cotton for punishment." He never said nothing. I never did make 'em do like I said because I was ashamed to take him over there. Him and his mother was behind me. They had three rows and I had two. I heard him talking to her. He said to his mother, "God damn, Mama, just think \$25 for a old scroungy cat." He was throwing at the cat sitting on the hood of the car and missed the cat and hit the windshield. I never did make him work all of it out. I thought that hurt him worse than a whipping. But it was rough. I had trouble with him the last years in high school. He has a temper I guess about like his daddy. So he was in line catching the bus and he was very particular about his clothes and especially his shoes so he said some of the kids was pushing and shoving like a bunch of kids will do. So he stepped out of line and the teacher in charge of the line gave him a shove and shoved him back in line and told him to stay in line. Well, at that time he was seventeen years old, and he used some bad language and told the teacher, "I'll use my fist on you." He was kicked out of school once before because of his smart talk. When they kicked him out my wife went down there two or three times and got him reinstated and she was mad at him and she wouldn't do it this time. I said, "Well, I'll go this time," but I hated to. My brother-in-law drove me in. So my son was sitting in the backseat and he said, "I'll tell that so-and-so a thing or two." I said, "Okay, you just wait till you get over there and I'll let you tell him." We got over there--pulled up in front of the high school--and he was sneaking down in his seat like this (gestures) and I said, "Come on." "No, go ahead. I'll just make it worse." I said, "That's probably right." I went in and talked to a man teacher--not the one that give him a tough time but one of the high officials. He was pretty well upset. I told him, I said, "I want to apologize for what that boy done. My wife and I was working hard to get him out of high school--and the rest of them too--and he only lacks two or three months of being out, and I would appreciate it very much if you would let him go ahead and graduate." He first said he wasn't going to do it. I just stayed there and kept talking. He finally said he would, but if he ever gets out of line again that he would kick him out for good. Well, that meant you know there wasn't going to be no reinstating anymore.

So I told him, "If you don't go on back and graduate, I got a hoe waiting for you. I'll put you out in that cotton patch

hoeing them weeds. He will tell you to this day that's the only reason he went back and finished school. He's got a good job now. Makes \$1,200 a month besides what he makes on the side. He's getting along a lot better than his old daddy and mother ever did.

You don't realize how to appreciate an education like us people that haven't got one. I'm proud of people that's got education. Whether it's high school or whatever they got--the higher they get the more proud I am of them because we didn't have that chance. We worked and my daddy farmed most the time. When he wasn't farming he was working for somebody else. Us children went to school when the cotton was all picked and the next spring when it got big enough to chop, we'd start hoeing it. Now that's the kind of education we got. And he was pretty bad to move around too and that's the reason we both said when we had the children, we wouldn't keep them out of school like we had to do. That's one reason I said I wasn't ever going to drag my children around.

Now my brother older than me--three years older than I am--he only had two children. When the oldest was ready to go to school they happened to be living on an old maid school teacher's mother's place and he left them there with the school teacher and went up north to work. Her mother owned the place they were living on and they kept doing that up until the children were in high school, didn't they? [asks Rosie] They stayed there from 1944 until what--three years ago?

One reason I didn't follow the crops after the kids got out of school was that her mother and father was still with us. As I said, she was old and you couldn't drag an old person 70-some-odd years old around. She was eleven years older than her husband. He was a wino but the nicest guy you'd ever seen when he was sober. But he drank. Many a time I've seen him drink four bottles of wine a day by himself. When he drank he was vulgar-mouthed and nasty.

J.G.: And you said that your father-in-law lived with you for about eleven years?

Laird: Ten years. He died in 1961.

J.G.: To get it clear in my head--when you came back from the Beaumont and Riverside area was 1942?

Laird: That was in January. First of World War II. Yes ma'am.

J.G.: And you came and you lived seven miles outside of Porterville?

Laird: Northwest of Porterville, yes.

J.G.: And you went to work as a farm hand on an alfalfa farm? And you stayed there fourteen seasons.

Laird: Yeah, alfalfa and cotton. What I mean by seasons is doing the harvesting--making and working the crop. Towards the fall of the year when we got the crop laid by, I'd pick cotton. I'd rake and cut and rake the hay until the cotton was ready for picking and after that was all over, I'd pick the cotton. When the cotton was picked he would start me to cutting the stalks and getting the ground ready to prepare to make another crop. But he had 420 acres of his own and the second year I went to work for him, he rented another 160. Then the next year he rented another 160. Well, his brother come back--he was in France--and his brother taken over the foreman's job and he hired another guy too, but I was his main hand. I done just what I wanted to do 'cause I never seen him around and you never seen a nicer guy to be working for than his brother.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

Laird: As I said, I worked for this fellow fourteen seasons and most of them was the whole year -- maybe a month or two off. But he got on the bottle and he had three different women--didn't he [asks Rosie] by the time we done the fourteen years. He got on the bottle and he would come out and stop me cutting hay, baling hay, whatever I was doing and twice a day he'd send me to town to get him some vodka. He lived five miles out of Poplar and five miles out of Tipton. He'd been picked up for drunk driving and he was afraid to drive when he was drunk. And I'd go get it for him. He got to where he wouldn't pay me. Well, the first time he wouldn't pay me I kept on asking him. After I quit I turned him in to the Labor Commission.

J.G.: The Labor Commission?

Laird: That's a law they got. If you were working for some farmer or anybody else even the factory, if they don't pay you--if it don't get over \$300--you go to the Labor Board. That's the Labor Commission. If you go any more than that you have to turn it into the Small Claims Court to collect the labor debt. Well anyway, I went to this Labor Commission. Seventy dollars is all he owed me but just wouldn't pay it. So I turned him in and of course they made him pay it and penalized him \$15 or \$20.

But I didn't work for him next year. I worked for another fellow. Well, the next year he come back--him and his brother both come back and begged me to come back and work for him. He promised me faithfully--he'd been married again--now he said, "If you come back and work for me again there won't be no problems in wages." I said, "You're the nicest guy I've ever worked for, but I work for a living and I've got to have my money. That's what I work for--money." I said, "If you promise you'll pay me, all right." "Okay." I went back. At first he paid pretty good. Later in the year he got in debt to me \$170. He moved to Tulare and his brother lived out there on the ranch. He wasn't even paying his brother. So I told his brother one day--I said--his name was Robert--I said, "Robert, I've got me another job. I won't be here tomorrow." "No," he said, "come on finish out the crop with me." He said, "I just can't harvest without you." He said, "I'll go down to the gin"--'course the gin was financing him.

J.G.: Cotton Gin?

Laird: Boswell Company. The gin companies finance most of the growers. Some of them finance themself. Robert said, "I'll go down here and make the arrangements and they'll pay you." Well, the Gin manager come out and said, "Yeah, I'll pay you if you'll wait two more weeks 'cause he done drawn up all of his budget." And I was mad so I said, "No, I won't." So I quit.

I worked for another fellow that year. The next year he hired me back again. But, I didn't have no problem with him after that. The Labor Commission penalized him \$170. But I finally got my check for \$320. That's what they penalized him. But tell you how they are now, I turned him in to the Labor Commission and kept a-waiting and kept a-waiting and kept a-waiting. No word. So I went up to Tulare to old Judge Rush. He was the Justice judge up there. I went to his office and wasn't in so I told his secretary what I wanted. "Well," she said, "you can't see him. He's busy down in court." And so I said--I had a bad temper--so I said, "Young lady, I'll tell you. I'll go plumb over you and the judge's both heads if I have to. I'm going to get my money." "Well, you can't even see him. He's in court." I said, "I will see him." So down there I went. I know she got on the phone before I got out that door and told him I was coming. He was in a trial. I went right in the back and sat down and he was a comical old character. He said, "Hey, you back there." I knew who he was pointing at but I just sat there. He said, "You!" he said, "with the striped overalls on, come up here. What's on your mind?" I said, "Well, judge I didn't want to interrupt your trial, but I'm trying to collect my wages and I can't collect them." "Well," he said, "I had the man arrested but he made bond. I couldn't keep him in jail."

I said, "Now judge that won't do me a bit of good to keep him in jail. I don't want the man in jail. I want my money." "Well," he said, "go on in there and talk to my secretary and she'll tell you more about it than I can." So I went in and talked to her. She acted like it was a secret and somebody was about to hear. She said, "Don't worry Mr. Laird, you'll get your money now." Everybody in town was after him. There was no reason for him doing that except drinking of course. He made good crops. Anyway, I finally got my money. But that's the kind of runaround they give you.

J.G.: What year was that?

Laird: That was in the 1950s--the late 1950s.

J.G.: You said earlier that you had worked on Tagus Ranch?

Laird: I did--one time. It was with a bunch of WPA workers. That was in 1938 shoveling sand out of their irrigation ditches.

J.G.: And that was in 1938?

Laird: Yeah, in 1938. In 1938 was the only year I worked on the WPA.

J.G.: I see, okay.

Mrs. L.: In 1941 he got \$44 a month from the WPA work and the Water District hired him and guess what he got for that--six and a quarter cents an hour.

J.G.: From the Water District. What were you doing?

Laird: Sawing wood, patching pipelines. See what they'd done--they'd bought up privately owned apple orchards. They needed the water because the city was growing and they needed the water. Well, they had huge reservoirs made out of concrete and they had some city wells too, but the city wells wouldn't supply enough water. They had these huge reservoirs and them ranchers had their own water and the water would come out of the mountains you know. Well, they needed that water so they bought up all the apple orchards and hired me and a few more to cut them trees up for six and a quarter cents an hour. That's all we got and a few commodities. And that's when we raised Cain and they finally sent us over to Riverside and put us to work on the WPA. I worked there two weeks and then I got a job baling hay.

J.G.: You said a few commodities. Did you get surplus kinds of things that families could get?

Laird: Well, here now I'll tell you what we got. Sometimes you'd get

a few canned goods--those were eatable. We got bacon squares. Well, some of the bacon was so old that it had turned green and had molded. The grain flour had weevils in it. It was grain. It wasn't white--it looked like ground-up wheat--just like ground-up wheat only it was coarse flour. It had weevils in it. Some of the white flour had weevils in it. Sometimes you'd get raisins and some prunes and half the time them was mildewed too. Been rained on or damaged or stuff like that. Very few of it was eatable and that's what we got.

J.G.: That was in the early 1940s?

Laird: That was in 1940.

J.G.: Was there a time in the late 1930s when you could get commodities?

Laird: Yeah. I didn't. The only time I got any of that was in 1935. I'd got off of it until then. But I tell you what I heard a fellow tell a woman down in Beaumont. He went up there and he said, "Miss Summer," he said [the welfare lady] "I woke up this morning and thought I'd fix me some breakfast and I got a little dog. All I had to feed that little dog was some of the ground flour. I cooked him some of that and made biscuits out of it. He just snubbed his nose and walked off. Now I have to eat that. I have to eat something the dog won't eat." She said. "I'm sorry, we'll feed you a little more white flour this time." And that's the kind they give you to eat. Most of it wasn't fitting to eat for human beings.

J.G.: What did you think of Roosevelt and some of his programs?

Laird: Well, to be frank with you his intentions might have been good and the mistakes he made he wasn't always responsible for. It was his advisers just like all of them have their advisers. The first mistake I think he made was destroying something. I told you the other day that people were hungry and naked. It got to where people couldn't rent. You read all the time what's created this welfare program--the ghettos of Chicago, New York, Detroit, Michigan--everywhere there's a big city. It's crowded up with Puerto Ricans, colored people, and poor white people. The slums are just overcrowded with them. And they're always having to bail the cities out of hock. Look how many times they've bailed New York out of hock -- how many times they bailed Chicago out of hock. It isn't nothing but welfare programs that caused it. Well, they got the poor and they have to feed them, and that's what's created it. That's one of the programs that I don't agree on.

When I came to this country up here west of Corcoran, Boswell Land Company owned thousands of acres of land and other big

banking concerns did too. The government drained that lake.

J.G.: What lake?

Laird: Corcoran Lake. It used to come up there within a mile or two of Corcoran. The government drained it. They went in there and leveled it to keep the floods out. I'd seen it flooded in 1939. That water was right up to the eaves of the houses. You could see the exhaust of the tractors sticking up out of the water out there in 1939. I seen it. Well, they drained that out and turned it over to them big land dealers--Boswell Gin Company, Salyers Land Company and several other big companies.

J.G. So what you're saying is that Roosevelt's policies created this welfare system and big owners owning huge farms?

Laird: I'm tellin' you the truth--I didn't know what welfare was. I didn't. Now I'd heard of soup lines. I'd heard of them. But personally I never seen one and never was in one. And Herbert Hoover was elected in 1928. All right, that was after World War I and the bottom fell out of the cotton prices. It wasn't Hoover's fault no more than it was mine because Congress controlled it. President Roosevelt had more power than any President we've ever had up there yet. In 1913 Woodrow Wilson was elected President. In 1917 he was elected again. I was big enough to read a paper. I can remember it. All the headlines on the paper said, "Vote for Wilson. Vote for Wilson. Stay out of war." [There were] little [newsboys] walking down the streets. You could hear them hollering all the time.

Well, Wilson was elected again with a big majority, and in 1917 we's in war and everything boomed. My daddy was farming and we sold cotton for eight to ten cents a pound until that war broke out. After that war broke out the price jumped up to forty and forty-five cents a pound. People said, "Oh, we're getting rich." My old daddy was against it. He told one of my neighbors, "Yeah, that's blood. Pure blood money is all it is. If people's got to bleed and die for me to have a few dollars, I don't want it." Well, they almost come to blows over it.

In 1919 I got as high as \$5 a hundred picking cotton. Man! That was in 1919. In 1920 the bottom fell out. Farmers had borrowed and begged everything they could get to buy more land--went out and bought equipment and mules and horses--there was no such thing as tractors -- and sunk themselves into debt. Well, the banks and big companies wound up with the farms. That rocked on for years till 1932. Roosevelt went over with a big majority 'cause people was tired of Hoover. I was tired of it too, but I lived through a lot worse, lady, afterwards. I did for a fact--true fact.

Mrs. Laird: When Eisenhower was elected, two of my sisters-in-law and me was going somewhere like Fresno or Bakersfield. This one sister-in-law is a hotheaded Democrat. Boy, I mean she's hotheaded. 'Course, I'm not either way. We vote for the man. We don't vote for the party. We vote for the man. We've always voted for the man. Anyway, going down the road we was in her car and she said, "Well, see you got a new President this morning. Did you vote for him?" I said, "Yes." She said, "Well, you're going to be right back to where you was when Hoover was in there. Did you know that? When Hoover got elected we had as nice a home as there was in Oklahoma." And I said, "Well, did Roosevelt give it back to you?" She didn't have no answer for that of course. I said, "Well, Christine let me tell you this much. If they'll put me back on the farm where we was when Hoover was in there where if Alvin got sick and I wanted to go out and drive old Pete and Judy, I could do it, I wouldn't have to run ask the boss about it. I didn't ask nobody for nothing when Hoover was in office. We was on the farm. We was doing our own work. We was raising our own chickens or milk and eggs and now I don't have none of that."

Laird: Well, to finish it out--I think that's what's created all the problem we have now. I know I lived through it. I've seen women and children--this is hard to believe--back in the late 1930s and even up to 1941 riding freight trains.

J.G.: Women and children riding freight trains? Where did you see that?

Laird: Right there in Imperial Valley. We lived just about 50 yards from the railroad track and there's a big stockyard there. They bring the cattle out of Old Mexico and Texas and places like that and run them on the barley fields and sugar-beets fields to put them through the winter. They stop there with them cattle cars and I'd seen a lot of women and kids and men. The last year I was there in 1939 and 1940 there wasn't a day passed that there wasn't a hobo man that wanted a meal. All the different kinds of people come there pretty near every day wanting a meal. I didn't turn them down if I had one.

J.G.: And that was men and children and women?

Laird: Men and children. In 1936 I was steady employed on the ranch. I was getting \$3 a day for twelve hours. We had four children then. The doctor charged me \$30 to come ten miles to deliver the baby--our fourth child. Anyway, this crippled man and his wife and three children knocked on our door one winter night. They said they needed something to eat and they was cold. We'd take them in and feed them and her [Rosie] and her mother went and got some old coats and things they could scrape together out of the closets and trunks. The next morning my wife's daddy took them to Brawley.

J.G.: To where?

Laird: To the Brawley welfare office. El Centro was the county seat, but the welfare office was just ten miles. He loaded them in his car and helped them down and got them some help. I don't know where this family had come from, but they looked pathetic--little old kids four and five years old and him crippled!

I worked on this ranch in the Imperial Valley three different years and the owner paid every two weeks. He didn't want you to have any idle time. He wanted you doing something all the time. He come out there one day and it was awful hot there and I was irrigating this barley. The barley's up about shoulder high and ready to cut when it got dry enough. He said, "Alvin, why don't you go down to the other end and check your water," which was a half mile--and a half mile back. Well, on the east end there was some shade trees. He said, "Take your shovel and cut that dry mustard off the borders." I said, "Mr. Young, there's a half mile down there and half a mile back. It's so hot and I'm so damn glad to get back up into this shade, I don't have time to cut no mustard seed. If you want that mustard cut, you hire somebody else besides me to do it." He was hard-boiled. He had one poor Mexican out there worked just as hard as I did and he had two Hindus and me. We irrigated and took care of 1,000 acres. He was paying that Mexican \$2 a day and me \$3. The Hindus told me he was paying them \$3. The only time you'd ever seen him was on Monday morning--big talker--big loud-mouth character and he kept a-talking and I said, "Mr. Young, how much are you going to pay for irrigating this year." "Well," he said, \$2.50." I said, "Wait a minute, Mr. Young you're paying them Hindus \$3.00." "Why I'm not paying them so-and-so such a thing." I said, "Well, now I don't know which one's a-lying you or them, but they both swear you are." "I'm not--darn it--I'm paying Tony--the Mexican--\$2.00 and them [Hindus] \$2.50 just like I'm paying you." I said, "Now, just hold on a minute. It's worth more than \$2.50 a day to stand on this ditch bank twelve hours in this heat--much less do any work." "Well," he said, "you're a pretty good irrigator. If you won't say anything about it--he was lying and he knew he was lying--I'll give you \$3.00." Well, I went on and worked the rest of that year till January of 1937. Then I went down to the All American Canal.

J.G.: You went down to the All American Canal. You worked for this guy irrigating in the Imperial Valley for three years.

Laird: Yeah, part of three--part of 1935, 1936 and 1937.

J.G.: There wasn't enough work to keep you busy all year round?

Laird: No.

J.G.: What did you do in between times, then?

Laird: Nothing. We lived on what little I had saved.

J.G.: Did you have to go on welfare or were you able to make enough?

Laird: No, no, not then. I made enough, yeah. Now out there on his place he usually had something for you to do on this and the other 1,000 acres. There was working in ditches. He cleaned all his ditches with shovels by hand. There was no such thing as plowing them. His canal-water ditches was wider than that wall over there and then for sub-ditches he'd run the water out here in this sub-ditch for 80 acres at one time. The pipe wasn't in tubes. It was little redwood strips nailed together about an inch and a half or two inches square you know--burried in the ditch. You'd take little paddles--make little paddles out of boards--and go along and gauge this water. If it got to running too fast it would flip your peg over a little bit. This owner was superintendent of the water district. He stole more water than he ever paid for.

J.G.: In addition to being a grower of a 1,000 acres he was superintendent of the water district?

Laird: That's right. Anyway, I want to tell you this story. The last year I worked for him when he had 160 acres at the edge of the desert. This may be hard for you to believe, but it was so hot you'd scare a lizard. Anyway, the owner ordered so many feet of water. Well, then they didn't have no gate that raised up like they do now--just got boards over the head gates and the water would gradually flow. Well, he'd set up near the side of his house and he'd look through them field glasses. He knew when that ditch rider left and he'd wait till he'd get out of sight and he'd go over and drop in another board. And you might already have your water lot but when that other head of water hit you, you had to make room for some more. This ditch rider come down through there one morning and he was hot under the collar. "Hey, fellow I want to tell you something--I want you to leave that water alone. I got that water set and your neighbor down the road here has got so many feet and you drop in this board ahead of him and it takes away water from him." I said, "I know that. The man I'm working for lives right over in that white house. He's probably up in his upstairs now watching you with a pair of field glasses--and he's the president of this water district. If you want to get any information you'd better talk to him and leave me alone. I'm not going to steal water. It's nothing to me to steal water. Do you think I steal water to make more work for me?" Well, he left and didn't say another word.

That fellow kept that up all the time. He'd order so many feet of water--well them boards is eight-inch boards. You know how much eight inches is. He stole that water.

He owned 1,000 acres. He didn't rent it. He owned it. And that's what's gotten me against big operators. They call theirself good, honest, law-abiding citizens. They're nothing but--they're worse than a common thief. And that's what I feel about a lot of people's religion, lady. I believe in people living like they want to and like they feel. Live where you believe. Prove it. Don't say you believe something and do something else.

J.G.: Before I asked your wife what she thought "Okie" meant.

Laird: That's an insult.

J.G.: What does that mean?

Laird: Well, it's a low-down people -- scum of the earth. That's the way I take it. When we first come out here we had an old Model-T Ford--any kind of old wreck car we could get around in and didn't have enough clothes to hardly hide our nakedness. I didn't like it. No I didn't, but that was the only way. I couldn't help it. I didn't appreciate anybody calling me an "Okie"--and don't yet-unless they did it in a joking way. It's just like me saying some degrading remark to you against your belief or anything. We're human beings. We're all human beings. And I say live like you believe and treat people like you want to be treated. I have no reason to come up and insult you because you don't live or believe like I do. I think you'll agree with me on that.

J.G.: I do indeed.

Laird: Like I said before, I'm proud of anybody that got an education. I'm proud you got it and I'm proud of anybody that's got more education than I've got because I haven't got one. I don't begrudge it them. I don't begrudge anybody their wealth if they made it in an honest and fair way. But to get out here and work somebody for nothing like they're working these wetback Mexicans right today and poor white people like they did back in my days and the blacks in the south [isn't right.] You don't know nothing about what happened in the south amongst the colored people. In 1933 I knew a farmer [whose] name was Parris Green who had this colored guy working for him plowing with mules and a cultivator. He went out there and shot that guy off of that cultivator just like you'd shoot a dog.

J.G.: Where was that?

Laird: Right there in Oklahoma where I was raised. It was the same

town I was borned in. Well, that fall I was at the cotton gin with her [Rosie's] uncle and he said, "Parris, what did it cost you for killing that nigger?" Was no such thing as a colored person or a black man--just a nigger. He said, "\$300. That's the lawyer fee you know." Had another family there who was wealthy farmers--big farmers. One of them was drunk and went out to one of his niggers' house one morning in a little one-room shack out there on Sunday. "Get out here and go to work," he said. [The black man] said, "Mr. Ben, this is my first day I've tried to rest. I've worked every Sunday. I was going to rest today." "Come out of there and go to work, or I'll come in and kick you out," the owner said. [The black man] said, "Mr. Ben, anytime you kick my door down you won't kick anybody else's." He kicked the door down and when he did, the nigger shot him.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2

END OF INTERVIEW

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY

The 1930s Migration to the Southern San Joaquin Valley

Oral History Program

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: Rosie Lee Harlas Laird (Age: 69)

INTERVIEWER: Judith Gannon

DATED: January 24, 1981

J.G.: This is an interview with Rosie Laird by Judith Gannon for the California State College, Bakersfield, CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project. The interview was held at 754 East River Drive, Porterville, California on January 24, 1981 at 9:30 a.m.

J.G.: Okay, Mrs. Laird your husband talked a lot about the experience of coming to California during the 1930s from his point of view and now we would like to hear some of your experiences as a wife and mother and employee in the fields during that time. So just go ahead and reminisce.

Laird: In 1935 we came to California from Oklahoma because we couldn't rent any land in 1934 or 1935. In 1931 we came to Texas and we stayed there until my sister died. When my sister died, my husband borrowed \$8 from his father for me to go back home to Oklahoma. In Oklahoma they had extra good cotton and where we was in Texas--in Pecos Valley--they didn't have very much cotton. Alvin was about through picking what little he had, and he and his brother and some friends of ours loaded up and come back to Oklahoma. During that time I was pregnant with our third baby which is the oldest one that's living. Alvin took a job from my uncle and he was supposed to get paid \$1 a day for every day's work he did, and he was supposed to wait till after the cotton was picked in the fall to get his pay. Well, when he picked the cotton, the old landlord didn't remember owing him anything and all we got was our food and our feed for our cows and our chickens out of it. Now this is the honest truth.

J.G.: When you were working for your uncle did you live on his property? He had cows and things like that?

Laird: Yes.

J.G.: You said a little bit earlier that you lost two children. Where did that happen and how did that happen?

Laird: That happened at Barstow.

J.G.: Barstow, California?

Laird: Barstow, Texas. Where we lived at Barstow we had to haul water eighteen miles and that cost us a dollar a barrel. The water set in big tanks for months at a time and I got kidney poison and went into chills and fever. I lost both babies with kidney poison. When I lost my first baby I went to the hospital and was in the hospital eleven days. It cost \$4 a day for me to stay in that hospital. Of course, the doctor took the baby. When I got pregnant with the second baby which was right away, I took chills and fever again and I lost that baby. I'd have chills--one at 12:00 daytime and one at 12:00 at night. My whole body was so sore until I couldn't hardly stand for my husband to turn over in bed. Every muscle was just like a boil almost. Anyway, when the baby died I knew the minute that life stopped because you know everytime that there isn't any life. My muscles was sore and I could feel it just extra clear. So I told the doctor and he said, "Oh, it was imagination." But, anyway, he packed me and caused the baby to be born, and it was dead all right--stillborn you know. Anyway, in 1931 my sister died. I went back to Oklahoma when she died in September. Then my husband and them came on back to pick cotton and I got sick again. The doctor told me when I lost the first two that I'd be very lucky if I carried any more. He said that I'd lose them at that stage. At that stage I had to go to bed and alter my feet above my head to keep from losing the third one. He was born in 1932. Sometimes during the summer you didn't have any money -- nothing but credit at the grocery store--but that's all. The baby got sick with the breaking out around his mouth and around his bottom. He couldn't nurse and he couldn't have a bowel movement. He'd just scream bloody murder everytime he tried to. So I took him to the doctor. 'Course, the doctor would wait for his money until fall time when we went to work picking cotton. But at that time back there in the east where we lived, grocery stores sold groceries--pencils and crayolas and stuff like that for school children--but no medication at all--no powder, no baby oil, no olive oil, no nothing that you had to have for babies. The medication I needed to heal this baby's mouth cost ten cents and of course we didn't have no car. I bummed a ride to take him to the doctor and I came back home and gathered up the five dozen eggs out of the yard and rode five miles horseback--bareback--to the store to sell those five dozen eggs at five cents a dozen. Then I rode the horse on into town which was seven miles further to get the medicine and come back home. It took me practically all day. My mother kept the baby while I was doing this.

In 1933 when our next son was born--which was the fourth pregnancy. He was borned in the middle of summertime. Again we had no money for nothing. I gathered up a dozen nice fat laying hens and sold them for 25 cents apiece to have \$3 to buy cotton tips and Q-tips and baby oil and stuff that I had to have for a new baby. Well, the landlord's son knew I'd sold these hens and had money so he sent his brother down to borrow the money from my husband. Well, it wasn't my husband's money--it was my money. And Alvin told him, "I don't have no money." Then later his wife told me, "It sure did make him mad 'cause he didn't get that money. He wanted it to buy a quart of whiskey and go dancing on." He would pay me back in the fall, but I needed it in the summertime when that baby was born. Did he get mad at me and wouldn't speak to me for six months. I told his wife, I said, "If you had needed it for medicine, I'd might have let him have it, but I wouldn't have even let my dad or Alvin have it to spend on dancing and drinking!"

J.G.: How were your babies delivered? Did they have a midwife that came to your home?

Laird: No, we had a doctor. He came out. He had a car. He'd come twelve miles to deliver our babies. We lived in the forks of Red River and North Fork where the Red River divides Texas from Oklahoma. That old doctor was our family doctor for years. We had what we called a breeding jackass and they even put that doctor across that river on that jackass. My dad's even carried him across that river on his back. You can only get the boat so far and then you are still in water, and he'd put that doctor on his back and carry him out of that boat up to the dry land. The doctor made a joke out of it. He said he'd crossed that river on everything except our old billy goat.

Sometimes the doctors was a little late in getting to the birth. With our oldest son that was born in 1932, he was out on another call. He'd delivered twin babies and both of them was stillborn and he had quite a time delivering them. So he didn't get there until our oldest son was about three or four hours old. Our second son also was born a little bit before the doctor got there.

J.G.: Who delivered the baby?

Laird: Oh, my mother and some of my cousins. They weren't midwives, understand. Now my grandmother on my dad's side of the house was a midwife, but midwives didn't deliver none of mine.

J.G.: But your mother and your grandmother knew how to cut the cord and all of that?

Laird: Yeah, they did that. In 1934 we didn't make much of a cotton crop as Alvin told you in his talk the other day. Our crop was kind of low and the landlord wouldn't lease us any land because he wanted that plow-up money himself. When the landlord wouldn't rent us any land in 1935, we loaded up and started for California. It was us and our two older children and I was pregnant with our oldest daughter. We had the old truck and \$40 between the three families--my mother and dad and my brother and my uncle on my dad's side. So there was eight of us came out here in that truck with everything all eight of us owned. We got to Buckeye, Arizona and stopped there. We started unloading and setting up our tents. We brought our bedsteads and our springs and mattresses and things and my mother and I was always very particular about our beds. We'd made all our quilts and we had some beautiful quilts. Anyway, all the people was gathered around us watching us unload. It was pretty late in the afternoon after they'd come in from work and here we was putting white sheets and pillow slips on our beds. The people said, "Oh, we hate to see you do that. They won't stay pretty and white like that very long." And I said, "Why?" They said, "Oh, it's just too much work. You have to haul water to wash with and everything." But we kept them that way. We still keep them that way. It's a lot of hard work, but it is still worth it. Of course, there's no such thing as washing machines then and Purex to bleach them out with. You had to use lye to break your water with and lye soap or a coarse soap that would break your hands out. Oh, I've had my knuckles bleeding where you rubbed with a rub board.

Everything had to be done on the rub board. You had to heat your water outside to wash with and then hang them out. Where we was we didn't have no clothesline and we would spread them on the tent ropes or on the cotton stocks. Well, we just had a heck of a time. But as I said, we only stayed there three weeks and that's the only time we ever lived in a farm camp like that. The rest of the time we lived on farms. We lived in some pretty rough-looking houses, but we always lived kind of out to ourself in the little houses that they had.

Anyway, in this farm camp whenever it started getting pretty dark you could see the stars through the tent. That's how thin the tent was. I said, "Oh, if it ever rains here we'll drown." This old uncle of mine who had been out here before said, "Sis, that's something I'll guarantee you. It doesn't rain in this Gilly Valley." That's the Gilly Valley over in Arizona around Buckeye. It started raining that night and that tent just come through like a sieve. We got up and we took the broom and we each took a time about sweeping that tent top down, and you'd sweep it down and get that water started running down and then it wouldn't leak. We'd take a time about all night keeping that water swept down like that off of our beds and things. I think it rained every day we was

there. It would rain at night and then it would clear up in the morning and the wind would blow and dry the cotton out and they'd pick cotton in the daytime. That was the darndest mess.

You asked about the people that lived in the camps. One night about 12 o'clock we heard someone moving in right behind us and we thought by the way they talked that they were colored people. There wasn't a colored person in that camp and I guess there was 150 tents in that camp. I mean it covered about a twenty-acre block just of nothing but tents -- close enough together that all the room you had was to park your truck or your car in between your tent and the next tent. Well anyway, we heard these people talking--all bachelors--and there was about twenty of them. They put up a big tent for themselves to sleep in and a big tent for them to cook in and everything. We got up the next morning and they were colored people. Well, about half the camp marched up to the boss and told him to get them out of there -- didn't want them down there amongst their kids and wives and things--so they moved. They had as much right there as anybody else, but they could have a camp off to theirself if they wanted.

In the fall of 1933 and in the spring of 1934 Alvin's brother was at Brentwood, California working in the apricots--picking apricots for four cents a bucket. A bucket is a foot across and a foot and a half deep. It holds about 40 pounds. That was four cents a bucket they was getting for that. They went on strike and the landlord--the apricot grower--had them all to come up to the barn and have a talk and told them if they didn't want to pick apricots, they could move. Well, they was afraid to go ahead and pick because them strikers would come in there and beat you to death. They'd put you in the hospital if you went ahead and picked. They'd call you scabs. Them scabs got the worse end of the deal by a whole lot. So anyway, they moved out of the grower's camp and moved on a government lake and there was about 55 or 60 tents. I mean right down in the sand lake beds. They hauled the water in with huge tanks for them to drink and cook with, but for washing and bathing and everything you had to dip the water up out of the lake and let it settle to use it. Anyway, they lived down there then until they came on down here to work in San Jose or somewhere in the other [fruit-growing areas.]

J.G.:

So they weren't really a part of the strike.

Laird:

Yeah, Alvin's brother Charlie went to jail four or five days over it for being an agitator. He wasn't, but the farmer said he was so naturally the cops taken the farmer's word. They always did back then and they still do a lot. They'll take the big guy's word against the little one's.

J.G.: How was Charlie treated when they put him in jail?

Laird: Just throwed in jail with a bunch of the rest of the strikers. That's what they all did. How he was treated in jail he never did tell us.

J.G.: Could you tell me a little more about the living conditions in the big camp?

Laird: In these big camps they'd have little bathrooms where they would just dig a hole in the ground and sit the bathroom over that and then have the hole that you use. Well, then when that hole filled up, they'd move it over a little and dig another hole and cover this one up. Well, that's the bathrooms they had and the water from the showers just run back into the fields. There was no such thing as a sewer line or a cesspool or anything for it to run into. I've had to take my boots and wade into the water before you got to the shower to step up in there and then pull your boots off and take a shower. The health officers came and stopped all this kind of stuff. They made them have flush toilets and they made them have hot and cold water in the cabins. That made it complicated for us because we couldn't get those places and the farmer building all this kind of stuff for just three weeks work. Well, it was just a lot of expense to them and they just didn't want to do it.

J.G.: What year was it that the health officers started putting pressure on the farmers?

Laird: About the early 1960s--maybe 1959--somewhere along there. As I said, they wouldn't let us people live in those places but they'd let these wetbacks come in and live there. They wouldn't live like we do just three or four in a cabin. Sometimes they live as many as twelve and fifteen in a cabin. I can take you right now in 1981 to within two blocks of my home--if you don't believe it I can show you--there's a little room that's not as big as this room and it has seventeen bunkbeds in it. The woman charges them wetbacks \$35 a week for board and room and they don't even have a window in that room. They have a pipe for ventilation and they don't even have a screen on the door or anything. Now this is 1981 and that's within two blocks of my home here.

Way back about the time they first started bringing the wetbacks over here, well we went out to get us a job cotton-chopping. That was after the children were up big enough to all be in school and I started working in the fields. This big Russian guy told Alvin, "No, I don't want no white people. I want all Mexicans if I can get them. Mexicans can stand more heat and they can put in longer hours and they do stoop labor a lot. And besides they don't talk back to you!" In other words,

they wanted to pay them a dollar a day which was just about half the price that we got. That's the reason why they brought them over here in the first place to keep the wages down.

J.G.: When was that?

Laird: Back in the 1950s--1957, 1958 or 1959--somewhere along in there. Anyway, my husband told them then--he said, "When you get enough of them in here to tell you to kiss their butt and go straight to hell, you'll have wished you hadn't got them in here." And then when Chavez come in and went to forming the unions for the wetbacks, well, the farmers began raising hell about it. And Alvin told them, "Don't you expect me to feel sorry for you for I don't."

Once we was picking oranges right out here up on the hill about two miles from here. They came out and wanted to know if we was going to join the union. Alvin told them, "No. I'd be retired in two or three years and it wouldn't do me any good. Besides if you get that union in here, we wouldn't have a job. It would be all wetbacks and Mexicans that would have the jobs." And sure enough they just about taken over right now. You couldn't go out there right now and get a job if you was 25 years old and could make a hundred dollars a day. They wouldn't let you unless your face is brown. Now that's a fact. I've had it in packing sheds all down through the years when I packed grapes and worked in the potatoes. Now in the potatoes they don't use the Mexicans as much as they do in the grape sheds. In the grape sheds they definitely use mostly Mexicans because they don't holler about overtime. They didn't know nothing about overtime. It was just one of these things. It was hard for you to get a job.

J.G.: Let's go back to where you were living in a tent in Buckeye, Arizona and then from there you went to the Imperial Valley?

Laird: To Yuma, Arizona.

J.G.: What crop was there?

Laird: Cotton. When we first went there we picked cotton--or they did. I didn't. I was pregnant. I had three babies at home, and my brother was just small.

J.G.: You had three little kids at home at that time?

Laird: My brother was only five. It was our two oldest boys and my brother. I babysat for them or kept them. We didn't know what babysitting was then. I couldn't go to the field with my two small ones and was pregnant too so I stayed at home and did the cooking and most of the washing and things like that.

J.G.: Were you able to have enough to eat during that time?

Laird: Yes, we had enough of what it was we had, but we didn't have a whole lot of meat or milk. We tried to buy the children milk all the time. But as far as the adult people, we drank water or tea. We drank lots of tea--we always have drank lots of tea. But as far as having milk for the children and things that they needed we didn't have a whole lot of that.

J.G.: You left Yuma and you came up into where?

Laird: Into the Imperial Valley and we stayed until July there and then we came up to San Jose and Alvin worked in the fruit there. Now we lived in a camp there, but it was a tourist camp and we had our own private bathroom and shower.

J.G.: A tourist camp. I'm not sure what that is.

Laird: Well, they call them motels now. But back there it was definitely called tourist camps because they had so many for renters that stayed all the time and so many for tourists that were just coming through. But anyway, in this tourist camp they did have a lot of tents and we lived in a tent about a week until one of the cabins got empty. But we paid--we didn't live in the free campground like it was over there at Buckeye. We paid for the ground there--for tent space and the use of our water and everything. Then when we left San Jose we came on back down here and stayed the fall and picked cotton.

J.G.: When you say back down here, where do you mean?

Laird: Back down around Earlimart and Delano and Tipton and Pixley. We got our mail at Pixley.

J.G.: And that was in about 1934?

Laird: 1935.

J.G.: Before we go on, tell me what it was like to have three small children while living in the tourist camp.

Laird: Well, I only had my two when we lived in the tourist camp. The only time I had the three was when we lived in Buckeye.

J.G.: Your mother and father and your uncle?

Laird: We had went our separate ways by that time. They had went their way and we had went our.

J.G.: So by the time you went up to San Jose [there were how many?]

Laird: Just had my two. No, I had the three then. The baby was

in May and then I had my two, but I still had three.

J.G.: Where was your third baby born?

Laird: Calipatria.

J.G.: How did you get medical care in Calipatria?

Laird: Well, from the time we got there and landed with our money we started saving a dollar now and a dollar then, and I mean it was just a tight go. They've been years at a time that we never went to a show or bought anything like that in the way of what we call luxuries. We had the money to pay the doctor. Twenty-five dollars is all it cost but it took us quite some time to save it up.

J.G.: That was a big sum.

Laird: Yes, it was because he was only working for about \$2.50 a day then I think--\$3 a day. By the time you paid your rent and your utility bills and then gas to go to work and back and the upkeep on the car, it took a little doings. 'Course it takes a little doings for us to save a little now. It's the same thing and always has been our way of life. Then when our fourth baby was born, she was born at the same place--Calipatria. We did the same there. We had the money to pay for her when the doctor delivered her.

J.G.: What year was that with the fourth child?

Laird: In 1936.

J.G.: So in the meantime you had gone from the San Jose crops and then you went down and picked cotton here in Earlimart and then back to Calipatria which, I think, is in the Imperial Valley.

Laird: Yes, we just made the rounds in California. By 1937 and 1938 our older boys was old enough to start to school and after that we stayed put pretty close in and around Porterville and Tipton. Now we did go to the Imperial Valley in 1939 and stayed down there where he worked at that alfalfa mill for about nine months and then we came back to Beaumont and that's where our sixth baby was born. He was born in Beaumont, but we had the money there to pay for him because Alvin worked in the fruit and went off on a fire fighting job. He stayed quite a while and we had the money to pay for him. Then when we moved back up here--we moved back up here in 1942--Alvin had a steady job then on the farm. 'Course, there was three of the children in school then the two older boys and the girl.

We just been right around here ever since. Only after the children all got out of school--then we followed the fruit

again with my brother. But while they were in school we made it a point to not move them around. Now we had a lot of friends and we had some relatives that would say, "Oh, you ought to get you a truck and load up and get to the fruit. Why, with them kids you could make a hundred dollars a day." What does a hundred dollars a day mean when you're taking your kids out of school and pulling them around in places like that to live like a bunch of heathens? Some people that worked were like that--now some of them didn't but some of them did--just turned their kids loose. Some of the places were pretty rough to live in even after I didn't have any children. Why, you had to leave your little cabin locked and everything to keep the kids from prowling. You couldn't leave nothing in them without them prowling. It was just pretty rough at times.

J.G.: How did you manage during those years before you settled here in Porterville when you had so many little children? You must have worked so hard.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1

Laird: Well, I had my children helping me when they were quite small. I had my girls standing on boxes where they'd be tall enough to reach the sink to wash dishes. Then in 1942 my mother came to live with us and from then on she lived with us all the time. I started to working in the field and she was at home with the children. She would have the children to bring her potatoes whenever it would go to getting close to suppertime. Then she would make up the bread and they could put that in the oven and they could fry the potatoes and she would watch the beans. She had arthritis pretty bad and she had asthma pretty bad so most of her work she done sitting down. When we came in from the field, her and the children would have our hot supper on the table and then after supper we'd all fly in and get the dishes cleaned up. We had one daughter--our third daughter--she got the idea that she didn't like to do the supper dishes and her tongue always hurt her. She'd grab that tongue and say, "Oh, my tongue hurts. My tongue hurts." And the girls still laugh about that kid getting by with that. Now her daddy let her get by with it.

I could have had a fight with a truck driver in the field one time. We was picking up potatoes and the potato digger had broke down. It was cold and frosty, and we were sitting

around the campfire warming up waiting for the digger to be fixed. This old truck driver was saying something about school. At that time I had three kids in high school--three girls because my youngest boy was still in grade school--and he said, "Oh, I don't think school does kids any good." He said, "All girls do when they go to high school is to learn boyism and all the boys learn is carism." I said, "Well, you better go to school and learn some kind of ism cause you sure do need it." "Why," he said, "I guess I kind of got on your toes, hon." I said, "You're darn right 'cause my kids has learned a lot from school. I've learned a lot of my fancier cooking from my girls after they got in high school." All I knew how to do there in Oklahoma until Alvin and I married was fry potatoes and cook beans and cook bread. Now that's about the end. Frying steaks or anything like that was always left up to our mother and we didn't have a whole lot of that to fry most of the time. But fancy roasts and things like that I learned a lot from my girls after they got in school. I told him so and I said, "You come go home with me tonight and if I haven't got a hot supper on the table waiting for me when I get in, why, I'll apologize to you."

J.G.: Back to those times when you were following the crops and you had the small children -- did you usually have a stove in your cabin?

Laird: No, we lived in a place a time or two that didn't have water inside. When our third daughter was born we lived in a one-room house on a farmer's place that didn't have running water in it but the hydrant was just right outside the door and it wasn't so bad.

It was pretty rough with the children at times. We lived at one little place and my second son was bad to just wander off if there was a dog or a cat or a bird or something that he would--whatever it was. He would just wander off. To keep him from running off, I took old chicken wire and nailed up across the garage. The only way he could get in and out of that garage was come through the little cabin where I was. He run off one day and I got to hunting for him and we lived in a place where two highways crossed. He was laying down on one of them highways with his head laying up there sound asleep. He was using the highway for a pillow. Oh Lord, that's when I penned him up.

J.G.: I notice when you talk that you never really lived in one of the government camps.

Laird: No.

J.G.: Is there a reason for that?

Laird:

Well, yes because during these times Alvin always tried to have other work to do besides work that called for those camps. Those government camps was definitely for people that come and went all the time! Just on the go all the time. As he told you in his interview the other day, you couldn't have a clothesline and if you did have, you had to sit out there and watch your clothes dry to keep people from stealing them. I mean they'd steal you blind. No ifs or ands, they'd almost come right into your tent and take things. When we lived in the tents we had all of our canned fruit--mother and I were always exceptionally close with everything-- I mean we never did throw nothing away that we could use. We had jars and jars of canned fruits. In fact, we just had the boxes stuffed plumb back under the bed as far as we could stuff them. Just the whole bed was solid with jars of beans and peas and corn and tomatoes and what jellies and jams we could get to can. You just had to have someone be around camp most all the time to keep them from going in and taking your groceries and things like that. Only one time did we ever live in a camp. As I said, Alvin always managed to work at other little old jobs where the farmers would furnish him a little house or cabin to live in without living in the government camps. Now I had cousins that lived in them right here at Woodville in them little old tin shelters. Hot--it would be so hot in the summertime and oh, so cold in the wintertime. That one time in those tents over there in Buckeye was the only time we ever lived in one of those farm-owned camps or government camps either one. I visited in them quite a lot like I say with friends and neighbors and things, but we never did live in one of them.

J.G.:

Aside from the stealing and that sort of thing in the government camps, did the people you know have anything else to say about what they thought of the people that ran the camps?

Laird:

Well, my brother lived in this one at Woodville for a little while over there and I can tell you some of the things the camp boss would come around and do--like for instance, my brother had a flat on his car one morning. He left it sitting there for a day or two with that flat on it--he had no place to go. The camp boss came around and told him to get that flat fixed because we don't like that kind of stuff sitting around in the yard like this. Well, right next door to my brother was a Mexican family that lived there and he had car parts--he had his engine plumb out of his car--and car parts strewn all over his lawn. But they didn't say anything to him. My brother told him--he said, "Go over there and get on that guy and make him clean up his yard and I will mine."

J.G.:

You know I've read about a lot of government camps before I started doing the interviews. The ones back in the 1930s according to the things I read were supposed to be a good

place to live--that there was a kind of committee and that the people ran the place and that kind of thing. Did your relatives ever talk about what the camp was like and what the camp boss was like back in the 1930s?

Laird:

Well, at that time I didn't have any relatives that lived in the camps. Like I said, the only time that any of my relatives lived in the camp was this one in Woodville. But I can tell you a little bit about them. The farmers that went to these government camps just wanted you for a day or two--maybe a week--and they wanted you at the cheapest prices that was paid in the country. Now I know that to be a fact. A lot of the farmers my husband worked for took into consideration that if you worked at night irrigating or plowing, they paid you a little more. But then in them government camps they thought it was all the same. You'd get paid day and night the same thing. It was pretty rough on some of them. I don't mean just a little rough but pretty rough in the working conditions.

Now in this Woodville camp they had these little tin shelters that one of my cousins lived in. They also had what they called the garden home and you had a place for a garden. They were pretty nice little places but you had to come up to their specifications before you lived there. If you left out one row of that garden that wasn't filled up with something, you heard from the camp boss 'cause that was what that garden space was for -- tomatoes, corn, anything you wanted to put there but of course you had to pay for your water and your utility bills. They were pretty nice. The little houses--they was one-bedroom houses and the kitchen and the living and shower and bath.

J.G.:

Did they have those back in the 1930s or is that something else?

Laird:

No, those I showed you there was the 1930s camps. These at Woodville they didn't build that one there until about 1941 or 1942. When we came back up here they were just completing some of them and filling them up. Then at this camp at Woodville they had also what they called the apartment camps. They had the garden homes and the apartment house and then the tin shelters. The little apartments were pretty nice. I visited friends that lived there too. But as I said you had to keep your yard up so-so. Well, it's just kind of like these new houses now that you buy that's for low income [people]. If they come in and find one screw out of the door and something out of place, by golly you've got to fix it. Not next week but right now.

J.G.:

Then to backtrack for a second, you settled here in the Porterville area and during the time that your kids were in grade school and high school--when your mother was living

with you--were you able to work in the field then?

Laird:

Yes, I worked out then too. I started working a little bit out in 1943 and then after that I worked out at everything I could work at. Of course, I never drove a tractor like Alvin did. I chopped cotton and picked potatoes and I cut grapes and I pulled leaves on the grapes and I thinned grapes and I packed grapes and I graded potatoes in the grade shed. But in all these field jobs that I worked in, my children worked with me. I started my two boys to working when they were ten and eleven years old and I put them on a row to theirself. They held up a row and they got fifty cents an hour--that was a dollar an hour. That's what I got paid and they got fifty cents an hour which kept them busy and their mind occupied and made a little for school clothes. We give them half of what they made and they'd spend it on school clothes and things. Then when the girls got a little older, we cut potatoes and we picked up potatoes with them and cut grapes and we did them the same way. We didn't keep them out of school to go off on jobs and to work or pick cotton or anything. Now of course when the kids were smaller they had what they called the teacher's meet and kids would be out of school a whole week. Well boy, they thought that was a picnic. We'd take our lunch to the field and they'd pick cotton and during that time they would pay for their school sweaters and their school pictures and thingslike that with what they made like that.

J.G.:

When you were talking about your children helping in the fields, was that after school and on weekends?

Laird:

No, after school they did their housework and homework after school. Weekends they would help us. Of course, on Sunday we never did chop cotton or anything on Sunday. It would be Saturday morning or maybe all day Saturday. But it would be mostly in the summertime when school was out. We didn't take them out of school to do anything. They stayed in school until school was out and then they worked with me during all the summer.

J.G.:

When you think back over the time from 1934 to say 1944 in that period of time, did you have the money to do any kind of recreation? Or, what was your social life like during that time?

Laird:

Work! Well, as far as social life we visited a lot with our relatives and friends and we had a few dances and things like that and play parties. We'd let the kids have little birthday parties. But as far as refreshments and things like that we didn't have a whole lot of money for anything like that because we had to watch what money we did have for other purposes--really living purposes. No, as I

said, I guess all through those times he and I both read a whole lot and we don't have but one child that don't like to read. So our family--our whole family--us and our children except for this one daughter--our oldest daughter doesn't read very much--but the rest of them reads all kind of books--just anything I don't care what it is--good books. I mean it isn't cheap novels like twenty-five or thirty cents or a dollar novel. It's good books they read. Reading was mostly our recreation. Then of course the boys was always busy with their gardens and their milk cows and their chickens when they were small.

'Course, the kids after they got in school had their ball games and two of my daughters was pretty good singers and they had singing classes and everything. Two of the boys was pretty active in school. I'd come in many a night from the field--come right in and the girls would have supper ready and one car between us all was all we had--the girls would want to go see their brother play football or their brother running in track or something. Just the one was all that played very much football. The oldest one played track a lot and basketball and baseball. I've come in many a night and taken my bath and eat my supper and put on my pajamas and put on my housecoat and taken me a book [since] I was the only driver. He couldn't because he was putting in such long hours. I'd drive them up to this school and I'd crawl into the back seat under the street light, lock the doors on the car, and I'd lay there and read myself to sleep while they was doing what they had to do at school. I'd done it many a night. We always tried to work with them in their school so they wouldn't get disappointed. The oldest one--the rest of them didn't ask us too much about it--but when the oldest boy finished grade school and he went into high school, he brought his form in to fill out and he said, "Well, I want you guys to help me fill out this [about] what you want me to do and what you want me not to do." I told him, "Jay, neither one of us ever finished the eighth grade and for us to tell you what to do now is something beyond our knowledge. If you want to dig a ditch, I'll get out here and work like the devil and I'll buy that shovel for you to dig that ditch with, but don't ask us what we want you to do. We want you to do what you want to do! If it's to be a doctor, we'll work the rest of our life to send you through school -- if it's to be a lawyer"and so forth and so on. He went to school a lot after he got in the service. About half of his time at night was spent in college after he went into the service so he's got the better education than any of them. I guess he had a little more ambition than the rest of them. Now, Joy went to college some and she's pretty ambitious, but she can use her noggin where some of us can't.

J.G.:

When you think back over the years in the late 1930s and the

early 1940s--being from Oklahoma--what were the local people like toward you?

Laird: You mean the people out here?

J.G.: The people here in California.

Laird: Well, I'll tell you. They was a few that gave you some dirty remarks and dirty looks and something, but you just get it right down on the whole. Most of the people in Porterville and these little towns are from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri and Texas and places like that theirself so they didn't have a whole lot to say. Now little slurring remarks never did bother me. It'd just slide off me like water off of a duck. But boy, there's one that would get fighting mad (points to husband).

J.G.: What do you think it means when someone uses the term Okie? What do you think about that?

Laird: Well, it never did bother me, but as I said, it did [my husband].

J.G.: What do you think that meant?

Laird: Well, it's just like calling a Texan a Texan--that's all I can tell you.

J.G.: You didn't see it as mean?

Laird: No, I didn't see it as being called a bad name or anything. Calling an Arkie an Arkie--you know that's the same thing as an Okie and calling a Californian a pea picker or prune picker. That's what we called the Californians--prune picker. I told a lot of them when they'd say, "Oh, you're an Okie," "Well, is it any worse to be Okie than it is a prune picker?" That was my comeback at them. So it never did bother me very much. Like one of my sons was told by one of the school kids, "Your mother's an old fatso." And he said, "Well, I'd rather have a fat, jolly mama than an old dried-up skinny one like yours is." So that was my comeback at them when they said something about Okie.

J.G.: When you look back over that whole experience of having come to California at a time when people from Oklahoma were not well appreciated and having to follow the crops and the difficult time to make ends meet--all of those experiences--what affect do you think they had on you as a person?

Laird: Them feeling that way?

J.G.: The whole experience as you look back--do you think it had any

affect on you on the way you are now?

Laird: Hard or critical or something? No, ma'am, I don't think it did. Because I'm me and I've been me ever since I've been me--all of my life. I've always been jolly and like people as a whole and I never did try to find too many faults. My husband and I both when we was first married started out trying to be by other people like we would like to have them be by us. Which you find they're not a whole lot like that. As far as having built my character or anything, I think my mother already had that built before I ever married and before I ever came to California. I can't say that much about my dad because he didn't have a very good character himself and he didn't care whether us children went to school at all or not. After we finished the fourth grade, my mother fought tooth and toenail with him for us to go on to school and get what little education we did get. As far as him, he said, "Women didn't need no education--all she needed to know was how to cook and have kids." And that was his theory of life.

J.G.: Well, what did you think about that?

Laird: Well, I liked school! I went to school under some pretty rough conditions.

J.G.: But I mean the whole idea that all a woman was for was to cook and have kids?

Laird: Well, I had different ideas 'cause I'd seen school teachers that I liked real well and I knew you had to have an education to be even a stenographer or a bookkeeper or anything. I knew that I didn't want to live like he had lived all of his life. My mother had a pretty good education. They used to have what they called a old Blueback Speller and she could spell every word in that speller. Her and one of my aunts could do it. And that old book disappeared at my mother's funeral. People and relatives from all over came in and I never did find that book after my mother died. But at one time one school teacher offered her \$1,500 for that book and that was way back in the 1940s. I don't know what it would be worth now. I cried over it whenever I found that book gone. She had it in her trunk and that book disappeared so I don't know whatever went with it. If my dad would have listened to my mother--but as I said Dad thought that men should wear the pants of the house and they should be the ruler of the house and all this, we'd have been worth a million dollars when Alvin and I married because my dad made that kind of money. You can ask him in his interview later on and he can tell you my dad made money where we haven't made pennies.

J.G.: How did your dad make his money?

Laird: Well, for one thing he got a good break whenever we went to

Dalhart, Texas and he got on a ranch out there with his brother-in-law. His brother-in-law gave him every third heifer calf that was born for him taking care of that ranch and paid him wages. When we left there in 1920, my dad sold enough cows to start him his own cow ranch there in west Texas and this uncle of mine would have helped him buy land in Dumas, Texas for \$20 an acre which was a good buy. It was just as level as this floor is. He and his brother and sister coaxed him off back into a different part of Texas and blew away everything he had. It was that way all during our life. His sisters and brothers could talk him into anything, but he should have listened to my mother.

In 1929 when we left Oklahoma, we had farmed there that year and we made a good crop and we had about \$1,000. And \$1,000 then was like \$10,000 is now. One of my uncles was farming down there in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas. He coaxed Pop off down there and we farmed and boll weevils ate us up. But cotton was up about so high and making about a bale and a half or so to the acre. It was just real pretty and we went into that field and my uncle raised up and said, "Hey, have your guys' rows been picked?" We got to looking, "Yeah, right there it is--over there it is too." Those Mexicans had come in there at midnight or in the nighttime just a mile and a half from the river and carried that cotton back across the border. They had just left us about six or eight rows on the outside and then a little bit on the corner. They had picked that whole field out in the middle. When we went to gather the corn, the first two or three rows was just real good corn, but [in the middle] it was the same way. Mama told Papa, "We're not going to live down here. These kids have worked as hard as you have all year and then to have something like that happen." So we loaded up and come back to Oklahoma. That fall Alvin and I married and we started in with our family. It's just been tuck and tick all our life.

J.G.: How did you meet your husband?

Laird: When I was still wearing diapers, they came up to Oklahoma. We lived in Oklahoma there around Frederick and Altus--25 miles south of Altus, Oklahoma -- right down there in between those two rivers like I told you. I was born in 1911 and he was born in 1907, and they moved up there in 1916. I wasn't even in school when he moved up there. To tell you actually when I met him--I couldn't.

J.G.: Did they live on a farm close to you?

Laird: Yes, his dad homesteaded a place down in Oklahoma pretty close to where we lived. My husband used to get a laugh out of the kids. There was a flour they called Red Star Flour. On the

front of the sack it had a great big red star. Mama would cook us cookies a whole lot. They hadn't had a mother in five or six years, and they'd come over there and mother would give them those clean flour sacks to carry their cookies home in. She'd tell them, "Now be sure to save my flour sacks 'cause I use them." And he told the kids Mama made us panties out of them--which she did. She made us underskirts and panties both out of those flour sacks and he said that when we'd stoop over, there would be that big old red star. And he used to tease the kids.

But I'm going to skip up to about 1944 and 1945 and tell you about some little experiences we had then.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 2

Some things was just hard to get. You had to have rationing books. I still have some of my ration books. You had to have stamps for shoes and stamps for sugar and you had to have stamps for coffee and for meat and for any kind of dairy products. Of course, we was living on the farm then and we had all of those--meat we raised and lard we made and my own soap and butter and eggs and chickens and milk. So we didn't have to use stamps for that. But I've gave away stamps and stamps and half of books full to the people that lived in the little cities that didn't have room for animals like we did. I even give coffee stamps away because at that time we had two children that was old enough to get coffee stamps. The only time we ever drank coffee was for our breakfast. We'd have coffee stamps left and instead of seeing them wasted, I'd give them to my friends that needed them. I did that a lot. And I've even given meat stamps to my friends--real close friends--that needed bacon and stuff.

You couldn't buy material. They had one kind of dress here in Porterville for schoolgirls. They were just an old striped material that looked kind of like those striped overalls. My uncle was working at the Glove Flour Mill in Sacramento and they had those flour sacks in 100 pound sacks. The sacks had pretty prints on them. He'd steal two sacks a day for me and fold them up and put them in his lunch kit and bring them home. And everytime he'd get a chance to come down here and see me, he'd bring me 75 or 100 of them sacks. Now that's the honest to God's truth. And he'd try to pick them out to match so that I could make a blouse and a skirt to match. I made window curtains out of them and I made quilt tops and used the white ones for sheets and pillow slips. We had one daughter that was pretty proud. I mean, she didn't like some of the places we lived in and she didn't want to wear them old flour sacks to

school. Anyway, she got to school and had on a pretty little blouse and a skirt that matched and the teacher made some remark about it and wanted to know where in the world she got it and she wouldn't tell her. The other daughter just walked up and told her, "My Uncle Hugh brought them down here from the Globe Flour Mill," and she said, "I wish I had an Uncle Hugh." But he'd do that at least once a year--bring me down just 100 of them sacks like that. Boy, I was the luckiest guy there was in the country with my kids and having clothes for them. Some of those flour sacks would have cowboys, rodeo dancers, square dancers, or fishermen on them and I'd take them and make the boys sport shirts out of them. Oh man, they got more compliments out of them.

J.G.: When did you find time to do all of the sewing?

Laird: At night a whole lot.

J.G.: I would think that after working in the fields all day you would be exhausted.

Laird: At night. That's when I did most of my ironing. Everything had to be ironed then. I'd get the kids off the bed and him and mother would go to bed and I'd sit up and listen at the radio. During that time we'd picked us up a little radio somewhere and I'd sit up a lot of nights until 11:00 listening to the radio and ironing. Everything had little ruffles and things on it. Of course, my mother did all the mending. If there was a button or a patch or anything that she could sew sitting down, she would do that. But all the ironing I had to do. My daughters had asked me a lot of times, "Mother, where did you find time to do all that?" And I said, "In my time after you kids were all in bed asleep. But you know, that habit is still with me. I can go to bed and I'll lay there and I'll turn and I'll roll and I'll twist and I'll turn and I can't go to sleep until 11:00 at night.

J.G.: After being a lady that was so active and so busy raising seven kids and doing all the washing and ironing and the cleaning and the sewing--

Laird: And the canning. There's been a many of time in the summertime that we'd can. I had one son that I could put in the kitchen with anybody canning and I've got one son that I could put in the kitchen with anybody cooking cakes or pies. Well, I've got two sons I could do that with. I learned them all to cook. One time I got sick and I had new washtubs--big washtubs filled with peach preserves. You have to peel them and slice them off the seed and let them sit overnight with not a bit of water in them, put sugar over them and let them sit overnight and they make their own syrup. Then you have to put them on and cook

them until that syrup is real thick like Karo syrup. I had two huge tubs full of those peaches ready to can the next morning. Got up the next morning--during the change of life--I started about forty--and I was so sick. Every time I'd get on my feet I'd faint. So the kids said, "Just stay in bed, Mother, we'll do this." And I said, "Well, I'm afraid you'll let my peach preserves scorch." Those kids flew in there and that oldest boy and that oldest girl canned every one of them preserves--cooked them and canned them by theirself--just them kids. When their dad come in for dinner, they had hot chicken and hot creamed potatoes and mother had fixed some hot biscuits for them to cook. They had his hot dinner ready for him.

J.G.: You can really be proud of the way you raised your family.

Laird: Yes. And as I said, we was a family and we had to work together and pull together to be together.

J.G.: After having been so busy and worked so hard all of your life, what do you do now that you're retired to keep yourself occupied?

Laird: Let me have my husband to get you some of the stuff and show you. Get that doll there, Alvin, and show her that. I make poodle dogs and I make dolls and I have a tea bag. Do you know what a tea ball is that you put tea in and put down in there? Well, you take those tea balls and you take these beads and you can string them tea balls up and you just make a long chandelier thing out of them. Now that's all beads.

I quilt and whenever any of my grandchildren gets married, I make them a quilt. I can them anywhere from fifteen to eighteen pints of jellies--plum, grapes, cherries and chow-chow--homemade chow-chow. And that's what I give for wedding presents. I don't run down to the store and get them things that somebody else can buy at the store. I give them things that nobody else can give them. Last summer I gave one of my grandsons who was getting married a lone star quilt--one huge star covers the whole bed.

My mother read a lot to pass the time. She read the Bible a lot and she read good books too. Like my husband, she read history books. She had the most active memory of anybody I ever was around in my life. My husband has always had a real good memory until he had his heart attack. When he had his heart attack, I guess, he completely died because they put that electric machine on him three times before they brought him back. Funny thing is what he said to the nurses and doctors working around him. He said, "That thing hurt like hell and I hope you don't do that again!" The doctor told him, "I hope we don't have to again." But his memory has gotten a little bit

cloudy since then and his eyesight also. That's when he decided he better quit driving his eyesight got so bad. Then I have an inner ear trouble that's how come I quit driving. Sometimes I can just work like the dickens and then sometimes I can just drop that pencil and stoop over to pick it up and I just go blind and then after I do I get sick as a horse. I thought, well if I was to do that out on the road driving and kill some young person that had a baby or two to take care of, I'd go crazy. So we live next door to our daughter and we're just a block and a half from our drugstore and we're just a block and a half from the grocery store so we keep pretty active though.

Up until the last year, we had our own milk cows. From those two milk cows we had enough milk and butter that our daughters or we never bought any butter or milk. Anytime they wanted cream to make ice cream out of--I mean pure cream too--they'd come and get pure cream and make ice cream out of it.

J.G.: When you look back over all of the years, what time would you say was the hardest time?

Laird: Well, from about 1933 to when the war broke out. There'd been some of them years that's been pretty lean. Part of that time the year our third daughter was born my husband was working steady on the farm, but the farmer didn't have money to pay him. He owed him \$300 or \$400 at one time. Alvin was supposed to bring in some groceries when he come in from work but the kids got sleepy and tired waiting on their daddy and they went to sleep. He brought the groceries and when we got supper cooked we woke them up. But that's the only time that we didn't have any food in the house to cook anything with. But they've been some times that if one of the children had got sick, I don't know what in the world we'd have done. As I said, back then--some of them days--you didn't have no credit nowhere and it was just hard.

J.G.: You were lucky enough during that time that nobody got sick.

Laird: No, nothing only just having our babies.

J.G.: I think I read on the form you sent back that one of your children was born in a barn?

Laird: Yes. It wasn't exactly a barn. It was what they called the cooling room of the barn. But it was just a little one-room cabin--wasn't as big as this--and she was the fifth child. We had two beds and our stove and our refrigerator. It was just an icebox--it wasn't an electric refrigerator--and our table and trunks and chest of drawers or two--everything was in that one room.

J.G.: And that was attached to the barn?

Laird: No, it was off away from the barn a little bit. His stepmother and her four children lived in the barn--part of it--and we lived in that little cooling room.

J.G.: When was that?

Laird: In 1938.

J.G.: Is that when your husband was working on the ranch and that was the housing that you had?

Laird: Yes. As I said in the earlier part of the interview, we lived in some crummy-looking little places, but it wasn't in big government camps where you had to watch everything all the time.

J.G.: Were you kind of far away from other people?

Laird: No. One of the guys that had rented the land lived close to us and Alvin's stepmother and two boys and two girls lived there too. They all had cars.

That fall my mother came up to live with us and her and my husband bought me my first washing machine. I had five children. Boy, I'll tell you I was walking on clouds when I had that old washing machine. Of course, I had the baby in diapers and I'd wash while the rest of them was in the field. We had one family that come in from Arkansas and they was living in a tent out in the field. Two of the children were experimenting with the machine. I was out to my neighbor's house using up some of his lines to hang out the clothes. I heard this little girl scream and I knew what was wrong when I heard her scream. I dropped everything and ran. My mother was home sick and she run and cut the machine off instead of releasing the wringer. By the time I got there the wringer had run up that baby's arm until it just got plumb up to the shoulder and just stood there and spun. It just pulled this muscle all away from her little arm. The grandmother was with her babysitting her--a real old woman. She ran out there with some cotton swabs and alcohol and she was going to wash that baby's arm in alcohol. Well, it was just a bloody mess and I knew that if she did that it would take that baby's breath. I was afraid to leave her there with that old grandma--afraid that she'd do it after we left. Alvin's sister and me picked that baby up in our arms and we ran a mile and a half to the field. When we got up in hollering distance, Alvin saw us and he thought it was one of ours. So he just pulled his sack off and dropped it right where it was and started meeting us. He got up close enough that we could tell him that it wasn't ours. He went back to tell them people.

I guess they didn't have no confidence in Alvin or something. They only had about fifteen pounds apiece of cotton in their sack. Instead of leaving that cotton there for Alvin and them to take on to the scales which was a quarter of a mile away, they had to go weigh that cotton and then walk back that quarter of a mile to get their car--and their baby hurt like that. Oh, I tell you I was so angry at them people I could have bawled. We brought her on in to the doctor and they sent her to the county hospital. You know, we saw that child after she got about ten or eleven years old, and it just looked like a great big centipede on her arm where that had been stitched up, but she had perfect use of that whole hand. They did the most marvelous job on it 'cause those muscles were just tore to pieces.

The thing that was so aggravating about it was it was so unnecessary. Three or four days or a week later my mother-in-law was using my machine and she got a sock in a pocket of a pair of jeans and it blew the fuse. I mean, it popped that wringer up. Well, after she did that and we got it straightened out, I got to thinking--why in the world didn't that do that on that baby's arm. So next time I saw the meter guy reading it, I asked him. "Well," he said, "I don't know unless there was a penny behind that fuse box or something." So I asked the guy that farmed the place and he said, "Yeah, they'd been blowing so many fuses that I put a penny behind that fuse box." And boy, from then on I kept some fuses there for that fuse box 'cause that could have killed that child. Blood poisoning could have sit up and could have killed that child.

We've had some pretty rough experiences in our life like that. In 1936, when Alvin was working on that All American Canal we was living in tents. We had rented our own land from the Indian Reservation and my uncle and his wife and their four children and my husband and me and our four children was living together. Alvin had our tent built up to where it wouldn't fall during the wind, but Uncle J.D. didn't his and the ridge poles broke. When her tent fell down she brought her baby over and put it in bed with my baby and us women was out there trying to patch that ridge pole. I heard one of the babies cry. Her baby was one day older than my baby. So I sent my oldest son in to see and he come running back and he said, "It's our baby and her face is all full of blood."

In order to get the beds to fit in the tent you had to have one real low bed or it wouldn't go up against the wall. So I took a hacksaw and I cut one off. The baby had fell and hit that with the corner of her nose and just split her nose from right here plumb up to the bone part of it. So, we grabbed her and went running as hard as we could down to the doctor which was about a quarter of a mile. When Alvin come in that night

from work there that big old patch was on her nose and her other eye black, and he liked to had a heart attack himself. You could just write a whole book on things that I could tell you and it would just be amazing. We had those stitches--three stitches--taken in that baby's nose and you know what? It cost \$3. Now they charge you about \$50 a stitch, I think.

J.G.: It sounds like you always managed to pay for the doctor bills.

Laird: Well, we always tried to keep just a little money. We do the same thing now. I mean, we do without a few little things that we could use ourself in order to have a \$100 or \$200 in the bank so we could use it if we needed to.

We've been pretty conservative saving like that all of our life. I just won't throw nothing away as long as it can be used. Now I take old jeans or his old striped overalls. I've got quilts from the back of the legs where the material is. You can sew them together or put two of them together and quilt them on the sewing machine and you can throw them out there on the grass and the kids can play on them. Then you can shake the grass off. If it's a blanket or something you've got to get down there and pick that all off. But them old jeans--I made about nine quilts the year before last--just small ones to lay on their sun decks on their swimming pools.

J.G.: You are a super creative lady.

Laird: Well, we've always had to be. Right now I could go down through this country and see these cotton-picking machines--all that cotton on the ground. My God, I'd have had a heart attack if I'd seen that in my cotton field. If we dropped one lock, we had to go back and pick it up. Why, you could go out there and you could just pick up bales. There used to be an old colored woman back there way back and he can tell you the same thing--that had a little old trailer that she could push by her hand and she'd go along the roads where that cotton would fly off of them. She had a permit to pick that cotton up, and that's the way that poor old soul made her living. She must have been 75 or 80 years old. Her hair was just as white as mine.

J.G.: When was that?

Laird: Oh, I seen her do it plumb into the 1930s and from the time that we moved. In 1923 I remember seeing that old lady the first time picking up that cotton alongside of the highways. Just take her little lunch along with her and her jug of water and that big old push-cart big enough to hold a cotton sack or two and she'd hook herself up to that and pull it down the road a half a mile.

J.G.: Is there anything else before we wind up? Is there anything else that you can think of that you wanted to mention?

Laird: Well, if I could just go back and relate my whole life there could be lots of things that you'd be interested in. It's just--you know--we just lived pretty hard all of our life and we've worked hard all of our life. We neither one of us ever knew anything else. We was talking this morning at the breakfast table. When he was thirteen and his brothers was ten and fifteen they chopped cotton for a guy. I don't know whether you know what a cocklebur is. This man's cotton was just solid with cockleburs and jimsonweed. Alvin and his brother--Leonard was only ten now mind you--would hoe in that field whenever that guy needed them. He said if he could and they could stay up with us, he'd pay him man's wages. It was just solid weeds from one end to the other, but now they won't let children do that you know. All kids has got to do now is set and watch that thing and think of meanness they can get into.

J.G.: Yeah, that's true.

Laird: And I think that's a whole lot of what's wrong with most of the kids. They don't have enough to occupy their time with and their folks just let them set around and not do anything. When they get older they don't want to do anything.

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 1

END OF INTERVIEW

ADDENDUM

The Laird Family History prepared in 1977 by Joy Laird Furr
and Melva Laird Hodge.

**THE
LAIRD
FAMILY
1878 - 1977**

(1)

FORWARD

We hope that everyone finds this as interesting to have and read as it has been for us to compile. We also ask everyone's indulgence for errors on names, dates, etc. Any inaccuracies were unintended and we hope you will help us correct and add to this family tree, of sorts.

We are especially interested in any information about our earlier ancestors. We are presently trying to find out more information from GRANDFATHER LAIRD'S sister's children.

This writer has a theory, how accurate, we don't know, about our family name. During the 18th and 19th centuries there were severe civil disturbances in Great Britain. The Scots refused to pay homage to Elizabeth Tudor because they claimed Mary Stuart was, in fact, the legal descendant to the crown. During this period, there were severe retributions against Scotland and many Lairds, who were landowners and clan leaders, immigrated to America, leading their entire clans with them. Some of them had prices on their heads and could not use their family names. It was most probably because of this, that the leaders simply became known as 'the Laird' and later shortened to Laird. This is the most logical answer to the reason for so many Laird families we know that are not related.

We thank everyone for their patience with us and the help we received trying to collect the information we have here.

Joy Laird Furr

Joy Laird Furr

Melva Laird Hodge

Melva Laird Hodge

In the year 1878, September 12, James Columbus Laird was born in Wise County, Texas. About the same time, Ruby Leonard was born in the same county. At this time, we have no information about how they met, and hardly anything about their families, but we do know that they were married in Wise County in 1898.

They had six sons. Francis, named after James' father, was born in 1899 and died at the age of two, shortly after Earl's birth, March 22, 1901. Next came Charlie, born September 23, 1903. Grady was born on December 28, 1904. Then came Alvin, born December 9, 1907, and Leonard whose birth-date is June 12, 1910.

Then, in 1912, Ruby died, leaving a great void in their lives. Leonard, who was just a toddler, was sent to live with James' sister, Lou, until he was five. At this time, he came back home to be raised with his brothers.

About 1916, James homesteaded a small farm on the Red River, in Jackson County, Oklahoma. This is where they remained until they all grew up. Times were not easy for the boys during this period. They were on their own a lot while James worked to earn their living. But, they all had great love and respect for their father and retain fond memories of him.

In 1919, James married Liddie Polk. She had two children, a son, Luther, born October 22, 1914, and a daughter, Minnie, born March 21, 1917. They were not legally adopted, but were raised as Lairds and retain the family name.

There were two children born in this marriage, a son, James William (Bill), born July 27, 1920, and a daughter, Mary Elizabeth, born June 28, 1922.

James died December 23, 1934, at the age of 56. Liddie lived a long, full life and died December 31, 1976 at the age of 83. (Liddie's birthdate was January 11, 1893.)

The rest of the information we have will be presented in a semi-outline form for easier presentation and understanding.

Earl Albert Laird - born 3-22-1901 in Wise County, Texas. He married Lois Gertrude McMath 7-4-25. They raised four daughters. They live in Beaumont, Ca. (Retired) They have thirteen grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Edna Lee Partlow - she works at Riverside County Hospital. She is married to Quewin Partlow, who works for the Riverside County Road Dept. They have been married 32 years and have four children and four grandchildren.

Earl - age 31 - lives at home - goes to college - single

Jerry - age 27 - married - wife's name Diane - two sons.

Jerry works for Standard Oil and Diane works at a convalescent hospital. They live in Riverside, Ca.

Jerry - age 7

Travis - age 3

Judy Jackson - age 26 - works in Greyhound Bus Station - two daughters - she lives in Riverside, Ca.

Tammy - age 7

Amy - age 1

Ruby Bull - age 18 - married - husband's name is Danny - they both attend college. They live in Riverside, Ca.

Ruby Taylor - She is married to Vernon Taylor. They are self - employed. They own and operate a print shop. They live in San Bernadino. They have two sons and one grandson.

Vernon - age 25 - married wife's name Karen. Vernon works in the printing shop with Danny and Ruby. Karen works for United California Bank. They have one son.

Jeffrey - age 5

Glenda Jones-She is married to Ray Jones, who works at Goldstone Tracking Station, and is a housewife. She has five children and lives in Barstow, Ca.

Gary - age 17
Rauland - age 16
Cy - age 14
Glenda - age 9
Benjamin - age 8

Linda Joy Rodman-She is married to Jay Rodman, who works as a welder. She works in a factory. She has two children and lives in Beaumont, Ca.

Kelly - age 15
Joyce - age 13

Charlie Clifford Laird - Born 9-23-03 in Wise County, Texas. He married Zona Dempsey 11-13-36. They raised two children, a son, and a daughter. They live in Porterville, Ca., and are retired. They have five grandchildren and two step-grandchildren.

Charles Laird - age 39, born Nov. 21, 1937. He lives in Sacramento. His wife's name is Linda. He works as a carpenter. He has two daughters, one son and two step-daughters.

Jennifer - born 3-22-60 (lives with mother in Lakeport, Ca.)
Julie - born 3-22-60 " " " " "
Brad - born 5-10-62 " " " " "
Jennifer (step-daughter) age 12
Cassie " " age 18

Clara Lee Williams - born 8-15-41, age 35. She is married to Paul Williams, who works for Gaf Corporation, and lives in Anaheim, Ca. She works for Laura Scudders. They have two sons.

Steve -born 6-8-63 age 13
Jeffrey - born 9-18-68 age 8

Grady Henry Laird - born 12-28-04 in Wilbarger, Texas. He married Myrtle Lee Temple 11-15-30. They are semi-retired and live in Porterville, Ca. They have two children, a son and a daughter, five grandchildren and one great-grandson.

Grady Laird Jr. - age 43, born 10-13-33. He is a registered nurse, presently working at Porterville State Hospital. He has two children, a son and a daughter, and one grandson.

Jeanine Hankins - born 11-13-54. She has one son.

Scott Hankins - born 9-19-71 age 5

Anthony Laird - born 6-12-56. He is in the U.S. Navy.

Arvada Bailey - age 35 - born 4-10-41. She is a housewife and is married to Jim Bailey, a building contractor. They live in Visalia, Ca. She has two sons and one daughter.

Steven Musgrove - age 15 - born 5-31-61

Darren Musgrove - age 13 - born 5-23-63

Amber Bailey - age 9 - born 1-29-69

Alvin Bryan Laird - born 12-9-07 in Tillman County, Oklahoma. He married Rosie Lee Harlas 10-19-29. They are semi-retired and live in Porterville, Ca. They raised seven children, three sons and four daughters. They have twentyseven grandchildren, nine step-grandchildren, and four foster grandchildren. They also have three great-grandchildren, six foster great-grandchildren and a number of step-greatgrandchildren.

Jay C. Laird - age 45- born 3-18-32. He is married to the former Charlene Robinson. He is retired from the U.S. Air Force and owns a farm. Charlene works as a secretary for an attorney. They live in Clovis, New Mexico. They have two children, a son and a daughter.

Fred - age 19 - born 7-27-57. He is a college student and works with Jay. He is engaged to be married this summer to Cassie Snyder, also of Clovis.

Marina - age 15- born 8-3-61

Francis Bryan Laird - age 43 - born 7-13-33. He is married to the former Juanita Polk Floyd. He is a farm machinery mechanic and Juanita works at Sierra View District Hospital. They live in Strathmore, Ca. He has five children, four daughters and one son. Juanita has seven sons. He has one grandson and a number of step-grandchildren.

Teri Lynn Toon - age 23 - born 6-20-53. She is married to Ivan Toon, a machinist. They live near Watson, Oklahoma, and have one son.

Hershell Bryan - age 4 - born 1-17-73

Rose Marie McMillan - age 22 - born 7-28-54. She is married to Gary McMillan, who works in real estate, and lives in Oklahoma, near Watson.

Francene Kay Reed - born 5-10-56 - age 20. She is married to Bernard (Bee) Reed, who is in the U.S. Marines. They are expecting their first child in May.

Marty Laird - age 20 born 7-28-56

Deborah Louise Laird - age 19 - born 3-18-58 student
Seven step-sons:

James, Dale, Ray, Roy, Larry, Wesley, and Dennis Floyd.

Yvonne May Sullivan - age 41 - born 5-19-35. She is married to Bill Sullivan, a psychiatric technician (supervisory), and lives in Atascadero, Ca. She is a housewife. They have five children, three boys and two girls. They also raised four foster children (Bill's nieces and nephews). They have 1 grandchild and six foster grandchildren.

Jeri Chastain (foster Daughter) age 26 - born 1-25-51. She is married to Randy Chastain, who works as a prison guard at the Paso Robles Boys School. She is a housewife. They have three children, two sons and one daughter.

James Randall (Chip) - born 7-20-71

Tracy - born 7-21-73

John - born 11-15-74

Rick Norris (foster Son) age 24 born 11-16-52. He is a welder and plays part-time in a band. His wife, Linda, is a housewife. They have two children, one son and one daughter. They live in Fresno, Ca.

Richard - age 5 - born 9-1-71

Stephanie - age 4 - born 7-20-72

Daniel Sullivan - age 22 - born 6-18-54. He lives in Fresno, Ca. and works as a plumber. His wife's name is Liz. They have one daughter.

Brandy - age 1 - born 10-22-75

Valinda Eugenia (Ginger) Bales - age 21 - born 12-33-55. She is married to Phillip Bales, an electrician. They live in Atascadero, Ca. Ginger works in a convalescent hospital.

Janet Duty (foster-daughter) age 20 - born 1-31-57. She is married to Harold Duty, who works on a government job as skilled laborer. Janet is a housewife. They live in Atascadero, Ca., and have one son.

Lindsay Ford (Lin) - age 2 - born 10-4-74

Dale Clinton Sullivan - age 19 - born 5-23-57. He is single, lives at home and works in a gas station.

Rodney Norris (foster-son) age 19 - born 7-29-58. He lives at home.

Vernon Leon Sullivan - age 12 - born 2-25-65

Varena Elaine Sullivan - age 9 - born 8-31-67

Melva Lee Hodge - age 40 - born 10-29-36. She is married to Le Roy Hodge, a mechanic, and lives in Porterville, Ca. She is a housewife. They have five children, four daughters and one son. They have one grandchild.

Rita Lavon Hodge - age 21 - born 10-10-55. She lives in Santa Maria and works for a catering company and is informally engaged to Matt Spence, also of Santa Maria.

Lorraine Rose Rogers - age 19 - born 9-27-57. She is married to Gary Rogers. Lorrie works for a convalescent hospital and Gary works at Tubb's, a local factory in Porterville. They have one daughter.

Michelle Lynn - age two - born 1-17-75

Roy Len Hodge - age 17 - born 10-21-59

Judi Lynn Hodge - age 14 - born 6-1-62

Dawn Michelle Hodge - age 13 - born 12-28-63

Bernice Faye Shirley - age 38 - born 8-24-38. She is married to Jim Shirley, a landscaper foreman for California Department of Transportation. She is a housewife. They live in Fresno, Ca. They have five children, four daughters and one son.

Jonanna May - age 18 - born 7-27-58. She is married to Vaughn May. He is a carpenter and Jonanna works at Maxwell Studios (photographer's shop). They live in Fresno, Ca.

Kimberly Ann Shirley - age 17 - born 3-22-60
Mary Katherine Shirley - age 15 - born 10-17-61
Justy Lynn Shirley - age 13 - born 7-19-63
Jimmy Bryan Shirley - age 12 - born 2-24-65

Earl Calvin Laird - age 36 - born 8-25-40. He is married to the former Azyle Cole. He works as a landscaper foreman for the California Department of Transportation. Azyle is a housewife and part-time college student. She also does extensive volunteer work for their local hospital. They have two children, one daughter and one son. They live in Ukiah, Ca.

Debra Jean Laird - age 11 - born 2-14-66
Stanley Earl Laird - age 9 - born 4-1-67

Joy Alvalinda Furr - age 34 - born 7-8-42. She is married to Ronald Furr. They both work at Porterville State Hospital as psychiatric technicians, as well as owning and managing a combination book, magazine and tobacco store. They live in Porterville, Ca. She had three children, two daughters and one son, then married Ron, a widower with two daughters.

Caryn Beth Thompson - age 16 - born 10-4-60
Pamela Robin Thompson - age 15 - born 11-8-61
Julie Lynn Furr - age 13 - born 5-12-63
Timothy David Whiteley - age 10 - born 5-28-66
Shelley Dawn Furr - age 8 - born 8-10-68

Leonard Lee Laird - born 6-12-10 in Wilbarger, Texas. He married Christine Shaw 7-10-35. He is semi-retired. Christine works at a cannery. They have three children, two sons and one daughter. They have eight grandchildren. They live in the country, close by Tipton, Ca.

Shawlene Gillahan - age 40 - born 6-16-36. She is married to Merle Gillahan. He is a sales manager for Montgomery Wards. She is a housewife. They have three children, two sons and one daughter, and one grandchild. They live in Fresno, Ca.

Amber Bass - age 21 - born 4-25-55. She is married to Bill Bass.
She is a housewife. They have one daughter.
Heather - one year - born 3-30-76

Kelly Gillahan - age 19 - born 10-30-57 - student
Kerry Gillahan - age 17 - born 4-9-59

Jerry Laird - age 37 - born 3-13-39. His wife's name is Betty. They are both school teachers. They have two sons and reside in Tollhouse, Ca.

David Laird - age 16 - born 10-2-60
Michael Laird - age 15 - born 8-23-61

Larry Laird - age 37 - born 3-13-39. His wife's name is Sharon. He is an electronics engineer. Sharon works for a title insurance company. They live in Oxnard, Ca. They have two daughters and one son.

Renee - age 17 - born 3-18-60
Tracy - age 15 - born 7-4-61
Mitchell - age 13 - born 5-19-63

Luther Mitchell Laird - born 10-22-14. He is married to the former Mamie Nation (6-29-40). They have four children, three daughters and one son, seventeen grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. They are both retired and live in Porterville, Ca.

Henrietta Plunk - She has seven children.

Eddie McCaskill
Cheryl Fisher - she is married to Jerry Fisher, a probation officer for Tulare County. She is an LVN. They live in Visalia, Ca. They have two daughters.
Angela - age 8
Bethany - age 6

Michael Plunk
Roy Plunk
Thomas Plunk
Ricky Plunk
Kathy Plunk

Morrisean Robinson - She works at Villa Manor Convelescent Hospital. She is married to Tommy Robinson. She has six children, five sons and one daughter. They live in Porterville, Ca.

Mitchell Jackson - age 23 - he has one son and one daughter
Jerry Jackson - age 21
Tommy Robinson - age 14
Robin Robinson - age 12
Bradley Robinson - age 11

Janet Hair - she is married to Lem Hair. He works for Roberts Farms and she works at the Good Sheppard Home for the retarded in Terra Bella. They live in Porterville, Ca. and have five children and one grandchild.

Peggy Caraway - age 21 - born 2-2-56. She is married to Jessie Caraway and they have one son. Jessie Caraway Jr. -age 2

Elaine Hair - age 19 - born 10-18-57. Lives at home and works at Taco Bell in Porterville.

Gary Hair - age 16 - born 6-27-60

Gina Hair - age 15 - born 12-26-21

Cassie Hair - age 5 - born 2-21-72

Leroy Mitchell Laird - age 35 - born 9-23-41. His wife's name is Linda. He works for Tulare County Road Department and Linda works for Tulare County Fruit Exchange. They live in Porterville, Ca.

Minnie Lewis - born 3-21-17. She was married to ~~Otis~~ Rambo, had one daughter, divorced, then married Dick DeWitt. They had one son and one daughter and Dick adopted her first daughter. She has been widowed twice and lives in Morro Bay, Ca. She has nine grandchildren.

Mary Lou Robinson - age 40 - born 3-27-36. She is married to Dale Robinson who is vice-principal at Woodlake High School. Mary Lou is a registered nurse and a housewife. They have four children, two sons and two daughters.

Diana Lou Robinson - age 16 - born 3-27-60

Donald Dean Robinson - age 14 - born 3-24-62

Randall Douglas Robinson - age 9 - born 3-31-67

Debra Lynn Robinson - age 6 - born 9-12-70

Richard S. DeWitt Jr. - age 35 - born 2-13-42. He is married to the former Verlene Crawford. He is a dispatcher and Verlene works as a grocery clerk. They have one son. They live in Porterville, Ca. (area)

Richard Patrick DeWitt - age 16 - born 3-17-61

Alice Marie Bynum - age 33 - born 10-24-43. She was formerly married to Charles Linder and had one daughter, then married Don Bynum, who had two children. They subsequently adopted each others children and had one more of their own. They both work as psychiatric technicians at Porterville State Hospital. They also live in the Porterville area.

Michael Don Bynum - age 15 - born 7-14-61

Jeffrey Alen Bynum - age 14 - born 8-4-62

Robin Elizabeth Bynum - age 14 - born 3-3-63

Donald DeWayne Bynum - age 10 - born 11-25-66

James William (Bill) Laird - born 7-27-20 in Tillman County, Oklahoma. He is married to the former Marilyn Cord. He is a heavy equipment operator and Marilyn works at Smith's Bakery in Porterville. He has three children, two daughters and one son. He also has one step-son.

Sharon Kelly - age 35 - born 7-12-41. She is married to Russell Kelly. They have three daughters.

Kim
Lisa
Debbie

Sheila Wood - age 26 - born 9-29-52. She is married to Dennis Wood. He is employed by an electric company. They live in Texas and have three sons.

Leland - age 5 - born 9-28-71
Jason - age 3 - born 8-11-73
Travis - age 2 - born 4-1-75

Gary Laird - age 23 - born 11-17-53. He is single and lives at home with Bill and Marilyn. He is also a heavy equipment operator.

David Bruce Cord - step-son

Mary Elizabeth Kelly - born 6-28-22 in Jackson County, Oklahoma. She works at Smith's Bakery in Porterville. She has one son, three daughters, and seven grandchildren. She lives in Porterville, Ca.

Leonard Leon - age 35 - born 11-22-41. His wife's name is Gail Marie. He is a California Highway Patrolman and Gail is a housewife. They have two children, a son and a daughter.

Christian Leonard - age 5 - born 7-29-71
Michelle Elizabeth - age 2 - born 1-29-75

Donna Bolin - age 30 - born 9-25-46. Donna is a city clerk in Beaumont, Ca. She has one son.

Blayne Bolin - age 6 - born 5-25-70

Linda Migalski - age 27 - born 11-14-49. She is married to Chuck Migalski. He works for a Porterville cement co. She is a housewife. They have a son and a daughter.

Russell - age 8 - born 7-25-68
Dawn Ellen - age 5 - born 12-31-71

Brenda McDonald - age 27 - born 11-14-49. She is married to Jim McDonald. He works for Jone's Furniture and Linda works for Jone's Hallmark Gift Shop. They live in Porterville Ca., and have two daughters.

Carrie - age 7 - born 5-15-69
Lauren Ann - age 4 - born 1-22-73

This is, by no means, the end of the story. We hope all of you will gain more interest in our family as a result of this information. We want our children and our children's children to build upon this.

All of you please go home and talk to your parents and grandparents, if possible. Take down information, stories, and dates. Did you know it is a proven socialogical fact that people who can trace more than four generations of their family's histories are better achievers? Save up your memories and write them down. Help keep our reunions going and reintroduce yourselves and your children to your relatives.

You may not think these things are important now, but later may have regrets or your children may have regrets because you cannot trace these stories.

If any of you have any further information, please see that we get it and we will try to add to this year by year.

Again, thank you all for your help.

Joy Laird Furr

Joy Laird Furr

Melva Laird Hodge

Melva Laird Hodge

James Columbus Laird
b. 1878, Wise County,
Texas

[His parents from Tennessee]

Ruby May Leonard
b. 1878, Wise County,
Texas

[Her parents from Tennessee]

Alvin Bryan Laird

b. 1907, Frederick,
Tillman County,
Oklahoma Territory

Education: 6th grade

Church: None

m. 1929

Rosie Lee Harlas
b. 1911, Cloud Chief,
Oklahoma

Jay C. Laird
b. 1932
USAF (retired)

Yvonne May Sullivan
b. 1935
Technician

Bernice Fay Shirley
b. 1938
Child care

Francis Bryan Laird
b. 1933
Saw shop operator

Melva Lee Hodge
b. 1936
Resident trainer for
retarded children

Earl Calvin Laird
b. 1940
Lead man, Dept. of
Transportation, State
of California

Joy Alva Linda Furr
b. 1942
Psychological technician, Porterville
State Hospital

Francis Marion Harlas
b. 1893, Corral,
Texas

[His parents from Missouri]

Lillie May Jackson
b. 1882, Cleveland,
Texas

[Her parents from Liberty Co., Texas]

Rosie Lee Harlas Laird
b. 1911, Cloud Chief,
Oklahoma
Education: 8th grade
Church: Baptist

m. 1929

Alvin Bryan Laird
b. 1907, Frederick,
Oklahoma Terr.

Jay C. Laird
b. 1932
USAF (retired)

Yvonne May Sullivan
b. 1935
Technician

Bernice Fay Shirley
b. 1938
Child care

Francis Bryan Laird
b. 1933
Saw shop operator

Melva Lee Hodge
b. 1936
Resident trainer for
retarded children

Earl Calvin Laird
b. 1940
Lead man, Dept. of
Transportation, State
of California

Joy Alva Linda Furr
b. 1942
Psychological technician, Porterville
State Hospital

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