CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY
The 1930s Migration to the Southern San Joaquin Valley

Oral History Program

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE:	Vivian Leah Barnes Kirschenmann
PLACE OF BIRTH:	Boynton, Muskogee County, Oklahoma
INTERVIEWER:	Michael Neely
DATES OF INTERVIEWS:	April 22 and May 5, 1981
PLACE OF INTERVIEWS:	Arroyo Grande, San Luis Obispo County
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PREFACE

Mrs. Kirschenmann was a gracious and very pleasant interviewee. She lives on a high bluff above the ocean near Pismo Beach. She is devoted to her husband and family. Her life is guided by her religious beliefs and her positive attitude toward life and living.

Michael Neely
Interviewer

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INTERVIEWEE: Vivian Leah Barnes Kirschenmann (Age: 61)

INTERVIEWER: Michael Neely

DATED: April 22, 1981

M.N.: This is an interview with Vivian Kirschenmann for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Michael Neely at 3131 Highway 1, Arroyo Grande, California on April 22, 1981 at 9:00 a.m.

M.N.: What year were you born?

Kirschenmann: March 1, 1920.

M.N.: What's the first thing that you can remember as a child?

Kirschenmann: Living in Oklahoma and going to school. A terrible snow storm came and being stranded at school. In those days you walked to school. I was in the first grade. The teachers lived on the school grounds. They wouldn't let the little ones walk home because of the severity of the storm. [We were] stranded there for a week with me crying for my older brothers. I was number five of ten children. We had to stay overnight and I wanted to go home to my parents.

M.N.: Can you tell me the order of the brothers and sisters?

Kirschenmann: My oldest brother, Kenneth, would be seven years older than me. Then my mother had twin boys named Doyle and Damon. They weighed nine pounds each. I had a brother just older than me named Ansell. He's a minister and lives in Fresno, California. Then I was born. After that there was another daughter, Vera. Two years later Georgene was born. After we got to California twins were born, Dorothy and Donald, in 1930. Our last baby was born in 1932. Her name is Naomie.

M.N.: What was your school like?

Kirschenmann: An all red brick building. The teachers in those days lived on the school grounds. [There was] a lot of discipline in school

and respect for the teachers. Your teachers were part of your family. It would be nothing for us to look up and see the teacher coming over to our house to have dinner or lunch. [They might] come personally to talk to you about problems you had in school. I really can't recall having any trouble.

When I was stranded, I can remember my father coming in a horse and buggy to pick me up. The roads were quite bad. We didn't have the beautiful highways of today. It was a little country school. I have very fond memories because of the get-togethers and the luncheons at school. It was just beautiful.

M.N.: Can you remember what you were wearing that day?

Kirschenmann: Yes. Long flannel underwear, black stockings and a dress. My mother was very much for frills after four boys. I was the first girl. I always had my sashes and long dresses. I had my hair back with braids, sweaters and lots of clothes on because of the weather.

M.N.: What kind of shoes did you have on?

Kirschenmann: We had high top shoes in those days. Everything was more secure because of the weather. We dressed for the weather.

M.N.: Were they brown?

Kirschenmann: My shoes and stockings were black. Our underwear would be pulled down over and turned around. The stockings were pulled up on them.

M.N.: What was your father wearing when he came to get you?

Kirschenmann: I remember very well the mittens and the stocking caps.

M.N.: Were the mittens and caps homemade?

Kirschenmann: Oh yes. Definitely so.

M.N.: Did your mother make them?

Kirschenmann: No. Grandmother made those. At Christmas you got mittens and stocking caps. Everything was homemade.

M.N.: What was Grandmother like?

Kirschenmann: Grandmother was a person that stayed at home a lot. She stayed at home and cooked. I can remember sitting at a big, round table with beautiful food on it. We butchered the hogs in the fall. We'd all go to her house and the fresh pork would be brought in. The older boys did the butchering. We would be sitting around the table with Grandmother frying tenderloins and her big biscuits.

That's a very fond memory. After the pork would be butchered it was salted down. There was no refrigeration so it was placed in a big salt box on the side of the house and kept in salt for days or months.

M.N.: Was your grandmother a big woman?

Kirschenmann: Very large and big bosoms. I can remember so well Grandmother rocking me to sleep many times in an old rocking chair. I remember her flower garden very well. One of the main flowers was blue bachelor buttons and she'd always pick me a little bouquet of flowers.

M.N.: What did her eyes look like?

Kirschenmann: Her eyes were brown and she always wore little gold earings, they were real gold little hoop earings. Her hair was back in a little bun. I have very fond memories of Grandma.

M.N.: She was a kind person?

Kirschenmann: Very kind. Never talked back to her husbnad. I can remember Grandpa being always the one that did the talking and Grandma did the listening. Meals were ready and about all she did was stay and work in her flowers. There was nothing for entertainment whatsoever but to cook for the grandchildren.

M.N.: What was your grandfather like?

Kirschenmann: He was handsome. He was beautiful. Grandfather raised and sold pork. What he got a pound I don't know. It was very little but he provided well for his children. He had four or five boys and they raised the pork. They'd have a beef to kill in the fall. He made homemade whiskey and he'd sell the whiskey on the side. I think he said he had some of the best whiskey in the country. It was $5 a gallon. That was a lot of money then but he said that he felt he had the best whiskey in Oklahoma. They had stills. The marshalls would come and raid the stills. They'd warn Grandpa because they were some of his best customers.

M.N.: He'd allow them to catch him?

Kirschenmann: Sure. That was all planned.

M.N.: What would they do?

Kirschenmann: They'd just tell him that he'd have to tear his still down. He'd start another. I can remember the homemade molasses. They sold it. He lived on corn bread and molasses.

M.N.: The grandfather did?

Kirschenmann: Yes, the grandfather. We'd go there lots of times and eat corn bread and molasses with pork sometimes because of him raising it. It was quite a treat to go there.

M.N.: What was your father like?

Kirschenmann: My father was grandfather's oldest son. His name is George Martin Barnes. Incidently, we still have father. He's 90 years old. He was a very docile, good, kind man. Grandfather was too. He was a lot like his father and he looked a lot like him. He provided the best he could back in those days for his ten children. You can imagine.

M.N.: Was he a tall man?

Kirschenmann: No. He was short. He was small in stature and had blue eyes and blond hair.

M.N.: What was your mother like?

Kirschenmann: My mother was larger. Mother was one-quarter Cherokee Indian. You find so many people from the midwest who are Indians. My father met my mother and they married in Arkansas. She left her family and went to Arkansas and they lived there for many years. She was just the complete opposite of father. She was dark but very nice looking. She was around five feet eight inches [tall].

M.N.: What was her temper like?

Kirschenmann: She had more of a temper than daddy. Yes, definitely more. Her Indian would come out. Her nature was the complete opposite of my father.

M.N.: Was she a loving person?

Kirschenmann: Oh yes, very, very much. I can remember Christmas very much because I always thought it was so interesting. Mother always went in big for Christmas. In fact, she always had Christmas at our house. We would have a homemade sock and in it would be an orange from California, some English walnuts and homemade candy usually. Mother always provided and someway or another I always had a doll. We had the community Christmas tree. You would go in the woods and cut your tree and bring it in and decorate it with popcorn and cranberries if you were fortunate enough to get cranberries. We lived in a colored colony and there were a lot of colored people.

They would come in and do housework for what little you could afford to pay them. They would come and have Christmas with us. I remember the colored children all around Mother's tree. We

called her Grandma Barnes. She was great for Christmas.

Daddy would go into the woods with his gun. The older boys would tiptoe and help. Dad would always hunt and we always had quail and cottontails. They were plentiful. He could go out on any given day and bring back a cottontail for breakfast. We would have cottontail and gravy and mother would make biscuits. That would always be our Sunday morning breakfast.

M.N.: When did she start teaching you to work in the kitchen?

Kirschenmann: You know it was no given time. I was so small the first time. I can remember them sitting me on the sink to watch them cut up a chicken. The chicken had twelve pieces. They showed me how to cut up a chicken. It just fell in line. You weren't taught any certain thing by any certain person. It came by habit from watching and doing. You had to do it. I was the older [child] in the family and had to help with the little ones. It was just a thing that was my part. You had to do it. Everybody worked.

Daddy alone didn't make the living. The boys would work with him. It was a family thing where we all worked together. I worked in the kitchen and as long as you were big enough to do something we each had a little job to do.

M.N.: What would be your job?

Kirschenmann: Dishes mainly.

M.N.: How did you do the dishes?

Kirschenmann: I'd go to the well to draw the water and bring it into the house to wash the dishes.

M.N.: Did you wash them with a detergent?

Kirschenmann: Oh no, not at all, homemade lye soap. Mama was great at making [it]. We always had plenty of lye. When the boys were older and worked they naturally got their clothes stained a lot. She felt the lye soap was the best. You had a big black kettle that they boiled the soap in. There would be a day set aside to make lye soap. I have fond memories of keeping the little ones away from the fire as the old black kettle boiled. In fact, I have the black kettle here in the yard. I have flowers planted in it. I brought it back from Arkansas years ago.

I recall saving the used lard from all the pork. We put the lye in it and boiled it. It was made from a grease substance. The lye would boil to a certain consistency. When it got hard we poured it into a wooden box. We would cut it in squares. She took great pride in making her lye soap. She wanted hers white. It usually

turned out dark brown or yellow. I remember Mom wanted hers perfect so she'd make it whiter.

M.N.: Was it good?

Kirschenmann: It was terrific for clothes. It would take the stains out. We did not have any detergents. We just had this homemade soap.

M.N.: Did you scald the dishes after you finished them?

Kirschenmann: Oh, never. That took more work. Most of the time you would drain them or dry them if it was convenient. We'd sit around the wooden stove at night and have popcorn. There was no gas so when the fire went out after a meal it was pretty hard to boil more water. We always had a tea kettle sitting on it. We had a hot water tank on one of our stoves. It was quite a wood stove in those days. We were fortunate to have this hot water tank on one of our stoves. We had hot water for bathing the little ones. At night you brought a tub into the house. We'd bathe the little ones all in one water.

M.N.: What did the house look like?

Kirschenmann: It was board and batting. There were always beautiful flowers. I have fond memories of hollyhocks at my mother's yard. It was a little four room house in those days. It had only two bedrooms, a little living room with a kitchen off of the bedrooms. The toilet was outside.

M.N.: If I stood at the front door what would I see if I looked in?

Kirschenmann: Just chairs mainly and a bed in the living room. The cupboards with food in them.

M.N.: In the living room?

Kirschenmann: In the living room. You'd see fruit all over because they took great pride in their canning. It was kind of shown off. If you looked on the wall you'd always see a picture of Christ. There were two old pictures of Cupid awake and Cupid asleep. I remember very well having those on the wall. Not too many pictures. There were mainly pictures of the children.

M.N.: What kind of wallpaper did you have?

Kirschenmann: Tar paper. We put it on with those little round things that they'd hammer to put it on the walls. We put the tar paper up on the walls to fill in the cracks.

M.N.: What was on the floor?

Kirschenmann: Homemade rugs. It was always a wooden floor. I can't recall

ever having carpet. You'd have little throw rugs in front of a chair for the guest to sit in. You took great pride every Saturday scrubbing and cleaning the floor with lye soap.

M.N.: So it was clean.

Kirschenmann: Oh yes, very clean.

M.N.: Was there a quilting rack?

Kirschenmann: Yes. Mother was always quite active in church. They'd get together and have quilting bees. We always had quilts on the bed. Never a bedspread. The pride then was to have the prettiest and the finest stitch of a quilt. It was always homemade. The ladies would get together and they'd finish your quilt at your house. The next time, they'd go to another house to quilt. It was a community thing. The spreads were homemade quilts.

M.N.: If we walked then to the kitchen what would we see from left to right?

Kirschenmann: A wooden stove. A wooden table. We had a stainless steel sink with a pump which was probably from Sears to pump in the water. My father was pretty handy. He did pipe water into our house. We also had a well. In later years he piped water into the house so we had a pump at our sink.

M.N.: Were the bedrooms off of the kitchen?

Kirschenmann: Yes. The bedrooms were usually next to the stove in the kitchen. It kept them warm because we didn't have stoves in the bedroom.

M.N.: How were the bedrooms furnished?

Kirschenmann: Just beds and an old dresser for the clothes and things. My father made the beds. They were just wooden beds with straw mattresses. Every fall we would go and get the straw and make clean nice mattresses.

M.N.: Was that comfortable?

Kirschenmann: Yes. It was all right. We had feather beds. You were fortunate if you had a feather bed because that was really something. We always had them. A lot of people would raise geese. Oh, they'd squawk when we would pull their down features. I thought it was a frightening thing and very cruel. I didn't appreciate it, being a seven year old.

M.N.: What would you see out of the backdoor of the kitchen?

Kirschenmann: Oil wells. My father lived on a lease and they pumped the oil.

They called it the Boynton Lease. We had a gas torch from the oil wells that lighted the whole community. It went day and night. You could see the little frogs under it lapping up the bugs at night. It was interesting to sit out at night and watch the little frogs that would come out. You could always look out and see this gas torch light.

M.N.: How far away was it?

Kirschenmann: About fifty yards from the house. It just lighted up a long ways. In later years they piped gas into the houses.

M.N.: Could you feel the heat from it?

Kirschenmann: Yes, you could. It was a beautiful thing for winter when it would be cold.

M.N.: Was it noisy?

Kirschenmann: No. It didn't make too much noise. The noise I remember was going to sleep with the lullaby of the old wooden pump wheels.

M.N.: How far was the pump from the house?

Kirschenmann: There were several around the house where we lived. It was maybe 150 yards. My mother would ring a bell and my dad would come home for lunch. There were several wells around. The main noise at night was always the squeaking of the old wooden wheels turning.

M.N.: Did it smell?

Kirschenmann: It always smelled of oil. Always oil. You'd look down at the ground and there'd be oil oozing out. Later on, we moved to Seminole, Oklahoma which had quite an oil boom. People would follow the booms where they struck oil. Oklahoma had a lot of oil. My father was a pumper and we would move on. We did quite a bit of moving in my early days. I can remember that. We'd go to the next big boom. We hit the Seminole boom. I remember being taken out of school and starting again.

I remember the big rains. We had a lot of rains. We'd catch the rain in big barrels beside the house. We'd always wash our hair every Saturday in rainwater.

M.N.: Was it good for that?

Kirschenmann: Oh yes. It was always soft. We had a lot of rain and we never wasted it. We always kept the barrels out for the water.

M.N.: What was your relationship with your brothers and sisters?

Kirschenmann: Beautiful. We were always very close. I was the oldest girl. I can remember so well when my second sister was born. My father told the boys to take me for a ride in the wagon while my mother gave birth to the baby at home.

M.N.: Did she have a doctor?

Kirschenmann: Yes. I think they had a doctor come to the house. We had a colored lady that worked with us. Her name was Josephine. Josephine didn't deliver that baby. They did have a doctor. He came in horse and buggy and delivered the baby. I think it was for $5. I can remember the boys pulling me in a little red wagon down to the creek and back.

My father asked my twin brothers who were born on April 10 what they would like for their birthday. Would they like a ball and bat or would they like a baby sister? They said they'd like a baby sister. He said, "That's what you got."

We had a little pony. I remember the pony very well. His name was Snip. The boys would have to go cut a lot of wild clover and dry it to feed the horse. In those days you didn't have too much feed unless you fed them yourself. We lived out where there was quite a bit of greenery and we could feed our pony. Snip was our source of entertainment really.

M.N.: Did you have a creek or a pond?

Kirschenmann: Yes, we did. They called it Dry Creek. We lived by this creek and the boys had a swimming hole there. The boys would go to Dry Creek and swim in the nude. The girls wouldn't dare go down there. My mother would tell the boys, "Now put on your old jeans because the girls are coming."

I remember a Model T car. Everybody in the country came to see the Model T Ford. Daddy paid $400 for it. It was paid on payments of course and everybody came from far and near to see this car. I remember getting in the car and going down the creek and up the hill over to my Auntie Irma's house. That was always quite a treat for us children.

M.N.: What kind of food did you eat at that time?

Kirschenmann: We ate a lot of wild berries. We canned a lot. The spring brought wild mustard. Poke salad was a green that was very healthy and very rich in iron. We'd go down the creeks and get it in the early spring. We'd can it in the spring to eat in the fall. You always had a garden. My parents took great pride in a garden and if you didn't raise a garden you didn't eat well. Everything was canned. We had turnips and mustard. Then, in the spring, we'd go get wild poke salad. We'd pick the wild berries. We had meat simply

because in our little community there were beautiful cottontail rabbits. We would have quite a bit of cottontail as well as red squirrels and dumplings on Sunday morning.

M.N.: That was a regular thing?

Kirschenmann: Yes. My father was a beautiful shot. That's handed down to all of our family. In fact, Kenny Barnes, Junior, my nephew, is a world champion skeet shooter. My mother was a terrific shot too. That was handed down to my older brother Kenneth. Guns were a great pride and joy. When you'd look in the living room there was always a beautiful gun in the rack. The little ones never touched the guns.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

Kirschenmann: Sometimes we would peek at the gun. Daddy would say, "If you'll be quiet, you can follow me today because I'm going cottontail hunting." It would be close to the house down on Dry Creek. He'd go down and shoot rabbits. Mother would be ready when he got back. We would have fried rabbit, biscuits and gravy for breakfast.

We usually had a cow. We always had fresh milk. We had to milk the cow in the morning and the evening.

M.N.: Who milked it?

Kirschenmann: Mother and Dad. The cow had a bell and my dad would whistle. She was so beautifully trained that she would come to the house from the pasture to be milked. She was a Jersey.

M.N.: Do you remember how your mother made biscuits?

Kirschenmann: Yes. It's around two cups of flour, a tablespoon of baking powder, a teaspoon of salt and white lard and buttermilk. The can said Rex Lard. We bought it in gallon cans.

On the table was always sweet milk with buttermilk and clabber milk. We put a pinch of soda in the milk to get it to clabber. We always had three types of milk on the table with homemade butter and biscuits. Everybody made molasses or homemade jams. Daddy would go into the woods and put a big netting around his face in order to rob a beehive in a tree. We had our own honey and we'd can it and it usually kept. So, it was honey or molasses nearly always on the table. I can't recall having jams. We probably didn't have the sugar for it. It was a treat to go to somebody's house where there was store bought jam. In the spring we would pick the berries and make some jam if we had the sugar. Sugar was a treat.

M.N.: What happened then with the family in the next few years?

Kirschenmann: They kind of got tired of following the oil booms. My mother's next neighbor was named Art Naten. His family moved to California in 1927. They kept writing my mother letters. We came to Shafter, California mainly because of the beautiful climate. We had severe storms in Oklahoma. It's pretty bad and it was nothing for your house to blow away when those cyclones would hit. Many a night we awakened in the cellar. You had board planks with your mattress on them. You might sleep all night in that cellar because of the severity of the storms. My mother was scared to death.

My father was quite a carpenter. To make extra money he would build houses. It was always board and batting back then. He was building a house one time and the top of the house just blew away. He had to get down in the ditch as he was running toward the house. Mother said, "This is it. Let's go to California." The Natens kept writing. They would tell about the wages and work in the potatoes for about ten or fifteen cents an hour.

So we got a Dodge truck. We were seven children. Three were later born in California. Mother was pregnant at the time with twins. Our trip to California was from Boynton, Oklahoma in a Dodge truck with seven children. When we got to New Mexico, we stopped by to see cousins named Gremitz. They'd been our neighbors back in Boynton, Oklahoma. In New Mexico we worked with older boys and lived in a dugout house. That was Mountain Air, New Mexico. We lived in that dugout all that winter. That was a severe winter. It was very, very cold. Our wood was cow chips. Everybody burned cow chips. We would go out into the desert and gather the dry cow chips. I can recall daddy heating stones and wrapping them in paper to put at our feet. It was a severe winter, but we survived.

M.N.: When you were back in Oklahoma do you remember any storms?

Kirschenmann: Oh yes. Many a night. Mother would always put a feather pillow over our heads and we'd run towards the cellar. We weren't the fortunate ones that had the cellar built onto the house. You were really coming up in class if you had a built-in cellar or a kitchen sink. Our cellar would always be out from the house. We'd have to go to the cellar.

They had a warning sound. There was no TV to tell you. My mother, being Indian, could smell a storm coming. It was always a blue type funnel with a terrible noise and the wind. We'd run with a pillow on our head. The hail came severely all at once and the lightening would always strike. It was very dangerous. It was nothing to hear of it killing your cattle or people. The lightening in the midwest states would really hit severely. We would sit in the cellar all night till the storm was over.

M.N.: Did you ever see one of these funnels?

Kirschenmann: Oh yes. It was a dark, black funnel that came down. I can remember mother saying that it hit a certain district. We went up there the next day. They found a little baby up in one of the trees with a quilt wrapped around it. It was just as snug. It wasn't hurt. The storm just swept down and took the baby right out of its mother's arms. You would usually lay flat on the ground.

We knew when we left we would work our way to California. We didn't have enough money to make the trip. We wanted to get out of that storm district we lived in.

M.N.: Do you remember anything about the economic conditions at that time?

Kirschenmann: It was pretty rough. My mother always sewed for us girls. We had a Singer sewing machine. I can remember her crying when she had to sell the sewing machine for us to get a little more money for gas to go on west.

M.N.: She sold it before you left?

Kirschenmann: No, on the way. It was still in the truck with us.

M.N.: Did you have a sale before you left?

Kirschenmann: No. People in those days couldn't afford to buy. You gave it away. If someone wanted something you gave it to them. We had just saved enough money with my father working on the lease to get to New Mexico.

We stopped in New Mexico and made a broom corn harvest. Then we came on into Shafter, California. That was in 1929. Mother was pregnant and she gave birth to twins in July. Those babies were born in a little four room house at Smith Corner out of Shafter. The doctor came to help deliver [them]. They were six month babies born from the hardship. They did survive with much prayer. That doctor worked with mother and they were born in 117° heat. I remember putting them in boxes and keeping their skin greased. I was nine years old and the big sister. We could never let our babies dry out. No incubators. We'd keep them oiled. The doctor said, "I think you'll raise them if you'll keep them in olive oil."

M.N.: Do you remember how you rode on the trip out?

Kirschenmann: In the back of this truck. We had beds in the truck. We'd just line up and sleep at night. No motel for sure.

M.N.: Do you remember leaving Oklahoma?

Kirschenmann: I can remember my cousins coming down and crying. We had three

cousins whom I dearly loved. They lived up on the hill. We'd to to see them on Sunday. We all loaded up in the truck. The time of day probably was early in the morning.

M.N.: Do you remember what kind of games children played in Oklahoma.

Kirschenmann: Yes. Horseshoes.

M.N.: Children played horseshoes?

Kirschenmann: Yes. We played horseshoes and had a playhouse. I remember our playhouse. We had wire around the playhouse and wooden boxes. I was one of the fortunate ones. My mother always provided me with a doll. I was always fond of dolls. She sometimes made us dolls from corn but I had a doll. The boys played horseshoes. We were fortunate in having a horse so they rode the horse. We had a red wagon.

M.N.: A small red wagon?

Kirschenmann: Yes, very small. We got that probably at Christmas. We would usually sit around the fire at night and pop corn.

M.N.: Did you often have company?

Kirschenmann: No, not too much. We lived in a community where there were a lot of colored people. We would play occasionally with them. My mother did a lot of nursing. She never had enough of her own to care. If there was some lady giving birth, she'd go and help with the delivery. We'd play with the colored kids. We'd play hopscotch. It's a game where the chalk is drawn on the ground. We'd jump from one square to the other.

M.N.: The black and white children played together. Did the parents socialize?

Kirschenmann: Yes. We lived in a colored community. There wasn't fighting among us like you hear of today. My mother worked with the colored people. She did nursing among them and helped. There was a little colored boy whose name was Rufus. Rufus was a real large person. He never had enough food to eat and my mother would feed him. She always had someone at the back door to feed and help with.

We shared with others and those were pretty hard days. It was a pretty poor community so she would help feed them. She was a regular Florence Nightingale. I have nothing but praise for her. She not only raised her own, she raised everybody else's.

I can recall someone's baby dying in the church. It had pneumonia

and they never had shots for pneumonia. Mother had brought the baby home. I thought, "Oh my goodness. Here we've got another baby." Mother put it right in with her baby. It got sicker. She called the father and said, "We'll take the baby back to church tonight and there will be prayer for it." She saw it was a hopeless case. They went back to the church and they had the prayer. We had fruit jars of water to drink for the little ones. We sat on the wooden church benches. We always had our own homemade quilts under the benches. The little ones would get under there and go to sleep. We'd take a fruit jar or milk or water and feed them.

Mother brought this baby home and raised it for a good while but it continually got worse and there was no doctor. I remember the baby passing away and how heart broken my mother was to call the father and tell him. Its mother had died at birth and so my mother had taken it in because there was no one to care for this little baby.

M.N.: Was it a black child?

Kirschenmann: I believe that was a colored baby.

M.N.: Was church a big part of your life?

Kirschenmann: Very much so.

M.N.: What was your church like?

Kirschenmann: Usually it was under arbors. They put up straw top and some minister would come and preach. Then he would go on to the next town. They called it a revival. Yes. Church was very important.

M.N.: Did you go to church on Sundays?

Kirschenmann: We would go to church on Sundays and maybe Wednesday and Friday nights. Church was our main source of entertainment, really. My mother had lots of faith. It was amazing to see how she would pray for something. We could really see that her faith was very important. We didn't have a lot of medication. You didn't run a child to a doctor. She just had great faith. We would see beautiful works of God. That was implanted in our hearts at an early age. It has sustained us and been very important throughout our life. I can see where it's been a beautiful thing.

I can remember and still get letters from my colored nanny. Her name was Josephine. Men they called marshalls would come to our house. They knew Father lived there and had a pretty good name. They'd ask him if a certain colored boy was at our house. Dad said, "No. Now this man wasn't involved in anything. He's a good boy so don't bother him." The Klans [Ku Klux Klan] were riding

back in those days. They'd come in this community. My father and mother protected these people because they saw that they weren't involved in anything. But, the least little thing could happen and they'd come into this community and try to disturb it. My father protected these people a lot because he felt they were being persecuted.

In town they actually had a sign that said, BLACK MEN DON'T LET THE SUN SET ON YOU IN THIS TOWN. They'd have to rush to town and get their things and rush back. People were quite cruel. We had a beautiful relationship with the colored [people] because my father and mother worked with them and they were being persecuted. They never bothered us whatsoever. Not thievery, nothing.

To this day I still get letters from my colored mother. When we children would be playing outside, she would come in to help my mother. Mother wasn't always in the best of health. Josephine would come in at different times because my mother would feed them out of our garden. She'd help scrub the wooden floors. On the table would be a cake if we were good and stayed outside because she'd just scrubbed the floors. She never wanted us to come in and mess up the clean floor. The chairs would be on top of the table and under there would be a cake from Josephine, our colored girl. It was quite a rare thing to have the sugar to make a nice cake. She'd make us a cake if we were good.

M.N.: How old was Josephine at that time?

Kirschenmann: 30 years old.

M.N.: What did she look like?

Kirschenmann: Part Indian. The colored would mix with the Indians.

M.N.: Was she thin?

Kirschenmann: She was tall and thin. She was built a lot like my mother and was around five feet eight inches. She was a nice looking colored person.

M.N.: What was her personality like?

Kirschenmann: Sweet and very religious. If we weren't good children the boogie man would get us. If we were good God loved us. Basically very religious. She was also very superstitious. She would tell us old ghost tales. She played a very important part in my life.

M.N.: What was her full name?

Kirschenmann: Josephine Fields.

M.N.: How old is she now?

Kirschenmann: She's about 88 years old. I still get letters from her.

M.N.: Is she still alert?

Kirschenmann: Yes, very. She can even write to me. She was educated. They went to about the fifth or sixth grade which was great in those days. She could write her name and write letters. Her words are naturally not spelled correctly but she's still alive and lives there on the oil lease.

One time,"I can feel it in my bones", she said. "Our old barn fell today." She said, "Mrs. Barnes, someone's going to die. An old person will die because the old barn died." My mother said, "Well, I don't believe in your superstitions. You must get this out of your life." Later, we walked up to see Grandma Fields. She was very old and must have been 80 then. Sure enough, Grandmother Fields had passed away. Josephine warned us. She had a premonition of her mother's death. Mom said, "Well, yes, Josephine. You hit on this one."

We'd sit and she would tell us old tales of ghost stores. This was very important to us children. We thought it was great. Josephine was very spooky [when she told her stories]. That's what I loved to hear as a child. I think the things I recall now with happy, fond memories of Josephine telling us tales and singing old lullabies were very important in my life.

M.N.: You mentioned the Klan. Who would that be?

Kirschenmann: You wouldn't know. Cowardly thing to cover yourself up. Anytime anything would happen the Klan would come up with their white hoods on. White hoods always. If my father would hear them, he'd go up and say, "Leave these people alone because these people weren't involved in this thing. I know right here where they are and what they're doing." My father would always protect the colored people against the Klansmen.

M.N.: Were they like vigilantes?

Kirschenmann: Absolutely, that's the only name for them.

M.N.: Was it a positive influence in the community?

Kirschenmann: It was a thing the colored people feared greatly.

M.N.: Did they only take action against the black people?

Kirschenmann: As a rule, yes.

M.N.: They didn't enforce rules in the white community?

Kirschenmann: Not as much. I think possibly it was white people who were trying to keep the colored people in line. If they heard of a colored man beating his wife or something they'd ride in and give him the same type of beating. They thought they were doing some good.

M.N.: How did the black people respond to that?

Kirschenmann: Very fearful.

M.N.: Was there an action they could take?

Kirschenmann: No. Not really. I often thought maybe it was the law doing this.

M.N.: It was the law?

Kirschenmann: It was said that maybe the law was behind it someway. Whether or not it was, I don't know. It was a fearful thing when these Klansmen would come in on these communities.

M.N.: Did you ever see them?

Kirschenmann: My father did. The children would be put in the house so they wouldn't see too much. They'd just see some [men] ride up on their horses. I can't say I ever saw them. I can just remember my father talking about them.

M.N.: Wasn't your father risking his life?

Kirschenmann: Oh yes. Very much so. He wasn't afraid though. My dad wasn't afraid of anything. I think that's why he survived. He was well liked. He had a nice name. Never in any kind of trouble. He was what they called a hard working man trying to make a living for his children.

M.N.: Wasn't it rare that he would intercede on behalf of these people?

Kirschenmann: Yes. My mother was of this nature. She wasn't afraid of anything. I can remember one time a very deranged man sicking his dog on his cow. My father went out with his shotgun and said, "Take the dog off the cow or I'll shoot you. I won't have you treating your cow this way." The dog was just mutilating this poor cow all because the cow kicked the milk can over. My dad was small but his gun spoke for him I suppose.

M.N.: Were there an incidents of violence at that time that you recall?

Kirschenmann: No. Not like you hear today. We never locked our doors. We would go away for a weekend up to my auntie's on the hill and stay overnight. All the kids would line up on pallets on the floor. We took our own quilts like they do sleeping bags now.

We might go out in the yard and kill a chicken. We'd have chicken and dumplings for Sunday dinner. We played under torch lights. Always under these gas lights. [There was not much] violence.

M.N.: Did the black people have picnics or get-togethers?

Kirschenmann: They had their churches and they were allowed to go to town at a certain time. They wouldn't let coloreds come into town after sunset. When you went to town, they stepped aside and let you pass. They lived very fearful lives in this community with the whites. My mother and father lived right among them because we worked on the lease where they lived. My mother was always very kind to them. She looked after them and nursed and fed them.

M.N.: Were you discriminated against because of your close association with the blacks?

Kirschenmann: No. But remember this, they had their own schools. They had their own churches. They had little communities in their own town. You'd very seldom see them come into your town. You'd never see them eat at your restaurants. In those days there weren't too many restaurants. There were certain spots where they sat. That's the way it was. It was very much that way in the midwest and in Oklahoma. I'm speaking for our community. There wasn't a dark person in our school.

M.N.: When you left do you remember your parents actually making the decision?

Kirschenmann: Yes, through great discord really. My father did not want to go to California. My mother did want to come. She always read of California. She wanted to come out. Our dear neighbors had come and were writing all these beautiful letters of the weather in California and of the wages and how much better you could live. My father said he had lived on the lease there for several years and had a pumping job. He felt like we should live there and raise the children. There was a great dispute between them. She finally said she'd go without him. It was really that bad. Daddy being very docile and quiet like he always was said, "Well, we'll go and start but I don't think we've got enough money to take us. It's a long ways."

We stayed there all winter in New Mexico. When we got that far we did run out of money. Daddy was right about it. We worked to get money there to carry us on into Shafter, California.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

M.N.: Do you remember what your place was like in New Mexico?

Kirschenmann: Yes. It was a dugout. The houses were built below the ground.

You'd just have the roof above the ground and you'd walk downstairs.

M.N.: Where in New Mexico was this?

Kirschenmann: Mountainair, New Mexico. Portales was another little town we lived and worked in. They have severe winters there.

M.N.: What was this little dugout like?

Kirschenmann: Usually one or two big rooms under the ground.

M.N.: Was it comfortable?

Kirschenmann: Yes, to a certain extent it was warm. They did that because they had severe wind storms that would blow your house away so they built the houses under the ground. It was more snug. It would be warmer in the winter. It would be very cold. I can recall my father heating the bricks and wrapping them in paper or cloth to put at the foot of the beds to keep our feet warm at night. This took the place of electric blankets. We survived that winter and worked.

M.N.: Do you mean that you worked as well?

Kirschenmann: Just helping mother in the house with her chores and the children. The older boys would go and strip broomcorn. That's how they made brooms at this little place. They worked and got enough money to get us on into Shafter. I had my birthday on the way. My mother gave birth to the twins on July 12 so we got to Shafter, California in March.

M.N.: I was thinking about the time you spent in New Mexico. How did that affect your family?

Kirschenmann: All I can remember was the severity of the winter. It was awfully cold and we'd have to bundle up and go to school.

We had a cousin that drove the school bus. It was an old Ford bus. I can remember being in a one room schoolhouse with a little wooden stove in the middle with the children all sitting around the stove. The teacher would teach three or four little ones. That would be the second grade. There would be maybe four in the next grade. She would teach all these grades up to eighth grade.

One time we picked up this little boy. We looked out the window and the bus driver jumped out and said, "That little baby is awfully cold." The little boy that was standing there just like a mummy. We worked over him in the old bus to get him warm. We were messaging him and getting his circulation back. We got him to the school and the teacher gave him warm water.

M.N.: Do you remember your family getting ready to go on from New Mexico

to California?

Kirschenmann: I just remember getting into the truck and fixing it and loading it with the quilts and the food. It was canned food. I can't recall restaurants.

I can remember stopping beside a Spanish colony one night. They were having a funeral. Someone had just passed away. They asked my mother to stay and help with the family. I can remember eating the Spanish food. It was interesting because they weren't so much Spanish as they were Indian. It broke my heart as a child to see these beautiful quilts being put into the grave with this mother who had passed away. I remember my mother telling me that this was their belief that they take some of their personal things with them. This Indian burial made a great impression on me. They would put some pretty beads in the coffin. I thought, being a vain little girl, that I would love those beads. Why were they going to put the dirt in on her and all these beautiful possessions. These were hard times and it seemed so foolish to me even as a child that they put these beautiful quilts in the coffin. We stayed until the last bit of dirt was thrown in on the coffin. I know that it was a handmade redwood coffin.

M.N.: Do you remember where it was?

Kirschenmann: It was in New Mexico someplace so it's probably someone my mother knew. We stopped there and stayed overnight. We had a German police dog. I was so afraid they'd take my dog when we got to the California border. Even then they must have had some type of an inspection. I can remember the man saying, "Don't worry. I'm not going to take your dog." I was holding the dog. He was a pup and I hid it under my dress. It wasn't enough that we had all the children to feed. We had the dog too. The dog was part of the family and so I can remember hiding the dog under my dress. If they had taken my dog, I think I would have stayed.

M.N.: Your mother had to sell some of her possessions?

Kirschenmann: Yes, she did. The [sewing] machine, everybody had a machine in those days. She had an old Singer sewing machine. I can recall something else she sold. Mother always liked to dance. She had a red dance dress and she sold that.

We made it into Shafter and stayed with a family a week or so. Then we moved out to Smith Corner. It was a little place out south of town in Shafter. When we landed it was 117°. No refrigeration. My mother gave birth to the twins. They were three months premature.

M.N.: Do you actually remember arriving in California?

Kirschenmann: Oh yes.

M.N.: What were your thoughts?

Kirschenmann: How beautiful because there was a beautiful line of palm trees in Shafter. We came down the railroad track and over to these people's home. I thought it was something we've always dreamed about. I looked all over for orange trees. In these people's yard was an orange tree. I just thought it was Utopia. I thought it was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. It was March and they were more in bloom. They lived right in a cotton community. Right away my older brothers and my father started working in the potatoes. They start planting.

M.N.: How did they find work so quickly?

Kirschenmann: I don't know. I guess everybody was picking up potatoes in the spring. They went to work right away in the potatoes. The pay was 20¢ an hour. They didn't have all the mechanical pick ups. They had to do it all by hand.

M.N.: You mentioned your mother having twins.

Kirschenmann: She had the babies at home. I wasn't in the room when the babies were born.

Later on we went north to work in the grapes that fall. The spring was potatoes in Shafter. Then we went on to Dinuba and worked in the grapes. We lived there a couple years and had the last one of the children. Her name was Naomie. I was in the room when mother gave birth to her, the youngest. I went over to my aunt's house one time and she gave birth to a baby. I watched the birth. I have seen two babies born in my life.

M.N.: Did you actually help?

Kirschenmann: Just watched. She had a doctor with the last one. His name was Dr. Miller. In Dinuba they let me come in the room just as the baby was delivered. She told me the baby was slow in being born. If it sucked mucous into its lungs you would raise the baby up and pat its back. I can remember them handing me the baby and letting me put my finger in it's mouth to bring out the mucous from the birth canal. She gave birth to all of her children in the home.

I'll tell you something interesting. Mother never believed in giving children shots. One of my sisters, the one younger than I, had a very severe case of scarlet fever. Her name was Vera. We children never did have a shot. She didn't believe in shots and she wouldn't let her children have shots. Boy, if they sent a note home to Sally Barnes about her child they got a note back. "You'll never shoot any of these poisons into my children." She believed this. We were never sick. I never had measles. She would never let her children have shots. Polio. Never. She

would have fought the whole school but her children would not have shots. We were raised with no doctors and no shots.

M.N.: Did she have home remedies?

Kirschenmann: Sure. Turpentine and a little bit of sugar if you had sore throat from playing in the snow. Boiled onions put in a poultice on the chest to prevent pneumonia if you had a cold. Vinegar on bee stings. My father didn't chew tobacco but if someone chewed tobacco the tobacco went on the bee stings. Yes, those were all home remedies. Sweet molasses for a cough with a touch of vinegar in it. We were not raised with doctors.

M.N.: How old were you when you first saw a doctor.

Kirschenmann: I remember the doctor coming with a horse and buggy to visit the house when my sister had scarlet fever. I was about four years old. That was quite a treat.

M.N.: How old were you when you actually visited a doctor for yourself.

Kirschenmann: Not until I was grown. I can't remember going. I never went to a dentist till after I was grown.

M.N.: Do you feel that hurt you in any way?

Kirschenmann: Not at all. I've gone to a doctor as little as any person you ever saw.

We were raised on beans and potatoes. They're a great source of iron and potatoes are one of the greatest foods. We never had a salad with all of the Roquefort dressing or anything on it. Our salad was individual. It would be mustard greens on the table. The radishes would be in a little jar of cold water always. There might be some fresh spinach and turnips cut up. This was in a dish on the table. You never had a bunch of stuff over that. In the spring you had all those things on the table for your salad. Beans were always on the table and any kind of milk you drink. Always corn bread or biscuits and homemade butter.

We had our churn. The job for the little ones was turning the churn and mother's machine. I can remember peddling the machine. We turned the machine for her as she sewed. You had to do it by hand but that machine was a great possession. When you got rid of that, you got rid of a member of the family. It was that important in life.

M.N.: How did your mother adjust to California?

Kirschenmann: She loved it. She was just adventurous enough that she loved the weather and to think there were no storms. Of course, the

severe heat the first year really got to us. But she liked it very much.

M.N.: How about your father?

Kirschenmann: He'd get homesick and want to go back. He would. He'd leave the whole shebang and go back sometimes. He'd go back and work in the oil fields because he felt back there he was making more money. He would come back. This finally lead to a divorce, after raising all the children. He'd go back there and live. She'd be here and the strain of it was a little too much for them.

M.N.: How long would he be gone?

Kirschenmann: Three or four months at a time. He'd like to go back there and make better money. He felt he always knew pumping better than picking fruit or potatoes. He just thought that the pay wasn't all that great in comparison. He missed his folks. All his folks lived there. Mother didn't mind that much. She was kind of a rebel. She was very adventurous. She didn't mind moving on to the next tepee. She just had that much Indian in her. She was very adventurous by nature. Daddy was more stable so he'd go back to see his family.

M.N.: How did that affect you?

Kirschenmann: I missed my father greatly when he was gone. It didn't do anything to my mind. I just had a greater love for my father.

He and the boys would work in the woods out of Dinuba when we went north there to work in the grapes. One winter I remember him working in the woods and getting $5 a cord for wood. But it was lonely. I missed him. I was very close to my father so I missed him. He would write me letters and I would look forward to them. By then I was in the eighth grade.

One year I got to go back to Oklahoma with him and see my grandmother. That's who I missed, the grandparents. It was pretty much of a strain because there's no way of going back to see them. I was sixteen when I got to go back. It was after graduation. This was a big treat.

M.N.: How old were you when you left Oklahoma?

Kirschenmann: That was in 1927. I was seven years old. By the time we got to California it was 1929.

How ironic life is. This cousin came to visit me last year. I said, "Geneva, the only thing I can recall is that I missed you. I'd go to bed many a night and I missed the noise of those old pumps in

the oil fields. As a child that was a lullaby to me. I miss going up on that hill and visiting you and the other girls." She said that I'd sent her a bottle of orange perfume from California. She said, "My God. I thought you were the richest thing in the world when you got out there and made some money and sent this perfume back to me." Isn't that strange? I sent that back to her and she just told me this last year. Can you imagine? Here we are both 61. She said, "Viv, you couldn't have been ten years old when you sent me that perfume." That was a big deal. I was in California and everything was oranges, poppies and palm trees.

M.N.: The loss of relationships was difficult.

Kirschenmann: Yes. That bothered me a lot. I missed my cousins. I missed my grandpa. I missed riding in the wagon with grandpa and I missed the ice man. In Oklahoma the mailman would come with a horse and buggy and he'd bring candy. I missed this.

I really believe seven is a great impressionable year in a child's life. I'd talk to mother about it and she would say, "Vivian, you were seven. Why did that impress you so?" I think it was tearing up my roots there and leaving everything that was dear to me to go out west. I felt like I was going on an ocean voyage. Never to return.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

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Kirschenmann: When we got to Shafter it was in March 1929. It was quite a desert then. A lot of the German families had come there and had started clearing the desert sage brush away. The jack rabbits were so plentiful. A lot of people not only ate jack rabbit but they had jack rabbit drives. Rabbits eat up the crops. They had no means of getting rid of them so they'd have jack rabbit drives to kill off the rabbits.

M.N.: How old were you when you got to Shafter?

Kirschenmann: I was nine.

M.N.: Do you remember the first house that you lived in?

Kirschenmann: Yes. It was a little four room house. It was summertime. We slept with our beds out under the shade trees. The community where we landed was called Smith Corner. They had a lot of shade trees. In this heat you would sleep in the shade trees. Sometimes you would dampen a cloth. The only means of cooling was a fan blowing throw the dampened cloth so you could rest. It was nothing for it to get up to 117° out on the desert.

M.N.: What kind of work did your parents do when they first got here?

Kirschenmann: Definitely potatoes. They worked in the potatoes and irrigation. In March you would be irrigating. You harvested in May.

M.N.: What did you do at that time?

Kirschenmann: I helped with the twins. They were born prematurely at six months. Both of them lived but they weighed five pounds together. My mother's first set of twins were two of the largest twins. These were two of the smallest to live without incubation.

M.N.: Was there a reason they were so small?

Kirschenmann: I think the trip was very tiresome and hard on my mother. I'm sure of that. She gave birth early. It was very hot.

M.N.: Was your family well nourished at this time?

Kirschenmann: Our family always was. We always had a garden. We lived out of our garden. We bought milk. It seems like we had milk and vegetables but not as much meat. We lived in an Adventists colony. These people made nutmeats. They were canned and we ate a lot of the canned nutmeats. I understand now that this is very healthy. On our table mainly was beans and potatoes and milk. You'd have all three different kinds of milk because milk was cheap. We nearly always had a cow. There were times when you didn't have meat and the things that you maybe wished for. But we always had plenty of beans and potatoes.

M.N.: Did your family relationships change when you came to California?

Kirschenmann: No. If anything we were very compatible. There was a great love because of our big family and the hardships. I think it made a great love. The children were very close. I can't see that they changed. You would get homesick to go back east back to your family. The older boys would hitchhike, ride the freight trains or share a car back.

M.N.: They did?

Kirschenmann: Oh yes. The older boys definitely would.

M.N.: How old were they?

Kirschenmann: Seventeen or eighteen. Once and a while they'd save and get enough gas to go back. The older boy had a Model T Ford. Seemed like everything was Model T Fords. They would save enough money and go back in their car. They would always share rides. They would talk around the fields. Seemed like in this little community everyone there was from the midwest. You could always find someone that would share expenses to go back home.

M.N.: Did you go to school when you got to Shafter?

Kirschenmann: Yes. We all started to school there.

M.N.: What was that like?

Kirschenmann: In those days they fed the children that didn't have a lot of food. They'd have big cafeterias and saw that all the children had milk and food. School was very nice.

M.N.: Were the meals important to you?

Kirschenmann: Not that important.

M.N.: What was the school like?

Kirschenmann: An old fashioned brick building. It was called Richland School.

M.N.: It was in Shafter?

Kirschenmann: Yes.

M.N.: How many children were in the school?

Kirschenmann: During the potato harvest a lot of transients would come and go. In our third grade I would say we had maybe two dozen.

M.N.: Did you have any problems settling into the community?

Kirschenmann: You were always called Okies. When you came from the midwest, you'd be called Okies. Most of them were called Okies.

M.N.: Was it used as a bad term?

Kirschenmann: I think more in fun. The children at school would tease you a lot.

M.N.: It was good natured teasing?

Kirschenmann: Yes.

M.N.: Did you encounter any kind of prejudice or bad treatment?

Kirschenmann: Not at all. In fact the schools weren't as mixed. We had a few Spanish children in school. When I graduated in 1940, we had only one colored person in the class and two Spanish [kids]. We had 75 in our graduation class. After a while the Spanish people started coming into Shafter. We had what we called a Mexican colony. I think they had their own school. They didn't mix so much.

M.N.: But there wasn't any disharmony between people who'd come from the

midwest and people who were already here?

Kirschenmann: Yes. To a certain extent. There were remarks. There was no real violence like you see today. Things were more peaceable.

M.N.: Were there a lot of native born Californians in that community?

Kirschenmann: Most of them were from some other place. It was kind of a melting pot. The German people usually came down from Lodi up in the northern part of the state. You had your middle western people from Oklahoma, Texas and Kansas. Shafter was a real melting pot.

M.N.: What happened as you moved along?

Kirschenmann: We stayed in Shafter about five years. From there we went up north to work in the grape fields. There were a lot of grapes up in a little town in the northern part of the state called Dinuba. We lived there about five or ten years.

M.N.: Did you work in the fields at any time?

Kirschenmann: I never worked in the fields. Being the older girl, I always stayed home. The older boys did. My part in growing up was more dishes, cooking, homework and helping tend to the little ones. There were four older boys. There were four girls younger than me. The twins kept everyone in the family busy. I'm telling you! They were holy terrors. We were constantly washing diapers.

M.N.: That's a lot of responsibility for a young girl.

Kirschenmann: Yes it is. Although, I can see in my later years that it taught me to can. My home is still full of canned food. It taught me to keep house and do for myself. I think hardships, to a certain extent, are very good for a child. It teaches you so many things. You learn you can't have everything you want. You learn to sew. I think Dinuba was a beautiful little mountainous town with grapes all over. You'd go there and hit the grape harvest and maybe come back to Shafter. The homes you lived in were state homes. You could live in those homes for $1 a month. They had gone back to the state due to people not being able during the Depression to pay their taxes. You would pick out one of these state houses and pay maybe $1 to $5 a month for one.

M.N.: Were they regular homes?

Kirschenmann: They were regular homes that had gone back because of taxes. We lived in one of these houses at 190 Perry Avenue in Dinuba. We lived there for about five years.

M.N.: Were they furnished?

Kirschenmann: No. You had to have your own furniture. Sometimes they might

have some furniture. If you could come up with paying whatever was required by the state, you could live in these houses. Many people did this. A lot of people lost their homes.

I can remember our eighth grade graduation. Our clothes were all furnished. A lot of people didn't have their own clothes so they made a bunch of dresses alike for the girls. The boys were furnished with certain shirts to graduate. That was all paid by the school system.

M.N.: Did you wear one of those?

Kirschenmann: Yes. I remember my mother doing mine completely over. It didn't look like the other girls'. Mine had a certain special flower on it. It was nothing unusual for half the class to have these clothes but you could change them and make them different.

M.N.: Were you looked down upon for wearing those state clothes?

Kirschenmann: No. In those days things were rather rough. It was not like it is today. There was not that much difference made in the children. It just wasn't.

M.N.: 1929 was the beginning of the Depression wasn't it?

Kirschenmann: Yes.

M.N.: Do you remember that?

Kirschenmann: Well, yes, because that was during our trip coming west. My parents were pretty good managers so we had food. But, it was limited to what you had. It wasn't something you would choose but it was always good. Mainly beans and potatoes always and milk.

M.N.: Did things get better right away after the Depression or gradually?

Kirschenmann: I'd say five years. It wasn't anything that was done overnight. It was a gradual thing. It took you awhile to get back on your feet. There just wasn't the money to do the things you'd like to do. To me these homes were a salvation to people that couldn't afford their own homes.

M.N.: Did you stay in one home then?

Kirschenmann: Yes. We lived in one for five or ten years.

M.N.: So you really didn't move around following the crops.

Kirschenmann: We would to a certain extent. We lived in Dinuba at the time. The older boys had a car. They would come down to the potato

harvest. Then they'd go back up to Dinuba and hit the grape harvest in the fall. My older brothers and my father worked in wood. There was wood chopping. We lived in this little mountainous town. There was quite a bit of wood and my father had a saw. He sold wood for $5 a cord.

M.N.: Did the boys get paid for their work individually or did your father get the money?

Kirschenmann: My father was always very kind to the boys. In fact, he was one of the boys. My older brothers would take lead over Father. They were very compatible. There was a lot of love shown among them. He would give them what he could allow them. He helped them to get a car as they got older and the other things that children desire. One of my older brothers was very clever. I always say that Blue raised us all. He was just a boy who, from the very beginning, was full of energy and was a very good, hard worker. Blue saw that we girls had a bicycle. He got parts and built it. One bicycle was shared among five of us. We learned to do for ourselves. We didn't go downtown and buy a new bicycle. It was made. The car was put together from parts here and there also.

M.N.: Was it?

Kirschenmann: Oh yes. My brother could just create and do most anything. All his life he was very capable of having nearly anything he desired through a lot of hard work. He has a lovely business in Bakersfield named Barnes Core Drilling. He worked in oil fields. When things would slow down here he would go back east in different seasons and hit the oil fields, make a little money, and come back west. You were on the road back and forth.

M.N.: But all of it hard work.

Kirschenmann: Very hard work. You didn't have the conveniences like you have now.

M.N.: How did things go for you then?

Kirschenmann: We were shown lots of love and eventually, believe it or not, through all this love my father and mother finally divorced. My father would be on the road a lot and be gone back to work in the oil fields. My mother would be left here. Eventually they just had a separation. Later it lead to divorce. They were just worn out from hardship and raising ten children. In their later years they were always very compatible when they'd get back together say at Christmas time. We still had both father and mother through it all.

M.N.: How old were you when they separated?

Kirschenmann: Fourteen. We were in Dinuba. We started back to high school in Shafter. I think I was the first to graduate from high school. My sister followed. As times got a little better, it was easier to go to school and get an education. It was rough on the boys. Being older, they had to work and help support the family and supply food for the younger ones.

M.N.: You were fourteen in 1934?

Kirschenmann: Yes.

M.N.: Did you come back to Shafter with your mother?

Kirschenmann: No, with my father. After they separated in Dinuba, we came back with my father because he was working in the potatoes. We two older girls wanted to go and keep house for Father during the summer vacation. We came down there to help.

M.N.: Did she keep the twins?

Kirschenmann: Oh yes. She kept the twins because they were younger. We came back to Shafter. My father worked and irrigated at the Johnny Meyer Ranch.

M.N.: Must have been pretty rough.

Kirschenmann: Yes, it was. It think maybe the generation before us had it even rougher. We were raised with beautiful temperatures here. You could always raise a garden and live out of your garden. You learned to can everything. You made your own jams. In Dinuba we had a big fig tree out in the back. We lived off of that fig tree and fig jam. We canned figs and we pickled figs. I'll never forget our fig tree as children. We played in the tree. That was our recreation. The fig tree was part of the family.

M.N.: You graduated at eighteen?

Kirschenmann: I was nineteen when I graduated. It seemed like nearly every child who was there from the midwest was eighteen, nineteen or twenty. In those days, if you started school, you might be delayed. You might lose six weeks of school due to cold weather. Maybe you didn't make your grade. I think there was only one grade that I didn't make. You never start school there until you were eight. They didn't take children four and five and put them in school like they do today. In the first place, my mother wouldn't allow it. She believed you were a baby and should be home with the mother. When they got a certain age, you sent them to school. Most of the children didn't start until they were seven or eight years old. All those that graduated in my class were older. I thought it was better personally. I really do. It seemed like they were more

mature and sensible. To this day I'm not for starting children at school at five. I think they need to be home and have that love of the mother. Sure you can break them away and train them. I wonder if there isn't a lot of confusion. They're little and they need home and mother's love. I personally think it was better for us children who were older when we graduated.

M.N.: What happened after you graduated? How did your life go after that?

Kirschenmann: After I graduated it was 1940. The war broke out in 1941. My husband and I married. We went to church in Shafter and we married in the church. I was 21 by then. My husband was 19. He went to war and stayed eighteen months. Then he came home and we just continued our life. We lived out on the ranch house. His folks had a ranch house. We lived there for several years. Then we moved into Bakersfield.

M.N.: How many children did you have?

Kirschenmann: We never had children.

M.N.: What kind of work did he do?

Kirschenmann: Ranch work. His family was German. Most of them were ranchers. They all would get together back in those days and build one guy's barn. Then they'd go to the next one and build a barn. That's how they started that little community. It's mainly settled by Germans. A lot of them came out from North Dakota and South Dakota and went up north to Lodi. Then another little colony of them came to Shafter. They started buying up the land and putting in potatoes.

M.N.: What attracted you to your husband?

Kirschenmann: His naive, quiet, dignified way. He was very mannerly. I loved him because I thought he was such a kind boy. He would not go out on a date with me because he had to go home and milk the cow. That impressed me. I liked the fact that his mother came first. If he didn't go home to milk the cow his mother would milk the cow. He always made the point that he didn't want his mother to have to milk the cow. He was very close to his mother. I just always thought he was a handsome boy. On Sunday he went to church. They had the Reformed Church. He always went to church and I eventually started going to church with him. We married and lived our life then in Bakersfield for several years. Then, in the last five years, we came to the beach to live simply because we got so tired of the heat in Bakersfield. We came here in 1975.

M.N.: Do you like it here?

Kirschenmann: I like the beach. We used to come over here before we were

married. Sometimes the kids would get together. It was a big deal if you got to go to Pismo Beach. We would try to come over in a day and ride back of course. This was a big treat. His folks eventually had a summer home here and we'd come over.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1

M.N.: The whole family would come over?

Kirschenmann: Yes.

M.N.: You've lived here for five years?

Kirschenmann: Yes.

M.N.: It's a nice place.

Kirschenmann: It is nice. The weather here year round is around 60°. Here we have no refrigeration and it's just gas and utilities. There are so many beautiful vegetables around here that we like. It seems like someone is always bringing vegetables to can. I like it because of the weather. It gets a little cool sometimes and maybe a little windy but it doesn't bother me. I go back in the heat and it bothers both of us a lot. We feel far more comfortable here.

M.N.: You seem to be a very happy person.

Kirschenmann: I am.

M.N.: When you look back on your life, what stands out for you?

Kirschenmann: I'm glad that in our youth we were taught that God was first in our life. I definitely think that has sustained me throughout my life. God was so much a part of our home growing up. He ate with us and He slept with us. We always had a great deal of respect for our parents and each other. We children never fought amongst ourselves. We were always corrected with kindness and love which I think goes a long way. We're still a very close family. One of the nephews married, it's been ten years ago, but you know all ten of the children were there at this reunion. We took a beautiful family picture and the children were all together again. We try to do this once a year. I sometimes think hardships in life keep you close. I can remember one time. I was always quite an exhibitionist in church and wanted a new dress. Mother had some material. You didn't go buy a new dress. She stayed up half the night to get this dress finished for church. My sister said, "Oh we'll sew on it. It'll be beautiful Viv." They were proud for me, being the older girl, that I could have a new dress. We were proud for each other. The others didn't get a new dress but next time it would be the other sister's turn. You learned

to give. There is so much taken for granted. Hardships, to a certain extent, train you. They never hurt you.

M.N.: You don't regret that you were poor.

Kirschenmann: Not at all.

M.N.: You don't think it damaged your self image?

Kirschenmann: I was always a very proud person and if I was poor in those days I think everybody else was. I could always see the beauty in the world with the love of God.

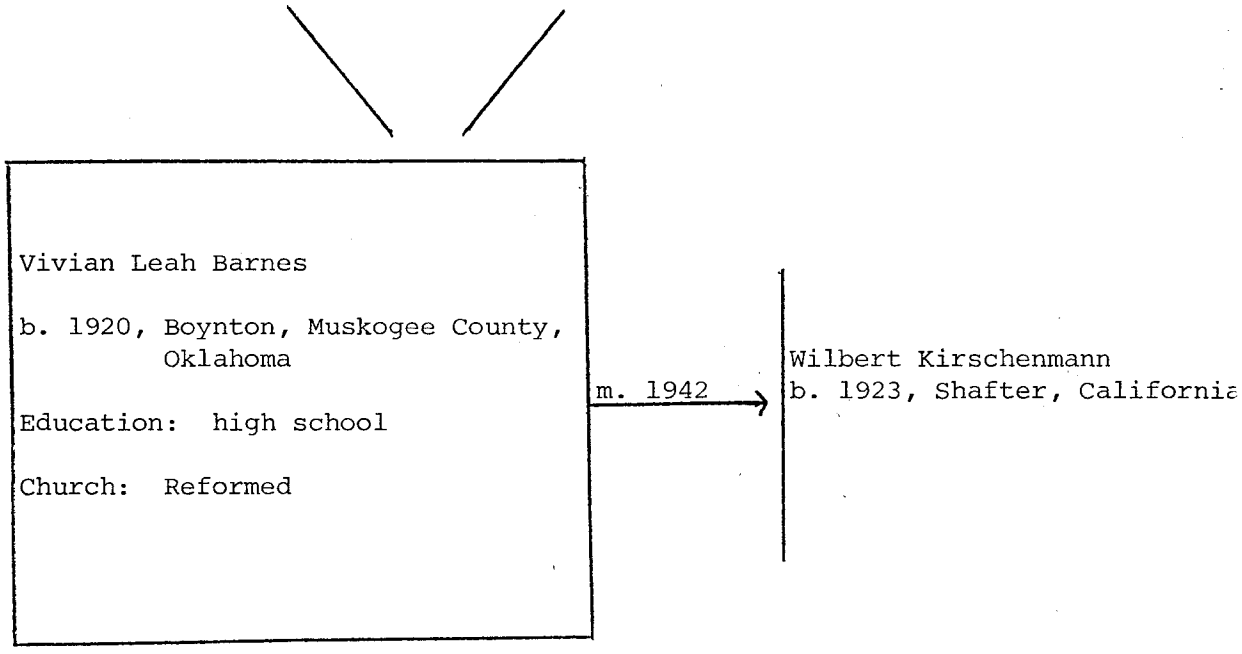
END OF INTERVIEW

George Martin Barnes
b. 1891, Georgia

[His parents from Georgia]

Sally Lee Barnes
b. 1893, Russelville, Pope County, Arkansas

[Her parents from Arkansas]



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