

## CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

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

## Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE:	Lillie Eva Grose May
PLACE OF BIRTH:	Wright City, McCurtain County, Oklahoma
INTERVIEWER:	Michael Neely
DATES OF INTERVIEWS:	June 2 and 16, 1981
PLACE OF INTERVIEWS:	Grover City, San Luis Obispo County
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## Preface

Mrs. May is quite a lady. She is a charming and gracious host. She is attractive and even somewhat elegant in manner. I enjoyed our sessions very much. She lives near the beach in Grover City in a large mobile home. Her husband is seriously ill and, although she seemed to avoid talking about it, her sadness was apparent. She loves her family and spoke of present and past members with real affection. Mrs. May is a religious person and her belief was often evident in her recollections. She is busily occupied as a sales representative for a nonretail product line. She was scheduled for sales "parties" nearly every day of the month. She continues to work hard and tirelessly.

Michael Neely  
Interviewer

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Oral History Program

## Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: Lillie E. May (Age: 64)

INTERVIEWER: Michael Neely

DATED: June 2, 1981

M.N.: This is an interview with Lillie E. May for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Michael Neely at 140 S. Doliver Street, Grover City, California on June 2, 1981 at 1:00 p.m.

M.N.: What's your earliest memory?

May: When I was six years old we left Hanna, Oklahoma and moved to Quinton, Oklahoma in 1924. Dad opened his grocery store and butcher shop. I don't recall much of the trip but I do recall living in Hanna, Oklahoma. It's just a little kid's memory.

M.N.: What is that?

May: You wouldn't believe it but my mother couldn't hardly remember this. I was telling her one day since I've been grown about the time my brother came home from the store where she'd sent him for a spool of thread and coming home he lost his change and she went out with him to look for it. I don't remember going out of the house. I was going back to the alley way and Mother sent me back in the house and I walked right straight through the house and out the front door. I don't even remember leaving the house but I remember I had a white dress and when my folks came and got me I had my hands behind me. I can still see the building which was some kind of a mill or something like that where it was an all wooden building. I was crying walking up and down and Daddy drove up in the car and picked me up. How far from home that was I don't know, but I was only three years old. I said, "Mother, I will tell you the color of dress I had on. I'll tell you exactly what I was doing when Daddy found me." I told them and Dad said he never gave it another thought. It's been so long ago and it wasn't all that dramatic. Maybe I was five blocks from the house. How do I know?

The last time I got to talk with my grandmother before she passed

and I was about eighteen or nineteen years old then I asked her if she remembered the first time I showed her how well I could play a piano. She had a piano and she'd allow us children a little while each day to play on her piano. She and Granddad came to visit us in Hanna. I said, "Grandma, come on, I'm going to show you how good I am on the piano." She said, "Honey, you don't have a piano." I said, "Yes, I do and I'll show you." I took her into my folks' bedroom under the clothes closet and there was my dad's typewriter he always left there. I sat down and I was just playing this typewriter. I said, "See Grandma, I practice all the time." Dad never did know what was going on with this typewriter. Now that's how far back I recall. As you get older you can really remember things back. It's in the bank up here and it comes out.

M.N.: What was your father doing for a living?

May: A butcher in Hanna. He worked for another man.

M.N.: Why did they move to Quinton?

May: All I know is he went there to open a store. Why he went to Quinton I don't know. All I know is that he never worked for anyone else from then on except only for the Safeway when we first came out here for three or four years.

M.N.: What was he like?

May: My dad was a very remarkable man. Anyone--you can ask Vivian [Kirschenmann, V., Oral History Interview #135] and all the kids I went to school with and the people his age and even those here in Grover City--he just was like his dad. My dad saw good in everybody and it's just like at his funeral services the pastor of the church in Grover City and the ex-pastor who had been there when my dad was living there both officiated at the services over in Shafter. He said, "Brother Grose made my day every time he'd come by. I would be out working around the church and he'd come by or maybe it would be cloudy or real foggy and he'd say, 'Isn't this a beautiful day? God just gives us such beautiful weather up here.'" Everything to him was good and everybody he knew there was good in them. I don't care what, they were good and he always told us children, "Remember this, you're not better than anybody else. You're just as good but you're not better than anybody else. Remember this, there isn't a person that's walked on the face of the Earth that didn't have something good about them. Maybe you didn't see it but other people would see it." That's the kind of guy he was. His dad was the same way--just beautiful, beautiful people.

M.N.: What did he look like?

May: I have a picture sitting right over there.

M.N.: Describe him for me.

Okay. I take after my dad-blond hair, blue eyes. Me and my brother who burned to death took after my dad's side of the family --blond headed and fair complected.

M.N.: Was he tall?

May: No, I would say my dad was about five feet six inches I believe but I'm not positive. I think it was about five six or five seven but no more than that. He never carried extra weight. He was just the right size for his height.

M.N.: How did he dress when he lived back in Quinton?

May: My dad and mother were always dressy people. He never went anywhere without a suit on all my life. Going to work when he would go the store he'd have his work pants on but he could put a nice sport coat on and you'd have a nice sport outfit because he didn't wear washables to work.

M.N.: What was your mother like?

May: She was a little doll. She was a very delicate southern gal and my dad spoiled her rotten and us kids spoiled her rotten. The day she died she was still [spoiled] rotten as she always was because we babied her. She was like a China doll. In Oklahoma we had a colored mammy and she'd rock my mother to sleep when my mother was ill. Us kids, naturally, we looked at our mother as something that had to be very protected and we couldn't see her do any hard work or anything. We never saw our mother work like the other women because my dad and my mother's brother lived with us and they treated her that way and naturally us kids treated her the same way. She's a darling little thing. She was very pretty and was Cherokee Indian and French. The Cherokee is a very, very light complexion. I guess maybe you know that. They're light complected and blue-eyed but she had the dark hair.

M.N.: Pretty features?

May: Very, very. She died on her 79th birthday. She came home from the church and laid down on the couch and went to sleep. She'd been dead about four hours before a neighbor came over. He looked at Mother and said to Dad, "Isn't Sister Grose feeling well today?" "No, she's awfully tired. She went to church this morning. I just covered her up because she was kind of cold." He was letting her sleep but she had been dead from the minute her head hit the pillow and he didn't know it. She didn't have one line in her face. In Shafter the word got out that Dad and Mother were raising their brother and sister. They didn't think they were old enough either my mother or daddy was old enough to be parents of us children.

M.N.: How old was your father when you were born?

May: He was born in 1894 and I was born in 1918.

M.N.: When was your mother born?

May: 1894. My dad's birthday was August 3, 1894 and hers was September 30, 1894. That was the difference in their ages.

M.N.: Were they close?

May: Very close, very close. I can only say this, my parents if there can be perfect parents I think they were as near perfect. We never doubted their word. We might have gone against them once and a while but we couldn't come back and say, "Why didn't you tell me?" They would tell us the pitfalls and the rest was up to us. I raised my two children the same way. I never said, "No", I just told them what the pitfalls would be and 90% of the time my children decided my way but I didn't tell them what was my way. My dad and mother raised us that way. I had a terrific childhood.

M.N.: How many children were there?

May: Only four that they raised but they had seven. Ernest Dean burned to death. He lived about 49 hours and died when he was four years old. The first one died--a little boy--at seven months because mother was pregnant with me and didn't know it and it was a breast baby and the milk poisoned him. She didn't know that she was pregnant until after he was born. [You know,] the old wife's tales that you couldn't get pregnant as long as the baby was nursing? Opal was the next one after me. I don't know how old she was. There's no record in the Bible of her death or anything so I have no idea about her and no pictures. She didn't live long enough for pictures.

My grandmother's Bible is like a diary. This was my dad's folks. Every morning they read the Bible out loud after breakfast. One would read one day and one the next and it took them 365 days to complete the Bible. Every year they read the Bible over and over again. I don't care who was visiting them. You'd sit down after breakfast and this was it. Well, anything that happened Grandma would write around the edge and I got that Bible and I never knew how old I was when the folks moved to Hanna. It was in March and I was born January 30, 1918. I got that after my dad passed away and I've got all this history but there's not a thing about Opal. Ernest Dean was four years old and I was nine years when he burned.

M.N.: How did that happen?

May: From an open grate gas stove. He had on a flannel night gown and he walked across--he had the croup--and he got to coughing and he went over to the spittoon. [There was] just enough breeze that it just hit that and my poor dad. They didn't have family rooms in those days. In the summer it was a sun room and in the winter the folks always put a bed in there if any

one of the children had a cold or was not well they'd sleep in there with them. My brother had been begging the folks to let him go with my older brother to deliver his papers on a Saturday morning. Finally they told him he could go this particular morning and they got up around four or 4:30 a.m.

My dad grabbed a blanket off the bed and threw it around Dean and wrapped him in it and he sucked the flames down and cooked his lungs. He lived 49 hours and the last thing he said, he looked up at Mother because Mother had promised him he could take Jean the baby sister two years younger than him to Sunday school class with him instead of her staying in with Mother in her class--this was Saturday morning that this happened, the last coherent thing he said--I was standing at the head of the bed looking down--he looked up at mother and said, "I'll never get to take Jean to church." That was the last words he ever spoke before he lost consciousness.

M.N.: It's really hard on the family.

May: It was very hard on my mother. My mother never really got over that. My mother died of a broke heart because my oldest brother had just moved away and he was in the butcher business, same as Dad, he'd just gone back from lunch and he was waiting on a customer and he just dropped dead with a smile on his face. He and my baby sister smiled out of the corner of their mouth and it just didn't look like he could be dead. That was on December 14 or 15 and it just tore us all apart that none of us was there with him. On May 29 following his death my baby sister took sick and she was two weeks dying--just withering away. That was the baby and the oldest only five months apart. God showed us then there was no easy way because we thought if we could have been there and helped Ernie we would have felt we'd done our part and then he showed us five months later it doesn't help.

M.N.: That's when your mother died?

May: No, my mother just quit living. This was in May 1962 when my sister died and my brother died in December 1961 and from that day on my mother just ceased living. She knew dad loved it up here because after the war Dad sold stores over in the [San Joaquin] Valley and he came over here and opened a U-Save Market over on Grand and there was nothing up there then. That was a dead end street up there but anyway they lived here. He opened this store to give it to my brother and wife. He told them he'd stay with them until the year was up and he'd have it on a paying basis for them and then it was theirs.

My brother decided to go back to college. They left and left Daddy there. He stayed until 1952 and he sold and went to Santa Ana to get a drier climate. He didn't want as dry as Bakersfield or as wet as it was over here on account of Mother so they went to Santa Ana. Then when my mother just lost all desire to live--she didn't

say it but we could see it--she told me, "I want to move back up to Grover City. That's where Daddy is the happiest." I said, "But Mother, you feel so much better down here than you did up there, don't you?" She says, "No, it doesn't make any difference where I'm at but I don't want Daddy to have to live down here all by himself." They came up here in February 1972 and my husband and I sold our business and brought our travel trailer up here September 1, 1972 just to stay until our business got through escrow and all. We were going to travel for a few years but my husband felt that we were needed here with the folks. I didn't argue because I always liked it up here and my mother went to sleep on her birthday the next year.

M.N.: She died on her birthday?

May: Yes, just went to sleep on her birthday. Then my dad married a woman that was a good friend of my mother's when they lived up here but they hadn't seen her since they moved back up here. Thank God they hadn't because he would never have married her. It would have been too much of a close thing. It was companionship at their age naturally.

M.N.: How old was he when he remarried?

May: Mother died in September and they got married in January. He was 79. She's the greatest thing that ever happened to me and to my dad because she's a hard working woman. She had a hard life all her life--a husband who deserted her and ran off with a teenage girl and left her with one of the children to raise by herself.

M.N.: So they're both still living?

May: No, that's what I'm getting at. God just sent her along. They made a 30-day trip on Greyhound right after they got married. The doctor said my father sat leaning over on the side like this because she'd be on the outside. When they came home they hadn't been home too long until his hip bothered him quite a bit and I kept trying to get him to go back to our chiropractor in Santa Ana. "No, it will be all right," they both said, "It's just old age, rheumatism, arthritis." Finally it came to the point where they had to operate. They put in a stainless hip and a plastic socket. When they do that to older people they have to keep their fingers crossed because so many things that can go wrong. He suffered then for about a year. He died two years ago.

We had to put him in a rest home because it got to where he'd fall out of a chair trying to walk and couldn't walk. When you'd ask him to help himself up on his feet he was like a baby. He'd push his feet out like this (gestures). He didn't know how to work them. We had to take him to a rest home and one day I was sitting there talking to him just like I'm sitting here talking to you. I knew he couldn't see me. His eyes hadn't changed but he wouldn't move his eyes around and catch people walking by

because he was one those people who'd speak to everybody. He didn't know any of us. He couldn't see and he couldn't walk anymore.

But I'll tell you what kind of a man he was. They had church services over at the home and my dad could sing word for word every religious song they sang and he was a great tenor. He sang right along with them remembering every word. He didn't know us and he didn't even know where he was at. He'd get aggravated at the girls working behind the counter. He'd say, "You know, Liz, I think what we're going to have to do now..." I'd go and I'd say, "Daddy, this is Lillie." He'd say before he lost his sight, "Look at them now they're just killing time. I'm going to tell you something if you're going to run this store for me you've got to tell them they have got to get on the job and start working. There's no standing around laughing and talking. They get their breaks and all of that but they have got to get their work done." That just worried him until he couldn't see anymore but after he was in bed and couldn't even be up at all, the church services would be held and my dad would start singing word for word and I couldn't remember the songs and I'd been singing them in church all my life. I didn't remember the words unless I had a book and I could glance at it. He did more good in that home for those people because he was happy and he was singing. When he died all the help in there you would have thought he was their father. He was there eighteen months. That stepmother of mine is a living doll. We are so close.

M.N.: Is she still alive?

May: Oh yes, she never knows when to quit working. She raises all of her food to freeze and can and give away and take to the church for them to take to needy people and all that. She's just a hard working woman and she has a heart of gold. My dad had real good wives but she's a friend. My stepmother is a friend, a very, very close friend for me.

M.N.: So all in all it's worked out very well for you.

May: I had two good mothers. She's a little Arkie right out of Fort Smith, Arkansas. She didn't live far from us because we were only about 60 miles from Fort Smith, Arkansas in Quinton, Oklahoma.

M.N.: So you have a lot in common.

May: Yes. She has four children. I've met two of them I know real well. We're very close and her children aren't the least bit jealous of my sister. My sister isn't that close because my sister lives up by Sacramento and she hasn't been around Mom all this time.

M.N.: How old were you when you married?

May: Just before my eighteenth birthday.

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

May: Two. They're both living. One's living here and my son is in Santa Ana.

M.N.: What years were they born?

May: My son was born in 1936 and my daughter in 1940.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

M.N.: What was your house in Quinton like?

May: The last house we lived in we had five bedrooms, a large living room and a large kitchen. The reason why there were five bedrooms off the kitchen into the service porch was that there was a hallway and a private bedroom for our housekeeper

M.N.: Was that your nanny? What was she like? How did you find this lady?

May: I don't remember. She wasn't there when we moved to Quinton. She didn't come to work for the folks until we got the Holt house. There every house is called by the original builder. My husband was born out here but if you go back to Colorado and ask for the Mays' farm--they haven't had that farm since 1905--it's called Mays' farm. Well, that's the way it was in Oklahoma. The original owner that was the name of the house. They didn't have numbers on the houses. It was the Holt house or Grose house or whoever built the house. When we went there that's when I remember Mammy Frances. I can remember her being at that house.

M.N.: What did she look like?

May: I'll tell you what she looked like. My mother said to her one day, "Mammy Frances, why didn't you marry an Indian?" She said, "Lord, honey, I couldn't marry anything but a big old black buck." She was very fair complected and had silky, silky hair. I remember that so well but I remember the color of the inside of her mouth after I grew up and I would think back. Then the other thing was the palms of her hands and the bottom of her feet. It's a different color than ours and the inside of their mouth is a bright pink color. That's what she looked like but she rocked my mother to sleep even.

M.N.: Was she a small woman?

May: She was heavy set just like a colored mammy would look like. She was heavy, loving. You know they'd give up their family for

their white family. The day that we left to come out here--we left in the morning between four and five--mother's sister and husband came up to see us off and Mammy Frances was sitting on the porch with a sheet with all of her clothes tied up in it. She was not going to let her babies go to California. Now she had a boy and a girl. I guess the girl must have been in high school but to me she was a grown woman and the boy was older than my brother and on Saturday they came to town. There were colored towns and a little ways from Quinton was a colored town and if you had colored help if they stayed with you they could not be outside after dark. If they would go back home for night they had to leave and get out of town before the sun went down.

M.N.: What would happen to them if they didn't?

May: I don't know. You know, that was a wrong way to live but that was the way it was and her husband and two children came to our place every Saturday. They'd come in through the back gate through the alley. I don't know how long it was before mother could force Mammy Frances to bring them into the breakfast room and feed them there and sit down and eat with them. She would cook it and carry it out to a little room off of the garage. It took Mother a long time. I can remember seeing Mammy Frances carrying food out there so I had to be awfully young and I remember sitting down at the table with them. Now that was an unheard of thing in those days but I didn't know it then. They didn't sit down at the table with the white people.

M.N.: Were you close to Mammy Frances?

May: Very close. My mother had surgery several times and it would be in McAlester in the hospital and would be gone for two or three weeks at a time. We missed our mother but Mammy Frances was our mother. We went to her with all of our little cuts and bruises and problems--not Mother. When we came to California it was always white help.

M.N.: Was Mammy Frances good to you?

May: Oh, very good. I'll tell you what a compassionate person she was. We were having a slumber party at my house and the little lady next door to us passed away that day. The body stayed in the homes in those days. They didn't embalm them in those days. Mammy Frances thought that was terrible that we didn't have enough respect for the people next door to have a slumber party. I was afraid she would talk to Mother. I was nine or ten years old. She was baking cookies for us that night and she bent over to get something out of the oven and I'm standing back there. I did like this (gestures) just kidding to the girls. She backed up and went right in that oven. She turned around and picked me up and laid me over her knee and pulled my dress up right in front of my friends and she really gave me a spanking and she said, "Now you'll have to lie down to enjoy your party tonight because you're not going to sit down" but see I didn't get mad at her because I knew I had it coming. I wasn't going to kick her. I

didn't intend to kick her and I was trying to be smart in front of my girl friends.

M.N.: So she really was a parent to you.

May: Oh yes. She'd rock my mother to sleep if my mother didn't feel good.

M.N.: How old was she in comparison to your mother?

May: I wouldn't know.

M.N.: Was she older than your mother?

May: Yes. She had to be because my brother is not quite three years older than me and her daughter might have been out of school. She wasn't married that's all I know. She was as tall as her mother. To me she was a grown woman but she wasn't. She was living at home and thinking back and looking at her she was a young girl but she could have been around eighteen or nineteen years old so I have no idea.

M.N.: What happened in Quinton before you came to California?

May: Dad opened a store in Quinton. He didn't work for anyone else there. He opened a store and he also had his own slaughter house.

M.N.: What was that like?

May: The slaughter house was out in the country. One time I remember being out there but I'd seen pictures of it in the albums and all of where he was slaughtering and the men who worked for him out there. For a while he had a hotel across the street from the store but they finally sold that and I don't know how they had it because the years we lived there it was quite a few years but to me they're very close. I can only remember so much. I look at the pictures and remember but a lot of that I don't.

M.N.: You lived there from 1924 until 1931.

May: It was a smelter town. The work force was the only source of income in town. Quinton was in a little valley almost surrounded with mountains. In fact, the kids who went to school in Quinton could walk down the mountain to school quicker than going in a car and having the drive that they would have to come to there. The boys would ride their horses down. In fact brushy arbor meetings are outside. It would be a vacant lot someplace. Now they have them out here in California a lot of different places until they build their church in a new little town or community but they don't call them brushy arbor. The reason they would call them that they would take limbs off the trees, then they would put on the top for protection in the daytime if they had day services.

The first time I realized the boys that were dating who lived out of town they rode their horses into town and that way they could come in more often than if they had to go and use a family car and go all around the mountain to come down there. It was a fairly good size town. I guess it wasn't really because when you're young things look bigger. It was a nice, quiet town. Well, I'll tell you what a nice town it was. Right after I was born my mother's brother came to live with the folks--he's always been around. You didn't go to public dances. It just wasn't heard of--the only ones would be the floozies.

M.N.: The girls in your family didn't go to public dances.

May: No, they didn't have public dances like that. It would be in a private home and they'd have their dances. Well, one time my uncle came home one Saturday night and we had our living quarters there [in the hotel]. He brought Speedy Butler who was the one who had this little band that would go around and play--it was guitar, violin and things like that. We were in bed and all of a sudden this music--boy, us kids were awake. It was about ten o'clock at night. Curly had brought these guys over there because way back in our living quarters we'd never hear. Curly was always out for a good time. My brother and I got up and we both like to dance. My uncle taught me when I was two years old to stand on his feet to dance so they had a dance in there. Do you know I was ashamed to go to school? My mother wouldn't stick her head outside that hotel. She wouldn't even go into the lobby because of that. In fact, in California they were doing things here that were absolutely not ethic back there. Like Daddy said, "We came a long ways when we came to California and that isn't by miles either."

M.N.: What did your house look like inside?

May: Well, us kids never went in the parlor unless there was someone who wanted to see us kids and Mammy Frances would take us in there. We had a parlor for them and then we had what we would call a family room but it was called a sun room that was our living room. We had a formal dining room and then we had our family dining room in the back. It wasn't a big house. I'd rather have this than that. It was just a house and to a kid a house is a house. We had a lot of friends with a house the same size as ours because in those days there were a lot of houses that had the parlor and formal dining room. Nowadays they have a family room and a breakfast room or something like that. In those days it wasn't any different from today where you have your living room, dining room and then you have a family room and an eating area. It's all the same thing just worded differently.

M.N.: How did you feel about your house as a child? Were you happy there?

May: Oh yes, it was home. That was the last house we lived in. The one before then we had the formal living room and the dining room.

They were both like that but in my eyes they weren't any different.

M.N.: Did you have your own room at that house in Quinton?

May: No, my sister and I always shared a room.

M.N.: Did you two get along well?

May: Yes, when we came to California the largest bedroom in the house was for the three of us girls and we had bunk beds and a single bed in our bedroom.

M.N.: What kind of mattress did you have on the bed?

May: Just mattresses. The cleaning women came in to clean and took them outside and beat them. Of course, they didn't have inner spring mattresses. In the winter they would put the feather bed on top and that was a feather mattress really just like a feather pillow but then you would bury down in that in the winter time and it wouldn't be so cold. I can recall so many nights that my dad would come home and he would crank the freezer and make us ice cream and us kids would eat it so fast we'd get these terrible headaches on homemade ice cream. Why do you get such headaches? You can buy an ice cream cone and you can eat as fast as you want to and it doesn't bother you but homemade ice cream will do it to you. We'd eat the first bowl and we'd run in the house and we'd get in bed and get down with those feather mattresses and get under the covers and eat our ice cream until mother found us. Every time we had ice cream and it was the least bit cold we ended up in our feather beds eating ice cream under the covers.

M.N.: How did you eat your meals?

May: At noon everybody sat down at the table. That was the main meal. My mother never approved of a heavy meal in the evening. We all had to be home at noon to eat. We couldn't take our lunch to school. Mother came and got us. We had to come home and eat and that was our meal together. Dad would get up in the morning and go to the store and go to the restaurants and get all of their orders and go to the school and get the order from the school because he supplied the high school cooking classes and the grade school. He'd fill those orders and deliver them and then open his doors. In those days you opened your doors at dark and closed them at dark but they had blue Sundays. The stores didn't open on Sunday. You didn't have set hours. You kept your store open until the last. The war changed all that then.

M.N.: What did you kids do for fun in Quinton?

May: We were so safe on the streets there. We had a large croquet ground with flood lights. Well, the men would come over to play croquet and bring their wives and kids. The kids would skate on the side walks and we always had a big lot where there was room for that.

Even in Shafter us kids would skate--"Run Sheepy Run"--you know that game where a group would go this way where the older ones would want to hide from the little ones. We would skate all over town there was no fear at all.

M.N.: And you had sidewalks?

May: Oh yes, oh yes. Dad would blink the spotlights on the court and that meant we had to come back home. There would be freezers of ice cream and stuff like that when the guys all got through or whatever Mother had Mammy Frances fix up that night for the crowd. People then were family people. My folks stayed that way as family people until us kids got married. We still had the same life that we had in Oklahoma where the family was concerned. We could have as many parties at our house as we wanted to but Dad and mother were always there and they were so much fun they played the games right along with us like "Post Office" and "Midnight Go Walking" and all these games.

M.N.: What's "Post Office?"

May: You're in another room and the door is closed and you're the post master. Mother or Dad would have charge of the door and another one. We were never alone because Mother and Dad were always playing with us and it was just a little kiss. Even the games where you'd play where you'd go "Midnight Go Walking." That is what they called it but Lord, how did you ever do it? I don't know how it arrived at what boy that you took the walk with. I can't even remember now but it was a way to get out and go walking but my dad would go walking with one of the boys. They were always around. We didn't think they were spying on us. Everybody loved my folks because they always played with us and they loved it. Parents never refused their children to come to our house for a party because they knew Dad and Mother were right there in Shafter right up until I got out of school.

Daddy more than Mother was a buddy. He was a father and we listened to him and we minded but he was our friend--he was our good friend. Nothing ever happened to me that I couldn't go to my dad and talk to him. I wouldn't go to Mother because she was sickly and I didn't want to worry her but I'd go to Daddy. All of us kids would just go to Daddy with everything. We weren't afraid of our parents like kids are nowadays. I've worked with young people and they're afraid of their parents but we never had any fear. I've asked my children since they've gotten older, "Are you afraid of me?" I had raised my children alone after I'd lost my husband. They'd embarrass me sometimes the things they'd come to me with but I wasn't sure sometimes.

I had a good life, really, I can't complain. Us kids would fight amongst ourselves and I'd get mad at Mother about something but I'll have to admit I never did get mad at my dad. My dad used good judgement and if he said, "I'd rather you didn't do it," I

I knew there would be complications if I did. I knew that my dad would not lie to me. Mother would say, "Oh, I don't want you to do it. I don't like that person." Not my dad. He wasn't like that. He'd just give you the pitfalls you could get into but it was up to you to decide. But if he set his foot down and said, "No, I don't want you to do it." I wouldn't even venture out because Daddy was older. Dad never lied to us kids.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

M.N.: How did you dress when you were a little girl?

May: Mother had her own seamstress that made all of us girls' clothes. She never bought store bought clothes and wouldn't allow us to wear them until we came to California.

M.N.: Your background is so different.

May: Don't get the idea that my family was wealthy but my dad always made a good living. As I say he's always been employed for himself other than a few years when we first came to California. I mean from the time I was six years old.

M.N.: How was he able to do that?

May: He was a go getter. I guess that's where I get mine because my mother never worked a day in her life. I like challenge. Don't tell me that I can't do something--physically or mentally--I'm going to do it if I possibly can because my dad always said, "Don't every say 'I can't', try and you don't know what you can do. Don't say, 'I don't like that', try it, you might like it." You lose a lot out of life by always saying, "I can't, I can't," try it. I'll tell you how he started. My dad always was this way. The girls he never dreamed would work. My mother absolutely set her foot down, no daughter of hers would ever work. My baby sister and I proved to her that her daughters worked. My dad would say, "When you go out in the work field you take any job that you can find and then you find what you want." I'll tell you why he did this. I'm sure it was because of the Depression and seeing all of these people who couldn't work who finally got in the habit so they just lived that kind of life the rest of their life and a lot of kids were raised that way.

M.N.: Lived what kind of life?

May: Welfare. He always said, "You can do anything anybody else can do and maybe a lot better if you put your mind to it, if you want to do it." So I've never been afraid.

M.N.: Was he just fortunate to fall into a good living or did he work for it?

May: Well, as I say, my dad always worked for himself except those few years that I know of because I was six years old when he opened

the first market.

M.N.: Did he put a lot of himself into his business?

May: Oh yes, definitely, he was a working businessman. He wasn't just an owner. He was a working businessman who always worked.

M.N.: Were you familiar with what he would do in a day in his market?

May: Well, in those days all of the meat was cut to order so you were definitely working all the time because this ready wrapped meat has been something since World War II.

M.N.: Did he cut his own meat?

May: Oh yes, and he usually had two or three butchers but he butchered himself. He very seldom would have anything to do with the grocery department. He had somebody else doing that. He did all of his own buying. Like I said, in Quinton he had his own butchering and he had his own slaughter. Now I don't know where it was at or anything about it but I have seen pictures of it.

M.N.: What were you like?

May: Just another child.

M.N.: I can't believe that. Look back on yourself, who were you?

May: I was always me.

M.N.: How do you picture yourself?

May: A little too loud and too talkative--pushing myself. I don't know whether I'd do that or not. I started to say if I wanted to change anything about me I would like to be able to control my talking. I never see a stranger. I have never run into anything harmful or embarrassing by being forward but I can't stand to see anybody stand around not talking, not entering in. Now I have a sister-in-law--my brother's wife--she'd rather be with me than anyone because she says, "Then I don't have to talk."

M.N.: Were you a happy child?

May: Very happy. My folks saw to it that we had a lot of fun--clean good fun. We were raised going to church and we were brought up in a Christian life. We were never told we couldn't have this person for a friend or that person for a friend but if it was someone that we shouldn't somehow or other we didn't have that friend anymore but even after we grew up I got to thinking about it one day and I was talking to the folks about it. I said, "Why was it someone that you didn't care anything about that I ran around with but all of a sudden I never ran around with anymore but you never did tell me not to run around with anyone?"

I raised my children the way they did, just give them the good points and the bad points and what could happen to them. Now it's up to you and you make your own decision in plain words but you don't say that. I raised my children that way and I had them come to me after they were grown. They had a get together at my house with a lot of the kids they went to school with and all these kids were talking about how they loved to come to our house. Their folks didn't care as long as it was my house because if they ditched school and came there, they were studying otherwise they went back to school because I'd take them. Us kids never got into any trouble. We had our little spats like brothers and sisters. We did things that we shouldn't do but it wasn't anything to disgrace anybody or hurt anybody.

M.N.: How did you do in school?

May: If I had studied, I'd have been a straight A student but as it was I never did take any work home and I was a B student.

M.N.: Did you like it?

May: I loved school very much.

M.N.: What was your school like in Quinton?

May: That's hard to remember.

M.N.: Was it a one room schoolhouse?

May: Oh, no, I never went to a one room school house. When we first moved there the high school building was one section and had a different yard and all. There were more children in grade school than in high school because a lot of them didn't go on to high school when they got out of the sixth grade because they didn't pass them if they couldn't do their work. There was a boy in my room when I was in the sixth grade who was a grown man. He had been held back for several years because they would not just pass you to get rid of you. You absolutely had to have passing grades. We had a teacher who looked just like Matilde, Andy Gump's maid. I saw her take this guy--and in Oklahoma boys had to wear white dress shirts with tie, they could wear overalls but they wore a white shirt and a tie--I saw her grab him right here and shake him so hard it popped all the buttons off his shirt. He was like a grown man. I don't remember how old he was but I can remember him being in that room all the time I was going to that school. Back there they didn't pass you on if you couldn't keep up and take your exams and pass them.

The first thing that happened to me in California a teacher told me she was going to leave the room and for me to give this guy the answers for the Constitution so they could get him out of the eighth grade. They wouldn't do that in Oklahoma--no way would they do that. School was a lot of fun but strict. They almost expelled

me from school for saying, "By George." You didn't use swear words in Oklahoma. I don't know how it is today. You were taught to be a lady and a gentleman and you did not use these words like this--no way. Dad always gave us money for the colonial teas and little things they had at school to raise money. They called it a colonial tea because it was on George Washington's birthday and they would have a little program that they'd put on at the tea and it would be in a colonial dress and also the ones who were in it. Every room would try for 100% to attend these teas but I didn't get my dime. Mr. Marshall said, "We're short one. There's one that hasn't paid their dime." I just sat there. He says, "Lillie, where's your dime?" I didn't know he'd know who it was. "I'm not going to the tea." He says, "Lillie, I know your dad gave you the money to go because you kids never miss anything that goes on at this school." I said, "Sure he gave me a dime to go but I don't want to go." That's the only time I remember being stubborn in school but I wasn't going to go for some reason or other. I didn't need the dime. All the candy and stuff I wanted was at the store. He said, "Lillie, I'm going to call your dad." I said, "Well, by George I'm not going." My dad had to come down to school. My dad just looked at me and said, "Young lady, I've never taken my belt to you have I?" I was scared to death. I said, "Oh no, Daddy, no." He said, "You do this one more time and I'll use my belt on you." I never held back on one of those deals at school again.

That's the way my dad punished us--those eyes and with that tone of voice you didn't know whether to try him again or not. I never did try him. Schools back there were so much finer than the schools out here. The teachers had a lot more finesse. They taught you with more respect. The first time I heard any swear words in Shafter I went home and told Dad that I knew some kids who were going to get expelled from school because of what they said to the teacher. They just laughed about it and they didn't do anything about it. So it was only a matter of three months from one school to the other and there was that much difference in the schools.

M.N.: What was the Depression like for your family? Do you remember the Depression?

May: As a child it didn't affect us children but when I look back on after we came to Shafter, because up till then mother had her own dress maker for all of us girls, but then in Shafter the only help we'd ever have would be one woman that didn't live in and just came and worked five days a week--so many hours a day. Mother didn't have a seamstress anymore but that didn't affect us kids but it affected the folks.

M.N.: Did it affect your father?

May: No, because my dad was always working but he wasn't making the money he was making when he was with Safeway. He wasn't making the money that he'd made in Oklahoma even though he was a manager.

M.N.: When do you remember the Depression as happening? When did it affect your family?

May: Not till we came to California and he had to work for somebody else and, as I said, that was a little less than four years and then he went into business for himself and then he just opened several stores.

M.N.: So it wasn't in 1929.

May: No, because the smelter didn't close down then. It didn't close down until the fall of 1930--no during the winter of 1931 the smelter closed. It had to have been in the early 1930s because we wouldn't have been that long coming to California.

M.N.: Why did your father come to California?

May: They were building the Hoover Dam in Nevada and my uncle that lived with us he and two of his buddies wanted to come out and get a job on the dam.

M.N.: Why did they want to come out here?

May: Well, because there was nothing in town for them. The smelter closed and everybody was laying off help. The stores were laying off help and he worked for my dad. Everybody was going someplace else for work.

M.N.: When the smelter closed that closed the town.

May: Yes, because that was the town. Quinton is still there. I've only been there one time when I was eighteen for just a little while but my folks have been back several times and they've never said anything about the town running down anymore so I really couldn't tell you what's going on there now. But Dad said, "We'll take my car and we'll go." The man next door to him had the mercantile store there. His brother was supervisor of the Safeway in Bakersfield and friends of the folks from Quinton had moved to Shafter and bought a little ranch out in Shafter several years before then. So Daddy wasn't going to stay in Nevada he was going to come on to California and stay with them. They had grapes and he said, "I'll just work in the grapes for him to pay my way until I can settle on something."

So they stopped at Hoover Dam and there were people camped out all over wanting jobs and they'd already hired everybody but people were hanging on thinking somebody wouldn't keep on at it or something but Dad and them just came right on. They only spent one night then they came right out to Shafter. He went into Bakersfield. Mr. Curry gave Dad a letter of reference to his brother and Dad came through Bakersfield and went in to see him and gave him the letter and all and then gave him the phone

number of where he was going to be. By noon the next day [they] told him [that he] wanted him right away in Bakersfield and that's how quick he went to work. See, there wasn't any lay over or anything like that. They turned the Shafter store over to him then in January. It had always been in the red and it was a new store but he pulled it out. In the meantime he was building up with all the conveyers. He got \$27 a week for being a manager--now that was six days a week, dark to dark. He opened the store with that \$27 because all the conveyers knew him. He'd been buying from them and he just kept right on and you'd buy on consignment. You pay when you get another one and that's how he started.

M.N.: How did your family make the trip out here?

May: Well, my dad came back after he got the job. He came out with my uncle and they just drove out. Well, dad came back to Quinton to get everything lined up and sell a lot of our furniture, eliminating all of this stuff and made arrangements for us to buy train tickets. He was there three days and then he went back to California because he had to come back to work. This friend of theirs who lived at our hotel--when I was very little we had the hotel--Dad asked him to look after us and see that we got to the train. Bill asked Mother how much the train tickets were and mother told him and he said, "My goodness, we can buy a car for less than that and I'll drive you out there and that way I can go to California." He had a brother that lived in McFarland. Mother said, "I don't think Curry would like that very much." Bill said, "He won't know it till we get there." So that's what he did, he bought this car.

M.N.: Do you remember how much it cost?

May: I have no idea but my dad was very ashamed when we arrived in it with all of our belongings and clothes. Mother bought a big steamer trunk and they had luggage racks in the back to put your trunks on and that was all of our clothes and her silverware. We lost that the first day out, never knew when it came off. We had to come on to California without a change of clothes.

M.N.: You mean it just fell out in the road?

May: Yes. It was in a luggage rack in the back of the car and with an old chug-chug like that--to us kids it wasn't a bad car but I know my dad was used to buying a new car every year and this was less than what the train tickets would be for us to come out on and there were three of us kids because some of my brothers were out here with Daddy. That night when we stopped there was no trunk on there. Everything we had was gone and I had on a pair of bedroom slippers. Us girls wore overalls for the warmth because we left the first day of December 1931.

On the trip out, one day we had eleven flats. Whenever we stopped at a tourist camp Mother called Daddy so he'd know we were all right. We stopped in Flagstaff [Arizona] and we got up the next morning and

saw the snow. Mother told Daddy that it was starting a good snow storm here so the next morning us girls got up and we went out to the restrooms which were out in the center and one of the girls fell down. I tried to get her up and we had to pull whoever it was because it was too icy. We were snowed in for four days and we couldn't get to a phone to call Daddy. Daddy called Quinton, Oklahoma and I guess the operator listened in because she knew us too and he told them that he hadn't heard from us and how it had been and Mother had told him that it was snowing but she could have called by then.

Well by the time we arrived in California Daddy was getting sympathy cards from Oklahoma because the headlines said that Mother and us four kids were froze to death in a snow storm in Arizona. Every time we'd have a flat we'd all have to get out of the car because in those days the kind of jacks they had and all that kind of stuff. I didn't know that much about them but anyway you couldn't stay in the car when you jacked it up. Somewhere in the process one of my shoes got lost. Mother couldn't tell Daddy when she called to send us some money because he was mad enough that we were driving out but he didn't know what kind of car we were in. He said, "I wished you had come on the train like I told you." Mother said, "Oh, it's all right." When mother did call Dad he said, "You've got to stay where there's a phone and you can call me." Well there wasn't another chance of any snow storms from Flagstaff, Arizona on out so Daddy came up our last day out and they came up on the Tehachapi Mountains to meet us. Daddy was so embarrassed when he saw us. Talk about The Grapes of Wrath! I guess that's what we looked like.

Of course, I didn't get out of the car. All I had was one shoe and Dad rode with us the rest of the way into Bakersfield. He said, "Pull the car around to the back of the garage." We went into the house and just cried. Daddy was about 34. He said, "I had to live this long to see my family look like this." None of us had a change of clothes so Daddy had to go to town and buy me some shoes because we couldn't go to town and get other clothes. He and Mother went to town and shopped for us kids and had to buy us all new clothes. Of course, we didn't get many because Daddy wasn't making that kind of money but in those days I guess you could get a pair of shoes for 50¢ but that was a lot of money. It would be like \$20 today.

M.N.: But you looked destitute when you came over the pass?

May: Yes. We weren't loaded down, most of the Okies had all their furniture on the car and all that stuff. We didn't have that. We didn't even have a trunk on our car. We didn't have any suitcases on the car. I know my dad was very embarrassed and my mother was embarrassed for him too but for us kids it was all fun. If I had my life to live over I wouldn't give that up because I think it's good for everybody to go through things like this because us kids never knew that there was anybody that ever got into the situation that we were in and to us kids that was funny. It was all funny,

that whole trip. It wasn't funny to my mother but it was sure funny to us kids and then my dad being so embarrassed. I felt sorry for him but it didn't hurt us kids. Kids nowadays couldn't take that. They're too protected and have been given too much. The Crash of 1929 did it, but look at the people who committed suicide.

M.N.: What did you think when you got to California?

May: Oh, I was happy. I went out and pulled an orange off the tree-- that's the first thing I did.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

Session Two June 16, 1981

M.N.: Well, we ended the last time with you picking an orange off the tree in California. What year was that?

May: December 11, 1931.

M.N.: Do you remember what happened from then on?

May: Well, we were all in Bakersfield. We arrived ther December 11 and it was the first week of January that we moved out to Shafter because Dad took over the Safeway Market in Shafter.

M.N.: What kind of house did you move into?

May: The first house was called the Midgely's house and it was a small house and we were there maybe three or four months until we went into a large house just down the street. My dad bought it and that's still in our family but it's business property now.

M.N.: So he did well right away.

May: He worked for the Safeway for four years, built it up and all, but his idea was to get acquainted with the conveyers and all so that he would be able to open his own store. When he notified Safeway that he was ready he found a building a few doors down from Safeway. The main part of the town in Shafter was two blocks.

M.N.: How did you adjust to California?

May: I adjusted very well and so did all of us children. All of us but my mother adjusted to California real fast. We'd studied about California and it's always been like Florida. It's painted way out of proportion. It's always talking about all the oranges and all the sunshine and the ocean so us kids were very excited about it. We hated leaving our friends but we liked California and I still like California. We all stayed right out here in Kern and Orange Counties.

M.N.: Were most of the children that you encountered from California or

were they from other places?

May: Now that I've been reading all of this Shafter history I find out that there were a lot of people from Oklahoma but they never admitted it. It was quite a trauma when we first started because of making fun of us. There was no reason for them to make fun of us because we could have turned right around. There were different nationalities here and we weren't accustomed to that. There were either Indians or whatever we called ourselves. There were Germans and everything else living there but we didn't know it. We all went to the same school and they all spoke English, even the Indians did. Out here they made a definite point. Italians and Germans had their places where they lived over in the Valley. There was a Russian colony, a German colony, an Adventists, a Mexican colony. They called them colonies but they all were Shafter or were surrounding Shafter. We didn't realize there was so many from Oklahoma as children because we didn't discuss it. The children did make it kind of rough on you. They called you an Okie and things like that but it never hurt. It was only kids stuff. You laughed about it. We'd call them desert rats and they'd call us Okies.

The most embarrassing thing that happened to me was a teacher when I was reading in geography in front of the class and I was in the seventh grade. When it came to R-O-U-T-E we always called that route. The teacher corrected me and said, "Route [root]". I said, "I'm sorry but you're in the wrong place. I'm reading this sentence." I read it again and he corrected me again and made a remark about "now we really know you're from Oklahoma." Then he pronounced it R-O-O-T. I went home and told my dad. I said, "Do you know we rooted our way all the way to California on Highway 66?" He said, "What are you talking about--that's route not root." That's the only time the teacher ever did anything.

We had about a half a dozen kids who made it very, very miserable for anybody that came from Oklahoma. I made it a point because I knew how it affected us kids. I'll never forget when I was a freshman in high school and here's this girl in tears. I'd never seen her and I sat down and introduced myself to her. I said, "Where are you from?" I knew she wasn't from around there. She looked at me kind of funny and looked around and looked back at me. I said, "Are you like me? Are you from Oklahoma?" She had the look on her face that I had when I first came to Shafter School. She said, "You're from Oklahoma?" I said, "I'm from Oklahoma." She said, "Isn't it awful hard to live here with these people?" I said, "No, just stick your nose up in the air and [be] proud you're an Okie." She always would say to me, "Lillie, I could never have made it because I had begged my folks to send me back to my grandparents to go to school." Kids can be cruel but it wasn't that bad--it really wasn't. It was a great adventure.

I really think changing an environment for children is good for them--educationally. If you're born and raised in one vicinity that's all you know. That's what you're accustomed to. Every state

even has it's own little different ways--different habits. They even talked different. It doesn't have to be from another state. I don't think anymore they pay attention where anyone is from, do they?

M.N.: I don't know. What about adjusting to the different ethnic groups?

May: That wasn't a problem really. It was interesting to go to their house where their folks spoke their native language. It was very interesting. I'll never forget in one family there were five girls and the mother died and left a two year old child and Mr. Herman couldn't hire anybody and the girls did the cooking and all. I loved to go over there to eat the German food. We had a big Russian settlement and it was interesting as far as I was concerned because I ran around with all of them so I got to be initiated into all of their different ways, the way they lived at home, the kind of food they ate, their beliefs. There's not that much difference in all of us.

M.N.: Was there a big adjustment educationally for you coming from Oklahoma?

May: I hate to say this but we had much better teachers. Very strict, strong teachers. Out here as I said before they wanted to put us children back a year and my dad went down to the school and he said, "I want you to give my children a test on what all the pupils are on now and if they don't pass it put them back a grade but I don't want you to put them back until you give them a chance." We'd had that the year before in Oklahoma. When our cousins did come out to see us they were ahead of us but they had the belief out here that in Oklahoma, Arkansas and Missouri and in all those states that their schooling was behind here but it wasn't.

M.N.: So you weren't put back?

May: No, we all got to stay.

M.N.: Did you do all right in school?

May: Oh yes.

M.N.: Did you like school out here?

May: Oh, I loved it because of the weather and we were very active where in Oklahoma most of your school days were bad weather and you were inside. Here we were out so much playing ball and games like that. Oh about three months out of the year you didn't even go outside, only one or two days the sun would come out and you played in the snow. I'll have to say I missed the snow but I wouldn't go back to it. I'd go to the mountains. The schooling was behind and I don't know whether it still is but teachers didn't have the control of the pupils.

M.N.: Why do you think that was?

- May: The leniency--our teachers were stronger than our parents. When we were in school what that teacher said was it. We didn't defy or argue with them. We didn't talk back and if something bothered us too much we went home and talked to our parents and if it was something that needed to be taken care of the parent would go to school but you didn't handle your teachers that way. The first thing that happened about the first month I was in school the teacher punished this boy by sitting him on the back seat in an outside row that had Mexican girls all around him. They were using Mexican girls to punish the boy. Walker Fry was the boy's name and he wouldn't sit down in the seat and Miss George asked him why he wouldn't sit in the seat and he said, "The seat's too darn small." Well in Oklahoma I almost got kicked out of school for saying, "By George." I was horrified by that and I went home and told my dad. He said, "You didn't have to repeat the word." My dad was really shocked at the schools out here. He was very disappointed with them. When my cousins would come to visit they were so far ahead of us kids at school--they really were.
- M.N.: Do you feel it hampered you in the long run?
- May: No, not really because by the time you've graduated from high school you have picked up all of this anyway. It was the shock that so many children were held back a year because they were new out here and they didn't need to be if their parents had been like mine. They wouldn't have had to have done that. They lost a whole year.
- M.N.: Did things financially continue to get better for your family?
- May: It was a slow process. I didn't realize how bad it was until I took over the Shafter property and the big house. Our home place has four apartments in it. I went in and looked at the size of those clothes closets and I said, "Daddy where did we put our clothes? Us three girls had this big bedroom back here and where did we put our clothes?" He said, "In the closet." I said, "Daddy, that wouldn't even hold my slacks and blouses," and he said, "Yes but in those days you didn't have clothes like that," but see us kids didn't realize that because no one had a whole lot. The only ones that they'd be a little jealous of--there were only four in high school that had a car. In one family the boy and girl--the Lockmars--they had a car and theirs was brand new. My brother had a car but it was probably about three or four years old, and Verlin Hughes. That's all that had a car in high school.
- M.N.: Your brother was one of them.
- May: Yes, but it wasn't a new car by any means. My folks didn't buy a new car until 1934.
- M.N.: Did your brother buy the car?

May: No way, he wasn't working. My dad bought it for him. Neither did these other kids. There wasn't work for the kids unless they worked in the fields. Now my brother would work at the store on Saturday and then any boys at school who wanted to be a butcher he'd give them turns working at the store. He paid them but he taught them and they went into the butcher business after they got out of school. My folks built a new home in 1937--\$2,750 for a beautiful stucco with tile roof, hardwood floors. Things really didn't get real good until the war came along.

M.N.: I remember you said your mother had a hard time adjusting.

May: She did have a hard time adjusting, a very hard time adjusting. Her health, well, she just went downhill after we came out here because I think she was grieving for the family because we weren't here no time when her mother died and fourteen days later her father died. Then her sister died and her only niece died. It was all in a short amount of time. So my mother existed.

M.N.: What year did she die?

May: 1973, but she was sick all those years. I don't imagine in all of those years she had five good years. She had a total nervous breakdown, not mentally, but if it had been any worse it would have been mental. She was in the hospital seven months.

M.N.: When was this?

May: In the 1930s. I was a freshman in high school.

M.N.: How did that affect you?

May: I was in the eighth grade when that happened. We were scared and the doctors told us she would live. It was just that she had too many things happening all at one time. That drastic move of just pulling up and bringing us out here and then the trip out here. Really it had her down by the time we got out here. My mother was a weak woman. She had one sister and six brothers. The two girls were spoiled rotten and then when Daddy married Mother he made it worse than ever because he spoiled her and when us kids came along we spoiled her. Really we took care of her. She couldn't have survived without the family. My brother died--just dropped dead on December 16 waiting on a lady at the store. An artery ruptured in his heart--December 1961. Five months later my sister died on May 29, 1962. In December mother's twin brother was killed at the airport in Oklahoma City. That was the end of it and from then on my mother was always--it took her until September 1973. She just gave up living. She never went anyplace.

M.N.: How was high school for you?

May: Fun. It was small, thank goodness. I felt so sorry for my two children going to high school where there were hundreds and hundreds

of kids. There all of us knew everyone and the four years we went to the same school and there was no strangers there because we were in grade school and went right into high school in a small town like that but we still had the same classes they had in Bakersfield. We didn't miss out on anything like that but it was a good time. I enjoyed it very much.

M.N.: What year did you graduate?

May: 1937.

M.N.: What did you do before the war?

May: Got married and had two children and then I went to work for Lockheed.

M.N.: How did you meet your husband?

May: There in Shafter. All my girl friends worked in the fields and in the cutting sheds. Well, that was a "no no" in our family. Women just didn't work so the summer of my second year of high school we were at church on Sunday night and all these girls were all going out to the cutting shed for apricots at Bill Sill's Ranch. They kept saying, "Oh, Lillie, please don't you think you could talk your dad into it because we have so much fun out there?" We got Dad cornered after church was over with and kept on begging to let me go out there and Dad said, "Okay, I'll give you two weeks but if you lose any weight...." I never could keep any weight on me.

I went out there and Otis and Curtis were brothers. Otis was black headed and brown eyed and Curt was blonde headed, blue eyed. Boy, they were from Hollywood. His dad had been the director in the westerns in charge of the horses and cattle and all and his older brother worked there. His dad got hit by a milk truck and they lost everything they had and they came up and were working in the sheds. It was a case where they had had everything and then had lost it all. They were handsome guys and the gals were nuts about them. I was flighty. I never went steady. I'd have a steady boy that I went with for the school doings but then I'd have a boy friend from Taft or Wasco or some place just to be different. The girls had had engagement rings on and pinned on their bra and, boy, they were after those two guys and crazy me I could have cared less. I'd go down and shoot marbles with the apricots that were small until the boss caught me and got mad. I only made it two weeks. My folks would come out there and bring me my lunch and I would eat it and upchuck it before they left. Dad marched me down to the drug store on the Saturday of the second week and weighed me and he said, "That's it." That was the end of that episode.

That's where I met him [Otis]. My best girl friend was crazy about him and she was the pastor's daughter and she was two years older than I was and she was engaged and, oh, she was really crazy about

him. One night he was begging me to let him take me to church. I could care less and I thought they were good looking, but going steady I didn't want to be tied down like that. I said something to my mother and she was so mischievous. She said, "What was he talking to you about?" I said, "Oh, he's wanting to take me to church tonight" and she said, "why don't you let him?" "Well," I said, "[My girl friend] may be mad at me and besides I don't care about going with him." My mother kept on and she got so mad when I married him. I said, "You're the cause of it." I ended up marrying him. He died years and years ago. I met him right there. They had nothing, bless their hearts, but they were good people-- hard working people. His dad died very young. He died right after our first baby was born.

We opened a service station. My dad leased it for us out at Formosa. Highway 99 went on the other side of the railroad tracks all the way down and the old building was still there the last time I was over there. There was an Associated service station and there was a Greyhound bus stop by the service station. There was a depot and then there was another little place. That's all that was there. Dad leased this and gave us a five year lease on that. We were there three months and gave up the lease. The guy gave us a Pontiac convertible for the lease and we moved into Bakersfield. There were six killed in the three months we were there right on the corner. The highway came down and made a turn like this (gestures). We saw six people killed there and I was scared to death all the time. We knew the highway was going to change and we decided we'd get rid of it then.

M.N.: It was a good time to get out?

May: We weren't there very long and we didn't make anything. We did because it was all clear to us. It was Dad's money in it. We went to Bakersfield and that's where we lived all the time.

M.N.: What did your husband do in Bakersfield?

May: He ran Bateman's Grocery Store. When that closed out he went into the service and died not long after the service. He worked in a grocery store. He was a good produce man in the grocery store. He was from Oklahoma.

M.N.: What were the war years like for you being at home?

May: It made a woman out of me. I had really been overprotected by my dad because he wouldn't let us work and all that kind of thing so when I went to work for Lockheed I didn't even have a social security number. This was so comical. I went down with the boss' wife. We didn't say a word to our husbands. We went down and signed up. They asked me for a social security number and I said, "I don't even know what a social security number is." They said, "You have to have a social security number before you can go to work so you get your social security card and you bring your

number in and let us know so we can put it on your record." I was the third one hired--no plant yet--and she was the fourth because I got out of that guy's office before she did hers. I'd never worked.

I didn't know nothing but I went home and I called my dad and I was crying. I was scared. Dad said, "What's wrong with you?" I said, "Dad, do you know the mark of the beast is out? Do you know you can't get a job without a number?" Well it didn't dawn on him what I was talking about. "Why do you have to have this number?" I said, "They call it a social security number." My dad just roared. That's how dumb I was. I only worked for them seven months. I was a private stenographer and I didn't like someone else taking care of my two children. I had this big beautiful home and I turned it into a nursery. I rented to servicemen's wives--three bedrooms, basement and the garage converted to a sitting room and bedroom and rented those out. It was just the gals and their husbands would be home because they were cadets from Saturday noon and till Sunday at four o'clock. I made my living that way.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1

M.N.: How long did that last?

May: I'm still corresponding with three couples that rented from me during the war. We haven't seen each other since but we've got pictures of their kids and their grandchildren and now their grandchildren are getting married but we've never seen one another but we write long letters starting the first of December and then get them in the mail. We always say we're going to meet sometime but we never have. I had sixty-five different couples in my house.

M.N.: That supported the family well?

May: Very good, sure. I was getting \$10 a week from the five different couples. That was just a room. They had full run of the house and kitchen privileges and then I'd go to my sister's Saturday night and stay all night with my two kids and that way it gave them the run of the house. One would be eating in the dining, one cooking, one in the breakfast room eating--it worked out perfect. Sure I made \$50 a week and \$50 a week in those days was a lot of money and then I got \$80 from the government. I was getting \$280 a month and that was big wages. Not only that I had this nursery going.

M.N.: For their children?

May: No, this was by the hour. I would keep them by the week but I wouldn't take them before a set time in the morning or a set time in the evening because I didn't want to interfere with the gals that were living there or my children. I kept them by the hour,

by the day and by the week. I charged 25¢ an hour but now that's like \$8 an hour. I first started out renting three bedrooms and I took my dining room and put a rollaway bed, a full size, that I and my two children slept on and I'd fold it up and put it behind the screen and I had a big buffet deal that I used for our clothes and things and then there was an extra closet in the hallway that we hung our clothes. With the men not there it worked out perfect.

M.N.: So you more or less rented your house out.

May: I took care of my own children. I didn't have somebody else taking care of them and I was free to go dancing every night. I meant we went dancing every night. There were eight of us girls who went to school in Shafter. Some of their husbands were in the service and some were divorced. Some of their husbands were home but he knew all we did. We had that reputation. The guys would all say, "Boy, you can have a ball with those girls dancing but about three dances before it's over with you might as well forget them and go get your gal if you want a gal to go someplace with because they're not going to go with you. They may go with you to have something to eat or go bowling but that's it." We had a big reputation for that. Some of those girls are living over here right now. We had a lot of fun. I taught servicemen to dance. They'd have these combat boots on and I'd get out there and teach them to dance.

M.N.: When did your husband come home?

May: 1946, but he didn't come home and stay. He went to his brother's. He was a mother's boy and she blamed me because he was in the service. I had nothing to do with him being drafted. He didn't even say he was married and I kept waiting for a check to come in for us and it never did come. I checked with the Red Cross and he didn't even put down that he was married so they had to fix it up for me. But his mother thought I was the cause of him having to go in the service. I wouldn't have even known how to go about getting someone into the service.

M.N.: Well after he died how did things go?

May: Well, we never lived together after he came back from the service, even when he'd come up to Bakersfield. He stayed in Hollywood with his mother and he would come up. Well, his check would come in there and he'd come up and get his check. We never lived together anymore after that. In fact, he was down at his mother's when he got drafted. I had already gotten an attorney because my dad advised me to because my dad had bought this house for me. He died in Sacramento. I buried him. My phone number happened to be in his billfold. That's the only thing they had to go on and they called me. His mother was dead by then and his sister and brother wouldn't have anything to do with him so I buried him.

M.N.: It wasn't as traumatic as it might have been.

May: No, it wasn't. It was sad when I went for the service. It wasn't much of a service. It was just my sister, his sister and I and my son and daughter--very sad. When I was sitting there I thought, "So young to throw his life away" because he never worked after he got back. In other words his mother made him a mama's boy. He was a good guy but when he came home from the service that was it.

M.N.: It wasn't the service--the experience that did it?

May: No, he broke down going over on the boat from fear and he went right into a hospital. Then when it was okay for him to come home why then they sent him home. So it wasn't a war deal and he couldn't get a pension for that because it was just fear. They had a lot of guys who were so scared that they cracked up on the boat. He happened to be one of them.

M.N.: Probably the smart ones.

May: A lot of the men folk in our family were in the service and they all came back. In fact none of them was killed in the service. My mother said that was the way it was in World War I. All of her family came back. None of them was killed in the war.

M.N.: How did thing sgo for you after that?

May: Up. It's been going up ever since. I raised two children and I put them through school. They never gave me any trouble. They gave me more trouble as adults than kids. They're both living and my daughter has four children and my son has one daughter.

M.N.: When did you marry this time?

May: We've been married twelve years but we met in the 1940s right after the war. I married again right after the war. I met him while he was in the service but he wanted to marry me and I said, "No way." Then when he got out of service we got married in September 1946. He trained servicemen in drilling. He was a driller.

M.N.: You mean oil well drilling?

May: Yes, oil wells. Vern's folks lived in El Monte and I would go down there to see him at his folks' and the only way we could be alone was to go down to the Kit Kat Bar on the corner. He came up there as a bartender at night because his dad took ill and he had to see the irrigating their citrus and avocado groves. He was born and raised right on that property. We met him there and the gal he eventually married we knew her and we knew him. He met her the New Year's Eve after I got married and then they got married. Then when he [second husband] died I came up there to see the folks. He was going to help design and build the houses that Dad had built up in Grover City in the late 1940s.

M.N.: Who's this?

May: My second husband. He had a heart attack while he was driving the car going to the store after milk--very young. He was a flyer in the Air Force.

M.N.: Then you married this last time?

May: We've been married twelve years. I really raised my children alone because I only had three and a half years with my second husband.

M.N.: Strong lady.

May: No, I don't call it strong. I just had a job to do and I did it. I wouldn't want both my husbands dying--him and the condition he's in. All our friends from way back says, "Boy, Lillie, I don't know about you." It never worried me. It was just something I had to do and I happen to be strong enough to handle it. I know my sister couldn't. My dad bought her a home and gave her money to live on when she and her first husband divorced. He had to take care of her until she got married again. He wanted to do that to me. I said, "Hey, Dad, you didn't get me in this position. You didn't ask me to get married when I got married. It's my problem but I won't let my kids go hungry. I'll come to you before I'll let my kids go hungry but otherwise I will ask when I need it." Fortunately, I never had to ask.

M.N.: When you look back on things how do you see your life?

May: A very interesting, fulfilling life. Some people might ask, "Where do you get that?" but I met a lot of people and gained a lot of friends by working that I never would have done if it hadn't worked out but I am a person who likes people. Once I know a person I never forget them. I may forget their names but they can come out of the blue when I haven't seen them for 20 years but they'll say something. Maybe I'd forget their names, but their voices-- that's the way with him. He was standing in back of me. I went into his store and I had a little vest pocket chihuahua and a little tiny tea cup poodle much smaller than her and I had my purse and it was on Sunday afternoon and I had a pair of shorts on and I ran down there. My daughter-in-law said, "You've just got to go down there and see that interesting place," and this guy came up behind me and I was looking at all these things and he asked me if he could help me and I said, "No." He started talking to the two dogs. The reason why he was talking to the two dogs he was trying to find out something about me. I kept hearing this voice and I looked at him. I didn't know him from Adam. Finally I said, "Are you Chips and Edie from El Monte?" Edie was his wife's name. He said, "I'm Chips but I'm not Edie." They had been divorced for several years then. He's quite a bit older than I am but Edie and I are both the same age. He started taking me back to El Monte. I went out and sold my house. I was there one day and left and never went back again because that was where my husband and I married and lived.

M.N.: It wasn't a happy place for you?

May: There was nothing for me anyway because my folks were all up here at the coast by then. I hadn't seen him in all of these years. He started to take me out to El Monte to renew all the old acquaintances because we used to have big barbecues together and things like that. You know how I knew I was going to marry him? His mother was in the hospital and I swore I'd never marry again. Why get married? I always worked anyway. His mother wasn't expected to live and all five of them were there and they were at the hospital all night long so I went down and took over the store for Johnny on Sunday.

He came out to the store not knowing I was there and I said, "I've got it going just fine so you go back over to your mom's and stay with her" because they were expecting her to die just anytime. He kept hemhawing around and walking around there and he was acting so nervous and I chalked it up to his mother's condition. He kept looking at his watch and finally he said, "Honey, I've got something I want to tell you." I said, "What is it?" "My sister and my brother--" I said, "What's happened to them?" He said, "Well, I don't know how to tell you. They've done for me what I couldn't do." I said, "What could they do for you that you couldn't do for yourself?" He said, "They set a wedding date for us to get married." I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "You're going to get a call" and before he could finish it the phone rang.

It was his sister. I'd never met the younger sister but I'd met the two older sisters. She said, "Hello, Sis." I said, "Hello." She said, "I'm the youngest of the bunch." I said, "You must be darkest." She said, "Look, we've got it all set up. The wedding is going to be at Helen's place and it's going to be a patio wedding"--the date, the whole bit. I said, "I'm not so sure about all of this." She said, "That's all right. We've got it all straightened out and Gil can fly down here and so can I for the wedding so we'll all be here for the wedding and all that." I said, "What about your mother?" She said, "Well if something happens to mother we'll set it up for another day but it will be a few days later while we're all still down here." I said, "I don't think it's appropriate for us to get married with your mother in her condition." Johnny always assumed we were going to get married and I had a feeling he assumed this. I used to tell my folks, "Boy, is he going to be dead wrong." First thing you know the date was set and the whole bit. Here come his son and daughter-in-law and kids. They came up from San Bernardino. What could I do? I thought, "Boy, I was roped and tied into that." That's how we ended up getting married and he's the farthest thing from an Okie there is. He was born and raised in Orange County in Yorba Linda.

M.N.: He's a nice man.

May: He is a nice man. He's a very sensitive person, very sensitive. I call him an old softie. He chokes up and gets tears in his eyes over things that you should be laughing about and having fun about but he's just a very sensitive man, a very good man.

M.N.: You've been fortunate then.

May: I have. Not only was he a very good man, he was a good provider. His son is just a God send. He and my son played together when they were little. They were born the same year. There is about four years difference in them but his daughter is much older. She couldn't be my daughter. We're not that close. We never lived around close to one another. I think a lot of her but we're not that close. When his dad's in the hospital Gerry who is the captain of the fire department in San Bernardino is right up here with me and sticks with me and gets on me if I won't eat. I'm one of these people that when I'm bothered with something I won't eat. I don't get hungry. When he comes up he tells the neighbors that he's more worried about me than about his dad.

All in all I've had a great life, experiences that I wouldn't give up, adventures I've had. I've lied a lot to get jobs but my dad always said, "All they can do is fire you. Anything anybody else can do give it your best shot. Try it and never turn down a job. Take it. You can be looking. Remember this-- you give them eight hours work because you may have to face them again and ask them for another job." That really stuck with me. If I had put the years experience and totalled them up to this day my age wouldn't even get close to the years.

I always put eight years experience. I went to a dinner house up here and I worked at Lockheed so I didn't know anything but my folks were entertaining in our home and then the places Dad would always take us out to eat. I watched all of this so I saw what they did. All of a sudden my husband's dead and here I am with these two kids. They're in school and it's going to take money and I don't have a house to take in anything where I can stay home. My son was in high school and my daughter was in the eighth grade. I went to the unemployment office. If they'd had any sense they'd have known I was lying. I went up there and I applied for a job in a first class dinner house. I said I had eight years experience at a dinner house. After I got my job I got to thinking about it if I'd had eight years experience working in a dinner house I would have belonged to a union. You don't go to the employment office to get a job in a first class dinner house because you've got to have experience but they were just as dumb as I was.

So I went out to the Motel Inn in San Luis Obispo. That was the spot in town. They had me working at two or three o'clock in the afternoon. The chef was a woman and she hired me. She said, "Stella is going to be out tonight and the dining room is going

to be closed off. There's going to be a banquet so you'll just have this little old counter here and these four big booths." That was great because the girl would be busy over there and wouldn't see the mistakes I was making and where they served the food was up high and she sure wouldn't be paying any attention to me. So I went out there at five o'clock and Jake said to me, "Well, Lillie, Stella isn't going to be here tonight so you're going to have to do the whole thing."

I was smart enough and I'd been to enough banquets and my folks had domestic help enough that I knew how they served in the home and Dad had taken us out to nice places to eat and I was always very observant of things like that. It was the going that was the only thing that bothered me. I did know about the dining room for a banquet. I knew the tables had to be shaped differently. I said, "Well, Jake, you're going to have to show me how you want these tables set up because I don't know whether you're going to want a speaker's table or if they're going to have delegates sit at certain tables." I just buffaloeed my way through it. She came and showed me. She showed me the cart to load all the dishes in to go in and set it up. I saw these big old heavy trays I was going to have to carry with food on it and I thought, "No, I'm going to carry the dishes on those trays and by the time I get through setting up I'm going to know how to carry a tray."

I taught myself the wrong way and had to have that bone removed years later from it. I was carrying it like a cocktail tray and bracing it with this and it was rubbing this bone. It went off like a breeze--like I'd been in it forever. The owner of the motel died seven months later and they had to close down the bar and restaurant till the estate was settled. I told Jake that I'd never worked before in my life like this. She said, "You mean, this hard." I said, "No, in a restaurant. I've never worked in one before. She said, "Oh, Lillie, now you're kidding." I said, "Oh, no, I'm not."

I decided that I wanted a day job where I would be off on Sunday with my children and Corcoran's in San Luis Obispo had a fountain as long as from this living room wall way back beyond our bedroom there--forty feet. It was a long son of a gun. I walked in there and here's the soda fountain and I sat down where there were four stools here and then this long counter and here was all the booths and they did exhibit cooking in the window. I sat down and had a cup of coffee and looked the place over and it said WAITRESS WANTED in the window. I thought it's not going to be a fountain girl or they would have said FOUNTAIN GIRL WANTED so when Bob Corcoran came over I told him I'd come to apply for a job. He said, "How much experience have you had?" I said, "Eight years." I said, "I've been seven months out here at the Motel Inn and as you know it's gone into estate."

I sold myself to him. He said he had a girl coming in on Wednesday, this was on a Tuesday, and he was going to try her out and then he wanted me to come out on Thursday and try out. He said, "Have

you had any experience on a fountain?" I said, "Years of experience on a fountain." I'd never made a coke. By the time I got to the little cottage where I lived the land lady called me and said, "Lillie, Mr. Corcoran wants to talk to you on the phone." I sold myself too good. "I've called the other girl and told her not to come in, I've already hired somebody. I want you to come in in the morning." I went in at eight o'clock in the morning. We opened up and I'm setting up the booths and filling up things and all and Bob came in at ten o'clock. He said, "Lillie, you're going to work the fountain and these four stools." I thought, "What am I going to do in a situation like this?" I kept working around there trying to think of how I could get out of this. Finally I went over to Bob and said, "Mr. Corcoran, I worked in a creamery." Why all this came to me I'll never know. I said, "My experience has been in a creamery and I know that you work on a different percentage than they work on." I knew my dad's percentage and how he worked on percentage so I was smart enough to know that all businesses are on percentage. I said, "I know that your percentage is not what they have on a creamery so you're not going to want me to use that much in the orders. Would you do me a favor? When I get each first order will you please make it for me so I can see how much you put on it?" I figured by the end of the day they've ordered everything that's on the fountain and I'll know. He did.

Well, I worked there a year. I have delayed reaction on deaths and things. I hold up and then it maybe will be six months or a year and all of a sudden it just piles up on me. So I had been there about eight or nine months and I just froze on the job taking an order. He pulled me right off of that and put me on the counter. The doctor said, "You're going to have to get on the outside. Whatever you work at is going to have to be on the outside--fresh air. Get out--no pressure." I told Bob that I had to quit and told him why because it happened on the job that I just froze right there. I was in talking to him one day and said, "Bob, you know you are a good teacher for a fountain girl." He said, "Well, where did you get that?" I said, "You taught me." He said, "Well, I didn't teach you anything on the fountain" and I said, "Oh, yes you did. I'd never worked in a fountain before. I'd never even made a milkshake." He said, "How did you know how to do all that?" I said, "Bob, I asked you to make the first one so I'd see how much you used for that." He said, "Yes, but that was for our percentage" and I said, "I could have cared less about your percentage." That was why I was able to work and get along because I wasn't afraid. All they could do was fire me. They couldn't do anything else to me.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 2

M.N.: It sounds to me like the timid little girl from Oklahoma turned out to be a real go-getter.

May: You've brought things out of me that I haven't thought about since

they happened. Looking back over my life now I don't believe I would have been the same person as I am today. I don't think I would be that person if we hadn't pulled up roots and left. That was a drastic change now that I think about it. To my children just to move from down south [California] to up here was a change for them and they were at the age of leaving friends and all that. I saw how it affected them but I think I was a much stronger person. I think I was at a good age to make a move like that.

M.N.: It seems like that kind of stress ruins some people and it strengthens others.

May: I believe it ruins the older people. Do you think that would affect children?

M.N.: I don't know.

May: I can see how that would affect the parents especially if they had to drop down in finances I would think that would be a big stress on them but maybe seeing how my dad went from nothing in four years back up owning his own business--he never gave up. He never gave up. He was strong and he never complained. Us children didn't know we had bad times. Honestly, if we'd been spoiled brats, now that would have been a different story. People where we lived probably thought we were spoiled because we had everything. I don't mean everything but we were comfortable.

M.N.: It seems to me that you were really strongly affected by your father.

May: Oh, I was.

M.N.: Maybe his attitude of making things work.

May: Really, I looked up to my dad and I babied my mother. In fact, I always called her Mother. I was the only one of the children who called her Mother and I'd call her my little baby when she'd get sick when I was in school. By the time I was in the eighth grade I was taller than she was. She was a little tiny thing--ninety pounds. Of course, she got heavier later in life but she was the type to be babied. I'm not the type to be babied.

M.N.: You sound like you're the type to lead.

May: I'm a leader. I'll have to admit that even in school. I was social chairman of our class for four years of high school. That has to be a leader to be the social chairman all that time. I've never been afraid to try something. I won't try something that I know won't be good for me. I'm not talking about things like that. I'm not afraid to venture out and give it a try.

M.N.: I don't see where you got the gumption to go out and take jobs.

May: I guess it's because my dad was strong. We never saw any weakness in our dad at all--how he ventured out! That was a big, big move he made and there were four of us kids. After the way we'd all been raised--like I say it didn't bother us kids but Dad never wanted Mother to ever go without. Mother had to have everything and when Mother was sick Mother was the one who was babied all the time. In fact, she was babied when she wasn't sick. He wasn't afraid to try and I get my outgoing personality from him. He never saw a person or a stranger that he didn't like--some things he may not like about him but he liked the person and I'm the same way. I like people. My granddad was the same way--he never saw a stranger.

M.N.: But these are not the characters I saw in The Grapes of Wrath.

May: I never saw The Grapes of Wrath people really until I was married and I would go down into Hoover Camp and get Christmas packages for families and turn their names in. We made it a point to ask where they were from because they were called Okies and the biggest majority were Californians. It was the one right off of Chester on Jewett Lane in Bakersfield down by the river. There were some proud people in there too. You'd go in and this one lady--in fact I'm very well acquainted with the family because I admired her courage. She had no bedspreads but white sheets, pure white covered the beds. The table which was just a wood block was bleached out from using purex to keep it sanitary and all and she swept that dirt so much it was just like you were walking on board and she always swept it and sprinkled it.

M.N.: She was from Oklahoma or California?

May: Come to think of it she was from Oklahoma. She was an older woman and I didn't ask her that question but when my husband and I got married and we went into Bakersfield he managed the grocery store, service station, oversaw the restaurant and the court of cottages there on Chester--the Hoover Camp was the back. They traded at the store.

M.N.: What year are we talking about?

May: Well, this goes back to 1937 or 1938 that I did that. World War I veterans got their bonus about the time Otis took over the store. He was there first before we got married and then we went back after we got married and gave up our place.

M.N.: My impression was that these people had just given up and that they just laid around.

May: No, no way. They were field workers looking for work. The men who got their checks from World War I drank it all up and did nothing until that money was all gone. I think it was because their spirits were completely down. This lady I was talking about--she was a very proud woman and you could tell that they had had money

and they'd been very well fixed because she always even in a house dress looked like she was ready to go to a big banquet and every hair was in place and that place was immaculate and all around it on the outside. Her husband was one of them who got his check. He died a few years later. They got rid of that place and some of them were living around town in small cottages and there were a few of them that I kept in contact with until I left Bakersfield that I'd met after we got married and they traded at the store. There were proud ones and some that didn't care.

M.N.: But it's interesting to me that there was a large percentage of native Californians.

May: That's right because they had lost everything too because there was no work.

M.N.: Was this 1937?

May: It was hard times until the war.

M.N.: I thought those camps were only inhabited by people from Oklahoma or migrants.

May: Well these people weren't from Bakersfield. They'd come to the Valley for work and they got there and never got enough money to get out of there.

M.N.: What I'm saying is that an observer going into one of those camps seeing these people living in filth saw those people as Okies.

May: Let's go back on that living in filth. You found a big majority of those people who were immaculate. Here's another little guy from New York. In fact he's my Uncle Eddie. He's dead now but he and Mom Cramer adopted me because I was so young when we got married. He lived down there but he was a brick mason in New York and his youngest daughter would have been my age. His wife and four daughters were killed in a train wreck. It was on Sunday and they were going on a picnic with another family and he got a call to come in. That was terrific money in those days and this was just before he came to California. When I met him they'd been dead about four years. He had this terrific job, a beautiful home. They had everything. The neighbors and them were going and they'd take the train and go out to wherever they were going. Uncle Eddie got a call to report to work--emergency--so he went and his family went on and there was a train wreck and they were all killed. Uncle Eddie just walked into his front door, out the back door and left and nobody ever heard from him. The first time he looked in a mirror he was totally gray.

When my son was born Mom Cramer next door--she ran the restaurant--she took me over to finish raising me when I got married and then

my son and my daughter. She just died three weeks before her 94th birthday and had just quit work the year before she died in 1977. I became their adopted daughter and Uncle Eddie lived back there. He got pneumonia one time and he got drunk and he walked down the canal going back to his place and fell in the canal and it was December. He had pneumonia so Mom mentioned, "You know that little gray headed guy that comes up here, they call him Eddie?" I said, "Yes, I know him." She said, "He has pneumonia." I said, "He's living all alone isn't he?" She said, "Yes." So I went back down there to see him. I was never so amazed--the most gorgeous fireplace. You wouldn't believe and it had the barbecue and all that he'd built in this little shanty but it didn't look like a shanty and he taught me to put a teaspoon of purex in your dishwater and it keeps everything disinfected and bleached out and clean. He had a big fireplace and a barbecue out in front and he'd picked up rocks and things and made a fence around his place.

M.N.: This is the shack in the camp?

May: It's back in the Hoover Camp and it was just like this other lady, just immaculate. He lived with me. Of course we were there at that place a long time. They waited for the baby to be born. He was living with me when I was renting my rooms out but he would take care of my children for me to go anyplace I wanted to go. I made a trip back to Texas on the train and he took care of my two kids. I'd rather leave them with him than anybody else I knew. He did all the cooking. He was a proud man. There was a lot of proud people back there and a lot of clean places but you still had the kind that gave up. Maybe they had been proud before but they lost it. They weren't strong enough to make a come back. I don't think any of them was intentionally, maybe some of them, probably I know half of them had pride because they got out of it. The ones who were still there when they kicked them all out, those were the ones who didn't make any effort to better themselves. If you had walked in there and seen these little places that had nice yards then you knew the inside was clean as the outside. If you saw where that yard was swept clean and a pitiful little plant stuck around here or there.

M.N.: But I wouldn't have known that that person was from Oklahoma?

May: No.

M.N.: If I'd walked in that camp?

May: As a total stranger and everything said is "Okies". There were Californians called Okies because they were living this way. Every town had a settlement like that.

M.N.: So a casual person couldn't go into one of those camps and know who they were?

May: No, they wouldn't and I wouldn't have known that. I got tired

of everybody being an Okie that didn't have anything. I knew by my relatives coming out here and visiting. I knew by my folks and all of the pictures they would send us and all. Back there they had as much as we had out here. There's only one thing, Oklahoma is like all cold states there's no lawns in the winter. It's just dirt, everything frozen. That's what we like so much about California because it was green all year round. It was cleaner but we did miss the snow. That Depression hurt all states--all states. The dust bowl states were hurt the worse because they couldn't make a come back as fast as the other states made.

M.N.: They not only had the Depression but the dust bowl as well.

May: See that's when they really began to come out here was from the dust bowl time. There was a depression all over the United States before the dust bowl. Then the dust came right after the depression--wasn't that around 1935? They started coming out here when the market crashed because all of the factories and things only went so long before they closed. The smelter in Quinton didn't close until 1931. The big peak of the Depression is when the dust bowl hit and they all really began to come out. Iowa and all of those states and Dakotas and all of them came out here then. It was from all of those states.

M.N.: If you wanted your children to know how you feel about your life.

May: Sure, I made mistakes that I wouldn't have made if I could do it over, but it wasn't mistakes that affected anyone other than me. I don't think I'd change my life. I really don't because my children--I had to bring them up with them knowing my finances. Friday night after dinner all the money and all the bills were on the table and they knew exactly what I had left over. To show you an example--my daughter was taking dancing lessons and she was good. She was in the fifth and sixth grade then and she was taking dancing lessons but she was in her own little way making up all the dances for the class. She was real good and she was taking piano lessons and very good at that and all of a sudden her dancing teacher called me up and said, "Lillie, what's the matter with Shirley? She hasn't been the last three Saturdays." I said, "Well, there's been nothing wrong." I thought she took her lessons so I talked to Shirley Ann about it and she said, "Mother, I decided I would do more on my piano and I'm not going to take dancing anymore."

Do you know I didn't find out why she quit dancing until after she was married and a gang of kids was at the house and we were talking and I said, "Shirley Ann, you would have been a wealthy woman today if you'd stuck with your dancing." She said, "Mother, you want to know why I quit dancing?" She said, "I would have loved to have kept it up." I said, "You could have kept it up." She says, "No, because I knew when I broke my ballet slippers you did not have the money to buy me another pair but you would have got it somehow or other," and she said, "I didn't need it that much." I thought,

"Well, maybe in a way I was wrong letting my children know the situation we were in but then when you look at it another way I think it made a better person out of them because they had to make decisions that other kids didn't make because she had to make that decision on her own. No, I don't think I'd change my life. I think I had a good life, a few mistakes I made where I wouldn't want my children to follow my footsteps but I'm proud of my life. Let's put it that way. I really am--I'm not saying it just to be saying it but I've always been happy with my life.

M.N.: I look at your face and I see some sadness but you're quick to smile and laugh and your eyes look determined.

May: Yes. I have made mistakes that I regret but I came out strong. It didn't pull me down. Let's put it that way--I was never defeated.

M.N.: Are you happy today?

May: Yes. Sad on account of his health but proud of my children, proud of my grandchildren and I'm happy because I still have a mom. It may not be my mother but I still have a mom.

M.N.: You're a very lively and interesting person.

May: Well, thank you. I will say this, if people never had any worse life than I had and are strong enough to handle it I think they feel the same way I feel.

END OF INTERVIEW

Walter Curry Grose  
b. 1894, Moody, Howell Co.,  
Missouri  
[His parents from Missouri]

Eva Lena  
b. 1894, Morrilton, Conway Co.,  
Arkansas  
[Her parents from Arkansas]

Lillie Eva Grose  
b. 1918, Wright City,  
McCurtain County,  
Oklahoma  
  
Education: 3 years high  
school  
  
Church: Pentecostal

m. 1935 Otis McClain  
b. 1915, Oklahoma  
deceased

m. 1969 Homer J. May  
b. 1915, Yorba Linda,  
California

Otis Dean McClain  
b. 1936  
TV and radio

Shirley Ann McClain Wiseman  
b. 1940  
Housewife

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