

## Preface

This is a series of three interviews in one family. The first interview is with Mrs. Lula Martin, age 88, mother of Ernest Martin and Jewell Egbert.

The view stated by the senior Mrs. Martin is that life wasn't so difficult. A view not shared by her two children who felt that their experience made an important impact on them in later life.

Mr. Martin makes some very interesting observations about the influence of the migrant on the San Joaquin Valley. He does this from the perspective of one who has traveled widely and seems to feel he has outgrown the San Joaquin Valley.

Judith Gannon  
Interviewer

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

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

Oral History Program

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE:	Lula May Quinn Martin
PLACE OF BIRTH:	Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory, Oklahoma
INTERVIEWER:	Judith Gannon
DATES OF INTERVIEWS:	March 26, 1981
PLACE OF INTERVIEWS:	Visalia, Tulare County
NUMBER OF TAPES:	1
TRANSCRIBER:	Barbara Mitchell

## CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

## CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY

## The 1930s Migration to the Southern San Joaquin Valley

Oral History Program

## Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: Lula Martin (Age: 88)

INTERVIEWER: Judith Gannon

DATED: March 26, 1981

J.G.: This is an interview with Mrs. Lula Martin for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Judith Gannon at 1603 Princeton Drive, Visalia, California on March 26, 1981.

J.G.: Why don't you begin by telling me a little bit about what you remember about your childhood in Oklahoma.

Martin: Oh, my childhood, we was poor folks and we didn't own a place back there.

J.G.: You were from Oklahoma, right?

Martin: I was born in eastern Oklahoma when it was called Oklahoma Territory.

J.G.: Did you live on a farm?

Martin: We lived on a farm. We were just renters. We leased Indian property for two and three years at a time then we'd plow and get it ready to work. We done two places that way while we lived there.

J.G.: That's when you were living with your father and mother then.

Martin: Yes. I was younger then.

J.G.: What was your house like that you lived in?

Martin: The last one I lived in wasn't very good but it had plenty of rooms but it wasn't very good--it leaked and things like that.

J.G.: What was your first house in the Oklahoma Territory like? Was that a log cabin or a one-room cabin or a regular house?

Martin: Back there my father would lease the Indian land and then he built log houses. That's what we lived in when my two sisters were married. We lived in log houses.

J.G.: How many sisters and brothers did you have?

Martin: I had two brothers and five sisters.

J.G.: Big family. What kind of crops did your father raise?

Martin: He raised cotton and corn. We never planted no alfalfa and stuff like that. He just raised cotton and corn. He just gave a third and a fourth of the crop. When he leased it from the Indians we just paid so much a year.

J.G.: You leased it from the Indians.

Martin: From the agency.

J.G.: From the agency, I see.

Martin: Sauk and Fox Indians and then they had Shawnee and Kickapoo Indians.

J.G.: But it was the Indian agent that made the deal for the Indians.

Martin: Yes.

J.G.: How long did you live on Indian leased land?

Martin: We'd lease them for about three years.

J.G.: Then you'd have to move on to another one.

Martin: Then he'd rent another one. My oldest brother drove oxen and he'd break up the new land and by the time we got it all ready to go well then we'd get us another one somewhere. We lived on three brothers' places. Their names were Hugh Wakolee and Jackson Wakolee.

J.G.: Until you got married was this the life that you had moving from one Indian lease to another?

Martin: Yes, then we rented some after that too. I was eighteen when I lived on the last Indian place.

J.G.: Did you go to school during that time?

Martin: Yes.

J.G.: Where did you usually go to school?

Martin: We went to school where we went to church. The church got blown away by a cyclone. They built a nice, new one. I haven't been

back but once since I came out here.

J.G.: How many years of school did you complete?

Martin: I went till I was eighteen. I had the St. Vitus dance if you know what kind of disease that is. I got in the fifth grade. The teacher said I'd be better at home than in school because it kind of upset me. So that's all the education I had anyhow. I've learned a lot since then.

J.G.: Yes, I'm sure you have. How far was your school from where you lived?

Martin: Well, it was about a mile and a half or two, could have been two miles. Back there they have wind storms and they dug a cellar over at the school house. It would get water in it. When they'd see a cloud the children all got up and dipped the water out so they could go down into the cellar if they needed to. But I never did go to the cellar while I was going to school.

J.G.: In the fifth grade you stayed home because you had the St. Vitus Dance?

Martin: They said I'd be better and my country doctor gave me medicine to run that into inflammatory rheumatism so I'd be still, my feet and hands. That's the way he cured it. He gave me medicine to cure me.

J.G.: You don't have that anymore?

Martin: No.

J.G.: How long did you have it? When did you get over it?

Martin: Well, I was in bed about two, three, or four months and, I know, my cousin just came there and they liked to see me eat because I was funny. They said I'd start like this to my mouth and my hand would go out here.

J.G.: So you didn't have much control over how your hands and your feet moved. They just sort of moved on their own.

Martin: No. The doctor gave me medicine and I got over it, but I was several years getting over it. I was about twenty or something when I got clear over it.

J.G.: So you lived at home up until you were how old?

Martin: I wasn't married until I was 26.

J.G.: So you stayed at home during that time. From the time that you didn't live on Indian land anymore at eighteen where did you live?

Martin: We went down by Paden, Oklahoma. Then we moved to Hillabee. We were living there when my father died.

J.G.: You were how old when your father died?

Martin: I was about 21 or 22.

J.G.: Then who took care of the farming?

Martin: My oldest brother. He was a bachelor. He never did get married. He said, "I thought I'd better stay with my mother and you girls" so he stayed with us. My mother died after I was married.

J.G.: What did your father die from?

Martin: I think he had kidney trouble. I don't know whether it's the Bright's disease or what but it was his kidneys and my mother died with cancer of the liver.

J.G.: So at 26 you met your husband?

Martin: We were living up north of Paden and we'd lived up there for a year. They were at our neighbors. We were having a singing group. My husband came along. He was moving on the place we were moving off of and I looked out the window when I seen him go by with a load of stuff and I claimed him. He's the one I married. We lived together until just lacking seven or eight days being fifty years.

J.G.: How long did you know him before you got married?

Martin: I was engaged to him for about four years before I got married.

J.G.: So you met him when you were about 21 or 22.

Martin: Yes.

J.G.: Why did you wait so long?

Martin: He went into the service. He said he'd rather have a sweetheart in service than to have a wife.

J.G.: He went in during World War I?

Martin: He was 32 when he got married and I was 26. So he had just gotten back then when I got married.

J.G.: What year were you born?

Martin: 1893.

J.G.: So if you were 26 when you married it was 1919 so he did go to World War I.

Martin: Yes. He was in the medical corp. He would pick up the wounded and dead. He stayed in there nine months and I guess the war was over by that time I don't remember.

J.G.: So then he got back and you got married and then what happened?

Martin: We got married in April. My sister got married first. We were both aiming to get married at the same time but we didn't. She married April 2 and I married April 13 in the same month.

J.G.: What was your wedding like?

Martin: I was married at home. My sister went down to Tecumseh and I went with her and she got married down there. She wasn't married by the preacher. I had two preachers at my wedding.

J.G.: Why did you have two preachers?

Martin: They went to church where I went. They preached down there. One of them was having a revival and we asked one and the other one came along because they knew each other you know.

J.G.: So they came to the house. Did you have a party afterwards?

Martin: No, we just got married after lunch time. They married us and then they left. But they sure did shivaree us.

J.G.: What's a shivaree?

Martin: That's when young folks come and hammers on everything. Oh, they made the racket. We were shivareed three times. So I guess they all loved us.

J.G.: Did they come in the house or did they stay outside?

Martin: No, they were on the outside. We always had to treat them when they shivareed. So we had cigars and candy.

J.G.: Were you in your own house then?

Martin: I lived with my mother. My father had died then.

J.G.: So when you and your husband got married, you stayed with your mother.

Martin: We stayed there a few days and we went back up toward Prague, Oklahoma and lived up there a year and we moved back down that way.

J.G.: Your husband rented a place near Prague?

Martin: He was living with his brother and he would do the chopping of the cotton and his brother would do the plowing.

J.G.: So they were in partnership together.

Martin: So him and I done the hoeing of it.

J.G.: So you worked right along in the field with him.

Martin: Yes.

J.G.: We were talking about when you were living near Prague and farming in partnership with your husband's brother. Did they rent the land?

Martin: Yes, they rented.

J.G.: They didn't sharecrop it?

Martin: No, they just rented it and paid a third and a fourth.

J.G.: When you say a third and a fourth, what do you mean?

Martin: Well, it's a third of the cotton or corn--whatever they raise.

J.G.: So then after a year you decided to move?

Martin: Yes. We moved back close to Meeker, Oklahoma. I lived there with my mama and we lived on Indian land there. We had a real nice house to live in that time. It had an upstairs and all.

J.G.: The reason that you came back down from Prague was to stay with your mother and to help her?

Martin: Well, we were all together.

J.G.: Oh, your mother went with you too.

Martin: Oh yeah, after my father died we all lived together till I came back down there. She died at my house.

J.G.: Your mother and you and your brothers and sisters all moved together as a group?

Martin: My oldest sister was married. One died when she was six years old. I never saw her but the two girls were married when we were on the Wakolee place in the log house.

J.G.: You stayed together as a group all the time.

Martin: All the time.

J.G.: What happened when you went back around Meeker? What was the farming like then?

Martin: It wasn't too good. We didn't raise too much that year that we



came out here. We started to California in 1935 and arrived here in 1936. We were eleven days on the road.

J.G.: I was wondering what happened in Oklahoma. What was it like in Oklahoma just before you came? What was your farming like?

Martin: Well, it wasn't too good. You didn't raise too much you know.

J.G.: What happened?

Martin: Well, we didn't irrigate back there. We just waited for the Lord's rain to come.

J.G.: And the rain didn't come.

Martin: Didn't have much rain. Don't raise very much when you don't have rain. We rented 160 acres and we were living on that when my mama died. They're all buried in Meeker Cemetary. The grandfather and step-grandmother and I've got a baby buried back there and my sisters are buried back there.

J.G.: You have a baby buried back there?

Martin: It was just before my last child.

J.G.: After you got married in the early 1930s you and your whole family were farming around Meeker and you were having a drought so that the crops were not very good.

Martin: They weren't very good so we sold out and came out here. We had about seventeen head of cattle we sold and we sold all our stuff which wasn't too much. The house wasn't very good that we lived in. You know when you get rent land you don't get very good houses sometimes.

J.G.: What did your baby die from?

Martin: It was born and lived a few hours, I don't know. He weighed over twelve pounds and I don't know whether he was hurt getting here. I was sick about fourteen hours. I seen the lady who delivered him a year or two ago. She came out here from Oklahoma and said that he couldn't get his breath. He was born December 1 and buried December 3. She said that they broke ice in the water bucket and put some ice on him to make him cry. She said that he had pneumonia --whether he did or not, I don't know. She's still living and she helped deliver two of my children.

J.G.: Is she a midwife?

Martin: No, she was just there. She just lived the next place down just cross the highway.

J.G.: Did you have a doctor that came to your delivery?

Martin: Oh yeah, had doctors. He's the one we owed. He was with me with all my children, but I miscarried in California when I was about 40 years old.

J.G.: So all of your children were born in Oklahoma?

Martin: Yes.

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

Martin: I had a girl and three boys. It was five years before my first one ever came. I guess that St. Vitus Dance had something to do with it. I never did take no medicine. I don't believe in it.

J.G.: You got married in 1919 and you lived on various farms until 1935 when you came to California?

Martin: Yes.

J.G.: All of your children were born in Oklahoma, one died shortly after his birth, and then you had one more after that and a miscarriage? So before this child died you already had two out of your four children before you had that baby?

Martin: And they're all living but the one that was little when he died.

J.G.: Were those pretty rough years? Those years when you were having your children?

Martin: Yeah, it was pretty rough, but I worked everyday my husband did. I believe in women helping their husbands.

J.G.: You were a woman's libber way before it was popular. Who watched your kids during that time?

Martin: I'd take them with me to the field. Ernest was little and we had the railroad tracks running down through the place and I'd get kind of peeved at them fellows when they'd come by. They'd toot their whistle and wave at us and it would wake up the babies when they were little, but they say they moved that railroad out now.

J.G.: So what made you decide to come to California?

Martin: To get work.

J.G.: Your husband decided there must be work in California?

Martin: Yeah, he had brothers and sisters out here and they told him they could surely get him a job, so when he got out here they got him

a job. We left owing my doctor \$35. He said, "Now don't you starve the kids to pay me that," he said, "You don't have to pay, it's okay." So when we got our first check in California we sent it to him. So we don't owe nobody nothing.

J.G.: You said there was a whole group that came out here together.

Martin: Yeah, my sister and she had five children and I had three. I was married five years before Jewell came along, she was the first one.

J.G.: You had three boys and one girl.

Martin: Yes.

J.G.: So you sold your livestock and came to California with your brother-in-law and his wife and their five kids and you and your husband.

Martin: And our children and my brother. He lived in Shawnee, Oklahoma when we started to come he came with us, he didn't have no children. Nobody with him only just him, my other brother and his three children all came out here together.

J.G.: Your brother and his three children. His wife was dead?

Martin: Yes, she was dead.

J.G.: So between the three couples there were eighteen of you and you had eleven kids--is that right?

Martin: I think so. My brother-in-law had a car and then I guess he had a trailer pulling behind us, and my brother had a big truck. So we didn't bring very much, just our bedding and clothes and things didn't have too many of them. We sat in the back of that truck with my brother and his children. My baby wasn't very big so he seen an old man carrying a bundle on his back. He was walking and he had whiskers and he said, "There's old Jesus." My brother got the biggest kick out of that about Ernie saying that. We had a little Christmas party when we were coming out. We would rent cabins along the road to stay in at night. We didn't sleep out but two nights on the way.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

J.G.: So you had Christmas on the road?

Martin: Yes. It was in Fort Worth, Texas. That's how far we got the first few days.

J.G.: You said you spent eleven days on the road. Did it just take that long because your truck went that slow?

Martin: Well, they didn't drive fast like they do nowadays. We cooked just like we did at home. I'd make the biscuits and things and my sister would fry the eggs and bacon.

J.G.: Sounds like you had plenty to eat on the road.

Martin: Oh, we did.

J.G.: Did you find cabins that you could cook in or did you cook over a campfire?

Martin: Oh, no, they had stoves in the cabins. On New Year's Eve we forgot to buy some flour before they closed and we couldn't buy it the next day because of New Year's so we had to do without until about three o'clock, that's the longest we'd done without anything to eat. We always ate three times.

J.G.: Where did you come to when you came to California? Where did you first settle?

Martin: We lived in Wilmar\*. That's in Los Angeles.

J.G.: You came to one of the suburbs in Los Angeles, that is where you first stopped?

Martin: Yes. We stopped at his brother's.

J.G.: What was your first thought when you saw California?

Martin: I thought it was beautiful.

J.G.: You came in from over in San Bernardino mountains and that area?

Martin: We came over a lot of mountains.

J.G.: Did you have any trouble at the border that the border guards were checking or anything like that?

Martin: I don't think so, but I don't remember.

J.G.: So you stopped the first place in this town in Los Angeles. How long did you stay there? Did you work there?

Martin: We stayed there awhile. He had several brothers who lived there. He had a brother-in-law and a brother who were Nazarene preachers. We loved his brother whose name was Virgil and I always loved his wife because we were just like sisters. We'd stay there until we rented a house there. His brother bought one just across the street and we all lived close together and we always went to church together.

J.G.: What kind of work did your husband find?

---

\*Wilmar is located in Rosemead.

Martin: He'd just take odd jobs. They were building houses and moving some of them. The first job he got was something about pushing bricks around for the ones that laid them.

J.G.: He was the carrier of the bricks for the person that was putting the wall of the house together.

Martin: The wall or cement around the bricks.

J.G.: He did that kind of construction type work in Los Angeles. Did you stay in Los Angeles for a long time?

Martin: No, we didn't stay there too long. We came up to the Valley and the first place we moved to when we got here was Evans Camp down by Farmersville. I don't know how long we stayed there. We went over to Millard's and got a job. Mr. Millard hired us and we worked for him nine years.

J.G.: Mr. Millard was near Farmersville too?

Martin: He was a farmer. He ran a dairy too. He had a nice place there.

J.G.: Was that near Farmersville?

Martin: No, it was between Farmersville and Exeter.

J.G.: And you lived where at that time?

Martin: We lived in a dairy barn which the owners fixed up. They had a nice place for a stove. It was twelve by twelve brick, little room. I cooked in that and we had water pipes in there for the dairy barn.

J.G.: You had running water?

Martin: I don't know how many years [we] lived there but my kids went to school down at the school. Jewell, when she got older, got a job at the Greyhound Bus Depot. She'd go up there and catch the bus and ride to Visalia and then back.

J.G.: So your husband helped Mr. Millard with the dairy.

Martin: No, he didn't milk or anything, he worked on the land.

J.G.: What kind of work did you do on the land?

Martin: We set out a ten acre grape vineyard. I helped to do that. After we moved out of that place we moved over north a little ways and we lived in a big house. The people had moved out and we stayed there one year. It was a big house, then we moved in a smaller house. We worked for Millard for nine years.

J.G.: Did you feel like he treated you well? Did you ever feel that the people that you worked for took advantage of you or anything like that?

Martin: No, they were all good to us. They raised sweet potatoes and they raised tomatoes and I helped him. I pulled those sweet potatoe slips and my husband he rode in an outfit and he set them out. I chopped and picked cotton. There's where I weighed 212 pounds.

J.G.: You weighed 212 pounds?

Martin: 212 pounds. They'd sell milk at his house to anybody who wanted to buy it. The man that run the dairy, he'd always bring our milk down to us and set it on the porch. When I weighed 212 he got to weighing 212 and we had a big laugh about that. His name was Hayworth.

J.G.: It sounds like when you came to California in those years after 1937 that you lived okay.

Martin: We got work here up here in the Valley.

J.G.: You were able to always find work.

Martin: Yeah, my husband always got work on farms. My husband got along with all the people he worked for. I did too. We set out Millard's plum orchard and we set out them grapes before we left from there. We didn't live in too many places but I enjoyed it.

J.G.: Do you ever regret having moved from Oklahoma?

Martin: No, I'm proud we came. My mother wanted to come to California. We talked about it before she passed away but she didn't get to come. I believe she would have lived longer if she would have come.

J.G.: After you stopped working for the Millards what kind of work did you go into then or where did you work?

Martin: I think that's where we got enough money to pay down on a half acre.

J.G.: Where was that that you bought the land for your house?

Martin: That's still here not too far from the theatres down there.

J.G.: It's in Visalia.

Martin: Yeah, it's out of town on Sixth Avenue I think.

J.G.: Did you build a house on it or was there a house on it?

Martin: Yeah, we built a house and the house is still there.

J.G.: How long ago did your husband die?

Martin: He's been dead since 1968. He died from diabetes. He's buried at Exeter.

J.G.: So you bought land here in Visalia. What kind of work was your husband doing then when you were living in Visalia?

Martin: He'd go back over to Millard's and work.

J.G.: After he stopped working at Millard's what kind of work did he do?

Martin: I don't remember.

J.G.: After he died were your kids grown?

Martin: My daughter was married.

J.G.: So all of your kids were grown and you weren't left to raise youngsters by yourself.

Martin: I was by myself. I wrote my nephew a letter and asked him if he wanted to live with me. Him and his wife moved in with me and we stayed there till I couldn't tend it and I sold it. I sold my house for \$3,000.

J.G.: Are all three of your boys here in California?

Martin: All but the baby that died.

J.G.: And your daughter is right up here?

Martin: My son lives in Pasadena--the one that's a minister. He's lecturing today.

J.G.: Oh that's right. What about your other boys? Where do they live?

Martin: They live over here not too far.

J.G.: You're still close to all of your children?

Martin: That's why they wanted me to move back up here instead of staying in San Bernardino. The kids all said they'd come and see me, but they don't get to come too often but anyhow I see them once and a while.

J.G.: If you look back on your coming to California, moving here from Oklahoma are there any stories or any incidents that you can remember that really stand out in your mind that were really happy

or really sad times?

Martin: I don't think so. We were all happy. When we can we'd all just have a big time like a reunion.

J.G.: Everything turned out to be okay?

Martin: Yeah.

J.G.: Sometimes the people who migrated to California were called Okies. Have you ever been called that? What do you think that means?

Martin: Don't know. I guess some people thought they were old fashioned or something. I don't mind being called Okie. I'm proud that I am. I was born in Oklahoma.

J.G.: That was okay with you?

Martin: Yes.

J.G.: Were you ever treated badly by the people that lived here in California before you got here? Because you were an Okie, did you find that the people that lived around you were not very nice?

Martin: No. I've been treated just like everyone else. Wherever I go it doesn't make any difference what church it is, why I fit. I'm going to the Morman Church now. Of course, my daughter is a Morman and [so is] my son-in-law. That lady takes me every Sunday evening. I go to their Sunday school and they have talks.

END OF INTERVIEW



## CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

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

## Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE:	Jewell Martin Egbert
PLACE OF BIRTH:	Meeker, Lincoln County, Oklahoma
INTERVIEWER:	Judith Gannon
DATES OF INTERVIEWS:	March 27, 1981
PLACE OF INTERVIEWS:	Reedley, Fresno County
NUMBER OF TAPES:	2
TRANSCRIBER:	Barbara Mitchell

## CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

## CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY

## The 1930s Migration to the Southern San Joaquin Valley

Oral History Program

## Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: Jewell Martin Egbert (Age: 57)

INTERVIEWER: Judith Gannon

DATED: March 27, 1981

J.G.: This is an interview with Jewell Egbert for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Judith Gannon at 364 E. Myrtle, Reedley, California on March 27, 1981.

J.G.: Why don't you start by telling me a little bit about what you remember of your childhood in Oklahoma.

Egbert: Like where we lived? We lived on a farm with 160 acres but not much of it was farm land, it was mostly pasture. There were little hills and the ground is very red clay. It was kind of a harsh life. We had no conveniences at all. We lived in a four room house with no electricity or water in the house. We had a well which had a bucket and a rope and we lowered the bucket into the well. It was probably 50 feet from the house. On the porch we had a little stand with a bucket of water and a dipper that we drank out of. We didn't use glasses out there. It wasn't comfortable. There was nothing comfortable about the whole thing. The lights we used were kerosene lamps, so we usually went to bed early and got up early. My dad had a few cows. I think we had seventeen at one time but they weren't all milk cows, some were calves. My father sold cream to a local creamery probably ten miles away. They picked it up. I don't know if this was done daily or not, but when they picked it up, especially if it was in the summertime and it rained a lot, the roads would get so sticky and muddy that sometimes the truck would get stuck and would not get back to the creamery in time for the cream to stay sweet. It would sour and we wouldn't get paid for that. It was just one of those things.

The ground is really different there where we lived near Meeker, Oklahoma. So much clay. I used to play with the clay. Make little dolls and things in the clay. I think my dad grew corn and cotton mainly on a share basis because we didn't own the farm. We never

had any money really. A certain percentage of the corn would be allotted to the owner and a certain amount of the cotton and whatever else we grew. I think he grew quite a bit of feed for the cattle and we had a team of horses.

I was born in 1924 and I'm talking about 1930 when I remember things. We didn't have a car. We didn't have a car only a wagon and Meeker was probably three or four miles away and if Dad went to town we went with him in the wagon. The road was hilly and I was always a little bit scared because there'd be steep hills and it was kind of hard to keep the wagon where it was suppose to be. I was always afraid it was going to go over the horses.

I had two brothers--I had three brothers. Mother lost one when he was an infant. We always had a garden. I don't think we had much snow but we had lots of rain. They had tornadoes. We've never had one touch right down where we lived until after we moved. After we did move one came down and demolished everything. They'd built a new home and it demolished the home and killed cattle and oh, it was just a terrible, terrible thing. But that was after we had moved away.

We walked to school, probably two and one quarter miles. I hadn't been back in 45 years and went back last year and we retraced it. I had always said I walked two miles to school and my kids would say, "Yeah", but I really did. It was a little country school, probably in the whole school there were eight grades in two rooms, maybe only twenty in each room. It was small. People were very friendly. You knew almost everyone in the whole area for miles.

We didn't have a car, everyone else did though. We were just a little bit less fortunate I think. My dad never drove. He never learned how to drive.

Water was kind of scarce in the fields. To get water for the animals my dad used to dig a lot. I think it had been a creek that had gone dry, but there was still water underneath and he used to go down and just dig and dig and dig. He would have a little hole dug out where the animals could go down and drink from that. I guess the drought probably is one thing that prompted us to move to California because the crops just finally didn't grow and it was so hard to get jobs too. Of course, he didn't make enough on the farm and that was the Depression years and it was just very difficult to make ends meet. My dad had family in California and so we decided that eventually we would come out here. It took some time then to rake up enough money, because he owed people money. There wasn't enough money to buy groceries and he would charge it until the crops came in. Finally the crops didn't come in enough so he did owe quite a lot of money. I don't know how much, maybe a couple hundred dollars all together and that was a lot of money then. He talked to all of his creditors and they thought they knew he wasn't going to get ahead back there so they agreed that he could come and pay them

just as soon as he could which he did. I don't know how long it took but he did pay back every penny. It took time though because I think when we came out here you only made about 25¢ an hour. He made 30¢ soon after and then it just gradually got to be more but he never made very much.

My mother worked in the fields with him back in Oklahoma. We would tag along. There was no babysitting or anything like that and if any of us were sick, of course, she didn't go in the fields with him.

We had little wild pecans on our farm and little wild plums that she used to make plum jelly out of--little tiny ones but good. And wild persimmons that were only about two inches across and they were good. Really more tasty, I think, than the ones we have here except the Japanese persimmons, I think, they're really delicious here. We had a few fruit trees, but the fruit was so small and nothing like California fruit. Oranges were such a treat. We only had oranges usually at Christmas time. Then probably only one. We would have bananas more than oranges but we didn't have those very often either.

J.G.: You said it took awhile to get the money together to come to California. How did they finally achieve that? How did they get the cash to make the trip?

Egbert: Well, my mother's sister and her family came with us and a couple of my mother's brothers. My mother's sister's husband was a Rawleigh man so I think he saved a little from his. We just finally had to sell everything. We sold our cows, I think, we only had one horse left because one had died, I'm not sure about that, but we sold everything. We had a sale and sold everything, he really wasn't able to save anything. That's the way we had to do it. We just sold what we had and what little furniture which was nothing really, but we did have chickens and pigs and things like that. I asked my mother and I think it was less than \$300 that we sold everything for. I'm not positive about that. She was thinking it was more, but I think she's forgotten. It's possible I could have but it was a small amount. My aunt's family didn't have a lot either and I think they said they ran out of money just before we got to California. My mother's brother was a bachelor and he had a little more money. He'd been able to save more throughout his life so he helped everyone out that ran short. We didn't have very much money left when we got to California either, but my dad had brothers in Los Angeles and that's where we came was to Los Angeles.

J.G.: Who had the car?

Egbert: My aunt and uncle had a car. We bought a truck with my mother's brother. My dad and my uncle went together and bought this truck which was about four years old, but it made it okay. They didn't pay very much for it. It seems to me it was like \$250 and we paid

half of it, even though my dad didn't drive, he paid for half the truck so we could travel out here. We put all of our belongings and rode in the back. My mother and my two brothers and some cousins rode in the back of the truck. It was very like that old Steinbeck novel almost, not quite. We were all very poor, but we didn't have some of the morals that were in that book. I mean I think our morals were a little better than some in there.

J.G.: So you rode in the back and, I think, your mother said it took eleven days?

Egbert: It took us eleven days. We left before Christmas and I think, we got here probably January 2 or 3. We spent Christmas in Fort Worth or Dallas. We didn't drive at night and we would stop fairly early and part of the time we camped out if it was warm enough. That was after we got closer to California. I remember camping out two or three nights so that probably was in California or Arizona. We came the extreme southern route so it would be less mountains and warmer. We came through El Paso and lower Arizona. It's a little further that way.

J.G.: When you got to California you were living in a dairy barn? Was it your father that made it more like a house?

Egbert: No, it was the people who owned the ranch. They did that. My dad wasn't very good with his hands. He was just a little bit clumsy with his hands so he didn't ever do anything like that. He might have helped a little bit. We had wood heat. We had a wood cook stove. I think we finally got a gas heater because the gas was there, but it was not comfortable at all.

J.G.: Cold in the wintertime and hot in the summertime?

Egbert: It was hot in the summertime. It wasn't that terribly cold in the winter because of the heater, he kept it going all the time. We had an outdoor toilet so it was cold. You would have to go outside to go to the bathroom. It was very uncomfortable. Now that didn't bother my mother and father that much. They were never used to anything, any real comforts and so that didn't really bother them much. They did want a place of their own. They wanted some land and after he paid back the money that he owed in Oklahoma eventually he saved enough to buy about half an acre on which they built a little home. I was married then so it took a long time for them to do that. They really didn't notice the discomforts as much as I did. I think I was overly sensitive. I don't know if being a girl is the reason I was overly sensitive, but I was always a little bit ashamed to have to live in the dairy barn or to tell people where I lived. I wouldn't tell them if I didn't have to. I think there were people who really had a dislike for the migrants and made it kind of hard on some of the children.

J.G.: Did you ever have that experience when you were going to school like

when you were living outside of Exeter?

Egbert: I had a teacher who liked to make you feel bad. In a sewing class she asked what our room was like and would we like to change our room and she was going to help us redecorate our room. I didn't have a room. There wasn't even any paint. I slept in the living room on a little cot. I don't think it was even painted, but it was made into rooms then. I'm sure she knew that I lived like that. I don't know how much of the class, probably one-third, were migrant type people or people that didn't have the wherewithal to do things. So she went right down the line and I was so embarrassed and I thought, what will I say? I didn't want to lie because I was really taught never to lie and I knew if I lied I'd feel bad about it for a long time. And yet I wasn't going to say I don't have a room. I could have done that. So I told her my room was pink and green. Then she said that color combination was not good so we'll change it to so-and-so. I felt really guilty that I had told that lie because I didn't even have a room. It was no big deal. Most people wouldn't have been bothered, I think I was just overly sensitive.

J.G.: I've had other people who remember certain little things. It's like those things take on the whole experience of having been a migrant and some of the put downs that they experienced as a result of that.

Egbert: But of course there were a lot of migrants that were destructive with property and so probably these people felt they were overrunning the country or something. Of course, this teacher didn't have a right to try to make you feel bad and maybe she didn't, maybe it was just my over sensitivity.

My younger brother was only four when we came up here and he was always very bright. Always questioning everyone he met. He just couldn't get enough answers. He was telling his teacher in the eighth grade what he wanted to do and she said, "We'll see. I'll bet you that you never do so-and-so." It was really a put-down, an educational type put-down. She was a teacher and had lived in the area at Exeter for a long time. Her husband had a big ranch. I think that really stuck with him because he went on to get education. It became an obsession it seems to prove her wrong. I don't know if that's what did it, but he just kept going to school and doing all kinds of things. I know one time he said, "You know I'd like to see her to let her know that I have done some of the things that I said I wanted to do." I think it was kind of a push with him and with some people because we were kind of made to feel inferior, I believe. The way we lived too and yet we children couldn't do anything about that. I don't blame my mother and father either, I don't mean that. They had never had anything so they didn't see the need to upgrade the home or anything. Then they didn't have the money anyway. Most of the other migrants did come up higher and faster than we did. I think maybe because my father

was older and too he was happy living in that half camping kind of a way. It was very embarrassing to me after I went to school and found out that the other part of the world didn't live like that, that we were different. My middle brother has always rolled with the punches so nothing ever bothered him either. It's just a difference too in people.

J.G.: So you went to high school in Exeter?

Egbert: I went all four years in Exeter.

J.G.: You graduated from there?

Egbert: I graduated from there. World War II broke out just before I graduated. I graduated in June and we didn't have money for me to go to college. I thought about going to junior college, but then when the war broke out you just had a different attitude about everything. It was easier to get jobs then and I went to work for Greyhound selling tickets. I worked there for seven or eight years.

J.G.: Your father and mother continued to work for the dairy.

Egbert: Yes. Until he was in his sixties. They were good to us and good to him. He was a hard worker and very honest. That really has stuck with me, honesty. I couldn't cheat anyone out of a penny and I'm sure he never could do anything like that. He was very, very honest. We were always taught that we were bright. I never had the feeling that I wasn't fairly bright. I always had this feeling that we were somewhere down here because we didn't measure up in clothes and furniture.

J.G.: Did you have much social activities in high school?

Egbert: I didn't have any that involved my home because I wouldn't bring the people home. I had a couple of really close friends that lived in our area and they were the only people I would bring home with me or I would go to their home because I was just too embarrassed.

J.G.: Were your close friends of migrant stock also?

Egbert: Yes.

J.G.: So they probably lived more like you did.

Egbert: More like we did but not quite to the extent that we did. I had one girlfriend who was from Oklahoma too, but there was just the one child so that would make a difference too. They lived in a house. I always wanted to have a house, any kind of a house because I considered it a barn that we lived in. It was really right on the road. I remember, if a car would come by and if it was someone that I knew from school, I would run around back and hide because

I didn't want them to know that I lived there. A lot of people never knew where I lived.

In high school I played in the orchestra and if we had all county orchestra where I was involved in going somewhere then sometimes the children's parents had to bring us home. That would always really upset me because they'd have to find out where I lived. It always bothered me. But as I say I think I was overly sensitive I'm sure. It probably wasn't the people as much as it was just my attitude about it. My mother used to laugh at me. If I would run and hide she thought that was funny. She couldn't see how I felt about it.

J.G.: Kids are more sensitive sometimes and you were more out in the community--your parents were there on the farm and didn't deal much with the kinds of pressures that come from the outside.

Egbert: My mother I believe went to sixth grade. It was hard then to get an education. She's 88 now. My father, I'm not sure if he went that far or not, but they could read and write. They just didn't have a good enough education to do very much. My father was very bright. He had such retention powers and it's a shame that he couldn't have lived at this time where he could have gotten an education because it was a waste. He used to drill us on the capitals of the United States and he knew all of them. This is a little game that he would play with us.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

J.G.: Let's go on and talk a little bit about what happened to you after you graduated from high school and started to work. You worked for eight years for Greyhound. Did you meet your husband in that time?

Egbert: Yes, I did. He was stationed at Lemoore Air Force base. I met him and after I had gone with him a year and a half we were married. We moved down to Daggett which is just out of Barstow. He was at Daggett Air Base. We were only there three months then he was shipped out, that was quite an experience too. I came back home and went back to work for Greyhound again. I worked in Visalia and Tulare for about eight years which was interesting.

J.G.: After your husband got out of the military you settled in Visalia?

Egbert: In Visalia, yes.

J.G.: How did you wind up Reedley?

Egbert: He used the G.I. Bill and learned how to be a mechanic. That is what he wanted to do. He only had a high school education, so he went to work in Visalia as a mechanic. We had three children and he was holding down three jobs to make ends meet and a friend of his



told him that insurance would be a good thing. So he went into the insurance business. We moved to Hanford then to Reedley and back to Visalia when he became staff manager and then eleven years ago we moved back up here because he liked working in this area insurance-wise. He was with the same company 26 years. Now he's on retirement disability, but it's been very good to him. We've done a lot of things that we couldn't have done. We've been to lots of conventions that we'd never been able to go to otherwise: Hawaii, Mexico City and Canada and many beautiful places.

J.G.: I'll bet you bought a house the first chance that you got?

Egbert: Yes, we bought half an acre east of Visalia and had one built. We only paid \$800 for the half acre. Then we read an ad in the paper that a contractor would build a house for \$4495, a little two-bedroom house. We could choose the roof style and quite a bit of things. It wasn't much of a house, but it was cute and we had two children then and it just meant a lot to me. Of course, we haven't done fabulous, but at least we have a home. We did have a nice home in Visalia which we sold when we came up here, but that has always been primary importance. Not that I wanted anything really fancy I just wanted something that I'm not ashamed of. My husband has been very supportive of that and we've never lived in anything that I have been ashamed of since we've been married. I think he realized how important it was. But I still don't think that my mother and father realized how important that was to me because it was not to them. It was just one of those things. They were beautiful people. It's just that their way of life was a little bit different.

J.G.: I think you mentioned Roosevelt earlier on in the tape and I wanted to ask you what did your parents think of Roosevelt and his policies?

Egbert: Well, my parents were Republican and I believe a little bit prejudiced. They didn't think much of him mainly because he was Democrat. He did a lot of good I think, but my dad was not very impressed with Roosevelt. I think it was because he was Republican and I think it was because he was not educated too.

J.G.: Do you think he had any experience with the Roosevelt policies? Some of the Oklahomans I've spoken with talked about Roosevelt's policies to raise the farm prices. Some of the crops were not planted and animals were killed. Farmers had strong feelings about killing the animals and not allowing other people to benefit from them--to eat them.

Egbert: I remember some things about that. Now I don't remember too much but I do remember my dad feeling badly about that too. I think he initiated the WPA [Works Progress Administration] didn't he? I believe he did. That was a way a lot of people have survived. I don't think they would have if he hadn't had that. As I say, I don't really know

and I haven't studied that much about it. I was pretty young when Roosevelt was in office. Although he didn't die until World War II, but I didn't know that much about politics or anything. I do know that my father did not approve of Roosevelt. The exact reason I'm not sure, but he did cut down his little pension.

J.G.: That may have had something to do with it.

Egbert: Yes, he was in quite a long time before he did that. That little pension meant a lot of him, but then you should be able to look over the whole thing that maybe there was a good reason.

J.G.: You were living in Evans Camp, there was a government camp up around Tipton, do you ever recollect or hear anything about what living conditions were like in those camps?

Egbert: Now at Linnell which is near Farmersville, they built one I think it was the late 1930s. I was hoping we could get one of those. That sounded great, but I don't think they were that great because they were too close to your neighbors and there were people that took advantage. Some of the migrants really took advantage and tore up property and there were fights. You had a lower class of people involved with some of the government camps, but it really was a godsend, I think, to some of the people. It meant a lot to some of them because it gave them a little bit of a home and a little space for a garden and they wouldn't have had otherwise, so I think it really meant a lot to some of the people, but I think there was a lot of destruction too.

J.G.: Was Evans Camp was a private camp?

Egbert: Yes. The old man lived there, he had that acreage and it was pretty. He had water put on it and it had oak trees. It was really a pretty camp ground. He just utilized it for people. He was a good man. He didn't charge very much.

My mom said she thought she bought her first stove at Evans Camp. It was just a tin cook stove that we bought out there. I guess they used it maybe to heat too. She said my dad paid \$4 for it. I remember, we also bought an old Victrola. We had to turn the crank to get it to play, but we'd turn it real fast and it would play the records. We paid \$1 for that at a second hand store, but that was something fabulous. We'd never had a radio in Oklahoma. We did have one in Los Angeles that a nephew had bought us. He paid \$5 for a radio that had a funny sound to it, but it was a radio. We'd never had one in Oklahoma so a lot of the things I felt I've so much more in California. My dad really liked the radios. We had things like that that we wouldn't have had in Oklahoma because we had no electricity.

J.G.: In your barn house?

Egbert: It had electricity and it had water in the kitchen area. It was

a little separate brick building that they washed the bottles or whatever that they'd used and the equipment for milking. We used that as a kitchen and we put a big old wood cook stove in there that my mother cooked on and she had that for years. I can't remember when she got a gas stove. Later they bought a little bit of acreage and built the home. The relatives came in and other people that they knew helped them build it. They didn't hire very much of the work done and then she got the gas cook stove and they finally got a bathroom in the house, but it was long after everybody else had taken all these things for granted.

J.G.: What year would that have been?

Egbert: I'm not positive but between 1945 and 1947.

J.G.: It sounds like your father didn't actually work in the fruit. He worked for one person. He was like a hired hand.

Egbert: Yes, he was. Well, for the first few months he worked in the fruit then if they didn't need him then they would also work other places.

J.G.: Apparently there were some rather violent strikes that went on during the 1930s in Tipton. Do you ever recollect that he had any connection with that?

Egbert: No, I don't believe he ever did. I don't believe he would have participated in anything like that. He had his own ideas about things, but then the need wasn't there for him because he did have this job that really paid him enough that we could eat anyway. Sometimes he worked other places, but only when they weren't needed at the dairy. That was a year-round job. He didn't make much money. When we first came out here, I think he worked ten hours a day for 25¢ an hour. It might have been 30¢ but I think it was 25¢. When I went to work in 1942 I worked six days a week, eight hours a day for \$18, which just sounds terrible now, but I thought that was fabulous. I remember thinking, "Oh gee, wouldn't it be great if I could make \$100 a month, \$25 a week. I would be in seventh heaven." I never made an awful lot for Greyhound but then I quit in 1949 and I think then I might have made \$40 or \$50 a week.

J.G.: Did you get an apartment or did you live at home?

Egbert: No, I stayed at home and we lived out in the country and I walked a mile and a half to the bus and a mile and a half from the bus so it was three miles a day.

J.G.: At that time they were living in their house?

Egbert: No, this was still out in the dairy barn, but there were Orange Belt buses that went along the highways. We were a mile and a half away from the highway. I could ride the buses for free because I worked

for the Greyhound and so that's what I did. If I worked late at night I would get home at 11:30 p.m. and my dad or brother would meet me and walk home with me. I didn't think so much about it then but afterward I was thinking that's going an extra mile because he had to get up early and go to work. Only one time I remember there was some mix-up and I got off the bus and there was no one there. That was frightening. I walked almost all the way home before they did come to meet me. My dad realized that something had happened.

J.G.: It's very dark in the country.

Egbert: Very dark. There were mainly grapes around where we lived out there. My parents did work in the Emperor grapes. My dad worked for Miller at the dairy and they may have had grapes too. I'm sure they did, Emperor grapes along with other things.

J.G.: Emperor grapes are a certain kind of grape?

Egbert: Yes. They're big and they have seeds but Exeter has, I think, that's the main place for Emperor grapes.

J.G.: As you think back over the whole thing and you think about Steinbeck's portrayal about what the life of a migrant from Oklahoma was like during that time what is your impression? Was that pretty accurate or did he exaggerate? What did you think of that novel or the movie, whichever?

Egbert: It's been a long time since I've read. I remember thinking at the time that it was a little harsh on the migrants. I didn't like the morals. There were bad morals depicted in there and that, of course, could be so. That's just people you don't know about that. I know in our family our morals were very high and I kind of objected to that, but probably it was pretty much the way it was. As I say it's been so long since I've read it that I don't remember. But it was very harsh I think. So many of them lived in so many different kinds of places and I do feel that we were really considered lower class. Not that we had to go to the back of the bus or anything but I certainly felt people considered us lower class. I know some of my friends felt that too so we really worked hard so that they wouldn't know by our speech that we were from Oklahoma.

J.G.: You've certainly lost the accent totally.

Egbert: I think I lost it pretty quick. I would really work hard on it. I don't know if my mother's is an Oklahoma accent or it's just her, but she has so many words that are different than other people. She used to say so many things that I'm sure a lot of people wouldn't know what she's talking about unless maybe you were from that area.

J.G.: Like what?

Egbert: I've heard her say, "Sky west from crooked," that meant you didn't

know where it was coming from. Instead of saying, "always" she said, "allers". Oh, so many things. I've tried to get her on tape so I can remember for my children and grandchildren and so forth who are not going to know her to realize what a different way she had of speaking.

She's the one who dug our storm cellar in Oklahoma. My dad was not afraid of storms. She was so frightened of tornadoes. If we went to school and it was cloudy she would be so scared. We had a storm cellar at school, but it always had water in it so they didn't take us down there unless it was a dire emergency. There were no sky alerts then. You never knew when it was a dire emergency you just waited until it hit you. My mother said, "I'm going to dig my own." To get to the storm cellar we'd have to go a half mile down that wet clay road where every time you'd step you'd pick up a pound of dirt so she dug the cellar herself. My dad would help a little if he was around, but he wasn't worried about the wind. Lightning once and a while would frighten him, but weather didn't mean anything. So she dug that storm cellar. I don't know how many months it took her. It took a long time. She went through all different layers of soil. I remember one layer of thin rock. She'd dig and dig and she dug it down about five or six feet. Daddy put the roof on and I could stand up in there. It was a cellar. It had no floor, it was just dirt and there were bugs in there. Did you read the little story that I sent along? I'd sent along a little story that I'd written about her storm cellar. I sent it to the Fresno Bee and they printed it in the "Between Us" section. It wasn't a fabulous thing, but I thought it would be good for her to know how I felt about her. We were down there times when there were tornadoes. None really hit our place although one moved our henhouse to a new location. Lightning struck a corner of the house and took a whole corner out of it one time. I think we were in the storm cellar then, but I was scared to go down in the storm cellar because there were spiders and bugs. My dad went with us once and there was a scorpion that bit him on the back of the neck when he was down there so he never went back again. So really the storm cellar was more dangerous than waiting up there for the tornado to hit.

The house in Oklahoma was terrible. The roof leaked. Everytime it rained really hard the roof leaked. Have you ever been to Oklahoma? The rain there is something else. You talk about rain it's not the same. When we were going back this time I had forgotten how severe it was. It rained so hard and this was before sundown that we had to stop. It got so dark we couldn't see to drive. So we had to stop along side of the road because it just poured. So the rain used to come into the house and we had this big old library table that my uncle had left there on his way to California from Missouri. It was a huge thing and we would get underneath. Mom would put a quilt on the floor and we would get underneath the table, Mom and the kids. Daddy would be out in the field somewhere --rain never bothered him. Mother would have little buckets here and there and you could hear it dripping all over the house.

One time I saw a snake in the house. There were holes in the ceiling too and I was sitting on the bed and here was this snake that went from one hole into another hole into the attic. I don't know if Daddy was there then. I told him and he says, "It will get hungry and it will come down, just don't worry about it." I don't know how many nights I stayed awake. We had mice in the house. You could hear the mice nibbling. But that was really frightening. I don't know what happened to the snake. I never saw it again but it took a long time before I really slept well again. I was more scared back there than here. We had more comforts here even if we lived in a barn. We never had a snake in the house. I remember seeing a wolf back there that came into the backyard fairly close. Never had anything like that here.

J.G.: Did they have the dust storms where you were?

Egbert: Yes, they did have them but I don't think they were in our area so much. The crops quit growing and I think it was the drought, but I think the dust was a little further away. It affected us too. It affected us because the soil just didn't produce like it should. But the actual dust was a few miles from us. Mama doesn't remember too much about the dust and I don't either. But I do remember the soil wouldn't grow anything so it was all affected. We would have come to California sooner, but my grandmother was sick and they didn't want to leave her. She died in the spring and we came in the winter after she died. She wanted to come to California so bad. My mother's always been sorry that she didn't get to make it.

J.G.: Sounds like for many of the Oklahomans California was the land of golden dreams.

Egbert: Yes. I know the first orange tree we saw I don't know if it was in California but it was just like the picture postcards, it was really just hard to explain the beauty of that or the palm trees. I had never seen palm trees and I love palm trees to this day. I had never seen anything like that and it was hard to believe that there were trees like that and that oranges grew like that and you could just go pick one. We didn't go pick them because they belonged to someone else, but I remember seeing the first orange tree and how much it meant. It was a dream come true. But it's hard to adjust too I think because it was so different especially in Los Angeles. It was city everywhere and we were country people. It was hard for me to go to school there with all the children and the teachers were different. There weren't migrants there. Most of the migrants came up into the country, the agricultural area. There weren't that many there although most of my father's people lived in Los Angeles. A couple of them were ministers and so we got to go to church often.

J.G.: Is there anything you wanted to bring up or anything that I haven't asked you that you'd like to relate?

Egbert: No. I think we probably covered pretty much. I think I've mentioned

how severe I thought it was back there. When we went back last year the roads at the old farm where we lived are still the same. They're still clay but they have pickups now that don't seem to get stuck. The railroad is gone now. We had a railroad through our field and the hobos used to come up and ask for food. They've taken the railroad out. Trains are gone. I don't know where the hobos have gone. It's just changed so much but I really was a harsh way of living I think. I've been writing about it so my children can understand. It was a completely different era. I don't mean my children have grown up with everything they want but they don't understand how to go without a lot of things.

END OF INTERVIEW

# A shelter from the storm in an Oklahoma that was

## The Fresno Bee

Monday, Mar. 24, 1980

### Between Us: A Readers' Exchange

*Contributions for Between Us: A Reader's Exchange may be sent to Between Us, The Fresno Bee, 1626 E. St., Fresno, Calif. 93786. We are looking for personal experiences, recollections, remembrances. Contributors also are asked to include a short autobiographical paragraph to go with the story. Black and white photographs also will be accepted. No fiction or poetry.*

Jewell Martin Egbert said the "events in my story began in 1932 near Meeker, Okla." She and her husband and youngest daughter have lived in Reedley for the past 10 years, moving there from Visalia. She has five daughters and nine grandchildren. She says she enjoys cooking, gardening and sewing; and, except for a bit of poetry, this is her first attempt at writing.

By JEWELL MARTIN EGBERT

It was late spring, the afternoon hot and sticky. Large clouds began to appear and I could hear thunder rumbling in the distance. One of the clouds became heavy and dark. Rain fell violently and the sky was bombarded with continuous flashes of lightning. Tornado weather.

Mama's eyes filled with fear as she stood at the door. Daddy was down in the pasture digging in the watering hole. Our nine cows and team of horses watered there, but the level was very low and constant digging was necessary. I remember that Daddy never seemed to be home when a tornado threatened.

Mama knew she would not have time to take my two younger brothers and me to a neighbor's storm cellar. This meant walking a half mile down a wet, red clay Oklahoma road. She placed a quilt under a large, heavy, old table and we all lay down listening to the dripping of rain in pails scattered about the house under the leaking roof.

Thunder was closer now. Rain came down in liquid sheets. We huddled close together and hoped that Daddy was safe.

Fortunately the tornado missed us, but that incident prompted Mama to dig her own storm cellar. The next day she removed the shovel from the vegetable garden and began her endeavor in earnest. She knew she could expect little help from Daddy because he was always so busy on the farm. Anyway, he was never frightened by wind. He usually ignored the weather.

Life was slower then. We had no automobile, although most families did. We had a wagon. My brothers and I really did walk two miles to school, not often in snow but many times in rain. We attended a small, two-room country schoolhouse called "Pleasant Hill." Entertainment was simple, a church picnic now and then or a swim in a farmer's pond. And once in a great while our cousins would arrive bringing a big block of ice and we would make ice cream using our own cream and eggs. Since we didn't own a freezer, the delicious vanilla concoction would be poured into a gallon syrup pail. The pail was of thin metal and equipped with a handle. This was placed in a large milk bucket with the ice and salt. We each shared in the making, turning the handle until it refused to budge. The freezing time seemed like hours but this was soon forgotten when the

rich, creamy dessert was scooped into our waiting bowls. What ambrosia!

Our home was a four room, L-shaped, basic, no-frill house. We had no electricity. Our water came from a bucket lowered into an open well by a rope on a windlass. Although our house was humble in appearance the grounds became beautifully alive in the springtime. Tall, dense, white and purple lilacs towered above a richly scented yellow rose garden. I am still pleasantly haunted by the lingering fragrance that drifted through the air.

In the front of the house a summer willow swayed in the wind. To the side stood a gigantic mulberry tree, a stately sentinel, home of the mocking bird who gave us many musical performances each day and whose mimicry was unexcelled! I felt a kinship to this winged creature, believing that his melodious calls were created especially for our pleasure. As time went by, the mulberry tree became known as the "Mocking Bird Tree." In the hot summer months Daddy would suspend our coil bed springs with chains from the tree's hefty limbs, hanging them quite high just in case a mad dog might be in our vicinity. His one and only fear was of rabid dogs. We children felt that Daddy would protect us from the dreaded animals so we slept soundly. We were awakened each morning by the songs of the mocking bird. How we loved the sound!

Mom continued her digging, taking time out for the necessary commitments of a farmer's wife. She fixed breakfast early. This meal often consisted of fried potatoes smothered with milk gravy accompanied by hot biscuits spread with home churned butter and sorghum molasses. After breakfast she helped Daddy milk the cows.

During the slow, dedicated dig, she started a garden, canned tomatoes, and made jelly from the tiny plums in our pasture.

By the time the small, wild persimmons were ripe and juicy, the excavation was finished. Daddy built the steps, put on the roof, and hung the heavy door.

My mother was happy. She knew that when the storms came again we would have our own cellar not far from the house and quite close to the summer willow. Like our house, it was a basic, no-frill cellar; damp, dark, and with a seepage of water on the dirt floor. But it was our cellar.

Winter came with piercing cold



wind and blizzards. The hog was butchered and salted down. Our old, wood burning heater roared and worked overtime to keep us a bit warmer than the cold outside. Life went on.

Finally spring came. With it came tornado weather again. Thunder boomed and lightning flashed everywhere. Rain fell heavily. Mama knew

the time had come to test the cellar. She persuaded Daddy to accompany us, although he was not overjoyed at the idea. I carried my baby brother while Mama grabbed the kerosine lamp and matches. We all hurried through the rain. Daddy opened the weighted door and we quickly went down the wooden steps. Mama lit the lamp.

I immediately disliked the cellar . . . the damp odor, the semi-darkness, and the closeness. Most of all I disliked the spider crawling on the wall.

We sat on wooden boxes and Daddy drilled us on the capitals of the then 48 states. He knew them all. Time passed slowly. After about 30

See shelter, page 85

## Shelter

Continued from Page 84

minutes Daddy shrieked and clasped the back of his neck. He moved closer to the lamp and a scorpion fell from his collar.

We were terrified! We quickly returned to the house. Mama bathed his neck and tried to make him comfortable, but the pain was excruciating and swelling began immediately. In our excitement we forgot about the storm which soon settled into a gentle rain.

My father almost died from the scorpion's poison but finally did recover. I don't remember his presence ever gracing our cellar again and my almost fearless father added two

more fears to his list of one: cellars and scorpions!

In the three years that followed we did occasionally visit Mama's underground shelter. We also saw several tornados, but none of them actually touched down in our immediate area.

We then moved to California. A cellar was not needed here. It was no protection from an earthquake. Mama initiated her own defense — Prayer.

The new owner of the Oklahoma farm built a modern home not far from the old house. Soon after completion it was totally demolished by a tornado. The faithful mulberry tree was uprooted and lay like a fallen giant on the red ground.

Where is the mocking bird?

## CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

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

## Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE:	Ernest L. Martin
PLACE OF BIRTH:	Meeker, Lincoln County, Oklahoma
INTERVIEWER:	Judith Gannon
DATES OF INTERVIEWS:	April 5, 1981
PLACE OF INTERVIEWS:	Pasadena, Los Angeles County
NUMBER OF TAPES:	2
TRANSCRIBER:	Barbara Mitchell

## CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

## CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY

## The 1930s Migration to the Southern San Joaquin Valley

Oral History Program

## Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: Ernest L. Martin (Age: 49)

INTERVIEWER: Judith Gannon

DATED: April 5, 1981

J.G.: This is an interview with Mr. Ernest Martin for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Judith Gannon at 702 Park Avenue, Apartment 205, South Pasadena, California on April 5, 1981.

J.G.: Would you begin talking about your earliest memories of coming to California? I think you said before we went on tape that you really were fairly young and have little recollection of Oklahoma so why don't you begin with your earliest memories.

Martin: Yes, that will be fine. As far as Oklahoma is concerned I only have hazy recollections but they're so disjunctive it's impossible for me to put them together so I'd better start with where I finally recollect what was going on. We had a trip to California. My mother and father said it took eleven days which is most remarkable from my point of view. But I do remember one phase--crossing into California. Everybody was very happy that they were now in heaven so to speak. I don't think they were disappointed when they got here. As I recall about my father he had been a farmer for most of his life. After getting out of the service in World War I he went into farming. He had formerly been on the railroad selling newspapers or something like that but then he became a farmer and when the great Depression came and the Dust Bowl set in--we were in eastern Oklahoma and I don't know if the Dust Bowl was there or not--but anyway he sold his cattle as I recollect. He had a sale of some kind and sold some 35 head if I'm not mistaken. He had enough money for the whole family to make the trip. I think there were two or three families maybe four that came altogether on that trip. I know we came the southern route because it was in late December after Christmas when we started and they didn't want to get snows on the northern route which I suppose was very wise. But I remember only one incident when we got into California and that's only hazy. We got to Southern California and established ourselves here in the

Los Angeles area because we already had relatives here and that was the reason, I think, we came to California in the first place. It was looked upon as the land of opportunity and I suppose that's what it turned out to be as far as my father was concerned. We came to the Los Angeles area and, if I recollect correctly, stayed here about six months. My father had a major operation at the time at Sawtelle Veteran's Hospital. It was a serious one. At the same time my uncle that came out here with us also had an operation and I remember there was quite a consternation with my family. I mean my mother and my aunt because both bread winners were now in the hospital. But they got out and Dad recuperated. He didn't like Los Angeles because he was a farmer. He decided to go to San Joaquin Valley. We went up there in 1937 and we settled in Farmersville and I can well recollect that it was a most unusual experience for me because it was my first time to live in a tent. Here I was a young boy and I'd been living in a house up to that time. But now we had wall-to-wall dirt. It was just south of the main area of Farmersville and there were lots of other tents around there too. I think my dad bought that tent in Farmersville. We stayed there for some months--I'm not sure how long but less than a year--then he finally got a job, more or less a permanent one, on a farm where they raised grapes and peaches and things like that. My father was an industrious person--very honest, and that is not an egotistical appraisal. He was a very honest person and so is my mother. They didn't go to church per se but they considered themselves basically good Christian people and that was very important from their point of view. The way I understand it for people coming out from Oklahoma and Arkansas, Texas area it seemed like most of them were Baptists or Methodists or Pentecostal or whatever, but the church ethic or the Christian ethic was paramount to everybody we knew although people could sometimes on Saturday evenings and afternoons live it up. Yet the principal ethics of Christianity were very important to my family.

My father finally got this job with a rancher named Earl Millard. He liked Dad so much that he said that he could give up the tent and resettle in an old cow barn--literally it was a cow barn for the milking of cows--that if Dad wanted to fix it up he could live there. My father proceeded to do that. So he moved his family from Farmersville about two miles toward Exeter and we started living in this refurbished barn. We stayed there until World War II began.

J.G.: Before you move on so quickly could you describe what you remember about the barn-house.

Martin: Well, it was a literal barn. It had a cement floor and had a trough for cattle--I won't explain what the trough is for--that had to be covered up. A floor was put in as I recall and then there were three rooms. This couldn't have been more than 600 square feet living space and here we were a family of five living there. I know that some of the two older children didn't like it too much

because it didn't seem to be quite kosher but Dad was an honest and industrious man and felt that he was properly housing his family. I will say one thing that my mother has always said that all the time through the Depression in Oklahoma and coming out here and going into the San Joaquin Valley we never missed a meal. She takes great pride in that and I think she should. The two older children didn't like the environment in which we were living but I just grew up in it and it didn't phase me so much. As time went on I began to see that we were living quite differently than lots of other people who had been here for some time and it was a great relief in one way when we finally got into a bigger house, and a real house. Now I'm going ahead of myself a little bit perhaps but I would say our whole environment for the first three or four years was one of being a permanent migrant. We were staying in the same place but living in conditions which most people would say were quite temporary. That's the way it was. There were lots of other people in the same state. Many of my relatives as I recall both on my father and mother's side up in that area in the San Joaquin Valley had about the same type of situation so the environment wasn't anything unique to us. We seemed to be in a normal social environment for migrant workers but it was far different than the people who lived in Exeter or in Visalia or Fresno or places like that which had permanent residences.

J.G.: When you say it was far different for the people living in those towns do you mean that it was different for the migrant--the incoming migrants living there or the locals who had settled there some time before?

Martin: I think for both. I think that you might say that the migrants coming in were a subculture--an intrusion from the midwest of a different culture that people had not been used to before and the dichotomy was very pronounced.

J.G.: Talk a little more about that.

Martin: Well, the term Okie, whether you were coming from Arkansas or Texas, was a term which I think suggested the subculture that had moved into the San Joaquin Valley. I hesitate to call it that way because we were all Americans but there were different social standards. I was able to detect from the very beginning, once I came to about ten years of age, that we were kind of different than other people. We were good upstanding Christian citizens, United States citizens, but there was a very definite difference. We were "migrants"--that's the term that historians have used for us at the time. I think it probably fits very well even though we were soon permanently settled in a home. There was still the feeling of migrancy to describe Oklahomans until the middle of World War II and even after World War II. When World War II was over then the migrancy more or less stopped as far as my family was concerned. Many Oklahomans became settled citizens of the state of California in a way but still with the feeling that we had somewhere, some way to go before we could blend in with

the normal population.

J.G.: Talk a little more about that. You used the term earlier, "We were different" and now you're saying, "Before we would blend with the normal population", I'm not sure. I would like to hear you talk about what ways did you feel you were different and separated out from the locals.

Martin: To my recollection it would come back to the matter of either living in town, in a house, living or working as a garage mechanic or as an accountant or in the bank or grocery store--that type of person was different from the ones living in the country or in the suburbs of the cities and working in the fields. I suppose I got the feeling that the people who lived in the towns were the upper crust, socially. It was impressed upon me that that's the way it was. Even my own family, in fact, took great pride in some ways in believing that they were different. They were and weren't different. It's kind of a hard thing to say how different. To me this Project might be better served if I give you my point of view at the present and then go back to the early days in the San Joaquin Valley. I've been out of the San Joaquin Valley for many years. I went to the Air Force when I was eighteen so I was away from the San Joaquin Valley since I was eighteen--I'll be 49 this month. I was in the Air Force for four years and went to various parts of the world. I went to college here in Pasadena and after three years I went to England. I stayed in England for fourteen years. My wife and I were both there. Our children were born in England. I've been to Israel eighteen times and lived there over a year of my life, so I guess I've come to a position of not being a San Joaquin Valley boy anymore. I still have a little bit of the "southern" accent from my parents.

I now feel that the central or southern San Joaquin Valley is now "western Oklahoma" to a certain extent. The migrants coming in actually changed the whole environment of the southern San Joaquin [Valley]. That's the way I look at it now. When I go up there I feel that I'm going into areas of Oklahoma and Texas and I'm not just talking about my own family. I have the ability now to circulate with quite a number of people in the university system. I've just come back from England and had some talks with people from Oxford University. It appears to me that the Southern San Joaquin Valley or the San Joaquin Valley itself, it's whole society, it's whole structure, has changed and I think the people who changed it came from Oklahoma, Arkansas and Texas and some of the other adjacent areas.

J.G.: Could you talk a little bit more about how you see them as having influenced the Valley and how you feel that there is a southern Oklahoma in the San Joaquin Valley?

Martin: I think that we won. By that I mean, we took over. We were the outcasts in a certain sense at first. But now the people living in

the San Joaquin Valley--inside the cities, inside the city limits--and the people in Visalia even in Fresno and Bakersfield are now descendants of those people and it's changed the whole environment of the central San Joaquin Valley. The Valley area to me, viewing it now and after 30 to 40 years of being away, seems to show that we won--we took over. This is why you don't really hear so much of Okies anymore in the area--you might but it's only a nostalgic term--it's something that's not really derogatory anymore.

J.G.: Was it a derogatory term when you were coming up?

Martin: Oh yes. Very pronounced. That's the point. The people in the towns who had been there since World War I or before were a group apart--literally a group apart. Most of them were WASPS [White Anglo-Saxon Protestants] you might say but so were we. Yet we were very different and the term Okie was the word by which the division was made. It's amazing to me how much influence one word can have. I recognized from childhood that I was of a different breed even though I was kind of smart in some ways. Maybe I didn't appear like a migrant worker's son. But the people in town actually felt we were different and that there was an invasion. It was an invasion that was upsetting their culture and they didn't like it too much. There was a natural resistance to it. To me it's just as natural as anything. If I'd have been one of them I think that I would have said the same thing. However, after World War II the people who came from the east began to buy property and began to be quite prosperous. They moved into the cities. I didn't want to be a "farm boy" from Oklahoma so I went into town and got a job at Greyhound Bus Lines. I got a business job. Then I went to college and wanted to get into meteorology and that's why I went into the Air Force. Indeed, I became a meteorologist--the government sent me to the University of New Mexico during the Korean War for a year and I became a meteorologist. But I'd left the San Joaquin Valley by this time and I was thankful to. This is something I think is important to say because I don't know how many others were like this but it's a natural psychological desire to want to belong--to want to be like the others. If the others are one way and that's the way society is, you tend to blend--you want to.

Well, that's I guess how I wanted to be so I joined the people in town. I left behind my migratory instincts because I didn't have it in the first place. By moving into the cities and moving into the towns, the society got changed by us. When I go there in 1981--and over the past ten years--to the San Joaquin Valley I feel I am in Oklahoma, Arkansas and Texas. They have taken over the central Valley. They don't call Bakersfield--this goes back even ten or fifteen years--they don't call Bakersfield "Nashville West" with country and western music and all of that for nothing. Such music became very prestigious and you'd get Oklahoma men coming along like Merle Haggard. I don't know Merle Haggard. I never even met him in my life. I don't even like his music much but that's



neither here nor there--there is a power in music. It was a part of our way of thinking. It was very important with the migratory workers. There were two things that gave us entertainment--movies and music, usually cowboy music as we called it. We thrived on movies, especially cowboy movies. A big part of people's lives was church--their church and their music. Even in the church they would have music. Now our family didn't go to church but so many others did. But movies, music and church were really what motivated them--kept them going. They would work, work hard picking cotton, plums, peaches and everything like that and they'd come home in the evening turn on the radio and listen to music. If they could get the Grand Old Opry from Nashville, Tennessee in those days it was a great triumph. I can remember my father turning that dial to make sure he could get WSM [call letters] Nashville--and if he could get it he would brag about that for a week's time.

From a psychological point of view, such music had a powerful influence upon melding together the people. The music was a common type of language that everybody understood. Church was important too. Our brand of Christianity--Protestantism--was God's own denomination. I don't know any Catholics. Catholics, at that time, were looked upon as inferior. We were the elite as far as Christianity was concerned and nobody else was. But it's stupid from my point of view now.

J.G.: Don't you think that's fairly common? All of the religions think that they're the elite, the one that's chosen so it's understandable.

Martin: It's true, but look at the power of the emotional type churches stemming in a sense from Pentecostalism. Lots of our people throughout the San Joaquin Valley subscribe to it.

These people coming here could relate with one another all the way from Gorman to Sacramento or way up to Redding with a "common" like for music, cowboy movies, and emotional churches. It was a type of unifying force. So music and cowboy movies were just part of our culture--we didn't know anything else. We liked war pictures and things like that too but the idea of the west, the cowboy, were their motivating force. We like it. They liked it very much. They considered themselves the best Americans in the world. If you don't believe me, ask them. I think these psychological things became a widespread universal language for us. The Pentecostals, Baptists, Methodists, coming out of the middle west or Arkansas and Oklahoma, were "unified". The fact that most of them like cowboy music as it was called in those days and cowboy pictures and John Wayne, who was the finest guy that ever came along as far as we were concerned. Even Gene Autrey was a stabilizing force. We would go to the movies, Saturday afternoon was always movies. The movies coming out of Hollywood influenced us tremendously, especially if they were in the early Americana type of thing. I think they reflected our inner desires to perpetuate this. To our people, their way of life was America. New York wasn't America. Maine wasn't America. Chicago



might be acceptable. But we were the real America. These things made up their culture and it solidified the whole of the San Joaquin Valley, as I see it, into a type of transplanted Oklahoma. They took over and even the stable, steadfast, long resident people that were there now had to give in to this. So I think it's quite a phenomenon that actually has taken place.

J.G.: So what I'm understanding you to say is that over time, rather than as frequently happens when minority groups come in they assimilate to the culture of the majority, in your opinion, the opposite was true in the case of the San Joaquin Valley that the minority coming in the Oklahomans, Arkies and Missourians were the ones that prevailed and the existent culture meshed in with the view of the migrants.

Martin: Absolutely, from my point of view, and I think it's valid. The vanquished finally conquered and they conquered almost completely.

J.G.: Do you think that was because of sheer numbers or, how, since that's a different way, do you think that that came about?

Martin: I may be wrong on this but I think numbers had a real effect, but there was also proliferation. It wasn't just like salt throughout the southern San Joaquin Valley it was like tablespoons of salt all over the place. Not only that, the people who came in because we were called Okies at first and given a lower class. But believe it or not, those people coming from Oklahoma and Arkansas and Texas had a natural inborn feeling of superiority. It's hard to believe. I mean here they are dirt farmers having nothing whatsoever. They couldn't rub two dimes sometimes between their fingers but they still felt a superiority--the superiority primarily came I think because we considered ourselves better Christians than anybody else. I know there were scoundrels all over the place, some of the worst scoundrels came from these people. But they thought of themselves as "special to God" in some ways. So there were two types--the rough and rowdy and all of that but even the rough and rowdy would never or hardly ever criticize the Bible. If they ever criticized the Bible they were in trouble and they knew they were in trouble. They could go out with their women on Saturday night, they could hell it up during the week but they hardly ever talked against the Bible, never talked against the Bible. That's an exaggeration but you see the point. As a result of that there's a feeling of superiority and that feeling, if you have people who are dynamic and they have nothing and they see other people around who have something and they want to get it and they have this dynamism about them, they'll get it. They got it. So I can just say, as an outsider now coming back for the last ten years, I would say, if you want to see Oklahoma, go to the San Joaquin Valley.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1

J.G.: Tell me a little bit about since you went to school right during the height of the anti-"Okie" feeling what that experience was

like for you.

Martin: Well, I went to a school right outside of Exeter and there couldn't have been any more than 100 kids in the school. We all had a camaraderie with each other that was quite fine. There were very few rich kids in that school as we might call them or kids with their fathers having farms or landed property and things like that. But I would say that half of the children there were just like I was and as a result of that I did not find any major problems while I was going to grade school. My sister and my brother, however, being older having been sent to high school at that time, might speak rather caustically about how they were treated. I wasn't treated that way so much and like I say, I made relatively good grades in school and, in fact, I almost was too smart. By that I mean, I remember how I got spanked. Oh, did I get spanked and I deserved it. What happened was this. Mrs. Walsh, our teacher, had us name the capitals of the United States. We had a little quiz going on and I knew those capitals because my dad always taught me. He liked geography and things like that so I knew them all. So I was standing there rather arrogantly, as a nine or ten year old kid. It came my turn to answer and I answered them all. Finally, she came to Oklahoma. She says, "Ernest, what's the capital of Oklahoma?" I answered, "City". She said, "Ernest, what's the capital of Oklahoma?" I answered again rather arrogantly, "City". And she said, "Ernest Martin, you come right here." And she spanked me in front of those kids and I deserved it because I was being smart with her.

By the time I got to high school, this was now after World War II, things were being ameliorated tremendously, as far as "Okies" were concerned. There were so many people from Oklahoma in high school that when a person started criticizing them he was going to get into some trouble. There were still, however, in high school in Exeter a tendency for us to stay together a little bit too much. But after World War II and football coming along and some of those boys from Oklahoma and Texas were the best football players you could imagine, it changed rapidly. What happened was now they're all right. Now they're in society. What happened was that the accents that some of these kids had now almost prevail in certain areas of the San Joaquin Valley, maybe not in central Bakersfield but certainly in some places.

J.G.: In Bakersfield you can hear the twang, the drawl very, very frequently in the people. So then after you graduated from high school you left immediately to go to the Air Force?

Martin: No, I went one year to COS---that's College of the Sequoias in Visalia. I was working in Greyhound Bus Lines at the same time. I wanted a business career of some kind but I wasn't quite sure. I certainly didn't want anything to do with a farm. I mean this was something that was an anathema to me and I guess it still is reflective of my not wanting to be associated with the "Okie" image.

For some reason or another I didn't like living in a tent with dirt on the floor--well, that sounds reasonable enough. I didn't even like living in that barn. I mean it didn't bother me all that much like it did I think my sister but I wanted to escape that and so did my sister and brother. So here I was at Greyhound Bus Lines doing all right there. Then I went to college one year at COS and that's where I got an interest in meteorology. My professor suggested--since I was rather precocious, I was only sixteen when I got out of high school--that the best thing to do was to go into the Air Force. The government would train me to be a meteorologist. So I talked it over with my parents and went in. Low and behold the Korean War broke out just two weeks after I got in and as a result of that lots more opportunities came my way to advance in education. That is when I left the San Joaquin Valley and I left it for good except to go back occasionally on visits. I will say this that even as late as ten years ago, when I would go back there and stay for about two weeks, I'd find myself slipping back into the environment. It's so easy to pick up. It's kind of an easy going type of social environment. It's so easy to get into it. It's so relaxing in some ways. It's not a high pressure kind of a deal. I'd find myself getting back into it but as soon as I come back to Los Angeles and go back to London where I lived I would shed that early image very, very quickly. But it's so easy to fall into and that is another reason why I think it has power associated with it because most of the people in the migratory period, which I would say was from the early 1930s to the end of World War II or maybe 1950, were ambitious in one way but slow and easy in another way. There's hardly any high pressure to it. It's powerful in some ways but with me I escaped it. I would not feel at home in the San Joaquin Valley anymore, I just wouldn't. I love it. I love to visit, I even thought of moving to Bakersfield on one occasion about six or seven years ago but my business would make it impossible for me to live in the area. I would only consider Bakersfield as an investment in property and I might live there but I want to be close enough to Los Angeles. I am not one who fits in well any longer in the environment of the San Joaquin Valley. By that I do not mean central Fresno--when I say central Bakersfield I'm not talking about "central" geographically, I'm talking about the upper crust of Bakersfield I guess maybe I might like that. I don't know. But I wouldn't want to be in the San Joaquin Valley anymore. I'll live in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

J.G.: What I'm understanding is that you feel like the more cosmopolitan areas are more comfortable for you?

Martin: Yes, but because of environment. If I had not gone into the Air Force at the time and been exposed to other regions of the United States and the world and if I would not have been associated with the college that I was and if I'd not gone to London, I probably would have blended in very well. In fact, I probably would have said, like so many others up there, "I wouldn't like to live anywhere else." Southern California is different. Southern California is

the big city Oklahoma or big city midwest--so different from San Francisco. It's more cosmopolitan in San Francisco. But Southern California is different and it has been taken over, as I view it from my own personal opinion, by Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas.

J.G.: It sounds like what you're saying is that that's country. And country with all of the connotations and the life style that goes with country versus city and the kinds of life style that you view as part of city living.

Martin: I would say so. Well, that's my appraisal. That's personal but to me, it's country western.

J.G.: Tell me a little bit about your experiences after you got out of the Air Force.

Martin: After I got out of the Air Force I went back to San Joaquin Valley for one year. I was in doubt about a particular organization that I was getting in contact with. That organization was down here in Pasadena. I didn't know whether I wanted to join or not. It was a religious organization but I wasn't sure, so I went back to Visalia and had a second year at COS. In fact, I changed from meteorology to social science, history and that is my profession now--history and theology. I'm not into church or a denomination. I have nothing to do with that. My organization is the Foundation for Biblical Research. We deal with Biblical matters be what they may, doctrinal, prophetic, geographical, archaeological or whatever it might be. I got into history and once I got into history at COS. I went one year and decided to go south and I came to Pasadena. I turned my back on the San Joaquin Valley from that time forward. Not back in the sense of revulsion, but I simply saw greener pastures for what I wanted to do in other places.

J.G.: How did you become interested in the Biblical research area since it appears that although your family considered themselves to be religious they weren't extremely involved in church and that kind of thing.

Martin: That is true. In fact, it was my father that introduced me to this religious group that was in Pasadena in which I became very much entwined. I've now exited myself from it a long time ago, thank God, from my point of view--nice people and all that, but too dogmatic. My father introduced me to it when I got back from Greenland. I was in the Air Force and I was on furlough. He had the radio on and he was listening to this Herbert W. Armstrong who came out of Pasadena. I wasn't even paying any attention to it but to make a long story short, my father said, "Ernest, this man is smart. Why don't you listen to him?" So I listened to him. I said, "Yes, he has some interesting things [to say]." Finally, step by step, I became very interested in it simply because he was prophesying the end of the world by 1972, and that Christ would be

back at His Second Advent by 1975. Now of course this goes back to 1955 so we had twenty years to go. I got very interested simply because I got scared. I considered myself an intelligent young man but this man seemed to have a message which was very unique. He seemed to speak with authority.

He got me interested. The environment in which I placed myself in that group was very powerful in order to influence young minds. Within a year after I came down here and joined them I went back home I went back quite frequently because I was in Pasadena for three years of college here to see my family. My father kicked himself in the seat of the trousers for introducing me to it simply because he was interested from a superficial point of view. His basic concept of Christianity revolved around the word love and concern for your neighbor and being honest and being fair and paying your taxes and thanking God that Christ died on the cross for us. All of those basic but that's as far as it went with my father. That's about as far as it went with my mother until she got older. But we had a very superficial Christianity--very profound in the heart--but superficial as far as the organization was concerned. We never went to church--a regular church--lots of others did but we didn't so much and when I got in contact with the group down here my father got very upset and my mother to a certain extent. Finally, just before he died a little over ten years ago he finally resolved in his mind that what I had done was probably all right. I think he'd be far happier with me now knowing I'm not in it. I'm not serious about things like that anymore. I'm very much like my father now. I'll turn on the radio or television and I'll watch the religious people speak and they have every right to speak. I get a big kick out of it. I'm not seriously inclined that way anymore but I'm not anti-religious. I'm certainly not anti-Christian.

I came down here to a church group and that's what really took me away from the San Joaquin Valley because once I got connected with the group and I came up through the ranks pretty quickly in their academic ranks. Then after three years of college they sent me to their offices in England. I had just married my wife--been married to her about a year. We're divorced now, but we went over there in 1958 and then by 1960 they wanted to start a new college in England. So I came back here and got some more training at the college and I helped to select a place in England with another man and we started a college and finally got 300 people going to it. It was a very nice college.

J.G.: That still was a part of Herbert W. Armstrong?

Martin: Yes, it was. By the way I'll say this about Herbert W. Armstrong's message, it had an appeal to lots of individuals. Where he made his greatest inroads was amongst people from Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas, or from California, Oregon and Washington but most of them were transplants coming from those eastern areas. It was a message which greatly appealed to them because it was a message of authority.

There was a basic fundamentalism to it which appealed to them very much. Still, there was a lot of resistance to it from the mainline Pentecostal groups or Baptists and so forth. It caught my attention.

We started a college in England and I became Dean of Faculty. I was teaching all the time--my main profession was teaching and I was also a minister ordained as a teaching minister. I had some pastorates in England and I also became Dean of Faculty which is analogous to a principal over here. That lasted until 1972 and I came back to Pasadena and became their chairman of the Department of Theology at Ambassador College in Pasadena. I finally left them in early January 1974 which now goes back about eight years. I've been on my own since that time. I established the Foundation for Biblical Research immediately after that with about 300 people on the mailing list and we quickly grew to about 3,000 within the first year--the second year we had 5,000. I now have about 5,000 people on our mailing list. I don't teach in authoritarian type of religious manner of any kind. I think that's the reason why I've been successful. But during the last years of my tenure with Ambassador College I suggested to Mr. Armstrong, our Chancellor, while in England back in 1968 that it would be a good idea if we got into archaeological excavation in Jerusalem. That would help the prestige of the college--that would help the church and it would help him personally. He always wanted to get on Radio Jerusalem. It was a psychological thing with him. He wanted to be in Jerusalem. I thought this was a good way of doing it. He took my suggestion and told me to go down to Jerusalem.

I went to Jerusalem with another man and we talked to Professor Mazar at the Hebrew University who was formerly the president and rector of the University. Low and behold we were in an archaeological excavation in Jerusalem. That next summer in 1969 I took 50 students down there for two months with my wife, my family. We worked on the south temple wall at Jerusalem which became the biggest archaeological excavation in the history of the Middle East. Within the next year I had 100 students down there and the following year another 100 and 100 after that year. I was down there for five summers in archaeology. I have been interested in history of the Middle East and contemporary history as well as ancient history and Biblical history. When I started my own organization, after getting out of Ambassador College, I had the external credentials for carrying on with a work dealing with Biblical matters. By this time, I'd established a certain amount of prestige throughout the world mainly with people in the Worldwide Church of God which is the denomination of Ambassador College. From then on people kept writing me and they still write me.

Our organization is going fine. I will say this that my organization is not one in trying to put down my former one at all, but I'll say this, the philosophical principles which govern it are fundamentally different than those over there. They have a hierarchial church government from the top down and we have no church government at all.

Ours is primarily for education.

Well, to make a long story short, when I left the San Joaquin Valley in 1955 and I changed my career from meteorology to history and finally to theology I didn't turn my back on the San Joaquin Valley or the people but now I had a new mission from my point of view and I stayed within that and because of my experience overseas, living over there for many, many years and meeting so many types of people, I now find it a little difficult to live within the Valley environment. I find it very hard to stay very long even around some of my older relatives. That doesn't mean they're bad--they're some of the finest people, better than I am--but the point is I now have gone away from it. That's why I might be able, in one way of looking at it, to give a pragmatic, almost a distant appraisal of the whole thing. What happened in John Steinbeck's book was very typical.

J.G.: Typical of what?

Martin: Typical of the life style within the first two years--within the first two or three years right after the Depression I mean right before World War II. I would say it was a little different for our family because the way I understand it the book depicted a number of rascals in the migratory group. My own father and mother were different, much was so typical. The casting of that picture was superb, absolutely superb. I identified with virtually every individual in that picture. It was just perfect--couldn't have been better. Everyone deserved an academy award in that one because it was so typical. But it wasn't typical after World War II. No it had changed, it changed very much. I can look at a distance now and look at the San Joaquin Valley and I know it's an exaggeration but still at the same time I think that we conquered.

J.G.: There seems to be a lot of interest in the country western music at least in Bakersfield--a lot of twang--so I might have to agree with you there. What did your parents think of The Grapes of Wrath? I've talked to families that are like you that say it was really right on target and others have said nothing--their experience was nowhere like that at all.

Martin: There's one part of that picture that was very, very different but yet at the same time I can understand it to have happened. If I'm not mistaken when they first got out here in that picture was near Arvin or somewhere near Bakersfield, I think, where the big camps were. All of that looked quite typical. But none of us were ever in any of those big camps, none of us ever were. There was up near Farmersville such a camp. They called it a government camp. Some of our friends were there but our family never was.

J.G.: Why do you think that was?

Martin: Pride. I think that my family never wanted to take anything from



the government. They wanted to be independent. They would rather support the government than have the government support them. That's not giving accolades to them, it's just a fact. They never would have liked to take relief. There were a lot of people that I knew that didn't want that--then some that did. The personalities that were picked for that film coming from Oklahoma were so typical I can imagine that happened that way.

J.G.: What you're saying is sometimes the experience was a little bit different as to the living conditions and that kind of thing but the personality as portrayed by the characters was really accurate.

Martin: They were superb, absolutely superb. I could not imagine that those people didn't come from Oklahoma and Arkansas. I'd bet money they all did and I don't think any of them did. But they did a marvelous job.

J.G.: One of the things that maybe you might have been aware of first hand or have some ideas about--there were a lot of attempts to organize the migrants at that time by various groups and they didn't really didn't seem to get it off the ground too well. Did you have any experience with that or hear your family talking about it or have any insights as to why you think that the labor movement just really didn't make it during that time?

Martin: To my knowledge my father and all of my immediate relatives that I can think about were never approached by anyone to organize. I think that there would have been a resistance by my father and the people that I know. I have the feeling that they didn't know what unions were all about to begin with. Most of them were farmers, dirt farmers. No one even heard of a union. Well, they did but unions were completely foreign to our culture. In fact, my family felt that unions were foreign to the American way of life because Communism was even associated with unions somewhat and we were anti-Communist. Anything anti-American we were against. We sometimes took it to an extreme. They were very opinionated on things. I don't think the labor movement would have done well with us. I guess it didn't. They looked upon themselves as nice, upstanding, Christian folk that were a part of this country and California was as much theirs as Oklahoma.

J.G.: They saw being a part of the labor union was something that was anti-American?

Martin: Almost, certainly anti-Oklahoma, Texas and Arkansas and, like I say, it was completely foreign to them. They didn't even know what to expect about it. I don't think it would have had a chance in the world in my family organizing. Now people may have talked to my father--I don't know, I was a youngster at the time but I know one thing they wouldn't have had a chance in the world with him because he said, "Look, I do my day's job. I get a day's pay. If I don't get enough money I'll go and ask for a raise."



J.G.: He apparently didn't feel like he was ever taken advantage of like some of the people that I have spoken with who really have some very unhappy recollections of being cheated if there was any possibility of getting away with that they were cheated at every turn.

Martin: No, not with my family. I think I can state again and it may seem like they're some of the nicest guys in the world--and I don't mean it that way but I don't recall my father ever saying he was cheated. I don't ever recall it from my mother either. After all here's a the deal. They went out and picked cotton--it was \$3 per 100 pounds. They picked their cotton and got their money. They had enough to eat, to keep clothes on their backs and a roof over their heads. Who could want more, when you had lost all in Oklahoma? To my people, God blessed them by allowing them to come to California.

END OF INTERVIEW

## INDEX

- Art/Music
  - Country music, 33, 34
- California
  - First impression, 10, 27, 29
  - Treatment in, 14, 25, 31-33, 43
  - Wilmar, 10
  - Farmersville, 11, 23, 30, 41
  - Exeter, 11, 19, 20, 30, 36
  - Visalia, 12, 13, 21, 22, 36, 38
  - Los Angeles, 10, 17, 27, 30
  - Reedley, 22
  - Linnell, 23
  - San Joaquin Valley, 36-38, 41
  - Pasadena, 38
  - Bakersfield, 41
- The Depression, 29
- Discrimination
  - In schools, 19, 20, 36
  - In community, 31-33
- Education
  - In Oklahoma, 2, 3, 16
  - In California, 11, 19-21, 27, 36
  - College, 20, 32, 33, 36-40
  - Discrimination, 19, 20, 36
  - Athletics, 36
- Family Life
  - Entertainment, 34
  - Sports, 36
  - Cars, 9, 16, 17
  - Cooking/Food, 10, 17
  - Dating, 21
  - Marriage, 3-5, 21, 39
  - Shivaree, 5
- Farming
  - Income, 16
  - Methods, 7, 16
  - Land ownership, 12, 18, 22
  - Land rental, 1, 2, 6, 7
  - Sharecropping, 2, 6, 15
  - Crops, 2, 15
  - Drought, 7, 16, 27
  - Dust storms, 27, 29
  - Government policies, 22
- The Grapes of Wrath/Steinbeck
  - Identification with, 18, 41, 42
  - Objections to, 18, 25
  - Movie, 42
- Health
  - Diseases, 3, 7
  - Health care, 3, 7-9, 30
  - Birth of children, 7, 8
  - Causes of death, 4, 5, 13
- Housing
  - Homestead in Oklahoma, 1, 2, 6, 7, 15, 16, 26, 27
  - Homes in California, 11, 13, 18-24, 30, 31, 37
  - Tents, 30, 37
  - Grower-provided, 11, 18, 23
  - Government-provided, 23, 41
- Impact of Experience, 12, 14, 19-21, 32-35, 41, 43
- Migration to California
  - Attraction of California, 8, 16, 27
  - Reasons for move, 7, 8, 16, 30
  - Transportation, 9, 17
  - Shelter, 9
  - Belongings, 9, 18
  - Funds available, 17, 29
  - Cooking, 10
  - Route, 9, 18, 29
  - Border inspections, 10, 29

(continued)

## INDEX

## The New Deal

Roosevelt, 22, 23

WPA, 22

## "Okie"

Definition, 14, 31, 33

Reactions to term, 14,  
33, 36

## Oklahoma

Oklahoma Territory, 1-3

Paden, 4

Hillabee, 4

Prague, 5, 6

Meeker, 6, 15, 16

Return to, 16, 28

## Relief

Attitudes toward, 41, 42

## Religion

Churches, 2, 10, 14, 27,  
30, 34, 35, 38, 39-41

Revivals, 5

## Violence, 23

## Work

Migrant labor, 31

Odd jobs, 11

Permanent jobs, 11, 20-22,  
24, 30Employers, 11, 12, 20, 21,  
30, 33

Unions, 42

Strikes, 24

Wages, 17, 24, 42, 43

During WW II, 20

After WW II, 33, 37, 41