CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

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

Oral History Program

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE:	Elbert Ray Garretson
PLACE OF BIRTH:	Chattanooga, Chomanche County, Oklahoma
INTERVIEWER:	Michael Neely
DATES OF INTERVIEWS:	June 25 and 26, 1981
PLACE OF INTERVIEWS:	Palmdale, Los Angeles County
NUMBER OF TAPES:	3
TRANSCRIBER:	Barbara Mitchell

Preface

Reverend Garretson lives on a quiet street in Palmdale in a neat and attractive parsonage adjacent to the church he pastors. He is a man who seems larger than life. His speech has the manner of an educated, well trained orator. His expressions are unconsciously theatrical. He is interesting to listen to and an excellent storyteller. We conducted our interviews at the front pew of the large chapel, however, an atmosphere of intimacy remained. Rev. Garretson has studied the history of his family and is proud of his heritage. He has a fine collection of old photos and documents. He and his delightful wife spent extra time showing these to me. I enjoyed our time together and was left with an indelible impression of an active, strong and vibrant personality.

Michael Neely
Interviewer

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INTERVIEWEE: Elbert R. Garretson (Age: 65)

INTERVIEWER: Michael Neely

DATED: June 25, 1981

M.N.: This is an interview with Mr. Elbert R. Garretson for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project at 38756 Puerta, Palmdale, California on June 25, 1981 at 2 p.m.

M.N.: What's the first thing you can remember?

Garretson: When I was two and a half going across a pasture in Comanche, Oklahoma, on my father's back and I was carrying my teddy bear.

M.N.: What year was that?

Garretson: It was about 1917. I was born on November 15, 1915.

M.N.: What kind of teddy bear was that?

Garretson: It was a brown bear. We had our farm there in Comanche, Oklahoma and then we decided for some reason to move to Ponca City. The folks had a covered wagon and we went across Oklahoma to Ponca City just below the Kansas line in 1917. I do recall going on the covered wagon behind a team of white mules. I remember going through the Indians towns. We went slowly of course with the covered wagon and on one occasion the mules being a little fractious jumped. My mother and I fell down just in front of the double tree and right in the traces of the mules. That was one scary case. Part of the time we were a little skittish about going through some of the Indian hamlets and villages, but we made it fine through into Ponca City. These roads were just little country roads that we'd go through from one little village to the other. We went up to Ponca City for a while and I know as I look back the folks were anticipating what to do. Then they moved to Monita which is in California and there's no more Monita now.

M.N.: How long were they in Ponca City?

Garretson: Just about a year possibly a little less.

M.N.: Do you remember your home there?

Garretson: I do now but I'm sure there's no remnant. In fact, I found out this last March that there's an old Ponca City and a new one because we went through there going from Oklahoma City to Wichita. We went right close to Ponca City.

M.N.: What was your home like there in Ponca City?

Garretson: It was just a country home. They raised wheat and I remember the gypsies coming through to beg and borrow. There was quite a situation.

M.N.: What were they like?

Garretson: They came in long wagon trains and they would come boldly up to your place to make all kinds of barter with you whether you wanted to or not.

M.N.: Where were they from?

Garretson: I think it must have been a contraction of Egyptians. They were called gypsies and I don't know where the word gyp comes from entirely either but I think in the realm of etymology there might be some connection. This was really interesting to me as I look back.

M.N.: Did they dress oddly?

Garretson: The women wore colorful long dresses. I have heard all kinds of stories of some of the women coming to the house right on in and getting what they wanted. Sometimes the gypsy men would go out to the barn and take things if only the housewife was there. I've heard stories like this as a boy. I can't confirm anything but I do remember some scary stories about the long trains of gypsies that would come through.

M.N.: Were farm houses left unattended?

Garretson: More or less. Maybe the housewife would be there and the men would be out working.

M.N.: Was your father sharecropping?

Garretson: I don't think he ever sharecropped or very little anyway. Generally he would do his own farming. It's possible that he rented a place but as I recall they bought this place in Ponca City. Then they decided to come out and he would work either in the oil fields or as a carpenter in southern California where some of the relatives

including his mother lived. Then I remember moving back to Oklahoma and the first Armistice in 1918. We came out to California in 1918 but we moved back in time for the Armistice. We were on our farm in western Oklahoma.

M.N.: Do you remember the trip out?

Garretson: Yes, we made it on the train. We'd disposed of our old mules. The two white mules, Kate and Dina, as I recall we kept them. We moved to California for a while and then took the train and went back and I remember some interesting things along that line. We'd gone from southern California on the train and got as far as Tucumcari, New Mexico. I remember the train was ready to leave and I was still at the restaurant. I don't know what caused me to linger behind but I barely got on the train with my folks.

M.N.: You were about four?

Garretson: Even younger, between three and four. I made it on the train.

M.N.: Were you excited about that trip?

Garretson: Oh yes, it was very memorable as a boy leaving Ponca City coming to the Gardena Valley in Los Angeles. Incidently it was all wide open country in Los Angeles. You could go from Gardena to Los Angeles and you would have these little Japanese farms. Then we went back to Oklahoma. They had 120 acres and it was a very good place. I was really rich. I didn't have a penny but had freedom and ponies. All told, I've had seven ponies.

M.N.: When you got back to Oklahoma?

Garretson: Yes. Then later, due to the financial situations around the time of the Depression, the folks would come back out for a few months and my father would work in the steel mills or in the oil fields. We would resuscitate financially and we could go back.

M.N.: No one has had quite such an interesting story of going back and forth.

Garretson: We vacillated there. We kept the farm, however.

M.N.: It was always the same farm?

Garretson: After leaving the one in Ponca City we went back to western Oklahoma near Elk City, to a little community north of Elk City called Hammon, Oklahoma.

M.N.: What year did you move to Hammon?

Garretson: I believe this was 1918. Our first trip to California was only a few months at Monita and Gardena and then we moved back to Hammon and stayed there alternately until 1936.

M.N.: Do you remember your impression of Gardena?

Garretson: Oh yes--Main Street in Gardena. I started to say 166th Street. I'm a little doubtful but I've been down there at different times, same stores, same houses. Actually the Harbor Freeway goes over Gardena Grammar School and I remember just the other day we went down to Catalina but we went to the port at Long Beach. As we crossed over about where 166th Street was I pointed to where Gardena Grammar School used to be because the Harbor Freeway goes right over it.

M.N.: But you do have memories of it when you were there?

Garretson: Very well. I spent some of the fifth grade there in Gardena Grammar School. That was on a later trip and not for long. I think on two other occasions we came out to resuscitate financially. The farm was a good old farm but it really wasn't rich soil. What really brought us out here in 1936 was not the fact of the Depression but the dust bowl and the loss of our cattle. We kept the farm for several years after that but the thing that brought us out in 1936 was that particular thing.

M.N.: Back in the early days when you were quite young, do you remember what your father was like?

Garretson: Yes, I think I could describe almost any situation or any question a person might ask. To me he was always very loyal, loving, helpful. He was a strict disciplinarian but he was also one that made you appreciate him.

M.N.: Was he a religious man?

Garretson: Yes, religious. He'd been at Whittier College at Mount Pleasant, Iowa. He played the clarinet and he had learned so many fine songs typical of which might be The Old Oaken Bucket and a number of fine old refrains of songs right on down to some very humorous songs. I grew up with him as he sang those songs as we farmed and worked together. One of the finest memories of my life was the fact that he left impressions of good songs and good thoughts and I appreciated it.

M.N.: Why did he go to college?

Garretson: Whittier College was basically a Quaker college. Family friends were Oliver Wendell Holmes and John Greenleaf Whittier and second great-grandfather John Green Garretson and he was named for John Greenleaf. They were all in the Iowa area. Although my father was not a Quaker, they were all from Quaker backgrounds years gone by. We have the data since 1656 when John Garretson Van Der Huff sailed over on the Prince Moritz and landed at Manhattan. They were all raised in New York. My father was born in Buffalo in 1895 I believe and then migrated down through Iowa and then into Indian

Territory.

M.N.: So in a sense you came from a family with an intellectual background. Was he an educated man?

Garretson: I considered him that way but not necessarily skilled in anything but carpentry. He was very good as a carpenter known in Kern County as a good contractor. While he was in Wasco and Bakersfield he built for others as well as for himself.

M.N.: Was he a literate man?

Garretson: Yes, I thought very much so. I learned more of the English grammar in early years than I did later and I certainly had some good teachers later but I know his helping as a boy to correct this on such things as double negatives and a number of things that we would have otherwise slowed our English needlessly and I think I do bad enough now.

He looked good in a straw hat. One year instead of binding our wheat we had it in heads stacked and ready for the thrashing machine. This was before the combines were really extant. The stacks were all ready with the heads which looked so fine. I have pictures of it now of myself, my brother and my father. We were ready for the thrasher to move in the next day but we had quite a tornado come in and hit the entire stack and there was a year's crop gone. We looked like bad farmers that morning.

M.N.: You couldn't recover it?

Garretson: No, it was scattered all over the acreage. Everything was gone but we did have a lot of joy on the farm. I don't think we made much but we did have things during the Depression years of the 1930s when there were soup lines and so many difficulties in the congested areas of the cities. We ate well, worked hard, didn't make much but this was why I thought I was rich as I look back at it.

M.N.: What did your father look like?

Garretson: He looked better than I do. I consider that he was quite well proportioned and I considered him handsome. That was my opinion. I think of his kindness to me. You know beauty is in the eye of the beholder. I looked at him as a handsome man because he was a good, kind hearted person and fair. I never found him to be anything but fair to all of us and I really appreciated it.

M.N.: What was your mother like?

Garretson: Very kind. If I consider my father kind, I consider my mother even more so but she also was strict in discipline. I think I was very fortunate to have parents who loved us and yet would discipline us and showed that love in discipline.

M.N.: Was she younger than your father?

Garretson: Yes. I believe she was born in 1892 and was from German background, the name was Rummel.

M.N.: Was she pretty?

Garretson: I considered her so as I look back to the younger pictures. I never did think of her in terms of prettiness. I just thought of her in terms of a mother I could depend on and somebody who was really helpful in any way she could be. She didn't hesitate to lay on the discipline when it was needed.

M.N.: How would she do that?

Garretson: She had been known to use a tamarack switch when it was handy.

M.N.: Did you forget about it?

Garretson: Oh, I didn't forget the lesson.

M.N.: Did she work in the field?

Garretson: Very little. She'd get out some but mainly she would have a large garden each year and she felt so at home in the garden. She really wasn't out in the field with us fellows.

M.N.: Do you recall the kind of food you ate?

Garretson: In general, it was from the garden such as potatoes, greens, the beans, things that we would raise. There was an oddity, maybe not so much oddity, but in that particular area there was something that would be gathered more or less wild that you'd make a very fine salad out of called poke and the dock greens. Then we'd have the wild plum thickets and go in there.

M.N.: Was it hard to get them?

Garretson: No just sometimes you had to watch out for yellow jackets and we could go harvest these in a number of early cars, sometimes Model T Fords, sometimes wagons. I remember riding in a surrey with a fringe on top. A number of families would go to the plum thickets, and we would take our picnic lunch. We'd gather in our plums and it was really an exhilarating, joyful, memorable experience.

M.N.: What does a plum thicket look like?

Garretson: They were really thick. They were not a tall tree but closely knit and woven and you'd have to go into minute areas to get the plums out. They were small plums. I remember on one occasion an old fellow came to see us and my mother had a delicious dish of plums and by the time he'd finished there were more plum seeds than I've ever seen in my life.

M.N.: Were they tasty?

Garretson: Oh, yes. They could be bitter but these farm women really knew how to fix the plums and they were delicious.

M.N.: Would she she also can?

Garretson: Yes, there was a lot of canning done of the native fruits. There was nothing wasted and the whole community would go if they found a given area where there were peaches or apples. Someone coming through might tell and they would notify one another. We had the old country phones and the general ring would be used to notify one another where they could purchase things or to go to a certain orchard. I thought that was wonderful. For instance, the general ring came one night that the candles on the Christmas tree had caught the Babswitch Memorial School on fire and so many people lost their lives. It occurred near Hobart, Oklahoma and the general notified everyone of how many people had lost their lives that night. That changed the laws that school doors must open out in 1928. That was the type of thing that would come over the general ring. Doors opened on the inside and the people could not get out. They panicked and rushed the doors and no one could get out. This changed the laws.

M.N.: Now the phone we're talking about is the box on the wall?

Garretson: Yes, the old fashioned kind. The illustration was of how the simple and loving farm people worked together. The problem of one was the problem of all. I really appreciate the attitude as I look back.

M.N.: If I came into the front gate off the road to your farm and I started with my left what would I see?

Garretson: You'd be facing north and you would see to the left a garden part of the time and part of the time a small corn field, maybe popcorn field. Then you would see a barn and a granary and up on the barn you would see pigeon holes where we had a number of pigeons that stayed and then you'd see a chicken house a little to the north of that.

M.N.: What color was this barn and granary?

Garretson: If you ever saw a barn without color that's it. It was never painted and was sort of grey. The granary was never painted but the wood was clear for a long time.

M.N.: Was it round or square?

Garretson: It was oblong but it was also tilted. Now the old chicken house was that way too except the year after the tornado hit.

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

Garretson: I don't recall but I do know that we lost them all because somebody in the neighborhood who was not typical of the neighborhood had come in and chloroformed them. So we lost the chickens that night due to his getting them so quiet they couldn't make noise and he confiscated them. That's a delicate word for pilfering.

M.N.: But he also killed the ones that he didn't take?

Garretson: No he took them all and he put them asleep.

M.N.: I've never heard of that before.

Garretson: No, I haven't either nor since but it worked and he got all of our chickens.

M.N.: You never found out who did it?

Garretson: Well, we found out who did it and dropped it. We pretty well knew but it was better to keep friendship in the small community. I'd rather he have the chickens and we have general friendship. I think the folks just dropped it. Sometimes it's good to seek peace and pursue it and sometimes maybe it's not but on that occasion we dropped it.

M.N.: What would I see after the chickens?

Garretson: We had a pasture and a three-cornered field and it sloped off on down toward a creek. There was a draw and down toward there a windmill on the right, then a sloping pasture that went off toward a bluff where there were gypsum rocks. It's a white rock and you'd find mica in there.

M.N.: I haven't heard that before.

Garretson: Little slips of it. You could find some interesting things there.

M.N.: You've got a lot of unique experiences.

Garretson: Well, you remind me of things I hadn't thought of for years. The field comes up to the barn so we're looking north and the barn to the left, the granary and also the chicken house only it's slightly in front of that gate to the left. Then we're looking straight north over a pasture. It's a better part of a 40 acre pasture. Down in this are a couple of draws that come into a triangle and there is the pond and another plum thicket and then we look up hill to the north where we call it the north forty. We go up the pasture a ways and there are all kinds of flint rocks and you can strike them. I have two flint rocks with me now in my study. At night you can strike them together and there are just streaks of fire which shows latency of heat and light. I think the fourth day of creation the Bible says the sun, moon and stars, but we have light before that time. I can't

decipher all these things but I often think there's latent heat and latent light and plenty of energy in rocks.

Also there are Indian arrow heads all over our 40 acre pasture. It's possible that we had more than 40 acres of pasture but it's a little hazy as to the exact number of acres. What we call the north 40 and the east 40 where we had our main wheat crop was a round mound of a hill. We only had 120 acres because somebody previously had bought off the northeast 40. On the pasture part, however, there were Indian arrow heads a good deal because this was the realm of the Cheyenne and Arapaho.

From the barn we go into this three-cornered field which is quite a fertile area. It was totally a triangle and it goes down to a little creek or a draw. I hate to call it a creek because the water didn't run excepting in season. There was a draw with a lot of trees and then you'd cross over that draw and go up into the east field where the wheat was raised. That's the description mainly of the 120 acre farm.

M.N.: Where's the house?

Garretson: As you enter the gate the house would be slightly to the right and it was an old fashioned house with an upstairs--two rooms upstairs and three downstairs, and it withstood everything except the fire that finally took it.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

M.N.: A fire took the house?

Garretson: Yes, we had rented the house to some friends. They seemed not to know but in this house were some very fine delicate tools. My grandfather had taught a carpenter school in New York and my father was heir and recipient of part of those tools--one of which was solid maple. It could have been an oak bench with a fine vice on it and a number of fine tools--irreplaceable really. They came from the carpenter school in New York and then by way of Salem, Iowa down to Mount Pleasant and finally into Indian Territory and of course Oklahoma became a state in 1907. My father had kept these tools and that was one of the main regrets of course, losing those. All of our furniture had been moved out except those tools of his. Of course, then we built later. We'd rented a home that my father had built from a fine old fellow, a Swede out of Chicago, Mr. Carlson had come down there and then he and his family went back to Chicago. We rented his home up on the hill to the west about a mile. Coming home from high school one evening I saw the smoldering ruins of our old house. It was quite an impact.

M.N.: What year would that be?

Garretson: It must have been my junior year and I'm doubtful as to the

year. Later we built an oblong type of concrete home which is still standing with quite a basement to it. I remember going back one time after moving to California just to view the old place and I raised the door that lead downstairs into the basement and I was greeted by one of these beautiful black animals with a white stripe on his back. He turned the other direction and I knew I should flee for my life so I made the steps in the other direction.

M.N.: Was this an ugle house?

Garretson: It wasn't as pretty as the one that burned down. It was a concrete structure without decorations on the outside of it. It was very solid, like I say it's still standing. They use it now for a granary.

M.N.: Let's go back to the old wooden house and go in the front door and once again start from the left and see if you can tell me what I'd see.

Garretson: We're talking about two south doors and one north door and one east door so let's start from the south door. We enter in through the kitchen and dining room/kitchen combination old farm style. There we see to the left a wash pan, a bucket of water. We had a cistern then we look over to the left a little further and there's a large double picture window. There's a division in the center of the window but large and very beautiful with the view out toward the garden.

M.N.: Was that unusual to have a large window like that?

Garretson: No, it might have been unusual for some areas but this style of house was not unusual. Yet I may be contradicting myself because I don't remember seeing a vast number of big windows in that community but I'd seen them in other places so I'm answering it from just a casual memory. That was an extra large window for our house even.

M.N.: Looking out this window the land kind of went down?

Garretson: No, we're going back to the gate where we first entered then looked to the left and to the front. This was slightly uphill. In our house the big window would sweep out toward where the granary was and it would be a few feet higher and the bar was sitting out there 100 yards and that was slightly uphill. There to the right of that window would be an old fashioned cook stove of cast iron and this is where my mother did the cooking. She heated the water for the dishes and she made the finest biscuits in the country. Then we had a brick chimney right up through there clear to the top and on one occasion at four o'clock in the morning somehow this caught on fire.

M.N.: The chimney caught on fire?

Garretson: The house did briefly. Something came out of the chimney where there was a fault up there so we hauled water. The whole family lined up from person to person, bucket to bucket and my father doused it out and it really didn't do any damage--not too much.

M.N.: He could fix it?

Garretson: Yes. One of the finest memories would be in the summertime we'd come into this kitchen and the harvest hands would come in and we'd have a nice big table spread and the window was beautiful and the north and south doors were open and I remember the finest of meals. It wasn't a fancy house but the finest of meals would be prepared and put on this table.

M.N.: What kind of meal are we talking about?

Garretson: The farm harvest hand, the wheat growers, the thrashers and this would include all of the staples of the farm community. You never went without maybe two kinds of meat--chicken and beef--and then you would have the sauces, the gravies and the salads and certainly the fruit salad as the dessert but you would have ice tea made with ice brought in from town and generally wrapped in an old blanket that would make it last a long time. You could buy 25 pounds of ice for a nickel and I've paid as high as $2 for it in Yosemite. Then we would have these nice farm meals.

M.N.: How long would a meal like that last?

Garretson: There was more food left but the fellows were so busy during the harvesting that they would eat and within 30 to 45 minutes they were going back out. During the meal everybody would be friendly, happy, joke. The ladies and their daughters would all dress in calico or gingham and they were dressed in dresses and the girls and the women were ready servants for the men and the boys as they ate. I remember the kitchen for that and also from our evenings at home with sometimes a gas lamp but most of the time a fine kerosene lamp. It was here that I was able to do good at my algebra at night. I studied under that lamp at night.

M.N.: Did it sit on the table?

Garretson: It sat on the table. In the evenings we would have our family get togethers around this. Not only would we eat but sometimes we would sing and read a chapter out of the Bible each day.

M.N.: When did you have that?

Garretson: That was after the meal was over as a rule. Every day we would have maybe ten verses or a chapter of the Bible but we would have also a lot of family associations such as looking at pictures, playing simple games such as dominoes for example. So the memory of that kitchen is pretty vivid.

M.N.: That was the family place.

Garretson: That was the family place; however, we did have the living room where the heater was.

M.N.: This dinner you were talking about with all the farm people in there. Were these men rough men? What were they like?

Garretson: They were fine good citizens and I suppose what their private lives or conversations might have been was not fully known to me but I found the entire crew was a set of gentlemen. Now I have heard language that I don't prefer to use and I don't think should even be said. I saw gentlemanliness in these fellows. I would see hard working, swarthy, dusty men come in there and take time to wash their faces and hands and they'd all sit down and inevitably they would offer thanks for their food.

M.N.: Was that sincere or was that just a token?

Garretson: It's difficult of course for me to read the heart of the other fellow. It is a token always and becomes a groove of life that I would personally just simply say is a good one but every time a person does anything of this kind it should be done in my estimation with sincerity. I know that a groove can become a grave.

M.N.: What I was getting at was were these men perfunctory in their religious beliefs or was it a deep conviction?

Garretson: There were some of course that would be courteous enough just to sit down and as customary bow but they didn't personally ever pray. It was obvious that some of them weren't but there were enough among them who respected it that they simply went along. There were others who were not merely perfunctory but were really sincere, obviously without being able to prove it. They were sincere in their religious life so I saw nothing but sincerity as a young man and a boy in these harvest gatherings that I could interpret as being anything but a desire to be honest in it. Now that was my impression.

M.N.: Were they in fact honest decent people?

Garretson: Occasionally you'd find somebody who could pilfer you out of your existence if possible but generally I thought they were good.

M.N.: Let's go on into the living room.

Garretson: We're going east from the kitchen into the living room and we see first of all another chimney where our stove was and this provided, of course, our winter comfort and heat. Some of the time there was a couch and some of the time depending on how much company there was a bed in what was ordinarily a living room but

there was also to the right as we enter an old desk and bookcase combination. We have only the top left and it's in Tehachapi.

M.N.: Had you father made that?

Garretson: No but it did come out of the school in New York and was very ornate, beautiful, well built.

M.N.: Did you have a quilt hanging from the ceiling?

Garretson: No, sometimes the neighbor women would get together and do that for a few hours and then it would come down. In fact over here in the annex there are hooks for the women of the congregation who get together and do that. In this living room we had an east and south window and a north door. The south part of the house had a south door that would lead out onto a porch which if you kept turning to the right you'd come back into the kitchen. For the porch we had black or grey slate on two sides of the house which made a nice porch. The old fashioned telephone hung on the south wall of this living room.

M.N.: What color was the wall?

Garretson: It had wallpaper and I have no memory of what that looked like except I do remember flowers.

M.N.: Did the kitchen have wallpaper as well?

Garretson: Yes, some of the time it did.

M.N.: It was a board floor?

Garretson: Part of the kitchen would have lath and plaster. There was varied walls. Actually it wasn't a very fancy house.

M.N.: Let's go to the back of the house.

Garretson: As you turn to the left or to the north out of the living room we go into a bedroom. My brother and I had our bedroom there. The house was not too solid although it was well built. It was not solid in that being old when we bought it. Many times in the wintertime we'd wake up and a blizzard had hit us and we would have a little bit of snow on our bed. We never paid any attention to that. At night my mother would heat the bricks, wrap them in paper and put them at the foot of the bed for us to keep our feet warm.

M.N.: Were there bedrooms upstairs?

Garretson: Yes, there was a bedroom upstairs. This was where my folks had their bed as a rule. It was warmer but it did call for a climb.

M.N.: Was it a ladder?

Garretson: No, we had a regular stairs going upstairs. The north portion

was where these fine tools were kept and the south portion is where part of the time the country school teacher would rent that from us. Different teachers would but some of the time my folks used that as a bedroom.

M.N.: They would live in the house with you?

Garretson: Yes. They would have that as a home because we were half a mile east of the school.

M.N.: Were these school teachers peculiar like I've seen on television today?

Garretson: No, I've often thought that's a misrepresentation. I thought the teachers were so balanced and so shrewd and their mental status and acumen I thought was outstanding and never do I see a similarity between what is pictured and what I went to. For instance, my first teacher in grammar was also my last teacher in high school because she had migrated from teaching country schools into high school. She owned the Rialto Theatre and was a drama teacher and critic and outstanding grammarian. She was very good in grammar.

M.N.: All of this is in Oklahoma?

Garretson: Yes, in the meantime we did come back out to Gardena and I went to Monita and Gardena Grammar School briefly when my father worked in the steel mill. We'd get ahead financially sufficiently to go back and we'd get back on the farm. I thought the school teachers were very good.

M.N.: What kind of life did they lead? Were they pretty much circumscribed in what they could do?

Garretson: Of course I'd have to speak from the inexperience of boyhood but I don't think so. As I offer my opinion on it the teachers were able to present moral ideas. I remember we would sing the songs of America every morning and generally there would be reading of a chapter of the Bible without comment. Having saluted the flag and sung the songs--this was the way we started every day of school. Having done so, we simply went to our work. We'd have recess and have the general games for fifteen minutes and then get back to school. There wasn't much time to do anything but school work during those hours.

M.N.: How did these teachers handle misbehavior?

Garretson: I should know because part of the time I received a little discipline for that. I really wasn't so bad in my talk but the teachers were real good under the conditions. We had all eight grades in one room with one teacher part of the time which was difficult. One of the teachers was kind of cruel. I wouldn't call him a disciplinarian. I thought that his entire attitude toward it was kind of cruel. Some of the boys got a spanking every day and sometimes

a hair snatching and a pulling so I didn't recommend that kind of thing although I thought he was a fine old fellow but he still missed the mark. Others would be very good. Some of them are in California now--very educated and nice people. All he did was smear my memory. He didn't muss up my hair.

M.N.: Did your parents support what the teachers did?

Garretson: Yes, without fuss. They didn't support it all basically in that particular teacher but they never had any trouble falling out or challenging it. There were some who did. I have seen some rough things come out of the school and I've seen very fine things. When I say out of the school I mean in the neighborhood. We would have our get togethers--box socials, pie suppers and invariably there would be some old country boy that would want to show off with liquor under his belt a little. Generally that was just a little loud noise at the back of the school for a few minutes. We would have our picnic at the end of each school year and that was very fine and enjoyable. On one occasion we saw a razor and knife fight on the part of the men in the community. One man felt that he should control the fellow who was not suppose to have himself under mental control and they went through the charade of a fight and nobody was hurt but everybody stood their distance and watched it. Then we went on to the river bottom. We had a swing; we had swimming; we had homemade ice cream, a big dinner and everybody had a good time including these two fellows. This was the kind of thing that was always amazing to me.

M.N.: What kind of social life did those teachers have?

Garretson: They seemingly had a normal social life. As I look back now my second teacher is still living in Lawton, Oklahoma. Later she married. She was a young woman at that time. Interestingly I'd watch her at night. She and my mother would talk and she would sometimes wash her hair and she had the longest hair I've ever seen. Yes, the longest I've ever seen. I was impressed by that and her kindness and her diligence and then the teacher that I mentioned that owned the threatre, she was outstanding in the state of Oklahoma and very well acquainted with the theatrical world.

M.N.: You said the Rialto Theatre--that's in Oklahoma?

Garretson: That's in the little town of Hammon, Oklahoma--"Tale of Two Cities"--they had shown that so that the entire school could go and see it.

M.N.: By a theatre you mean a moving picture house.

Garretson: Yes. Of course they had all kinds of gatherings when the congressmen would come from Washington. This would be the community center.

M.N.: Your family came to California in 1918?

Garretson: Yes, it was early in 1918 or 1917 but I do remember the first Armistice was when I was in Oklahoma. My memory of it was at the sight of these tools on this big bench when my folks were talking about the Armistice being signed and we were in Oklahoma at that time.

M.N.: When was the next time you came to California?

Garretson: It was about 1923.

M.N.: You stayed how long in California?

Garretson: A few months or it could have been a year just long enough for my father to make the financial rebuilding and then we'd go back because they were determined to keep us on the farm.

M.N.: Things have been pretty good in California?

Garretson: Well yes, it was better because your wages were better and higher and there was more work but we went back to where home was.

M.N.: Then you came out again?

Garretson: Then we came out again for a few months and as I recall that was in 1927.

M.N.: That was the last time before the permanent move?

Garretson: Yes, before 1936.

M.N.: 1927--what were things like then financially?

Garretson: They seemed very well. There was a lot of activity. Everybody was busy and everyone helped each other. We lived only two or three blocks from the old Gardena High School where you find it very dense now. It was sparse then and people were in more of a disposition to know one another naturally. We were acquainted with neighbors all over the area.

M.N.: You were about twelve years old.

Garretson: As I recall I was nine and again at eleven.

M.N.: But you were old enough to have a strong impression.

Garretson: Yes, I remember three Mexican boys I knew real well--Daniel, Manual and Joe. I've forgotten their last names.

M.N.: Did you have problems being from back east?

Garretson: No problems. I seemed to fit in very well.

M.N.: Was your family considered poor when they came out here?

Garretson: No more than anyone else at that particular time. Now in 1936 having come from the dust bowl and the Depression I think that while we were not The Grapes of Wrath we were classified with the people who were on the run and we were because when that dust bowl hit and we lost our cattle and the Depression was on. We weren't so much on the run. We didn't have to move at all but it was convenient. My father and brother came out ahead of us six weeks and they found jobs in Kern County right away and it was just a convenient thing to do.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

M.N.: In 1927 when you were here you were again here about a few months to a year?

Garretson: Yes, both times it was previous to the 1929 Depression. My father had come out alone for about six months to work again and my mother kept the three of us children back there for a few months while he came out and then in returning he came and brought his mother, my grandmother, back with him. They came in a Model T Ford in 1929 so we were able to be on more of an even footing financially. If we'd had a strong or rich bottom field farm we might have been better off but making up for that my father was able to come into good jobs and he kept us going that way.

M.N.: Back in Oklahoma when did the Depression hit?

Garretson: I remember when the news came in 1929 of the Crash which was when I really began to sense it.

M.N.: Was it really a crash?

Garretson: Well, it was so notarized. We began to notice not being affluent with money anyway but we noticed it in the lack of work and in the difficulty that a number were having. We ate well and we worked hard. We didn't make much but when we really began to feel it was when the dust came in from Colorado--the white dust and the heavy blowing. I have had to walk at times into some of these storms where you might be three or four feet from me and it was difficult to see anything and I would have to feel my way along in the dust. For these reasons we lost crops and we lost cattle. This made a real depression for everyone.

M.N.: When did that start?

Garretson: The dust came in 1935, 1936. To some it may have come a little earlier. I know at times we would have dust that would settle in on our kitchen table and certainly on all of our furniture. This was a steady stream of white dust.

M.N.: Financially when did the hardship begin?

Garretson: For us and I can't speak for all and yet I do believe that 1931 and 1932 were very difficult. By the time Mr. Roosevelt became

President there seemed to be plans ready under the FERA [Federal Emergency Relief Administration]. Then a host of other things such as the WPA [Works Progress Administration] and a number of programs that seemed to be ready to go. We participated only in a portion of them. In order to have cash the government offered us so much a head of livestock. They would kill the livestock, leave them on the pasture with a penalty of a heavy fine if you ate the meat.

M.N.: You had to waste the meat?

Garretson: Yes. Then we were taken into town and given beef from Argentina and this was something a lot of people couldn't calculate but here was cattle lying in the fields. I often wondered why the fresh meat was here and the canned beef was here. A lot of people wondered and still do. Here we have a situation where we were given cash for cattle and the cattle were killed under penalty of a fine if you ate this meat. We were given cash and that's the cash that we saw for the time being. Under such situations and when that was expended there were fruit tramps. We didn't do that but we did go into work in Kern County. We found the fields ready for workers.

M.N.: When you came here?

Garretson: Now this is a situation that in 1931 and 1932 and right on through it was very difficult to find work. Evidently millions were out of work across the nation. The federal programs were getting started and people began to feel like a citizen that was provided for and yet you know that all provision has to come from some source and yet nobody wanted to go on relief. Everybody desired to work so we avoided that in the main and just went where there were jobs.

M.N.: How did this dust thing start?

Garretson: I have been told that up in the north toward Colorado there were certain areas of soil from which came all this white dust because it did drift in. There was a lot that drifted in and there were huge clouds. It would look like storm clouds then it would come rolling in and I have seen a tremendous dust storm almost break between real clear fresh air and this tremendous dust rolling in and this would be day after day. Sometimes the day would clear and be nice and the ground would be white and here would come another rolling storm. It had to come from somewhere up north, maybe Colorado soil, maybe somewhere in New Mexico but mainly to the north.

M.N.: Oklahoma soil was red.

Garretson: Yes, in the western portion, and there was plenty of red dust blowing normally from year to year. You would have some dust storms similiar to west Texas. I lived in Big Spring and I've seen some

tremendous dust storms there.

M.N.: How was this white dust storm different?

Garretson: Evidently it was the plowing situation mainly that could remedy that since that time as I have heard there have a system of "deep plowing" that has avoided that. We had drought, dust and depression--a combination that moved a lot of people. Of course, John Steinbeck wrote The Grapes of Wrath and there were various attitudes, aptitudes and situations of people that would come from Oklahoma. Numbers of them would come from different places. Some of them stayed in Oklahoma. We could have stayed. Right now our old farm that sold for a few hundred dollars would go into $80,000. It's tremendous.

M.N.: You're familiar with Steinbeck?

Garretson: Just some of his writings. I never did try to ready all that he wrote.

M.N.: Did you like what he wrote?

Garretson: I didn't necessarily dislike it. I saw more from out of the picture. Some of it I didn't particularly like.

M.N.: What about the picture?

Garretson: I thought it was a very interesting picture--very graphic in what occurred in the way of storms and so on.

M.N.: Do you see your father in that picture?

Garretson: No, I really didn't.

M.N.: Did you see those men sitting around the table back home?

Garretson: No, I couldn't see that but I did see a lot of portraits of people that maybe hadn't for some reason gotten an education. I saw what I thought was not necessarily misrepresentation of everything but a misrepresentation of some but it had to represent some phases. It seemed to do a lot of stirring of peoples' minds one way or the other.

M.N.: How did the storms affect the life at home and the cattle and the farming?

Garretson: Not only the depression but also the crops--the failure of crops. Drought and crop failure. When you don't have rain and don't have deep plowing you have a problem there anytime.

M.N.: What do you mean by deep plowing?

Garretson: A shallow plow is one thing but a deep plow really gets down and turns that soil up so it's able to retain what moisture there

was there. I hate to speak with any authority on this but I know I've heard enough farmers talk about the value of deep plowing.

M.N.: What's the problem with shallow plowing?

Garretson: Well, of course then you've got the dust easily taken off the surface. There's something about deep plowing that is helpful. I really can't speak with authority on it.

M.N.: But it did effect your animals?

Garretson: Mainly through lack of fodder or food in other words. Of course we had to haul water for our own drinking. It was difficult to get water for the animals. Some of them died and quite a few we had to sell off.

M.N.: Did the dust affect your health at all?

Garretson: I couldn't tell if it affected ours. There's a joke back in Texas now that the only way to really be healthy is to inhale some of that Texas dust. I don't think it helped it any.

M.N.: Did you have to take any special precautions?

Garretson: No, I would prefer that dust storm to the smog in Los Angeles.

M.N.: Did it get into your house?

Garretson: Yes, very much unless the house was completely sealed and even then it would be difficult. Dust has a way. It would come in on the furniture and the tables and it would be awfully thick. I would hesitate to say one quarter inch but I've helped clean it up.

M.N.: What about illnesses in the family?

Garretson: We were very fortunate ourselves. We had some illness. I think the common cold would be the worse thing that hit us. We'd have some flu. I think it could have been avoided many times had we used Vitamin C. We avoided a lot anyway.

M.N.: Did you see a doctor frequently?

Garretson: Not too much. We had a family doctor and he was a good old fellow and he would make house calls.

M.N.: How far out of town were you?

Garretson: Five miles.

M.N.: What about home remedies?

Garretson: Good old Rawleigh Company. They would sell products for a few

chickens and they would take them as pay. That was always a great barter.

M.N.: Did they advise you?

Garretson: They'd say here's a liniment that's good for so and so and that would be the extent of it.

M.N.: Do you recall a flu epidemic?

Garretson: Yes. That would be back in the early 1920s or just before. We were fortunate in escaping that. We had flu but we never did have the flu to the extent.

M.N.: Did you ever see tuberculosis?

Garretson: I saw it one time where a fellow came through that community and he was in the back of a pickup and somebody was taking him somewhere. In those days to be carried in a mattress in the back of a pickup was real commodious because you could otherwise be taken in the wagon to the doctor. They had stopped down by our mailbox and I said, "What's wrong with him?" They said he had consumption so they were taking him somewhere to the doctor. No, TB was not typical of our community. In fact, I thought the entire ruddy group of kids and parents were quite healthy in our neighborhood. We didn't have many of the citrus products and we didn't have very much in the way of orchards but somehow or another as I said awhile ago there was nothing wasted. Everybody seemed to conserve and work together. I remember a man buying a hammer mill. It's a mill that has tremendous hammers with a number of screens and you can mill. You make flour with it but he moved into this community with this hammer mill. He was very good in that he didn't charge high prices and we would go to this mill with our wheat and he would make grapenuts for us so the entire community was making their own grapenuts.

M.N.: What about minorities--blacks or Indians--were they around?

Garretson: I never remembered going to grammar or high school in Oklahoma without going to school with Indians.

M.N.: Were they a problem?

Garretson: No, we all got along fine.

M.N.: How about black people?

Garretson: There were a few, very few at that particular time.

M.N.: Did you ever see any Klan activity?

Garretson: No and I'm sure there were members of the Klan somewhere around but I never saw any activity.

M.N.: Why do you say that?

Garretson: I'm sure of the general area and I think there might have been but I couldn't prove it sitting here.

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

Garretson: Yes. This was a lot of our enjoyable life. We would go to church five miles away except when the Depression got pretty bad and difficult. We went right there in the community. We had a nice little congregation then.

M.N.: How old were you when you came to California the last time?

Garretson: 20.

M.N.: You finished school back there.

Garretson: Then came out here.

M.N.: Anything else that I haven't asked about from back there that you remember strongly--an incident?

Garretson: Well, there were a lot of pleasures of going to the mouth of the creek that goes into the Washita River and always there was a nice big swimming hole dug out and we would swim. This was good plus our ponds. We would have hunting at night sometimes. The whole country was wide open and everybody's farm was yours and yours was theirs in that sense. We had a lot of community association. It wasn't anything at all for us boys out of school to play "outlaw and sheriff". That was one of the big games and it would take in miles of travel and running and struggle to get one of your prisoners back into the storm cellar. You never saw such scuffles in all your life. Those were simple pleasures.

M.N.: Did you work in the field too?

Garretson: Yes.

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

Garretson: We had the single disc and single mole board plow and I've broken sod on two big plots about 40 acres each behind a team where they would simply turn the sod over and I would follow. Generally it was a horse team but I've worked with mule teams too. An incident that is memorable to me is about a wagon. In order to pull a wagon there's a double tree but off the double tree in each end is a single tree that goes to each horse and I remember a single tree that had been discarded down by the windmill and I had kicked that single tree around through the years and then having come out here in 1936 about four or five years later we went back for a visit and I went to the old farm and down by the windmill I happened to see that old piece of single tree and I gave it a kick as I always did. It had turned to stone, petrified,

in five years which reminds me that not all petrification takes millions of years.

M.N.: It had actually turned into rock?

Garretson: Yes, it had turned into rock.

M.N.: Was there some kind of community tragedy or event that you can recall?

Garretson: There were no community problems when it came to getting along. Any variations in people's beliefs were still resolved in a friendly way.

M.N.: No shootings or hangings?

Garretson: No hangings. We had occasionally a careless boy who would go out hunting and with his shotgun lean it against the wire fence. We had one of our neighbor's boys do this. He leaned the shotgun against the fence, crawled through the fence and it went off and killed him--that would be a tragedy. We would have anyone in the community--everybody being simple and being acquainted and having a care for one another. A death would be a tragedy in that sense, not the kind of tragedy that you give up on but the kind of thing that you've sorrowful about.

M.N.: How were funerals handled?

Garretson: They were generally in a church building, sometimes in a home. I remember the first funeral I ever took care of was of a 75 year old man. It was right in the living room.

M.N.: When you say took care of?

Garretson: I was asked to preach the funeral. I was eighteen years old. I took the Book of Psalms and covered some of the points of Isaiah and proceeded into the Book of John briefly and stood at the foot of the casket in this particular case and the family and friends had all crowded into a living room. It was a cold wintery dusty day. Were it not for the fact that he was a reputable old fellow and everybody had hope, it would have been a very grim day. I just brought a few points from the Bible. There was a congregational singing and then out to the burial.

M.N.: Was he buried in a cemetary?

Garretson: I don't recall. Beyond the house service, I just don't recall. I do have a faint memory that they were going to a cemetary and it being a cold winter day I didn't go to the cemetary.

M.N.: How was the body prepared?

Garretson: This I don't know--the kind and loving hands of the neighborhood

people. They'd always have someone or more likely the one who had sat up with the one who had passed on.

M.N.: Why did they do that?

Garretson: Custom I think. There still is that custom in Texas. I noticed they would set up with the family in the home of the one who had passed away and many of the funerals were taken care of right in the home, domestically, till the funeral homes began to become more pronounced the watching with the family was sort of a loving gesture.

M.N.: I forgot to ask you how many children you have in your family.

Garretson: Three--my brother is three years older and he lives in Bakersfield. I am the middle one and my sister is six years younger.

M.N.: What's your brother's name?

Garretson: Paul and my sister's name is Reah and she lives in Tehachapi.

M.N.: And your wife's name.

Garretson: Avery.

M.N.: You have four children. What are their names?

Garretson: Emily lives in Denver. Vernon lives in Lemoore. Philip lives in Lodi, and Gayle lives at Lake Isabella. He's to be married next week at the East Bakersfield Congregation. I will go down there to perform the ceremony next Friday night.

M.N.: You're going to marry your own child.

Garretson: Yes.

M.N.: I like that. Why did your family come to California that last time--specifically.

Garretson: Specifically because it was an improvement over the dust, the depression and the drought. It was financial really to put it in one word. It wasn't because we had to. We were making a living. It's just that we got to thinking things over. I know my grandmother and aunt were in the Los Angeles area. They lived right on the main street of Gardena. The home has been moved but the whole building otherwise is there--so many of the places where my grandmother worked as a practical nurse in those days are still there. We came out there but we came immediately up to Wasco.

M.N.: But your family didn't come out here blind. They had had plenty of experience.

Garretson: Yes, even our destination of Wasco in particular was because we had relatives and friends there. We decided to come right there and knew where we coming.

M.N.: You didn't make that trip with fear?

Garretson: No, the only fear I had and I didn't fear that much was the brakes on my 1929 Model A Ford.

M.N.: You were driving?

Garretson: I drove all the way. There were six of us who came. Three of the neighbors wanted to come with my mother and sister and I. I did all the driving because I knew how to handle a car.

M.N.: Did your family sell out?

Garretson: No, we kept our farm. We've sold it since then but we didn't sell it at that time.

M.N.: Were you running pretty lean?

Garretson: Yes, it's hard to say lean because gasoline was either twelve to fifteen cents a gallon so it didn't take much to get here. We ate well on the trip and made it fine. The only thing was that there just wasn't much money where we came from.

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SESSION TWO June 26, 1981

M.N.: Let's go back and talk about the week or the days before you came to California. How did the family get ready for that?

Garretson: The trip out was made six weeks after my father and brother had come out and they'd come with two more men and all of them came ahead and they got work. I was busy concluding some of the business on the place. I was 20 at that time. I'd graduated from high school and I'd been busy at my work preaching. I had a number of congregations invite me to speak just before I left so I was busy both Sundays and Wednesdays because these were the stated times of their meetings. Then I had various business on the farm to tend and get the car ready. Three of our friends wanted to come with us so I had to get the car ready. It was an old 1929 Ford that I'd been using on my own. These were days of drought and heat but just as we left we had quite a storm. We had quite a rain.

M.N.: What month was that?

Garretson: October 1936.

M.N.: How did you get started as a minister?

Garretson: This is something I hadn't planned. I'd planned to go into the Holstein-Friesian cattle business. I already had a herd started and loved the work of farming and dairy. I had read the New Testament through eight times before I graduated from grammar school. I

enjoyed it. I didn't understand too much about it but the more I read the more I appreciated it and then the small congregation in that area needed some help and I was a willing teacher so I agreed to the job of teaching certain classes. They wanted me to make the talk so to speak which I did. In making these talks and being called on by different congregations to help I just went into it gradually. I was back there in March 1981 and I saw that 40 acres that I wanted and I looked back and there was no way to make a living on that 40 acres and back then I thought there was. I had in mind a dairy. Had it been out here it would have been different with the richness of soil. This was how I got into it just gradually and then I began to study, take courses and finally I planned to go to Abilene Christian College in Abilene, Texas but instead came out here and went to Pepperdine College. This is a brief history of the start. Some of my first work was in the San Joaquin Valley. This first protracted meeting which means a meeting covering two weeks steady, day and night, preaching and teaching was in Venice [California] and the next was in McFarland and Wasco and Lancaster.

M.N.: What kept you in the ministry?

Garretson: Well I was interested in it. I really like it and it became more or less second nature. I thought I was doing good in that I was firm in my faith and firm in my belief but also it was a way of really serving humanity and meeting many problems that I could help in without inviting myself in on the problem. I thought it was a way of prevention of wrong doing and helping a lot of young people and I just enjoyed it.

M.N.: You impress me as thoughtful and practical.

Garretson: I think the first reason for believing anything is because your parents did, as a rule, but then when you grow up you have to affirm or deny that and you have to have cogent reasons for accepting or denying it. I saw no reason to change after reading what I thought was so much directly in the Bible and related evidences of Christianity and then certain scientific books in favor and some against and I found out that the reasons for faith were overwhelming. I concluded that a man couldn't believe without evidence and he couldn't believe against the evidence and he couldn't believe a contradiction. I found those things were so strong that my faith grew. I've never seen any reason to change. I did get into a law course but I didn't see any reason to go ahead and pursue law as an avocation.

M.N.: You came to California in 1936 and you were 20 years of age.

Garretson: Yes.

M.N.: And then you were married when you were 24 or 25?

Garretson: When I was 25.

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

Garretson: I'd gone from Los Angeles where I was working with the church in Hawthorne and had moved to Fresno and worked with what is now the Arlington Heights Congregation. It was Merced and "R" congregation at that time and I enjoyed my work very much but over the months I was invited to Chowchilla and conducted quite a long meeting actually--31 days and they wanted to go right up to Christmas time.

M.N.: These were revivals?

Garretson: Yes, but I don't think of it in terms of reviving the dead but in terms of simply extending the work. We had a very successful meeting with a lot of training with the young people. During the time they invited me to come and work with the congregation which I did. I went down to the high school and played tennis and got acquainted with all the kids and was invited to certain parties and one night at a basketball game I was sitting back at the back bleecher with two other fellows--young guys, one in the church and one not. We were all friends.

Back near there was this girl who is now my wife and she and a number of the girls were clapping and hollering for the winning team and hopefully it would be their own team, Chowchilla. With her long black hair and sharp brown eyes and what I thought was the most beautiful "thing" I'd ever seen, she turned around and just happened to stare at me face to face. In my heart I said, "That's it," and it turned out that way. I turned to these boys who didn't know her name but they said, "Well, that's so and so's sister," and over the next couple of weeks I happened to meet them in a play and she was the singer in the play and her brother happened to be the old crazy guy in the stage play. I again asked her name and they said, "That's the old crazy boy's sister." He was really an actor. He always played the part of Bob Burns, the comedian. I invited them to go with me which they did. We went out and got refreshments at the milkshake place and then I invited her to church.

M.N.: How old was she?

Garretson: She is seven years younger than I am so at that time I met her when she was seventeen and we married when she was eighteen. This wonderful little vivacious thing who turned around and stared at me face to face. She doesn't remember it and I said, "That's it!"

M.N.: Did she know what she was getting into?

Garretson: I don't know whether she's found out yet or not. My plans might have been long ranged. She's been a very fine co-worker. She's very studious and a born logician. She's a very good thinker.

M.N.: It would seem to me that a minister's wife bears a burden probably equal to that of the minister.

Garretson: I think so. In many ways more so because where I can deal with the problem directly she has to deal with it indirectly. Also

she's been able to help a lot of people in that she is so frank and honest and logical that they have come to respect her. In every congregation I've ever worked they are able to respect Avery and see that her logic and her--she's not ignorant of the Bible either--but her persistence and forthright dealing with any problem on an impartial and fair basis thrills me. It's been a big help. I really appreciate her for it. I like that. I really do. I really appreciate her for it.

M.N.: How long was it then until you had your first child?

Garretson: About a year later. Emily was born in 1942. We were married in 1941 so Emily was born a year later.

M.N.: Your second child?

Garretson: Three years later in 1945. If I recall, Vernon, our first son, is about three years younger. Then Philip was born in 1949 which gives us another distance in time of about maybe four or five years. Gayle was born in 1958 near Modesto.

M.N.: How did your professional life go from the time that you were married?

Garretson: It went better even. I always had good relationships with the congregations and the people whether it's in a school or office or shop or farm or mill or anything of the kind. So it is with people wherever they are even in church there are always some problems. Where there are people there are problems. I always thought I did fine single but by the time I was married I should have been as they say, "set in my ways," but it wasn't so much that because I found that working together and everything else began to work better. Our honeymoon was a trip to Grand Junction, Colorado on another meeting and it was really a joyful trip.

M.N.: When you came to California at first did coming from Oklahoma present obstacles for you?

Garretson: No, it didn't, as I can see, but it did present opportunity for growth and development. Your horizons are expanded. I came out of a simple farming area and coming to the San Joaquin Valley, it was a simple farm area too. I had been in Los Angeles going to Los Angeles schools somewhat as a boy so I wasn't entirely new. Having graduated in western Oklahoma, coming to California was certainly something new. There were more people here and yet I found everyone was eager. They were workers. I suppose I was very fortunate. As I mentioned yesterday living in that simple community where all the farmers and their families were upstanding people, maybe not what they ought to be in life or what they would want to be, but they were good people and I moved into Wasco at first and I saw the same brand and breed of people with one exception and that was even better. Some of the old timers in Wasco were really

fine upstanding citizens, solid people. You ran into quite a German community. There might be some variation and interpretation of what they thought Christianity ought to be but I found students willing and good people and enjoyed being with them.

M.N.: Did you ever visit the migrant camps?

Garretson: Some. We never lived in one but just by the very nature of some people in church who would visit and want to be friends with you. I would go out into their homes in these camps and visit and have dinner with them occasionally.

M.N.: What was your impression of the camps?

Garretson: I saw the situation with some of them that I really wasn't close to. I thought they were very run down and it depended somewhat on the length of time the people would be there. If they were there for a very few weeks then it seemed that they were run down more but in some of the camps, while I found poverty, I also found a good deal of happiness and joy. For example, going into the home of one family whom I won't name, I remember going to visit them. In the same camp and others there was happiness with good food on the table, well prepared, neat and clean amidst what could have easily been a fly and filth infested room. They kept it clean. What occurred in Chowchilla where my wife is from they call little Oklahoma City. She was, however, from out on a farm. These people bought a lot for $25 to $75 and they put a little shack on it and it became the prettiest part of town because the entire area was filled with flowers and these poor people that could have easily been looked upon as trash became known as honorable people because their entire little homes would remind you of going into Disneyland--the pirates of the Caribbean area. You see those little old shacks that these people built in what was called a little Oklahoma City were a place indeed to look at because of the flowers and gardens. Now visiting in their homes and eating meals with these people I was never disappointed for there was no dirt and filth. There was nothing by way of finery but not filth that I saw. I did view from a distance some that I thought that needed cleaning.

M.N.: Did you encounter only migrants in these camps or did you find that there were native Californians living in the camps?

Garretson: I'm not able to answer that question with accuracy because I saw people who'd been here for some time. Even the people there were migrant in the sense that they didn't own a house but they were the kind of people who would be frugile enough to save and they buy. That's the kind of people I was with. They were in shacks and in migrant farm labor camps or whatever.

M.N.: Did you ever encounter the term Okie?

Garretson: Very much.

M.N.: What's your reaction?

Garretson: Well it was done with good will and humor. I've even used it and used it on myself and others to joke. I found very few that resented it. Even now I can say it. If I'm in Oklahoma, I can say it. They can joke about it. Out here I found all the people willing to find a little humor in it. One joke that was told was that the Orientals here couldn't figure how the Okies could come in and take California without firing a shot.

M.N.: So you didn't see it as a term of derision?

Garretson: Only here and there and even then I didn't see any reason to feel hurt because I knew what was in my own heart and a lot of my friends' hearts. So anything they'd say in derision I took it and I didn't run into it too much. I ran into very little. Some of the bigger farmers in California today were fortunate enough to use their wisdom and financial skills and came out to California very poor and now they are millionaires.

M.N.: You mean they came out in poverty.

Garretson: Yes, came out in poverty and some of them have come right up in the land of opportunity. May it continue!

M.N.: Outline your professional growth and development on up to today.

Garretson: To make it brief--having been an independent student taking correspondence work, then some resident work, then entering into Pepperdine and then going in 1937 to a special course in Freed-Hardeman College in Henderson, Tennessee which was established years ago as a very fine stately school by A.G. Freed and N.B. Hardeman. I received instruction and training and special help there. I really appreciated it. In 1938 I moved into Fresno and then in 1939 moving from Fresno to Chowchilla retaining friends all the way, making advances here and there, growing in information and in some general expanse of information spiritually and secularly I found there was nothing for me but real joy in development. I moved too much. I didn't have to move but I enjoyed it. I remember moving to east Texas which was a very fine move but it was needless. Then I moved to Salinas and then from Salinas which I enjoyed so much.

M.N.: What year did you move to east Texas?

Garretson: 1942. I didn't stay long because gasoline rationing was going to force us to stay so I moved back and came back again to Chowchilla. Repeatedly I've gone back to Chowchilla. I've worked there twice. Then Fullerton, California with a congregation there twice and Big Spring, Texas twice and with the church in Wasco twice but these moves I mention only as an incident something that I enjoyed doing which I don't enjoy like I used to. I'd rather get to a place and stay there. I've been here six years going on seven.

M.N.: What's the name of the church.

Garretson: Palmdale Church of Christ--25th and East Avenue Q.

M.N.: It's a very pretty church.

Garretson: Thank you very much and also good people to work with. As the years went on I found an opportunity I thought to do some good and still do. In 1946 I started Yosemite Encampment for Young People. That went on for three years and then I decided to move it to Shaver Lake, Dora Bell Camp Ground. I had my own tents, garbage cans, table facilities and boat and we would have our studies. We would have one study in the morning and take a hike. We would hike a ways and then sit down and then study what we needed to study and then hike a ways again--boys and girls together and you never found anything better in all your life to cooperate with you. I never took any special help along. I did at times have a helper but I would tell the young people that I'm up here alone with you and you have to be the policemen in the situation because obviously I can't handle it if you don't. So having deputized, as it were, the young people you would have the best helpers on Earth. Some really funny incidents occurred but the point is the summer encampments went on in Shaver Lake for five years.

M.N.: How long would they last?

Garretson: Generally a week. That's about all the young people could be away from home so I would take the young people to Yosemite first and then to Shaver Lake. All told there were nine of these camps. Then various ones of the men that I knew up and down the state began to incorporate both the Yosemite Bible Camp at Oakhurst which is quite a large institution now and one at Sierra Bible Camp at Lake Almanor area so I stopped running my own camps because I was invited to work with these others and I have continued right on to the present time. I work with the Sierra Bible Camp at Lake Almanor and also the one at Oakhurst. I go in August this year to the one at Oakhurst.

M.N.: Do you still enjoy it?

Garretson: Oh yes and I generally take the teenage class. I would just as soon have the little boys anyway.

M.N.: You mentioned something about Arizona.

Garretson: Yes, I was in Phoenix working with what is now the Camel Back Congregation.

M.N.: How did you get there?

Garretson: I was in Fullerton and some of the people had come over to Fullerton to visit relatives and they asked me if I'd consider

moving to Phoenix. After a little time went by I thought yes, I always liked the city of Phoenix so there again I left a very fine congregation in Fullerton and I moved up the San Joaquin Valley. I got an invitation to come back and work with them and then I got an invitation to go over to Phoenix. All of these moves were needless but enjoyable. I enjoyed going. I look back and say, "Why didn't I stay in Fullerton?" or "Why didn't I stay in Chowchilla all those years?" and "Why didn't I stay in Phoenix?"

M.N.: Then maybe you wouldn't have the twinkle in your eye you've got now.

Garretson: I don't know about that twinkle. I sometimes say, "Why do you move?" I move from Big Spring, Texas to here and I said, "Why did I move?" I loved it in Big Spring. I went back and I moved this time. Of course, I am enjoying my work here.

M.N.: Once again how did you end up on the Reservation?

Garretson: Among the Navahos it goes back to my association with Omar Bixler who is quite a promoter. He is now at Fort Defiance. He is a promoter in a sense that I don't think I could ever have found a better Chamber of Commerce man anywhere and I think he was the head of the Chamber of Commerce at Moses Lake, Washington and through the years going back nearly 40 years Omar would call me and say, "Elbert, we found an opportunity to help a certain group of people," for instance in Vernal, Utah or Artisia, Colorado or Moses Lake, Washington and as time went on his work took him down into Fort Defiance with the Navahos. I've been over there for quite a few meetings and I've got two scheduled this summer and so that's enjoyable.

M.N.: Is that a pretty area?

Garretson: To me it is and I don't know anybody who thinks otherwise. You know the red soil, green trees, high plateaus and the history behind it means something when you consider Canyon De Chelly and all of this area and the history that is with those people. Everything put together, to me, it's a very beautiful country.

M.N.: Aren't the Navaho hard to work with?

Garretson: Might be for some people but I've found it otherwise--just to behave and be friendly with them is what they want. They don't want you to interfere and control their lives and any presentation of Bible truth that I have had the privilege of doing has been on the basis of an invitation and never coercive. I don't believe that I should make anybody do anything but if they're willing to listen. Now the Navahos that I've been associated with were willing to hear. Some of it's been through an interpreter, some of it has been direct and I've found them to be very receptive and simple people. I think I'm a simple person for example.

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M.N.: How long have you been working there now?

Garretson: My association with the Navahos goes back I think the better part of four years--not long but there's quite a plan to continue on from time to time working with them.

M.N.: When did you start at this congregation?

Garretson: I started here six years ago--the last of 1974--I believe.

M.N.: What are your plans?

Garretson: Right now the plans are more or less immediate. The long-range plans are to continue wherever I am here or elsewhere. I have no plans for elsewhere but in summer camp work, in working with the Navaho and in other mission meeting work and we're just now concluding our vacation Bible school which I think has been very good. Whatever opportunities that we see in the environment plus reaching out which sometimes takes me to the border of Canada in gospel meetings.

M.N.: How old are you?

Garretson: 65.

M.N.: Don't you have a rocking chair pegged?

Garretson: I sure do but I don't sit in it all the time. Now I have a good bed to sleep in but I don't stay there all the time.

M.N.: It doesn't sound like you're looking for a complete retirement next week.

Garretson: "Boast not yourself of tomorrow", said Solomon in Proverbs but try to behave yourself and try to use what you have in the best way. Somebody said, "Do the best you can with what you've got where you are." That's crudely stated but it's really true. One of the greatest things in the world is what God has given us, our health and talents such as they are. Use them well and don't rely on your own strength. I always think of that old statement that Solomon made. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not to your own understanding but in all of your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths." That doesn't mean that I want to take an overly emotional attitude toward religion but I believe a man's reconsiderations of life go on everyday therefore we live in the present and if we live in the present live it right and we take the future into account then life is made up of pleasant memories. If life is made up of pleasant memories it is because a man ought to live right today because tomorrow it will be part of his past and that will greatly influence his future. I don't think a person can bypass that truth.

M.N.: What about your own children--have they been important to you?

Garretson: Oh, very much. I don't necessarily live for any one person unless it is the general way of thinking. What I live for is what I think is truth but I'm certainly happy to have the wife I have and the children. They're very important and I really enjoy those children--everyone of them.

M.N.: Do you have grandchildren?

Garretson: Yes, I enjoy them too--seven of them.

M.N.: Coming from Oklahoma how are you different than someone else that I might meet?

Garretson: It might be in the worse way. I know some Oklahoma people that I think are very shrewd, very well educated and a number of them stayed there. For instance, the class I graduated with in 1936 I think that they're some of the shrewdest mentalities and finest of young people at that time who are now older people and I don't know but what I could say that they're people I look up to even now and I thought I had a wonderful class. I look at some of the people at the reunion that took place at the Ramada Inn in Elk City last may 1980, and as I looked over it and scanned that group of people and visited with them I thought I'm really fortunate to have been associated with this kind of teachers. In my own particular class I see them as a very intelligent fine group. As far as I am concerned I learned a little but I paid the price for it. I struggled.

M.N.: Tell me if you can what kind of a man was your father in Oklahoma that last year and how did he change in the next year or two after he came to California or did he change?

Garretson: I don't think his principles changed at all. I think he changed in that he was glad to get out of the dust bowl and out of the drought and the loss of our livestock. I believe that it was an exhilaration and an acceleration. He was very happy at all places but nobody could actually be joyful at the financial losses and the drought and the situation. He hated to leave the old farm and so many friends but really and truly to him as I look back, not knowing for sure, to him it was quite a boon in that he was busy in carpenter work. He was a very skilled carpenter. As a "farmer", I think he enjoyed "carpentry" work more than farming. He enjoyed farming but there was something to be made and some progress you could see.

M.N.: Did he do well as a carpenter?

Garretson: Very well. He became a contractor in Kern County for several years. He finally had to stop because of the dust that he was having to contend with in the carpenter shop. He had the outdoor carpenter work that wasn't a problem to him but he had a carpentry shop and he would build things within it and some way or another I think in these times there's a way of filtering this dust out, but he didn't

have that and he decided to retire from carpentry work. He had these fine Delta tools that he hated to part with but he sold them and he had two Watkins routes--one in Tehachapi and one in East Bakersfield and he said he never enjoyed anything so much as door to door selling of Watkins products.

M.N.: Did he do well at it?

Garretson: Yes, he did. I don't know whether he matched what he could have done in carpenter work but he did well enough and he'd told me that many times. Ie was kind of amazing to me. He enjoyed the farm but carpenter work more, so I think California was good for him really in the move as I look back.

M.N.: You feel it was good for you?

Garretson: Yes, I've often wondered if I'd had stayed and gone to Abilene at the college how my life might have changed but I will never know so I don't worry about it. I think it's been good. I've enjoyed California very much.

M.N.: Have you enjoyed your life?

Garretson: Oh yes, I'm happy.

M.N.: How do you as a person look at your life?

Garretson: I look at it as something that needs to be constantly improved. I see that when I'm happiest is when I know I've improved. Where I've blundered before or made any error and I correct it, then I'm happiest.

M.N.: You seem to have a happy personality.

Garretson: Yes, I'm not happy if I think I've made someone unhappy. If I think I have neglected my responsibility or if I've hurt someone or failed to go visit an old couple that I sould have gone to see. If, say, I've neglected them for three weeks then I'm not happy until I go then I feel real good about it. In the overall picture, being active and trying to take care of yourself to some degree to say the least and if you have a measure of health and you have some decent self-respect you can give happiness. You know I believe happiness is one of those things that you don't pursue. You don't think about happiness. You pursue what's right and happiness is inevitable.

END OF INTERVIEW

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b. 1885, Buffalo, Erie Co., New York
[Parents from Iowa/Wisconsin]

Ida Leefa Rummel
b. 1892, Jamesport, Daviess Co., Missouri
[Parents from Indiana/Missouri]

Elbert Ray Garretson

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m. 1941

Avery Lee Kilday

b. 1923, Rockport, Atchison Co., Missouri

Emily Ruth (Flournoy)
b. 1942
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Vernon Wayne
b. 1945
Minister

Phillip Elbert
b. 1949
Retail Clerk

Gayle Ross
b. 1958
Minister

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