

## CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

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

## Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: Esta Mae Lewis Rymal

PLACE OF BIRTH: Cushing, Payne County,  
Oklahoma

INTERVIEWER: Judith Gannon

DATES OF INTERVIEWS: January 14, 1981

PLACE OF INTERVIEWS: Bakersfield, Kern County

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PREFACE

This interview was with a woman who lived in California for only one year and who returned to Oklahoma. She remained there for twenty years and returned to California only after her children were grown and living in California. She and her family seemed to see California as a stepping stone--a way to earn enough money to return to Oklahoma and buy a farm.

This interview required little editing.

Judith Gannon  
Interviewer

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INTERVIEWEE: Esta Mae Lewis Rymal (Age: 58)

INTERVIEWER: Judith Gannon

DATED: January 14, 1981

J.G.: This is an interview of Esta Mae Rymal for the California State College, Bakersfield, CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Judith Gannon at 1000 Pacheco Road on January 14, 1981, at 11:00 a.m.

J.G.: I noticed from the form that you sent back to the college that you were born in Tryon, Oklahoma.

Rymal: I was born in Cushing, Oklahoma. I was raised in Tryon.

J.G.: And you came to California when you were fifteen?

Rymal: Yes.

J.G.: Okay. Would you begin by telling me a little bit about your family and what your life was like in Oklahoma before you came to California?

Rymal: Yes. There was seven children and we went to a rural school and then to high school in Tryon. We lived in the country. We lived on a farm. Of course when the drought came along (tape skips) other people suffered more than we did. We lived on a farm and raised all of our food. We had chickens, pigs and cows, so we didn't ever go hungry. We didn't have a lot that we should have. We didn't have the clothes that we should have had. But we had love which I think is very important. My father was a farmer and at that time it was pretty hard to dig

your living out of the soil. When the drought came along the ponds and the creeks dried up. We had a spring that ran all the time and it dried up. We had a pump down by the house, the kind that you raise up and down, and we pumped water for the cattle and horses to drink and [all our household needs] during those years. The government came in--I remember this especially--we raised cotton. In order to raise the price they destroyed the cotton fields. They came in and plowed the cotton under. They also killed our cattle and paid us a nominal fee for them.

J.G.: What did your parents think of the idea of plowing the crops up and doing away with the cattle?

Rymal: Well, the government paid them when they did it. I don't remember what my father thought. I think during the early 1930s I was really too young to remember too much except seeing them plow the cotton under and shoot the cattle. I don't remember how my father felt about it. I guess he was probably glad to get the money because the price for both the cotton and cattle was so low at that time.

J.G.: So that probably the amount of money that the government paid for the crops you produced was more than what you could have received if he'd tried to sell it?

Rymal: Yes, I'm sure. And by destroying this it raised the prices of cattle and cotton because they were doing away with part of it. But as I say, we never went hungry. I'm sure that people in the cities probably did.

J.G.: You say you had seven brothers and sisters?

Rymal: I have three brothers and three sisters and they are all still alive except one.

J.G.: I notice that you said that you grew up in Tryon and you were born in Cushing and you were raised until you were fifteen in the country on the farm?

Rymal: Yes.

J.G.: Could you describe your social life on the farm?

Rymal: Well, you know, we didn't go to movies much. I remember going to movies when I was probably thirteen or fourteen and paying a nickel [admission]. We had our form of entertainment which was visiting the neighbors. We had parties for the young people at different houses. There was always someone that could play a violin or guitar and we made our own music. We would move everything out of the living room and play party games and make homemade ice cream.

J.G.: Did you live fairly close to your nearest neighbor?

Rymal: About a quarter mile. And we had to walk a mile to school when we went to grade school.

J.G.: What was your school like?

Rymal: Well, the first school was a two room, wooden building. There were four grades in each room. That building burned down and I almost didn't make it out of there. We had been practicing for a literary--we used to have literary programs too. That was another form of entertainment. We'd been practicing all morning and we were tired and waiting for the bell to ring at noon and one small boy wanted to build a fire. We had these big potbelly stoves and we'd had a fire in the stove because it was in April and still cool. The stove was full of huge firey coals and the teacher told him no, it was too warm. Well, he walked over, picked up a 5-gallon can of kerosene, opened the door of the stove, tipped up the can and poured the kerosene on the coals and the stove exploded. My mother said that for months after that when she'd go to build a fire it would scare me because I was the last one out of the school building. I was climbing out the window and it fell on me and the school house was falling in it was so much on fire. I almost didn't make it out of that. They built another school house right on the same spot and that one burned too. I heard stories--probably old wives tales--that if you build a building back on the same spot that it will just keep burning.

J.G.: How old were you when this happened?

Rymal: I was about six or seven. It was pretty scary.

J.G.: I bet it was. So if I am understanding this right, you were actually born in one city but lived on a farm outside of that city. You spent little or no time in the town you were born in.

Rymal: The town that we lived close to--Tryon--was a very small town. I think at the time the population was probably 200. And they had a general store, gas station, bank, cafe. Main Street was about two blocks long. It was just a very small town.

J.G.: Did your father buy the farm then that you moved to?

Rymal: No, my uncle owned it and he rented it from him. Eventually, he bought it. My two younger brothers and myself were still at home when we came to California and by working out here in California and by saving their money they went back to Oklahoma and bought the farm that I was raised on.

J.G.: Are they still living on the farm?

Rymal: No, when my father was about fifty-five he had his first heart attack and he had to get off the farm so they sold the farm and

bought a house in Stillwater, Oklahoma. My father's been gone about ten years and my mother's still alive.

When we came out in April, 1937 a lot of people were coming to California. We first went to Fresno. We were there just a little while when we moved to Hanford. Then my father decided he wanted to try a cotton camp where you live in the cabins and pick cotton. I think we were there about a month and we moved back to Hanford. I think we were in California a year the first time and then went back to Oklahoma. In 1939, we came back out and that's when I got married the first time. Later my folks went to Oregon and finally back to Oklahoma.

J.G.: So you really didn't come to California and settle and stay, you went back and forth to Oklahoma a couple of times in the meantime.

Rymal: Yes. I have a brother that's still out here. He lives in Hanford.

J.G.: Why do you think your family decided to go back that first time after they had come to California?

Rymal: Well, the first time we came we were just here a year as I said and I met my first husband during that time. I was fifteen and we wanted to get married. My father said that he took me back to Oklahoma so I wouldn't get married. But when I came back I got married anyway.

J.G.: What did you go back to when you went to Oklahoma?

Rymal: We went back to the farm.

J.G.: So your father could start renting again from your uncle?

Rymal: Yes, he didn't buy it that time. He bought it later. We were only back there a year and we came back to California in April 1939. My folks were out here I'd say a few years, but I guess Oklahoma was home to them.

J.G.: How about you?

Rymal: Well, I find myself going back every once in a while to visit. I was back this summer to visit my mother. I guess, to me it's always home. I came to California in 1971 and I was here a year and went back. Then I came out in 1976 and I've been here since.

J.G.: What do you think it is that draws you and your family back to Oklahoma each time?

Rymal: Well, I think it's family a lot. I only have one brother out here and he lives in Hanford and the rest of my sisters and brothers and my mother live in Oklahoma. I think that just the

simple fact that it's home and you just feel drawn back there every once in a while.

J.G.: You say it's home. What makes Oklahoma and not California home?

Rymal: Well, maybe I have two homes. Maybe that's because I was raised there. I lived in Stillwater 20 years and raised my children--three sons and my daughter. My three sons live here--two of them in Bakersfield and one of them up on the Grapevine and my daughter lives in Denver.

J.G.: So you have your extended family--your parents are still back in Oklahoma and your children are here in this area.

Rymal: Yes.

J.G.: Let's back up a second and talk about a typical Sunday in Oklahoma before you came to California. What was that like?

Rymal: We were usually too far away from town to go to church, but the families got together then, I think a lot more than they do now. I had a lot of uncles and aunts. We traveled in a wagon--we had a wagon for a long time and my father would hitch up the horses to it and we'd get in there. If it was cold we'd take a quilt with us and we'd go visit my aunts and uncles and eat dinner and stay in the afternoon and then come home. We did that quite a bit.

J.G.: Your aunts and uncles lived in the same area around Tryon?

Rymal: Yes.

J.G.: How far were you from town?

Rymal: Two miles.

J.G.: So as far as your actual church-going that was more of a family kind of thing?

Rymal: Yes. My mother as far back as I can remember read the Bible to us and we prayed together. So we were raised up with it. We lived in Cushing for awhile until I was about five and we went to church there because we were close. But, we never went a great deal when we were on the farm.

J.G.: What did your father do while you were in Cushing?

Rymal: My father worked for the Katy Railroad. I believe on my birth certificate that his occupation was teamster. Now we have a Teamsters Union, but I don't know I think probably what my father was doing was working with horses.

J.G.: Do you remember how it came about that you moved to the farm from working on the railroad in town? How was the decision come to

to start farming?

Rymal: Well, my grandmother--my father's mother--she felt like we should live on the farm because the children--us children and my mother--should help make the living. That was always the way it was with her family, they all worked in the field. She talked my father into moving to the farm.

J.G.: Did the kids work on the farm?

Rymal: Oh yes, we raised cotton and corn and wheat and oats. And in the spring we'd have to chop the cotton, chop the weeds and grass out of it and then in the fall we picked cotton. With the corn, we had to shuck it. You'd go along with the wagon and pull the ears off the stock, pull the shucks off and throw the ears in the wagon and put them in the barn to store them. With the oats and wheat the farmer went along and cut the grain and put it in shocks and then the harvester came along and my dad threw the bundles in the harvester. The farmer had to put the bundles in the harvester and the straw went out one spout and the grain went out another. So we all worked in the fields. All of us even my mother at times. I remember--you know children remember how good things tasted--when we'd be over in the field, mother would bring a big bowl of potato salad, fried chicken, and hot rolls to the field and I remember how good that tasted. Of course, we always butchered pigs and beef and my father cured the meat. I know that the hams we have now probably taste just as good, but I don't think so.

J.G.: No, I don't think they would either. It seems like that fresh, right from the farm has to be better.

Rymal: Well, we had cattle and milk cows. I never milked cows because I never learned how. But I gathered eggs and fed the chickens and of course, we had to bring in wood for the cook stove and the heater. We'd carried wood in and we'd go into the pig pen and pick up cobs to start the fire with. We had calves we always had to feed. We all pitched in.

J.G.: Sounds like a lot of hard work in that kind of life style.

Rymal: It is.

J.G.: What do you think led up to your dad's decision to move from Oklahoma to California? What happened about then?

Rymal: Things were pretty rough. There just wasn't any way you could make money and digging it out of the soil, you just couldn't do it. My sister and her husband came to California before we did and they went to Fresno and that's how come we went to Fresno. I guess they wrote to us and told us things were better out here. So my father decided that he would give it a try. We loaded up our car and at the same time that we came one of my other sisters

and her husband and their children went along in their car. So there was two cars of us.

J.G.: I know you said on your form that you came out with two younger brothers. Were your other brothers and sisters older?

Rymal: They were all married. It was just my two younger brothers and myself and my mother and father.

J.G.: Did your family have a sale and sell all the household goods?

Rymal: Yes.

J.G.: Was that the money you used to get out here and get started?

Rymal: Yes.

J.G.: Do you have any recollection of about how much money that was?

Rymal: I know my father sold all of his cattle and horses. I remember that he had two horses their names were Maude and Dick and my father had had them so long that he almost cried when he sold them. It was almost like giving up a child. We sold farm machinery and chickens and pigs and all of that. I am sure that at that time which was 1937 we got very little for any of it. I wouldn't have any idea how much he got for all of that stuff. But it wouldn't be but a few hundred dollars, I'm sure.

J.G.: It sounds like you had a little bit of cushion to fall back on when you first came.

Rymal: Yes.

J.G.: What do you most remember about the trip between Oklahoma and California?

Rymal: I had never seen mountains before. We had to stop. We couldn't make the trip in one day--the cars didn't go quite as fast as they do now. We had to stop over, I guess we probably stayed at a motel. They didn't call them motels. I can't remember what they called them. But I remember the first mountain we saw. It was somewhere just out of Texas, I think, and it was just one big hill but to me it was a mountain. I thought that was interesting. Never having traveled or seen anything before.

And the roads--this is something that would surprise people today--especially through the mountains. Now we have big freeways that go through the mountains but then you only had just one little road, one little lane around those curves and my mother was so scared going through those mountains because you just make a little wrong move and over you'd go over the side. I remember that.

I remember we went through Tehachapi and coming up on the other side the mountain is real steep and the brakes wouldn't hold. Someone jumped out--one of my brothers I guess--and grabbed a rock and we pushed on the car and got it back up on top of the hill. It was kind of scary.

J.G.: Was that your first view of California coming down over the Tehachapis?

Rymal: Yes.

J.G.: What did that seem like to you?

Rymal: We were all excited, I know I was, to see California. I think when I filled out the paper--people called it then the land of milk and honey. A lot of people in Oklahoma used that expression because you could come out here and make a living. You could save money because my father did and they didn't have the drought here like we did and that's why we came out. My father felt like we could better ourselves. I know The Grapes of Wrath shows--I have to laugh because we never lived in anything like those people did in that. I'm sure you've seen it. A lot of people didn't like that when that book was written and they called us Okies.

J.G.: When was it when The Grapes of Wrath was written were you back in Oklahoma or here in California?

Rymal: I think probably in California.

J.G.: You say you didn't live like that at all?

Rymal: Only in the cotton camp near Corcoran. My father thought he wanted to try it because you could live in one room--just a cabin built up there and he wanted to try it because he thought he could save more money where he didn't have to pay rent. But it was really like The Grapes of Wrath and we weren't there but a few weeks and my father said, "I'm going back to Hanford." So we moved back to Hanford and we had a real nice two-bedroom house and he worked in the fruit and the cotton and things like that.

J.G.: Describe for me a little bit what it was like when you lived in the cotton camp.

Rymal: Oh, there were a lot of people that lived in those cabins that they really didn't keep themselves clean. They were dirty I would say trashy people. We weren't that kind of people. We had always been clean, kept ourselves clean, wore clean clothes. Most of the people that lived there were like that--they were kind of trashy people. We had a shower. Everybody used the same shower and it was just a bunch of cabins for the workers to live in. It was terrible that the people who owned the cotton would put workers in there where they had to live that way.

J.G.: This cotton camp was privately owned by the cotton grower?

Rymal: Yes.

J.G.: So the whole family lived in a one-room cabin. What about bathroom facilities?

Rymal: We had outhouses. They were outside.

J.G.: What about washing the clothes?

Rymal: Well, I'm sure there was a well where you could get water. There wasn't any water in the cabin itself. No piped-in water so you had to get your water and wash on a board.

J.G.: Did you work in the cotton fields while you were in the camp?

Rymal: I went to school. I worked on Saturday and after school. I believe in the form I filled out I put Coalinga but the cotton camp we lived in was down by Corcoran. My father always wanted to try things and if he didn't like it then he'd just go back to where he was.

J.G.: So I can get it straight in my head, when did you come to California?

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Rymal: We first came to California in 1937 to Fresno and lived there for about eight months and then we came to Hanford and we were there about three or four months.

J.G.: What kind of employment did you have when you were in Hanford?

Rymal: Well, let's see, we worked in the cotton. It was in the spring and we chopped cotton, chopped the weeds and grass out of it, and we worked in the fruit--you know peaches--and in the drying sheds where they dried the peaches and apricots. That is mainly what we worked at.

J.G.: You mentioned you went to school in Fresno and Hanford. Did you work in the fields with your father also?

Rymal: I went to school in Fresno. I went to Clovis High. Our address was Fresno, but I had to go to Clovis High. I worked on Saturdays and when I could in the fields, but then when we came to Hanford I went to Hanford High School. I went to school well, California, at least they used to be, was very strict on you being in school. If you weren't they came out and brought you to school so I went to school all the time.

J.G.: How was it for you to change three different schools in a short time?

Rymal: It was rather difficult. When I went to Clovis High, I didn't know anyone. I have always been rather a shy person anyway and I don't get acquainted with people too easily at least I didn't then. I do more so now. But, I was only about fifteen and I didn't get to know too many people at Clovis because we weren't there too long. At Hanford I got acquainted with a girl up the street from us and we went to the bus together and I got acquainted with her and her friends so it was a little easier. But it's hard on young people to go and change schools when you don't know anyone.

J.G.: That was such a hard time for many people that there were a lot of cases the kids really had to work the fields right along with their parents--truancy officer or not. I wonder, how much of the year did your father work? How about when there weren't any crops, what happened then?

Rymal: There was usually something for him to go on and work at. In the spring the cotton takes several weeks, well in fact, probably a month or two or longer. There's usually something else that comes along. There's work in the orchards to do. So he worked most of the time, but he wanted us children to get an education and he saw that we went to school. He never kept us out of school to work in the fields. Even when we lived on the farm, we went to school. He wouldn't keep us out to work in the fields. We went to school.

J.G.: You mentioned earlier that you lived in a two-bedroom house when you first came to California, was it a rented house?

Rymal: Yes.

J.G.: So it sounds like your father was always able to follow the crops. Did he have to leave home to do that or did he come home every night?

Rymal: Yes. Hanford is kind of an agricultural section of California and there's grapes and of course the apricots and peaches and then there's cotton. There's usually something to keep you busy. In 1939 my father was over a crew of men working in the orchard. He was good at that and his boss put him to work at it. I think about that time you made about 25-30 cents an hour. But you could buy a loaf of bread for 10 or 15 cents.

J.G.: So it sounds like for your family during this period of time things weren't as depicted by The Grapes of Wrath.

Rymal: No, not in my family. As I say, my father wanted to try the cotton camp but it wasn't for him. My mother knew it, but she let him try it anyway.

J.G.: How did he come to the decision to go to the places that he did to find work? What led you to go first to Fresno and then to Hanford then to Corcoran?

Rymal: When we went to Fresno, my sister and her husband had come out before we did so that's why we went to Fresno. Then my father had a brother who lived in Hanford, so that's why we came down to Hanford. And of course the cotton camp he just wanted to try that out and see what it was like.

J.G.: Was it by word of mouth that he knew there were jobs in Corcoran?

Rymal: They had those cotton camps all over. They weren't just in Corcoran, they were in other places. I suppose that he just heard about them from someone. Like you say word of mouth. He heard about them and thought he would like to try it.

J.G.: Could you describe your day in either Hanford or Fresno? What was a typical day like for you?

Rymal: On school days I had to walk about half a mile to get on the bus. The people that owned the property where we lived were beautiful people, they were from Syria. The grandfather was a beautiful old gentleman. He'd tell me, "Now when you're walking from the bus stop to the house, don't you get in the car with anybody." He'd come to meet me almost every afternoon and walk with me until I was home. We'd come home from school and if they were working in the fields, I'd go and work a few hours in the field and come back and have supper and that's about what we did. Of course, on Saturdays we'd work in the field all day.

J.G.: What about Sundays?

Rymal: I don't think we went to church. I don't remember going. Like I said, my mother still read the Bible to us. She always took time to do that. My brothers were in school too. They were just small, both younger than me. They went to school and so did I. My father wanted us to get an education because he only went--I believe he went to the sixth grade was as far as he went. In his time that was quite a ways to go in school.

J.G.: It sure was. A lot of people during that time had only first and second grade. There's been a lot of talk about the way the growers treated the laborers.

Rymal: I don't remember any of the land owners doing anything mean to us. The ones that I remember were real nice. They treated us with respect and they were friendly to us. We weren't just a bunch of workers. We were friends with the people we worked for.

J.G.: The other people that worked for these same growers, there weren't any ill feelings about being taking advantage of or anything like that?

Rymal: No, I can't remember any of it. As I remember they were all real nice people and treated us nice.

J.G.: Did your father primarily work for one grower or a lot of different growers?

Rymal: No, I think he worked for one fellow in fruit and another fellow in the fields--the cotton. That's the only two I remember.

J.G.: You said earlier that the decision to go back to Oklahoma was because you met this young man that your father wanted you to get away from.

Rymal: My first husband, yes. I eventually married him. But my father said that's why he's taking us back because he didn't want us to get married. I was only fifteen and that was rather young. I was seventeen when I got married.

J.G.: How did that all come about? You went back to Oklahoma and farmed there awhile.

Rymal: In April, 1939, we came back to California.

J.G.: What made him decide to come back to California?

Rymal: Well, he still wanted to work and save money and buy the farm. That was his dream he wanted to buy that farm.

J.G.: It sounds like he found California as a temporary stepping stone to get back to Oklahoma.

Rymal: Yes, I think so. I think that was the main reason he came because he felt he could come out here and work and save his money and go back and buy the farm.

J.G.: When you came back to California in April, 1939 where did you settle?

Rymal: We came back to Hanford.

J.G.: Did he go back to the orchards and the cotton?

Rymal: Yes, we worked at the same thing. In 1940, they went to Oregon for a while and I think they saved money up there.

J.G.: So you came back to California and met your first husband.

Rymal: Yes, I married him in 1939.

J.G.: What was your life like after you married?

Rymal: We lived on a ranch for just a few months and then we had to move.

J.G.: Was the ranch in California?

Rymal: Yes, it was up close to Lemore. We were only married about five years--five or six years and then we were divorced.

J.G.: You say you lived on the ranch only a few months, what caused you to move?

Rymal: Well, when they bought the ranch, my father-in-law had traded their place in Hanford plus some money that my husband had gotten from a motorcycle accident. They used that to buy the ranch. At least pay down on it and they bought cattle and they were going to sell milk. My father-in-law was supposed to be making the payments on the ranch and he wasn't so we lost it.

J.G.: Then what happened?

Rymal: In 1940, we moved into Hanford and we lived there and my first son was born. My husband went to work in the oil fields. We separated several times. I wanted so badly to raise my children with their mother and father, but it just didn't work out that way.

J.G.: After you moved back to Hanford and got divorced what happened then?

Rymal: I had my sons and I went back to Oklahoma and that's where my daughter was born--my daughter has a different father. I lived 20 years in Stillwater and raised my children all by myself.

J.G.: What made you decide to go from Hanford back to Oklahoma?

Rymal: My family was back there. My mother and father were there. My youngest son was only a month old and I felt like it would be awfully hard for me because none of my family lived here and if I went back there at least I would have the support of my family. They would help me with my children and that is the reason I went.

J.G.: Did you work when you went back to Oklahoma?

Rymal: No, I had aid to dependent children until my daughter was old enough to go to school. Then I went to work. I worked about ten years. I worked for Holiday Inn in the laundry and then I worked in another laundry in Stillwater. I became disabled and haven't worked since.

J.G.: So after the 20 years in Stillwater you then moved back to California.

Rymal: Yes, my sons were here and they said, "Mother you don't have anything holding you there, why don't you come out and live in California and be close to us." So, I'm here.

J.G.: So it sounds like you're half an Oklahoman and half a Californian.

Rymal: Yes, and then I met my current husband and we got married. We've only been married since April. We've known each other for about three years but we've only been married since April.

J.G.: Back during that time when you think about The Grapes of Wrath and the way of the life of a migrant and your life experience was quite different. What do you think happened with the other people or do you think your experience was unique or were there a lot of people that didn't have that super hard times that they denote in The Grapes of Wrath?

Rymal: Well, I'm sure that a lot of the people that lived in that cotton camp where we went had no choice. They had no choice but to live there because they didn't have the money to pay rent in town and they probably had no choice. I imagine that in The Grapes of Wrath most of that happened in these kinds of camps. Of course, we didn't live in them except for just those few weeks. It wasn't for my father. We never lived like that and he just didn't like it.

J.G.: It sounds like your father was able to find work most of the time. One of the things that was stated in the background reading I have done, is that for a lot of the people they just simply were not able to find work. They worked about maybe half of the year. I wondered if anyone around you or acquaintances had any similar experiences to that of really not being able to find work during that time.

Rymal: Well my uncle lived in Hanford. My father's brother and they worked the same as we did. With us my two brothers and I and my mother worked in the field too--all of us worked in the field. So with all of us working it was a lot easier than if there was just a man and his wife and she had small children.

J.G.: Did your mom work in the field?

Rymal: Yes, she worked right along beside my father. Of course we worked whenever we weren't in school. That helped to make enough money so we could live in town. But as I said, I am sure there were people that couldn't find work and had to live in cotton camps. Because, I think they could live there even if there wasn't work in the field until the work started.

J.G.: One of the things you read about and one of the things I think was in The Grapes of Wrath, was the people that came to California and had no money for much of anything and lived in tents right along the irrigation canals.

Rymal: Yes, I didn't see any of that, but I am sure there was. But I

like California, I always have. I guess now this is home to me, but I still feel a pull back to Oklahoma because that's where my roots are.

J.G.: There was some labor unrest during that period, apparently there was some attempt to organize the field workers. Did you or your father ever have that touch upon your lives at all?

Rymal: No, I don't think so. I'm sure they have organized since then but I don't remember.

J.G.: You don't remember hearing anything about strikes or labor problems that the growers had?

Rymal: No. I can't remember. I know we worked all the time practically the whole year round. There were a couple of weeks when there was no work, but there was always plowing and planting and all that. My father worked all the time and we worked when we could.

J.G.: Is there any event or anything during the time you were in California, either the first year when you came out with your family or the five years after your marriage that stands out in your mind?

Rymal: Oh, I remember--my father was kind of a gruff sort of man, he had a high temper. He wasn't mean to us. He was good to us. He'd just lose his temper sometimes. I remember in 1941, when they went back to Oklahoma I was next door with some friends and my mother and my brothers came over to say good-bye because they were leaving the next day and my father didn't come over. So on the way back to Oklahoma he wrote me a card, I still have it and he said, "I just couldn't come over cause I just couldn't tell you good-bye." And he told me if things don't work out for you, you always have a home. That was unusual for my father. I was so surprised when I got it because he was always such a gruff sort of man and you never knew what he felt inside.

J.G.: Some of the people I've talked with felt that people were not very kind to them when they came to California. Did you ever have any kind of experiences when the local people or the kids in school were hostile or anything like that?

Rymal: No, when I went to school there in Hanford I went there quite a while and made a lot of friends and I remember one girl asking me--I've had to laugh about this since because it was so funny--she wanted to know if you had to cross the ocean to get to Oklahoma and she wanted to know if the Indians were still wild. Of course, things like that were so funny because you don't go across an ocean and I had a notion to tell her, "You haven't studied your history lesson very good if you think you have to cross the ocean." And of course the Indians haven't been wild for a long time.

J.G.: The term that you sometimes hear "Okie" used. What does that mean when somebody says that?

Rymal: Well, my youngest son says that he thinks it's a derogatory remark, calling somebody an Okie. He says I am an Oklahoman. To him an Okie is a name given to a lower trashy kind of people from Oklahoma. But I don't mind, you know, I am an Okie. I was born there. I have two children that were born in Oklahoma. So I don't feel that someone is insulting me when they call me an Okie.

J.G.: Have you ever heard of the term "Dustbowler"?

Rymal: No, I don't think so. Now the dust bowl to me was the panhandle of Oklahoma. We lived in the central part of Oklahoma, but the drought affected us too. But in the panhandle there were no trees, it's just prairie. The dust just went across the country because there was nothing to stop it, and everything dried up. There was no rain and like I said the creeks and the ponds and everything dried up.

J.G.: Sometimes that is the term used to denote the people that came from the dust bowl. I know you said earlier in the interview that your mother's chicken and potato salad was something that you recall. If you think back to the foods that you ate during the time you first came to California, could you describe what an average menu was like?

Rymal: For breakfast, my mother made biscuits--this was every morning--fried potatoes, ham gravy, eggs, coffee and milk. That was an average breakfast. But we worked hard, we worked it all off. My brother painted a picture from memory of the farm where I was raised--my mother has it, he sent it to her. When I was back there this summer and I took it and sat it on a chair and took a picture of it.

J.G.: I would like to see it.

Rymal: Well, I'll get it for you, it looks just like the farm.

END OF INTERVIEW

## INDEX

- California
  - First impression, 8
  - Treatment in, 11, 15
  - Fresno, 9, 11
  - Hanford, 9, 11, 12, 14
  - Corcoran, 9
  - Lemore, 13
- Discrimination
  - On job, 11
- Education
  - In Oklahoma, 3
  - In California, 9, 10
- Family Life
  - Entertainment, 2, 5
  - Chores, 6
  - Cooking/Food, 6, 16
  - Marriage, 4, 12, 14
  - Problems, 13
- Farming
  - Methods, 6
  - Land rental, 3
  - Crops, 2, 6
  - Drought, 2, 16
  - Dust storms, 16
  - Government policies, 2
  - Move from town to farm, 6
- The Grapes of Wrath/Steinbeck
  - Identification with, 8, 11
- Housing
  - Homes in California, 10
  - Grower-provided, 8, 9
- Migration to California
  - Attraction of California, 4, 6, 8, 12
  - Reasons for move, 6
  - Transportation, 8
  - Shelter, 7
  - Funds available, 7
- "Okie"
  - Definition, 16
  - Reactions to term, 16
- Oklahoma
  - Tryon, 1
  - Cushing, 2
  - Stillwater, 4, 13
  - Return to Oklahoma, 13
- Relief
  - Welfare in Oklahoma, 13
- Religion
  - Church, 5, 11
- Work
  - Migrant labor, 8, 14
  - Permanent jobs, 10
  - Employers, 12
  - Strikes, 14
  - Wages, 10