

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

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

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE:	Lillie Ruth Ann Counts Dunn
PLACE OF BIRTH:	Porum, Muskogee County, Oklahoma
INTERVIEWER:	Judith Gannon
DATES OF INTERVIEWS:	February 14 and 16, 1981
PLACE OF INTERVIEWS:	Bakersfield, Kern County
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PREFACE

This is an account of a woman's valiant efforts to survive a chaotic family life in Oklahoma and the effects of the Depression by migrating to California only to find herself embroiled in the 1933 Tipton/Pixley cotton strike. It is an excellent account of the kind of pressure brought to bear on those persons who attempted to organize the farm workers during the 1930s. It also describes some of the family problems which resulted from these experiences.

Mrs. Dunn took great pains in personally editing the transcript. The highly emotional nature of the interview made even further editing necessary for clarity. Even at age 73 many of her experiences remain extremely painful to recall. Mrs. Dunn gave the Project a book which she wrote and a record album of gospel songs which she wrote.

Judith Gannon
Interviewer

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INTERVIEWEE: Lillian Ruth Dunn (Age: 73)

INTERVIEWER: Judith Gannon

DATED: February 14 and 16, 1981

J.G.: This is an interview with Lillian Ruth Dunn for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Judith Gannon at 3200 Monterey Street, Bakersfield, California on February 14, 1981 at 9:30 a.m.

J.G.: Okay Mrs. Dunn would you like to begin by talking a little bit about what you remember about your childhood in Oklahoma?

Dunn: Well, I was born in Porum, Oklahoma --that is in Indian Territory -- on February 14, 1908 and today is my 73 birthday. My father was a blacksmith. My mother and father came from Missouri to Oklahoma and behind our property where we lived in Porum, Belle Starr and Pony Starr and the cattlemen had a war. My mother called it a pitch battle where she lost her voice. That's about my earliest childhood remembrance. My mother and father separated when I was about six years old--possibly six and a half--and we moved to Missouri just out of Joplin a little way to a town called Prosperity, Missouri. My mother married again and we went in a covered wagon to Loveland, Colorado. We stayed there for awhile and went back to Missouri and then back to Oklahoma. I was raised on sharecropping farms in Oklahoma. We rented a place for a year where we farmed cotton and corn and then the next year we'd hunt another place. We moved just about every year for several years. My stepfather left us when I was about 13 years old. He went to Colorado. He had the miner's consumption from working in the lead mines in Missouri and he couldn't live in Oklahoma because he needed to have a higher altitude which left my mother and we children to make it the best we could. I married when I was 19 years old. I had gone to Wewoka, Oklahoma and was working in the hotels where the oil field men lived and worked. I met my husband and married him there. His name was Dell Dunn and he was from Atoka and

Colgate, Oklahoma. He was Indian and Irish. My oldest son, Jay, was born in Wewoka on November 17, 1927. We moved to Hobart, Oklahoma and my second son was born there. My husband worked for \$1 a day and there wasn't much to do so we left and went as far as Roswell, New Mexico. We sold our furniture which didn't amount to much. The last thing we sold was a cook stove for \$3.50 and we used that money to go as far as it would go. My husband didn't understand how far it was to California and he thought that that money would get us to California but we went as far as Roswell, New Mexico. We stayed there for awhile and I worked in a cafe. Then in the latter part of 1930 we came west to California.

J.G.: Before we actually arrive in California, could we go back a little bit and talk about your childhood--like how many children were there in your family?

Dunn: There were four older children--my father's children--two boys, two girls. My stepfather and mother had four children--three boys, one girl. Two of the children were twins--a boy and a girl.

J.G.: So there were eight of you altogether?

Dunn: Yes.

J.G.: When your stepfather left when you were thirteen, how did you all get along? How did you support yourselves?

Dunn: Well, it wasn't easy. We picked cotton, chopped cotton and hunted rabbits, picked wild berries, canned fruit and raised a garden.

J.G.: So at thirteen years old you were already working in the fields.

Dunn: Yes.

J.G.: Your mother and brothers and sisters also?

Dunn: Well, my oldest brother went to my father. My sister who was two years older than me married--that left myself and my own brother two years younger to support as well as my mother and the four children from her marriage to my stepfather. We did that with whatever we could find to do.

J.G.: So you and your brother--you as a thirteen year old and your brother as an eleven year old--took the major responsibility for supporting the family?

Dunn: Yes.

J.G.: That made you grow up in a hurry!

Dunn: Yes, we grew up in a hurry.

J.G.: Were you still doing sharecropping?

Dunn: Yes. We plowed the fields, planted the crops and harvested them too. My brother and I would find some little place in Oklahoma around close. We would move most every year. One year our house burned down. We had a little wood stove. We must have left a piece of wood in the stove that was too long. We went someplace and left it hanging out. It fell out of the stove and set the house on fire and burned everything we had. The neighbors and friends built us a house.

J.G.: How far out in the country did you live?

Dunn: Eight miles. At that time we lived about eight miles from Hanna, Oklahoma. Later we moved to the neighborhood around Eufaula and Hanna. I had an aunt and uncle--my mother's sister and her husband--who lived there. They seemingly stayed at one place quite some time. But we just moved from one place to another. My brother was eleven and I was thirteen. By the time I was fifteen we were the sole supporters of our mother and the children. We didn't know too much about how to farm but we did what we could. We picked the cotton in the fall and hauled it off to the cotton gin in town to buy enough food to last through the winter. We raised hogs and we usually had a cow. My mother made a garden. By all of us working we survived.

Then when I was nineteen my oldest brother came home. He didn't get along with me too good because he usually came in and sold everything we had including horses and mules and then he'd kind of leave us to make do the best we could the next year. So I went to Wewoka and got a job in a hotel. The first job I found I was paid \$5 a week with room and board.

J.G.: What were you doing?

Dunn: I was making beds and helping in the kitchen and things like that. Those were very trying times. I was raised by a mother who was very strict. We didn't have any drinking in our home and we didn't have any cursing. We didn't have anything like the morals that people have today. When I went to Wewoka I was astonished at the things that went on and what was expected of people. I was fired from my first job after I'd been there about a week. I was fired because the lady that ran the hotel had a nephew who got fresh so I was fired. Then I went to some people that I knew and stayed about a week. I found another job which paid \$7 a week.

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

- Dunn: That would have been 1927. I worked there possibly two or three weeks when I was fired again. The lady that operated the place had a husband who was paralyzed from the waist down. He asked me to bring him a glass with sugar in it. I didn't know that his wife would be angry about it so I took it to him. His daughter saw me and told his wife. She jumped on me and we fought. Later I learned that he soiled himself when he drank whatever he put in the glass with the sugar and water. She fired me for bringing him the sugar in the glass which I didn't even realize would make him drunk.
- J.G.: You thought you were doing a good deed.
- Dunn: Yes.
- J.G.: Tell me a little bit more about what it was like for a youngster of nineteen who lived in a sheltered kind of farm community to come to an oil field camp town which sounds like it was really wide open.
- Dunn: It was a howling wild place. I would never have married when I did if I had had a home. But it was kind of rough without a home.
- J.G.: It must have been terrifying when you were there all by yourself and fired wondering where your next meal was coming from.
- Dunn: Yes, it was. Anyway, I met my husband. He was working in the oil fields. However, it was a mistake to marry someone that I didn't know very long.
- J.G.: How long did you know him?
- Dunn: About six weeks.
- J.G.: We'd do things differently than we would have done given choices.
- Dunn: Yes. And so we married in Wewoka on February 23, 1927 and my oldest son was born on November 17, 1927. We lived in Wewoka for quite some time. He worked in the oil fields but it seemed he didn't know how because he didn't make too much of a living so we moved to Hobart. Our second son was born in Hobart. My husband worked in an oil mill in Hobart and made \$17 a week. Then he worked in a car wrecking yard for \$1 a day which made \$6 a week. We tried to exist on \$6 a week and finally we just sold our bed, our stove and a dresser--we didn't have too much. Three or four dollars here and there and first thing you know it was all gone for food. We had a stove left and my husband sold that for \$3.50, put gas in the car and took off. We got as far as Farwell, Texas which is on the way to Roswell, New Mexico.

J.G.: How did you live on the way to Roswell? Did you stop?

Dunn: Yes. One day it was raining so hard--we had a 1927 Chevrolet touring car--we stopped on the road at Farwell, Texas. It was raining and we were getting so wet that we stopped. Someone invited us into their house with our two children. We stayed all night there in the house. My husband worked a day or so while we were there--someplace a little ways from there in the wheat or barley or some kind of thrashing--he worked a day or two. We used the money to go on to Roswell. When we arrived in Roswell we camped near the Pecos River. We didn't know that the Pecos River had flash floods. We were camped there and we didn't have anything to eat so my husband started out looking for work. He came back that evening where we were camped and said he just couldn't find anything and I told him to take care of the children--that I would try. So I went out and washed windows in Roswell.

Before we arrived in Roswell, we stopped in Texas--it was somewhere near Dallas in a pasture under the shade of a tree. My husband tried to find something to do there. We were way out in a pasture if I remember correctly and some man came riding up on his horse and wondered what we were doing out there. I told him I was waiting for my husband to come back--that he was looking for a job. He invited us to go to his house--to go home with him. We never went, of course, but he seemed to think it was strange that I was out in this pasture sitting on the ground.

Then we went to Roswell as I say and we camped on the Pecos River. Someone came along and told us after we'd been there a couple of days that we shouldn't park on this River or camp down near the River because there are flash floods. We decided that we would move. We parked on the same River on the other side of town where there were some trees. I found a job at the Bankhead Cafe. I needed a white uniform to wear in the cafe. J.C. Penney credited me with a uniform. At first I washed windows for a lady. She asked me where we lived and I told her on the River just out of Roswell. She bought us some groceries and took me home. Later we moved up on the other side of town on the Pecos River again. I went to the Bankhead cafe to ask for a job. I worked at the Bankhead Cafe I don't know how many weeks when a customer who had received a settlement from an industrial accident to his eye asked me if I would like to go into business with him in a cafe. He knew of a cafe around the corner on Second Street. They called it the Square Deal Cafe. He said he could get it if I could stock it with groceries then we would go into business. So I said, "Sure." There was a little store on the road home where I asked them if they would credit me with the food for the cafe. The owner answered, "yes", so we went into business. I was there about two or three weeks. We were doing pretty good but my husband became jealous of the man and without my knowledge he sold

the business--that is, my part of it--and said he was coming to California where he could get a he-man's job. He received an old Essex car and \$90. I never saw the \$90 so I think he must have told me a story about that, but anyway my mother sent us money to come to California. We arrived in California somewhere in early 1931 because the cotton was still in the fields I remember. I started picking cotton in California and we had the two children--my two sons, Jay C. and Donald Ray.

J.G.: How old were they at that time?

Dunn: The youngest one was something over a year old. He was born on December 10, 1929 and would have been a year old on December 10, 1930. We arrived in California in January 1931. My mother and I picked cotton and my brother and my husband went to work at the Tagus Ranch north of Tulare. They never received cash but were given Tagus Ranch money which they had to spend on the ranch. We were pretty desperate along about then. My mother had the four children that were living at home and they weren't grown with my oldest half-brother being about 14 years old--it took a lot of food for all of us.

My brother brought some oranges home from Porterville and I didn't know that the oranges were frostbitten until after my youngest son had eaten some. He became ill with diarrhea. We were told that the oranges were frostbitten. We took my baby to the hospital in Tulare but because we were from out of state and were told we didn't belong there they wouldn't admit him. He died. We lived in Tipton--twelve miles from the hospital. They wouldn't help me with him and he died. Eventually, just before he died, someone called the doctors and they came out to the ranch but he was already dying and we couldn't save him. He died on June 17, 1931. He died in June and my little girl was born on September 13, 1931.

In 1933 we moved from the ranch where we lived into a little house that was vacant. We lived there for awhile. My husband worked for \$1 a day trying to provide for us.

J.G.: Before you lived in the vacant house was that on the Tagus Ranch?

Dunn: No. Tagus Ranch is a few miles north of Tulare. My husband and brother went to Tagus Ranch. We didn't live on Tagus Ranch. We lived in Tipton but my brother and husband worked on the Ranch and stayed there while they worked. Tagus is about fourteen miles from Tipton.

J.G.: So you stayed in Tipton?

Dunn: Yes, my mother and her family, myself and my children stayed at Tipton on the Vetter Ranch. Mr. Vetter was a fine man. His family lived in Lomita, California and he had this ranch in Tipton

and he was a very good person. Anyway the second year that I lived on the ranch after my little girl was born--1932--I raised turkeys for Mr. Vetter. He had some turkeys and I raised turkeys for him. I raised 317 turkeys and the deal was that all the turkeys I raised over 200 I could have. He let me take his car and turkey eggs to Tulare where we put them in an incubator and bought food for the turkeys. My husband wanted to take the money I'd earned from selling the turkeys to buy the ingredients to make some booze--that's where the money went --the little bit that I made from the sale of those turkeys went for booze. Then we moved off of that ranch and moved into this vacant house that was just across the road.

J.G.: When you were living on the ranch was that in a ranch cabin?

Dunn: Yes, in a one-room cabin. My daughter was born when we lived in a one-room cabin.

J.G.: With running water and that kind of stuff or did you have to carry your water?

Dunn: No, it wasn't modern. It was just a cabin and an outside privy. The one-room cabin did not have water inside. You had to carry the water inside and things like that. There was water outside the cabin but not in the cabin. I picked cotton that fall after my little daughter was born on September 13, 1931. I would bathe her every morning and put her in a wicker basket and take her to the field. I had a wire that went over the top and a mosquito net to keep the mosquitoes and flies off of her. I'd take her in the basket and sit it on the end of the row and pick cotton. I'd pick down a ways and then back. Then I would move her to the other end or the middle of the field then I'd pick down and back so I could watch after her. We moved off the Vetter Ranch in 1933. In 1933 there were strikes in the grape vineyards and then in the cotton fields.

J.G.: In Tipton?

Dunn: Yes. It was 1933 when we had the strike. My little girl was nearly two years old. We were cutting raisin grapes on the Stark Ranch out of Tipton. We were down in the field cutting raisin grapes and the pickers asked us if we weren't going to strike. We said, "Strike?" And they said, "Yes, everybody's out of the field but you people." I said, "Well, what are they doing?" He said, "They're striking." And I said, "Well, what are they striking for?" He said, "Well, we're trying to get better wages." So we went out to the end of the field. We didn't even know what a strike was. Then after the grape strike they had the cotton strike in 1933.

J.G.: Okay, go back to the grape strike. What happened when you all

walked off the field?

Dunn: Well, we were told to go home. So we went home. Men came along and asked my husband if he wanted to picket. Well, we didn't know what picketing was but he said he'd do whatever he could. So he went with them to picket. They picketed day and night on the Stark Ranch trying to get better wages for cutting raisin grapes.

J.G.: What were they asking for?

Dunn: Well, I think they were getting a penny a tray. I'm not sure what we were getting because it was so long ago but we didn't get five cents a tray for several years after that so I'm sure we only got about a penny a tray--you'd have to cut 200 trays to make \$2. But we were so used to low wages that \$2 a day to us seemed like a considerable amount of money when you had worked all day 12 hours a day for \$1. Anyway, we were in that strike.

J.G.: Did you ever hear what happened? What was the end result of the strike? Did the strikers get anywhere with their demands?

Dunn: I think that they went back to work cutting grapes as best I recall. We started picking cotton and we were getting 40¢ a hundred and you had to pick 200 pounds to make 80¢. I took my little daughter out in the field and I had to watch to keep her from getting lost--the cotton was so high. The pickers told us that they were striking in the cotton. We were still living in this little house that we had moved into in Tipton when we had the grape strike. We came home one evening after we'd started striking in the cotton--of course, when we were told a strike was on in the cotton fields we went out to --we found that our things were moved out on the side of the road. When we drove up there we didn't have anywhere to go. We were out on the side of the road so we moved to Pixley where strikers' headquarters had been set up. We gathered with the others at this striker's hall. The authorities told us not to have any guns or any clubs or anything like that because it was against the law.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

Dunn: The longshoremen from San Francisco sent food and clothing to distribute to the people and we helped cook. We had a big stove out back of this building which had been an old Chevrolet garage in Pixley. Eventually we started going around the fields because there were some people called scabs still in the fields. We started going around the fields with car caravans. The union told us that no one had ever yet been able to have a strike in the fields because it was too inconvenient. You had so many places you had to go--all the fields scattered in the county.

It wasn't like a store or business. I began to go with them around the fields and there was a little Mexican girl--a midget--she would tell me what to say because the people in the field were mostly Mexicans. She taught me to say, "Huelga Piscodores, Pickers Strike,"--I had a loud voice and I would get the people out of the fields. By then I was losing some of my timidity. I began to help get the people out of the fields. Then the authorities began to say that I was an agitator and they called me the worst red-headed agitator in Tulare County because I could really get the people out of the fields. When I saw what I could do I knew that we could win the strike. We could get \$1 per hundred where you could make \$2 a day instead of 80¢. I thought, "Well, my goodness, why not?" So we struck. We won that strike on October 17, 1933.

J.G.: When you say you won--what happened?

Dunn: The farmers gave us \$1 per hundred. But before we won the authorities told us not to have any clubs or any guns or anything to fight with but they allowed the farmers to come to strikers' headquarters in their cars with their shotguns. The highway patrol turned the traffic around Pixley--Pixley was right on Highway 99--over two blocks and let the farmers shoot into this hall where we were. The farmers killed the Mexican Consul Pat Chambers was one of the men making speeches to us and Caroline Decker I don't know if you remember them.

J.G.: Caroline Decker is familiar.

Dunn: Caroline Decker and Pat Chambers were the people who were helping us in the strike and who were called Communists. I had been out in the field where Pat had made a speech. He was standing on the back of a pickup bed and was making a speech. He told us that the farmers were trying to make the streets of Pixley run red with blood as did the streets of Harlan, Kentucky during the coal mine strike years before. When we got back to the strikers' headquarters, the farmers were there with their guns and they began shooting. The traffic had been detoured so that it wouldn't come through and be involved in the shooting. The farmers began shooting across the highway and into the strikers' hall. When the shooting began there were still some men out on the street. The Mexican Consul and another man tried to wrestle the guns away from the farmers and were shot and killed. The farmers shot eight people running from them into the strikers' hall. I told you that the hall had been a Chevrolet garage with these great big doors which you could drive a car through out the back way--these people were running and the farmers shot right into the building where the strikers were assembled. They shot one boy in the heel and made him a cripple--one woman was shot in the back of the leg. During all of this I was getting my daughter a drink of water in the rear of the hall and I heard these shots--it sounded like

firecrackers. It never occurred to me that those people would actually shoot us. Just before the shooting I'd gone down the street and they had been out there. The law enforcement officers had moved off about two blocks--at least a block and a half from where we were--to Judge Swanson's place of business. I had gone there and taken Jack Hill who was the Under Sheriff of Tulare County by the arm. And I said, "Look,"--even as I said this I didn't realize they would actually shoot--"do you realize those men up there have guns and they're going to shoot those people?" I took him by the arm and he walked with me as if I was the boss-- I don't know why he did it. I led him right on down to the strikers' hall and I said, "Those men are going to kill those people." However, I didn't believe that they would actually kill them for it seemed incredible that they would shoot anyone for refusing to work for them for such a low wage--it seemed like such a contradiction. I wanted Mr. Hill to know that they had guns and to see for himself. Well, he didn't do anything and they actually shot and killed the Mexican Consul and some of the strikers. I entered the rear of the building and got my daughter a drink and that's when I heard this popping noise--I really didn't realize that it was guns going off. The people began to run. I looked around and they said, "Oh, they're shooting! They're shooting!" I went out the back and got the building between me and the people who were shooting.

Of course, there was a trial for these farmers which was a mock trial. They didn't try to find out what they had done. They arrested Pat Chambers and Caroline Decker and nine others and I think there were nineteen of them who were called Communists. They had witnesses at the trial which was held in Sacramento who lied about them. These so-called Communists were sentenced to ten years in prison.

J.G.: Caroline Decker and Pat Chambers?

Dunn: Yes and some of the others too.

J.G.: So instead of arresting the people who did the shooting they arrested the people who got shot.

Dunn: Absolutely. They arrested the people who they called Communists-- Pat Chambers and Caroline Decker. The strikers got a big bus and went to Sacramento. We people knew what Pat Chambers had said but the authorities claimed that he had incited a riot when he was only telling us that the farmers were going to make the streets of Pixley run red with blood as did the streets of Harlan, Kentucky. Those were his exact words. But they wouldn't let me testify even though I was sitting with the Mexican Consul in his car when Pat Chambers gave his speech. I know what he said. But they never let me testify because they knew I would tell the truth and that I wasn't afraid to tell the truth--I didn't really know enough to be afraid. I wasn't so aware of people doing things to

people. I just wasn't raised like that and I couldn't believe what I was seeing and what I was hearing. I knew it was happening and yet I couldn't hardly believe that people were like that. One of the farmers was named Smokey Nickels and when they held the trial for the farmers in Visalia they wouldn't even let me in the courtroom. They barred me from the courtroom so one time I put on a hat and lipstick which I never wore and dressed up a little different than what I'd been dressing with borrowed clothes, and I went into the courtroom. I was sitting there listening to the things they were saying and it was a farce.

After that strike they had set up the Pixley Food Depot where the people would stand in lines two or three blocks long waiting for food.

J.G.: Before we get into that part of it who was doing the organizing--the strike organization?

Dunn: I can't recall the names of the people. I had become acquainted with them after the strike began--they were just like us. They were just people out there working for a living in the grapes and cotton fields. Pat Chambers and Caroline Decker were two that I know came from around Salinas where they organized the berry pickers. They had been over in the strawberry fields over on the coast trying to organize the people around Salinas and Watsonville. After the strike in the cotton and grapes the food depot was set up and Lillian Monroe came down and tried to tell the people that there was plenty of vegetables and plenty of meat and food like that instead of what they were giving us.

J.G.: Do you remember what organization it was that was trying to organize you? Was it the AFL or CIO or any other organization like that?

Dunn: Yes. It was called the Agriculture Workers Industrial Union, I believe. [Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union]

J.G.: And Caroline Decker and Pat Chambers were representatives of this organization?

Dunn: Yes.

J.G.: So after the trials were you able to go back to work in the fields or were you blacklisted? What happened to you as a result of your involvement?

Dunn: I was blacklisted of course. Some farmers were very mad. After the cotton strike we worked in the fields but a lot of times they wouldn't let me work because they called me a redheaded agitator. Sometimes we'd get a job--sometimes we wouldn't.

J.G.: How about your husband? What did he think about your being this

involved in it?

Dunn: Well, he would rather have gone back to Oklahoma and curled up and died than to have been in it.

We had to go to the bread lines in the wintertime and the winter after the strike they told me not to come down to the Pixley Food Depot. They said, "Mrs. Dunn, don't you come down here. Send your husband." And I said, "Well, I'll send him but you won't give him anything when I send him. If you don't give him anything, I'll have to come down there." So that is why they said we were rioting at the Pixley Food Depot. [This was] the first time that I had heard of Lillian Monroe. But I wasn't there that morning when this happened. We had an old cow that we were milking which belonged to a widow woman and I took her some buttermilk because she was sick--she wanted some buttermilk. They told me at the Food Depot not to come and I wasn't there. But Francis Hicks and Chuck Harding and Kerby Brooks were there who were like me knowing our families needed that food. So Lillian Monroe had been there that morning and I don't really know what happened but later in the afternoon when I went there--it was about time for them to close--I learned that my husband and the others had been denied food. I asked my husband if he was given any food and he said that they wouldn't give him anything. And I said, "Well, you'd better get back in line because there's nothing out at the house." The door to the Depot was one of those that you had to slide so far and then it bends in--it had a hinge on it that would bend inward. So when he got to the door they opened the door for him to come in but they didn't know that I was out there too. When he stepped in I was going to step in too because I knew they would turn him down again and then lock the doors and nobody would ever get anything that evening. It would be two weeks before they'd be down there again. So I started to step in and I put my foot in the door. They tried to close the door on my foot so I had to shove the door to keep them from mashing my foot. A man by the name of E.C. Vale was there with this gun on his hip. He whirled around where I was for when I pushed the door open I evidently pushed into him but I didn't know it because I couldn't see him. They said, "We told you to send your husband." I said, "I sent him and you didn't give him anything," and I said, "you better sack them up because I came after it." I was angry. I finally reached the point where I was sort of belligerent to tell you the truth because I'd just been harassed too long.

The supervisor looked over at them and said, "Sack them up boys." And so they gave us some food. But the food they gave us was just tallow for shortening and split beans full of rocks and dirt and rice--no telling where it came from--and things like that. They actually took the vegetables and the fruit out into the country and poured oil on it and burned it.

- J.G.: The fruits and vegetables that were supposed to be given to the people?
- Dunn: They didn't think they were supposed to be given to us. I mean they didn't intend to ever give us any fruit or vegetables because those were supposed to be sold and they'd burned them to keep the food prices high. You had to pay for them. If you didn't have the money to pay for them they'd burn them before they'd give them to you. The same thing happened to meat. They took the cows and the hogs from the farmers--they paid the farmers for their hogs and cows--but they didn't give them to the people to eat. They took them out and slaughtered them and told the people, "We don't want to catch you with a bit of that meat." Some of the men would sneak around and dig up some of the meat after it was buried. That was the only way they could get it. We couldn't buy it without any money and they wouldn't give it to us. They'd rather burn it than give it to the people. It was unbelievable!
- J.G.: How did you live that winter of 1933 when you hardly had any work and you couldn't even get the commodities that they were offering?
- Dunn: Well, we lived in a eucalyptus grove in a little two-room house. My brother came out from Oklahoma to live with us and he helped me saw down a tree, cut it up and make stove wood out of it--my husband wouldn't do it. We'd sell a whole cord of wood for \$1.50 or \$2 or whatever we could get for it. It was stealing but the people who owned the land lived way off and didn't even know there was a tree on it to cut down. We also milked this cow and with what we could get at the Food Depot that's what we lived on. It wasn't easy.
- J.G.: So were you still living with your mom and her four kids and you and your daughter and your husband?
- Dunn: No. My mother left in 1931--the first year that we were here--and went back to Oklahoma. When I mentioned that my brother came out and lived with us it was after he'd been back to Oklahoma and came back out to California. He and I cut wood--sawed wood with a crosscut saw.
- J.G.: Why didn't your husband do that?
- Dunn: Well, he was afraid. He didn't want to steal and said it wasn't ours. He was afraid that he'd be arrested. I don't know. He was just kind of timid and scared. I guess I had to do it or else we'd starve.
- J.G.: It sounds like during that time you had to be the strong person.
- Dunn: I was that. They told him when I was in jail, "Now if you'll get her out of California, we'll turn her out." And he'd come to me

and say, "Now Lillian, we can go back to Oklahoma." I said, "Look, I haven't bothered these people and I'm right here and I'll stay right here until it freezes over." I really became hardened to what they were doing.

J.G.: How did you become such an activist in the strike? How did that come about for you?

Dunn: Being without food for your children makes an activist out of you. At first I was very religious--not sanctimonious but God fearing. I really believed in the Lord. They told us that Communists didn't believe in the Lord--that Communists are anti so I guess I was the only one in that whole group that ever prayed. When the meetings would begin they'd ask me to lead them in prayer. But then I became very militant. It wasn't that I didn't believe in the Lord anymore but someone had to do something.

People during that time had polio. One man came to me and he said, "Mrs. Dunn, I've got two children in Tulare Hospital with polio--my wife and the baby is down and I think they've got pneumonia. Could you take us to Tulare to the hospital?" I didn't have anymore gasoline than anyone else had--no money either but I had an old car and I said, "Yes, I will." Neither of us had any money for gas but I drove down the street to where Judge Swanson and Merrill Howard had a service station--Swanson was the Judge of the little community there. I asked them to put in three or four gallons of gas--I didn't say a tank full. When they came for the money I said, "I'm sorry but I don't have the money to give you for this. I'm taking this man's wife and baby to the hospital. I'm going to furnish the car and I'm going to expect you to furnish the gas. If you don't want to give it free, you tell the Welfare Department--maybe they will reimburse you."

J.G.: What was their reaction to that?

Dunn: They didn't like it but they'd kind of gotten used to me by then--I'd reached the point where there was too much sadness and too many things going on that weren't right. Maybe you can't see how a person gets that way but you finally do reach that point.

J.G.: In other words it sounds like you reached the point where you became outraged over what was happening to everybody.

Dunn: That's right. Some things are kind of hard to talk about but you asked me how we survived. There was a colored man out there in the country and he would kill rabbits and give them to us for meat. I'd milk this old cow and give him milk. When they had me on trial in Visalia for rioting he wanted to be a witness for me. Bless his heart. He got up--he was an old fellow--and he didn't

wait for them to ask him any questions--he said, "This woman is a good woman!" He was waving his cane at them and they kept saying, "Sit down, sit down." He was telling them how good a woman I was but they made him sit down, bless his heart.

But we survived--you had to. I've heard of some people eating cockroaches. I never ate any of those. I ate plenty of rabbits though.

J.G.: You say he was a witness for you--what were you arrested for?

Dunn: Rioting at the Pixley Food Depot--the time I told you I pushed the door and went in. That evening after we got home with what groceries we received--if you could call them groceries--Delos Howard came to my house. He was the Constable and he was a very nice person. He said, "Mrs. Dunn, I hate to do this but I've got a warrant for your arrest and I've got to take you in. I don't want to do it but I've got to." I said, "Oh, that's all right, Mr. Howard." So he took me to Visalia. They arrested me for rioting. Lillian Monroe knew that I wasn't there--she knew that they had confused my name with hers because she was the one that was actually there that morning. She said that there was plenty of meat in the country and plenty of vegetables for the people to have a proper diet. But I hadn't been there. I didn't even know this had happened until after they had arrested me. She went over to Mike Kerney's--a farmer who lived over in Waukena--and told him that they arrested a lady by the name of Lillian Dunn and that really they were after her but they didn't know it. He said, "Well, you go turn yourself in. Don't you let that woman stay up there in jail." She said, "Oh, I won't do that until I make bail." So he came to Visalia and made bail for me and three others who were arrested also. He had a 40 acre ranch and he hocked his ranch for me. They let me out but they never arrested Lillian Monroe because they still didn't know it was she they were after instead of me. I hadn't rioted at all. All I did was tell them that I'd come after some food. There wasn't anything at my house to eat and I had to have food for my children.

J.G.: So they weren't actually arresting you for forcing your way into the Food Depot--they were arresting you for what Lillian Monroe had done that morning.

Dunn: Yes, for what she'd done that morning. When they tried to prove it they found out that they had the wrong person. They then tried to make a case out of me coming for food. The Judge said, and these are his exact words, "There was no riot and no evidence of a riot, but a deep underlying principle involved here which must be considered is Communism." So Mike Kerney bailed me out as well as Francis Hicks, Chuck Harding and Kerby Brooks--they arrested all four of us--Hicks had been with Monroe that morning.

They had the wrong woman when they arrested me but they didn't know that until it was all over. I'd told them that I wasn't even there and that I really didn't even know this Lillian Monroe. They let us out on bail and a few weeks later they arrested us again for trial and Mr. Kerney bailed us out again. He bailed us out about three times. Everytime I'd get there he'd bail me out.

J.G.: Why do you think he did that?

Dunn: Oh, he said he liked me. He said, "That woman is just the kind of woman that I like." He told the Judge, he said, "Judge, don't you like her? She just suits me." They wanted to put us on probation because they knew we hadn't done anything but they couldn't prove it. So they went to Chuck Harding and Kerby Brooks and Francis Hicks and they all said, "You go to Mrs. Dunn and whatever she tells you, that's what we'll do." So when he came to me I said, "Look, I didn't do anything. If I've done anything, you put me in jail and if I haven't done anything you've got to turn me loose. But you're not going to put me on probation, no way." So he went back and they called us into Visalia one morning and--after all that ruckus--they had decided to give us some meat. But the meat that they gave us was decaying. The chunk they gave me was about eight inches by twelve inches and it wasn't fit for human consumption. So I rolled it up in paper and I took it to court where I sat outside the courtroom until we were called in. When we went in the Judge said, "Have any of you anything to say before we sentence you?" And I said, "Judge, I have something I would like to show you." And he said, "Okay." I got up and walked up to his desk and I laid the package down on his desk. He was sitting in this swivel chair and said, "I've seen all the Communist propaganda I want to see." I said, "Judge, this isn't Communist propaganda." So he sat there and watched me unwrap the meat and when I got it unwrapped--this decayed meat--I held it up so he could see what they were giving us to eat and he started swiveling back in his chair. I said, "Judge, they could have given this to us when it was fit to eat but instead they waited until it was decaying and then gave it to us." Well, he started back like this and I said, "Well, come on Judge and smell it. You should at least smell it if you expect us to eat it." He began to gavel for the bailiff to get me out but the bailiff liked me too so the bailiff was pretending to try to get to me when he was actually going around different seats weaving his way through the crowd to come to where I was. And Mr. Kerney was there and Mike Kerney said, "Judge don't you like her? She just suits me." And finally by the time the bailiff got to where I was there was a whole row of reporters sitting down front. They had never printed the truth in those papers. They called me a redheaded agitator--I wasn't redheaded. They said I had eight children--I only had three. They were really quite uncomplimentary about me in the paper. So I walked down to the reporters

and said, "Now smell this and see if you can get this in the paper like it is. You haven't printed one truth since you've been printing that paper." You see how you can get when you're oppressed so much? You become angry and ready to fight.

J.G.: I can just picture you doing that--that is really great.

Dunn: But anyway I was pregnant when they had me in jail. I was about four months pregnant with my fourth child.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

Dunn: Speaking of hurting your children, my oldest son went to school and, of course, the word Communist--you know, they had really blown that thing out of proportion--the word Communism is a come-on gimmick for the United States of America. It's the biggest farce--a word to brainwash the people with. Pardon me if you think I shouldn't say it but it's the biggest farce that this country has ever known. During the time that all of this was going on they got Archbishop Hanna from San Francisco to talk to us to find out what we poor people wanted. They had him come to Visalia and he got up and looked at us and said, "Well, what do you people want anyway?" I said, "Well, I'll tell you. I'd like to at least have enough to eat and enough to wear and maybe a piece of linoleum on the floor so I wouldn't get slivers in my feet." You know that is not too much to ask, is it? We were called Communists but the whole town didn't even know what Communism was. It actually means that the means of production and distribution are in the hands of the people. If production had been in the hands of the people we wouldn't have let them bury those cows and hogs while we went hungry. They couldn't have taken the oranges and vegetables and poured oil on them and set them on fire while there were people going hungry and didn't have the money to buy. Don't you see what I mean? They couldn't have done that. But it wasn't in the hands of the people.

Yet, when everyone of my three boys grew up they came out and said, "It's time to fight for your country." The same children that they tried to starve to death, that didn't have any place in California, are the very people they came to and said, "It's time to fight for your country." Now what part of this country belongs to the people that don't have any land and don't have any home and don't have any money. Now how in the name of God does anyone's reasoning tell you that you can go out there and confiscate a young man's life for his country when he doesn't even have the money to buy himself a home--he doesn't have a country.

My little kids went to school and they were mistreated in school because their mother was a Communist. I was a Communist because

I didn't have the necessities of life. I didn't even know what Communism was. The Judge said to me, "Mrs. Dunn, are you a Communist?" I said, "Judge, I never heard that word before. I don't know what Communism is. If Communism means having enough to eat and enough to wear--I was born like that."

I happened to walk downtown while they had recess while they were eating dinner on day during the time we were having this trial and I walked into this store and some men said to a spectator at the trial, "Well, how's the trial coming down there?" He said, "Why them people didn't do anything--that's a farce. They don't have anything to hold them people for at all."

They were talking about it in Visalia. It was because the people were naked and destitute and hungry. The very people that they'll tell you today that should get out and fight for this country the most don't have a crying dime.

J.G.: It sounds like what you are saying is that at that time one of the ways that they attempted to gloss over the wretched living conditions of the people was by saying this is all Communist agitation.

Dunn: Communist agitation. When you have to pick 100 pounds of cotton for 40¢ and you have to take a little child of one and a half or two years and let it stand out in that cotton field all day and all you can pick is maybe 200 pounds at the very most, there's something wrong with your country! And it's not because you're a Communist. If that's Communism I was born like that.

J.G.: What was the outcome of your trial?

Dunn: They gave me two weeks and they gave Francis Hicks six weeks. Kirby Brooks and Chuck Harding hadn't done anything at all but they got six months in jail.

J.G.: You spent two weeks in jail?

Dunn: Oh yes. They have to do something. How could they use the taxpayer's money and put up a big deal like that without doing something. The Judge said, "These people--I've tried to be good to these people and I'd like to give them probation, but they won't accept probation." I told him, "If I'd done anything, put me in jail. If I haven't done anything, turn me loose. Why should I have to report to a Probation Officer when I haven't done anything."

J.G.: What did they actually find you guilty of?

Dunn: Nothing. He said, "There was no riot, no evidence of a riot, but a deep underlying principle involved which must be considered--" this is the Judge's exact words, "--which is Communism."

- J.G.: It sounds like he put you in jail for being a Communist.
- Dunn: Yes, "Deep underlying principle involved--" for being a Communist.
- J.G.: What did that do to you? How did you feel when that happened?
- Dunn: I felt like if that was Communism and knowing myself and what I had gone through I liked Communism better than what they've got. Frankly that's exactly the way I felt and still feel. If Communism means having enough to eat and enough to wear then I was born like that.
- J.G.: Were you bitter or hostile or angry when this happened to you?
- Dunn: Very much so. Afterward--in 1937 or 1938--I started going to church. They were having a little revival in Pixley. I sang and another girl played the piano and a boy picked the guitar--we really enjoyed ourselves.
- In 1937 I had an operation for a ruptured appendix. I came home from church one night and I had appendicitis. I was so sick. I said, "Would someone go get Dr. Siebert?" He came to the house and my Bible was laying on my sewing machine and he set his little bag down there on top of the sewing machine and said, "Mrs. Dunn, do you read this Bible?" I said, "Yes, why?" "Well," he said, "I thought you were a Communist." Isn't that sad? He thought I was a Communist. They had even brainwashed a doctor--with his intelligence and schooling--they had brainwashed the doctor.
- I went to the hospital. I nearly died with a ruptured appendix. They let me lay there all day until the next night. The doctor had said, "Go over to the hospital in the morning if your side still hurts." I went the next morning. Two nights later the operation was performed. They came in and asked, "Well, Mrs. Dunn, will you just lay here and tell us a lie?" And I said, "Well, I don't think I would. But my side doesn't hurt now." My appendix had already ruptured and they looked into my eyes and I was about gone. They had to give me a spinal to operate. I survived, honey, and that's the main thing.
- J.G.: You sure have. What hospital were you in?
- Dunn: Tulare.
- J.G.: You were living in Pixley at that time?
- Dunn: Yes, in Pixley.
- J.G.: You were living in the cabin in the eucalyptus grove in Pixley?
- Dunn: No. We paid \$13 down on a house and paid \$10 a month. It was

just a little shack but it was better than the house in the eucalyptus grove. I think we did have a little sink in the kitchen. I had a little oil stove to cook on.

J.G.: Was that in Pixley?

Dunn: Yes.

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

Dunn: That would have been about 1937 or 1938.

J.G.: What year was this whole trial thing going on?

Dunn: It was in 1934. My son, Mike, was born on August 22, 1934. I was four months pregnant when I was in jail.

J.S.: You spent two weeks in jail after the trial. What was it like for a woman to spend two weeks in jail in 1934?

Dunn: Well, I'm not familiar with jails but this was a nice place. I mean it was so much nicer than where I lived at home. I can't recall what kind of food I had.

My brother heard about it back in Oklahoma--my older brother--and he came to the jail to see me. He was so broken up. They said, "Mrs. Dunn, your brother's here to see you." They took me into the room. He said, "Sister, now you know mother didn't raise you like this." He thought I had disgraced the family. I said, "I haven't done anything." He said, "Well, now mother didn't raise you like this." I hadn't done anything. What could I do about it? Mother didn't raise me like that.

J.G.: Did your husband watch the children during that time?

Dunn: Yes and no. My little daughter stayed with the Harters in Tulare. They were Communists. You know, I found the most precious people were Communist. They called me a Communist but this drew me to people I didn't even know existed. They took care of my little daughter and my husband took care of my son. There were some Jewish people in Tulare by the name of Miller. They had a store there and they gave my little girl some shoes. They dressed her and fed her and took care of her and took pictures of her and everything. Real nice.

So if I lean toward Communism don't think anything about it because someday, somewhere, somehow this country has got to know the difference between people that are naked and destitute and hungry and if that's Communism they're going to have to know what Communism is.

J.G.: I agree. I think that when people see a chance to make a better

way for themselves, a better life for themselves--it doesn't matter what it's called--that will be the direction in which they will go. When you're desperate you've got nothing to lose.

Dunn: You've got nothing to lose, honey.

J.G.: During the trial you stayed in Pixley then and lived there from 1933 until 1940?

Dunn: We stayed in Pixley until 1940 and we moved to Delano.

J.G.: You started to talk earlier about your children being mistreated in school.

Dunn: When my oldest son was going to school they would taunt him and chase him and he wouldn't tell me. I didn't know it at the time because if I had known I would have been furious. He tells me now and it's still an ache in his heart.

J.G.: He must have been about five or six years old?

Dunn: About six.

J.G.: Mostly because you were a Communist?

Dunn: Because everybody talked about me being a Communist. Lord, I didn't even know anything about politics.

J.G.: Who defended you?

Dunn: An A.C.L.U. [American Civil Liberties Union] lawyer. I think the same one --- I can't remember his name -- I think the one who prosecuted the Nazis at the Nuremberg Trials in Germany. He became a very prominent attorney. He was a very famous person. He came out to the house where I lived--just an old splintered floor and one large room with a little cubby hole where you'd hang your clothes and things. He was all right. But I got a good education out of all the trials. I know what is going on in the world.

J.G.: Kind of a hard one, wasn't it?

Dunn: It was hard. But you know what I've discovered and I want to go on record with this is that there is a religion in this land that is the archenemy of Communism. And now in this age some of their priests and nuns are beginning to see that Communism isn't so bad. The Catholic Church has been persecuting people for centuries--that's actually the head of the whole thing--persecution. This is exactly what's causing the United States to have a [cold] war with Russia--not that Russia is doing anything to us but the

Church of Rome is afraid of the Russian philosophy--I'm not saying that Russia is right--I've never been there.

People say, "Well are you a Communist? You should go to Russia." I would like to go to Russia. I would like to see what they have. I would like to see if they're telling us all the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Or, if they are propagandizing the people of the United States to make them willing to fight Russia and be wiped off the face of the earth. I'd like to know because I can't see that they're doing to us what we're trying to do to them.

Even the strike in Poland today. We have strikes in the United States and the United States isn't up in arms about anyone striking in the United States but they've got their eyes glued on Poland simply because it's a religion. It's a religion.

J.G.: So you think the Catholic Church is so terrified of Communism that they are behind all of the wars.

Dunn: Yes. The United States is the last Catholic stronghold in the world. They are using the people of the United States who don't even know what they are fighting for to combat Communism just like they did in Vietnam. I tried to write a book but I didn't do a good job of it because the lady who was to help me was a Catholic. I asked her before we started if she was prejudiced. When she learned about what I had written she tried to keep me from obtaining my manuscript. I called it The Great Indictment. In this book I gathered from the Kern County Library and the secret societies of all ages and different places the attitude of the Catholic Church. Its doctrine and how the Church feels about Communism, the Jesuit Society and the CIA--all of this--I have it. I just xeroxed it off. I'm not a writer because I don't really know how to go about writing but I've xeroxed it off and compiled it in a book.

The Jesuit Society in the United States has all these universities and they're a hotbed for the CIA. CIA agents actually infiltrate these other countries where these poor people are in jail where they call them terrorists and so forth. People can't help being terrorists if their country is starving them to death. You have to be something. You have to get up in arms somewhere. Someone has to do something. You just can't say, "Well, today you pick cotton for 40¢ a hundred and next year you're going to do it for 30¢ and the next year for 20¢ and the next year for 10¢", eventually you'll be doing it for nothing. You see what I mean? You can't do it that way, honey. It can't be done that way. Before you leave here I'll give you one of them. [Copy is with limited access material.]

J.G.: I would be interested in what you've gathered together. I'd like to backtrack a little and talk about what it was that made

you decide to come to California versus anyplace else when you left Oklahoma.

Dunn: My mother was here. They had written us and thought conditions here were so much better than they were in New Mexico. She sent us a little bit of money for gas. We were in Roswell--my husband had sold out the little place that I'd tried to have a business--he didn't want me working there no more and he didn't have a job--what do you do?

J.G.: How did your mother decide to come to California? How did all that come about.?

Dunn: My oldest sister and her husband were coming and my mother decided to come along with them and the kids because my sister's husband kind of helped guide the family. Of course the boys were growing up--she had the three boys and one girl--she brought them out here. The year that we came they left. My brother-in-law and sister had already gone back to Oklahoma by the time we got here leaving my mother and brothers out here--the next year they left. They were here when my little boy died on June 17, 1931--right after that they left. They went to Texas and then to Oklahoma.

J.G.: At the time you were in Oklahoma was your husband unemployed or was he working in the oil fields?

Dunn: When he and I married he worked in the oil fields--then he worked in a garage tearing down cars. He made only \$1 a day. Seems ridiculous doesn't it?

J.G.: Yes.

Dunn: You can't hardly believe that, can you?

J.G.: What made many of the Oklahomans decide to go to California? What kinds of things brought people in such huge numbers from Oklahoma?

Dunn: Well, there was a drought for one thing and the Dust Bowl. I mean the dust storms that they had there. You could find any number of houses just boarded up along the roads--nice houses out on ranches or farms just boarded up. The people couldn't survive there. There would be sand knee-deep up to the side of the house where the sand had blown. It just beat all the paint off the houses. I don't know why all the topsoil blew off--whether it was because they'd farmed wheat and it hadn't rained or what. Oklahoma was never too much of a farm country to begin with because the streams cut ditches and they didn't have the wisdom or knowledge to terrace it to keep it from cutting gullies through the fields. Everyplace we ever lived there were

gullies where the water would cut ditches and eventually washed away the topsoil. We farmed though and maybe we'd make a couple of bales of cotton a year. I never did know what they got for a bale of cotton--maybe \$200 at the very most. We might have earned \$400 a year but that's no money.

J.G.: Before you moved to the oil camp you were living on a sharecropping farm?

Dunn: Sharecropping. We didn't have any money to rent a place so we would just give them so much--a half, I think, we gave them half of what we made to live in the house and farm the land. Sometimes we'd get a place that would have a little prairie hay that they could bale up for the horses and cows. Alfalfa was hardly known back in those days and cotton would be growing on land that didn't have too much topsoil--corn the same way. You usually planted your corn down where the soil was better--close to rivers or creeks--wherever it was that you lived. We sawed our own wood for the wintertime and sometimes we had to carry water from the creek to wash dishes and everything--sometimes there was a well and sometimes there was a cistern and the water ran off the house. I remember one time I had chills and fever because the cistern got full of wiggle tails and we didn't know it. I guess we were a very ignorant bunch of people. I tell my son that, I said, "We were so ignorant."

J.G.: You were so young too.

Dunn: Yes it was kind of sad.

J.G.: So at ages eleven and thirteen you and your brother were doing all of these things. You were putting in crops. You have an older brother though--where did he go?

Dunn: He went to my father's. My father moved up near Tulsa and he went there. My sister wasn't going to be caught in the shuffle so she married. She married at fifteen--that left my brother and I--someone had to take care of my mother because she wasn't capable of taking care of herself.

J.G.: It sounds like you were a strong person right from the very beginning.

Dunn: I have been. I've never been sick very much in my life. Actually, I've never taken medicine--I don't today. I don't have a bit of medicine in this house. You find a lot of people with pills in every crook and cranny. There are no pills in my house. You know, Judy, I've known the Lord all my life since I was thirteen and if it hadn't been for Him I'd of never made it.

J.G.: When you were nineteen and your brother came back and sold out all

of your equipment and everything, how did you come to the decision to move to the oil camp?

Dunn: Well, I don't really want to tell that--some things hurt too bad.

My older brother wasn't happy about my mother leaving my father and he didn't like my mother marrying again nor did he like my little half-brothers and sisters. I felt like they couldn't help being here, you know. He'd been gone all summer and he came home and started fussing with my oldest half-brother--he was a very precious little thing. I was all there was to stand between him and my older brother--my older brother would have whipped him if I didn't do something about it. When he'd go to the table to eat, he'd fuss at him--just fuss at him eating and other things--finding fault. This particular morning I'd fixed breakfast and my mother was in the living room or in the front room sitting close to the stove and my brother was jumping on my oldest half-brother. I said, "Now leave him alone and let him eat,"--my little brother was crying now. So my older brother jumped up from the table and went into the living room--these are hurtful things--and he grabbed the poker that you used to poke the fire with and he drew it on my mother and I tackled him. He was seven years older than I was but that didn't make any difference. It was my mother he was jumping on so I tackled him to keep him from hurting my mother. I wrestled him up into the corner and my little brother came running out of the kitchen with the butcher knife and said, "Here, Sis, use this on him," and he handed me the knife. Of course, that scared my older brother and he left the house and went up to another town--Hitchita--where my grandfather lived.

He wrote back and told my mother that he could sell the team of mules that we had if she'd bring them up there. So my mother took the white team of mules--we had two mule teams--and an old one seat rig and went up to where my brother was staying for a couple of days. When she came back she brought the team of mules and the rig with her. I said, "Well, mother, I thought Luther was going to sell them while you were gone." She said, "Well, he didn't want to sell the team of mules--he just wanted to talk to me. He told me he would stay next year and make a crop for me if you didn't stay--he could get along with all of us but you. If he stayed, you couldn't and if you stayed, he wouldn't." I said, "Well, mother, what did you tell him?" She said, "I told him he could make a crop for us." So I left.

J.G.: Why did you choose to go to Wewoka?

Dunn: I had a boyfriend who had gone there to work in the oil fields. He'd come home to tell us that he was making good money. He was poor like us but he was very nice. So I went to Wewoka. When I got there I didn't find him right off. I didn't know where to find him or how. Dumb me.

J.G.: How did you make the trip? Where did you get the money to make the trip?

Dunn: That's some more sad stuff. When my brother came home he sold all the corn that we had and all of the cotton that we'd picked--sold everything. I didn't even have shoes and it was wintertime.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

Dunn: Mother had an old cook stove and she said, "Well, if you sell that stove, you can buy yourself a pair of shoes." So I went around trying to sell that stove--me, a girl of nineteen, going around trying to sell a stove to buy a pair of shoes. When she told me that my brother was going to stay I went over to my aunt's--my mother's sister. We went out into the field and picked their cotton. It was wet and the snow would be on the ground but you could pick the bolls of cotton--they would be dry when the ground was still wet. We pulled bolls off and we'd take them into the house and we'd pick cotton out of the bolls in the house. It took us several days to get a load of cotton for my uncle to take to town. My uncle took a load of cotton to town and while he was there someone told him that somebody there needed a live in house-keeper. He came back and told me he'd found me a job paying \$3.50 a week. We got another load of cotton ready to go to town and I went to town and worked one week for these people--believe it or not I was making money.

I used the money to go to Wewoka. I stayed one night in a hotel and the lady told me that they needed someone at the hotel--the job paid \$5 a week with room and board. But instead of a room they put a bed at the end of the hallway and the girl who cooked and myself were suppose to sleep there--with all the doors along the hall where the men slept. Well, I was raised in the country and we never did anything like that. I mean, it just wasn't even thought of much less done. So this particular night the girl who cooked went to a show or someplace and the nephew of the woman who owned the hotel came to our bed in the hallway to ask if I had a clock. I told him that yes I had a clock and he sat down on the bed and started smarting off. I said, "If you don't get up I'm going to tell your aunt." He said, "My aunt don't care what I do." Finally I told him, "If you don't get up, I'm just going to kick the daylights out of you." He got up. But the next morning she fired me. They let me know right off that that's the way the girls made their money.

J.G.: By doing a little prostituting on the side?

Dunn: Prostituting on the side. You worked for them to have the bed to sleep in so you could get the money from the boys who worked in the oil fields.

- J.G.: It must have been quite a rude awakening for a girl of nineteen?
- Dunn: It was. I'll tell you for sure. I had been there with a preacher and his wife once before. I used to sing in church and they'd come for me to go to church with them. I had been in a revival one time with this preacher and his wife and I knew some people who lived there--the minister of the church--so I went there. That was the only place I knew to go to so I stayed there for about a week and they finally found me another job working in the Shoats Hotel. It paid \$7.50 a week and I thought that that was \$2 or \$3 more than I had been getting. I was supposed to sleep with the girl who did the cooking. Well, the first couple of nights we shared the bed together--I was used to sleeping with my sister so it didn't bother me--I didn't really know any different. About the third or fourth night I went into the room to go to bed and there was a man in bed with this gal. When I opened the door he said, "Well, come on kid, I can take care of both of you." I just closed the door and went back into the dining room. I thought I'll stay here until he left. I didn't know to tell anyone. If I told somebody they'd probably fire me. I didn't know people were like this--it was crazy, honey, real crazy.
- J.G.: Did you ever find your boy friend who went to Wewoka?
- Dunn: Yes, eventually, but I'd already found this man.
- J.G.: You'd already found Dell? You've got so much to say that I would really like to come back again and talk with you some more if it's not too painful for you.
- Dunn: That's all right, honey, I'll manage next time.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2

Session Two February 16, 1981

- J.G.: Okay, Mrs. Dunn, in our last interview we had gotten through the strike up in the Tipton/Pixley area and that was from the period of 1933 through 1940.
- Dunn: Yes.
- J.G.: Could you recall for me what it was like--the living conditions--in the middle and late 1930s.
- Dunn: Well, there was not too much difference in those years until we elected President Roosevelt. He kind of changed the atmosphere for the people here--if you want to call what was going on in that period atmosphere. After Hoover was out of office we seemed to have a little work. Roosevelt provided jobs and things began

to pick up.

J.G.: That would have been in the late 1930s. What did you think of Roosevelt as a President?

Dunn: I think just about anything beat Hoover. I'm not sure that even today the President of the United States has too much control over what goes on. It seems to me that there are people conspiring to bring on depressions and to control the money. I'm not well educated enough to understand the workings of the government but in later years I've been noticing that the people are manipulated. The President--even though he would like to do some things--some of them--I don't believe even tries to do anything too much. I used to blame Hoover for everything but knowing the things that are going on today I wonder if he had good advisers or if he was able to do anything more than he did. I really don't know. Maybe he didn't understand. I think we are manipulated in the United States. You can't have a great number of people in a country who are millionaires and billionaires who haven't contrived--by fair or foul means--to take it from someone else.

When you have a group of people who are in abject poverty and you have millionaires and billionaires in a country there has to be some disparity there. As far as I'm concerned there's a manipulation--a conspiracy but I wouldn't be able to tell you who. It would take someone who knows more about it than I do.

J.G.: What do you think Roosevelt did during that time that was helpful to the migrants or the field workers?

Dunn: Well, he provided jobs for one thing.

J.G.: In what way?

Dunn: He had the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] and the WPA [Work Projects Administration] and there were sewing projects for women. I worked on a sewing project. My husband worked on a WPA project building the airport at Delano. There were some of the young people who went to CCC and lived away from home to make some money. I think he pulled the country out of the doldrums. I'm not sure Hoover could have done it or else why didn't he do something. I could never understand why they killed off the hogs and the cows and buried them before people could have eaten them--it was perfectly good meat.

J.G.: That was during Hoover's administration that that happened?

Dunn: Yes.

J.G.: So did you stop working in the fields then? You said you worked on a sewing project.

Dunn: I worked on a sewing project from 1935 to 1936. I lived in Pixley at the time. It was before 1940 because we moved from Pixley to Delano in 1940. They had packing houses in Delano where they packed lettuce and different vegetables and at the time they had a union. You couldn't work unless you belonged to the union--the union had them pretty well sewed up till no one could hardly get in the packing house. A friend and I had gone to Salinas thinking we might learn how to trim lettuce and make some money that way. But we couldn't get a job because we couldn't even talk to the boss. They wouldn't even stop to talk to you about a job. They'd just start walking and you'd just have to walk along and hang onto them to talk to them. Of course, I was never a person that could do that.

Then they opened the packing houses in Delano after we moved there--it must have been 1941. I made several trips to this particular packing house trying to get a job trimming lettuce because it made pretty good money--piece work. The boss wouldn't stop to talk with me and I had made several trips--finally the man who owned the packing house said to me, "Young lady, can I do something for you?" I said, "Well, yes, I guess you can. I'm trying to get a job but this packing boss won't stop and talk with me. I just can't run across the house trying to tell him that I want to work." So he told me, "He'll be back at one o'clock--he's gone to Bakersfield. When he comes back I'll have him stop and talk with you. You be back around one o'clock." The packing boss' name was Swede Antonelle--a very nice man--and at one o'clock when I came back he turned a lettuce crate down and put his foot on it with his elbow on his knee and talked with me. He said, "You be back in the morning and I'll put you to work."

So the next morning when I went back he put me to work. He even got in line and trimmed the lettuce to show me how. The union people there kind of snickered and said, "He must want her to work pretty bad. He must want her to work pretty bad." That didn't bother me because I really did want to work. I worked for Roden-Berry and Molica in Delano and a number of packing bosses and from then on I was able to make a living.

It seems today that not too many people are willing to try to do anything for themselves. I never did like to take or ask for anything. I didn't want to be asking people to help me when I could help myself.

I lived in Delano till about 1945 or 1946. During that time my husband and I separated. He was part Indian and Irish--I'm not sure that the Indian or Irish had anything to do with it--but he didn't provide for us when we got through the Depression. When he'd make a little bit of money in the packing houses he'd throw it away. He would go to the beer dives and play the slot machines and drink and come home drunk. He wouldn't do anything

for the family. He never tried to provide for us. Finally I told him when my oldest son was seventeen and about to join the Navy, "Now I'll make a living for the children, but I won't make a living for you any longer. You're throwing the money away. I went through one depression with you and I'll never go through another depression. Now when you can make some money, do something with it, have a decent home--you'd better straighten out and help. If you don't, you can make a living for yourself from now on and I'll make a living for my children."

I divorced him and moved to Bakersfield where I worked in the Kern County Hospital for almost two years from 1946 through 1947 in the special diet department. It didn't pay too much--\$140 a month but it was better than nothing at all. When prices began to rise I bought some vending machines--the kind you put peanuts in and put them on counters of different places. I also knew a man who had a little trailer court and he let me collect the rents and take care of the trailer court. I got twenty percent of what I took in--that and the hospital work made a decent living for my children. Then my son came home from the service and married right after that. I survived. I keep saying I survived but that was one of those things that you did.

Before we moved to Delano we had built a little house in Pixley. I sold the house--the one which I had paid \$13 down and \$10 a month --and received \$350. I took the \$350 and bought a lot. By picking cotton and cutting grapes--materials were cheap at that time--I had a friend who's husband was a carpenter and he helped build us a little two-bedroom house. When we left Pixley in 1940 my husband sold that place for a 1940 Chevrolet and I think \$250. So we moved to Delano.

J.G.: Why did you come to Delano?

Dunn: Well, it's kind of hard to say this but I moved to Delano because my husband was always having strife and fighting in the house. I felt embarrassed--like people don't like people who are always fussing at home and I couldn't take it any longer. So he said, "Let's move to Delano." He sold what we had and moved to Delano. When we moved to Delano he starts the same thing all over again--like drinking and carousing and not working and making us look bad to the public.

J.G.: Do you think alcoholism came out of the rough times that all of you had?

Dunn: No. We always made excuses for him because he was raised, you might say, without a mother. His mother died when he was quite young--I think six or eight months old--and then he had a step-mother until he was about twelve and then he was booted from his father and stepmother's place to the relatives and around

and around. So we always like to make excuses for him. You'd think someone would outgrow that after thirty or forty years--some people never outgrow things. They just can't handle what's wrong with them. I don't know but I couldn't raise my children respectably in that atmosphere because you can't raise your children if everyday they're hearing vulgarity and cursing and fighting and that sort of thing.

After we built this little house in Pixley he and his brother got drunk one day. His brother had come by and they'd gone to Corcoran and when he came back he picked a fight. I was ironing him a white shirt and he kicked my ironing board out from under the iron and started a fight for no reason. I had to have him arrested. I couldn't have him there and fighting with the children. This made me feel bad because when you get out--when someone goes to the road camp and comes back--it does something to you. It always scared the children. I just couldn't have it. About the only place I ever went at all was to church and he'd say vulgar things about the preacher and the church and all my friends. Eventually when my little daughter was about twelve years old he began to say things to her that would hurt--some men think women should crawl under the bed--that they shouldn't be seen or heard. I finally told him one day, "Now you've been talking this way to me, but you can't talk that way to my daughter. That's one thing I won't allow." With all other things combined I decided that I could raise the children without him. It was more important to raise the children and have them grow up to be somebody and be respected than to try to keep a home together in that atmosphere. I couldn't take it any longer so I left him.

J.G.: Is that when you came down to Bakersfield?

Dunn: Yes. I came to Bakersfield. I first went down in Imperial Valley. We had a little house which I sold when we moved to Delano. We took the \$250 and bought a lot and started building another house. I accumulated enough money working out in the fields and places to build a little two-bedroom house. It wasn't a well built house, but it was better than a lean-to. When I sold the house in Delano I bought a 27 foot trailer which I hitched to my car and drove down to the Imperial Valley where I thought I could trim lettuce which was something I knew how to do in order to provide for the children. I hadn't been there long when my husband came and moved into the trailer. One day after he'd gone I moved the trailer back to Bakersfield. I'd put my trailer where he couldn't find it. He didn't know how to find me so he went back to Delano. I went to work in the hospital. My oldest son at that time was in the Navy and I had my daughter and two other sons at home. She went to East Bakersfield High School and the two boys were in grammar school. I worked in the hospital for about two years but that wasn't enough money to provide for the children so I went to Edison and worked in the potatoes. While I lived in

Delano I learned to pack tomatoes and pack piece work. Usually when you're working piece work you get more money than you do by working by the hour and I really learned to pack fast. I became one of the best fruit packers--there weren't many who could do more than I did--if anyone had a job in the country, I had one.

Later on my daughter married a man in Wasco; one son went into the Navy and my youngest son was home. I would fill the refrigerator full of groceries and leave him home--he'd get to school himself--I'd go up to Watsonville and pack tomatoes. It became habitual with me to work. I'd work in Edison in the potatoes until the fruit started--then I'd go off and pack fruit. I had a regular round to make. I'd go up to Merced and pack tomatoes until about July 10th then we'd go to Watsonville where I would pack until the pears came in--then I'd go pack pears--first on the river near Sacramento then I'd go to Hood River, Oregon and Medford, Oregon--then later on up to Shalan, Washington--then I'd come home. After my children grew up I went as far as Fort Lauderdale, Florida and packed tomatoes.

I was a union member and they notified me when we were starting--sometimes they'd miss a day or two but anyway I had a job then practically year-round. If I came home and didn't have work for a month or two I could draw a little unemployment until we started again. This is the way I survived--sounds strange, doesn't it?

J.G.: What years would that have been when you were following the crops?

Dunn: That would have been around 1949 to 1974. I went to Florida in 1967. I was in Florida when Martin Luther King was killed. I was working in the apricots in Winters, California when Robert Kennedy was killed. I was in the pears in Ukiah when Marilyn Monroe died. I was in Bakersfield when John F. Kennedy died.

I followed the crops even before the second youngest son was in the service but I didn't go and stay for long. I would maybe go to one town for a couple or three weeks and come back. Bakersfield didn't pay any money--the farmers in Bakersfield wouldn't give you a living wage. I said this to the boss that I worked for one day, and he said, "Lillian, you people could get more money if you would ask for it." And I said, "Well, Gene,"--it was Gene Mettler--"the problem is that a lot of the women working in Bakersfield have husbands who have jobs. They have jobs at the phone company or the gas company or something like that and they're only out there to buy some sheets and pillow slips or maybe a washing machine. It makes it very hard for those of us who are providing for children and buying the washing machine and paying the rent and things

like this."

In the spring I would have gotten behind with my house payments say for three months--I usually tried to buy a home--never wanted to rent. I can't recall renting anyplace except when I was away from home working. I remember one time I bought this particular house on Monterey Street and I was behind three payments. At the time it was a little early for the fruit and I was going to lose the place. I was only paying \$40 a month but that was pretty strenuous for me with two children and trying to send them to school--they weren't old enough to work or anything. So I went to a man in Bakersfield--a fine person--he and his wife ran Ogle's Dress Shop in East Bakersfield. Someone had told me there were people who would lend you money on a place and let you pay them so I went to him and told him I was about to lose my home. He lent me the money on my property and let me pay him--that was easier because I could get behind three months but he knew I would make it up just as soon as I got back on the job when I got paid.

J.G.: When did you stop working in the fields?

Dunn: I stopped working in the fields when I was in Delano in 1945. I used to work in the packing house and in the fields all at the same time--you probably think that's kind of strange--sometimes we'd work until three o'clock in the afternoon in the packing shed and then I would go out and wrap grapevines. When they prune the grapevines they have these long runners and you wrap them around the wires. In the back of my car I'd put two balls of twine with little bags that my kids could help tie--they'd bicycle out to the field when they got out of school.

I wrapped this man's vines. Most people were working for 80¢ an hour. I asked him if he would let me work piecework because I worked in the packing shed until three o'clock in the afternoon and I could come out and wrap vines after that and the children could come out and tie them. I worked by the thousand. Every thousand vines I got \$13.

J.G.: Nobody could ever accuse you of being lazy.

Dunn: No way. My little boys hated the grape vineyards and they knew that if I got stung by a wasp that it would be all for the day so they stirred up the wasps. I got in a wasp nest and they stung me. I said, "Well, if that's the way you kids feel about it, I'll just not come out here anymore." That was my last day of grape cutting. They didn't want to get out there in the hot sand and the hot sun. So that was my last working day in the grape fields.

J.G.: Sounds like you always had to take your kids with you when you worked.

Dunn: Oh yes. I took the youngest son to work when he was four or five years old. We usually had a dog and the dog took care of the boy. I could always tell where my baby was because the dog wouldn't leave him.

J.G.: What I meant was when did you quit working the fields or quit following the crops?

Dunn: The last time I packed fruit was in Tehachapi in 1974. I worked in Lake County before that and came down and packed in Tehachapi. But I just kind of got tired of doing that. Then I started taking care of elderly people. I've just been off of a job since October 1980. I worked two years and two months taking care of an 87 year old man.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1

Dunn: You know there's a great reward to a person mentally when you think that you've been able to carry your own weight. By that I mean you're able to stand on your own two feet and look the world in the face and say, "I don't owe you a dime."

J.G.: It seems like that's what you've done.

Dunn: That's what I've done.

J.G.: Let's go back for just a little bit to Pixley to the days when you were involved in attempts to organize the field workers. Did you feel the unions were successful in organizing?

Dunn: At that time I didn't know too much about unions. Fact is, I didn't know anything about unions. I didn't know how they operated or worked. All I knew was that we were working for 40¢ a hundred and you couldn't survive on it--it wasn't fair and it wasn't right. We were told that the farmer owed the finance companies and they were not able to pay--that was probably true--but the finance companies conspired--someone conspired against the people to work for practically nothing. Somewhere or other you have to break that. You can't just keep going down and down and down--you've got to come up.

When Cesar Chavez started to organize the people I was working in Lake County and he called up there and asked the union lady if there was anyone there from back east--Oklahoma--that could talk to these Okies down here. She told him no and about that time I walked in. She ran up to me and said, "Oh, Lillian, I forgot about you. Don't you live around Visalia somewhere?" I said, "No, I live around Delano--in Bakersfield." She said, "Well, Cesar Chavez has just called. The CIO is going to pay someone to help Cesar. Would you be willing?" I said, "Sure, I'd be

willing. I came to this country with my pots and pans flying."

I helped him organize DiGiorgio and Giunarra. I know him personally and he is one of the finest people you ever met. Chavez and Dolores Huerta negotiated the contracts with the state. The state would not give the farm laborers any unemployment--they wouldn't do anything for them when they were off work in the fields. They were having to go on welfare and I felt we were subsidizing the farmers with the taxpayers taking care of the people who had worked for nothing all year--these people were doing what I had done. I had a kindred feeling for these people because I had been there. When I came back to Bakersfield and the AFL-CIO paid me to help I went to work because I've never been a person that's really scared of anything.

There were a lot of people on the Sierra Vista Ranch in Delano that Mexicans couldn't talk to. I went there--from house to house and it was so surprising to the Mexican people because they were scared of Okies--the Okies really had it in for the Mexicans. I'd go in the house and sit down and talk to them. I'd say, "Look, you people are living on this ranch and you're getting your house furnished, your lights, your gas and you don't have to pay to come to the fields. You walk out of your house and walk out onto the fields. These people you are hurting have to pay for a place to live and they have to drive back and forth to work." And they'd say, "Well, they called us scabs." I said, "That's exactly what you are. This is the word used for people who are running someone else's wages down--not caring for the other person while you are surviving." I organized those people--they were part of me. I understood what the Mexican people were going through. I just really like Cesar Chavez and I don't care who knows that.

J.G.: It sounds like the real organization of the farm workers didn't happen until Chavez arrived.

Dunn: That's right.

J.G.: Although there were strikes and attempts to organize back in the 1930s they weren't too successful.

Dunn: They weren't too successful.

J.G.: Do you have any thoughts about why those organization efforts in the 1930s weren't so successful?

Dunn: Cesar Chavez is a person who has worked in the field like I have and you can't organize somebody if you don't know what they're doing or what they've had to go through. The only reason that I could organize the people or help to organize was because I had experienced working in the fields. I knew how far their money went and how their children had to live and shuffle from one

school to another. I even went as far as Florida to help them [organize] in Florida.

J.G.: Do you think that the people who were trying to organize in the 1930s were not farm laborers themselves?

Dunn: They were farm laborers and others from other places who saw the great need. It was political. By this I mean that these people had seen the hurt and they knew what was going on. They were more educated; however, they had not experienced the trauma of trying to make a living in the fields. They wanted to help. They did everything they knew how and I loved them too--Pat Chambers and Carolyn Decker. My son, Pat, is named after Pat Chambers and my son, Mike, is named after Mike Kerney--the man who posted bail for me.

J.G.: So you think that although their intentions were good the people really didn't think they knew what it was like?

Dunn: I think the farm people knew. No one had ever tried to organize cotton pickers because you've got a field here and maybe four miles over there you've got another one and while you're over there at that field someone can be slipping in over here picking cotton. It's not like a store or the PG&E [Pacific Gas and Electric] where you've got one building and the people entering and leaving the building exit by the front door so you can see who's going in and who's going out. In the fields they've got more access and more space to scab on you. If they see you coming they can drop down in the tomato field or the cotton field or the grape vineyard so you can't see them. When we tried to organize the cotton pickers we had caravans. The law enforcement officers were against us also. They were paid to come by and throw dust on us in the gullies--they would just have plumes of dust. We'd be covered with dirt and dust when the evening came. They were paid to keep us out anyway they could. While we would be going down the road they would run into the dirt with their cars and throw dirt on us with their rear wheels to intimidate us.

As we drove down the road they would be following us real close--as close as they could--sometimes they would go around us and get in front--things like that. They intimidated the people and when they were allowed to shoot and kill the people we really began to know what it was like and what we were up against. At first you wouldn't think they'd shoot or kill anyone--law enforcement was suppose to be for everyone. You can't imagine that they're going to be told before they leave their office in the morning to divert traffic for two blocks but they did--and those people were allowed to shoot. When they were brought to trial it was made to look like the strikers did it.

- J.G.: Did you stay active in the labor movement after that experience or did you taper off until you started to help Cesar Chavez?
- Dunn: I had to join the union when I went to work in the packing houses. There was no union in Delano but there were unions in Watsonville and Salinas. Those packing house workers would come from Salinas as a group to work in Delano --that's why I had such a hard time getting a job--they'd come from where they were used to doing this and bring packers and trimmers with them. The local people didn't have a chance of getting a job. I just barely got a job by going down there and telling the man I wanted to work--he realized that I needed a job and he was very nice about it.
- J.G.: During the time that your children were going to school in the 1930s in Pixley and you were called a redheaded agitator were your kids treated differently than the local kids while they were in school?
- Dunn: My children always went to the local schools--we were local. My oldest son and daughter had just started school when they were calling me names. Jay was about six years old and my little daughter was five years old. Jay didn't realize at the time what was happening and didn't tell me. Years later he tells me what they did to him. All these years I didn't know because if I had I would have been the first one down to that school if I'd thought he was being mistreated by anybody. It wasn't because he was not a local youngster but because his mother was a Communist and an agitator as I was called. I think my little girl was too young to know exactly why they were doing anything to her though she never did tell me much about whether or not she was mistreated.
- Even when I went to church those poor, silly people would call me a Communist--they didn't even know the difference. One time I went to church in Lamont and the people there wanted me to pay them ten percent of what I made--I didn't have no ten percent to give those people--I was doing well just making a living. They asked me if I was a Communist--if I believed in having all things common and why didn't I sell what I had and give it to the poor. I was a poor Job's turkey myself.
- You wouldn't believe the way the preachers preach against Communism when they don't even know what Communism is--it's a brainwash thing. You don't realize that people are brainwashed about Communism. I worked one time in a place where we made cooler pads and this one woman was talking and she didn't want Ronald Reagan to be Governor of California because he was a Communist. And I said, "My God Almighty, what's wrong with you woman? You're calling Ronald Reagan a Communist? He's calling everybody else a Communist. What's wrong with you?"

J.G.: Back in those days was there any time for recreation or free time at all or was it pretty much work?

Dunn: It was all work. There was no play then. If you had any time to play you had no clothes to wear and no money too so what difference did it make? If you were out of work you were in misery because you didn't know where your next meal was coming from. You didn't know how you were going to pay your light and gas bill. When you went to work you were so happy to get to work that you never thought about pleasure. It's kind of a habit with me--they call me a workaholic. It really doesn't bother me to work.

J.G.: Did you ever live in those government camps--around Arvin and Corcoran?

Dunn: I went to one. I don't know if you'd call it a government camp or not though I guess it must have been because they had showers and toilets in this particular place. A friend of mine said before I ever learned to grade potatoes, "Well, Lillian go with me down to Edison." I hadn't ever graded potatoes but I went out in the field. We had a tent which we lived in and we had bedsprings, a bed and a stove. I stayed two days. Lord, I'd never picked up a potato before--that's a job! You drag this sack between your legs and when you get this sack about half full of potatoes--about 50 pounds--you drag it up and set it down to jostle those potatoes down--then you grab another sack and hook it on. The first day I made it pretty good because I wasn't sore and I went in and took a shower. The next day I went out picking potatoes and when I got home that evening I was so tired and sore I climbed into the shower but I didn't know I was in the men's shower. There I was soaking wet when I heard some men coming in and I said, "My Lord, I'm in the wrong one." Can you imagine trying to put on your clothes while you're soaking wet? And as I dashed out I said, "Excuse me, I'm in the wrong pew." I went out and got my things and put them in the car and went home to Delano. I thought that's enough of that--I can't do that anymore.

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

Dunn: That would have been about 1944.

J.G.: So during the 1930s and early 1940s you always managed to put a little money down on a house and have a house that you were buying.

Dunn: Yes. You didn't have to have anything like you do today. I actually bought a lot from a person in Delano. I think I paid \$50 for it--the house, the material and all I paid \$250. We hauled it from Porterville. I think the man built it for about

\$150 so you can imagine what kind of house it was. We didn't seal it at first--we just put the outer boards up. You could lay your comb and brush and things on the two by fours inside that connected the house. It was better than a tent.

J.G.: You have led an interesting and remarkable life. During all this time--I'm noticing your Bible is here--did you ever stop believing in the church or in the teachings or stop going to church?

Dunn: I don't attend churches now. I don't belong to any church. I don't believe you have to belong to a church--any church. I believe that when you come to Jesus Christ and you're baptized in His name you're in the body of Christ and there's nothing that can take you out and nothing but the spirit of God that can put you in. I don't think that you come to the Lord and He saves you or takes you into His body. By the body of Christ I mean the body of believers that really believe the truth. You take that person and join Him to an organization. I don't think that's it. I don't believe that's it. I don't believe that the Bible teaches that that's it.

J.G.: Is this the way you've felt for a long time or is this something you've come to recently?

Dunn: No. I found the Lord when I was thirteen years old in a revival meeting in the town of Hanna, Oklahoma. I guess all my life I have had this feeling about the Lord--even in the cyclones and storms in Oklahoma I always felt that the Lord would take care of me. He healed me one time when I was fifteen years old of the chills. I never took medicine. I read in the Bible that He would heal you and I figured that He told the truth. I had chills very bad--malaria--because our cistern that we drank out of was polluted--of course I didn't know that that was the cause of it. I sent for the people to come to pray for me. I thought when I sent for them they would just drop everything and come over but they didn't. Eventually I got over the chills and they did come and pray for me. The lady said, "Come, go home with us." So I got up out of the bed, put on my clothes and went home with them. I never had another chill from that day forward.

J.G.: When did you stop affiliating with an organization or has that been the pattern you've had all your life?

Dunn: I never joined a church in my life. My mother had me baptized in the Methodist Church when I was about five or six years old. The first church I had knowledge of them organizing was organized in Dustin, Oklahoma. I went with some people there and a few of them joined the Assemblies of God from Springfield, Missouri. I must have been about fifteen but I didn't join. No one asked

me to join but even if they had I wouldn't have because I didn't see any reason why I should. If I was all right without it why should I join? When I came to California I went to the Assemblies of God Church in Pixley. They wanted me to join and I wouldn't but they kept nagging me. They gave me different reasons why I should join. I told them I didn't want to put my name on their book. Finally the preacher said he'd like to put my name down in his book so he'd know all those coming to his church. He kind of gave me an offhanded excuse so I told him that if he wanted my name in his book to put it down. It wasn't long after that he told me to take it off. I said, "Well, now you put it down, then you take it off." He finally rubbed it off.

- J.G.: When you look back over the whole experience of living through the migration to California, the hard times during the Depression and the years of the 1930s, do you think living through that time had a long lasting effect on you?
- Dunn: The things that happened to the children hurt. It just hurts to think that people can be like this.
- J.G.: It seems like that experience is still extremely painful for you to think and talk about. The hurt is so deep.
- Dunn: Well, actually I think the thing that hurts so bad is seeing your children hungry--my baby died.

END OF INTERVIEW

Henry Jackson Counts	-distant cousins-	Nancy Ann Counts
b. 1880, Reynolds County, Missouri		b. 1885, Reynolds County, Missouri
d. 1939, Dove Creek, Colorado		d. 1955, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
<u>[His parents from Missouri]</u>		<u>[Her parents from Missouri]</u>

Lillie Ruth Ann Counts Dunn
 b. 1908, Porum, Muskogee County,
 Oklahoma
 Education: 8th grade
 Church: Jesus' name (no formal
 affiliation)

m. 1927

Dell Dunn

Jay C. Dunn
 b. 1927
 Draftsman-Standard Oil

Bonnie Rae Dunn
 b. 1931
 Real estate broker

Patrick O. Dunn
 b. 1936
 School principal,
 El Tejon, Kern Co.

Donald Ray Dunn
 b. 1929
 d. June 17, 1931

Mike L. Dunn
 b. 1934
 Insurance broker

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