CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

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

Oral History Program

Interview Between

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| INTERVIEWEE: | Joyce Vernon Seabolt |
| PLACE OF BIRTH: | Fort Gibson, Muskogee County, Oklahoma |
| INTERVIEWER: | Stacey Jagels |
| DATES OF INTERVIEWS: | March 19 and 22, 1981 |
| PLACE OF INTERVIEWS: | Tulare, Tulare County |
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# PREFACE

Mr. Vernon Seabolt lives with his wife and his grandson (whom he adopted) in Tulare, California and works for the Southern California Gas Company. Mr. Seabolt is extremely friendly and articulate and quite flattered to share his experiences with the Project. Although he has his experiences in the thirties in perspective, there are certain incidents that he talks about that still bring back the feelings which he had then. Because of his excellent memory, his interesting life and his natural feeling for what is relevant and what is not, he was a superior interviewee. Mr. Seabolt added comments and edited quite a bit of the transcript. He also went to great pains to collect and organize the numerous photographs. He has a very strong personal sense of history and an interest in setting the historical record straight.

Stacey Jagels
Interviewer

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

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Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: Joyce V. Seabolt (Age: 52)

INTERVIEWER: Stacey Jagels

DATED: March 19, 1981

S.J.: This is an interview with Mr. Joyce V. Seabolt for the California State College, Bakersfield, CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Stacey Jagels at 503 Manor, Tulare, California on Thursday March 19, 1981 at 6:00 p.m.

S.J.: I thought we'd start first with when and where you were born.

Seabolt: I was born on September 12, 1928 in Fort Gibson, Oklahoma. This is in Muskogee County, which is in the heart of the old Cherokee Indian Nation. The fact is, my family is of Cherokee Indian descent.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit about your parents?

Seabolt: My father was born in 1892 in the Cherokee Nation. It was the Cherokee Nation at that time and not the State of Oklahoma. He became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1907 when Oklahoma became a state. He was one quarter Cherokee Indian. He had a limited formal education--attended just grammar school--but he had a deep interest in education. He loved to read. He liked literature and liked to read orally. Through our lifetime each of us children vividly remembers our father reading to us in the evening, particularly after the day's work was done. He read various books and instilled in all of us a great love and appreciation for literature. My name is kind of an interesting name--Joyce. Everybody had always called me Joyce. I have never felt self-conscious about this at all. I was named by the way after the poet Joyce Kilmer who was killed during World War I.

S.J.: Was your mother of Cherokee background also?

Seabolt: My mother was of white descent but she also was born in the Cherokee Nation which later became Oklahoma. Her parents were merchants and traders and were quite wealthy people. My mother was well educated, musically inclined and taught school in her early years. She became a mother at a fairly young age and she and my father--as did many families of that generation in farming communities--raised a large family. I had eleven brothers and sisters and ten of us survive to this day.

In making our trip I had one sister that was already married and she didn't make the trip with us so it was just ten of the children that made the trip.

S.J.: When you were growing up did you feel the Cherokee heritage strongly? Was this instilled in you? Did your father perhaps tell you stories or history of the Cherokees?

Seabolt: My grandfather, who was one-half Cherokee Indian, was very proud of our Indian heritage. He was considered a pioneer. He lived to a ripe old age. He was well educated. He became educated in the Cherokee Nation by his own employment and putting himself through school. He liked to talk and tell of the history of the Cherokee Indian. He was interviewed on a number of occasions by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. His memories were recorded in their Archives. I have copies of these recorded interviews and I'm very glad to have them. My father was also very proud of his Cherokee Indian heritage and was not the least bit ashamed that we were of Cherokee Indian descent. On the contrary, he was very proud of that heritage. My father shared that with all of us children throughout our lives and we too are proud of that heritage.

S.J.: What was your father's profession?

Seabolt: In Oklahoma my father was a farmer. At the time the Cherokee Nation was split up and divided into the state of Oklahoma each of the Cherokee families was alloted one hundred and ten acres and was given approximately $60--it was up to them to develop and survive. My father became a very successful farmer and continued to farm in Oklahoma during the period from 1907 through 1935. We all know the Great Depression hit in 1929 but in spite of the Depression he was able to weather the storm until 1936. At that point we were hit by drought conditions but were not involved in the dust bowl because we were in the eastern portion of Oklahoma which is greener. We still had drought conditions, very severe drought conditions. Because of both the Depression and the drought conditions my father finally became unable to pay the taxes on our farm and we lost it in 1936.

S.J.: When he was farming was 110 acres as much as he owned?

Seabolt: Yes.

S.J.: Was that large enough that he occasionally would hire people to come and help at harvest time?

Seabolt: Yes, but primarily we children worked. I had, as I mentioned earlier, eleven children in our family and I was about mid-way in this family. I was about the youngest one when we lived in Oklahoma that productively worked on the farm. We all worked.

S.J.: Do you remember very much about the work you did?

Seabolt: Yes, I picked cotton. I can remember clearly two events that have stood out in my life--that are very memorable and I hope I never forget them. I traveled with my father on a wagon pulled by a team of mules that was loaded with cotton from our farm to Fort Smith, Arkansas, some 21 miles. It's one of those things that made such an impression that I'll never forget it. There was another incident that I'll never forget--we also grew sugar cane on our farm from which molasses was made and sugar was processed. I can remember us taking a load of sugar cane to a neighboring farm where they processed the cane and made sugar and molasses. I can remember the neighboring farmer calling me over and keeping in mind that at that time I was about six or six and a half he said, "Have you ever tasted more?" I looked at him with a quizzical look on my face and said, "No, I don't believe I have." He dipped a cup into this great big vat of boiling sugar cane and dipped off the foam and froth off the top and handed the cup to me. He said, "Now taste it." I tasted it and it was very sweet and sugary and delicious. He said, "Now, doesn't that taste like more?" Made quite an impression on me at that time.

Also at the age of about four and a half--keeping in mind that we were a farm family and before I started school--my mother had put me down for a nap. I wasn't asleep. I was lying on the bed looking up and I noticed what appeared to be flames coming through the ceiling. I jumped out of bed and alerted my mother and older sister. They were the only ones at home. My father was away on the other side of the hill plowing with the team of mules and our house was on fire. There was just the three of us at home and I was small but I remember carrying certain smaller articles out of the house to save them. My mother and older sister were able to save many of the smaller contents of our home. The home and the larger items were all lost. We then started over by building another home. Those are things, of course, I will never forget.

S.J.: Could you describe the house that burned? Do you remember how large it was?

Seabolt: I would describe it this way--it was a typical farm home of that

era--frame construction, modest in size, no indoor plumbing or modern facilities. It was a typical farm house of that era. The house had a cellar for storing food. It was sturdy and adequate but nothing like the homes we know today and all of the modern conveniences that we have.

S.J.: Was the new one they built similar to that?

Seabolt: Similar, very similar to the one that burned. We didn't get into a modern style of construction until sometime later.

S.J.: Do you remember how many brothers you shared a room with?

Seabolt: Four, shared a room with four brothers and, typically, we had two in a standard size bed.

S.J.: Do you remember much about other families that lived around there whether ten or twelve children was a typical farm family?

Seabolt: I would say in that generation and in that area the families tended to be on the large size. Of course, it's hard to generalize and say that they were all large but a family of our size was not at all unusual. I would say it was pretty typical. I remember the good things and I think that's good for people to remember the good things as well as some of the things that are not so good. During the Depression years my mother saved a few pennies and nickels and dimes because I wanted a pair of gloves. It was wintertime and it does get fairly cold in Oklahoma. She had saved up enough money for me to get gloves. Right across the street from the school there was a little country store that sold gloves. I'll never forget the gloves that I wanted as long as I live. They had a little star on the cuff and they were sharp looking gloves. I took the money with me on this particular day and on my way to school I was going to buy the gloves. They were out of them so I spent my money on marbles instead. The marbles were there and attracted me. I'd lost all the marbles playing keepers at school. So I had neither marbles nor gloves. Also, we weren't able to save that money again to get the gloves.

S.J.: Your early life was during the Depression so most of the time your family had the necessities but extras like that were hard to come by.

Seabolt: That's right. Since we were farm people we did have food. We never went without food but it was the niceties of life--clothing, gloves, shoes, entertainment--things that took cash money that we were deprived of in Oklahoma before we came to California.

S.J.: When you did need things like a pair of shoes which was necessary if you were going to school or work did your family barter? Some people have told me that bartering was very common then.

Seabolt: Yes, that's true. I remember one instance very clearly. I mentioned to you that I had one sister that was already married when we made the trip to California. I can remember going to her home for a day before we left Oklahoma--just to spend the day with her. We thought very much of that sister as we did of all our brothers and sisters. She wanted to provide something special for lunch that day so she went out and caught two chickens out of their chicken yard. She asked me and my brother, James, to take them to this little country store and trade them for some lunch meat and bread--that was bartering. She didn't have money to buy the lunch meat and bread but she did have two chickens that she could trade. Yes, it was a common practice.

S.J.: How about exchanging labor? Perhaps it wasn't necessary in your family but did other people trade labor?

Seabolt: Yes, when I mentioned the trip to the sorghum mill where they were processing our sugar cane--that was really traded labor. My father would help harvest this farmer's crop in payment for his processing our sugar cane. This worked to everyone's advantage because all the farmers couldn't afford to have their own processing plants. So yes, there was a sharing of labor between farmers.

We didn't have the big farm equipment that exists today. Principally, it was mules and hand plows and wagons. There were some horses but the horses weren't primarily used in the farm work in that area--it was principally mules. I went through just one year of school in Oklahoma. I'll never forget the last day of school. My brothers and sisters and I were all at school when my father came to pick us up. We were going to leave for California the next day. He'd sold much of our farm equipment and did have a few dollars. He went to Fort Smith, Arkansas and bought a Model T truck because we were a large family and it was going to be a long trip. He came to school to pick us up and after we all got in the truck to go home the truck wouldn't start. He decided that perhaps that truck was not dependable enough to take to California so he took it back to Fort Smith and traded it in on a 1928 Dodge touring car with large wheels, tires with wooden spokes and a steering wheel that was about the size of the cars today. It had three seats which we badly needed. There were twelve of us that made the trip in that car--my father, mother and ten children.

S.J.: You mentioned school--you were there just a year. Do you remember very much about school? Did you want to go to school? Did you enjoy it?

Seabolt: I enjoyed school. I always enjoyed school very much. I remember my teacher. She was a very fine person. She too was hit by the Depression. Everybody was hit by the Depression. She was very understanding. The populace at large was very understanding. In

that era if a child had shoes that were quite worn and clothing that was quite worn it was overlooked because other children had worn shoes and clothing.

S.J.: Everyone was in the same situation?

Seabolt: The teacher's clothing was not as nice as teachers wear today. She was very understanding and a good teacher. She had the interest of the children at heart. It was a small country school.

S.J.: Were all grades in one classroom?

Seabolt: Several grades in one class. It was pre-primer and up through the fifth grade and then sixth through eighth as I recall in this particular school. There was one teacher teaching pre-primer through fifth--small school.

S.J.: You did meet children in that school and perhaps you went home sometimes with them. Do you remember ever noticing whether other families in the same economic situation you were in?

Seabolt: Let me answer that this way--I think we were somewhat better off than many. We did have plenty of food at all times. My father was a good farmer and a good manager and he was able to hold out until 1936. There were approximately 750,000 small farmers in that area of the midwest who lost their farms during the Depression and in the dust bowl period. My father was one of the last to lose his farm in 1936 so there were those who were obviously worse off in that time period than we were.

S.J.: Do you remember children staying out of school during the harvest time?

Seabolt: Yes.

S.J.: Did your family keep you out of school?

Seabolt: Yes, that's correct--that was typical. Schools were even geared to the harvest season.

S.J.: Do you remember how old you were when you first went into the fields to help out?

Seabolt: I would say I was never abused.

S.J.: Perhaps they would take you out to do a little work and a little bit of playing.

Seabolt: That's right. With that understanding I became accustomed to doing little menial things probably by the time I was five or six. There

are a great many things that a child five or six can do and enjoy and actually do easier perhaps than an adult can because they don't have to stoop down and so forth. I can remember picking cotton at the age of six but I can't say that I was ever overworked. I wouldn't want to give that impression.

S.J.: You don't remember it being terribly difficult work or being over tired or anything like that?

Seabolt: No, not working for my father.

S.J.: And your older brothers and sisters probably had assigned chores?

Seabolt: Certainly because we had hogs, cows, chickens, mules, and horses. They all had to be fed and watered. In those days you couldn't just turn on a faucet and fill a watering trough.

S.J.: Did your mother have time to help out in the fields or was most of her work in the home?

Seabolt: My mother was a homemaker and she did an excellent job of running our home in Oklahoma. She did the cooking for all of us, the cleaning for all of us, which was no small chore because it was not using washing machines as we know them today. There were pots in the yard under which you heated the water. You used a scrub board and old metal irons. She made our soap. Between cooking and cleaning she made all of the clothes--principally for the girls and the shirts for the boys and my father. Trousers and shoes were purchased but most of the other wearing apparel mother made. She made beautiful quilts. She canned fruit and vegetables, made jams and jellies for our food supply and made hominy. She fed and took care of our chickens, churned butter and did all of the household work typical of that period. She had quite enough to do without working in the fields.

S.J.: Did your mother participate in any community things? A lot of the mothers were active in the church or did social work.

Seabolt: We were active in the Methodist Church as far back as I can remember. The fact is my grandfather Seabolt was very active in the Methodist Church. My great-grandfather Stephen J. Shackelford was active in church. He was a Methodist minister. My mother played the piano in our church and liked to sing--we all liked to sing. Some of us could sing and some just thought we could. I happened to be one that didn't even think I could but we all enjoyed it nonetheless.

S.J.: You attended church every Sunday?

Seabolt: I wouldn't say every Sunday but we attended regularly.

S.J.: Do you remember revivals during the summer?

Seabolt: Oh, yes. Revivals were commonplace occurrences in that day and time and I do very clearly remember attending revival meetings. Essentially what revival meetings are of course is an outside traveling minister coming in and presenting a series of services perhaps with a fresher view--a different outlook. They were interesting experiences. Some of the revival meetings I enjoyed. Some I did not particularly agree with the method of presentation.

S.J.: Some people have told me that these were also social events.

Seabolt: Yes. Church was a social event.

S.J.: If there was a Baptist revival Methodists and other Protestants would also come even though it was not their religion.

Seabolt: Yes. Church and revivals both were social events because we were farm people and we were separated from one another sometimes by a great distance. The area was not heavily populated like it is today. It was a chance to get together and visit with friends and other children and parents--particularly parents because so much of their time was spent working that it was a chance for them to relax and visit and renew acquaintances. They had what we use to call potluck on the grounds. It was lots of fun. I have fond memories of it.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

S.J.: Could you tell me more about your mother and her family?

Seabolt: My mother was of Irish descent and her family was very proud of this ancestry. My mother was not allowed to associate with Indians. Of course, my father and his family were of Indian descent and even though they were just a portion Indian they were Indian. They were not paupers. They were prosperous farmers not wealthy but still my mother was not allowed to associate with them. They did come in contact with each other through the years because as farmers my father's family would trade with my mother's family so they would see each other. My father and my mother were attracted to one another. Because she was Irish my mother was also superstitious. Irish people have lots of superstitions and they are quite charming superstitions. One superstition was that if a young lady would throw her handkerchief into the air on a dewy morning whatever initials were on the lawn when she picked it up would symbolize the initials of her husband-to-be. My mother did this and when she picked her handkerchief up the symbol that she read into that--I'm sure part of that was because she wanted to read these initials into it--were A. L. S. My father's name was Alfred Lafayette Seabolt. They became engaged and married on

December 25, 1913. My father was 21 and my mother was 18.

S.J.: Was there much discrimination against Indians then?

Seabolt: Yes. There are a great many people of Indian descent in this country and many of them cover that up. They were not proud of it and passed as being totally white for whatever reason. We never did. We were proud of our heritage.

S.J.: Did this cause problems in your mother's family with her parents?

Seabolt: No. My father was a fine person. Although he had a limited formal education he was very literate. He loved to read. He loved to talk. He was a sociable, well liked person. He was well accepted into their family.

S.J.: So they came to terms with this?

Seabolt: They were married by my mother's grandfather who was a minister in the Methodist church.

S.J.: Did your father become Methodist then?

Seabolt: My father's family had also been Methodists for years. The fact is my grandfather Seabolt was active in the Methodist church for years and years and years.

S.J.: Your grandfather on your father's side?

Seabolt: Yes.

S.J.: How about Indian stories? Do you remember hearing stories about Indian superstitions?

Seabolt: I am very interested in my ancestry and the ancestry of the Cherokee nation. I have done a great deal of research. In answer to your question, yes, I have a whole book that I have put together on that very subject right here. Those that I will be speaking about are from things that I've been told rather than what I have experienced. I hope you will understand that. In the olden days they had the Corn Festival which is called a Green Corn Festival. Corn was the basic staple food for the Cherokee Indian. It was a very important food item. The Cherokee Indians, by the way, were farmers long before the white man ever came to America. Many people don't know this. The white people learned a great deal from the Indians. One of the things that they learned was how to plant corn, how to plant pumpkins, how to plant sweet potatoes. We forget that sometimes. We like to think we taught the Indian all of that but it isn't necessarily so. The Green Corn Dance and Festival was an important festival. Another was the Eternal Fire--in the Cherokee nation in their sacred houses they had what they

called the Eternal Fire and they never let this fire go out. All of the campfires were lighted from this single source--that was the one that was tended day and night so that it never went out. It was in the sacred houses which each clan had. The Cherokees did not have tribes, the Cherokees were clans. The Cherokee clans were under the women. Men were not the head of the clan, women were. Members of the clan could not marry in the clan, you had to marry outside of the clan. This was before the white man said you shouldn't intermarry--that's interesting. The Indians figured that out a long time ago--it was forbidden. My family is descendent from the Holly Clan. We can trace our Cherokee ancestry back ten generations to Oo-Loo-Tas of the Holly Clan.

S.J.: Did you hear about very many superstitions in the Cherokee folklore?

Seabolt: The Indians believed very strongly in nature, animal lore and in visions which many would perhaps call superstitions. They believed that it was possible for man to communicate with nature. I don't necessarily term that as superstition but I think most people would. They had a very close communion with nature and animals and a respect for nature and animals. The Cherokee people did not plunder the land nor the animals. They took what they needed and learned to live with nature. I think that's where we, as white people, could learn a valuable lesson today.

Do you know what Oklahoma means? Oklahoma was comprised of two Indian words--homa meaning red and okla meaning people--the name means Land of the Red People.

What is now Tennessee, Alabama, North Carolina and Georgia was all Cherokee Territory and had been for years as long as the Indians could remember--that was their homeland before white man ever came to the shores of North America. Gradually the white population increased and through various treaties land was ceded to the white man. In 1824 the Cherokee Nation issued a proclamation that they would not cede one more foot of land to the whites. At that time a deputation of five Cherokees was selected to go to Washington, D.C. and meet with Congress and the President of the United States, who was Andrew Jackson at that time, to explain that they were not going to cede one more foot of land to the white people. My fourth great-uncle was a member of that deputation, George Lowrey, Jr., and he was a spokesman for that council. They took that stand and held firm even under great pressure from the states in the area, particularly the state of Georgia because gold was discovered on Indian lands. Anytime anything of any value is discovered on Indian land somebody else wants it.

Georgia was insisting that the Cherokee Indians be moved out of their homelands. The Cherokees resisted that, not through warfare, not by hitting people over the head with tomahawk, not by scalping

them or shooting them with bows and arrows but through the legal system. They were self-educated people. They fought it up through the Supreme Court and got a Supreme Court judgement that said they were entitled to their lands. President Jackson said, "The Supreme Court has rendered a judgement. Let them enforce it." He said, "They cannot." The Indians were moved on The Trail of Tears in 1838 from the southeastern part of the United States. My great-great-grandfather and great-great-grandmother survived the Trail of Tears as small children--that's when the Indians came to what is now Oklahoma in 1838 and 1839. So prior to that Oklahoma was not the Cherokee nation. It was only at that point in time that it truly became the Cherokee nation. Some 16,000 Indians were forced to leave their homelands on foot starting in October and walked over 1,000 miles in the dead of winter through ice, snow, and sleet. They lacked food and some 4,000 of the 16,000 perished. You don't hear much about that but it's a very dark period in our history. A Seabolt child died and was buried along the Trail in Illinois. Fortunately, my forefathers survived.

S.J.: When the Indians were in Oklahoma they intermarried with white people as your family did. Do you think it is possible that some of the Cherokee customs merged with white customs and that a lot of people who are now called Okies really have a lot of this Indian background?

Seabolt: There's no question about it.

I mentioned some foodstuff a moment ago that we thought we were so ingenious in developing but they were actually developed by the Indians long before that. Sweet potatoes--the Indians were ridiculed because they ate roots--sweet potatoes are roots. Corn--hominy is parched corn--that's Indian food. This is a custom that has been adopted by the people of the south and midwest--Oklahoma and Arkansas and so forth--but is derived from Indian custom.

You've probably heard the expression that someone is so happy that they're in seventh heaven, well, the Cherokees believe in seven heavens. The seventh heaven is the highest form of heaven according to Cherokee belief. The Cherokees believe in a supreme being but they don't call it God as you and I refer to our maker but it's still a supreme being and they believe in heaven.

S.J.: Do you think some of the emphasis on family and family ties that we find in the people who moved here from Oklahoma could have origins in their Indian roots where clans were so important?

Seabolt: I wouldn't necessarily make a definite answer but there was a close association. I wouldn't be at all surprised.

I also might mention the Cherokee method of raising families. I

I have already mentioned to you that the mother was the head of the household because the men were primarily warriors and hunters. The women ran the households, did the planting, did the cooking and so forth. The men were gone much of the time so as a result the father of the children didn't have the direct responsibility for their training. The mother and one of her brothers assumed the responsibility for the training of the children. The father would assume the responsibility for the training of his sister's children. This was the custom throughout the Cherkoee nation and history.

S.J.: When your family was back in Oklahoma was your family very close to your extended family?

Seabolt: Oh, yes. We had a number of relatives in that area and we visited rather often. My mother's younger sister just passed away a year ago at the age of about 78. I was visiting her at the rest home just shortly before she passed away. She recognized me when I came in and said, "Joyce, of course, you have no recollection of this but I slept with you the night you were born on a feather bed on the floor in the kitchen of your home." I was born at home. In those days you weren't born in hospitals. My mother had had a difficult time my aunt said. She said, "She couldn't take care of you so I came over. I was only about 20 and I spent your first night with you on the down-filled mattress on the kitchen floor." She remembered that when she was 78 years old.

S.J.: So the family was very close.

Seabolt: Yes, very close--very important.

S.J.: How about neighbors and other people in the community? Was there a strong sense of a community feeling?

Seabolt: I think so. Again, I was quite young in Oklahoma but I do remember the family relationship. I know there was the sharing of labor and so forth.

S.J.: We also said that church was an important social outlet.

Seabolt: It was important and in tragedies people certainly gathered to share in a tragedy. I mentioned a little earlier that our home was burned to the ground. We were not left destitute as a consequence. We did have people who rallied to our support and I think that was typical of the area. There was this closeness, this caring and there was a sharing of troubles--very important. I think that is lacking today.

S.J.: You were born just before the Depression hit so your earliest memories are during the Depression. Do you think that had something

to do with the community feeling? Times were bad for everyone. Do you think that pulled people together too?

Seabolt: I think it depends on where you were and at what point in time you're asking the question. I think yes, if everybody is hit across the board in somewhat equal circumstances there is this sense of pulling together. On the other hand, when we got into California and were outsiders coming in we were not accepted. So it depends on the time in history that you're talking about.

S.J.: Your father held out all the way till 1935 which was way into the Depression and the drought. Do you remember your father talking about what crops were ruined or anything like that?

Seabolt: It was not so much that the crops were ruined it was a combination of things. It was poor crops and people didn't have the money to buy them. Even if you could raise the crop you couldn't sell them.

S.J.: Very low prices.

Seabolt: Or no prices, no market. So you had no cash money--that was the real problem at that time. We could raise the food for our own needs, raise the food for our cattle, raise the food for our hogs, and raise the food for the chickens but we couldn't raise any cash money. This is the reason we lost the farm--we couldn't pay the taxes. We couldn't pay the taxes with hogs and chickens. You had to have money and you couldn't get money for them. We weren't as hard hit by the drought as the flatlands--the dust bowl area--but we were affected by it.

S.J.: So you were victims more of the economy than of the drought or the dust bowl.

Seabolt: We were victims of both but more of the economy that the dust bowl. It was a combination of both.

S.J.: You were in eastern Oklahoma, do you remember any dust at all?

Seabolt: I don't remember the dust. I don't remember the piles up along fence lines and along houses--that did not exist in our area. It did damage crops but the fact remains that if you had grown abundant crops you couldn't have sold them. Although that affected us it really was not the determining factor in losing our farm.

S.J.: Roosevelt had a program where he paid farmers either not to plant crops or to plow them under. Do you remember hearing anything about that?

Seabolt: Yes, I was aware of it but it came along after 1936 after we'd lost

our farm.

S.J.: Perhaps you had relatives who stayed in Oklahoma?

Seabolt: I have some cousins who were able to hold out and retain their farms and are prosperous today on the same farms that they had during the Depression years. In fact, I visited one of them within the last two years and it's a beautiful, beautiful place--beautiful country.

S.J.: Another problem that caused farmers to have problems with their crops was that farming methods were not very sophisticated. They didn't use crop rotation. Often they would plant cotton year after year after year. Then they would plant in the same straight rows. The irrigation methods weren't very sophisticated either. Do you remember your father mentioning anything like that later on?

Seabolt: Much of our land--about 110 acres--was pastureland which was grassland, natural terrain. Much of it was garden crops and sugar cane and some cotton. There would be a plot here and a plot there and another plot over here with a pasture in between so it wasn't just rows and rows and rows like you picture in western Oklahoma and Kansas. I think that was where the dust bowl area was located. The Cherokee people recognized the force of nature and they did not demolish a whole area to clear it and plant everything in rows. This was not their heritage or nature. The white people were the ones who planted long rows and planted the same crops year after year and destroyed the natural terrain. Those were grasslands and you destroyed the natural grass which created the dust conditions.

S.J.: Do you remember if your father rotated crops?

Seabolt: I can't really say but I assume so since it wasn't all one crop. We didn't have the whole place plowed at one time because the land wasn't that way. There were hills and valleys and some of it was suitable for pasture land only and was not suitable for plowing and irrigating and row crops.

S.J.: So in that sense the farming in eastern Oklahoma was very different than farming in western Oklahoma?

Seabolt: It differed from farming in western Oklahoma and Kansas, that's right. It varied a great deal.

S.J.: When your father couldn't pay his taxes on the farm was that what finally made him decide to give up farming?

Seabolt: Had to--there were no other sources of employment so he sold the farm and the livestock and raised what cash he could so that we would have money to buy the necessary transportation and survive during the trip to a new life in California.

S.J.: Why did you choose California?

Seabolt: I have an uncle who had been in California for some time. My mother's brother, Uncle Jeff Shackelford, had already received a commitment for a job for my father. My father had employment when we got to California.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

Seabolt: My uncle had secured employment for my father and it was on a large holding owned by the Timken Ranch. You may have heard of the Timken Bearing Company. They were the owners of this large ranch. They were absentee owners by the way--it was run by a farm superintendent and employees on the farm.

S.J.: Did your uncle also work there?

Seabolt: No, he did not. He knew the operator of the farm and they needed a seasoned, experienced farmer and my uncle explained to them that my father was such a farmer.

S.J.: Did your uncle write to you and tell you what California was like?

Seabolt: Yes, that is right. We had never visited California--neither my father, mother, or any of my brothers or sisters--but my uncle had communicated with us and told us that he did have this employment and had it firmed up. My father was interested and we did have a place to go.

S.J.: Do you think that if you hadn't had an offer like that you would not have come?

Seabolt: We would have had to because we had to survive. We literally had lost the farm. We'd already lost our source of income because we couldn't sell our produce. We had no money coming in. We'd also lost our source of food when we lost the farm so we had to leave. California was the promised land in those days.

S.J.: Did you hear a lot about California when you were back in Oklahoma? Did people talk about it a great deal?

Seabolt: Yes. There was a great circulation of leaflets and circulars with glorious offers of jobs in California, particularly the central California area where we are right now. These were false hopes as you well know but what they were trying to do was encourage people to come to California to work as laborers, quite cheap labor, I might add.

S.J.: Did the people in Oklahoma talk about this a lot? Was this sort of a common dream?

Seabolt: Of course, you have to have something to dream about. You have to have hope and faith. They were hoping and had faith in a better future and they looked to California for it. Yes, it was a topic of conversation. There were an awful lot of people who left earlier than we did and about the time that we migrated to California.

S.J.: Do you remember what your uncle wrote you in letters about California?

Seabolt: No, I really can't say. I'm sure it was encouraging because he did have good employment. He was working for the school system in Brawley, California and living in town with his wife and family and was doing quite well. So I'm reasonably sure he painted a somewhat bright picture.

S.J.: Do you remember if you had any ideas of what California was like?

Seabolt: I had none whatsoever. I was strictly a farm child. I had never seen anything except a rural atmosphere. I'd never been to a large city in my entire life. The closest to it was Fort Smith, Arkansas and I always picture that from my childhood memories as being a large city because in comparison to Fort Gibson where I was born it was a large city. I visited Fort Smith again after I was an adult and it is not as large a city as I remembered. It's a good size community and a good size city. I would say it's considerably smaller than Bakersfield or Fresno yet to me it was a large city some 40 or 45 years ago.

S.J.: So you didn't have any real picture in your mind of what California would be like. Was it an adventure for you? Were you excited?

Seabolt: Oh, it was a tremendous adventure to all of us and there was a great deal at stake. I would almost picture it as the earlier days when the pioneers were heading someplace. It was a do-or-die situation. It was an adventure but literally your life was at stake.

S.J.: You were so young then. Do you think you realized that?

Seabolt: We knew very clearly that our future was at stake. We knew that we could not go back. We had lost what we had. We all very clearly understood that.

S.J.: Then your parents were very honest and open with you about this.

Seabolt: Yes. We lost our place and there was no turning back. We knew that everything had to be forward. We had to have that hope and dream. We had no idea what California was like--none whatsoever, especially the Imperial Valley. If we had we never would have gone. I don't know whether you're familiar with the Imperial Valley or not.

S.J.: You mentioned that your father got the truck which didn't work out

and he came back with the car.

Seabolt: He finally got the truck started and got us home but he figured out it wasn't going to be dependable enough to go 1,600 miles. In those days that was a week's journey. So he did take the truck back to Fort Smith and trade it in on a Dodge touring car that had three seats and a large trunk area in the back. It was crowded to say the least. We did not travel with bedsprings and mattresses and pots hanging all over the car as depicted in many books and movies but it was crowded.

S.J.: Do you remember what possessions you did bring with you?

Seabolt: We obviously only took the bare necessities--clothing, foodstuff and a few personal items that were meaningful to my mother and father and sisters and brothers. One item that was saved from the fire that destroyed our home a few years ago was a baby picture of my father when he was about fifteen months old. We did get a few water marks on his baby picture but we saved it and that was one thing that was very dear to my mother. We brought that to California with us.

S.J.: You described some of the jalopies that are stereotyped in books and movies. Coming out here did you happen to see any cars loaded down with mattresses?

Seabolt: Yes. A question might come to your mind about where we slept on the trip out which took seven days. We didn't sleep in hotels or motels. We slept along the road on blankets spread on the ground. We did not have mattresses all over. Only one time on our journey did we sleep inside a building. We'd stopped for fuel and water right at the close of the day. The owner of this service station and market was very much a gentlemen who recognized our situation. He said, "I have extra beds. Would you folks like to use them?" He made them available to us. So there was only one night that we slept indoors. The rest of the journey some slept on the ground and some slept in the car.

S.J.: Did you consider that kind of an adventure at that age?

Seabolt: Very much so. I remember this as fun. My older brothers and sisters took a more realistic view that it wasn't so much fun. A child my age could sleep under any condition.

S.J.: Do you remember if your older brothers and sisters and maybe your mother were upset by the conditions they were living in--that that was so different from living in their own home?

Seabolt: It was a traumatic experience for my mother. She gave up life-long friends and she was a friendly person. It meant a change in life

style. It was a traumatic experience for my older sisters in view of the fact that they were nearing adulthood. It was a pretty traumatic experience for my older brother because he was in those early adult years as well. They were the ones who suffered from the move. The brother just older than I am and on down the line were less affected by the move and more impressed by the adventure, the change and the experience.

S.J.: Do you remember if there were any particular events in those seven days, perhaps car trouble?

Seabolt: I can tell you a number of things. I mentioned that we only slept inside one time. We traveled about 45 miles per hour which was a pretty decent speed in those days. Toward the end of the journey we were all getting a little tired, funds were getting low and my father's foot was getting a little heavier on the accelerator. He started driving a little faster and the old engine started to get a little bit worn out and it started to peck--make a noise. It was obvious that we had a rod going out on the car. In the middle of the desert my father pulled over in what little shade he could find. He drained the oil out of the crankcase, removed the pan from the car with what little tools he had and repaired the car. He then put the pan back in and put the oil back that he'd drained out--he couldn't buy new oil because we were out in the desert. We made it the rest of the way on that repair job. That was a remarkable feat in itself because he was a farmer not a trained mechanic.

S.J.: Do you remember seeing lots of other cars broken down alongside the road?

Seabolt: I can't really answer that. I remember our own circumstance more than the circumstances of others. I'm sure it was true but I can't honestly remember a lot of other cars broken down. I'm sure that most people like us couldn't have gone out and bought a brand new car. The Dodge that we bought was a 1928 model and our trip was in 1936 so that vehicle was already eight years old loaded down with twelve people for a 1,600 mile journey.

I suspect that most people were buying older cars that would have mechanical difficulties. We were fortunate that it only happened to us once. Remember too that we were farm people used to horses and buggies and wagons not cars. We were used to hills and rolling plains not mountains. When we hit New Mexico where we encountered mountains with winding roads, high bridges, steep cliffs and so forth my mother refused to go down some of those mountains in the car. She would get out and carry my brother, Abe, who was less than a year old, down the steepest hills and let the rest of us go down in the car. She would meet us at the bottom of the road. After two or three such episodes my father, who was a very patient man, finally said, "Beulah, we're never going to get to California

if you don't stay in the car." He convinced her that it was safe and that he was a good driver though inexperienced and that he wasn't going to let anything happen to us. She finally consented to stay in the car and not walk down every mountain.

Another interesting thing happened when we arrived at Yuma, Arizona on the seventh day of our journey. Yuma is at the border between Arizona and California. We were 55 miles from our destination. We weren't broke but our funds were low and there wasn't any money to spare. We were detained at the Arizona-California border by the immigration service and were not allowed to enter California.

S.J.: What reason did they give?

Seabolt: We had to show proof of employment before we could cross into California. This happened in the United States of America!

S.J.: Did your mother and father realize this was illegal or that this was wrong of them to ask that?

Seabolt: We thought that it certainly was not fair. It was just another one of those things that was the last straw. We couldn't go back--we had nothing to go back to. We didn't have the funds to make the trip.

S.J.: These people were officials so you didn't really have a choice.

Seabolt: We did have an uncle who had secured employment for my father so it was a matter of getting verification to these officials. My father called my uncle and explain the situation and my uncle brought certification to the immigration authorities in Yuma that we did have employment. We were stranded there for some hours before he could get there. There were some very understanding people there in Yuma who invited us into their homes for refreshments. They took us to a neighborhood park so we could relax. They were very, very kind to us.

S.J.: Do you remember how long this was?

Seabolt: Probably most of the day.

S.J.: How did this affect your mother who was already upset by the things that were happening?

Seabolt: It was discouraging but we were still encouraged because we knew our uncle was coming to rescue us. What the officials were trying to do was keep destitute people from coming to California because by 1936 an awful lot of people had already migrated to California.

S.J.: Do you remember how those officials treated you otherwise?

Seabolt: They were not brutal. I would say they were businesslike. They had a job to do and they were following instructions. However, one of the immigration officials did insult my older sister, Flossie. She was a very pretty girl in her late teens and she was holding our youngest brother, Abe, who was a baby. The official wanted to know if it was her baby. It hurt her feelings and, of course, this upset mother.

What they were doing was illegal and it was proven illegal in the courts but at that time it was the rule that was being followed. We were fortunate in that we were able to show proof that we did have employment. We were allowed to enter California and continued on our journey.

S.J.: Were you very hopeful after that?

Seabolt: We never lost hope. They had been hard years in Oklahoma. We didn't go from a life of plenty one day to a life of want the next day. There was more of a gradual transition from a pretty plentiful life to less and less and less. We had to do something.

S.J.: Do you suppose that other people had similar trouble at the border?

Seabolt: I would suspect so. I wouldn't think that we had been singled out. We did have some money, we weren't flat busted.

S.J.: Do you remember if your father told you how much money he started out with coming to California?

Seabolt: We each got a little allowance before we left and some of us were thriftier than others on the trip. I can't remember which category I fell into. I have a hunch I wasn't one of the thriftier ones. Some of my older sisters saved their money. I do know that by the time we left Yuma my father had borrowed some of those allowances back so I do know that our funds were pretty well depleted by that point. We had no surplus to be quite frank. It would have been very tough.

S.J.: How about food along the way?

Seabolt: We brought money to buy food as we went along. We didn't have any way of preserving food and had no capacity for carrying large quantities of food with that many people in the car. We carried enough food for a day or so and supplemented it as we went along.

S.J.: You said that you stopped along the road at night and perhaps built a fire before you went to sleep?

Seabolt: Oh yes.

S.J.: You mentioned that the people in Yuma were very nice to you.

Seabolt: Oh yes.

S.J.: On your way out here you seem to have had some very good experiences.

Seabolt: Very good experiences--I tend to remember the good things--the good outweighed the bad. Once we got to California my father did go to work on the Timken Ranch in Brawley. He continued to work there for many years as a farmer on this large farm. He worked seven days a week and generally got off at Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. No paid sick or vacation days--those things were unheard of. Fortunately, he was a strong, healthy man and stood up under it well.

S.J.: You said that when your uncle secured this job for him that the people who owned the place were absentee owners. They were looking for an experienced farmer. Was your father a foreman over other men?

Seabolt: No. My father was a workman. When we first came to the farm there he drove a team of plow mules.

S.J.: Do you remember what crops you grew?

Seabolt: We grew an awful lot of hay. We grew some wheat, lettuce and carrots. No citrus. It was a large farm with hundreds of acres farmed using very primitive farming methods--mules, plows--a full-time job for a number of people.

S.J.: How long did your father work there?

Seabolt: He went to work there in 1936 the very day we arrived in California and worked there until about 1941. We lived in a large two story frame house on the Timken ranch. We were a large family so we needed a large house. All five of us boys shared one room in this farmhouse and we had the entire upper floor. It was one huge room that we shared. It was kind of like a ballroom to us. I'll never forget that.

We experienced an earthquake in 1940--a very severe earthquake. I was reading Pinnochio and when the earthquake hit we all stopped what we were doing and ran outside.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

Seabolt: It lasted for several days with aftershocks. People were afraid to stay in their homes so they slept outside. We spent most of the next week sleeping outside with some of us sleeping in the car. Homes such as we lived in with wooden frames received minimal damage. Stucco and brick homes throughout the area were badly damaged. There were no fatalities, however. Across the border in Mexicali

there were numerous fatalities in adobe structures. It was very frightening to someone who had never experienced an earthquake and none of us had ever had such an experience.

S.J.: How would you compare the house you were living in in California to the one you left in Oklahoma?

Seabolt: It was larger but it wasn't any more modern. We did have running water so from that standpoint it was more modern but we didn't have an indoor bathroom. It was a typical farmhouse of the early 1900s.

S.J.: Was that provided by the owners?

Seabolt: That's right.

S.J.: Did you pay rent in addition?

Seabolt: No, that was part of my father's salary.

S.J.: Were there other houses on the farm?

Seabolt: Yes. The superintendent of the farm, a fellow named Parker, had a very nice home. I wouldn't have been surprised if he had indoor plumbing. There was another home down the road about a half or three-quarters of a mile which was on the same farm. I would say there were four or five homes scattered throughout the farm--housing for various farm families over several miles of territory.

S.J.: How about other workers who came to work on the farm, do you remember where they lived?

Seabolt: Yes, there was a family named Clay. They had a son about a year older than I was. He and my brother and I became best friends. His name was Raymond Clay. We spent a lot of time together hunting and fishing in the canals. He lived about a mile from us.

The superintendent of the farm, Mr. Parker, was very kind to us. I caught pneumonia when I was about nine and was very ill. It was still the height of the Depression. I couldn't go to the hospital because we had no money for hospitalization. I did receive doctor's care, however. I missed some school as a result of the lengthy bout with pneumonia. I had some good, interested teachers who sent me homework so even though I couldn't go to school I could work at home and receive the grade and credit for my work. I was able to stay with my class that way. My health was affected though and Mr. Parker took an interest in me and arranged for me to go to a health camp that summer at no expense to my family except for the necessary clothing. I spent most of the summer in a mountain camp with other boys and girls who had similar health problems. I enjoyed it very, very much and made some good friends. The only thing I didn't enjoy nor appreciate was the health food. They didn't

feed you hamburgers, hot dogs or tacos. They fed you foods that you should eat on a regular schedule like squash. We had to eat everything on our plate. I detested squash. I would hide it in my shirt pocket to keep from having to eat it. I will not touch squash to this day. I have never insisted that my children eat squash even if it is good for them. In spite of that I became healthy.

S.J.: How about your brothers and sisters? Did they have any health problems?

Seabolt: No. I don't know why I was singled out and got pneumonia. It just happened. It happened right at Christmas. I had eaten a lot of candy, hard rock candy and I thought maybe I'd eaten too much and that was making me sick. I thought it would pass but it didn't.

S.J.: Could your family afford a doctor?

Seabolt: We went to a doctor by the name of Dr. Ben Davidson, an old family doctor in Brawley. I was not without medical care I just could not be hospitalized. Just like today, it's tremendously expensive if you don't have insurance. In those days, who had insurance or money?

S.J.: How about regular checkups? Was your family in a situation that when you needed a doctor you went?

Seabolt: No, we didn't go in for regular physicals but if we needed a doctor we went to see a doctor. My father was employed and although he wasn't getting rich he was making enough money for us to have the necessities of life. We didn't have any niceties but we never went hungry our entire lives. My clothing most often was tattered and worn. There were times when I didn't have shoes but my clothing was always clean and I never went hungry. I was always loved. We had a very close, happy family relationship even without those niceties of life.

S.J.: Could you make a comparison between the way you were living in Oklahoma and the way you lived in Brawley?

Seabolt: I would say the basic difference was our acceptance.

S.J.: Your economic level was about the same?

Seabolt: Our economic level was about the same but in comparison to the people in Brawley it was lower.

S.J.: So that made a big difference.

Seabolt: Also, being newcomers to the area and of Indian decent made a difference.

S.J.: How about when you went to school--was that a problem?

Seabolt: All of us children were good students. My mother was a former teacher and my father was a studious man who'd read to us since we were little children. We all learned to read at an early ago so from an academic standpoint we never had any trouble either with school or with teachers. We did have difficulty gaining acceptance in the community and that hurt. People like to be accepted by their fellow students and by the community at large.

I can remember very clearly they practiced a May Day dance when I was about in the third grade. I can remember dancing up a storm learning that dance around the Maypole. I couldn't participate in that May Day dance because I didn't have any shoes--that was one rule they made. It hurt and I didn't forget it. Even today, I'm not a wealthy man but I'm comfortable and I feel very badly when I see a child with tattered clothes and worn shoes because it brings back memories of those earlier years. It brings tears to my eyes.

S.J.: But there were probably other children in those circumstances?

Seabolt: In Oklahoma yes but not so much in California. The established people were better off economically than we were so there was the distinction. You could see it and feel it. You had to earn acceptance and that did not come quickly. It was a slow process. We were clean, literate people and good students. We were determined to gain acceptance and in doing so I think we overcompensated. Most of us became top students in the class--that way we gained some degree of recognition. It took a few years and as our economic condition improved we became more acquainted with the community. We immediately became active in the church. It took a few years but we finally gained a place in the community. My father was selected Father of the Year in Brawley, California in 1952 in recognition of his many contributions to the city throughout the years and to the youth of the area. This is an indication of our acceptance in the area.

S.J.: But you feel that that took time?

Seabolt: It took a lot of time, a lot of time. It didn't come overnight. I think a lot of people would have become discouraged and said, "We can't do it. We'll never be accepted." You can become resentful of course. We did not.

S.J.: Was this true of all your brothers and sisters?

Seabolt: Yes. In fact, my youngest brother, Abe, became mayor of Brawley and in later years served on the County Board of Supervisors in Imperial County. He's a very successful businessman in Imperial Valley. I have three sister who became nurses. My sister, Mildred, has been a city librarian for many, many years. She's a lovely lady.

We have gained acceptance in the state of California.

S.J.: When you first went to school in California do you remember seeing other children who might have come from Oklahoma or Texas?

Seabolt: Yes, but they were in the minority. We had two minority situations to contend with in my family. We were in the minority because of being a farm family from Oklahoma and because of being of Indian decent. You felt it I'm sure just as the Mexican-Americans feel the difference in southern California right now. We may not recognize it but I'm sure that it is felt very strongly. It existed.

S.J.: How well off were you as compared to other children from Oklahoma or Texas?

Seabolt: My father had a job continuously and at no point in our life did my father accept one dime of charity or welfare. He was employed consistently from the time we entered California to the time he died in 1964. From that standpoint, we were better off than most.

S.J.: You think that maybe some other families were not quite so industrious?

Seabolt: I would say so. Because my father had ten children to support, however, meant that the dollars just didn't stretch as far so perhaps we weren't quite as well off in that area. He was making a consistent wage it's just that there was less of it to go around. To illustrate that, I've talked about he niceties of life and the fact that we didn't have any. A child today doesn't hesitate to ask their parents for money for a show or whatever. I never went to my father to ask for money for a show. I wouldn't have embarrassed my father by asking for a dime because I knew he didn't have a dime. If I wanted to go to a show I earned the money to go. I did go to work early like most of my brothers and sisters. I started work at the age of twelve but I was not overworked.

S.J.: Perhaps after school or on weekends?

Seabolt: That's correct and during the summer. We had a very fine neighbor of Dutch decent and they owned a fairly sizeable grapefruit and orange orchard and farm. My brother, James, and I would work there after school and on weekends and during the summer picking fruit. In those days we were paid a generous salary for our work. He was fourteen and I was twelve. We were paid 50 cents an hour--not bad.

S.J.: Did all of that money go for your own expenses or did you contribute part to the family?

Seabolt: We did not contribute that to the family. It went toward buying clothing for ourselves. It also went towards entertainment but mostly we bought clothing that we needed. My older brothers worked too.

My oldest brother, Alfred, who was large and strong, did farm work and drove a truck. We all worked but we didn't contribute to the support of the family we supported ourselves which helped on the whole.

S.J.: Do you remember very much about your employers and your father's employer? You mentioned you received a very good wage.

Seabolt: I mentioned Mr. Parker who was my father's boss. He was a fine and fair gentleman but didn't pay much. The pay was a condition of the times. The family I worked for were Dutch--fine people. They've since passed away. In later years I worked for O'Connell Brothers--my brother, James, and I worked for them. My brother did maintenance work on farm machinery. I cleaned up the place and in my view I was paid a fairly good salary for what I did.

S.J.: Did you ever hear about other people who were farm families from Oklahoma, Texas and Missouri being mistreated by employers?

Seabolt: We knew of the migratory families and the circumstances with which they were faced. We were fortunate in that we were not in those circumstances moving from place to place. As a migrant worker you don't have time to settle--you're there today and in two weeks gone again. You have no time to build a foundation. No time to gain acceptance.

S.J.: Did you come into contact with some of the migratory families at school?

Seabolt: Yes. They came to the Imperial Valley. There were migratory workers that came into the Imperial Valley during harvest time.

S.J.: Did you consider yourself more fortunate than these people?

Seabolt: Oh yes, very much more fortunate because we did have the home which was suitable. We did have year-round, stable employment. We were much more fortunate than those people, no question about it.

S.J.: Are you familiar with the government camps?

Seabolt: We had a government camp in Imperial Valley. I had some friends who lived in the government camp but we never lived there.

S.J.: Did you ever visit there?

Seabolt: Yes.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2

S.J.: This is session two of an interview with Joyce Seabolt on March 22, 1981.

S.J.: You have some things you want to add about Oklahoma.

Seabolt: I did have a chance to do a little thinking since our last interview. I don't think I really adequately explained my memories of the terrain of eastern Oklahoma where we lived before we came to California. I remember very green, rolling hills in eastern Oklahoma. It's a heavily wooded area and is a beautiful scene. It's much like the mountainous and hilly areas of the southeastern part of the United States where the Cherokee Indians originally came from--that's why they were able to adapt to that area because it was very much like their previous homeland. They were not the plains-type Indian. I remember the soil very clearly. The red clay soil of the mountain area is beautiful soil. The river bottom land is a dark almost black soil--extremely rich farm land. The richest farm lands were in the river bottom and that's where my father and his brother's and his father's farms were. On a recent trip to Oklahoma, this is one of the things that came back to me very quickly when I saw the terrain and the soil. I thought I might talk a little bit about our place in Oklahoma--the old Seabolt properties. There were a number of Seabolt brothers as well as their father, Alfred Pickens Seabolt. In total it was quite a large holding of land and on that land there are some very historic sights involving the old Cherokee Nation and the state of Oklahoma itself.

In the old days twice a year there were huge cattle drives that traveled through Cherokee Nation country--throughout the western area. The place that they traveled through was called the Big Skin Bayou--that was a fjord that was centered in the Seabolt properties. I have pictures of that fjord and a newspaper article about it. It's very interesting to me. Another thing I visited recently on our trip back to Oklahoma was the old stagecoach route between Van Buren, Arkansas and Tahlequah, which the the Cherokee National Headquarters that's now in Oklahoma. Of course, originally that was Indian territory. This old stagecoach route traveled across the old Seabolt holdings and property. There was a stagecoach stop on the Seabolt property. They're planning to build a dam and dam up Big Lee Creek, which is a large creek that runs down through and across our old property to create a lake and reservoir. This would supply water to Fort Smith, Arkansas which is the largest city in the area. Most people are in agreement that the dam is needed. The water is badly needed. They need to gain control of Big Lee Creek because in heavy rainy seasons it rampages and gets out of control and does a lot of damage. So most people are in complete agreement that this needs to be done. The unfortunate thing is that it is going to cover many of these old historic sights including those that I just mentioned. There is also one cemetary involved that will be covered in that area but I am sure arrangements will be made to move those buried there.

My sister told me about shivaree. She said she could remember very clearly the shivaree that we gave our older sister when she got married in Oklahoma. This sister was seventeen years old, Beulah Valeria, but we called her Liddy. The closest thing that you can relate to shivaree in California is a shower, but shivarees were much more expansive and festive than showers. At showers you invite friends and relatives and it's principally just the ladies involved. A shivaree is for the whole family--men, women, youngsters and it includes friends, church friends--it's quite a happening. The one that was given for my sister Liddy was held in the barn of her husband-to-be. She was given a wide variety of presents to commemorate the occasion such as a daisy churn. A daisy churn was the most modern churn of the day. It even had a crank arrangement instead of the old push paddle type and the daisy churn was quite small in comparison to the old model. It held about a gallon of milk. My sister appreciated that very much. In addition, symbolic of a newly married couple establishing a farm they were given twelve fertilized eggs to start their chicken yard with. She was given a great many handmade and hand finished embroidered tea towels, pillowcases, doilies and so forth. All of these were made out of flour sacks. These were Depression times but the gifts were very beautifully made and much treasured. She was also given a large quantity of home canned goods--in fruit jars. She was probably given a year's supply of jams, fruits, vegetables, jellies and so on. The idea was to get the young couple established and on their feet--that's the primary purpose of a shivaree in addition to the good times. She was given homemade quilts and homemade furniture which was made out of willow branches--woven willow branches much like wicker furniture that we know today only of heavier fiber. The branches were woven together into chairs, chaise lounges and so forth.

There was dancing, refreshments, food and the beverages included home brew. Those are my sister's memories of what shivaree means. They were gay times. One of the primary intentions was to keep the young couple out as late as they could on their wedding night.

I also thought a little more about the Cherokee religion. The Cherokees did believe in seven different heavens. In the old days the Cherokees would pray a prayer much like this: "Let my soul be in the first heaven. Let my soul be in the second heaven.", and so on up to the seventh heaven. The first heaven was suppose to be as high as the tree tops. The second heaven was as high as the clouds. The seventh heaven was where the Supreme Being resided. Another old Indian prayer goes like this: "Oh Great Spirit whose voice I hear in the wind and whose breath gives life to all the world, hear me. I am small and weak. I need your strength and wisdom. Let me walk in beauty and make my eyes ever behold the red and purple sunset. Make my hands respect the things that you have made and my ears to hear your voice. Make me wise so that I may understand the things that you have taught my people. Let me

learn the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock. I seek strength, not to be greater than my brother, but to fight my greatest enemy--myself. Make me always to come to you with clean hands and straight eyes so when life fades as the fading sunset my spirit may come without shame."

I'd like to relate the Lord's Prayer as it would be interpreted in the Cherokee language. The Lord's Prayer would be titled, "Prayers He Had Taught Us." "Our Father, heaven dweller, hollowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom let it make its appearance. Here upon earth take place Thy will, the same as in heaven is done. Daily our food give to us this day. Forgive us our debts the same as we forgive our debtors. And do not temptation being lead us into. Deliver us from evil existing. For thine the kingdom is, and the power is, and the glory is, forever. Amen." I thought those were beautiful and I've always enjoyed them.

This was written by an old Cherokee Indian many years ago and it's entitled, "The Way It Was".

"An old man speaks of the changing land. We talk about how the woods used to be long ago. Acorns used to cover the ground. There were tall oak trees and acorns were thick out in the woods. People don't believe you now when you tell them, but that's the way it was. The trees were very large and the ground in wintertime was covered with acorns. There was mast in the woods many years ago. When you tell this to the white people they won't believe it. When the people wanted to fatten their hogs they just let them live in the woods and they would return home as fat as they could be. Some people look back and say that those were the good old days. I look back too. I look back to those good times. It was good times in those days. People had an easy living. The Indian were left alone in the woods where they had all these things. When the sawmills came--they done away with all that timber you see and we don't have the mast. The sawmills did that."

I have a real treasure that I would like to show you and it's something that I hope never to have to part with. It is an original copy of the Cherokee Constitution when the Cherokee Nation was forced to move from their old homelands in the east to the west which is now the state of Oklahoma. My fourth great-uncle was put in charge of the preparation of this constitution and was the original signer of this document along with other important members of the Cherokee Nation. It is very old, very fragile and it belonged to my grandfather. I have had it now for a few years. It's very fragile but very, very precious to me as a keepsake. Unfortunately, he stored some cartoons in it and they have become stuck to some of the pages but that too makes it even more valuable to me. It gives the constitution of the Cherokee Indians. It also gives all of the laws of the Cherokee Nation and many of those laws are very similar to the laws you are familiar with today. Also the constitution is very similar to the

Constitution of the United States government. It's just a precious document.

S.J.: I think last time we were just beginning to talk about the government camp in Brawley and you said that you knew some people who lived there in the camp.

Seabolt: Yes. Fortunately, my family never had to live in the government camps but we did know people who lived there. I had two very special friends who lived in this government farm labor camp that was on the northern side of Brawley in the Imperial Valley. Their names were Bill and Barbara Van Biber. They were brother and sister. When I first got acquainted with them they were probably twelve or thirteen years old. The last time I saw them they would have been in their late teens and I haven't seen or heard from them since that time.

S.J.: Do you remember visiting them in that camp?

Seabolt: I visited them at their place in the camp and visited with their parents. I became very good friends with them. We got acquainted originally through our church. They started going to our church. People who lived in farm labor camps were usually the ones that followed the crops from one area to another. It took time, considerable time, to gain acceptance from people in California. Fortunately, our family--since we worked on the same farm--lived in the same house, went to the same school, went to the same church. We had that time to make this contact to establish this relationship but unfortunately, the migratory workers were faced with the same challenges of making and establishing contact. The difference was they didn't have the time because they would come for three, four, five, or six months and then be gone. You cannot develop a relationship in that short time. I think their biggest difficulty was that they were never accepted. They were always outsiders looking in. I would have to say that the migratory workers had a much more severe life and harder life than my family had. I think the basic difference was the difference in acceptance from the people in California.

I know in the case of Bill and Barbara, they had difficulty gaining acceptance because they would come and go. Even though I knew them for a number of years they were not there lots of times in those years. They would come and go. The only reason we regained contact during those years was because when they would come back they would again start going to church. Church was a good place to establish these contacts and acceptance. It was difficult for migratory workers because I'm sure in many cases they felt reluctant to go to certain churches because their clothing was not as fine as other people in the area and it's difficult because that sets you apart. People don't like to be set apart.

S.J.: Do you remember the actual facilities of the government camp? Do you remember if it was a very clean place?

Seabolt: I've seen government farm labor camps in this area as well--out here in the Visalia, Farmersville, Tulare area. The one north of Brawley was quite good in comparison to some I've seen in this area. It was not fancy. I don't want to give you that impression at all. It was very plain. The construction was not of the type that we have in our homes but they were substantial. They were fairly good-sized and adequate. They did have indoor plumbing, restrooms facilities, bathing facilities, etc. On the other hand, the farm labor camps that I've seen in this area--in the San Joaquin Valley--were far from adequate. The conditions would be termed almost intolerable and a person would have to be almost destitute to have lived in them.

S.J.: The government labor camp that I was thinking of near Brawley is of the type where they built wooden platforms and then put tents on them. Are you thinking of the same thing?

Seabolt: The one I'm thinking of in Brawley was not a platform with tents on it. I have no personal knowledge of one with tents in Brawley. I'm not saying at one point in time there not one but I have no knowledge of it. I am quite familiar with this other one and it was wooden frame construction--not expensive construction.

S.J.: Perhaps a cabin?

Seabolt: That type of thing only it was more like multiple units. They weren't high-rise but they cut down on construction and conserved building materials. They would build four or five units in a row--like a motel wing but it would be all out of wooden lath-type construction. I don't recall seeing the canvas-topped ones that you mentioned. I'm sure those would have been very similar to the ones I was describing in this area.

S.J.: The ones that you said were not very nice in this area--could you tell me when you saw those?

Seabolt: I saw these after I came up here some twelve or thirteen years ago. I wasn't visiting anyone in particular. I am a curious person and I wanted to see them and see with my own eyes the conditions under which people must have lived.

S.J.: In your opinion these were very bad conditions?

Seabolt: In my opinion they had to be very poor living conditions.

S.J.: Were these inhabited at that time?

Seabolt: At the time, they were demolishing this particular one and building a new set of units. This was back a few years ago.

S.J.: But you still think that they were not very nice back in the thirties?

Seabolt: They had to be very bad. They had to be hot and poorly ventilated. No sanitation facilities were provided--it was close, crowded and had very limited cooking facilities. I would say it would have been substandard housing for anyone.

S.J.: How about down at Brawley in the government camp--do you remember common facilities like restrooms, places to wash clothes--that sort of thing?

Seabolt: The facility that I mentioned in Brawley had individual restrooms. I can't recall the washing facilities but since they were units--they were in individual units--I would have to suspect that there were community washing facilities. When I visited my friends I didn't notice.

S.J.: When you first mentioned these you said that your father was fortunate enough that he did not have to live in a place like this.

Seabolt: Yes.

S.J.: You say it was also adequate for people and it was clean. Was there some stigma attached to living there?

Seabolt: There was a very definite stigma attached to living in labor camps. I think perhaps we're all proud and no one likes to accept charity. I think there was a stigma that living in a farm labor camp was a form of charity because it was government sponsored. I think the local citizenry looked on that as a form of charity and looked down on people who lived in a farm labor camp. There was a stigma attached and I do feel that my family was fortunate not to have experienced that firsthand.

S.J.: Do you remember if your friends that lived there were teased or harassed about it?

Seabolt: Children can be very cruel. I haven't dwelled on that in our discussion but children can be very cruel--not just about where you live but also your speech and most of our speech did vary somewhat from that in California. We were made fun of--sometimes our clothing was more tattered, more worn. Although they didn't realize they were being cruel when they would call attention to this the person wearing tattered and worn clothing felt it very deeply. Being called "Okie" in a derogatory sense was painful. I think the people who lived in the farm labor camps were certainly subjected to this type of treatment more than my family was. I

know that when it did happen to my family--it did happen to me and my brothers and sisters and certainly I'm sure that my parents felt this very acutely--it was painful. It was treatment that we weren't used to before we came to the area. I think we tried to adopt the philosophy that we are as good as anyone else, maybe our situation is just not quite as good as somebody else's, but we're going to do the best we can and we did.

I think in farm labor camps there was a more hopeless feeling. How do I do better than I am presently doing? Is there a future or is this all we can expect? I think it would have been very dismal, frightening and disheartening experience.

S.J.: From what you could see as a small boy do you think that some of these people who were migrant workers could have helped themselves more? Some people have said that a lot of people have stable homes because they worked very hard and they found a job and they were able to stay in one place for many years. Perhaps the people who had to move around didn't plan so well or were not quite so responsible. Do you think they could have helped themselves more?

Seabolt: I'm sure that's possible. I'm not sure that in all cases that would be true because there was a limited number of jobs available in a stable location. We were fortunate--my father was fortunate--and we certainly appreciate that. If you recall there were thousands of people who migrated to California and to think that all of those thousands could have found a stable, steady job in a given area would have been over-simplification. As the years progressed, however, perhaps the question you ask is certainly relevant. Perhaps they could have bettered themselves sooner and become part of the community. Perhaps I would not be able to say that with any certainty, however.

S.J.: Do you recall seeing ditch camps? Those were the camps under a bridge or near a river where very, very destitute people lived in tents or shacks made from cardboard. Do you remember seeing any communities like that?

Seabolt: I have seen pictures of them and have driven by areas like that but I have no personal knowledge of them. I can have a lot of empathy for them.

S.J.: We talked about the government camp in Brawley. Do you remember other farm camps that individual ranchers or growers would have on their land?

Seabolt: We lived in a home provided by the ranch. Although it was not an overly nice home it was well-constructed, sound and adequate size. We were thankful to have the home that we had even though it didn't have indoor plumbing. I don't know of any camps that existed on individual farms in the Imperial Valley where we were. The dwellings that I can recall were individual houses--some of

were not very good. Many of these houses were old and run-down but were liveable. I think that you get into the very undesirable element when you have a camp full of shanties and inadequate sanitary facilities and a large group of people living close together. I don't remember seeing that outside this farm labor camp in the Imperial Valley. There they had pretty adequate sanitary facilities.

S.J.: A moment ago when we were talking about school children and how cruel they sometimes are you mentioned that they would sometimes tease kids from Oklahoma and Texas because of their accents. You don't seem to have a strong accent now. Did you and your brothers and sisters have very obvious Oklahoma accents when you first came here?

Seabolt: We definitely did. I'm pleased that you mention that I don't have a particular accent today. I do still have a rather slow speaking voice which may be a carry-over from earlier times. Having lived here as long as I have some of the accent has disappeared. I've lived here 45 years and most of my education was in California schools and my associations have been with fellow Californians.

S.J.: But you did have a rather obvious accent?

Seabolt: Very distinct.

S.J.: Did you attempt to get rid of that accent? Was that something that concerned you?

Seabolt: I think it concerned me that we were subject to teasing or ridicule because of it. I didn't make a conscious attempt to get rid of it. I'm sure I was pleased when it did go away and the teasing and ridicule stopped.

S.J.: Was this something that the kids immediately latched onto?

Seabolt: I think children can be particularly cruel without even realizing they are being so. I think it's their nature to tease and make fun and a newcomer is a ready target, particularly if the newcomer has some vulnerable spots such as substandard clothing, speech differences and other things like that. Perhaps even the fact that a child wouldn't have enough money for lunch and therefore didn't participate in luncheon activities make him a target of ridicule.

S.J.: I've spoken with several people who said they tried very hard the first year to get rid of their accent.

Seabolt: It's true. I can't say I tried to get rid of it but I was conscious of it and I was glad when it stopped.

S.J.: You mentioned that you had had health problems but that you gradually

got over them. Did your brothers and sisters ever have any serious health problems?

Seabolt: Not to that degree. I had pneumonia which was a one-time situation. I can very clearly recall another incident, however. My older brother, James, myself and my younger sister, Roberta, all had our tonsils removed at the same time. In those days you didn't necessarily go to the hospital. When something like that happened we would go to the doctor's office. Old Dr. Ben Davidson, our family doctor, took all of our tonsils out on the same day in his office. My parents then took us home where we did our recuperating. We never felt we'd suffered from that particularly because our older sisters and my mother took good care of us. Today we would have been in the hospital under a nurse's care for X number of days before we could go home but in those days with limited finances that was unheard of. Other than that my family was pretty healthy.

S.J.: Do you remember if the migrant children who moved around a lot had health problems?

Seabolt: I really can't comment on that. I guess because I was so young I wasn't sensitive enough to it. I suspect that they did, however. If your sanitary facilities are inadequate that definitely leads to health problems. Perhaps their food was substandard also which would make them more susceptible to health problems.

S.J.: The doctor you went to was a private doctor your parents would pay?

Seabolt: Yes.

S.J.: Do you remember if there was a county facility that would have been free?

Seabolt: Seems to me there was a county hospital but most people have pride. My father had a tremendous amount of pride as did my mother. At no point did we accept charity. We never went to a county facility but I think there was a county hospital available.

S.J.: If your father could swing it he'd pay a private doctor?

Seabolt: That's correct.

S.J.: We talked a little bit about your father's job. He worked twelve hours a day and he had quite a strenuous job.

Seabolt: He worked on the Timken Ranch in farming for approximately six years until the start of World War II. My father and his father and his father before him in addition to being farmers were carpenters. During World War II there was a demand for builders--for naval bases, army bases, training facilities. My father went into carpentry in 1941--an occupation he pursued for the remainder

of his life. He thoroughly enjoyed carpentry and never returned to farming after 1941.

S.J.: When he was farming in the Imperial Valley you said that his employers were good people and always treated you fairly.

Seabolt: As far as absentee landlords were concerned we never met them. This was a large company--Timken Bearing Company--so we really had no contact with them. The only contact we had was with the superintendent which was a gentleman by the name of Parker and he was a fine individual, a fine man. I never heard my father say one derogatory word about Mr. Parker. We had a great deal of respect for him and we had a great deal to be thankful for.

S.J.: Did your father feel that his pay was fair or comparable with what he could get somewhere else? Was anything like that ever discussed with the children?

Seabolt: My father's pay was very minimum even though he did work many hours and many days. It was very tedious. People at that time were working long hours and many days just to make a living wage. I'd say my father made just barely a living wage considering the size of our family. I doubt that he would have been able to do better because there were too many people and too few jobs. I think we considered ourselves fortunate to have the stable employment during those difficult years as low as the pay was.

S.J.: Do you remember your father ever mentioning the attempt to organize unions?

Seabolt: My father as a farm worker never discussed the possibility of a union. As far as his work on the Timken Ranch was concerned I don't think he felt a union was necessary or would have been beneficial. In later years, when my father was a carpenter carpentry has always been unionized--or at least for many years it has. He was a union member as a carpenter but not as a farm employee.

S.J.: Did you ever hear any talk of attempts to organize unions from other people?

Seabolt: No, not in those years. I think my father would have been opposed because my father had been a self-employed farmer. I don't think he blamed the farmers who didn't lose their farms for his losing our farm. He blamed the conditions. I think he would have been opposed to unionizing farm labor.

S.J.: How about strikes? Do you remember any strikes occurring or reading about them in the newspapers?

Seabolt: Not in the 1930s but I'm not saying they didn't exist, I just don't

know.

S.J.: How about women and children working in the fields?

Seabolt: Yes, there were women and children who worked in the fields, particularly picking peas and beans. We were fortunate that my mother and sisters didn't have to do that. My mother and sisters did work but they were able to get other forms of employment and didn't work in the fields.

S.J.: Do you remember if your father had any time off during the off season when it rained?

Seabolt: On the farm that my father worked on they had a machine shop and equipment that needed repairs so in the bad weather they worked on equipment maintaining it. I would say that my father got three days off a year.

S.J.: You worked after school. What did you do?

Seabolt: I did a variety of things. I never worked in a packing shed. I picked grapefruits and oranges on a neighboring farm, put them in a webbing bag, put price labels on the bags and then they would sell these. This particular farmer and his wife treated my brother James and me extremely well. We felt that we were compensated very fairly for our work. As we grew older, he and I went to work for O'Connell Brothers, a large farming operation in the Imperial Valley. They also had a large machine repair shop. My brother worked in the repair shop area. I worked in the cleanup area cleaning equipment. I swept the floor and washed windows. We felt that we were fairly treated and compensated for our work.

In later years I worked in Western Auto Supply as a salesperson. I assembled toys. I assembled furniture and priced and sold articles. I also worked in Kirby Shoes. I learned how to sell shoes in high school. I sold a lot of inexpenseive shoes. In my junior year in high school, I went to work for Firestone Stores in Brawley. My primary job at Firestone was installing seatcovers in cars and installing tires on cars and trucks. I worked for Firestone Stores my junior and senior years in high school. Upon completion of high school I'd saved a few dollars and set out to seek my fortune. I left home--not under unfavorable conditions--and headed up through central California. I think my first place of employment was in Fresno where I picked tomatoes. I figured out real quick that there ought to be a better way of making a living than picking tomatoes. I proceeded north to Stockton where I picked peaches for a few days. I figured out that there had to be a better way of making a living than picking peaches--pay was low and work was hard and that peach fuzz was miserable. I went over to Salinas where I did some stoop labor picking strawberries and lettuce. I also figured out that there had to be a better way of making a living than that. The pay was low, the work was hard and it was very dirty.

I went back to Stockton and worked in a rendering plant. They don't smell so good. You can smell a rendering plant for miles and you can smell a rendering plant in your sleep. You can smell it in your clothes and you can smell it on your hands even after you've thoroughly washed your clothes and bathed. The odor permeates everything. I figured there had to be a better way to make a living than working in a rendering plant. Keep in mind all this time I was eighteen years old. I returned home much wiser and a little more worldly.

I placed applications at various places in the Imperial Valley and on August 27, 1947 I went to work for the Southern California Gas Company. I went to work as a helper in what was the Street Department in those days. A helper dug ditches. He used a pick and shovel. It was good honest labor for which I was adequately compensated. I thought I had a good job and I did. I progressed through the company and became a storeroom keeper, order dispatcher and then became a dispatch office supervisor at the age of twenty. In 1952 the Korean campaign started and Uncle Sam said, "Come and give me a hand," and I went into the service for two years. I became personnel sergeant major of the Headquarters Seventh Armored Division. I was released from active duty in November 1952 and went back to work for the gas company in December 1952. I returned to my supervisory job there in El Centro. In 1955 I was given the opportunity to transfer to Los Angeles for a little better job so I went to work in the training section in Los Angeles. About twenty months later I was given the opportunity to go into the Labor Relations Department--in those days it was called Personnel. I worked in the Personnel Department on Employee Appraisals. This was a system where we evaluated the performance of all of our employees throughout the company--we had some 6,000 employees. It was my job to interview supervisors much as you are interviewing me today and discuss their employees and record the employees' performance and appraise that performance. Then, much like you, I would return to my office and instead of the conversation being recorded on tape I would dictate the interviews onto tape which would be transcribed and made a part of the employee's permanent record.

Following that assignment I went into what we called the mechanical staff of the company and there I was responsible for developing tools and equipment for use by our field forces. I worked there for about two years and then I went into what we call our operating staff--writing job procedures, job instructions and standard policies. I was there for two or three years and had the opportunity to go to the San Joaquin Valley Division in 1966 and establish a new department. I was delighted. Being a small town boy by birth--first in Oklahoma and later in Brawley, California--I was glad to get back to a rural atmosphere. I became General Services Manager of the Southern California Gas Company and have been here for fourteen years. I am very happy. I have a good life.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 2

S.J.: We spoke about the fact that your father was very proud and would not take any aid even if it was in the form of living in a government camp or going to a county hospital where services were free. Of course he didn't take any money from the government or food stamps but many people didn't have as much as you had and did take aid. Do you remember or could you guess how many people from your background took aid? Do you think it was a lot of people or just a few?

Seabolt: I really don't know. I have no way of gauging that. We didn't have the welfare programs in the 1930s that we have today. There was a stigma against welfare or aid or charity and, there was pride. I have a hunch that there were those that did not have this same degree of pride and did not view this as a stigma and took advantage of what charity and aid was available. I'm sure that was true. I just have no personal knowledge of it.

S.J.: You wouldn't know if it was a lot of people or just a few?

Seabolt: I really can't say. Whatever I said would be a distortion of the truth. It just seems to follow that there were people that took advantage of any situation.

S.J.: You don't remember hearing about neighbors that did?

Seabolt: No. I would say certainly that it was not as prevalent as it is today. I do feel there are people on welfare that should not be who look pretty healthy to me. There are jobs available.

S.J.: In general, among your family and friends, this was something that one just didn't do.

Seabolt: Not as far as we were concerned. Certainly the people we associated with were working people and they were proud of that. They may not have had anything nor have been making very much but what they got they earned. I can remember many of our friends that were in essentially the same position we were in.

S.J.: Do you remember if people still helped one another out as you described they did in Oklahoma? If a family was having a tough time do you remember if others helped them out?

Seabolt: It wasn't just people from Oklahoma who helped. There are good people everywhere. We found good people in California too. I don't want to underemphasize that. I think perhaps that has been lost in some of the written books and documents. The O'Connell Brothers that my brother and I went to work for were wealthy people but they were fine people. They had fine families. Even though

they were wealthy they didn't act as if they were better than my family. There were times when my father's construction was a little slow and they would not offer my father charity--don't misunderstand--but I know they would dream up a job on their place that needed repairs in order to give him employment. He made the repairs or did the remodeling or constructed whatever it was and they paid him for it. I'm not saying that the work didn't need to be done I'm saying that I'm sure they wouldn't have had this done if my father's work was steady.

S.J.: So you had some very good experiences?

Seabolt: That was a very pleasant experience.

S.J.: On the other hand, you described some of the problems at school. Do you remember if there was any hostility in the town?

Seabolt: I don't remember any open hostility. I have the feeling that when a car pulled up with a number of children in it whose clothes were a little tattered there were a few derogatory comments made but no open hostility. I'm sure the hostility existed. I heard the word "Okie" many, many times through the years. I haven't heard it in a derogatory sense in recent years.

S.J.: The way it is used has changed.

Seabolt: Yes, it has. Then it was a derogatory comment. It was insulting. It was meant to be derogatory and insulting. Today when it's used it's said in jest. In this area it's used as a distinction between a white person and a Portuguese person. It is primarily used by the Portuguese who were discriminated against years and years ago. They were looked upon as being less bright than the native Californians. They were somewhat shunned and held apart. They weren't less bright. They were foreign people who didn't speak English. They were industrious and saved their money and invested in land. They became educated. Many of them in this area have been able to become very successful farmers and dairymen--some are the wealthiest people in the area. So now they call all white people Okies--it's jesting and they do it good naturedly but it's to make the distinction between Portuguese and whites. To them everybody who isn't Portuguese is an Okie. It's not a derogatory term. We have some very good friends who are Portuguese. We have a Portuguese son-in-law and some grandchildren who are half Portuguese with whom we are delighted. We couldn't have been happier with our daughter's selection of a husband.

S.J.: Since you mentioned minorities, I thought I would ask you if you remember very many minority farm workers in Brawley. Do you remember very many Mexicans, blacks or any other minority working?

Seabolt: We have in the Imperial Valley a large concentration of Mexican people.

S.J.: Did you at that time?

Seabolt: Yes, a large concentration of Mexican people.

S.J.: In the late 1930s?

Seabolt: In the 1930s as well as to this day. Number one, we're close to the Mexican border and in those days they weren't illegal aliens. They were actually legal residents of the area in earlier days. There was a high percentage of farm workers, crop workers, lettuce pickers, cantaloupe pickers and this sort of thing who were Mexicans.

S.J.: Do you remember if they got along well with the native Californians who were workers and the Okies who had just come in?

Seabolt: There were racial differences between white people, the local residents as well as the immigrants that came in from out of state. There were rather frequent disturbances between the groups. Fortunately, these were not very serious in the way of physical injuries but it was not unusual for there to be fights and bloody noses and skinned places.

S.J.: Do you remember if they integrated in the fields or did a group of Mexicans work together and a group of whites work together?

Seabolt: I would say by choice they would normally stay segregated. Also, they would generally live in different areas of the communities. Mexican people tended to live in one area and others lived in another area. We also had a few black people in my home town of Brawley. They pretty much kept to themselves too. So you had four classes of people if you want to talk in terms of classes. You also had what you might term as native Californians.

S.J.: Or what they termed themselves.

Seabolt: Or what they termed themselves. No one is a native Californian because we are all immigrants from somewhere else. Thank you for that distinction. Old time would be a better term. They termed themselves old time Californians. The white immigrants were second class. Then the Mexicans and blacks were there in the small community of Brawley and there was friction between them all.

S.J.: Do you remember if the Mexicans and the blacks were paid the same as the whites were?

Seabolt: I really can't say. I know the illegal aliens were not.

S.J.: But that wasn't as much of a problem then?

Seabolt: Not in those days as it is now. We had some of it. A lot of it in some of the farm work and some in the household work. They were not paid on the same scale. As far as the American-born Mexican-Americans were concerned I can't say whether they were paid the same scale as the whites. If I had to guess I would say they were not.

S.J.: Do you remember if the growers and employers treated Mexicans and blacks about the same way that they treated the Okies? Or do you think they made distinctions and perhaps treated them differently?

Seabolt: I think discrimination has existed for hundreds of years. It still exists today. I think there is less discrimination today that there was ten years ago. Less certainly than there was twenty years ago. My feeling is that there was strong discrimination in the 1930s and earlier.

S.J.: Would you say that the blacks were treated worse than the Mexicans? When you went down the list you had the blacks last?

Seabolt: I think that was subconscious. Now that you've raised the question I would have to say that yes, perhaps they were discriminated against more than the Mexican-Americans were to be quite frank.

S.J.: Do you feel that although the Okies were discriminated against they were not discriminated against in the same way that the Mexicans and blacks were?

Seabolt: I would agree with that assessment.

S.J.: I spoke with a black woman who'd worked near Bakersfield in the 1930s and there were very, very few blacks at the time and her experience was that Okies were discriminated against more than she was.

Seabolt: That is an interesting observation. That may very well have been true in this area. I do know that in this area the immigrants were badly treated in some cases. So her assessment doesn't surprise me.

S.J.: We spoke about how long it took some of the Okies to be accepted into their communities here in California. You mentioned it really took years. Is there a particular time in your life when you were a teenager or a young adult when you felt really at home? You felt that you belonged?

Seabolt: I was seven when we arrived in Brawley and I would say that about the time I graduated from eighth grade I felt that I had finally earned the respect of my fellow students and was accepted on the same footing with everyone else in the community. I would have been about thirteen--in my early teens. It was quite a lengthy

period of time.

S.J.: Did you begin to think of yourself as a Californian then or did the idea that you were from Oklahoma still hang on?

Seabolt: I have always been very proud not only of my Cherokee heritage but the fact that I'm from Oklahoma. I think Oklahoma is a great state with a rich heritage. I think in California there is a misconception about the state of Oklahoma because they don't know the state of Oklahoma. It's a misconception based on ignorance. It is rich in heritage. I never forget that I am from Oklahoma.

I think about the time I was in the eighth grade people accepted me for what I was. I was a good student. I worked hard and excelled academically. It's hard to look down on someone that's doing better than you academically. That was the position my brothers and sisters and I were in at that time. We were doing better than most of our other classmates. I mentioned Dr. Ben Davidson. He was a fine, fine man. He had two sons, Reid and Bennie Davidson. They were good kids. Reid was in my class. We were good friends but Reid was not a particularly good student. It would have been awfully hard for Reid to have looked down on me because he knew I was getting better grades than he was. Maybe it was because I worked a little harder at it. About the time I was in the eighth grade I felt just as good as anybody else. I could hold my head up.

S.J.: That would have been about the time the war started?

Seabolt: About the time the war started.

S.J.: Perhaps people's attention was turned to something else.

Seabolt: Economic conditions were changing which improved our life styles.

S.J.: When World War II came you mentioned that your brothers were in the war but that you were too young to serve.

Seabolt: Yes. I have one brother, Henry, who went into the service--the Navy at the age of seventeen and served for 26 years. I have another brother, Alfred, who went in in 1941 and served till 1945 in the Army. My brother, James, just older than me went into the service in 1944 and was in the occupation forces. By the time he went in and got trained the war was just about over so he went to Germany in the occupation forces and was there for a couple of years. Then I was fourth son and I didn't go in until the Korean War. Our youngest brother, Abe, went in in between the Korean campaign and the Vietnam war. He was in for two years but it was during peacetime.

S.J.: You didn't lose any brothers in the war. You were very fortunate.

Seabolt: I did not lose any brothers during military conflicts. We were very

fortunate there. I have just lost one of my brothers, James, who died at the age of 32 of a heart attack--a very young man.

S.J.: Do you remember if your economic situation got much better when the war started and your father changed jobs?

Seabolt: Steadily from 1936 to 1941 our economic situation improved and had certainly improved during the war. By the end of the war or about the time I was graduating from high school in 1947 our economic condition was fairly good. Of course, our family was somewhat smaller too. The older ones had gone their various ways. Our economic condition had changed and improved.

S.J.: You told me about the different jobs you've had working for Southern California Gas. Would you tell me a little bit more about your education?

Seabolt: I have a limited education. I started school in Oklahoma in pre-primer which is called kindergarten here in California. It's essentially the first grade. I started school here in the second grade and went to the Myron D. Witter School in Brawley up to the sixth grade. By the way, that's where the wealthier people in Brawley went to school. I didn't go there because I was wealthy but because I lived on that side of town. I went to Santa Barbara Worth School for seventh and eighth grades. I graduated from eighth grade and went into high school. I went to Brawley Union High School. I graduated from Brawley Union High in June 1947. College was out of the question for economic reasons. I did have two younger sisters who were also very good students. I had fairly good employment at this time and I assisted those two sisters getting starting through college. Both of them graduated from college. One became a school teacher and the other is a very successful business person in Richmond, California. She is married to a scientist at Cal Berkeley and they have wonderful children.

S.J.: How about your children? You mentioned that you have six?

Seabolt: My wife and I have five daughters and one son. My oldest daughter, Karen, has two children. She is married to a young man by the name of Charles Oehring. He's of German decent. They live in Whittier, California. My next daughter, Kathy, had two children--Jimmie and Johnnie. Kathy and Johnnie were killed in an automobile accident in September 1979. We adopted Jimmie and are delighted to have him. He is a wonderful child and a good student. He has made my wife and me very happy and we are younger as a consequence, I'm sure. My next daughter, Karol, is married to David Junio, a fine Portuguese young man. I had an influence on his life I think. During his high school years he was a good student. When I asked him if he planned to go to college he said, "No, we have our dairy farm. I'll just work on the dairy farm." It is a big farm. I said, "Well, have you ever considered going to college?" He said,

"I'm not sure what my dad would think about it." I said, "Well, did you ever talk to your dad about it?" He said, "No." I said, "Why don't you?" He asked his dad and he was delighted and he said, "If you want to go to college I'll pay for your college education." He did go to college and graduated later with an engineering degree at the top of his class. He was employed right out of his class by Honeywell in Denver, Colorado. He's been with them ever since. My daughter now has three children--beautiful children. My next daughter, Karla, is a private secretary to the president of a real estate company in Denver, Colorado. She and her husband, Bruce Henry, have no children. My son, Reginald, lives here in Tulare. He's 25 years old and married with two children. They are fine grandchildren. He is employed by Dairyman's Corporation here in Tulare which is the largest industry in Tulare. We are extremely pleased with our son. He has not missed a single day of work in all the years he's been with Dairyman's. Our youngest daughter, Kim, is a freshman at Fresno State University and is living in an apartment near the University--this is a new experience for her and us. It's working out well. We see her often and talk to her almost daily. We are still young parents because of our twelve year old grandson, Jimmie.

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 1

Seabolt: In talking about our children, Karol, our daughter living in Colorado, is presently attending Arapahoe College. She's 28 years old and the mother of three delightful children. She's determined to get her college degree. Karla, who is the private secretary in Denver, had attended one semester of college shortly after graduating from high school but she wanted to go to work in the private sector and has progressed steadily in that field. She has taken private business courses in that field through the years and she has quite a business head on her shoulders. She's very successful and satisfied and continues to take courses at the college level in Denver but a college degree is not her goal. Our two oldest daughters were satisfied with a high school education and marriage as their chosen careers.

S.J.: It sounds like you're pretty happy with your kids.

Seabolt: Delighted.

S.J.: Even though you had some difficult experiences when you first came to California and were living in Brawley are you glad that you came to California?

Seabolt: Life has been good to me and my family. The good things that have happened to us far outweigh the bad. I like my life. There were some things that occurred early on following our move from Oklahoma to California that could have been more pleasant--easier and more desirable but on the whole that has made us stronger. I wouldn't

change a bit of it as a consequence. I hold no animosity toward anyone. I think life is too short to worry about how I was treated or being called an Okie some 40 to 45 years ago. I think you can dwell on things like that until you become morbid. I don't believe in that. Life has been good. I like it. I'm glad I'm here and I'm glad to be a Californian but I'm proud of being from Oklahoma as well.

S.J.: Do you still have some ties to Oklahoma?

Seabolt: Yes, I do. I still have some relatives in Oklahoma. My father's youngest brother, Uncle Emmet, lives in Fort Smith, Arkansas which is just across the line from my home in Oklahoma. I have been to visit him twice in the last few years. He is getting quite elderly. I love him. He's a fine gentleman. I plan to go see him again hopefully in the next couple of years because he is advancing in age. The Seabolt people arrived in that area in 1838 and 1839 via the Trail of Tears. There are still a lot of Seabolts in the Indian Territory. We had a reunion there last May in honor, principally, of Uncle Emmet, and there were some 200 Seabolts at this reunion. It was in a community building built by the Cherokee nation on old Seabolt property I might add. It was near Nicut, Oklahoma which is in the vicinity of the Big Lee Creek and the old stagecoach line. We have many relatives in that area. I took my son with me to that reunion since he'd never been to Oklahoma nor had he seen many of his relatives. I thought he would find it interesting which he did. The thing that was interesting to both of us were the differences in the complexions of relatives and the degree of Indian blood. We have relatives in Oklahoma that are very dark with a high degree of Indian blood. We have relatives who are blue-eyed, quite light and if you didn't know it you'd never think they were of Indian descent. Out of those 200 people you could see the differences and they were all Seabolts--all our relatives and we love them.

S.J.: After meeting with your relatives who stayed in Oklahoma and comparing their lives to yours and that of your brothers and sisters, do you think that you've had a better life here in California than you would have if you'd stayed in Oklahoma?

Seabolt: It's hard to generalize. That's a good question. As I mentioned, I think we've had a good life here although there have been some rough spots. They had some rough spots too. The feeling I got in discussions with my relatives was that their life is pretty good today. Some of them are pretty prosperous--pretty prosperous farmers, businessmen, workmen of one kind or another. I had the feeling that their lives were pretty good. It's hard to generalize and say, "Do I really feel I would be better off there or here?" I'm not disappointed. I wouldn't speculate which would have been best. It's sad when anyone loses something they've had for many years which is what happened to my mother and father--that's sad. We have a good life. No regrets.

END OF INTERVIEW

# ADDENDUM

[Note: The following is the text of a letter which Mr. Seabolt wrote to accompany the photographs which appear in the volume. Captions were provided by Mr. Seabolt.]

Sharon S. Goldsmith
Associate Project Director
California Odyssey Project

In making this picture selection I have attempted to depict my family heritage; to illustrate our lives both in the "Land of the Red People", Okla-homa, and in California; to show the beauty in simple things, such as, the terrain in Eastern Oklahoma, a caring and loving mother and father with a stack of loose has as the background in California; to show the fond memories of one's brothers and sisters from much earlier times; to show that happiness can be found even in difficult times and circumstances; to clearly depict advancement in technology in a relatively few years and the impact on our lives -- Model "T" Ford Auto and single bottom plow with a mule as power source to jet airplanes and ease of travel; to show understanding of the past, the present, and faith and hope for the future of our children and grandchildren.

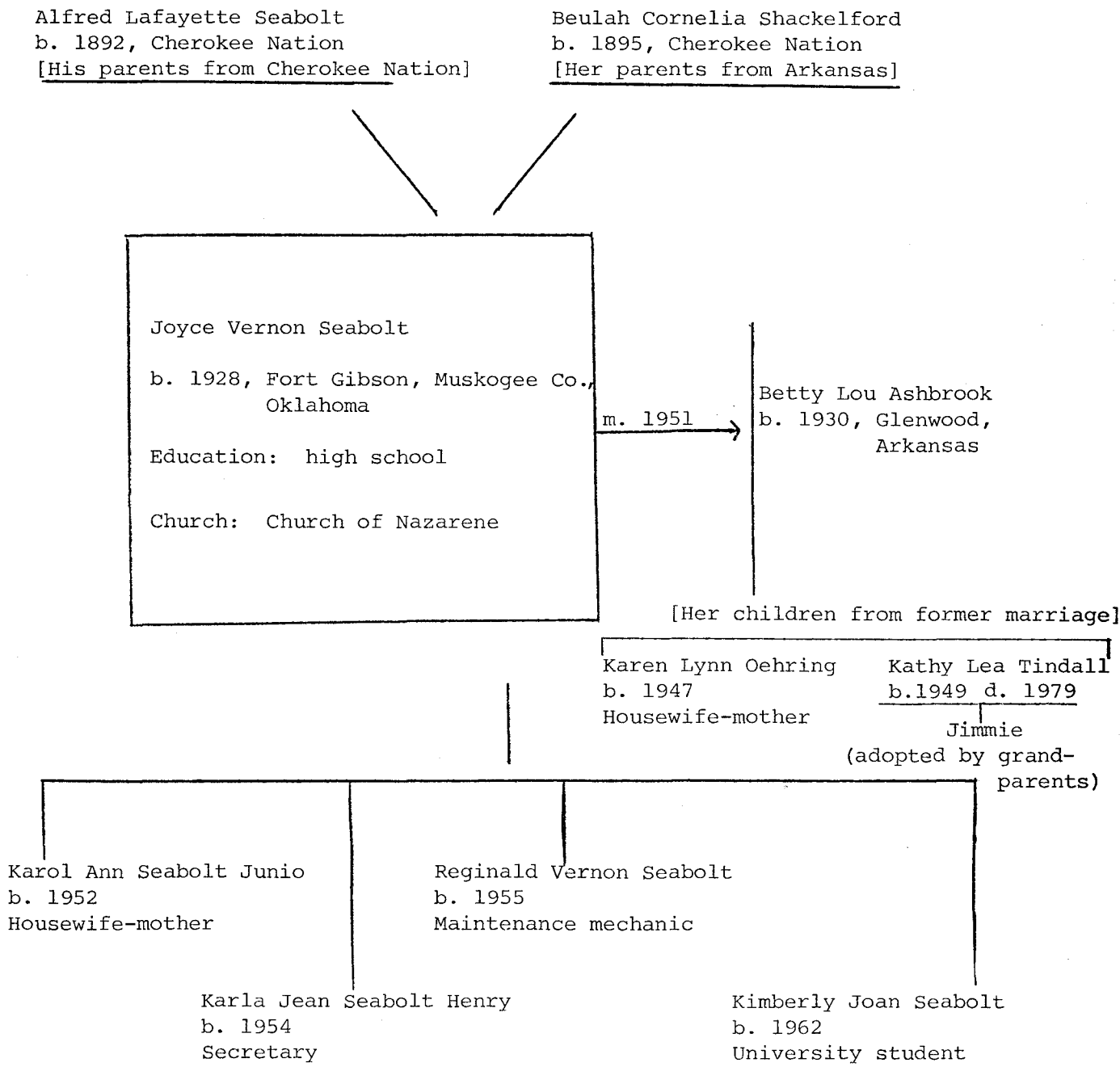
Much can be gained by an understanding of the past; but someone once wrote the following thought, "You cannot and must not live in the past but should take the best from the past and build upon that." This is an excellent thought and in each of our lives the "best" things in life far out-number the bad. The important thing is to recognize the "best" in people, conditions, and events and let them influence and shape our lives in a positive and beneficial way.

Enclosed are a number of pictures and articles. I have attached a brief description of each.

I hope they are of value to your project. Please let me know when you are finished with them and I will pick them up.

Sincerely,

J. V. Seabolt (signed)
504 No. Manor St.
Tulare, California 93274


Alfred Lafayette Seabolt
b. 1892, Cherokee Nation
[His parents from Cherokee Nation]
Beulah Cornelia Shackelford
b. 1895, Cherokee Nation
[Her parents from Arkansas]
Joyce Vernon Seabolt
b. 1928, Fort Gibson, Muskogee Co., Oklahoma
Education: high school
Church: Church of Nazarene
m. 1951
Betty Lou Ashbrook
b. 1930, Glenwood, Arkansas
[Her children from former marriage]
Karen Lynn Oehring
b. 1947
Housewife-mother
Kathy Lea Tindall
b.1949 d. 1979
Jimmie
(adopted by grand-parents)
Karol Ann Seabolt Junio
b. 1952
Housewife-mother
Karla Jean Seabolt Henry
b. 1954
Secretary
Reginald Vernon Seabolt
b. 1955
Maintenance mechanic
Kimberly Joan Seabolt
b. 1962
University student

# INDEX

INDEX (continued)