

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY

The 1930s Migration to the Southern San Joaquin Valley

Oral History Program

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: Loya Lucille Martin Holmes

PLACE OF BIRTH: Wayside, Oklahoma

INTERVIEWER: Judith Gannon

DATES OF INTERVIEWS: February 23 and 24, 1981

PLACE OF INTERVIEWS: Bakersfield, Kern County

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PREFACE

This interview contains a good statement of the marital problems which appear to be the result of the exceptional stress experienced during the relocation in California. Mrs. Holmes and her husband divorced and she was left alone to raise and support her children. A large task for a woman who felt she had no marketable skill. Mrs. Holmes states during the interview she feels that many friends and neighbors who came to California during this period were faced with the very same difficult marital problems.

Judith Gannon
Interviewer

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INTERVIEWEE: Loya Lucille Martin Holmes (Age: 64)

INTERVIEWER: Judith Gannon

DATED: February 23, 1981

J.G.: This is an interview with Loya Holmes for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Judith Gannon at 1109 Valencia Drive, Bakersfield, California on February 23, 1981.

J.G.: Okay, Mrs. Holmes, why don't we start out by your telling me a little about your childhood in Oklahoma.

Holmes: Well, the first thing that I can remember is that we lived in Checotah when I was between five and six. My father had a shoe shop there where he made and repaired shoes and also ran a second hand store. We also handled new stuff. My father decided that he wasn't making enough money so he went into farming but found out later that he was doing very well in the shoe shop. We started farming and raised cotton, corn, milo, maize, sugar cane and, of course, a garden on the side. I can remember working in the field with my father. I started picking cotton in a little salt sack. I went from that to a potato sack which they call gunnysacks here. They were tow sacks in Oklahoma. Finally, as we grew, we picked cotton in a cotton sack.

There were seven of us children and we all had to work hard to help support the family. My mother was ill with cancer from the time I could remember. I can't remember when she got it. She didn't die until 1945. Anyhow, we worked in Oklahoma till I grew up and then I got married at the age of sixteen. I didn't finish school because we had to work when there was work to be done. The only time we could go to school was when there wasn't anything to do on the farm. It wasn't that my father didn't want us to have an education, it was because he'd just taken us out to do the work. We farmed between 100 to 150 acres and there's no way one man could do that. We worked with horses. My sister and I would plow with my daddy because the boys left home after they got bigger and went other places to find work--that left me and my older sister to

help with the plowing. We plowed the crops and laid them by. Laid by means the last time crops get plowed before harvest time. We worked very hard as I was growing up. I got married at sixteen and began to have children.

J.G.: Before we go on to your married life tell me a little bit about your life on the farm. Did you have a social life? What was that like?

Holmes: Yes, we had a social life. My folks were very religious and we attended church a lot. We went to all kinds of functions along that line. We weren't allowed to go anywhere else. I think that's why my brothers left home. I felt like it at times but I didn't. We were a happy family.

Did you want me to tell what we did on the farm? Okay. We picked our cotton, we gathered our corn, we cut our cane, we made our sorghum molasses and we milked the cows. I have milked from four to five cows in the morning and at night. We always had milk and butter. There was one time we didn't--the year my father left the shoe shop and went to farming. We like to starve to death. My uncle gave us corn to grind for meal and another woman gave us the whey off of her milk. That's all we had for two to three weeks. We all got real thin. I can remember when we would have something to eat like corn bread and somebody else would give us sorghum molasses. My mother would say, "Take a little bite of the syrup and a big bite of the corn bread and you'll get full quicker."

We had hard times and suffered that year but that's the only year that I can really remember going hungry. Now there were times when we never had very much but we had plenty of what we did have which was mostly milk and bread. Lots of times we ate corn bread for breakfast and biscuits. My mother made homemade biscuits and we ate them with butter and syrup. We took our eggs to town. We would pack our eggs in a tub in cotton seed to keep them from breaking because we went to town in wagons. We also took our cream to town. We had separators which separated the cream from the milk. We took a big cream can full of cream to town on Saturday which was our big day. We used the money from the cream and eggs to buy staples. The main things we bought were salt, sugar, baking powder and coffee. My mother made sure she had her coffee--Peaberry brand. You couldn't fool her. You could try every way to give her some other coffee but she always knew if it was Peaberry or not. We raised everything else.

If we were able to get a load of light bread that was like dessert to us. My mother did have a friend that she'd got acquainted with when we had our shoe shop. They had a grocery store and restaurant. She would sometimes save the bread heels for my mother in a flour sack. My mother would bring them home on Saturday night as a treat for us kids. She'd say, "Let's let them last two or three days. Don't eat too many of them." She'd make bread puddings and we

thought we were in hog heaven.

J.G.: Let's go back. You had just mentioned that you married at sixteen. Tell me how you met your husband.

Holmes: I met him the first year I started school. I was six and was going to a school called Whodathoughtit in Whodathoughtit, Oklahoma. I'll tell you how it got its name. Years before I started school it was pretty rough. There were a lot of big old rough boys who'd whip every school teacher that would come there. Finally, there was a little woman about five feet two inches and she weighed 95 pounds and she put in for the job teaching at the school there. All the officials told her that there wasn't any way she could teach because they whip and run off every teacher. She says, "I'll take the job if you'll give it to me. I'll chance it." They couldn't get another man so they gave her the job. She rode a horse to school and she had a whip. The first day she was at school she took this whip and wrapped it around her hand. This was the story my brothers told me because they were larger than I was and may have been some of those who ran off the other teachers. I don't know because they were rough characters too. They said she stood up and said, "You will have respect for me, you will respect this school and you will respect the students who come here." There will not be this and there will not be that and you'll do this and you'll do that. One of the boys stood up and said, "What makes you think that you can keep order here? We've whipped and run off every school teacher that's been here for the last five years." She says, "I will be here when you're all gone." They began to make a fuss and started some trouble. She just unwrapped this whip from her hand and reached plumb across the room and gave him a whip that took a hunk out of one of these boys. She taught them respect and they learned to love her. That's how it got its name, Whodathoughtit.

I started going there and my husband was four years older than me. I kind of got a crush on him and he got one on me the first year I went to school. So our little love affair started then. For the boys the main thing then was shooting marbles. He would play marbles and if he won a real pretty marble he would hunt me up and give it to me. Then the girls didn't wear britches--slacks--to school. They wore dresses and long stockings. All the little dresses had pockets. I would put the marbles in my pocket and by evening my dress would just be hanging down because I'd have quite a few pretty marbles in the pockets. That went on the whole year. We were getting pretty close. Nothing serious, we liked each other real well. I remember one time he caught me out behind the stump and said, "Loye, I like you." I said, "I like you too." So that's how our little love affair started. I went to school that year and the next year it was the same. We left and went to Kansas the next year and harvested wheat. I remember scribbling him a little note. My sister liked his older brother. My sister two years older than me liked his brother who was two years older than him. We wound up marrying those boys.

My sister said, "I'm going to write Monroe a letter." I said, "I'm going to write Russell one too." Well, I couldn't say anything except, "I miss you and I like you." We sent the letters and they got them. We were gone all summer but when we came home and started school in the fall there he was--all smiles. We started the same old thing all over again--him playing marbles and me taking them. I remember one day some boy had pulled my hair. I had long black hair in two little pigtails on each side with ribbons on each one. He was kind of a bully and he jumped up on this stump and crowed like a rooster. He said, "Anybody that hurts my sweetheart is going to get hurt." He jumped off of this stump and onto this boy and beat the tar out of him.

We kept moving. People in Oklahoma would rent farms and would move around. We got separated for several years but when I was fourteen they moved over close to us. He said that he always kept tabs on where I was so when he looked me up we started the same old thing over again. We went to going together at fourteen and at sixteen we were married in 1933. By the time I was eighteen I had two children. I had my first daughter on February 7, 1934. I had another little daughter born on November 25, 1935--her father's birthday. The year my husband and I got married he made a sharecrop. In fact, he'd started making a sharecrop with my father. We liked each other so well we thought it was just as well to go ahead and get married so we did. We finished the sharecrop with my father and made a little but not much because things really began to get bad. The drought was on and times were hard. In 1934 we moved out by ourselves and farmed but our crop burned up. Our corn got two feet high and burned to pieces in the field. He cut the corn and brought it in to feed the stock. We had two horses, a cow, three hogs. He killed the three hogs but due to a change to warmer weather it didn't cure right so we lost those three hogs. They spoiled. We moved back in with my daddy, and my husband went hunting for work. We moved north to Checotah and he left me there with the one baby while he went to Casa Grande, Arizona to find work. He found work and sent for me. I rode out with his boss. He came out to visit and I went back with him to Arizona. We were there several months and I became pregnant with my second child. I was awfully ill. The cotton was picked and he was picking bolls and I wanted to go home. I was homesick. It was the first time I'd been away from my parents. I hadn't seen them in about three or four months and I like to die. It seemed like I'd been away three or four years. He sent me home and he remained in Casa Grande finding whatever work he could. My baby was born on November 25.

We left Oklahoma when she was three weeks old to go to Texas to my mother's sister's place for Christmas. We arrived two or three days before Christmas and stayed through Christmas and then we came through Casa Grande to pick up my husband. We made our trip on to the Imperial Valley where we got jobs picking peas.

J.G.: Before we get into what happened in the Imperial Valley I'm wondering about a couple of things. One is did you have a midwife deliver your two daughters?

Holmes: I had a doctor for both my babies. I had a doctor and a nurse with the last one and just a doctor with my first one. I was in labor with my first baby about thirteen hours. She weighed ten pounds. I like to die. The doctor didn't know much more than I did. It was a bad time. I think it cost me \$13. The doctor worked that long for that much money. I had a chiropractic doctor with my second baby. I went to him during the time I was carrying her. He would give me treatments that kept my bones all limbered up and gave me exercises to do every day. I told him what a hard time I had with my first one and he said, "You'll never have that with this baby. There isn't any use of any doctor being at a woman's house any longer than five hours. I'll never be there any longer than five hours." He was there only four hours. He worked with me in a way that I've never heard of any doctor working with a woman. He delivered that baby. He had a way of making you have your pain and when he felt that you had worn yourself out he could stop the pain. He really did this. I've often thought about this and I don't know why I didn't look up a doctor when I was going to have my last child. Of course, we just got out here and we were so poor at the time I wouldn't have had the money. Anyway, the whole thing only cost me \$15. That was for the year's treatment and everything.

J.G.: The other question I had was why did your husband choose Casa Grande, Arizona? How did he come to pick that place?

Holmes: My daddy told him that we had friends there whom my daddy and mother had known for years. They were there and they wrote letters back and forth all the time. They told him what good cotton they had there. There really wasn't much of a difference there with the Depression and everything. It was hard times everywhere even in California. He chose Arizona because he heard there was a lot of good cotton there and he was a good cotton picker. He was willing to do anything to make a living to support his family.

J.G.: What prompted him to leave Casa Grande to go to the Imperial Valley?

Holmes: We came through and he wanted to be with his family--me and his two children. We went there and he joined up with us.

J.G.: Let me interrupt you just a second so I can understand. You went to the Imperial Valley with your mom and dad?

Holmes: Yes.

J.G.: I see. What made them choose the Imperial Valley?

Holmes: I don't really know. I think we came that way on account of the

weather. It was in the winter and, of course, you get stories back and forth that say it's warm there and you won't freeze to death. We had nowhere to live so we thought we would come through there and if necessary just live in a tent or something which we did when we got there.

J.G.: Your family decided to move to California because the crops were so bad.

Holmes: It was bad yes. It really hit us in Oklahoma. The ponds were dry. We hauled water in barrels from the ponds and creeks but the creeks and ponds dried up. We'd take the water to our stock in barrels. We would just give them a little because the water was so unplentiful. We drew water out of the wells till the wells got so low you couldn't draw water anymore. It was quickly diminishing everything. We were poor but not as poor as a lot of people. My daddy was a good manager and a hard worker. He always had lots of cows, lots of stock, lots of horses, lots of hogs and lots of farming equipment. He talked it over with my mother and she said, "I'm willing." She never did want to leave Oklahoma but she said, "I'm willing. We've got to do something." They advertised a sale and got an auctioneer. We had a sale and sold out everything--everything they worked for all their lives. I think they had \$1400 which was a lot of money in those days. My daddy always had a truck of some kind but he traded that truck in on another one. It was a 1932 Chevy two-ton truck. My daddy was quite a mechanic so he made sure that everything was up to par before we started. We also heard from my sister about her trip to California. They had gone ahead two or three months earlier in a touring car. It was a one seater car with a rumble seat. In the car was my sister and her husband and her little girl and my brother and another woman and her girl who all went to California.

This woman and her daughter rode in this rumble seat all the way to California. She was quite an old woman then. They hit rain so they put tarp up over them and hunkered down. My family got all the details because my sister didn't try to take any bedding through or anything. They would write back and tell us what was coming and what we had to do. My mother and daddy had both been very cautious and got the car all fixed up. They told us they were checking for boll weevils, bed bugs and all this stuff which were plentiful in Oklahoma. Almost everybody had bed bugs and boll weevils. So they picked cotton and took it to a mattress factory and had three brand new mattresses made and tagged that they were sterilized. My mother set them aside and we wouldn't even sleep on them afraid that they'd know that they'd been slept on. We wanted to take our bedding through so my mother and I worked all summer and up into the winter making new quilts. We never had any bed bugs. That was one thing she wouldn't have. She would work day and night if any showed up. Sometimes they would and you wouldn't even know where

they came from. People would come and visit and stay all night and they'd bring them in their clothes. We made new covers and she'd taken them to this place and had them sterilized and put in bags. We just slept under our old stuff.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

Holmes: We made our new quilts and packed them and mother bought new pillow ticking and covered our pillows so everything that we left with was new. We'd also heard how they would check the trucks and things for boll weevils. So my mother had the boys take an old iron pot that we boiled our clothes in--that's the way we washed back then. We washed on a rub board. Our well water was hard so we carried buckets of water from the pond. We had lots of heavy clothes. We made our lye soap and boiled our clothes. Everything was real pretty and white because we just boiled everything. Anyway, my mother had the boys fill that pot up and she poured a whole can of lye in it and told my father, "I'm going to clean that truck bed so there'll be nothing they make us unload when they see how clean it is. She got up in there and put this boiling scalding hot lye water in this truck bed and she washed every little crack and corner of that till it was bleached as white as a sheet. She wouldn't let nobody in there till we put our things in. It was wintertime so it took a couple days to dry but it finally dried. When we left there we loaded up everything in one truck. We did bring a lot of stuff. I don't know how we got that much stuff in there but we did. Let's see there was my father, mother, two brothers, my sister, myself and my two children and my nephew--nine of us in that truck.

The two boys usually rode in the cab with my father and when we'd come to hills my brothers would sit on the fenders with a big rock. Sometimes that old truck would just chug, chug, chug till it would get hot and stop. The brakes weren't too good I don't think because the boys would jump off the fenders and throw these big rocks under the wheels. We called it scotching the wheels and that's how we got up and down those big hills. It was so scary. One time we hit high winds. My daddy had built up the sides of the truck quite high--about four or five feet--then he'd put tarpaulin over the racks. We had the beds fixed so the rest of us could stay in the back where the beds were. When we would hit these high winds it would almost blow the tarpaulin off. It would pop against those bows. My father put bows up like they used to on wagons and he put an old wagon sheet across the top. We used them back in Oklahoma when we'd go to church or picnics to keep from burning up. The wind would pop the wagon sheet against those bows until it would just drive you crazy all the way from Oklahoma to California. One time when we were coming through Arizona the wind caught the top and blew it off along with some of our things. I guess my daddy couldn't hear anything from the front. I remember one time Mother was trying to get him to stop and he couldn't hear so she turned her heels

--she wore high heels--at the glass at the back of the car and just kicked it out. He said to one of the boys, "What she wanting?" They said, "She wants you to stop." The boys had to jump out and go I don't know how far back and pick up several pieces of our clothing.

My baby was quite little and she got sick on the way. I wasn't well when we left. I got very sick and my baby got sick too and we like to lost her.

J.G.: On your trip you were living in the back of the truck with tarpaulin over it?

Holmes: Yes. We would camp at night and build little fires and do our cooking. We had a new wagon sheet that my daddy bought. Before we got to the state line he made sure that nothing was happening to those mattresses. They would take this mattress out very carefully and put it on the white wagon sheet. Then my mother would have him put the rest of the wagon sheet over it and they'd put the bedding on it. My daddy and the two boys slept on that and my mother and sister and the three kids all slept in the other bed. We all just piled up together and made it. It was cold but we didn't mind.

We traveled alone. We came to one place called the Top of the World. It was in Arizona and it was on Globe Mountain but at that time they called it the Top of the World. My sister and them wrote back and told us about this awful, awful mountain. While we were going up this mountain my mother made my daddy stop. She said, "I'm not going to ride in this truck up that mountain." Although the road was narrow and my daddy's truck was on the road the truck bed hung out over the canyons and it looked like he was running off the road. All we could do was look outside that bed and look down into the canyon. My mother was screaming and hollering all the time, "Tell Daddy to get over!" There were places on the road where you had to stop and back up to let people get by because it was just a two lane road. I remember she made him stop and she said, "Come on, Loyer." We left the kids in the car. My mother said, "We can't drag those kids up this mountain and they'll never know it if they go off." We started up the mountain but we didn't know what walking up a mountain was like. Daddy went on chugging along. Our legs got so tired that we couldn't walk. Mother was wearing a big hat. She always wore hats. She took off her hat and was waving and waving it to get my daddy to stop. One of the boys said, "Dad, I think Mama's wanting you to stop." We crawled up to the car and she said, "If we go off, we go off and that's all there is to it." When she saw that he was on the road and that the truck bed was hanging out over the road we felt a little better.

Another time she got so scared that she literally twisted off the corner of one of her new quilts. She was sick. She had cancer

in her eye and at that time was a nervous wreck. I remember her saying, "If I ever get to California I'll die there. I'll never leave." She did. We got there and she never did want to leave.

J.G.: She didn't want to go through that again.

Holmes: When we got to the top of that mountain we camped out and stayed all night. We had these little can cutters. You'd stick in there and work them up and down. Then you raise the four prongs of the can up and pour stuff out. I had never seen a can cutter. When I went to take some of our cans out to the trash I saw these smooth cans. I came wagging back I don't know how many of these cans and told my mother, "Look here. Somebody throwed away these cups." I'd never seen such a smoothly cut can before in my life. We made two or three trips to the trash can and I kept seeing these people throw away these cans. I told my mother, "Well, them are cans. They got something that's cuttin them smooth that way." So I went in this store to ask if they had can cutters. She said that they'd just come out and she showed me one.

I had my little baby with me. The couple that owned this store said that they'd never been able to have children. They were in the thirties and I guess I was eighteen at the time. She began to beg me for my baby and wanted me to let her adopt the baby. She said, "We'll set you folks up well." She told me what they'd do for us and that they would give us money if I would let them adopt my baby. I did have a real pretty baby. She said, "Honey, you're so young and you're on your way to California and you don't know what you're going to run into there. We're settled and established and though we're not wealthy we're well-heeled." She said that she could give my baby a good life and that she'd have anything she wanted. She would inherit everything that they had. I said, "I wouldn't give my baby up for anything. I may not have much and I may never have anything but nobody will ever get my baby. Don't you realize that I love my baby?" She said, "Well, we would love it too." She really put up a hard luck story but there was never even a thought in my mind that I would let that baby go. I went back to our camp and told my mother. I'll never forget it. She just got up and walked up to that store. My mother was half Cherokee Indian. She had long black hair and green eyes and her eyes literally snapped when she got mad. Even though she was very religious she was capable of getting mad. She went into that store and said, "My daughter told me that you wanted to adopt her baby." She said, "Yes, I'd like very much to." Mother said, "I'd like to tell you something. We're not rich people but we lived pretty good in Oklahoma until this drought hit. We're on our way to California to do better. I want you to know that we're not the kind of people that give away our children. I've had seven of my own. I've seen harder times than this when I lived in Arkansas and I never at any time thought about giving away one of my children. We may not have much to eat or much to drink but as long as there's

a breath in my body there isn't one of my children or grandchildren who'd ever be adopted. I'd take them first." That's the kind of family we had. We were close knit. If one was in need and the other one had we'd all share. It was always that way even when we came to California.

We got to the state line which we dreaded. However, we were in better shape than others. Before I get to this I want to tell a few other experiences.

I remember there was a car of people who'd traveled with from Checotah. We all camped in the same camp ground and we'd visit at night over the campfire. It was fun. I was always adventurous. They call me the gypsy of the Martin family. When we camped at Casa Grande, Arizona we saw other people camping there. We had plenty to eat. My mother was a manager and brought canned stuff with us that we had canned all summer. We bought loaves of light bread which I loved. We'd get them for about five cents a loaf. We went to a bakery in Casa Grande and bought day old stuff. I noticed these people making coffee. The mother and father drank the coffee and then rinsed the coffee grounds to cool them off and their three kids all had spoons and they fought over these coffee grounds. They ate every coffee ground in that pot and cried for more.

J.G.: Was that the only thing they had to eat?

Holmes: That was the only thing they had to eat. I remember us sitting there with our stomachs full and Mother said, "I can't stand this any longer." She gathered up a bunch of stuff from the day old bakery like rolls, cinnamon rolls and bread and lunch meat. She said, "Here, I think that you might like this." I remember those kids snatching so fast and cramming that bread in their mouths. They looked like squirrels and they almost choked. The next day my mother asked them not to leave until later and she went to the day old bakery and bought a whole big bag of stuff and gave it to them. We did that off and on on the way to California.

We had a saying in those days. Not everyone had trucks to travel in. They just usually had two seater cars and sometimes only one seat. If they had one mattress on the car they were called a poor Okie. If they had two mattresses tied on the car they were called normal. If there were three mattresses they were rich Okies. We'd say, "Well, there goes a poor Okie or there goes just a common Okie or a rich Okie." I guess we were rich Okies because we had three brand new mattresses.

There were people traveling from Oklahoma, Missouri and Arkansas. There were many who never had as much as a spare tire. Many, many times we stopped and my daddy would help fix a tire. At that time you patched them. We didn't have anything like these tubeless tires nowadays. My daddy was kind and he was good and he never passed

a car that was stopped. Some were hot and smoking and some were broken down. I've seen him work all day and all night on cars helping other people. We were all in this together.

We finally got to the line. I can't remember just where it was but we came through the Imperial Valley.

When we got to the checking station they said, "You'll have to unload your truck." My mother stuck her head out the window and said, "We're not unloading all of this car. When you check it you'll find out why we're not." She went through all of the other rigamarole telling them what she'd done to the truck. She said, "We've got new mattresses and everything in here is new except our dishes." We had to take the sewing machine out. She had an old Singer sewing machine that she wouldn't part with. She'd made us kids clothes ever since we were born. They had to set that out so they could see in the crack of this truck. This man took a little broom and a dust pan and he swept out a crack or two and never got anything because my mother had an old blanket laid down over the bed of the truck. He looked at the mattresses and he got up in the truck and he went all over everything and took these mattresses up and looked for bed bugs. He never found a single bed bug. He looked in our pillow slips and saw that it was all new ticking and that everything was new. He crawled down out of the truck and said, "Well, I want to congratulate you people. You're the cleanest Okies that's crossed this line." There were people all along the side of the road who were burning mattresses which was sad. If your mattress had bed bugs in it they burned your mattress. People would be sitting out there and they'd be crying and the children would be crying and there'd be two or three mattresses on fire. If you had dried stuff they'd check that too for weevils. If it had anything in it they would take that away from you. Some people were carrying all they had and they would just dump it in these big cans. If they found bed bugs on your clothes they'd go through your clothing and check for lice. There were a lot of people with lice that left Oklahoma. They'd check your head and everything.

J.G.: Did they check your head?

Holmes: They checked our head. Our heads were as clean as a pin. We got lice a time or two during our life but it was only when somebody would come and stay all night with us. The children would have them and my mother would check the kids' heads that would stay all night with us. I remember she would soak their head in lye soap and leave the lye soap lather on their head and tie it up and do ours the same way. We usually never got lice but that would burn.

J.G.: Lucky you had a scalp left.

Holmes: We had good and pretty hair. We never had anything more than a day or two. She'd see to it.

J.G.: That must have been kind of an insulting experience for you because you were so careful about those things.

Holmes: It was. It really was. My mother told them that we weren't like the rest of the Okies that came out here. They'd say, "Yes, we know, we know but we usually find something." They went through what we had and looked at our heads. The day before we left my mother had us wash our hair with lye soap and it just shined, just shined. When he looked at our heads and hair he said, "You're undoubtedly the cleanest people I've ever seen." I thought that was good coming from Oklahoma. We weren't held up there longer than an hour.

J.G.: You mentioned earlier that your baby got sick during the trip. What seemed to be the problem?

Holmes: My milk wasn't any good. I had an infection in my ovaries and I wasn't well because I hadn't recuperated before we started on our trip. I was sick and she was nursing. My other baby was so healthy and I had milk for two or three children. In fact, I nursed another baby for a mother who didn't have milk. I nursed two babies for I don't know how long and I had more than enough for those two. I never once dreamed that my milk wouldn't be any good. I didn't know anything about what an infection would do. She cried day and night. You couldn't get any rest. When we got to the Imperial Valley she cried so much and I was trying to pick peas and I wasn't well enough to pick peas but I wanted to help support the family. Everybody else could sleep but me. I thought about committing suicide. That's the only time in my life the thought has ever crossed my mind. There was this huge, huge canal that ran down through the Imperial Valley that irrigated the whole country. One night I got up and couldn't get any sleep. The other daughter slept well but I didn't want to leave one of my children. I got up and tucked the baby under one arm and the other under the other arm. There was this big walk that went across the canal. It was like a river. I thought I'll go out there and get in the middle and jump right off into it. I couldn't see no other way out. I was sleeping out by myself so the rest could sleep. I thought, well, I'll just get rid of it all but when I got her under my arm it was like a voice spoke to me that said, "Don't do it." I stood there for a moment and that baby quit crying and I can't hardly keep from crying while I tell this. She quit crying and I went back and laid her down and laid the other one down and she never cried again until we got to my sister's house [the sister lived in Lake Bottom on Kern Lake] then she went to crying again. She was so thin and I was so worn out from being sick. My sister was settled and had a little cabin. She took the baby and because there were some flies she took

a diaper and was waving over the baby's face. When she touched the baby's face with the diaper the baby grabbed it and began to stick it in her mouth. My sister looked at her and said, "This baby's starving." I said, "She couldn't be. I've got milk." My sister said, "Loye that don't always make the difference." She asked a fellow who was going into town to bring back a bottle and a nipple. She had milk. When he got back she filled the bottle half full with milk and put some Karo syrup in it and fed the baby. She went to sleep and slept two days and nights. She fed her during this time--just stuck the bottle in her mouth and I just dried up. There was nothing to it. I never had no problem like some women had if your milk was good because I was ill.

She kept the baby out there and let me recuperate a few days and the baby began to put on weight and in a week you wouldn't know her. I went to work then helping them pick cotton but I was too weak to carry my sack. My husband and Daddy would carry my sack for me. When we picked cotton here in California it was fifty cents per hundred. If you were a good cotton picker you could make \$1.50 a day. My daddy could pick 300 pounds easily. He had no thumb on one hand but he was a good cotton picker. Boy, in those days you could take \$1.50 and buy a big bill of groceries almost as much as you can carry so we were having quite a bit to eat. We thought we were doing all right.

I had heard of a job in Bakersfield--this woman wanting somebody to work for her. She had a young baby, an only child, and she was 40 years old. She didn't want to do the work or something so she was advertising for somebody to come and work for her. I got a hold of her and she found out that I had two children and she thought that that would be the right thing. So I worked for \$2 a week and was there day and night. I worked three weeks and to me that was a pretty good job. It was better than picking cotton but I had to come home because my mother got sick. She was ill all the time but she got worse and couldn't take care of the baby. My sister was having to help her husband and she couldn't take care of it so I came back. Right after that we moved to Arvin.

J.G.: You were in the Imperial Valley?

Holmes: Yes. We came to the Lake Bottom--Kern Lake which was called the Lake Bottom. There were lots of farmers there and they had lots of cabins. Each farmer would have his own cabin. We worked for Banducci and there were other farmers. I can't remember their names right now.

J.G.: How long did you stay in the Imperial Valley picking peas?

Holmes: I can't recall but I'm glad you brought my attention to that because there are some things I want to tell about what happened there. I don't know whether we were there three weeks or a month.

J.G.: Would that have been 1936?

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

Holmes: Yes, 1936. We camped there and people were making grass houses. I don't know if anybody ever saw these or not but as usual we made the best grass house. We had this huge tarpaulin that we put over our truck. They put poles in the ground and then poles across. There was a certain kind of weed that grew about four feet high which they cut down and put in bundles and weaved through the poles. Some people put grass over the top but we put our tarpaulin over the top and made a big one--bigger and better than anyone else's. Some people didn't even have a weed house. The men who were alone would dig into the sandy banks and pad the hole with a quilt or blanket and they'd sleep there at night. Some of them would have an extra shirt and they'd take sticks and jab that over the top of where they'd dug in. They'd put each sleeve in a stick and make a slight covering for themselves because it would dew at night. You'd see little fires all along the canal bank in the morning where people would be fixing their coffee and something to eat. There were lots of single men at this time. There were men and women who had one or two children and they wouldn't even have a car or anything to live in. There was one woman who had built a small thing. It was about four feet wide and eight feet long and it had a trough in it. I compared it to our feeding trough at home. They just had some sticks in the ground and some boards over the bottom. It had one solid side and some straw or weeds in it with an old blanket over it. I'd seen this woman who was big and pregnant and I'd talked to her a few times. She'd come over to see my baby. One day I'd come home for lunch and didn't go back to the fields that day. I heard some screams. They didn't live very far from us--just 100 yards. I heard these screams and I told my mother that I had to run over and see what's happening. Her husband at this time had left her--just walked off and left her. She was alone and trying to have her baby. I didn't know what to do. I said, "I'll go get somebody." She said, "Please don't leave me, the baby's coming." So I grabbed a hold of her hand and looked and sure enough the baby's head was coming. I grabbed her hand and she pulled on me and that baby was born right there in that trough. We cut it's navel cord. I ran down to the creek and got ice cold water to wash the baby. I made sure it was crying. I spanked it a time or two and having had two babies of my own I knew what they done.

I went down to the canal and brought back a bucket of cold water and cleaned the baby up. I said, "Where's the clothes?" She said, "I don't have one piece of clothing for this baby." I said, "Nothing?" She said, "Nothing." I said that I would run down to my place and find something for the baby. I hardly had anything either. I got the baby a little shirt and gown and two diapers and some pins. We left about two days after that and that woman was still there

in that thing. I don't know whatever happened to her. I've often wondered. I've often wondered if that little baby survived. Who took care of her at that time? They didn't have welfare like they've got now. They never had people to go see about them.

J.G.: Let me ask you one question about pea picking in the Imperial Valley. How did the growers treat the pea pickers? Did you think they were fair? There's been talk that some of the growers took advantage of people and others have said they were treated fairly.

Holmes: We were treated fairly. In fact, we never did have nobody looking down our neck. We were used to hard work; we believed in hard work. We didn't shirk our job; we didn't try to get something for nothing. You didn't picking peas or cotton. You either had it or you didn't. You got paid for what you picked. My daddy was a firm believer in his children working and I appreciate that. He raised a bunch of children that wasn't lazy. We never expected people to give us anything. Our boss was real good. He would tell all of his hands, "Pick as many of these peas you want and take them home and cook them." Needless to say, we took home plenty of peas and shelled and cooked them. We ate a lot raw. I often said I ate about as many raw as I picked to begin with. We always had green peas while we were there. We only picked for one man. Some bosses wouldn't let the pickers take any home to eat. They would sneak them in their clothes and take them home. I think that's being very rude.

I can't remember what we got paid for picking peas. It wasn't much but it was enough. It was enough to eat. I remember we would walk across this little bridge over to this store and everybody met over there in the evening. We bought sardines which we never had and we bought cans of salmon. We'd make salmon patties. We bought light bread and crackers and I thought we were living high on the hog myself. We loved it and we wasn't doing without. It was good for us and we saved money. My daddy had money but he was close with it because he went through all these hardships. One thing I can say about my daddy I can't remember but one time that he couldn't reach way down and pull a little money out somewhere. I do remember one time, the first year that we made a crop after leaving the shoe store. We'd gone somewhere--I can't remember where--but he'd lost his shoes. We came back and his brother had died in Arkansas. He'd just bought him a new pair of shoes. My aunt had given my daddy his brother's shoes but he wouldn't wear them. They were very close. I remember my daddy plowing the ground in the spring breaking the frozen ground barefoot. He would tie these gunnysacks around his feet to keep them from freezing. One day when he came in my mother looked at him and said, "Willie Martin, you put these shoes on and don't say no. If your brother was living he'd want you to do this. He'd turn over in his grave if he knew you were plowing barefoot." Daddy put them on and wore them out.

J.G.: What did you do with your children while you were picking peas in the Imperial Valley?

Holmes: My mother kept them. She was in bed most of the time but she kept those little children. She really wasn't able to but she done the best she could. She done her part. I would come home early and fix the dinner. We had plenty to eat. It seemed to me like we got little tickets. We'd pick peas and poured them in baskets. When we'd take a basket in they'd weigh them and give you a ticket with the amount on it. We would cash the tickets in. It was like picking strawberries. That's the way it was with strawberries. We'd go to the store and if we needed anything I'd run over to the store and get it. We always needed something. We drank a lot of milk because we were used to having milk in Oklahoma so I'd always go get milk and something for supper. We saved money with eating good and wages being so cheap.

J.G.: You had about seven adults working in the fields except your mother?

Holmes: No, my mother didn't work and the three children didn't work.

J.G.: The nephew was little?

Holmes: Yes, he was little--just six months older than my oldest girl. They were all under three years old so she kept them and the rest of us worked in the field. I didn't work as long as the others but every little bit helped. We even saved some extra money besides what my dad had and we came on to the Lake Bottom.

J.G.: You were going to pick cotton there?

Holmes: We started picking cotton there. My brother-in-law and sister were there and my second oldest brother. He'd come out with them. My brother-in-law was boss over at Banducci's Ranch--the foreman. They had taken a cotton trailer that was on wheels because they never had enough cabins for the people that was coming out there. They put plywood around it and put a top on it. This is what we lived in--a cotton trailer fixed up. We slept beautifully. That was lovely. As I said I went in town and worked about three weeks then came back. After that my daddy had heard that Arvin had more things than cotton picking so he and my mother went over one evening and checked it out. In fact, I think we all went and he got a job from this big farmer. He had lots of grapes and said that he'd furnish a house for us. We got a big three bedroom house sitting right out in a big grape vineyard. We worked for fifteen cents an hour. I thought that was living. Groceries were cheap; everything was cheap. We'd work all week and pool our money. We'd go to Dan's Store in Arvin and get our groceries and everything else we needed like clothes and shoes.

We found a little church and went to church there and that's where

I became a Christian. We lived there about a year when my father heard of this place in Lamont where they were selling lots. He thought that if we were going to stay in California the rest of our lives we should go and see about a lot. They were selling them for \$10 down and \$10 a month--\$300 a lot.

I'm getting ahead of my story. We moved from the farm to a Christian man's place. My daddy wanted his own place so he heard that they were giving box car lumber to anybody who would tear a box car apart. This fellow said, "You can build a small something to live in on the back of my place if you want to." He had about two acres there. My daddy went and tore down box cars and built a big one room house. I'd say it was one room. It was about twelve feet by sixteen feet. We lived there about a year and then he heard about this place in Lamont where he bought a lot.

He'd decided that we were going to tear our house down side by side and move it on the truck to our lot and put it back up again. This is what he did. My husband and I had to move out and moved to a camp. We lived in what was called a tent house. It was about nine feet by eight feet. It was walled up four board high and had a tent over it. We lived there and oh, how my heart yearned to go and get us a place but my husband couldn't see it. He was working at everything he could get and could hardly find enough money to keep us going. One morning he'd gotten up to build a fire in this wooden stove. The top of the tent was too close to the stove pipe. He jumped back in bed. I'd been asleep but happened to wake up and was laying there and smelled smoke. I opened my eyes and the whole top of the tent was on fire. I grabbed my children and jumped outside. I never tried to get out the door because the stove was sitting by the door. I grabbed my kids and jumped over the side. I grabbed one and jumped over and he pushed the other one out to me. He grabbed some water. I'll never forget. He was in his shorts. He grabbed the bucket and began to throw water up there on the roof. Some neighbors were up and they grabbed their water buckets. We were getting water from the faucets outside the tents and they ran over and put it out but the biggest part of the tent had burned. He said, "Well, I guess we just as well to go over to Lamont and see if we can purchase us a lot." We came to Lamont and got the second lot from my daddy.

My husband said, "Well, I never liked to talk about getting any help but I'm going to go up and see if I can get on the WPA [Works Progress Administration]. He said that in order for us to move we'd have to do it. They kindly threw something over our tent and we were there for another month. He went to work on the WPA but they never got nothing. They worked and worked like horses. They would gather these men up in trucks and take them up into the mountains where they built roads and did a little bit of everything. He'd come home at night so dirty and tired but he was

glad to have it. He was making \$27 a month. He never worked on weekends but worked five days a week.

The first month we took that money and got some flooring and some two by fours. My daddy helped him. We got railroad ties used for the sleepers and put down the floor and got the frame up. The next month we got lumber to bring it up four feet. We got foot wide grooved siding and put the sides up that month. We took the tarpaulin that had been through the mill and put it over the top and moved in. I was never so happy in my life. It was like a mansion to me after what I'd been through since leaving Oklahoma. We figured every month we'd buy enough lumber to put another row of boards around the house. We did that until we got it eight feet tall but we still had the canvas over the top. We knew it was going to take more to get our shingles and sheeting for the top. I was about three months pregnant and sick--was I ever sick. I couldn't keep anything but crackers and 7-Up on my stomach. Some of people who are as old as I am will remember that we had a three-day sand storm--one of the worst that they'd had in California. The only way we could survive--me and the children--was to sit up in bed with the covers over our heads. My husband would tie a towel or something around his face and he would walk to the store and get us bologna and crackers and bread and 7-Up. We would sit under the covers and eat. For three days we did this. There got to be so much sand that every so often I had to raise up in the bed to let this sand fall off the covers.

J.G.: What year was this?

Holmes: That was in 1938--the year my boy was born. He was born in August. When this sand storm was over the bed was so dirty and gritty that you just couldn't turn over. It really hurt. We had to take a shovel and scoop the sand out of our house. It took us a couple of days to get everything straightened out. We got over that and kept working on the house. We got the top on it and in August I had my baby. After I had my baby and he was big enough to leave with somebody I chopped cotton.

When my baby was three weeks old I had a nervous breakdown. I wasn't well at all and me and my husband got in a fight. He kicked me real good and I had a nervous breakdown. I passed out and they'd taken me to the hospital and had taken my baby along. I was in the hospital about two weeks. There were three or four days where I didn't know anything. I was hemorrhaging. The first day that I came to the doctor tried to tell me that I had had a miscarriage but I knew better. Come to find out it was a nervous breakdown. I didn't get well for about two months.

We never had a car but there was a county nurse who was coming out to see my mother and dressing her eye. My mother had her bring

me out from the hospital one day when she was going to see my mother. My baby was in and out of the hospital with diarrhea. Babies were dying like flies because of diarrhea and he was in and out of the hospital several times. He finally came through and things began to look better for us. I began to get better. They had water on the back of each lot but we had to walk to the back to use the outdoor toilets. There was a lot of typhoid at that time. In fact, my sister-in-law and her husband moved on the back of our lot in a tent. She got typhoid and almost died.

The next year I chopped cotton and brought the water to my house. I brought it right up to the kitchen door. Our room was fourteen feet by sixteen. We lived in that until the war came along.

J.G.: Let me go back a second and ask you a question. When you were hospitalized and your baby was in and out of the hospital and you were just managing with the income you had how did you pay for medical treatment?

Holmes: We didn't have to pay for it. I went to Kern General. If it hadn't been for Kern General on several occasions I don't know what we would have done. I went to Kern General when my baby was born. They had my records. I was in the hospital for three days trying to give birth to my baby. That was a bad time. I never could give birth to him so they took. I kind of thought maybe this was part of his illness. They mashed his head real bad but he wasn't mentally ill, thank the Lord. In fact, he's real well now. He's a minister of the gospel.

J.G.: How did you feel you were treated at Kern General?

Holmes: I was treated quite well under the circumstances. There were five women in the room with me having babies. I didn't think they'd given me the cure I needed. I thought my baby should have been born a long time ago. I kept telling them that I couldn't have this baby. I had had two before and I knew there was something wrong. I could bear down so much but then at a certain stage it was like it would go back the other way. I was wore out. I used an old grandma recipe to get far enough along that they did something for me. After three days I said, "Well, I'm tired of fooling around with this. I'm going to do what my grandma told me to do." When they brought me my breakfast I took every bit of my pepper. What that does is bring on labor real fast. One of the girls in the room with me wanted to do it too. They didn't have pepper in little paper things. They brought salt and pepper shakers on your tray. There was about two teaspoons of pepper in the shaker. I went to the bathroom and turned the shaker up and followed it with a big glass of water. The other girl did the same thing and we both went into hard labor. I mean hard labor. You just burn up and go into hard labor. They took

her into the main delivery room and me into the emergency delivery room. I was in there five hours trying to give birth to this baby. I'd bear down and the minute the pain was gone he absolutely would come right back up.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

Holmes: After about five hours they called in more doctors and they all watched me for a while. Dr. Joe Smith said, "You're just as well to go ahead. You're going to have to do it." The next thing I remember was they were putting ether on me. Later when I woke up I felt my stomach and said, "Oh, thank goodness it's over." That's the way I had my baby. I was there ten days and they never let me get up. That's the saddest mistake they ever made. I think they push it a bit now.

J.G.: Was the tent house you lived in before you built your own house owned by the grower or by the government?

Holmes: No, it was privately owned. He'd come in there two or three years before and bought this land. He built the floors and the sides and put tents over them and rented them for about \$2 or \$3 a month.

J.G.: We have to backtrack even further. Where did you meet your husband again as you and your family moved out to California?

Holmes: Casa Grande, Arizona.

J.G.: Did you drive to Casa Grande to pick him up and then come on to California?

Holmes: He'd been here at Kern Lake working. He'd left Casa Grande and went to Kern Lake and was working with his brother--the one who married my sister. When he heard that we were coming through and were going to stop in Casa Grande to visit my mother's friend he hitchhiked out there to meet us. The night he got in he was in a terrible car accident. He was riding in the back of a pickup and the pickup got wrecked and three people were killed. Everyone in the truck was killed but him. He was unconscious. He didn't know what he was doing but he carried two posts and laid them in the road and lay down between them. A school teacher came by and she was afraid to stop at first. She pulled on up further and saw that he had blood all over him so she got out and saw that he was unconscious. She stayed with him until some other cars came by and made arrangements for somebody to bring him to the hospital. I mean the jail. They took him to jail. They saw the wrecked car and thought he was the one was driving and that he was drunk so they put him in jail. When he got to the jail he told them that his wife was there and they called the house. They brought him down. He never had a piece of hide on his face he was so skinned up and burned up but he never had any broken

bones. That was a bad experience.

J.G.: During the time that you were living in a tent while you built your house in Lamont was your husband working for the WPA?

Holmes: Yes, he did.

J.G.: He worked for the WPA from 1937 to 1940?

Holmes: I'd say maybe two years because he was a pretty good gambler. He worked in a smokehouse in Lamont while he was working on the WPA. He'd play poker and win extra money. They finally put him on as bartender and he would tend bar during the day and play poker at night.

We were living good but I had always been raised that this was wrong. I had deep feelings about it for a long time. I wouldn't even spend the money that he would make from gambling. I knew what kind of shape the people that came out here was in. My husband was very free hearted with me. He'd give me all the money he had and just take so much back. I went to these people's houses and give to the women the money their husbands had gambled away. I never told him I did that. I'd give them \$2, \$3 or \$5 and tell them to go buy groceries. They'd say, "Why are you doing this?" My husband would tell me so-and-so was in the poker game last night and they lost every bit they had. I couldn't take it because I was raised to be honest and to do unto others as you would have others do unto you. He'd take their money and I'd give it back.

J.G.: Is that what you and he got into a big fight over when you had your nervous breakdown?

Holmes: I got up that morning. He'd made the fire and I got up and was putting on my daughter's shoes. He went back to bed and he was smoking. When he flicked his cigarette he intended for it to light on the stove but he hit our daughter on the tummy. She just had on this little shirt but it stuck and she went screaming. I was looking in her shoe and didn't know what it was then I saw her scratching her tummy. I knocked it off. It had just stuck there and it made a little hole and she was screaming and crying. I jumped on him and went to criticizing him and finally accused him of doing it on purpose. Of course, he didn't do it on purpose but I was so mad and he was too. He jumped up and kicked me. He grabbed his belt that was laying there and he was going to give me a whipping. I stuck my head in the corner to keep him from hitting me with the belt. I wound up with a nervous breakdown before the day was over. I had him arrested.

J.G.: What happened with that?

Holmes: I had him arrested and picked up. The law came and got him and was taking him to Bakersfield. He was playing and gambling with all of them serving them drinks and honky-tonking with them. They took him about two miles up the road and let him out. He came back to the house and threatened to kill me. My mother happened to be there. As I mentioned earlier, she was half Cherokee Indian and my daddy didn't pull nothing on her. My husband said, "You just open your mouth and I'll kill you." My mother just kind of eased over to where I had a great long butcher knife. It was razor sharp. She just walked over to him and said, "Russell Barber, you may whip my daughter and get by with it and you may do a lot of things but I dare and double dare you to lay your hands on her now. You don't have the guts to touch me." She said, "You'll touch the last if you ever touch this girl again." He never touched me again. He was afraid of my mother.

J.G.: You did get back together again after this?

Holmes: Yes, it was hard times.

J.G.: Was that sort of the way women were treated? Men could pretty much do what they wanted and women had to stand by?

Holmes: That's right. Men really took advantage. I won't say all men but some of them like mine did. I could name quite a few that was doing the same thing and the women stood by. I had my little way of getting even with him but in the long run he usually won.

There was a time in 1945 when he was running around with another woman. I'd caught him with her. I'd faced them both and she'd said that she'd never see him anymore. He didn't want to leave me and he didn't want me to leave him. He wanted his cake and eat it too. He wanted his family but wanted to tomcat around. He finally got her pregnant. He spent as much time with her as he did with us. I couldn't take it so I sued him for divorce. I had to leave town because he would have killed me. He was drinking quite a bit and he told me, "If you ever leave me and sue me for divorce, I'll kill you." I knew he would because I knew he was mean. He fought all the time. He whipped everyone and never took a whipping himself. I sued him for divorce but I told my lawyer about him and my lawyer said, "I don't want you there when they serve the papers on him. You get everything ready. Get your kids taken care of and don't leave them running loose because he can bring that against you."

We'd built a little house in the back and rented it to a lady. I'd give her cash for taking care of my kids and she'd give me a receipt. By this time I had acquired a car. My husband had had some bad luck while working in a shipyard during the war and he'd received a settlement. He let me get a car. As I say, he wasn't stingy with me. I could get what I wanted. That was one good thing about him. He never questioned me because he always said that I handled

money better than he could. I always had something to show for it and he didn't. He let me get a little car. I paid \$700 for it. Anyway, I took this car and went to Long Beach and stayed with friends down there. I had a cousin and I stayed with her till the day before the hearing and then I snuck back into town and saw the kids. Then I went to court. He had sued me for desertion. I'd followed my lawyer's instructions so I had my receipt and everything and I had had a woman of real good character taking care of them and feeding them well. I proved that I had kept check and calling so my lawyer turned him everyway but loose.

He carried a gun all the time and I turned this in and by the time they got through with him he couldn't say anything. They brought up this woman and he had to admit she was pregnant. They made him look like nothing. I got the home and the children. By this time we'd built on and had three nice rooms. So when we separated he went to living with her but he never did quit wanting me to go back to him till the day he died. He died in 1975. My last husband died in 1976 and they're both buried in the same graveyard.

J.G.: You were divorced in 1945?

Holmes: Yes.

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J.G.: When we stopped taping yesterday you were talking about your life with your husband and I think it was in the 1940s that you and he began to have some difficulties together. He was doing some drinking and gambling and running around. During the time you were living in Lamont and building your house were your three children going to school in Lamont?

Holmes: One of them was.

J.G.: Some people have talked to me about the way that their children were treated because they were migrants from Oklahoma. Some children weren't treated so well. I wonder if your children experienced anything like that when they were going to school.

Holmes: If they did I wasn't aware of it. I'd always take my children the first day and made it a point to get acquainted with the teachers. I tried to take part in the functions and things. I think that really helped and I joined the PTA. I could hardly afford it but I always managed. I didn't join at first and my first child said the teacher would always say something about it so then I was aware that it was very important to my daughter so then I joined the PTA. I worked for a living because it was right after that that my husband

and I separated so I wasn't able to take part in all the functions. If something fell on the night that I didn't have to work I did serve. I think this made a lot of difference. Of course, they came when they were young and didn't have a lot of reconstruction to do like I did. I haven't done too well at that. Anyway, I feel that they were fair with them and they were good teachers in those days. My children learned real easy and I could tell they had good teachers because they always sent home homework. I would help them with that. I remember when my baby started school. I'd taken him up that day, of course. He was all dressed up real cute and the teachers had a fit over him which like to tickle me to death. He stayed that day. The other children were crying because it was their first day of school. He looked at me and he said, "Mommy, why are they crying? They're acting like babies." I said, "You're a great big boy, aren't you?" He went to school two days and was just as glad to get off. The third day I was standing in the door watching him as he started walking off down the road. He got down the road a little ways and he put his hands in his pockets and turned around and came back and looked at me and said, "I don't believe I'll go to school today." Just like that. I had a time explaining to him that he did have to go to school. He didn't like that so I had to take him that day. We walked and talked about it. It was good.

Lamont was good for me. I have no complaints. My children all started in Lamont and then went to Mountain View--all three of them. Lamont was the first school they ever went to. They then went on to Mountain View. My boy went to high school in Arvin. A lot of people have a lot of complaints about Lamont and even a lot about California but I can say that it's done nothing but good for me. It isn't the same as it was when I came. Bakersfield used to be a wonderful place to live and it still is as far as I'm concerned. We do have lots of crime but they are having it in other places too so we can't just say it's Bakersfield. It was in Lamont where we got our foothold.

I think I said yesterday that we built this little fourteen by sixteen room. We had taken this month by month and we would just do a little bit each month because my husband was only drawing \$27 a month on the WPA. He would work elsewhere and he began to gamble a little and he'd take his gambling money and we'd fix up the house. I chopped cotton in 1940 and brought water to the house. A few years later I got water in the house and got a sink. By winter the house was really liveable but we didn't have it sealed. We had no ceiling at the top nor board on the side. I think it was perhaps a couple more years before we got all that in. We never had clothes closets or things like that. We never had that many clothes. We had nails on the wall and we hung our clothes on the wall. It's different now. You have big closets and more clothes than you can get in them. For that reason I think California

has been good to me. Then the war came. I'll never forget the day. My husband was cutting my brother-in-law's hair and we had a little radio sitting up on a little shelf and all at once they broke in and said that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. I remember how my heart just sank. President Roosevelt came on right after that and declared war. It seemed like everybody was so sad. They were standing out in their yards talking. We knew the boys would be drafted and many husbands would be drafted. My husband was drafting age. I didn't much care if he got drafted. I told him one day, "Well, you want to fight so bad,"--he was always fighting with me and everybody else--"maybe this will be good. You just go over there and fight the war." He didn't have to go. He was healthy enough to go. Him and another fellow had heard that if you drink whiskey and vinegar together your blood pressure would go up. I believe it's true. There were three of them that ran together like a pack. They all went for their physicals and every one of them had high blood pressure and was turned down. Of course, they quit drinking as soon as they got back so their blood pressure would drop again. I was so mad.

J.G.: You were hoping that he'd get drafted.

Holmes: I was hoping that he'd go because by this time I'd had so much trouble I was weary. I was taking care of my mother who was dying of cancer. I was taking care of her and fighting with him and taking care of the children and staying by myself a lot. It would have been good if he would have gone. I think he would have come back appreciating his home and children and wife more.

J.G.: When you think back what do you think caused your husband to start running around and drinking?

Holmes: He never drank when we were in Oklahoma and he didn't run around either. Now it works both ways I think. Hard times and depression sometimes draws you together and you lean on each other. You share more and try to figure things out. That's where you have more communication. When we got to California it was different. There was more work and more places to go and more places to hang out. It seemed like all the men would meet down at this place called the Smoke House. They'd just meet, laugh and talk and cut up and drink beer. It went from worse to worse. They began to get confident. There were lots of women at this time doing the same thing. They'd flirt around and take a new interest in life. They weren't the old farmer from Oklahoma. They were noticed and I think this went to some of their heads. The women were just something like we were when we came out here. We hadn't learned yet that we'd been liberated and that we could have a life of our own. I was very much a homebody. I thought then and still believe that a woman is suppose to take care of the house and her children and make things comfortable for her husband when he comes home at night. She should

have a good meal and have the house clean and the children clean and greet him with a smile. It worked only so long and then he got tired of looking at me smile. He wanted to look at somebody else so this is when it all started. It got worse and worse.

The war was on and we moved first to Lomita, California and he worked in the defense plants building ships. We were down there for a couple years I guess.

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

Holmes: He went in 1942 and worked through till 1943 and we were back home by 1944. I stayed in Lamont for almost a year and took care of the children. We would go down once in a while or he would come home most of the time on weekends.

I stayed because we had our little house and the children were in school or at least one of them. Also, I was trying to take care of my mother. Finally, I moved down with him when he got a house. It was impossible to find a house then. Later we moved back to Lamont and it was then that things began to get bad because money was not scarce at this time. There were lots of defense plants and so many boys went off to war and some husbands until there was plenty of work. The money was flowing freely. The more it flowed the worse the men got and those that stayed here had a ball. There were so many women left behind and girls without sweethearts or husbands. It went the men's heads. The girls and women would just fall all over them. I know my husband would come home laughing and tell me things about some old woman trying to make him. It went to his head. He got to playing around and got this lady pregnant but we lived together till almost time for her baby to be born. He was spending more time with her than he was with me. I had had all I could take so I sued him for divorce. He like to died when they served him papers. I knew to get out of town because he told me that he'd kill me. Sure enough when they served the papers he grabbed a pistol and ran home looking for me. He ran to two other people's houses looking for me there. I'm sure he would have killed me. Anyway, I got a divorce and was granted custody of the children and the house. I had a good reputation and was a Christian. I went to church and there was never a question that I would get the children.

Well, he really went down. He got to drinking more and went to living with this lady and that baby was born and right away she was pregnant again. He got to where he was coming over and borrowing from me. When we went to court and they gave him orders that he would have to move his things out of the house they told me not to go home. They were going to send a constable out there while I waited in the park. He had a bad record by this time for cutting and beating people. I stayed till I thought they were out of there but when I went home they hadn't arrived yet but he had.

He was sitting there in the house. Like to scare me to death when I walked in. I had a big table sitting right in the middle of the kitchen and he followed me around the table crying and begging me to stand still. He thought if he could get a hold of me he could talk to me. I never let him touch me. I was afraid if I did I would soften. I was crying and he was crying. He told me that he didn't want this, that he wanted me and the children and that he didn't love her. I'd talked to her before that and she told me that he said that he loved her and didn't love me. I got them together face to face. He felt that he could say anything to me and get away with it, that I would take it but he knew he couldn't do that with her. He just looked me right in the eye and said, "No, I never told you I loved you. I love Marie." I said, "Well, that's all I wanted to know." I asked him about the day when he followed me around the kitchen table and he said that he had to say that he'd lied to Marie. "You understand," he said. I said, "I quit understanding. I won't understand this."

As I say, at that time men were getting caught in webs. It wasn't because they wanted to. He got caught up in this thing and he couldn't find a way out. One day he ran up in the yard with a car and said, "Get the children and get in this car." This was just before his baby was born. He said, "Let's go to Las Vegas. I've got a good job there. Nobody will know where we're at and we can make this thing work." Our divorce wasn't final at this time. I said, "Well, I haven't done anything to run away from and I'm not going." I've often wished that maybe if I'd tried one more time that he might have straightened out. I was always afraid that he would always be sneaking around trying to see his child again. I think that's only normal for a woman to think that way. I told him how I felt and he said, "No, I never will. I'll never want it."

His girl friend's husband was coming home from the service. He was in the Secret Service and made tremendous money. He was sending her money home all this time and she was suppose to have been saving it to buy a house. She was blowing it--every bit of it. His folks wouldn't write and tell him what was going on because they were afraid that he'd get careless and get killed. When he got to San Francisco they called and said to him, "Don't be surprised what you're going to find. We've got some things. You come to the house first." She'd moved a time or two and he went to find her. She and my husband were living together and they weren't married. When his parents told him he just went crazy and they wouldn't tell him where she was at. He got a gun and was going to kill both of them.

Her husband came to my house and talked to me. I said, "Don't do it. I bought a gun to do the same thing." I did buy a gun after he beat me and everything. I was afraid of him. I was afraid to quit him and I was afraid to live with him. I felt like the only way out

was to kill him. He'd pulled a gun on me several times and put a knife to my throat and almost cut my throat. I thought the only way out was to kill him. I was afraid to leave him. So I bought this gun--a great big thing. I don't even know what it was. I followed him this night. He was at her house and was sitting in a rocking chair with her in his lap. The car was sitting in the driveway and the hedge was about two feet. I hid in that hedge and there was no way I could have missed. I wasn't no sharp shooter or anything but I would just about have been touching him with that gun. I fully intended to kill him. It was about twelve o'clock at night and I stayed in that hedge until dawn and people were going to work. When they turned out the lights I cocked my gun. I was ready. They went to bed instead and that's the only thing that saved them.

I had to go home. I had a hard chill and went to bed and shook for about two or three hours. You know, I was glad they didn't come out. By this time I was thinking right. He would have been dead and I would have gone to jail although I'm sure I would have been acquitted because they had my record of when he sent me to the hospital because of a beating. Everybody knew it. Even his friends would say, "I don't know how you live with him." That was just the beginning of the end of him.

I went on my merry way and began to work out then. He'd told the children that they'd starve to death, that I didn't know how to work. I said in my heart, "I'll make these children a living." I can say truthfully that I never drew one penny of welfare. There were people all around me drawing it. I went to work and I didn't know anything. I'd never worked in a public job before. I'd worked in the fields. I could do that. I'd washed and ironed clothes for five cents each and if anybody hates to iron it's me but I had to.

I finally found me a little cafe job up in East Bakersfield. It was called the Railroad Cafe. I told them that I didn't know how to do anything. I was so bashful that I could hardly look at anybody. They'd say, "What's your face so red about?" I could hardly wait on people. I stood it three days then I couldn't stand it any longer so I quit. I didn't even know how to make change. I went to work at a Chinese cafe called Mun Yin on 18th Street with the rest of the restaurants down by the canal. I worked there close to a year and loved it. I made \$27 a week plus tips which ran way over that. I began to buy new furniture for the house and bought clothes for the children. On my days off I'd take them some place and we'd have dinner out. We were really living.

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

Holmes: That would have been about 1946.

J.G.: You and your husband were having a lot of difficulty during that time. He was physically abusive towards you. Were there a lot of women who suffered those same kinds of problems during those late 1930s?

Holmes: Yes. There were lots of women who suffered just like I was suffering. Many, many men quit their wives and ran off with other women. In fact, I had several neighbors--close neighbors that this happened to. For some of them it ruined their lives. They didn't have the courage to pick up the pieces and put them back together again. Some got married again to better men than they had.

J.G.: It must have been terrifying for you to think about supporting three children feeling like you did having had no real marketable skills.

Holmes: That's right I had no skills except working in the fields and I couldn't make a living at that.

In the latter part of 1946 I worked about a year as a waitress. I was determined to make a life for my children and make a happy life. I worked at it. I know lots of boys that have been raised by their mothers who didn't turn out right. Children miss the parent who isn't there. I think they miss the mother more than they do the father. A mother can come nearer to taking the father's place than a father can replace a mother. I proved that to my children too. Later they told me they were glad that we'd separated because they had more fun. He was very strict and when he was drunk he'd whip them real hard. I never spared the rod with my children. I raised three good children. None of my children was ever in trouble and they're all good citizens today.

I worked at Mun Yin and I don't remember what happened. I didn't get fired. I think I'd taken a better job. I went to work at the Bamboo Chop Sticks and worked there quite a while. The tips were much more than they were at Mun Yin. I made really good tips. Sometimes I'd make \$100 a week. That's nothing to some of the waitresses today but for me it was good. I bought a car called an Essex Terraplane and we'd take trips and go to the mountains or over to Kern Lake or the park. We'd have fun.

My oldest daughter got married when she was fourteen, almost fifteen. I didn't want her to marry. I wanted her to go ahead and finish school. She said, "Mamma, if you don't let me marry, I'll run off." I said, "I'll never sign for you." She and her boy friend did run off to Las Vegas. They called me and wanted me to say that she was sixteen but I wouldn't. They had to come home. She wouldn't speak to me for a day or two. Later, she got my sister to sign an affidavit. She signed my name to it and they did get married. I've never been sorry because she could have had a search warrant out for the best man in the world and could never have

found any better. He was about eight years older than she. They've never separated. They didn't have children until they'd been married about thirteen years. They had a little boy and then about two years after that they had a little girl. She's got the best man in the world. He's so good to her. I think as much of my son-in-law as I could ever think of any of my children. In fact, he's my child because he married her so young and came into our family. He's never said a cross word to me in his life.

I worked in different cafes. I worked at French's Cafe in Bakersfield. It wasn't hard for me to get a job by this time because I had confidence. I was the kind of person who once I had confidence nothing could stop me so I didn't back down from anything. I went into the best cafes and worked. I worked in some little cafes in Lamont.

When my oldest girl was married and moved out my youngest daughter went to Gilroy Bible School which left me and my boy. We went to Colorado and I got a job working at a hot spring for a year or so and then we came back to Lamont which was where our house was. We owned our home so we'd always come back there from time to time. We made other trips to Colorado until my boy was grown then he went into the service in 1957. I ran across a wonderful man in 1957 but didn't marry him for six months after that. I sold my place at Lamont and began to buy property. I was quite adventuresome. I bought property in Colorado Springs and sold that. I bought property at Cortez, Colorado and sold that. Everywhere I went I bought a piece of property. I always made a little money on it. I was quite a real estate lady and if I'd been educated I could have gotten a real estate license and would have been a millionaire today.

J.G.: What year did your second husband die?

Holmes: He died in 1976. My father went to Arkansas to live awhile and got sick. He had leukemia. He was 95. I took a van and went to get my father and bring him back here. He called me one day and said, "Sister, there's something real bad wrong with me and I need you to come." We brought Daddy out and he died in my house in Fairfax in 1974. The day my daddy died my husband had gone to the hospital for some prostate gland test and they told him he had cancer. I took care of my daddy till he died then I turned around and took care of my husband for two and a half years until he died on September 27, 1976. I've just been roaming ever since.

J.G.: You took care of your mother until she died?

Holmes: I did.

J.G.: One time you mentioned that your father's dream was to own property

here in California. Did he ever realize his dream?

Holmes: He never did own a farm but he worked for many people and he was loved.

I moved from Fairfax after I'd lost two loved ones in that house and went into county nursing in between times. I fully intended to be a nurse. That was my heart's desire. I learned how to give shots with my mother. For close to six months before she died I had to give her a shot every hour on the hour. I was trying to take care of my family. This was the time my husband and I drifted apart. Some of this could have stemmed from my having to spend so much time with her. I was like a zombie. I'd get up from my place and have to go down there and give her a shot. I'd no sooner get home then I'd have to go back again. Sometimes I'd fall asleep and I'd hear her screaming. I'd just have to go. It got to where I was spending the nights there. I could get up and mix her morphine and give her a shot and not remember I gave it to her. I never did give her an overdose. I had to give my daddy and my husband shots. Other people would send for me to give shots. I would give shots as good as anybody. I should have been a nurse.

J.G.: What do you do now to keep occupied?

Holmes: I love to travel. I love scenery but I don't care about traveling with people. I like to go by myself because other people don't enjoy the things I do. I enjoy God's creations and I do lots of missionary work. I work with American Indians and I've been going off and on for years. I've built several missions with my hands and I teach the word of God. I also teach cleanliness and health.

J.G.: Is there one particular reservation or do you go to a whole bunch of them?

Holmes: I go to different ones but I especially work in the four corner area that borders Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona and Utah.

J.G.: Before we go on I wanted to ask you a couple of specific questions about the 1930s. When your husband was still in the fields do you recall any efforts to organize field workers?

Holmes: I remember them talking about it. I remember that some of them were for it and some were afraid. They had had such a hard time that if anybody tried to organize they'd be fired. I remember my husband saying that this is what we needed--protection so the farmer wouldn't have it all on his side and they couldn't make us do whatever they wanted. I remember it being talked about but I was out of the fields before it really happened.

J.G.: Were you out of the fields by the time there were strikes?

Holmes: I cut grapes and worked for DiGiorgio. I packed fruit the first year we came here for DiGiorgio. After we bought [a house] at Lamont and my husband and I separated I worked in a restaurant there and then I cut grapes. I worked in the fields off and on after they began to strike but I was never in a strike. I quit one time because I'd heard that they were going to strike and my daddy was afraid that I'd get hurt. He said, "Sister, somebody's going to get hurt and you've got those children to take care of. You can always find another job. You've been lucky that way. Why don't you quit?" I was ready to quit anyhow. It was hot. They did strike and people got hurt. They got beat up and I think somebody got killed before it was over.

J.G.: Did your dad ever talk about any of the government policies that were either harmful or helpful to the Oklahoma farmers during those rough years?

Holmes: Yes. We were kind of naive at that time. I remember Roosevelt had this program where they would buy part of your crop and plow it under. There was such over production. I guess everything was so cheap and they were trying to get the prices up. They would buy your cows and test them to find the ones that weren't too healthy. They'd pay you so much for those unhealthy cows and they'd kill them. If there wasn't anything wrong with the cows they'd just pay you for the cows and kill them and take the meat to huge canneries. Here's where they began to appropriate the food for the welfare programs. You could sign up and get canned meat. In fact, I got some of it when my husband left and went to Arizona to work. I got some canned stuff and peanut butter and applesauce--just a few things. This really helped.

I remember my father and mother talking this over and they thought the end of time was coming. They were great Bible readers. My daddy thought that this was leading up to the end of time. They didn't know whether to agree with the government's killing the animals or not. Daddy said, "Well, what's going to happen will happen. We'll just go ahead and do it. That old President has really got it worked out and he knows what he's doing." He really didn't think it was going to be good for the people but he said, "I need the money and I'll do it." There were lots of people against it. Some of them wouldn't do it for a long time. We didn't but it did work out for the best. It was good for us because it put meat in the canneries for people to eat who didn't have anything. It also gave you money to get by on. It did keep the price of crops level but, yes, there was a lot of apprehension in those days of everything.

J.G.: During the 1930s when you came to California did you and your husband or your family ever accept any outside help or were you able to make your checks stretch to get through those years?

Holmes: As I say, my husband got on WPA. There was another program that my daddy got on for a short while but he was just like me. He didn't believe in taking anything unless you had to. He signed up for something and got a small check because my mother was dying of cancer and he couldn't leave her. Right after that my brothers went into the service and they received allotments so they got by on that. My daddy was never for taking anything that he didn't have to have. He was a good manager. He could always find something and so did my husband.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 2

J.G.: When you first came to California in the 1930s what kind of reception did you receive from the Californians? Did you ever feel that the local people were unfriendly or were they fairly friendly? What was it like?

Holmes: No, they weren't friendly. There were a few that had a heart in them. I told you that I went to work for these people in Bakersfield right after we first got here. I worked three weeks. I knew more about babies than she ever thought about because I'd help raise some of my brothers and sisters and I had two of my own. These people went somewhere one night and left me with this baby. It cried and cried. I knew it was constipated so I used a suppository to move its bowels. When she came home I told her what I'd done. I thought she'd be glad. That baby cried and cried. It's little tummy was so hard. She got mad at me and went and called her doctor. She said, "This dumb Okie." I sat there and looked at her till she got off the phone. I said, "I may be a dumb Okie but I know how to take care of children. What did your doctor say?" She said, "Strangely enough he said that you done the right thing." I said, "I'll tell you something else while we're at it. You get another girl because I won't be here any longer than daylight and I can get somebody here to get me." She said, "Oh, you can't do that." I said, "Hide and watch." I left. She begged me and told me she was sorry but I was independent. I had had two or three fights over people slurring me about being an Okie. That was what most of the people fights was over when we first came here. They'd call us all kinds of things. I'm telling you those men who came from those states didn't take no guff off of nobody. They just knocked them over if someone said anything.

J.G.: Tell me about the disagreements that you had and the fights that you had over being called Okies.

Holmes: There was one lady whose house I went to over my children. Her children said that their mother didn't want them to play with my children because we were Okies and we might have some kind of disease or lice. My children came home and I asked them what happened. They said that the woman told them to go home and that so-and-so couldn't play with us because we were Okies and might

have lice. I never knew when I hit the ground. I was over there in that woman's house and I jerked her door open. I guess she thought I was stupid. She was in the kitchen and I flew in there and grabbed her by the dress and told her that if she ever called my children Okies again...they're Okies but they're good Okies. I said, "You have humiliated my children. I don't care what you say to me if you think you can get by with it. You call me one right now." She began to back off and said, "I'm sorry. I didn't know you knew." I slapped her right beside the head. I slapped her so hard that my husband said I'd probably get arrested. I said, "I don't care. It would be worth going to jail for." That woman couldn't be friendly enough to me after that.

Again, I was on the streets in Bakersfield. You know when you're moving around you step on somebody's heel. Well, I stepped on this woman's heel and she turned around. I said, "Oh, excuse me. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do that." She could tell by my voice where I was from. She said, "Well, you could expect anything from an Okie." I had her by the arm and I just pointed my finger right in her face and said, "Okie or not, you just say anything out of the way to me again and I'll knock your head off." I've never been a fighter but it was like something in us. We expected people to look down on us because we had heard so many tales and things. It was like you were on the defensive. Men were the same way. It wasn't very long after that that I got to feeling sorry for these people. I found out that I had more principle, more love, more everything than they ever had. When they'd say something I'd say, "You know, I feel sorry for you." I'll tell you what I told one of them one time. She said that she couldn't understand me because I was an Okie, the way I talked. I said, "Well, you know that's strange. You're suppose to be smart but I'm smarter than you. I can understand you and I can understand Okie language too."

J.G.: When do you think that anti-Oklahoma feeling subsided?

Holmes: After the war when our boys--the Okies and Arkies and Texans and Missourians--help win the war. We became equal. I knew their boys went to war and they would meet you and ask if you'd heard from your brothers. We were all on common ground. The war helped break down a lot of things. When the boys came home they felt like they'd been raised here. Over there there was no room for being stuck up--I'm better than you, you know. They would just as soon have an Okie save their life as anybody. That just put us all on common grounds, I think, and it began to subside.

J.G.: Did you ever read or hear about The Grapes of Wrath--the novel written by John Steinbeck?

Holmes: Yes. I read it. I was real aware of right where it was taking place. A lot of it was filmed at Weed Patch just a mile up the road from me. I'd been there on that big cement slab where they

were dancing.

J.G.: What did you think of the story? How true was that in terms of the way people lived at that point?

Holmes: Well, I'll tell you most of it was true. There was a government camp there. I know there were lots of places for people to live. We never lived in a government camp. I was real fortunate but we used to go over there and visit. We'd drive through. The church that I went to went out there and held services. I went out with them. It was terrible. There was no way to describe it. The year we came to Lamont there was a water ditch that ran up by the right of the road. There were trees all up through there. There were people who never even had a tent. They camped all along that ditch bank and they would have a blanket pinned up on the trees or some poles up. I'm telling you there would be from 20 to 30 lined up and down those trees living like this. We saw people living under sheets. We saw women that were so big and pregnant; we saw them with a little baby; we saw little children playing on that ditch bank and sometimes we would stop and visit with them. We were never that poor, never.

I remember we would come down through there and I would just cry because I hadn't had to really live like that. We camped out coming out but it seemed like the Lord was good to us. We were always able to find a place to live. Maybe for a little while we were hard up but we usually always just snapped right out of it. What amazes me is that people can say what they want but most of the people who came from Oklahoma have retired well off and that shows they weren't lazy. The thing that they thought about most was they thought we were lazy and we were coming for a handout. There were no harder workers than the Oklahoma and Arkansas people. They didn't back off from anything. They knew what hard work was. Many of them cut fence posts for a living. My husband did that over in the Lake Bottom. We were accused of just coming to California because we didn't want to work but that wasn't it. I wish some of these people could have been in our shoes. They would have died. They would have starved to death. There's no way they could have survived.

J.G.: You came out with a goodly amount of money in comparison to many people with whom I've talked. Some people arrived with only \$5 in their jeans.

Holmes: Yes, we were called rich Okies. I just thank the Lord that we didn't have to go through that. It was bad sometimes for us, real bad but I've seen worse times back there than I ever saw here.

J.G.: Back there in Oklahoma?

Holmes: Yes. I told you earlier how one time we only had corn bread and whey milk--not milk but the whey that came off of it. I've seen some

hard times back there but we finally got on our feet. There were times that we didn't have a lot but if we needed something my mother would say go catch some chickens. We'd go to town and get what we needed.

J.G.: Did you get a sense of what it was like for people living in government camps? Were they pretty happy with that or what?

Holmes: Some were and some weren't. I remember lots of people saying, "I wish I was back home. I had more back home." It looked like they could never get on their feet. They'd say at least we had a house and milk and butter and some eggs. Things were burning up in Oklahoma. They heard there was plenty of work in California and plenty to eat. There were some who went back. You know, all of my folks who stayed in Oklahoma could buy and sell me a dozen times. All of my family has retired with homes and they haven't done too badly for themselves. They learned a trade. I've got one brother who's a minister and my other brother lives out here. He's a retired carpenter and a veteran. My other brother retired from a big engineering company. I have one brother in Arkansas. He came out here but hated every minute of it. He made tremendous money here. He was a cat Skinner. They paid good money for that and he was just rolling money. He left his wife and family and went back. She liked it better here because she had more and had a different life. They divorced and he remarried. He's still in Arkansas. He loves it. He hates to even come out here for a visit.

J.G.: It sounds like all of your family did quite well.

Holmes: We did quite well.

J.G.: You mentioned that your son is a minister.

Holmes: My son is a minister and he lives in Utah just right over the line from Colorado.

J.G.: Is that how you got to Utah?

Holmes: No. I was there a long time before he ever was. We went to St. George, Utah in the early 1940s to do missionary work. I took it upon myself. I always loved Indians. I didn't know they had an Indian Reservation there. When we went there I saw all these Indians up in town. We were staying at a hotel at this time.

J.G.: Who is we?

Holmes: My son and I. I stopped one of them and asked, "Is there a Reservation here close by?" They said, "Yes, the Shivwits Indian Reservation is fourteen miles up the road." I asked, "Do you have any church or minister or anything like that?" He said, "No." I said, "Would you like to have one?" They said, "Yes."

J.G.: You have two daughters--one lives in Bakersfield?

Holmes: Yes.

J.G.: And your other daughter?

Holmes: She lives in Arroyo Grande on the coast and my other boy is in Monticello, Utah. He's a minister. All of my children are Christians and so are my grandchildren.

J.G.: One final question--when you look back over the whole experience of coming to California, of living through those years of being a migrant and of all the hard times, do you think that that affected you in the long run as far as the kind of person you are?

Holmes: I do. I wouldn't want to go back over it but I wouldn't take anything for not even one experience. Some people grew bitter and got worse. You know, fell apart at the seams but I said that when I came to California I've never seen a time that I wanted to retrace and go back to Oklahoma. I never have. When I shook the Oklahoma dust off my feet I never wanted to go back and live. I hardly ever wanted to go back and visit. I've stopped very few times driving through and I saw some of my kinfolk--not on my side but on my husband's side. After a few run-ins I said to myself that I like being an Okie. My experiences were going to sweeten me instead of making me bitter. I've worked toward that. I've taken advantage of every opportunity to better myself, to learn and to grow. I'm still doing it.

J.G.: So the experiences that you had back then caused you to grow and become a more positive person?

Holmes: Yes, positive. I was very shy and lacking in confidence. I had an inferiority complex. I had freckles. I was black headed and blue-eyed and had great big freckles. I had a complex over this. People would call me "freck". I had more fights in school over people calling me "freck" and so it gave me a complex. I remember one time when I was a child. We'd been to church and my mother was standing talking to this lady and I was hanging onto her hand looking up. I was about seven at this time. This lady looked at me and my freckles. My hair was black and my eyes were blue and my freckles were so brown. She said to my mother, "Charlie,"--my mother's name was Charlie--"I believe that child has a disease. I've never seen a child with freckles like that. She ain't suppose to have freckles when she's black headed." I got my hair from my mother and she's half Cherokee Indian. My mother said, "Omia, is that all the sense you have? This child don't have no disease, that's freckles. What's wrong with you?"

I came out here with a real bad complex and I would walk with my arms behind me and I never would wear short sleeves but as my

confidence grew I learned that I was just me. I went to a doctor one time I was so self-conscious about this. I'd made an appointment to see a medical doctor. I didn't know there were skin doctors. He set me down and said, "What are you in here for?" When I told him he said, "Young lady, sit down here. I want to talk to you." He said, "If you wanted to badly enough you can use stuff to get rid of freckles but not everyone can have freckles. There are lots of people who would like to have freckles. You just count yourself lucky you've got them. Just go ahead and be you. You're a pretty girl and you've got a good personality." I wish I knew where he was at. I would look him up and kiss him. That did more for me and I began to say, "Well, Loye, you're just you, freckles and all." You know, I got to where that didn't hurt me. I didn't think anything about it and nobody else did either. I was my own worse enemy.

END OF INTERVIEW

Willie Martin
b. 1882, Crawford County,
Missouri

[His parents from Crawford Co, Mo.] [Her parents from Polk Co, Ark.
and Atlanta, Georgia]

Charlie Lenora Mills
b. 1888, Mena, Polk County,
Arkansas

Loyer Lucille Martin

b. 1917, Wayside,
Oklahoma

Education: 7th grade

Church: Pentecostal

m. 1933

Russell Barber
b. 1913, Warner,
Oklahoma
(divorced, 1945)

Virginia Lee Barber Duncan
b. 1934
Housewife

Alma Jane Barber Brooks
b. 1935
Housewife

Kent Barber
b. 1938
Minister/ dry
wall finisher

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