

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

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

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE:	Hazel Oleta Thompson Smalling
PLACE OF BIRTH:	Tuttle, Grady County, Oklahoma
INTERVIEWER:	Judith Gannon
DATES OF INTERVIEWS:	March 23 and 26, 1981
PLACE OF INTERVIEWS:	Tulare, Tulare County
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PREFACE

Mrs. Smalling's story is the history of a family who came to California with \$10 and achieved financial stability when Mr. Smalling became an electrician. However, it also suggests some questions about the family's ability to cope with the change in life style when money was no longer a problem. Mrs. Smalling related her story with calmness and resignation. There were no emotional stops when speaking about times of sadness and tragedy. Editing was minimal.

Judith Gannon
Interviewer

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INTERVIEWEE: Hazel O. Smalling (Age: 62)

INTERVIEWER: Judith Gannon

DATED: March 23, 1981

J.G.: This is an interview with Hazel Smalling for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Judith Gannon at 1413 East Sonora Street, Tulare, California on March 23, 1981 at 9:00 a.m.

J.G.: Okay Mrs. Smalling, why don't we begin with you telling me a little bit about what you remember of your childhood in Oklahoma.

Smalling: I was born at Tuttle, Oklahoma. My mother died when I was six months and I went to live with my father's parents close to Blanchard, Oklahoma until I was about two and then we moved to Lexington, Oklahoma.

J.G.: Your mother died when you were six months old?

Smalling: Yes. When we moved to Lexington we only lived there a short while and moved back to Blanchard. My grandmother died when I was about seven then we lived with my father's brothers and sisters but not with him. I graduated from high school in Blanchard in 1935 and married in October of 1935.

J.G.: Let's back up a little bit and tell me what were the first seven years that you spent with your grandparents like? Where did you live?

Smalling: Mostly in Lexington and Blanchard where we moved on a farm. One of my aunts passed away when I was about four and my father's brother came to live with us. He had four children and lived with us for a couple years. It was really rough. We never had a school bus meet us in front of the house. We had to walk from a mile to a mile and a half to meet the bus. I've had the dinner bucket frozen to my hand when I got to school and had to have the teacher run out to get snow to melt your dinner bucket loose from your hand. I really enjoyed school and I studied hard. When I entered high school my grandfather went with me to buy books and when he saw an algebra book he said, "Oh Hazel, that's math isn't it?" I said, "Yes, it is Papa." He said, "Well, study real hard

so you can teach us about algebra." I graduated in 1935. There was no way I could go to college, my grandfather didn't think girls should go away from home to go to school and the closest college was at Norman. That was about 20 miles from where we lived and you couldn't drive back and forth and also, we didn't have the money.

J.G.: During those first seven years that you lived with your grandparents were times rough in Oklahoma or do you remember that was being pretty good?

Smalling: I don't remember it as being rough because it seemed to me that I had everything that I wanted. There really wasn't much that I wanted. I always had pretty clothes. I never went to town only once every two or three months and everytime I did I got candy or the things that a child wanted and that didn't seem like I wanted anything. We did live on a farm and we had no telephone or nothing like that, but that didn't bother me.

J.G.: What kinds of things did you do for entertainment when you were living with your grandparents?

Smalling: When we lived in Lexington we lived about a half mile from a family that had four children. One of their little boys was my age and so he and I played together all those years. He either came over to our house or I went over to his house and that went on during all the spare time we had. When we were living in Blanchard there weren't any other children there. I can remember my grandmother saved all the catalogs, magazines and newspapers that we had and I had learned to read so I read them over and over, then I cut them up for paper dolls. When I tell my children that now they think that's far out, but that's how I passed the time.

J.G.: Were there just cousins living in your family at that time?

Smalling: That was only about two years that they lived there and I can remember that I was jealous of them because you see all those years there was no one but me, but now my grandmother had to take care of five with two of them who were younger than me and I can remember that that bothered me. When they all lived there it was fun because there were so many to play different games still we wanted to play with paper dolls. I remember we really became expert at jumping rope. After my cousins left my father's sister came to live with us and she had a baby about three.

J.G.: Do you remember why your parents moved from Lexington to Blanchard?

Smalling: No I don't. I think it was because he could rent a farm that was much larger than where we were living in in Lexington, but I don't know for sure.

J.G.: So at seven your grandmother died.

Smalling: Yes.

J.G.: Do you remember what your mother died from?

Smalling: The flu epidemic in 1918.

J.G.: What about your grandmother?

Smalling: I don't really know how to explain that. In the olden days when there weren't any doctors my grandmother's brother-in-law had given her sister syphilis and when their baby was born the baby was starving. They couldn't get any milk that would agree with it. My grandmother's sister couldn't nurse the baby and my grandmother had just given birth to her last child so she decided that she'd nurse both babies. The baby that was her niece bit her on the nipple. The baby had syphilis from her mother and in the process gave syphilis to my grandmother and that was how my grandmother died when I was seven.

J.G.: What happened to the two babies, the niece and her own child?

Smalling: The niece died when she was six weeks old and the other baby, my uncle, lived. As soon as they found out about this they took him to the doctor. The doctor did all he could for him. He never did contract syphilis. He went ahead and married and had a family of his own and it never showed in their family. Apparently he was lucky enough not to get it from his mother.

J.G.: But the other baby died at a young age.

Smalling: Yes. It only lived six weeks or two months.

J.G.: What about the mother of the child that died? Did she also die soon after that?

Smalling: She lived about ten years after that, but she was very crippled from syphilis. I remember that she had to walk with a crutch. She had two other children by a different husband and both of them were born with syphilis too. I remember this was even after I was seventeen or eighteen those two children used to come and visit us and they were under doctor's care all the time. Right now I can't remember how long they lived because my husband and I left Oklahoma shortly after in 1937 so I lost contact with them.

J.G.: The aunt who originally had syphilis didn't ever get medical attention?

Smalling: You would have had to have lived during those times to know. Unless she got really bad sick you didn't go to the doctor and until she got to where she was dying she didn't go for care.

J.G.: Having infected three kids it seems like she would have wanted to go and seek out some kind of help. How far away was the nearest doctor? Was it a long trip?

Smalling: It was about 35 miles. The only way you had to go was by wagon and you'd just go to get help. For something like that you would have had to have gone to Oklahoma City which was about 35 miles from where we lived and you just didn't do it.

J.G.: So after your grandmother died you went to live with an aunt and uncle?

Smalling: Yes. My father's sister and her family came to live with us. They had a daughter about one and a half years when they came and shortly after they had another little boy. They only had two children. They lived with us for about three years and then they moved and my father's brother and his family came to live with us. They lived with us for about three years. When I was a freshman in high school my aunt came back and lived with us and they were the people then who lived with us until I married.

J.G.: Where was your own father?

Smalling: My own father lived first at a town called Mustang, Oklahoma. I don't remember exactly how old I was but I think maybe about eleven or twelve when he moved to a town called Watonga and that's where he lived until he passed away.

J.G.: Did you have brothers and sisters older than you?

Smalling: No, I was the only one from his first wife. I have four half-sisters and three half-brothers younger than me.

J.G.: Are they here in California or are they in Oklahoma?

Smalling: No. I only have one half-brother who lives in California and really I never got acquainted with those people until ten years ago. One of my half-brothers lives down by San Bernardino between San Bernardino and Patton. All the rest live in Oklahoma.

J.G.: So you were the only one who took the great leap and came to California.

Smalling: Yes. None of my father's brothers and sisters came to California. Some went far away. I have two cousins who live in Alaska who have been there years and years and I have one cousin who lives in the Azores who has been there 20 to 25 years.

J.G.: Well, I would say that that takes a pretty adventuresome spirit. What do you remember most about your childhood during the time that you first lived with your grandparents and the time that you lived with the different aunts and uncles who came to live with your grandparents? What was life like for you during that time?

Smalling: I used to wonder about my father, what kind of person he was. All the other kids at school were talking about their mom and dad and I had to listen. There was never anything that I could say. I can remember

that I was happy because I loved my grandfather I think more than anybody and I know my grandmother was really good to me and I loved her. I was really torn up when she passed away because I was scared of what life would be. I can remember my grandfather always whittled. I always got up so early. He had to get up to take care of the livestock so I'd follow him and help him with the livestock. I just felt like I was the most important person in the whole world walking beside him.

J.G.: He must have been quite a guy to give you a feeling like that. That's really important.

Smalling: He never liked to hunt or fish because he never harmed or killed anything unless it was something that had to be done. I know the wolves used to come and catch our chickens and they'd be flying and he'd kill that wolf and that would make me unhappy. He would say, "But he's killing the chickens. The only job he ever made me do that I was scared about was I had to follow the turkey hen to her nest to find her eggs before the bull snake got the eggs. I used to think he was mean to make me get the egg before the snake. There were a few times that I barely got the egg before the bull snake would. The bull snake would be just like me laying there waiting to get the egg. It'd try to run it off and it would go off a little ways and just turn right around and come back.

J.G.: That's really scary.

Smalling: But it mostly was really happy.

J.G.: So you went to high school. Did they have a high school right there?

Smalling: No. It was nine miles from our house and most of the four years that I went I walked a mile and a half to meet the bus. There was a short time when it came by our house. All the children in the high school rode that one bus except those that lived in Blanchard. It was a beautiful school. I went back and visited it about four years ago and I was really happy. I went to see one of my teachers that still lived there at Blanchard, but he had retired years and years ago.

J.G.: You were one of the few to get to go to high school during that time.

Smalling: Yes. The only reason that I was fortunate enough to go was because when my grandfather came to Oklahoma he came to help build Fort Sill. He helped get it into a position where someone would come and teach the Indians and the few white settlers that lived there. My grandmother was the one that the Army recruited. She lived in Indiana and she was sixteen years old. I've often wondered how her family let her leave, but she came out to Fort Sill with two Army guards to teach the whites and the Indians. That's where they married. They didn't have schools like we have now. They had books but she made the alphabet and did her own teaching the best she could. My grandfather was just as interested in education as she was so even though the other children didn't go my grandfather instilled in me a desire to want to go. He just wouldn't

have it any other way. I can remember that I wanted to please him so every night we had an algebra class and in my sophomore year [I had] geometry so he could learn that part of mathematics that he had never ever seen before until I became a freshman in high school.

J.G.: That would have been in the early 1930s?

Smalling: It was 1931 when I was in high school.

J.G.: What do you remember about the farming in Oklahoma during the time that you were in high school? How were things going for your grandfather on the farm?

Smalling: I never paid much attention to it, the first I remember is in 1929 when the Crash came. From those days on until my husband and I left Oklahoma it was terrible. My grandfather was well-to-do until that time because he had won a farm in the rush for Oklahoma. He had saved his money and had done fairly well because we didn't have nothing extra, but I did have what I wanted. In 1930 for the first time he didn't make a crop because the sand storms had started. He mostly raised corn and cotton and the sand storms killed both crops. He planted twice each year but still he couldn't make a crop. They didn't have food for livestock and I remember that they had to sell all their livestock. By 1933 we only had one team and one cow left which was unusual. It was getting to where he was going to lose his farm because of the taxes. My uncle who was living with us had somehow gotten money and had bought a farm and they tried to raise kafir corn. It's called maize in California.

J.G.: Is that different than regular corn?

Smalling: Oh sure it is. It's no taller than three feet with a large head on top and the head is about eight or nine inches high if it's good kafir corn and there's just hundreds of little bitty seeds in the head of the kafir corn.

J.G.: So how did your grandfather manage? Did he lose his farm?

Smalling: Yes, he did lose his farm. In 1933 they rented a farm at Blanchard, but by that time Roosevelt had been elected and he began to try to do something for the farmers of the dust bowl area to help them survive. In 1934 they had extra mules and two extra cows that they were to kill so they'd have more food for the ones left. They weren't going to allow the people to eat the cows and my grandfather rebelled at that. He said, "So many people hungry. They could have meat for a long time." He wasn't going to do it. The sheriff came out and talked to my grandfather and said that he'd have to do it. The livestock would have to be taken and buried. I was so scared. I didn't know what to do because I was afraid they were going to take my grandfather to jail. My aunt finally persuaded him to obey the law so my grandfather gave in, but he didn't like it. They weren't allowed to eat any of the cows they killed.

J.G.: I can understand if they sold it or something like that, but the families couldn't eat it either?

Smalling: No, we couldn't eat it either. We couldn't even cook a meal and invite our neighbors that were just like us. We had gotten to the point to where my aunt didn't have any shoes in summer. They tried to have shoes for her in the wintertime. In 1935 when I was going to graduate my three aunts went together and paid \$1.25 to buy material for a dress for me to graduate in and my uncle that lived with us and my grandfather got together enough money to have my shoes half soled. I was going to miss out on having a class ring and I remember I was so disappointed and my aunt says to me, "You write and tell your father to send you money to buy you that class ring." I wanted it so bad [that] I wrote the letter to my father and he sent me the money. I don't know how he ever got it because I know he was desperate too.

J.G.: So you hadn't been in touch with your father during those years? He was living someplace else.

Smalling: Yes. We might see him once a year or maybe we wouldn't and after the 1930s we didn't see him that often.

J.G.: It's quite a tribute to your grandfather that he kept you in high school when things were so tough.

Smalling: Yes, when I think of it now I don't know how he did it because him and my uncle and aunt did without so that my two little cousins who were just beginning to go to school and me could stay in school. Now all the other children in the whole neighborhood were having to stay out because they didn't have shoes. We went ragged but at least they made us go to school.

J.G.: So you graduated and then you met your husband?

Smalling: I already knew my husband. His family went to our rival school. I just loved basketball better than everything. I was a junior before I ever made our team and we beat them that year and that's when I got acquainted with him during my junior year. In the senior year there was only one school in the state of Oklahoma that beat us. Anyway, I knew him and he had tried to get me to marry him before I graduated but I knew my grandfather wouldn't allow it. I said after I finished school. We married that October after I graduated. You couldn't get a job. We went to live with his father and mother. They had two other children. I felt terrible being there because they were in the same fix that my family was and I knew that it was a desperate situation.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

J.G.: Tell me a little bit about how your husband courted you during that time? Did you live far apart?

Smalling: We lived about four miles apart and about a mile from where he lived which would be about three miles from where I lived there was a country church. To walk three or four miles to go somewhere was nothing. There was no other kind of entertainment. We all went to church on Saturday nights, Sunday and Sunday night and that was our recreation.

My aunt and uncle and grandfather never allowed us to come to their house, but all the other younger people that were married, we went to their house on a given night and had what we called a party. Maybe we didn't have music, but there could be somebody that knew how to pick a guitar and we played games. There was hardly ever dancing. I don't remember why we didn't, I guess it was because the older people wouldn't have approved. I only went to one dance during my life and then I felt so bad about it that I went home and told about it. She said, "When you tell Dad I think he's going to be unhappy." But he really didn't get on me too much. That was the only time I ever attempted to try to dance at a party.

In my senior year of high school I invited my boyfriend, my future husband, to go to our senior banquet and once or twice we had a banquet for our basketball teams or our football team and I invited him to go to those. It was very seldom but occasionally that he could find some other friends of his that could borrow the family car and we could go to the show. I remember once we even got permission and went to a show in Oklahoma City which was something that nobody else ever did.

J.G.: That's a long journey to go to a show.

Smalling: Yes, it was because I remember we left about noon time that day and we had a hamburger someplace in Oklahoma City and went to the show and then drove home that night. No one ever did that I don't think, especially in 1935.

J.G.: So you and your husband were married then in 1935? You lived with his parents for about how long?

Smalling: Yes. We lived with them for about seven months and then a friend of mine had just married and so she and her husband and George and I had decided that we'd try to live together and exist some way. That's the only way to put that. We had this little house that we paid \$3 a month for which wasn't really bad in those days. In the winter of 1935, George and my friend's husband trapped rabbits. When they had so many trapped then they'd peddle the pelts for 50¢ apiece. That was a lot of money and it didn't take very many to make ends meet as cheap as things were then.

In 1936 my first child was born. That was another desperate time. I didn't even get to go to the doctor until I was about eight months along. I knew that I had to live close to my aunt to help me when the baby was born because you didn't go to the hospital or get an R.N. [Registered Nurse]. You did well if you got a doctor. My grandfather finally came

forward and paid the doctor to come and deliver my son. We moved back close to my aunt and my grandfather paid for our rent and paid for the doctor.

At that time my husband's youngest sister had married and her husband said that he just couldn't stand it any longer. He had to go somewhere and find work. He knew that somewhere he could do better so one day he just walked away. About two months later we heard from him and he had made it to Pixley, California. He'd gotten a job and had a job for my husband if we could get there. We didn't know how in the world we'd get there, if I should stay there and my husband come. We didn't know how we could ever get enough money because my grandfather didn't want me to come. He was really old then.

J.G.: That must have been a really hard decision.

Smalling: When I think about it now it almost makes me cry, times were so desperate and so many people were desperate. In his family there were so many living together and trying to exist and my grandfather trying to help my aunt and her family and me and everybody going down and I knew that something had to be done. I told my grandfather, "Think of all the things that we can do if George could find work in California." Finally my grandfather gave in and my father-in-law and my other grandmother, my mother's mother, he and my relatives got together and they gave us \$20 travel money.

We came to California in a 1936 Cord. This gentleman had an ad in the paper that anybody that had good experience driving he would take him and his wife to California for \$10 if they'd help drive this car. My husband and one of his brothers-in-law walked to Oklahoma City to see if he could get in that car.

J.G.: 35 miles?

Smalling: Yes.

J.G.: How long did it take him?

Smalling: As I remember they came back that night, they started real early in the morning and they were back in the night. Anyway, he got the job, but he told the man that we had a baby and he didn't think I should go with the baby because he was going to drive from Oklahoma City to El Paso, Texas the first night and he figured a baby would be in the way. It was about a day or two before we were going to leave and we thought George was the only one that was going to get to go but he called and left word with the sheriff of our county that he had changed his mind and would take me and the baby. It cost us \$10 of the \$20 they gave for the trip and left. I'll never forget that.

It was sad to leave so many people, but still I was happy because I thought if we can work well that's something. We drove to El Paso

that night. On the road going to El Paso he picked up a hitchhiker so that was four of us and the baby. George and I were really tight with our money. We hadn't eaten what we needed to eat but he had insisted that I drink a lot of milk because I was nursing our son. We stopped at a special hotel and paid for our hotel room and the next morning at four o'clock we got up to drive on to Los Angeles. We were way over in New Mexico before we stopped and had breakfast and I remember George and I only had coffee. So when he was coming into California the owner of the car would have to pay a fee to get in the state but he knew about a ferry that went across. We've never been able to find it. Anyway, this gentleman knew of a ferry that could get us across without having to pay a fee somewhere north of Yuma and before you get to Needles. We came across into California on that ferry and drove to Los Angeles and by the time we got to Los Angeles my husband and I had \$1 left of our \$10 and I guess that gentleman knew that because he said he'd rent us a room that night in Los Angeles. The next day he was taking the car to Sacramento and we were still going to get a ride to Pixley with him from Los Angeles. He also bought our breakfast that morning before we left Los Angeles. He had picked up another car in Los Angeles from somebody. I don't remember the circumstances and I did try to remember that, but we left Los Angeles that morning with two cars. George and I were in one car and the hitchhiker who was coming to Arvin and him were in the other one. George had told him we were coming to the 3S Ranch in Pixley where his brother-in-law worked and had gotten a job for George. I remember it was getting kind of late that afternoon and we hadn't had anything to eat all day and George thought he had a dime and he said, "I'll stop and buy us a candy bar." When he stopped he didn't have but 6¢, we laughed about that later. We stopped at the service station and George told him he wanted two candy bars and when George saw that he only had 6¢ we just drove off. The owner of the car let us stop at Pixley and he drove on to Sacramento. He really was good to us that gentleman. He gave George the address where to bring the car to the next day in Sacramento and if he brought it in in good condition he would give us our \$10 back to us. I was so happy I didn't know what to do but then we got to thinking if something happened on his way from here to Sacramento and he didn't get the \$10 back he might have a long walk back to Pixley. But all went well and he gave George the \$10 back.

J.G.: He was really your guardian angel wasn't he?

Smalling: Yes he was. I wish I could remember his name. For years George and I remembered him. We never did correspond with him but we did remember his name but after the interview I got to trying to remember but I couldn't.

J.G.: You were eighteen years old at the time when you made this trip?

Smalling: I was nineteen and my husband was 21 years old.

J.G.: Scary time to have to live that close not knowing where your next meal and your next dollar is coming from. How did his job in Pixley pan out?

Smalling: Well, it was irrigating. I'll never forget how he hated it from the first day. They gave him \$75 a month. We lived in a water tower. It was very small, maybe a twelve by twelve building, three stories high. The water tower for the whole ranch was on the top. We got to live in the bottom floor of that water tower plus we got \$75 a month. I couldn't believe that that amount of money could be paid when George made \$100 in all of the time he worked in Oklahoma.

George couldn't believe his eyes when he saw how the cotton grew here in California and he loved farm work, but he hated the irrigating. We came to Pixley on March 26, 1937 and stayed with irrigating until June. In June we became acquainted with another couple from Texas on that farm and they told George that we could thin peaches and pick apricots and make \$25 a day. I said, "George, I know good and well you can't make that amount of money in one day." "Well, Hazel, why would they not tell us the truth?" I said, "I don't know but I don't believe that." I didn't want to go. I was so happy with the \$75 I didn't care. He decided to give it a try because he thought that if we can't make any good working in the fruit I think, even if I couldn't come back and work with his brother-in-law, he could work with someone else even if he had to take less pay. I felt that he was responsible for earning a living and if he felt like he could work for less money, I could go along.

J.G.: What was it about the irrigating that he didn't like?

Smalling: Well, in the first place he didn't know it then, but in later years when he became better acquainted with the farming procedures here in California he found the land was not leveled right. There was a trick in getting the land level. In later years he learned that and then he didn't mind it, but you see he would build up the dikes to keep the water in and he would go down here and they'd be washed out. By the time he got that one filled up the first one would be washed out again. The trick was that the land was not leveled. He didn't know it because that's the first time that he'd ever seen irrigation in all of his life and he just didn't know it but he just felt like to just dig all day long if he could make even \$10 or \$15 a day picking fruit was kind of foolish. I began to worry about the time when it came for our son to start school because I was like my grandfather, you just didn't miss school. I thought, "Well, that's four years away so I'll think about that in the future." We did go to the fruit. We first went to Patterson, California.

J.G.: You got across the border in a different way than the average, but did you have any acquaintances or people that you knew who ran into problems at the border?

Smalling: No, I don't but I did hear about them. To really tell you the truth I felt that if there had been a problem it was caused from the ones coming across. The people who were coming across were desperate people. They were just like my husband and I, they wanted to come because they felt like they could do better here. If the officials asked them, "Where are you going to work?" I'm afraid of what that person might have

answered him, "None of your blankety blank business." I believe he had a chip on his shoulder. I'm sure that my husband would have felt that way. I'm sure if my husband had been asked [he] would have said that in the same tone of voice.

J.G.: Even though he already had a job he would feel like it's none of their business what I do.

Smalling: Yes.

J.G.: What was your first impression of California? What did you think?

Smalling: I felt like it was the most beautiful place. We came into California in the middle of the night and we got to Los Angeles in the middle of the night, but the next morning when I woke up and looked out my hotel room and saw all the activity, the cars driving down the road. That didn't even happen in Oklahoma City. I went to Oklahoma City once after I married. There was not a car on the road. It was just like being in a new world. I knew when I saw the cars on the road that there was work here if you hunted for it. Everyone could find it. I felt it, I really did. Now we were going to a job which made it more difficult for us than the majority of the people. No one ever told me definitely that they had been treated badly at the border. I heard of it and I did make up my mind that possibly they had something to do with it.

J.G.: Now let's go on to what it was like to be a fruit picker in 1937.

Smalling: We went to Patterson where this couple we knew had gone the year before to work. The same person hired us that had hired our friends. My husband didn't mind the camping in the camps, but he preferred not to. My husband told our friend, "Let's see if we can't camp on their farm." "They don't do that," he says. "Well, let's ask him." We asked that lady and she told us, "Yes." I can't remember her name. She was real nice to us. We went back for four years and worked for her and she always allowed us to camp on her farm. The next year she didn't let our friends. In a sense I could understand it. If you invited someone to camp on your farm you wanted them to clean up after themselves. Anyway, George and I camped on her farm the four years that we worked for her and honestly he made \$25 a day during the peak of the harvest. I could not believe it. I worked too, but I couldn't even do anywhere near that well.

J.G.: What kind of fruit were you picking?

Smalling: We were picking apricots at Patterson, California. We went back about fifteen years ago to see her and she didn't remember us. She was an elderly lady at the time when we were working for her. I sure remembered her. They tell me now that her farm has been sold and that it is Patterson town now where her farm had been. We stayed about three and a half weeks and when we got through picking apricots we went to Modesto and worked for Sturtyvents. His farm isn't so big anymore but it's still

the biggest peach orchard in Modesto. George did the same thing and he let us camp on his farm. Our friends and us were the only ones. We did not work in any farms where we picked the peaches but they let us camp on it. They didn't do that for very many people I know. George and I did camp in some of the Okie camps but we didn't stay very long in any of them. We went back and we worked for Mr. Sturtyvent each of the four years that we worked in the fruit in California. In the meantime, the grapes had gotten ripe here at Pixley and around Tipton so George and I came back and the man at the 3S Ranch let us move back on his farm in our little old house in the water tower.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

J.G.: You were saying that you went back to the 3S Ranch and lived in your house in the water tower.

Smalling: Yes, and we cut grapes and then when the grapes were over the cotton was ready so we picked cotton until the last part of November. My husband was real sad to see his mother and father so we decided to drive back to Oklahoma with his sister and her husband and see his family. We'd bought a car and paid for it already and so his sister and her husband had a car too and they talked my husband into selling our car and we all went back in his car. My husband thought maybe things were better in Oklahoma and we might stay. By the time we got to Texas he knew differently because in Texas there was no cotton. When we got to Oklahoma his mother and father and my aunt and uncle and grandfather were in such a desperate situation that he gave them all our money. I really didn't care either. He bought groceries for everybody so that didn't give us any money to come back to California with. His mother was crying and said, "How will you go back son?" He said, "I don't know now, but we'll find a way and go back." I was pregnant again and he tells me, "Hazel, someday we'll make it. You can have your other baby here and as soon as she's born we'll go back to California." I was really scared because I didn't see how we could. I didn't think we could ever be that lucky again.

My daughter was born in April so we stayed on through April. I went back to my aunt and my grandfather got the same doctor. We had all run out of money, but the doctor came back and he delivered my daughter on April 23, 1938. As soon as she was born my husband began to make arrangements to get enough money for us to come back. My father-in-law's neighbor had a car that would get to California and she told my husband that she had \$20 and that she'd help buy the gas if she could come up with enough money besides that and drive us all to California.

In the meantime, my husband had landed a job helping the neighbor farmer take care of his stock and plow his land. They thought they might make a crop there in Oklahoma in 1938, but my husband had already decided that he never intended to live in Oklahoma again. It just had too much sadness and we had so much happiness. In 1937 when he worked and got 50¢ a day and lunch. It was four miles from where we lived to where he

worked. He walked the four miles to work and back, but he never could get any money ahead because nobody had any but us and the 50¢ a day barely got food for the rest of us because there were so many of us. Finally, he said, "You know what I'm going to do Hazel? I'm going to see if I can't get someone to loan me \$20." He asked the farmer that he worked for and that farmer went around around among the farmers in Oklahoma and he got \$20 that he stood good for and he gave George that \$20 on June 1, 1938. George and I and our two children and that lady and her sister came to California again. This lady who had the car had a job in Sacramento. She could drive and let us off out there where George's sister and her husband lived at the 3S Ranch.

George went to work there again. George's brother-in-law was the first one that came upon the idea that if the land was more level the irrigating problem would be less and so George worked with him then until March of that year. When we got here in 1938 we went right away to the fruit up north. In the meantime, he made money which he sent back to his father and one of his sisters and her family and they came to California. They came and worked with us at Sturtyvents that year in 1938. Then we all came back down to Pixley and picked cotton at the same place and somehow or other we eked out a living that winter. The cotton was over sooner than it was the year before. Anyway we finally managed somehow and in 1939 was the first time that we went north to thin peaches. We got to Mr. Sturtyvent's ranch too late. He didn't have any openings, but he told us where to go and this was to an Italian gentleman named Cervantes. We had fun there. His wife couldn't speak English and he could just barely and he had three daughters who did all the translating and we had more fun with those three daughters. In 1939 and 1940 we went back and thinned peaches with Mr. Cervantes then went back to Patterson and worked for the lady in the apricots and then back to Mr. Sturtyvent and we worked in the peaches. That was in 1938 and 1939. By that time my eldest son was school age and we had to stop somewhere and start educating kids. Fortunately, my husband did see my point of view and he decided the only thing left to do was try to change that man's mind down there at the 3S Ranch and get him to level that land so the irrigating wouldn't be so hard. George and his brother-in-law together couldn't do that so George decided that he was going to hunt somebody that wants to level land before they start irrigating and that was what changed the trick for my husband. He loved the cotton and alfalfa that grew here and all the crops. He accidentally ran into a man in the Pixley Post Office whose name was Tom Medlin and he was a big rancher between Pixley and Tipton. His farm has been sold now, but it's still a beautiful farm. Him and his brother-in-law who we'd help come out here in 1938 got to talking with Mr. Medlin and George told him, "I just love the farms, but I hate that irrigating because your land needs to be more level." Mr. Medlin said, "How did you come by that?" He said, "Well, if the land is level you won't have to dig so much to keep your borders up for your irrigating." Mr. Medlin said, "George, you come over and start leveling my land for me then." I don't remember what salary George made there but I don't think it was anywhere near the \$75 that he had earned over at the other place. We did have a house that we could live in so we went

to work for Mr. Medlin then and didn't go to the fruit anymore. Although after my children were grown and in high school we used to go out to the Tagus Ranch. George worked for Mr. Medlin until 1941 and naturally that was the beginning of the war and things changed in California and work became so good that anybody could find a job.

J.G.: During those years that you were following the fruit were you living in tents?

Smalling: Oh no. We lived under a tree. We never owned a tent during that time. I don't know why. We've never had a tent. We just camped right out in the open.

J.G.: So if it rained you got rained on.

Smalling: We got wet or sat in the car.

J.G.: Of course, the time that you were following the fruit was mostly the summer months.

Smalling: Yes it was but we did get wet. At Patterson one time it rained so hard it got our bed so wet that it took a week for it to dry out. We tried to double them up and put them in the car. We had a 1928 Chevrolet pick up when we came back that's what we bought in 1938. At the end of 1938 we bought a 1929 Ford four door and traded the pickup in on it up at Modesto. You can't very well get a mattress in that kind of a pick up to keep it from getting wet. Yes, we really had it rough, but I know that if we had wanted to we could have gotten a tent but somehow we just didn't do it and I can't remember now why.

J.G.: So in the winter months you'd come back to this area and generally found a rancher that would provide housing for you and in the summertime you camped out on the ranches or the farms where you were working.

Smalling: Yes.

J.G.: Why do you think that the farmers agreed to allow you to live on their ranch when so many of the other people were living along ditch banks.

Smalling: I don't know. The only reason I can say is my husband is a good worker. He always was and he worked for people when other people didn't have work. I'm not bragging, I'm stating a fact. If they said, "Get up and go to work at three o'clock", he got up at three and he didn't complain about it where others might have.

J.G.: Did you work in the peaches and apricots and grapes and all of that right along with him?

Smalling: Yes, yes, along with him.

J.G.: What did you do about child care?

Smalling: They either walked right along with us every step we took or I parked the car at the end of a row. In the grapes you can see them a half a mile down the road and I parked the car and if I got to where I couldn't see them I ran as fast as I could to the car to see what happened. It wasn't like it is now, you would not dare leave a child in a car by itself now. It was different. There was not the danger to the people then like it is now. When we picked cotton they walked right along in the cotton row with either myself or their dad.

J.G.: The farmers didn't object to having these children in the fields?

Smalling: If they did I never heard it. I'm sure that they must not have because there were plenty of people who would have done the work. I never heard any complaints.

J.G.: Was that a common practice for mothers to bring their kids right along with them in the fields when they worked?

Smalling: Yes.

J.G.: It sounds like you don't look back on this kind of camping out under the trees as a hard time. You seem to have a positive feeling about it.

Smalling: Oh sure. It was such a turn around from our life in Oklahoma where, to tell you the truth, we were slowly dying from starvation. You can do that over a period of six or seven years and you're dead. In California anywhere you went there was work, so to me it was happiness. Not having a tent or a house didn't bother me and I'll tell you another thing, it isn't as bad as it sounds. You can be fairly clean and live under a tree.

J.G.: How did you do your laundry?

Smalling: On a rub board, girl, with good, soft Felsnapa soap, just rub-de-dub.

J.G.: You lived close enough to the farmers that you could get water from them and that's how you took care of your cooking?

Smalling: Yes.

J.G.: Did you have a camp stove or something?

Smalling: My husband made us a beautiful stove that baked bread as good as one that you could buy.

J.G.: Sounds like a talented man.

Smalling: Thank you, he was really. He got the tin from Mr. Sturtyvent's farm. The first year we left it with his sister in Pixley. When we came back in 1938 there it sat ready to go again.

J.G.: Did you keep it or throw it away? Do you still have it?

Smalling: No, whenever we got to where we lived without moving around he took it to the dump. Isn't that a shame? I think about that now, I wish I could see it out on my patio right now. He took it to the dump.

J.G.: How about bathing and bathroom and that kind of thing.

Smalling: George built us a little outhouse. He got four posts from the lady at Patterson and he took old pieces of torn up sheets and he made a partition around it and a tub where I washed our clothes. You see we didn't know of bathtubs and toilets and wash basins. We didn't know about electricity. I had never lived in a home with electricity until we came to California, so this was nothing new to us to have a little home built place where you heat the water and put it in the tub where you washed your clothes and we took a bath every night.

J.G.: You must have spent a lot of time carrying and heating water.

Smalling: Really not that long. We had a coffee pot that held five gallons of water. While I was cooking supper George heated the water to take a bath. While I was washing the dishes he either washed our son or our daughter and by the time I got ready to take my bath he was about through with his. Also, our children were different. If he gave my son a bath and put his night clothes on he set him on a little old stool and told him to set there until his mama put you to bed, that child set there. I can't understand it. If you could see my son now you'd know. He's a good man. He worked hard and did good.

J.G.: It sounds like you and your husband were extremely hard working people. It sounds like you never sat down.

Smalling: I think people should like to work. To me those were really happy days, when I think about them now it makes me happy because we had come from so little to so much more. How could a person not be happy?

J.G.: It sounds like George was able to find work all the time during those years.

Smalling: He did. It may have not been a real good job or it might not have been an enormous amount of pay but at least it was something that kept us until he could do better.

J.G.: I know there were a lot of people who had to apply for welfare and the commodities that were handed out during that time. People were able to get some staples which they needed because for some people it was a desperate time, but it sounds like you never had to accept outside help.

Smalling: No, we were fortunate. In the wintertime when it was really bad and the cotton was already gone my husband either plowed the land like for Mr. Medlin for two years in 1940 and 1941 he leveled land each spring. Of course, now you can't work steady in the spring leveling land because it has to be fairly dry but at least he worked enough with

him furnishing our house that we had money.

J.G.: And in the earlier years was he able to pick up work in that slack season? What kind of work did he find?

Smalling: It was always at the 3S Ranch and it was plowing. He just was fortunate.

J.G.: You said earlier that George didn't want to live in the camps when you were following the fruit. Why did he decide to ask to live on the rancher's land rather than in the camps?

Smalling: When we first came out here his sister and him were real close and they really liked to fish and camp back in Oklahoma. We'd only been here about a month and his sister and her husband had heard of the Kings River which George had crossed when he took the car on to Sacramento. They got to talking about a camp that was near there. Okie camps is what they called them in those days. He had seen that camp there and so when we came back him and his sister and her husband got to talking about it and he said, "Hazel, that sure looked like good fishing." His sister said, "Why don't we go up there sometime? I saw a lot of people camped in there," so we finally decided to go up there and go fishing one evening. We went up there and him and his brother-in-law both were afraid those people would steal from you. Most of them had no morals and most of them were so intoxicated until they couldn't talk and, I know, his sister said, "No wonder they don't have any money, they're blowing it all on booze." He was just a little afraid where children were concerned. He didn't think that they'd just deliberately hurt you but accidentally and that was why we wouldn't have stayed in one unless we had had to. I believe he would have come back and irrigated before we would have had to have lived in one.

J.G.: Now are you talking about the government camps? There were some big government camps and there were some grower camps.

Smalling: No, this was a grower camp. We never stayed in the government camps.

J.G.: What did you hear about the government camps? What was that like?

Smalling: Well, we never heard nothing good except there was a place for you if there was no other place. Now that was hearsay too. I'm just saying my own opinion of what he and I and his sister and her husband gathered from it.

J.G.: So was the standard of living in the government camps very good?

Smalling: I believe it would have been if you had tried. If you'd have lived there you'd have kept your area clean, I remember, they had washers where you could go wash your clothes which was a big advantage to the women but you would have had to know to keep your washer clean and things like that. I never went to any of them and I'm only going by

what I hear. They said it was so filthy you couldn't get in the building where the washers were. Now that was no one's fault but the ones that lived there, if that was so. I don't know if it was so.

J.G.: Your general feeling was that the standard of living and the people that were living in the government camps weren't really any different than the ones that were living in the grower camps--that their level of cleanliness and how they took care of their things was not the way you wanted to live.

J.G.: Yes, that's so. That's my opinion. I was never there, but that's my opinion.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

SESSION TWO March 26, 1981

J.G.: Why don't you say again what you just told me before I got the tape recorder set up about your grandmother's illness?

Smalling: It was my uncle instead of my niece who bit my grandmother's nipple and gave her syphilis and also, I'd said that my grandfather got a doctor for me when my second child was born. That wasn't so. My grandfather had died in June of 1936 and it was my uncle that I had lived with that did that.

J.G.: We had gotten to World War II about the 1940s. Before we go onto that part of your life were there any thoughts or anything that you remembered after I left on Monday that had to do with the earlier part of your life that you would like to mention or talk about?

Smalling: No, there wasn't. I really did think about it too. Those two things I did want to correct and I made notes to that effect. When George and I came to California it was different than most people's experience because as I recollect most of the people left farms or homes that they had had for years so they might have felt differently than George and I did. It was happiness for us where it might not have been for them. We didn't leave anything where they had farms and homes and they did have a different thought than we did.

J.G.: Do you remember during the time that you were getting ready to leave Oklahoma about any of the government programs that were being initiated to help bring up farm prices.

Smalling: Yes. George worked on one since you mentioned it about three weeks but it was called the WPA where they worked on the roads and that was different than the ones where the farms were and I really don't know anything about them and that's the only one that we had any contact with. You were allowed about 21 days of work. It wasn't much, but at least it was good for the time being. I can't even remember now the amount of money he earned.

J.G.: That was back in Oklahoma?

Smalling: Yes, this was in Oklahoma. It would either be in the late 1935 or early 1936.

J.G.: Do you remember any of your uncles or any of the people who were on the farms talking about having to kill animals or destroy crops to try to bring up the farm prices.

Smalling: Yes. This was prior to that time. In 1934 and 1935 the sheriff came to talk to my grandfather about killing his animals.

J.G.: I remember now. It slipped my mind. Okay, back to California now. In about 1940 what kind of work did your husband do?

Smalling: He was working leveling land for a man in Tipton but you see our oldest son was getting close to school age and that was work that was done only in the winter months. George knew that it wouldn't last year round and he kept looking for a job that would be full time. In about December 1941, shortly after the war had started, things were getting to where you couldn't buy tires so he came here to Tulare to see about a tire. The Firestone Rubber Company had a shop here and they hired him that day and he worked for them until 1945 and we moved to Tulare in January 1942.

J.G.: What did he do for Firestone?

Smalling: They made tires. They took any tire with a good rim on it and they had a vulcanizer and a mold where they heated it. It got to a certain temperature in the mold and then it was cooled a certain way. They could take a good tire with a rim and make tires. He was called for the service and the first time he went to take his physical he was turned down as 4F because of an ulcer, but later on before the war ended he was called but before his date came up the war ended. He never had to go to the service.

J.G.: He was lucky.

Smalling: Yes, he was lucky to a certain extent.

J.G.: So he was making tires during the war.

Smalling: Yes.

J.G.: Your kids started school here in Tulare?

Smalling: Yes. My last child wasn't born until 1954. I had one in 1942, 1944, 1946, 1948, 1951 and 1954.

J.G.: You were a busy lady.

Smalling: Yes.

J.G.: After your husband went to work in the rubber plant did you continue to work?

Smalling: No. As soon as he got a steady job I worked no more until my oldest son and my second son got old enough to go to the field with me. After the war Tagus Ranch was a big fruit orchard near here and we went out there and worked in the berries and peaches during the summer. My husband he never did any more work like that. He quit working for the tire company after the war because there was no call for that anymore since people could buy new tires. He got different jobs until he became an electrician and then he didn't do anything else until after that.

J.G.: What year did he become an electrician?

Smalling: In 1947.

J.G.: You took your two oldest sons to work with you on the Tagus Ranch?

Smalling: I had five sons and three daughters. My oldest daughter was the one that was born back east and then I didn't have anymore until the last group of children and as the sons got old enough to go to the field they all went with us and we'd pick cotton in the fall and they would come on Saturdays with me.

J.G.: Tell me again. Your oldest daughter was born in Oklahoma, then before you settled in Tulare you had two more children?

Smalling: No, I had no more children until 1942. My first son was born in California in 1942, as a matter of fact 39 years ago yesterday.

J.G.: So you had one child when you were working the crops and then when you settled here in Tulare you had the other seven children?

Smalling: Six.

J.G.: Oh, I thought you had eight all together.

Smalling: I did, but you see I had one son before we ever came to California then when we went back that year we stayed long enough until my daughter was born in Oklahoma.

J.G.: The rest of your children were born right here in Tulare.

Smalling: Yes.

J.G.: Did you have any problem getting medical attention?

Smalling: No, I didn't. That was an odd way. The hospital was close and I thought that would be too expensive and I wouldn't go to the hospital and I'd get a doctor that would deliver them at home, but none would and the doctor that I finally went to who delivered five of my children said that he promised himself that he wouldn't deliver any more at home. The last

child that he delivered at home needed an oxygen mask to make it breathe right. He said that he could never make it breathe and kept promising himself that if that baby would live that he would never deliver another at home. I did have that one son in the hospital. Nowadays they have those nurse practitioners that deliver them at home, I'm certainly against that.

J.G.: It's okay if everything goes all right.

Smalling: Yes, but you see just like that doctor explained it to me the only reason that baby died was because he didn't have enough oxygen to fill its lungs to live. In the hospital everything is so handy. I had no problems as far as I was concerned. I probably could have delivered all six of my children at home fairly easily, but that was beside the point. It was easier for me. My husband said, "No more children [born] in the home." You see he had to help and he wanted to more of that.

J.G.: Did he help deliver your first two?

Smalling: Yes he did, him and my aunt and the doctor. So two was all he wanted to help.

J.G.: You said that you worked in the berries in Tagus Ranch. What kind of berries were they?

Smalling: Boysenberries, very few blackberries, mostly all boysenberries were grown there.

J.G.: Did they have a big crop?

Smalling: I think at that time was the biggest crop just on that ranch of any place in California.

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

Smalling: That would have been from 1946 to 1954. 1954 was the last year there.

J.G.: You're the first person who has ever talked about working in berries in California.

Smalling: They just had an enormous berry patch. I better not say how many acres because I'm not very good at that, but I know that it was big. I don't know how long it had been there when we started, but it would last no more than six weeks during the early spring. Sometimes it would start before the children were out of school.

J.G.: Is that hard work?

Smalling: Yes, it's hard work because you have to stoop all the time. They were no more than three feet high. Now they put them on wires. When you get your box filled you put it in the shade because berries are real easy

ruined and if the sun hits them that's it. I know we'd picked maybe ten or twelve of the little boxes and then we'd carry them out to get them checked.

J.G.: Do they still grow them around here?

Smalling: No and Tagus Ranch is no more. It's all been sold off. It hasn't been about three months ago, I guess, it came out in the paper that even the office buildings and all had been auctioned off.

J.G.: You must have been a busy lady working in the fields part of the time and raising your eight children.

Smalling: You know that still sounds like happiness. To me it is happiness because we didn't have really very much then. We had a garden and an orchard and we worked in the fruit and I canned and my children worked. Every one of my children were really hard workers except my youngest daughter.

J.G.: So your children all went to grammar school and high school in Tulare?

Smalling: Well, my two oldest and my two youngest graduated from here but you see then my husband became an electrician quite by accident in 1946. Our neighbor man had been wiring houses so he came to George one day and told him that he was going to join the union and see if he could get into the electrical union and did George want to go with him. It was just such a good job and he had earned more money at it than any other job he'd ever had so he told the man, "Yes". So they went over to Visalia and both joined the union and they sent him to work for a company called Commercial Electric which was over in the southern part of Tulare and he worked for them about six months. The government was building a lot of new buildings on Guam and they had hired the owner of this company to go to Guam to be one of the foremen for the electrical work. He tried to get my husband to go. We really discussed it, but we didn't want the children to leave the school so their daddy gave in. He went back to the union hall and he told them that he didn't want to go to Guam because his family didn't want to go so they sent him out to work for a company called Industrial Electric here in Tulare and that was the company that he stayed with until he became disabled. He had worked for them until 1959 when Industrial Electric was the low bidder on 178 houses in Palm Springs. They asked George if he wanted to go over there and he said he would so him and another man went over to Palm Springs to wire those houses. They got so many jobs in Palm Springs until the company moved to Palm Springs. In 1960 we moved to Palm Springs and stayed until 1966 when we moved back to Tulare.

J.G.: So then the four middle children graduated from Palm Springs.

Smalling: Yes.

J.G.: What brought you back to Tulare?

Smalling: Well, I don't know really when it first hit my husband. The time I first noticed it was when my oldest son was sixteen. My husband had got to drinking and it was on something I've tried to think of in the past two days. I don't know what it was that my son was wanting to buy, but his dad was going to have to sign for him and he'd made an appointment for his dad to go and help him with it, but his dad was passed out. He says to me, "Mother, do you know that every time I want Daddy to do something he's passed out?" Then it dawned on me that his drinking had become a habit. It was really getting the best of him. The reason we came back from Palm Springs up here is the owner of the company said that George couldn't work anymore unless he controlled his drinking. George would rather drink so he came back up here and worked for some other electrical company until the union told him that he would either have to go to their alcoholic center or not work anymore. They would see to it that he would get his pension from the union. He took the pension. His drinking finally killed him two years ago last July. He'd been a hard working man. A lot of people said they didn't think I should have stayed with him, but I'm glad I did. I'm glad I helped him if I did at all. I have no regrets. It is lonely. I feel his life ended before it should have and left me by myself. Sometimes I get awfully upset about it.

J.G.: You must have raised your kids by yourself.

Smalling: Well, from the time my eldest son was sixteen or seventeen I did it all by myself.

J.G.: It's not easy to raise teenagers all alone.

Smalling: No, I have to agree to that. All of my children now have made something of their lives. Two of my sons became electricians. One is an electrical contractor and the other one is a general contractor. We've had lots of tragedy in our family. My daughter is a manager of Cal Gas Company in Salinas. In 1965 her husband was killed in a mechanical cotton picker here in Tulare. That was so bad. When I think of it now I just get a terrible feeling. She lost her voice. She worked for a butane company here in Tulare and when they told her that her husband was dead she didn't speak for two or three days. I was so scared for her because she had two children to raise and I thought, "My, if she don't get her voice back that would pose a problem for her." The doctor came to see her and said, "She'll get over that. It might take her six months or a week." She spoke in about two days.

J.G.: That's a big hurdle to overcome. One day you're married and you have a husband and then the next day you don't. I can understand that.

Smalling: All of my sons except one had to go to the service. That was during the draft. My 39 year old son was just married and that kept him out or he had a job that kept him out, but he was the only one that didn't go. My son that passed away in October 1968 had to go to Vietnam. When he came home he had Hodgkin's disease and he died in two months

after he got home. He joined the Army and they made him a medic and sent him to Vietnam. He went to Vietnam about four months after he got in the service and when he was over there about six months him and one medic and then twelve other soldiers went around in Vietnam helping the natives as well as the soldiers. He would write home to send food. "Anything, Mother, that was light and you could fix," because he said that everybody was starving and he wanted us to send aspirins or anything like that that we could buy over the counter because he said he never had enough medicine either. He'd been there about six months and he wrote home once and said he'd fainted but he said he thought it was because him and the other men who were in this tank or whatever you want to call it.

J.G.: A lark. Is that what he called it?

Smalling: Yes, that's it. He said they did without their food to feed the children and he said he thought that he had just gone overboard but that he was going to start eating more. He went for his R&R [Rest and Recuperation] in Hawaii and his wife went over there to see him and when she came home she said, "He looks like a walking skeleton. I'm just hoping for when he can come home." When he did come home he only lived two months.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1

J.G.: That happened in 1968?

Smalling: 1968.

J.G.: Your husband died in what year?

Smalling: He died in 1978, it will be three years this July. In 1968 I began to work. My husband had earned an enormous amount of money and he had allowed me to spend it and we had accumulated lots of property. He wanted to sell everything, but I didn't because I was as bad at spending money as he was and I knew if we had money it wouldn't last no matter how much it was it wouldn't last very long. So I kept asking him not to and he never insisted too much. I worked from 1968 until I got to be 60 years old and then I retired from that job at the county hospital in Tulare.

J.G.: What kind of work were you doing there?

Smalling: I was working in the kitchen over there. George had died that year that I was 60. I'd been home about a year and the county hospital was going to close. The dietician called me one day because people were quitting to get different positions someplace else and she asked me if I would come back and work part time because they were having such a time keeping employees. I said that under my pension from the county I can't work and she said that they had gotten special permission for me to come

back and work ninety days per fiscal year. I went back and worked for them until they closed. Then I thought, "I'll not work anymore," but I decided I wanted to work a little bit more so I went over to the district and I've been over there now ever since.

J.G.: As you look back over the whole thing, what do you think was the thing that started your husband drinking? It sounds like he didn't have that problem until he started making really good money as an electrician. Was it too much money that you were just not accustomed to having so much extra money?

Smalling: It must have been that. His life was easier for him too really. He became a foreman. He saw that the work was done right. He had a trusted position so to speak to where he had to answer to no one. He had a pickup provided. He had any kind of tools he wanted. He had credit cards from the Industrial Electric and the extra money, an enormous amount of money he had earned. I have thought about it so much till I really don't know. I don't think it was nothing that he and I did to each other that would have caused it. It slips up on you to a certain extent and it controls your life before you really know it.

J.G.: It's a disease that can really get you from behind. That's true. Do all of your kids live around this area?

Smalling: No, they've all moved. My oldest son and my youngest son live in Palm Springs. They work together as general contractors. My oldest daughter lives in Salinas, California and Jerry, then my second son, lives in Newport Beach. He's an electrical contractor over at Riverside, then my next son, he's a Los Angeles policeman. My youngest daughter lives in Hanford.

J.G.: What keeps you here in Tulare?

Smalling: Sometimes I wonder. That's one reason I went to work, I like to go, but I've gotten to where I'm not too good at traveling alone and they all live so far away. I do own a house in Palm Springs and maybe sometime I might move over there because two in one town is the most I have and Riverside is not far, but I stay here because this house is where we moved in 1946 and except for the one in Palm Springs it's the only place I've lived. My kids and their dad built this house so I'd hate to leave it.

J.G.: I can see that.

Smalling: But I really don't know. I'll probably never move.

J.G.: Some of the people who have migrated from Oklahoma have had people use the term Okie to refer to them. Have you ever had any feelings about being called Okie?

Smalling: Only if it's in a derogatory way. When people speak to you, you know

whether they're really talking bad to you or not. As far as someone calling me an Okie, if they are referring to me in a nice way, I find it's fine because really that's what I am. I'm a person who's from Oklahoma and I just don't mind it a bit, but if they say it in a derogatory way it gets my dandruff up.

J.G.: Have you ever had anybody do that?

Smalling: Oh yes, lots of times.

J.G.: Was that during the time that you first came to California or has that been more recently?

Smalling: It's been later than that.

J.G.: What about your kids when they were attending school here in Tulare, did you ever feel they were the object of any hostility.

Smalling: No I don't.

J.G.: Of course, by that time your husband had gotten away from crops and had gone into something completely different.

Smalling: In fact, really my children were looked up to. I'll tell you why. They had a whole host of brothers and sisters and they loved each other in such a way that everybody else knew it. Their friends were envious, it used to be such a thrill for their friends to come to our house. At that time our home was not a very nice building. We didn't have nice furniture but they came to play with our children and they were happy and they were really looked up to for that reason. Yes, my children looked upon their childhood as very happy. I can tell from the way they talk to me now.

J.G.: When you look back over the whole experience of coming to California and living as farm workers for a period of time and coming here to Tulare and settling, do you think that your experience during that time of migrating to California had any lasting affect on you as a person?

Smalling: Oh sure. I think I would not have minded even if George had had a good job in Oklahoma for us to move to California because I've loved California, especially Tulare. Tulare has been really good to me. I didn't particularly like Palm Springs. It's like my two sons Jerry and Larry said, "Mother, there's no one there but outlaws and millionaires and we don't fit in either way." Yes, I've enjoyed being in California. I really have. My relatives, the ones that did stick it out in Oklahoma, some of them have become multi-millionaires because there has been oil on their property. All have done fairly well.

J.G.: Do you go back to Oklahoma?

Smalling: Oh yes, I got back twice a year. My husband and I were always travelers.

We'd spend our last penny to go somewhere. George and I together went to every state except Alaska and I've gone to Alaska since he passed away, but we were planning on going there.

J.G.: Sounds like you invested your money wisely in a lot of property and things like that and you also have done well over the years.

Smalling: We started out with nothing and when I went to pay the inheritance tax the attorney kept asking me how much we had when we came to California and I keep telling him we didn't have anything. He acted like he couldn't believe me because of the amount that I was going to have to pay on the inheritance tax. Another couple that was like us they may be living in a rented room in a house and I think the Lord has blessed George and I because I even have places that I can rent and get money from. He was a person like I say who was doing something. It may have been a lowly job, but at least he earned money and we lived from it.

J.G.: Sounds like he was really a hard working person.

Smalling: Yes he was.

J.G.: Have you ever read The Grapes of Wrath?

Smalling: Yes I have.

J.G.: What did you think about that book since that was really written about the experience that the migrant from Oklahoma was suppose to have had?

Smalling: The only thing in there that I could not agree with, it may have been based on fact, but it talked about the bulldozer pushing over people's farms, houses and turning them under. To my knowledge that never happened. The people who lost their farms and their homes lost it because they couldn't pay their property taxes. Those farms were sold at auction and naturally people with money were the ones that bought them, but the homes were left. I guess it was in the late 1940s before they began to rebuild homes and there are still some homes that are the same now as they were when I left.

J.G.: The Joads lived quite differently. It sounds like the Joads lived more like the people you were describing when you went fishing on the river.

Smalling: Yes. But then too they might have been different. George hadn't even thought about his drinking at that time and they have have been through so much or something that that might have started and, of course, now they weren't a drinking family though as I recall. They didn't drink. They just didn't have anything.

J.G.: Did George look upon the move to California and the life in California as having been as good a move as you feel it was?

Smalling: Oh, yes because when we went back that first time when our first daughter was born he never went back to Oklahoma but twice after that.

J.G.: So he really felt that it was a good move?

Smalling: Yes.

J.G.: Do you have anything that you would like to add?

Smalling: No, I don't think so.

END OF INTERVIEW

Edmond Bryan Thompson

b. 1897, Oklahoma

[His parents from Illinois/Indiana] [?]

Juel King

b. 1901, Texas

Hazel Oleta Thompson

b. 1918, Tuttle, Grady Co.,
Oklahoma

Education: high school

Church: Baptist

m. 1935 →

George Washington
Smalling

b. 1916, Oklahoma

George Bryan
b. 1936
Electrical
EstimatorJerry Robert
b. 1942
Electrical
ContractorJewell Frances
b. 1938
Manager, Cal Gas
PropaneLarry Preston
b. 1944
deceasedJames Danny
b. 1948
Policeman,
L.A.P.D.Virginia Kay
b. 1946
HousewifeCarol Denise
b. 1954
HousewifeDouglas Wayne
b. 1951
Carpenter

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