Terry Clipper came to California in his early twenties. His interview gives a description of the problems of the farmers in Oklahoma and his experience in the Civilian Conservation Corps. His experience in California is far less dramatic than most, perhaps because he was single and had relatives in California who were fairly well established. Mr. Clipper has a tendency to resort to violence as a problem solving strategy.

Judith Gannon
Interviewer
Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: Terry Clipper (Age: 64)

INTERVIEWER: Judith Gannon

DATED: May 8, 1981

J.G.: This is an interview with Mr. Terry Clipper for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Judith Gannon at 2130 Milvia Avenue, Bakersfield, California on May 8, 1981 at 10 a.m.

J.G.: Why don't you begin by telling me a little bit about what you remember of your childhood in Oklahoma. Just start with your earliest memories and come forward.

Clipper: I was born and raised on a farm three miles east of Dustin, Oklahoma. We dealt in cattle, horses, mules and farming. There were seven of us in the family: five girls and two boys, and we all worked on the farm. The girls' job was to do the milking, and my job most of the time was riding after the stock. My oldest sister rode after the stock too with me and Dad. He bought and sold cattle and farmed to raise feed for our cattle. My mother did all the cooking for the children. We had a four room house, and we boarded two school teachers. We had an extra room connected to the house we called the little tin kitchen where my mother did most of the cooking. We usually kept one or two hired hands until the times got so bad that we had to let them all go. I lived a half mile from the schoolhouse, and we all walked to school down the section line. Down the section if you walked to school you couldn't get a wagon or car over it. You had to go horseback. It was so rough you either walked or went horseback if you went the roundabout way it was about two miles to get to the schoolhouse from the wagon or car. There is where I finished my seventh grade. I went to the seventh grade then came the Depression. In 1929 when it really hit, it wiped us out completely. We didn't have anything paid for but they took everything we had—all the milk cows and all the mules, horses, saddle horses, saddles, wagons, everything we had.

J.G.: Who is they?

Clipper: The loan companies, the banks. We started into New Mexico. My dad
thought we'd go out there and get a start, but we got as far south as Ardmore, Oklahoma, just 125 miles southwest of where we were. My uncle was running a dairy there, and we stopped and started to help him. We had done a little farming.

J.G.: Before we go to Ardmore, how big a farm did your father farm there in Dustin, Oklahoma?

Clipper: Well, we farmed about 200 acres, and we had a lot of grass and open territory where we ran horses and mules and some cattle. I don't know who owned that country. It was just wild country back in the hills.

J.G.: Did your father raise horses and things like that for sale?

Clipper: Yes, he would sell them but mostly he would raise the horses for us to ride. All of us kids had a bunch of horses to ride. We worked in the fields. My sisters would go to the field and chop cotton and chop corn. They would go in the fall of the year and pick cotton, gather corn, shock oats or shock cane. They worked just like a man. My oldest sister handled a team of mules just like a man. Well, she could do anything a man could do because that's the way all of us were brought up.

J.G.: Now your father was buying this place?

Clipper: Yes, he was buying it. It was a good place. I would say it was the best place in that country. We had a windmill, a huge silo, two big barns and a big long henhouse. They were big barns, and we had an orchard. We always had grapes, peaches, plums and blackberries and we always worked in that and kept that up good but first part of the year was the watermelon patch. We didn't have much, nothing at all compared to now. We didn't have a radio but we had a piano and the two youngest sisters played the piano by ear. I was too busy rabbit hunting, and I never did learn anything like that. I guess we had a happy childhood. Naturally when you're young, you're happy and you don't know any better. We didn't have a lot but I remember when they wiped us out. Boy, that was a sad thing. All of us kids lost all of our horses. We lost everything we had.

J.G.: I can imagine that must have been quite a scene when the banks came and physically took away all of your tools and things.

Clipper: Yes. They got everybody else too so we were all in the same boat. They took all of our chickens. My mother used to raise a lot of turkeys and she always raised a lot of chickens. When it came time for us to wash clothes we had a black iron pot and we'd heat water in that. She always made her own soap--lye soap from the hogs we'd kill in the fall of the year. We always killed six, eight or ten big fattened hogs. We would kill a beef in the fall of the year when it would get cold. With a block and tackle we'd pull it way up in the windmill where it would be cooler. We ate rough stuff I guess. It was good food. We always raised our own sweet potatoes and Irish potatoes and we'd always have
a turnip patch. It got kind of tiresome eating that stuff. We didn't barbecue steaks like we do now. We'd just go up and cut off a piece of meat and I guess my mother would fry it as far as I can remember. I do remember later on in the 1930s we got a pressure cooker and when we'd kill a beef she would can it. Lots of times we wouldn't have so much to eat because we'd have a bad year—drought or the cattle didn't do good or couldn't raise any potatoes or anything of this sort. My daddy wasn't an educated man. He only had a third grade education but he was a hard worker, a real hard worker and so was my mother, washing clothes and rubbing on a rub board. When we got through washing they'd take the water and wash the rooms in the house. We didn't have linoleum on the floor or anything like that. On Saturday when we took a bath they'd use the rest of the bath water to wash the floor. My mother always swept the front yard. We always had to keep the yard clean and picked up because she said the people who have dirty yards have dirty houses on the inside. That's the way she did things. She cooked on a wooden stove. We had a wood heating stove and had to go to the timber in the fall and all year long to get wood and bring it out. Then right outside the house about 100 feet we had what we called a wood pile and that's where we'd stack the wood. We'd cut the wood and saw it in links for the firewood and for the heating stove. We had one heating stove in the house for the winter and we'd always sit around that heating stove in one room. We didn't have wallpaper on the walls. We had newspapers and my mother would mix it with flour and water and make a paste and we'd paste these papers on the house. Our house was about three-quarter inch plank boards, and that's as thick as the walls were.

J.G.: In an Oklahoma winter I'll bet that got chilly.

Clipper: It did, but by putting that thick coat of newspapers on the walls the wind didn't come though there except that it would break and you could hear it whistling through there and then we'd paste it back up. I know lots of times when it rained in the summertime the roof would leak and we'd have to set pans on the floor to catch the water. You could get in the attic and look up through there and you could see daylight but then when it rained those shingles would swell up and we wouldn't have so much rain through there.

J.G.: You said earlier that you boarded a couple of school teachers at your house. How did they decide that you would have the school teachers?

Clipper: We were the closest ones to school.

J.G.: That must have been a pretty full house with seven kids, two school teachers and hired hands.

Clipper: I don't know how in the world we did it. I know the school teachers had one room for them and they slept together. All of us kids just piled up on the bed and in that little tin kitchen where my mother did her cooking, why, we had a bed in there. I remember a lot of times when
we had cotton seed in the little kitchen and me and my brother would sleep on that cotton seed with a mattress on top of that which was real warm and soft. My mother always had feather beds in the house because we sometimes raised geese. In the fall of the year I'd kill ducks and we'd pick the feathers off of them and make feather beds.

J.G.: I wonder how people managed to do all those things. They must have been working all the time.

Clipper: We never sat down. For instance, we were up early in the morning and gone till late at night, especially my dad and I. The girls didn't have to get much in the daytime when it was cold, but they had to get up early and milk and they'd milk at night. On rainy days if we weren't in school especially on a Saturday or Sunday when we couldn't be out in the field working because it was raining, he'd send us to the barn to shuck corn or, if we had peanuts, to pick peanuts off the vine to get us out of the house.

J.G.: Sounds like you had very little time for recreation and that you worked a lot.

Clipper: We didn't really know what recreation was as we know it now. We did play dominos and checkers and in the wintertime we'd play hully gull with pecans because that was one of the ways we had of making money if the cotton crop was bad which it always was. We'd pick up pecans and sell them to buy clothes for the winter and we'd play hully gull as a game. If we had anything to read we'd read a lot.

J.G.: How far did you live from town?

Clipper: We lived three miles from town.

J.G.: Did you ever go into town on Saturdays or things like that?

Clipper: Once and a great while we would go, maybe once or twice or three times we'd get to go to town and they had a silent movie house there and we might get to go to a picture show. In the summertime another form of entertainment we had was to go to town because they always had a brush arbor there. The Holy Roller religion would have a brush arbor and we'd go there. Most everybody who did would either ride a horse or go in a wagon and horses. That's the only way we had of traveling. We'd watch the Holy Rollers sing and dance and shout and roll on the floors. That was great entertainment to us. Then we'd go home. We didn't participate in the religion at all but that was a lot of fun because some of them could sing well and they always had musical instruments. To watch them get the Holy Ghost and start talking in the unknown tongue jumping and running and rolling and twisting was a lot of fun.

J.G.: You said it was a brush arbor?

Clipper: Yes, a brush arbor. If they built it square they'd put in a tall post
on each corner and usually a fork in it and then they'd put long poles in that and put a post in between to hold it up. Then they'd put a center pole down and go out in the country, cut down persimmon trees that had a lot of leaves and pile it up on top of there. That would be a place if they had church on Sunday why they'd be in the shade. We always called it a brush arbor.

J.G.: That's the first time I've heard that expression. Let's go on to when you got to Ardmore.

Clipper: We started farming again. We rented a place but things were so bad along about that time because we'd had a seven or eight year drought and no one was raising any crops, just barely getting by. We did what farm work we could there. We went to school and lived about a mile from school. Most of the kids always had better clothes than we did but we were always clean. Mama always saw that we were clean. We would carry our own food to school in a dinner pail like we did before.

My dad had always been a hard worker and so was my mother. It just seemed to take all the life out of them when they lost what they did. Then it hit Ardmore and we couldn't go any further than New Mexico. We didn't have the funds to go on. There was no future or hope at all. Just like everybody else in the country we just raised our meat, eggs and milk and that's about what we lived on. We raised a little corn to have corn meal and I know us kids went barefoot until we went to school. There was no work.

We lived on this farm. Fifty feet from our house was Highway 77 which went from way down in Texas to way up into Kansas. It was a main traveled highway and the highway was full of people hitchhiking. They didn't know where they were going. They were just going and many times we'd have people stop in our house and ask for food. If we had it, we'd give it to them. Lots and lots of times they'd would ask if they could stay all night and sleep in the barn which we let them do. In those days we didn't lock doors. We didn't have anything anybody wanted anyway and you didn't feel afraid of people at all then.

J.G.: About how old were you when you were living in Ardmore?

Clipper: I was fourteen years old when I got there.

J.G.: That would have been 1931?

Clipper: Yes.

J.G.: Then you stayed there how long in Ardmore?

Clipper: We stayed in Ardmore until 1934 and in 1934 we moved farther out in the country about five or six miles and again we were on a farm. No work, drought—we couldn't raise anything. We had a few head of cattle and some horses and mules which we accumulated somehow. In 1934 we
had a very dry year that year and I got a job working on a big dairy about three miles from the house. I worked ten hours a day for ten cents an hour—that's what I got. Ten hours a day for $1 and I worked right along side of men with families and they got the same $1 that I got. Of course, it worked the same way with me. I would take the $1 home and give it to my folks to buy sugar and things like that. Of course, I didn't drink coffee or anything like that. I didn't work steady. It was just during the haying season or when we were filling silos or thrashing oats or baling hay. I remember in 1934 it was so hot and I was tending oat straw to a gasoline press right out in the hot sun and we were putting out six or seven hundred bales of hay a day.

When we got through there I went up to where I heard the broomcorn was supposed to start up around Lindsay, Oklahoma, which is about 50 miles from there. I hitchhiked up there and I stayed with some people I knew. They were on a farm and they had a bunch of children and I stayed two nights with them and they didn't have anything to eat. We had a little oatmeal for breakfast and not very much for dinner. I got up there a little bit early for the broomcorn work although I worked four hours and made 80¢. I came back home because I couldn't afford to board out and these poor people couldn't afford to keep me either.

I came back home and a friend of my dad wanted me to take care of some cattle they had on this pasture. He had a partner and they had about 300 to 400 head of cattle. When I was there the government was buying up these old, poor cows that were starving to death and were sick to give the people some help. President Roosevelt got in and that's when they started buying these old cattle. Out on this place they killed about 35 to 40 because they were allowed to take a certain percent of what you had. For three days me and a hired hand had three mules each, and we were pulling these cattle down off the side of the hill and stacking them. They'd passed the word around that anybody could come there and take any part of the cow that they wanted. They had some people there that were skinning part of the cattle for the skins, but the old cows were so poor that [to eat them] was like chewing leather off the soles of your shoes, if you had shoes with soles on them. We'd pull them off down there and let the buzzards eat them.

Then he had us breaking some ground. He sewed some wheat just to make some pasture. I remember when I got through and I had plowed the last furrow, we were about three quarters of a mile from the house. That's the last I remember until about two weeks later because of what happened when we left the field. We went to the house and he'd bought a horse and brought in there. This other hired hand and me were living there along in this place and he told me later that we left the field and went to the house and unharnessed our mules. I caught this horse and I was going to rope off of it to see if it would make a roping horse. When I was after this calf the horse stumbled and fell with me, and the next thing I remember was the next morning he asked me if I was going to get up and go to work and I said, "No. I don't feel like it." That's
all I can remember for about two weeks. They took me home and I know I was sick or something and I always asked my mother what happened to me and she said that with the heat all summer that I had the brain fever. That's all she could say. I just laid there and rested and slept. They poured water on me to keep me cool for about two weeks and then I was all right.

J.G.: Do you think you had a concussion?

Clipper: My head never was sore. I just had a bruised spot here on this shoulder. I don't know what in the world it was. That's the only time in my life I've been knocked out and I've done a lot of boxing and fighting and I was never knocked out in my life and I don't even know what happened then.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

J.G.: Tell me first about working for this farmer who was paying you 50¢ a day.

Clipper: He was paying me 50¢ a day and board. We worked from before sunup till after sundown because we were born to work and work was all we knew. I never did learn to play so we just worked and after I got hurt I never did go back there. I don't remember what happened. I don't think he had the money to pay me. I believe that's what it was. So I didn't do anything else the rest of that year. The next year in 1935 I was working part time on this big dairy again for 10¢ an hour. I was shocking oats behind a binder that was pulled by a tractor and I would have to go and half run all the time to keep up with it. The reason I was able to do it was because the oat crop wasn't very good because of the drought. They didn't produce very good. The fact we had small fields and me being young, I could trot and I kept the oats shocked up myself.

In 1934 my dad got on the WPA [Works Progress Administration] and in 1935 they had three CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] which was about fourteen miles from where I lived. Of course fourteen miles back there was a long ways because you either rode on horseback or you went in a wagon. Once and a while you might catch a ride in a car but there were very few cars. So I went in the CCC and got $30. They sent $25 home to my folks and I got to keep $5. I didn't smoke or anything like that so at the end of the month I'd always draw my $5 and I'd take that home because so many at home needed help. That was the greatest thing that ever happened except the WPA. When President Roosevelt came in and started creating jobs and providing jobs for people that were destitute. I mean good, hard working people with no jobs, no work, nothing. We did road work and they paid us $1.50. I mean you could work three days every two weeks. That's what they allowed us. They paid you $1.50 for your team on top of that.

If you were on a WPA they would send a commodity truck around. A
commodity truck was where they had staples in it like cheese, sugar, coffee, oatmeal, corn meal and stuff like that. It would meet at the schoolhouse which was about a mile and a half from where we lived and the people wouldn't go meet this truck because they didn't want the handout. They were hungry but most of them had too much pride see. So they sent out a letter that if you don't meet this truck to get these staples, they would cut you off the WPA. It hurt my dad so bad that he would send me on a horse up there with a sack to get the staples. It didn't bother me because I was young, but it would hurt his pride because they had to go up there and take that handout. It was a lifesaver--no clothes or anything like that but just food.

So when I went in the CCC it was like getting money from home without writing for it because $25 went home to the family to keep them going and I got $5 of which I wound up with $4.50 because I'd buy soap to take a bath with. When I was in there, there would be guys who had been there a long time and they had some extra clothes like extra shoes, extra fatigues, work clothes, shirts and things. They'd want to go to town and I had this extra money. Well, I would buy that stuff and take it home and give it to my dad and brother. I'd take home raincoats, overcoats, socks, shoes, overshoes. They never had any good clothes like that before.

I went in on June 18 in Ardmore and on January 11, 1936 they moved the whole company to the Grand Canyon in Arizona. On January 11, we left Ardmore and went to the Grand Canyon and got there on January 13, 1936. When we got off the train there at the Grand Canyon it was snowing real heavy, beautiful snow. I'd never seen snow that heavy and thick because in Oklahoma it doesn't snow that hard and soft. There were tall trees around there and we got off the train and we got on the trucks to go out to where our camp was going to be which would be the Indian Watch Tower that's 25 miles east of the Grand Canyon Village right along on the rim. We got out about a quarter mile or so from the Grand Canyon Village and they stopped the trucks and they told us, "Now we want you to go out and see the Canyon." We couldn't see the Canyon on account of the bid thick juniper trees. So we all jumped off the truck, there were about 200 of us, and we ran over there. When we went through those trees we were immediately right on the edge of the Canyon. I knew it scared me because I jumped back and crawled up and looked over it because I'm from flat land country and that Canyon is huge. Right straight off down there was our camp about 250 yards from the edge of the Canyon again although it wasn't quite as deep out there.

We stayed until May 28. While we were there we built fences, roads and landscaped some roads and built some telephone lines. Twice while I was there I walked down to the Colorado River and from this Indian Watch Tower you could see the Colorado River down there. It looked like you could just throw a rock off down there but it took us about six or seven hours to walk down there because we had to go two miles west and go down what they called an old horse thief trail winding down the Canyon to the River. I walked down there twice and that was enough for me.
On May 28, 1936, they moved the whole company to the Big Horn Mountains in Wyoming, up the big canyon there. It was right up in the hills and the valleys. It was the most beautiful summer I've ever spent in my life, beautiful and green up there. We built some roads and we worked on a dam they had up there and we fought forest fires. Then on October 16, 1936, they moved us to Brownwood, Texas where we were right on the edge of a big lake. We were about 150 yards from the water of this big lake, and we worked on roads and built some buildings and fences. I stayed there until October 1937 when I got out of the CCC.

J.G.: Did you just decide to leave or what happened?

Clipper: I got as high as I could in the CCC. I was a leader and I got in a fight. [I] got my jaw broken. They sent me to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, to a hospital down there. When I got back from the hospital after about seven weeks, they'd reduced me in rank and discharged the other guy that I got into a fight with. I'd been in so long, 27 months, I could no longer re-enlist. I was back to an enlisted man and I had spent my time. If I'd been a leader like I was I could have still stayed. So I came back home. We were on a farm again. We'd picked up a little bit and had a little bit better clothes.

J.G.: When you were working the CCC with all young men doing road and that kind of thing, what kinds of entertainment did you have in the camp or was it all work?

Clipper: We would work eight hours a day and we got paid at the end of the month. If it was bad weather and we couldn't work we got paid anyway. Say there were two or three days in Oklahoma that we couldn't get out and work, well we just stayed and camped, but if Saturday proved to be a good clear day then we had to work Saturday, but there weren't many days like that without work.

J.G.: What did you do the days you didn't work?

Clipper: When I was in Oklahoma on Friday evening if I didn't have to pull K.P., that's kitchen police, I would come home because I only lived about fourteen miles from home. I would come home. The entertainment we had was they provided boxing gloves for us, horseshoes, basketball and in the recreation hall they had one pool table and after hours when we'd come in from the field our time was our own until the next morning. We weren't regimented or anything like that and we didn't have to sign out or anything like we just had to be there the next morning because they'd run a check on us. I really enjoyed the CCC. It was the best pay I ever had up to that time. They furnished my clothes and hospitalization. Those were the best clothes I ever owned.

J.G.: Do you remember what you and that guy got into a fight over when you got your jaw broken?

Clipper: Yes. They put him on my work crew and we went out one morning and he
Clipper, T.

wanted to build a fire and it wasn't cold enough for a fire. He was a great big guy and an overbearing guy and the other leaders couldn't handle him. I told him there would be no fire and one word brought on another and although I wasn't as big as he was I cut down on him and we fought. I felt something on my jaw. I said, "Hold it a minute, I think I broke my jaw," and he stopped. I was bleeding at the mouth and he didn't knock me down. He came over and put his arm around me and we walked to the truck and to the infirmary. That's the last I ever saw him. He was just too big for me and I didn't have a club. There weren't any clubs or rocks or things around me. I just had my fist and he was just too big for me. I didn't hurt him and that's the only place he hurt me. He didn't knock me down or anything. That's the last time I ever saw him.

J.G.: Sounds like they just kind of cashiered him out right there.

Clipper: I think they did get rid of him the next day of course I was already gone. I remember that ride. I rode about 225 miles in an ambulance. It took us all night to get there it seemed to me. They injected me with cocaine. Man, that was a rough ride. I stayed in that hospital and had my jaw wired together for about four weeks I think.

J.G.: When you got out of the CCC and went back to Oklahoma how old were you then?

Clipper: I was 20 because I turned 21 when I got to California. I left Ardmore because I wanted to come to California. One of my sisters was already out here in California. She'd married a fellow and they were married for over a year but nobody knew it. He was already out here working and she was back there so he came back for Christmas and she left after Christmas and came to California. She left in December and he was picking fruit out here. I wanted to come to California because there wasn't anything there. I had a job building a big pond for a fellow named Plez McGee who later was a partner in this Kerr and McGee Oil Company which is that company involved with that girl in Oklahoma two or three years ago. They thought they'd killed her over that nuclear business--Karen [Silkwood].

J.G.: I remember that. She was exposed to a massive dose of radiation.

Clipper: She was reporting it or something and they killed her. She did get something out of it. I don't know what it was but I worked for this McGee and he was paying me 15¢ an hour building this pond. I was driving the team and running a slip. A slip looks kind of like a spoon but it's got two big handles on it and has two mules hooked to it and you work it in the ground and you dig out dirt and take it up on the hill and dump it. I decided to come to California. I left but my dad didn't want me to hitchhike, but we didn't have money to go on the train. At that time there was illegal transportation. There were cars that would pick up people, where you'd make an arrangement for them and for so much they'd bring you to California. It was illegal because transportation companies didn't like it because it was cutting in on their business. I think it cost me $12 to come from Ardmore to
Los Angeles. I left there in February and it was cold and the timber was all dry and no green leaves and everything would look dead. I remember I got to Los Angeles at night and the next morning I got on a bus down at Los Angeles and bought my ticket to Fillmore where my sister lived which is 25 miles east of Ventura. I remember when we left Los Angeles down about where you turn off of Highway 99 and go west down to Santa Clara Valley. It was called Tips there. I woke up, I'd been kind of dozing, and all I could see was green grass and the farther west I went the taller the grass became and I began smelling the orange blossoms. I never smelled anything and I have never seen a country so beautiful in all my life, pretty and green and here it was February. It was nice and warm and the birds were singing. I thought I was in heaven. I came on to Fillmore.

J.G.: Your family stayed in Oklahoma then?

Clipper: My mother, dad and my sisters. My oldest sister was married and my folks were all living in the house with her because we had to move off of this other farm. We'd lost everything. Somebody else rented it and we couldn't find another. My mother, father, two sisters and brother were living in the house with my oldest half-sister up in the northern part of Oklahoma. My sister that's older than me was in California.

J.G.: I'll bet that was a hard adjustment for your dad to make after being independent to have to go and live with his daughter.

Clipper: I couldn't realize it then until I got married and I raised my own family. I got my family raised now and I look back and see how terrible he must have felt because here he had children that no way possible without robbing a bank, no way he could get money to clothe them decently or expose them to any kind of culture or travel or anything, not a thing in the world.

J.G.: Did they ever consider coming to California?

Clipper: My sister came out first in December. I left there and came out in February. Then the sister at home who was the one my mother and father were living with, her husband came out. In about three months he sent for my sister. In 1939 my mother and my baby sister came out and stayed for about eight or ten months. Then my father got hold of a place back in Oklahoma and my father, sister and brother were farming that. Then my mother went back to help on the farm. They got disgusted with the farm. The ties were there but they were breaking loose. I never did go back and my sister never did go back. My mother, my baby sister and my brother all came out in 1940 which left my father there. In March 1941 he finally broke ties and came out. We all were living in the same house in Fillmore. We lived out there on a farm in an orchard where the guy had some oranges. I know the first job I got in California. After I got here in February it started raining in March and we had a terrible flood down there, a bad one. After this
flood was over across the river where my brother-in-law's father lived, it washed sand around these young orange trees, covered a lot of them up.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

Clipper: The first job I got was digging out the sand around those orange trees for 45¢ an hour. Well, I thought that's all the money in the world. I worked nine hours a day at 45¢ an hour until I got them all dug out.

When I first hit Fillmore I knew a lot of people there from Oklahoma especially my sister that came out first and her in-laws who lived across this river on this farm I'm speaking about. So I go out to visit him the first thing after I get there. His name was Lemons. I saw Mr. Lemons out breaking ground, plowing, so I went out and shook hands with him and talked with him following the plow around. He was using a plow. He was quite a funny man and had a big sense of humor, but he was a good judge of people and everything. He saw me as I was looking at those big oranges. The only orange we ever got was at Christmas time when we got one orange, one apple and a little candy. So he asked me, "Would you like to have one of those oranges?" We'd been taught all of our life never to ask anybody for anything no matter how hungry. The only thing you'd ever ask for was a glass of water. I say glass of water, but everybody had a big old water bucket back in Oklahoma and you drank out of it in one dipper. So I said I would. He'd seen a lot of Oklahoma people do this before so I went over and took one off the tree and went back and followed him around. I peeled that orange and ate it pretty fast. It was good. Pretty soon he said, "Would you like to have another one of those oranges?" I said, "Yes." I went over and got another one and ate that one pretty good. A third time he asked me, I seen a little smile on his face. Then I recognized what he was doing. He was going to see how many oranges I'd eat. He said, "Would you like to have another one?" I said, "Yes, if you don't mind." The trees were just loaded with them, millions of them out there, so I went and got another orange and I ate that. The only reason I took the third one was because there were so many oranges. If there hadn't been so many oranges I would have taken only one orange because that's the way we were raised. He asked me again and I said, "No, I don't think so."

I went back to the same place where the river washed all the sand and covered up all those trees, and I worked a couple of weeks out there. The orange picking season had already started but they were just taking so many people. They were taking all the people who were in the association, Sunkist Association, that controlled most of the oranges in there. They would take the old pickers first and then as the season progressed they'd take the younger pickers. My brother-in-law was a boss on the orange picking crew. He finally got me a job picking oranges.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1
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J.G.: When we stopped yesterday, we were talking about your first job in Fillmore picking oranges.

Clipper: The first job I had outside of digging out those oranges trees was of course picking oranges. I had to wait around until the older hands got on on first, you see, and then the new hands with a little pull got on. I went to picking Valencia oranges. The navel season had just finished. We all worked together, Mexicans and people from Oklahoma. There were a few sprinkled in there from Missouri and one or two from Arkansas. Fillmore is where most of the Oklahoma people stopped and the Missourians went to Santa Paula. We went to work for five cents a box picking oranges. That's the best they gave us and that was pretty good wages. I had to learn how to pick oranges and it's the speed and dexterity. The Spanish people had been doing it for a long time. I never was as fast as the fastest picker but I was faster that the slow pickers but most of those people were all aged and crippled. I got pretty good but it was hard work and hot work and dirty work. You climbed ladders all the time. Sometimes we'd have a fourteen foot ladder and then sometimes we'd have an eight foot ladder with a six foot extension on it. We climbed the top of that and maybe we'd have another six foot ladder on top of that. It was slow work in the big trees.

I didn't mind starting off working with the Mexican people. I wanted a job. We were paid the same they were. I'd never been around Mexican people so it didn't make any difference. But what hurt me more than anything I guess was that when we hit Fillmore, when you'd speak to somebody there in town, they'd just look at you and turn around off to space. I couldn't understand it because coming from Oklahoma where everybody speaks and is friendly. The only time the people were glad to see us was when we'd come in to buy groceries with our checks or to buy clothes or something like that. I couldn't figure out what they were afraid of because we certainly didn't bring any crime there. I never heard of any Oklahoma people ever getting into trouble there. I couldn't understand those kind of people. I don't know whether they considered us white trash. I know we were poor. There was no doubt about that. I learned a lesson there that I never would have gotten out of books, but it took me a few years to really grasp that lesson. The time I was there they wouldn't associate with us at all. We had to associate together except in the grocery store. They wouldn't include us in any of their activities and if you did force your way, why, you were left out in the cold. We were new to them and I guess they thought we were too friendly. But the lesson I learned as I thought about it was what if I'd been black? I didn't think about that for a few years until the equal rights movement got going.

Of course, President Roosevelt and his wife were always trying to include the blacks and uplift them. I realize that for us to get along we all have to be equal. What I learned there was that I had been prejudiced even back in Oklahoma because there were a few black people there and
I didn't associate with them. We didn't. We just left them alone. They left us alone. They had their part of town and they didn't even come into the theaters or anyplace. I found out what discrimination was and how it worked. So it taught me a lesson, and I don't feel that way about the blacks or the Mexicans or the Orientals. I know they're people and we all have to be together to get along in this world.

J.G.: You got a first hand taste of what discrimination is like.

Clipper: I got it real early but it took me a few years to realize what it was. When the equal rights movement started I was for those people because I'd been down that row.

J.G.: What were you treated like by the growers you worked for?

Clipper: We went out on a crew from the Sunkist Orange Association and they didn't have anything to do with us at all. They just showed the boss the orchard which he already knew. We went in and started working and they never did bother us. Most of them treated us coolly and didn't want to get too friendly with us. They were afraid of us but they knew they were good workers. That's one thing we were because we were hungry and we'd been used to working. There was one fellow that had an orange orchard there and his name was Riley and he had migrated there from Tennessee. He owned an orange orchard there, a big one. I liked him. I never did get too well acquainted with him but I would hear him giving those other ranchers the devil because he was a Democrat which set well with me. He really liked President Roosevelt. He was a big buy and not afraid of any of them. He'd say, "[You would have] lost every bit of orchards that you have if President Roosevelt hadn't gotten in and helped you and now you're still cussing him," which was the truth. He saved them and loaned them money and gave them price support on their oranges, but they just didn't like President Roosevelt I guess because he was a Democrat and trying to help everybody.

J.G.: Sometimes when I've talked to people they've mentioned that you really had to watch the labor contractor or the grower because they would take advantage of the workers if they possibly could.

Clipper: There was one time during the last year that I picked oranges in either 1939 or 1940, but that year the oranges were real small. They gave us an eight ring to pick oranges with which meant that you had to ring every orange that you picked. Before I went to work I'd heard that instead of giving us five cents a box they were going to give us four cents and hold out one cent which was going to be our bonus. I had to wait until later in the season until all the older hands had gone to work. When I went to work I went to work on the crew for my brother-in-law's brother, but he didn't tell me that that's the way they were going to run it that they were going to give me four cents instead of five cents like they did the year before and hold out that one cent so I'd stay the whole year. The purpose of that was because you
couldn't make any money if you had to slow down. The oranges were small and you had to slow down and ring every orange, put a ring over it. You finally got to where you could kind of tell but you couldn't make any money at that. So I worked until way up in the summer and I said I wasn't going to do this so I quit.

I didn't know how many boxes of oranges I'd picked so I went down to my boss's house and he wasn't there. His wife was and I said I'd like to see my record to see how many boxes of oranges I'd picked so she gave me the amount. I copied it down and I went to the Labor Commission and I sued them. They granted me a trial so I went to Ventura and appeared. I was all alone but when they showed up they had the field superintendent and the president of the Sunkist Association and about four of the other Oklahoma people that were bosses and lived in the Association houses who were friends of mine. I got up and told the Labor Commissioner that they hadn't told me that that was the deal but my boss got up and said he did. I knew that was the deal and he didn't have to tell me, but I figured he should have told me. I was suing him for the $28 that I had coming. These other fellows had to get up and swear that they knew the deal too and that the boss had told them. They beat me. I didn't expect to win. All these friends came to me later that evening after we got back to Fillmore and said, "Clipper, we had to say that. We live in the Association houses. We've got families and if we'd spoken the truth we would have been out of a job and a home." I wasn't married so I let it go at that.

In about two or three days I caught the field superintendent who was from Texas uptown and I ran him in the corner and hemmed him up in there. I wanted him to try to run out over me but he wouldn't do it. I just told him everything in the world I could think about him. I just told him what kind of guy he was. He wouldn't even say a word. It would have been like slapping a child if he stood there. Three or four days later I caught the president of the company uptown and I did him the same way. They wouldn't raise their fist, see. They beat me out of $28 but later on my brother-in-law's brother came down where I was staying with my sister. He mouthed off about it and I busted him up real good. That's all that ever happened to that.

J.G.: The $28 was that one penny that they held out?

Clipper: It was mine.

J.G.: Was it the bonus?

Clipper: That's what they called it, a bonus. They paid us five cents the year before but this year they said we'll only give you four cents and at the end of the year we're going to give you that other penny just to force us to stay on the job. I didn't like that at all. I thought that was wrong. The oranges were small and we couldn't make any money anyway.

J.G.: You were living with your sister then?
Clipper: Sister, yes.

J.G.: How long did you pick oranges?

Clipper: I picked oranges two years. Then I picked lemons in 1940.

J.G.: What did you do during off-season?

Clipper: I'd try to find jobs on the orange orchards doing a little something. Of course, it wasn't very much. In the wintertime when we weren't picking oranges it got real cold they would call us out to smudge, run those smudge pots. You couldn't find anything to do then after the orange season was through there too. I tried to join a CCC camp out here but there just wasn't any work out here. You could barely find work but the pay was better than it was in Oklahoma.

J.G.: Were you able to save enough money during the time that you did work to be able to carry you through?

Clipper: You bet I did. I didn't waste a nickel. I'd send money home too. I didn't waste any money. Picking oranges was hard and I saved it.

J.G.: So in 1940 you went to lemons?

Clipper: I got a job picking lemons. They paid by the hour no matter how many boxes you picked. They knew we were naturally hard and fast workers. If they'd been paying by the box we would have picked just as fast and just as hard because it was our nature then. Now I'm a little smarter. I wouldn't have worked that hard. I worked there for about three months and they weren't paying us enough and the Mexicans wanted to go out on strike. They did go out on strike and I walked right off with them, but there were lots and lots of the Oklahoma people who wouldn't go out on strike at all. I think it was because they had families and some of them lived in the Association houses. Some of them just had to have that money to live. In fact, I had a brother-in-law that wouldn't go out on it. I did because I believed in organized labor and I don't believe the working man is ever paid enough and I knew that they could pay more because they had fine homes and fine automobiles. The ranchers wore good clothes and I knew that they could pay us more but they were taking advantage of us and I didn't like it. At that time I had joined the Santa Paula National Guard and I knew I had a future in the Army at $21 a month.

J.G.: So it was really the Mexicans that lead the strike. What year would that have been in?

Clipper: Yes, they lead the strike in 1940 to 1941.

J.G.: Do you remember what they were paying you at that time?

Clipper: No, I don't. I just can't remember. It was 30¢ an hour.
J.G.: Was the strike successful?

Clipper: Yes, it hung on for a long time. On April 1, 1941, I was inducted into the regular Army. The Santa Paula National Guard Battery was inducted into the regular Army and we left there on April 14, 1941, to go to Cheyenne, Wyoming. We heard later that they got better wages. I don't know if you ever heard of the Limonera. Have you been reading about the strikes they had there a year or two ago and they sold their ranch and started kicking the Mexicans off who'd been there for fifty or sixty years? Well they were a big outfit. The big ranchers could have paid us more but I couldn't understand why they didn't want to give somebody else a chance when they were being subsidized by the government.

J.G.: Before we go on to your experience in the Army, did your sister and her husband have a house in Fillmore that you lived in?

Clipper: They rented a house. I forget how much the rent was. I had two sisters there at that time and I think my mother was taking care of some people doing domestic work. My sisters never did work in the packing houses but a lot of the women worked in the packing houses. They packed oranges and lemons and were just barely paid. My sisters stayed home all the time. My two oldest sisters would work doing domestic work in Ardmore and get $3 a week and their board. That's the most they ever did get. Seven days a week and they got $3 a week and room and board.

Those wages back then were better in Fillmore but they could have been better. I would hear the people say, "Well, this is better than what we did back there." They wouldn't stick together. They were afraid.

J.G.: What were the feelings between the Oklahomans and the Mexicans and any blacks that were in the fields?

Clipper: We didn't have any blacks in the fields at all. They were all Mexicans and a few sprinklings of Filipinos. I never did know of any trouble at all except when I got in trouble there on crew. The Mexicans had been there a long time and they'd picked those fields for years and they knew exactly where the best trees were. When you stacked your ladders on your trailer to go to another field they would arrange it when you got off of that the truck at the next field. You went to your set. The first ladder off had to go to the first set, the second ladder the second set, and so on. A set was four trees. You picked that set and you moved on. Well, they knew exactly how to set their ladders on that trailer. They knew exactly where the best sets were and we didn't. I didn't like that because we were getting the dirty end of the thing. We didn't know the score and were afraid of our jobs. We didn't know the country. It was strange.

One third of us were white people, the rest were Mexicans so when we'd get on the truck they'd get in a certain place because they knew where they were going to get off. I got in this particular spot and this Mexican tried to get me out of his spot so when we got in from work he
said something while I was talking to another one and one of them hit me in the back of the head with his tin lunch pail. It was heavy and he jolted me right back of the head. There were about three of them after me. A friend of mine was across the street in a filling station and he ran over there and pulled them off of me. I remember he was coming at me and I hit him right square in the mouth and knocked some of his teeth out but I cut this finger. See that hump in there? It used to be all humped up way big. I hit him in the mouth and knocked those teeth out and it cut my finger real bad. The next morning my hand was all swollen up. I couldn't move it but I had to go ahead and pick fruit. I guess I would have had blood poisoning, but they had a donkey baseball game. They wanted us Oklahoma people to ride those mules because they were kind of wild. It was kind of a week later and my hand was all swollen up and I didn't do anything about it. I got on this mule and I had this loose rope and he was bucking, and it broke that hand loose and it started bleeding and got all that puss out of there. They never did bother me after that and I never did hear anything about it and we worked together from that day on and they never did say anything about it. They knew that at least there was one they couldn't run over. They were just trying to see what they could do I guess. We drew the same pay they did. In fact they made more money than we did because they were faster pickers so we had to learn how.

J.G.: During that time a lot of people lived in some rather haphazard kinds of arrangements and government camps.

Clipper: We didn't have any government camps then. We just rented what we could find down in north Fillmore. It was a rundown section and that's where we had to live. You could always tell an Oklahoman's house because they'd straighten it up, but after we left there they more than doubled the price they were paying to pick oranges when we were all inducted in the Army in 1941. I went back in 1942 and things were completely changed. Most of them were Mexicans and the Association was furnishing the Mexicans houses because most of the white people had left the orange picking and had gone into the defense plants and gone to the Army but the Mexicans stayed there. They really gave them good houses and gave them a lot better wages and better working conditions to keep them there. That bothered me too because I knew they could have done the same dad gum thing for us when we were there.

J.G.: Did you ever run across any ditch camps where people had just pitched their tents along the irrigation canals?

Clipper: I've seen them. I didn't go in them. There was a place here in Bakersfield called Hooverville. Have you ever heard people talk about that?

J.G.: Yes.

Clipper: You know what that was? Living in cardboard camps out here toward
Weed Patch and Arvin. A friend of mine died last winter. If he was alive he could tell you all about that. In Fillmore there were a few of us that got credit. I never did extend my credit. I bought a few clothes and I'd always pay [for] them. They were getting a little better by the time I left there. I know one time when I hadn't been there very long I went to the picture show. It was a funny movie. I was laughing and the usher came over and told me I was laughing too loud. I didn't say anything because I thought, well, maybe I was.

J.G.: When you came back in 1942 did you think the attitude of the people had changed any?

Clipper: My first child was born on August 14, 1942. I'd been away. When my daughter was born it was quite a traumatic thing. We left Tacoma, Washington, and we were coming down here to the desert on maneuvers and I got off the troop train here in Bakersfield. I caught a bus down to Tips and I hitchhiked on into Fillmore. I had to walk about a half mile from where I got off and just as I walked in the door, the doctor was there with my mother-in-law and father-in-law. My wife was on the table. She was in labor then. I hadn't been there five minutes till my first child was born. When the doctor left I think he charged me $80 and I gave him $5. He didn't even say thanks. A $5 tip was really something from me because I didn't have any money anyway but I was proud.

J.G.: How did you meet your wife and when did you get married?

Clipper: I met my wife in Fillmore in 1940, and we got married on December 20, 1940.

J.G.: Was she an Oklahoman?

Clipper: She was from Nebraska and they had a rougher time in Nebraska than we did. She had a brother in Fillmore who was working in a filling station and a sister living in Burbank. She came out first and her mother and father came out later. He picked fruit here for quite a while until he went back to Nebraska.

J.G.: So then you were just married when you went into the Army in 1941.

Clipper: Yes, I joined the National Guard in 1940 before I was married and then on April 1, 1941 they inducted us into the regular Army and shipped us to Cheyenne, Wyoming. Her folks were just like Oklahoma people. They didn't have anything and they had to do the best they could and rent an old house. I sent money home. I would never let anybody call me an Okie because I figured I was an Oklahoman. I always figured an Okie was somebody filthy and dirty that was a liar and a thief and a cheat and wouldn't pay his bills. I wasn't any of that. I never would let anybody call me Okie. I know one time I went to Ventura to see The Grapes of Wrath, and when I came out of the show I had a bow in my back. I was waiting for somebody to say something bad about the Oklahomans because I would have busted them square in the
mouth, but it was all quiet. Nobody ever said anything.

J.G.: How did you figure that movie portrayed the average person from Oklahoma? Did the experience that the Joads had seem to fit at all?

Clipper: To me it did because I've seen people like that. The only thing was that was growing up around the people I did in the country, I never heard that kind of vulgarity or insinuations. It might have been there but I never did see it. I thought it was all right. The way they were treated was the way they were really treated up in this part of the country. I imagine we would have been treated the same way but they needed us to pick those oranges because the government was in there helping them and they were making good money. They were putting in more trees.

J.G.: So you think maybe you were not treated quite so badly in Fillmore as, say for example, here in Bakersfield.

Clipper: I know we weren't.

J.G.: Why do you say that?

Clipper: I've lived in Bakersfield since June 9, 1948, and most of the people here at that time were Oklahomans. I've heard too many stories.

J.G.: So they talked about the way they were treated and it seemed like a lot worse experience.

Clipper: Yes, it sure was.

J.G.: Do you have any guesses as to why it was so much harder for people who settled in this area than it was for you who lived in the Fillmore area?

Clipper: I guess because there was more farm labor here, cotton picking and grapes. We just had oranges and it was a different climate all together. I know these people here. I've heard them talk. They tried to work them for nothing more than they did down there. When the war came along my brother-in-law left and most all the young Oklahomans left there went to the defense plants where they thought maybe they'd treat them better.

J.G.: You were in the military for how long?

Clipper: Four years, nine months, twenty-seven days.

J.G.: Do you remember your serial number?

Clipper: 20954507. Yes, I sailed from Boston on December 4, 1943, and landed
Clipper, T.

in Liverpool, England, on December 17 and made the invasion of France. I was in on the invasion on France. I was in five campaigns. My outfit was the first one that met the Russians at the Elb River. I was a good soldier and hard worker. It was supposed to have been an act of Congress that if you were in combat and went overseas they were supposed to make you PFC but I was in the Army four years, nine months, twenty-seven days and I was always a buck private. I never did make PFC but I was a good soldier. I was a hard worker. I couldn't keep from talking back to them.

On the day we fired our last shot, me and my company commander got into it and I invited him to take his bars off and knock it out with me. He was a coward anyway. I knew he was a coward. He just ran and got a guy and put me under arrest quarters. On May 8 at Magdeburg, Germany I had my courtmartial. They gave me six months in the guard house and took two thirds of my pay, but they suspended my guard house time because of my war record. I'm not bragging. I was a good soldier. I never did rat on anybody. I carried more than my half of the load. I kept my equipment up and everything. If I didn't think a guy was right he couldn't tell me what to do. I knew how far to go. It worked out just fine for me because on May 8 it was Armistice Day. That's the day they had the courtmartial. They kept me under arrest quarters for I don't know how many weeks but while I was there all the fellows in my outfit were guarding me and they would always beg to see who'd get to guard me because all they'd do was sit in the house or go walking. We'd play cards or listen to music and the cooks were all my friends. I got better food than the captains and that's the truth. Finally one day a captain was walking across where we were occupying a village there and said, "Clipper, go get your rifle and go out on the road block." So I just went and got my rifle and went out on the road block. One day he came to me and said, "Clipper, I know what you're going to say but I've got to ask you something. Do you want to re-enlist?" I just looked at him and laughed and turned around and walked off. I didn't salute him or anything, just walked off.

J.G.: What did you do when you got out of the Army?

Clipper: While I was in the Army in France we were at a place called Selsey Bill [England] right on the Channel and we were staying at a resort hotel which was about fifty yards from the ocean. Every day it got to be boresome. They would give us a nomenclature of our weapons and we'd go through gas drills and everything like that. Heck, I knew that backwards, forwards, blindfolded or anyway they wanted to do it so I would run off and hide so I wouldn't have to go to the dang classes.

One day a friends of mine said, "Clipper, why don't you cut my hair." I said, "Okay." So we went and got the Battery tools, shear, comb and clippers. I put something around his neck, a shirt or something, and I was sitting there cutting there his hair. These two officers were coming down the hall in the big hotel looking for me and this other fellow,
for me especially because they knew I was hiding. We were sitting back there and I was cutting his hair. They said, "Clipper, didn't know you cut hair." "Oh, yes." They said, "I'm glad to know that. We'll send you plenty of customers." I got started cutting hair but all I knew about cutting hair was the way I used to have mine cut. The more I cut, the better I liked it. I didn't charge them any money because I didn't feel like I should because I wasn't that good, but the more I cut the better I got. I didn't know the shortcuts of getting what I was after. All the time we weren't in combat after we made the invasion I was kind of looking around. All these guys want their hair cut. Well, I got to thinking, I don't have an education and I'm tired of working in the heat. I'm going to work to be a barber because they always made a good living during the Depression. I always figured there would be another depression. In Oklahoma even at 15¢ which was what they were getting for haircuts, they traded for food. I don't know it just hit me that I could always get by that way. I wanted a warm place in the wintertime and a cool place in the summer. After the war was over I started cutting hair and started charging the guys for haircuts because they wanted to pay me because I was getting better. When I got out my brother had heard that I was a barber in the Army so he picked it up.

When we got out I went to roughnecking in the oil fields. I didn't like that. I liked the work but I didn't like getting up different times at night. He was working on an orange ranch and the Army was paying us to go to school and learn whatever we wanted to. I hadn't decided so I thought well, I can cut as good as they can and I don't even know what I'm doing but I'm not as fast because I didn't know all the shortcuts. So we applied to go to the American Barber College in Los Angeles and they accepted us and we went to barber school down there. One time when I first got to Fillmore I went into this barber shop and I told this guy exactly how I wanted my hair cut and that dirty rat took those close clippers and just gave me white sidewalls up the side. He was a middle age man and I tried to get him to move out so I could beat his head off but he wouldn't come out. I knew why he did it because he wasn't going to let no Okie tell him what or how to cut hair.

J.G.: So when did you start barbering here in Bakersfield?

Clipper: My first job was in North Hollywood. I got a job in North Hollywood right downtown by a bank. I went to work in there. Three barbers and myself made four barbers. The barbers in the first two chairs had been there for years and I took the third chair and the boss took the fourth chair. They would grab everybody who came in the door trying to starve me out. They'd grab every customer and wouldn't give me a chance. Just the overflow is what I got. Here I had a wife and child and had been through the war and I needed to make some money. I was living off my mother and sister in Burbank then. You couldn't find a house to rent. We had to all live together again. They would hog every customer. On top of that every day they'd say we ought to go over there and bomb them damn Russians. I just got through the war and had seen all that stuff
and they kept saying, "Well, why didn't you guys go on through Russia?"
Of course, they stayed there and made money. I'd hear them talking
about the stock market and how much money they'd made in the stock
market. I don't know whether they did or not.

One morning I'd had all of it I wanted. I said, "You SOBs, if I ever
hear you say that again I'll take you by the hair of your heads, both
of you, and bust your brains out." Just run them together like that.
I don't know whether I could have done it or not. The next day the boss
fired me. I went to a place and worked one day and I got fired there
because I was faster than the boss. I didn't like him anyway. Of course,
he didn't like President Roosevelt. I just worked one day but we weren't
going to get along. I went to another place and there were two guys
on Burbank Boulevard in Burbank. I worked there for about three weeks
and they were Communists. They didn't try to persuade me or anything.
I didn't know a Communist from anything. I didn't know what a Communist
was. I knew they were Communists because they said they were Communists.
I went on another street to work for this fellow and worked there about
five or six months. He didn't like President Roosevelt and I did. He
fired me on June 8, 1948.

My mother and I came up here [Bakersfield] on June 9 because my sister
was living here. I went out on June 10 and got a job and went to work
on June 11 and have been here ever since. I'd been thinking about my
brother in Arkansas. He was a barber in Arkansas and I thought that my
brother and I ought to be together. I thought I'd ask this old boy if
he'll sell this shop. It was going through my mind and I thought, "What
will I give for it?" I thought $1500 would be a good price. About a
week after I thought about that—he was always a quiet sort of fellow—he
said, "Clipper, would you like to buy this barbershop?" I said, "Yes."
He said, "Well I want to sell it and move out on Niles Street." I said,
"What do you want for it?" He said, "$1500." I said, "I'll take it."
So I bought the shop. That's the picture of it you see there.

J.G.: So you raised your family here in Bakersfield?

Clipper: When I was going to barber school in Los Angeles my second daughter was
born in 1947 in Glendale Sanitarium. She was born January 4, 1947, and
then my son was born April 12, 1948. They were both born in the same
place. When I got fired I had to move in the house with my sister and
her husband and family and another family. There were three families
in this one house. I couldn't find a house.

J.G.: I'll bet that was something.

Clipper: It was something. Finally my sister's husband got another job and they
moved out. A friend of mine was in real estate. I was cutting his
hair and I said, "I need a house." He came in one day and said, "There's
a repossessed G.I. house over here and you can have it for $500 down
and it will cost you $8,000. You can get it on the G.I. Bill." I looked
at it and said, "I'll take this house here." My wife and my dad came over and cleaned up the yard and everything. We bought it. We moved in in 1950.

J.G.: So you've lived in this house ever since?

Clipper: Yes.

J.G.: All of your children are here in Bakersfield?

Clipper: I have a daughter who lives over here on Loma Linda. Her husband is a principal planner for the Kern County Works and Planning Commission. My son is a custom car painter and lives over in East Bakersfield. Then my oldest daughter's husband is chief engineer for Palmer T.V. They live in Palm Desert east of Palm Springs. They live in the next little old village over called La Quinta.

J.G.: So you were going to tell me yesterday about the bootleggers.

Clipper: We lived on the edge of the prairie in the timber country. My dad and I would ride those hills all the time because we had stock back in there. We had some cattle and horses back in there. In these hills we'd go down those hollers where there was a creek. I guess in my lifetime while I lived back there I've seen 20 to 25 whiskey stills. They were just old farmers and old hill people back in there making whiskey. They'd sell it. I don't know what they'd get for it. We never reported them because they were just trying to make a living. If we had reported them and they knew it was us they would have come in and burned us out, burned up our barns and killed our stock. They didn't bother us and we didn't bother them. I know one time my dad shipped a carload of cattle to Kansas City and he went with them and when he came back through the pasture Papa found a still on our place. Papa told him to move it and he did. He moved it and that's all there was to it. One time there was a bunch of those bad actors there who stole some cotton from us. I hadn't been picking yet. I'd been doing something else but they'd picked a lot of cotton and the pile was on the ground and a few of those bad actors there stole the cotton. But those whiskey makers would have trouble among themselves but for anybody else, if you didn't bother them, they didn't bother you. There was a certain clique there. They would have trouble among themselves even though they were kinfolk. My dad drank quite a bit of that whiskey. They never would bother him and he never would report them because we'd see the whiskey stills all the time.

On November 8, 1928, it was election day and we didn't have school that day so a friend and I went squirrel and duck hunting. It was raining so when I came in that evening my mother said to me, "Son, you'll have to go to town and get your dad. He went up to vote but he's up there drunk so you ride up to town with Gillum Autry," that's Gene Autry's cousin. I said, "Okay." He was by our house in a car because he'd been down at a place called Dog Town looking at some stock there. So I rode up there to get my dad on my horse and ride back. He got there and said,
"Bud, you wait right here at the corner. I've got to go down to the home and I'll be right back." While I was there my dad was in a lumberyard building and I heard him when he woke up and grabbed a two by four or some dang thing. He was beating on the door hollering, "Let me out of here." Some people heard him and I remember some big loud mouth guy saying, "God damn, Emmett Clipper is drunk again." They all started gathering around there because my dad was well known and a fairly well influential citizen there. He would drink a little bit. I poured out a lot of his whiskey. I'd find his whiskey and I'd pour it out and he wouldn't do anything, just laugh.

I went and got his horse and brought it over there and then they let him out. I said, "Come Pop, get on the horse." He said, "No, I'm going to go vote." He walked up about a half a block. They were voting in the bank. They had this little old place of about 1200 to 1300 people with two banks, two gins, two stock yards, two railroad trains because two tracks went through there. He said, "I'm going to go vote." So he went in and voted and came back out and there were about 35 to 40 people gathered around there to see what he was going to do. He was quite a character because he'd been in that town for quite a few years. One time he ran a pool hall. He was well known and almost everybody liked him. He got up on his horse and he was sitting there on top and all these people ganged around there so he gave them a speech. He said, "Every one of you SOBs that voted for Hoover, you'll be chasing rabbits in about six months." A city marshall walked up there. They'd been in the National Guard together. This guy said, "Emmett you'll have to quiet down and get on out of town." He didn't like my dad. This guy was about six feet, two inches—a great big fellow. He was a blacksmith there but at this particular time he was a city marshall and he walked right up to the side of my dad's horse. My dad was about five feet, five inches but he was a powerful man when he was young. This guy had grabbed him one time and my dad was real fast and quick and strong so he threw a hip lock on him and just turned him up over his head and threw him right down in the mud hole. He didn't like my dad for that. My dad started unbuttoning his overcoat. I knew what he was going to do because he always carried a six shooter. When he came out with the six shooter I grabbed it because he was going to shoot that guy right there. I was eleven years old. I grabbed the gun and swung off on the side away from that guy. Another guy there grabbed his hand and took him to the cooler and kept him all night. They let him loose. Nothing was ever done about it. I guess it was six months or a little later when the hard times started. We left Dustin in January or February in 1931. There weren't any banks. They'd shut down all the gins. They closed down one of the stockyards and the town was just busted. Everybody was busted. The town was busted. I remember those things.

J.G.: Do you have anything that you would like to mention that I haven't thought to ask?

Clipper: I don't know if it would be interesting to anybody else but it's just part of our life. Here's what bothers me: I remember my mother and father,
this big place we had and how hard they worked. They just couldn't get ahead and no one else was getting ahead either. It seemed like the only people who were getting ahead were some of the bootleggers because they would haul this whiskey into Oklahoma City or Tulsa or Seminole where the big oil boom was going on. We worked seven days a week, not quite as hard on Sunday, but very seldom would we get to go to town on Saturday like the rest of the kids. We were working--fixing fences or plowing or moving cattle or doing some dang thing because they figured that's the way to make a living and we were going in the hole.

J.G.: Sounds like from what you're saying that for you personally the times in Oklahoma were probably harder than the times after you got to California.

Clipper: Oh definitely. Oh yes, yes. But I couldn't understand being treated like that because I never did treat people that way.

J.G.: So that was the hard part. Money-wise, however, you were doing better here in California than in Oklahoma.

Clipper: Oh yes, yes. I'd work for 50¢ a day there and my board. I'd work for 10¢ an hour when I could get a job which wasn't very often.

J.G.: Do you remember when you think back on that time did you think that jobs were going to be plentiful in California? I've even heard that some of the growers were circulating flyers and things advertising for workers.

Clipper: They did. I never did see it but what brought us to California would be other people that had left Oklahoma especially around Ardmore and they had come to California and done all right. For instance, my brother-in-law who had the orange picking crew had cousins who had left Oklahoma a little sooner. They'd left in 1933 or 1934 and they'd done all right when they hit California. Speaking of it like it was better than the things we were doing in Oklahoma so that's what started the migration just other people coming out and telling. People would hit here--Oklahoma people--and they couldn't wait until they got enough money to go back to Oklahoma. Since I've been in Bakersfield they'd go back on a visit. They'd borrow money when they were picking fruit down there to make the trip back because it was hard breaking those ties. An old hog will always go back to its nest. I've seen it here in Bakersfield since I've been here since 1948. I'll bet there have been 40 to 50 people that I knew personally and still know who couldn't wait till they got money in their pocket. "I'm going back to Oklahoma where they live easier and everything." They'd sell out here and go back there. This happens time and time again because behind that barber chair I'd hear all this and I'd see it happen. They would leave here and go to Oklahoma and they'd be there two, three or six months and right back here they'd come flat busted. It took some of them two or three times before they wised up. They would all go busted
J.G.: It's hard to break the ties with the old.

Clipper: When we got all of our people here I didn't have any desire at all to go back there. I figured I'd rather be out here in jail than running around loose back there.

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