 CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, BAKERSFIELD

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

Oral History Program

Interview Between

INTERVIEWEE: Martha Lee Martin Jackson
PLACE OF BIRTH: Lenna, Oklahoma (now covered by Lake Eufaula)
INTERVIEWER: Stacey Jagels
DATES OF INTERVIEWS: March 10, 1981 (one session only)
PLACE OF INTERVIEWS: Clovis, Fresno County
NUMBER OF TAPES: 2
TRANSCRIBER: Barbara Mitchell
Martha Jackson is an extremely shy, nervous person and was very uncomfortable with the tape recorder. Had the recorder not been used, she probably would have been much calmer and more talkative. She chose her words carefully and did not "run-on" or elaborate her answers. Mrs. Jackson told me afterwards that she is not an extremely talkative person under any circumstances and suggested that I interview relatives of hers, but this could not be arranged.

Stacey Jagels
Interviewer
This is an interview with Martha Lee Jackson for the California State College, Bakersfield CALIFORNIA ODYSSEY Project by Stacey Jagels at 1272 Villa, Number Two, Clovis, California on Tuesday, March 10, 1981 at 10:00 a.m.

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

Jackson: I was born in Lenna, Oklahoma, July 13, 1922.

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

Jackson: I lived with my aunt until I was three years old. My father remarried and that was when we moved to Maud, Oklahoma. There was an oil boom and a lot of people were moving to Maud to work in the oil fields. My father worked for the Magnolia Oil Company and then he worked for the railroad. And he always farmed. He had a truck farm.

S.J.: Could you tell me about what you mean by a truck farm?

Jackson: We raised produce like vegetables and he would sell them on the street. He'd hitch up his wagon and drive around town. He always let me go with him and ring a bell. The ladies would come out and buy their vegetables for that day.

S.J.: He did that in addition to working in the oil fields?

Jackson: Yes, and in addition when he worked for the railroad.
Jackson: How large was your family?

S.J.: There were six children in our family. My first half sister was born when I was three years old. I wasn't quite four. There were five other children--six all together. They were all half brothers and sisters because my mother died when I was two weeks old. That makes it a little confusing for me because I stayed with my father and grandparents and then my grandmother died and I lived with my aunt. Then I lived with my stepmother and father. I had a little different childhood.

S.J.: Could you tell me about where you lived and about the sort of house you lived in?

Jackson: When we first went to Maud we lived in a tent. Many people did because there just weren't enough houses for the oil boom. My father built a floor for the tent. We lived in the tent six months or a year. Then we moved to a house. We always lived in a house after that. He rented a farm when I was about six years old. He was a sharecropper I think. We lived on about four different farms before we moved to California.

S.J.: Did he have a problem making enough money farming? Is that why you kept moving from farm to farm?

Jackson: No. He just rented a larger place each time to increase our income. I think we were farming about 80 acres of land. He also used to rent more land. If there was a field that he could rent he would rent that and we'd grow cotton or cane or something just to add to our income.

S.J.: Were you very well-off then compared to other people around you?

Jackson: Oh no. We were not any better off. It seemed like almost everybody was the same. They just made a living and that was all.

S.J.: Could you tell me about school?

Jackson: The first school I went to was in the oil fields. It was called Rock Springs School in St. Louis, Oklahoma. The oil fields were named St. Louis. And I had to walk three or four miles to school. The first year I didn't get to go to school because it was in the oil fields and there were people from all over the world there. My father was afraid for me to walk and he couldn't take me so I didn't get to start to school until I was six years old. I should have started when I was five. After that I went to Central High but the grades were from kindergarten through twelfth grade. There probably weren't 200 children in the whole school, maybe even 100. It wasn't very large. I went there until I was fifteen years old.
I went to that one school until we moved to California. I think there were only about five rooms in the school so it was a very small school.

S.J.: When you came to California did you continue with school then?

Jackson: Yes, I did. I went to Clovis High School and I went to junior college one year, but that was much later when I was about 30 years old.

S.J.: How about the rest of your brothers and sisters—how far did they go in their education?

Jackson: They all finished high school and my youngest sister graduated from college. She graduated from Fresno State College and she's married to a lawyer here in Fresno.

S.J.: When you were in school in Oklahoma did you have to help out on the farm growing the vegetables and did you have some chores that you had to do every day?

Jackson: Yes, every day when we got home from school we put on our work clothes and we went out and picked or chopped cotton, thinned corn, or picked tomatoes. We fed the hogs and chickens and helped milk the cows. We had summer school for six weeks and then school didn't start again until October because that was the harvest time and we had to help pick the cotton. We were never paid for picking cotton when we worked for somebody else. We exchanged labor. I don't remember ever being paid for doing work in Oklahoma. When we came to California of course we were paid by the pound when we picked cotton. But in Oklahoma I remember working a week or two weeks helping a farmer with his cotton that had to be harvested. There was never an exchange of money. No one had any money.

S.J.: So you might exchange some milk or eggs or whatever you happened to have?

Jackson: Mostly labor is what we exchanged. We didn't expect any money. But people were very generous with their food. If someone killed a cow you'd just divide it with your neighbors. It was the same with labor or anything else. When someone was sick you just helped them. You just never expected money.

S.J.: Was there a strong community atmosphere? That's what it sounds like.

Jackson: There was.

S.J.: It was a small town and everyone probably knew everyone else.
Jackson: That's right.

S.J.: People were very close.

Jackson: Most of the people knew each other in Arkansas and Missouri back in the 1800s. A lot of them knew people that far back.

S.J.: Did you ever have to stay out of school to help with the crops?

Jackson: Yes. Not so much for the crops but maybe to help with housework and things like that. I'd take care of one of the children if my parents had to go away for the day. I never had to stay out of school to work in the fields.

S.J.: You must have had a lot of extra work taking care of the younger kids and helping around the house.

Jackson: I did, yes. I helped with the washing. We had to heat water in a pot—a large iron kettle. We had to build a fire. We had to draw the water out of a well because we didn't have a pump. A lot of people did though. We had to fill our kettle and build a fire under it and heat wash water and bath water too. And we had to hang out clothes on the clothesline. We used the washboard of course and it was a lot of work. I did have to stay out of school to help with that.

S.J.: Did you find that a problem? Were you able to catch up?

Jackson: I did. I found it a problem and I'm glad children don't have to do that today. I don't think they do anyway.

S.J.: Can you tell me anything about the houses that you lived in and how large they were?

Jackson: We had a three bedroom house. I have two sisters and three brothers so the girls had a bedroom and the boys did too. The three girls slept in the same bed and the three boys slept in the same bed. We didn't have a lot of furniture. I can't remember having a couch like we have today. I think we had a small bed in our living room. I'm not sure. We always had a wood fire. We had a lamp. In Oklahoma we didn't have an icebox. If we had ice usually it was delivered from Seminole, Oklahoma. On the Fourth of July there was always someone around selling ice so everybody could have ice cream. The houses were probably built in 1850 or 1875 and they were getting old. They were built with green lumber—my dad said—and they were getting old. The floors had cracks. If you weren't lucky enough to have a carpet on your floor you just had cold air in the winter. Almost all the country houses were like that.
S.J.: Can you tell me what you did with your leisure time?

Jackson: I don't think we had any leisure time. We went to church and they had camp meetings. We always had them. They were mostly at night. There were activities at school like 4H club meetings. They had what they called pie suppers. I was a little young. I don't remember participating too much. That was usually for the older girls who were dating. That's the way I remember it. We played baseball and we had rodeos on Sunday. I can't really remember anything in the evenings. We just went to bed early because we got up early and worked the next day—-all day.

S.J.: What time did you usually get up in the mornings?

Jackson: About three or four o'clock in the morning to milk the cows and feed the animals. My dad always liked to be in the field by daylight and he worked until four or five o'clock.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit more about these camp meetings in church? Was this a Baptist church?

Jackson: It was mostly Church of God. The Baptists didn't have many camp meetings. The Church of Christ was new in our area and I remember some people came from another state—-they called them Camelites. They were recruiting people for their congregation. The Church of God or the Holy Rollers as they were called had a lot of camp meetings. We always went because there weren't a lot of things to do. I shouldn't say it was just someplace to go because it wasn't. We went because it was church. We were Baptist but we still went to those meetings.

S.J.: Was it kind of a social event?

Jackson: It was. It was a social event. It seems like almost everybody came to those meetings.

S.J.: Were they very lengthy?

Jackson: Yes, they were. They kept you too long. The children were all sleepy and the men had to work the next day. They were too lengthy. Usually they would only last for two weeks at a time and then next year they would be back again. Sometimes they built arbors—-brush arbors—-for the meetings. Then at the schoolhouse they would have some activities—-preachings or whatever they called them in those days.

S.J.: Do you remember what the meetings were like and what the people said?

Jackson: I can remember what they did more than what they said. They used to pray a lot and dance around and roll on the floor. I thought
that was kind of strange, but we still went just the same. I don't really remember what they said. They just read the Bible and then preached about it like they do today in some places I know.

S.J.: Did you also attend church on Sundays?

Jackson: Oh yes. Most of the time church was in our school. We lived five miles from town so they had services in our school in the auditorium unless we drove into town. Once in a while we did. My grandfather was a Baptist minister and one of my uncles was a minister so he was active. I don't think he really had a church but he was active and his wife played the piano in the church at Maud, Oklahoma. His name was Bill Morgan and his wife was Sybil Morgan.

S.J.: Did just about everybody you knew go to church?

Jackson: Yes, at least the ones my age did even if their parents didn't go. Most of the children did go. It seems like almost all the parents went to church.

S.J.: You also mentioned something about going to 4H. Could you tell me a little bit about that?

Jackson: That was rather new in our area. I think only the last two years that we were there we had 4H. I grew vegetables and we had sewing projects. We went to a town called Seminole to meet with girls from all over the area. It was a sewing project to demonstrate how we made it and they picked the winner. My vegetables didn't amount to much. I think about all of us had a vegetable garden. I can't remember anyone ever coming to look at my vegetable garden. I guess the sewing projects were more important in our 4H.

S.J.: Did you like going to school then?

Jackson: Oh yes, I liked going to school. It was harder for children to get an education because the parents had to buy all of their books and everything and some of them couldn't afford it. I remember some children who didn't go to school. I don't think it was compulsory in 1937. My father and the principal at school went around the neighborhood and collected clothes for some of the children to get them into school--for the ones that they knew about. We had a good school. My teachers and my father grew up together and they'd known each other since they were small children.

S.J.: When you came out to California and went to school out here did you find many differences between the school here and the ones back in Oklahoma?
Jackson: Yes I did. I think the main difference was that our clothes were different and the kids made fun of us a lot. Our dresses were still longer. We hadn't caught up yet.

S.J.: How about your education?

Jackson: We were ahead because we had had summer school. We had just about the same thing. Oklahoma was quite a bit like California I think. The main difference was that we had to switch from Oklahoma history to California history. I remember having the same things in school here as I had in Oklahoma during the summer. So it must have been quite a bit the same even though the textbooks were different. I think it was taught on the same level.

S.J.: Do you remember ever having dances or parties or anything like that as you were growing up?

Jackson: My folks were pretty religious but they did have square dances and fiddle players. My stepmother's brothers were fiddle players and they had square dances in the house and at other people's houses. They didn't go out to dances. That was sinful. There were square dances and the ladies used to quilt. There were quilting parties. That was in the home—a social gathering in the home.

S.J.: I wondered about your parents. Were they also born in Oklahoma or did they come to Oklahoma from someplace else?

Jackson: My father was born in Oklahoma in 1900. My father's parents had moved to Oklahoma from Arkansas in 1895. My stepmother was born in Arkansas. My mother was born in Oklahoma--Indian Territory. On my mother's side there is Cherokee Indian, Irish and Welch. My father's grandfather fought in the Civil and was going to claim land in Oklahoma but he died before he got his land from the government. That was the main reason they moved to Oklahoma.

S.J.: Did you know much about your mother's side of the family?

Jackson: Not too much other than they came from Arkansas too, but I don't know what year that my great-grandparents moved to Oklahoma. I don't know if they went there to claim land or not. Most people did during the land rush. But I don't think they got land. My grandmother on my mother's side was Cherokee Indian and she was entitled to land anyway—which she did not get because my grandfather didn't want to admit that they were Indian. They just wanted to blend in and not be noticed. The land that my mother could have had was at Drumright, Oklahoma and it was not good farming land but it's good oil land. They have a lot of
oil there now. My grandmother went to school with Will Rogers. I found that interesting. She said he was always mischievous and he got expelled from school.

S.J.: When the Depression came you were probably only seven or eight years old.

Jackson: Yes. In 1929 I was seven.

S.J.: Do you have any memory of that time? Of how things changed for you and your family?

Jackson: Looking back it seems like we were fairly comfortable. My dad was working for the oil company when that started and I remember he came home and told us about the banks closing and how some of the people cried and they couldn't get their money out of the bank. Things just got worse and worse. We just barely made over $300 a year. The only difference was we were on the farm and we did grow everything. He moved to the farm right after that happened.

S.J.: Did your father lose his job then?

Jackson: I don't know if he really lost his job or he just decided to start farming full time. I know that he was a teamster and he always drove mules because they were smaller and he was a small person. I guess he couldn't handle the large horse—that's what I've always thought. They did lay off the men who were driving mule teams. That might be another reason why he went to farming full time. But it was just a living. We were lucky to have our vegetables and put away our canned goods for the winter and kill a few hogs. I think he raised about six hogs every year. We fattened them and we killed them and they did us through the winter. We didn't have much beef. We had two or three milk cows and our chickens.

S.J.: So there wasn't anything left over for extras?

Jackson: No. Nothing at all. When it really got bad I remember the WPA [Works Progress Administration] started, but I think that might have been later. I think this was the National Recovery Act. The last year we were in Oklahoma my dad did work on WPA and we did take food, but that's the only time I ever remember during all that time that we took food. We got canned beef or mutton, breakfast cereal, and grapefruit. I don't remember getting any beans although we ate a lot of beans. We got whatever they gave and some clothing. We got a mattress but that was just the last year that we were in Oklahoma. I guess that must have been the worst year that we were in Oklahoma. I guess that must have been the worst year of the Depression for us.
S.J.: Do you remember the situation that your neighbors and friends were in? Were they as bad off as you were?

Jackson: Yes, they were. I can't remember anyone having anything better than us and there were some worse off than us too. I remember being at some people's house at lunch time and they didn't even have plates. They had lids from one gallon lard buckets. That's what they were using for plates. Their house must have been built in 1850 because it just looked like it was going to fall apart. I remember some people that didn't have enough covers for their beds and maybe just a change of clothing--two dresses or something like that. I remember that we used to put cardboard soles in our shoes and you had to change them almost every day. You'd wear them out. I know we got one pair of shoes when school started and it seemed like they lasted us all winter. We just simply outgrew them by springtime. The toes were coming out, and there were holes in the bottom--that's when we put the cardboard soles in.

S.J.: Can you describe the farming situation to me--how it got worse each year?

Jackson: What we grew was sold so cheaply. I don't think you even got a dollar for 50 pounds of potatoes. We grew peanuts and we sold them by the bushel or whatever way they sold them. There just wasn't much money around. They just sold so cheap. When we had eggs to sell they sold for eleven cents a dozen. [My dad] grew a tobacco crop one year and he didn't make much off of that. Of course everything he made was through sharecropping and we had to give half of it to the person who owned the property. It was owned by the bank in Maud.

S.J.: So he finally just decided that he wasn't going to make any money on farming? Did he decide to come to California then?

Jackson: That was in 1937. After Roosevelt was elected in 1932 he had the farmers plow up their cotton crop that they were growing because there was a surplus on the market. He thought that would bring prices up. My father plowed under his cotton crop that year and I know he didn't get paid for all of that until 1940. I don't know how far back it went. I don't remember if he got paid for any of it while we were in Oklahoma, but after we came to California he got paid for some of the crops he plowed under in Oklahoma.

S.J.: How did he feel about plowing under the crops?

Jackson: It seemed all right at the time because he didn't know he was going to have to wait so long to get the money--to get paid for it. I've heard that some of the politicians in Maud probably got some of the money. Somebody from Maud told me that about
two months ago. They said that they were pretty sure that some of the people there had gotten some of the money.

S.J.: It bothered some of the farmers to plow under the crops when people were going hungry.

Jackson: I can't remember him plowing under anything but cotton. We grew a lot of other things--alfalfa, wheat and cane. We made our own sorghum every year from sugar cane. Sorghum is syrup. I don't remember him ever plowing anything under that was edible.

S.J.: Do you remember people ever killing cattle or hogs because the government told them they had to?

Jackson: No, I don't. In our area I don't believe it ever happened. I don't even remember my father talking about that during the Depression. [They didn't do that unless the animals were sick.]

S.J.: Do you remember when the drought came?

Jackson: Yes. I remember we didn't have rain and there was a lot of dust. I always thought that the dust came from Texas. I never thought that it was Oklahoma dust. I don't remember that much wind in our area. We were on the fringe of the Ozarks and there were more trees. It was hilly and there were a lot of shrubs and creeks. But we had a lot of dust. I can remember we didn't see the sky sometimes. The sun would just be a bright spot up there. We would have to clean the kitchen every morning before breakfast. We could write our name on the table or anywhere in the house. I always thought it came from Texas. My stepmother was reading in the paper that people were dying in Texas. They had to keep a damp cloth over their face. They were suffocating. But it wasn't that bad in our part of Oklahoma--in Seminole County.

S.J.: I've heard some people say that tractors came into widespread use at that time and that put a lot of people out of jobs. Do you remember seeing very many tractors?

Jackson: Not in our community. One farmer had his land terraced so that it wouldn't wash away when the rains came in the winter and spring. It was to try to cut down on erosion. We did have an erosion problem. Other than that I never saw a tractor in our part of the country.

S.J.: Was there something that happened to your father's farming that finally made him decide to give it up and come to California?

Jackson: Just that there was no money in it. I asked him just last week how many acres we farmed and he said 80 acres. We just didn't
get that much off of the 80 acres. The cotton was about two inches high. It was sure small.

S.J.: So the drought and the dust really affected the quality of his crops?

Jackson: Yes. Most of our relatives had already come to California anyway and so we just followed. We were so poor we thought that if we came to California we would have a better life with more to eat. We thought we could get a better education. We heard that your books were free in California. You didn't have to buy your school books and because of that I felt sure I could go on to school.

S.J.: What other kinds of impressions did you have of California? Did you have a picture in your mind of what California would look like?

Jackson: I saw postcards of the oranges and that's what I had in mind. The oranges and the warmer winters and a sunny, better place to live.

S.J.: Did you ever consider going to someplace other than California? Did you consider leaving Oklahoma and going to another state?

Jackson: We never thought of it. California was the only place from about 1932 until we finally got here.

S.J.: Did you talk about it a lot before you came? Was it in the back of your mind that you might eventually go to California?

Jackson: Yes, every year I hoped that that would be our last year and that would be the last crop. The work was so hard and there was so little in return. Every year I hoped that my father would decide to come to California. He started talking about it that July. I just kept praying that he wouldn't change his mind. After the crops were gathered we really did come to California.

S.J.: You say that you had relatives that were out here. Did they write you and send you pictures and postcards?

Jackson: Yes.

S.J.: Do you remember what they said? Was it just that it would be better?

Jackson: Yes. One reason I wanted to come was that my mother's relatives lived here and I had never known my mother's relatives. I really looked forward to getting acquainted with my uncles,
my aunts and my grandfather. I think that was one thing that I had in mind. I always wished that I could go live with them. But it didn't happen.

S.J.: When you were in Oklahoma did other people such as your friends and classmates talk about going to California too? Was this something pretty common?

Jackson: Not very many of them did. Probably one thing that drew us here was that my father already had the promise of a job when we came here. I can't remember any other people in our community that came at that time. I do know there are some here now but they were still there when we left.

S.J.: Could you tell me about your journey out here? Did you come by car?

Jackson: We came by car. There was a man in our neighborhood who had brought his family to Bakersfield. He came to Maud because he still had part of his family in Maud. He came back to get two of his sons and we came with him. There were six of us and three of them. That made nine people in a 1937 Chevrolet. My dad paid him $25 to bring us to California. My dad didn't come with us. He still had to sell the farming equipment. He came about two weeks later on the Greyhound bus.

My stepmother and my two sisters and three brothers came with us. John Thomas was the man who drove us. The first night we stayed in Albuquerque, New Mexico in a hotel and then the next day we drove all the way through to Bakersfield, California.

S.J.: So you made it in just two days. Did you have any car trouble along the way?

Jackson: He did have a little car trouble but I can't remember too much about that. I know we came over where it gets so hot. It was in October and the car did give him a little trouble. It would overheat. I don't think it delayed us very long because we only stayed over one night and then when we got to Bakersfield we stayed with his family. We made it in two days.

S.J.: How about your meals on the way out? Did you just stop by the road to eat or did you eat in cafes?

Jackson: We had one breakfast in a cafe but the other times we did buy food and stop somewhere along the road and eat.

S.J.: Did your stepmother have very much money with her when you came out?
Jackson: I don't remember how much money she had with her when we came.

S.J.: Do you remember seeing other cars along the way with people you might think were from Oklahoma? I've heard that there were lots of jalopies with mattresses and pots and pans loaded down with people. Do you remember seeing anything like that?

Jackson: Yes. I know there were a lot of people coming out and they did put their mattresses on top. That's the way my grandparents came. They brought everything they could bring. When we crossed the border into California the border patrolman looked in the car and he said, "Can't you get any more in there?" There were nine of us in that little car and it was very uncomfortable. I know he was used to seeing a lot of people come through there every day.

S.J.: Did you have any problems at the border?

Jackson: No. I don't know what they were doing. Maybe they were keeping track of how many people were coming through. They always check cars coming into California to make sure you're not bringing in fruit or something from another state. I think maybe that's why he was checking us.

S.J.: Do you remember when you came into the valley? You probably came through the Tehachapis.

Jackson: We arrived there at nighttime so I don't recall. The next morning when we started for Fresno I remember just that long stretch of road and the eucalyptus trees. I'd never seen them before. It seemed like a long, long trip.

S.J.: Why was your destination up near Fresno?

Jackson: We had relatives here. My stepmother's brothers and sisters were here and my mother's family lived out on the San Joaquin River. My grandfather had rented a farm there and was farming.

S.J.: You said your father came out soon after that?

Jackson: Yes, he came about two weeks after we did. I don't think it was longer than two weeks after that. He rode the Greyhound bus and then he started working for the Bakman Ranch.

S.J.: You said he had a promise of a job. How did he arrange that before he came out here?

Jackson: My stepmother's brothers were working at the Bakman Ranch and they needed someone else. My dad came and they hired him and he worked there until 1941. I was already gone from home when he quit working there.
S.J.: When you were back in Oklahoma and thinking of coming to California did you ever see any fliers circulated advertising jobs in California?

Jackson: I heard about it and I remember one that wanted grape pickers in California. I've heard that they were circulated all over the state.

S.J.: Did you see this one?

Jackson: Just one.

S.J.: Do you remember what it looked like?

Jackson: No, I don't. I can remember looking at it because someone had said they wanted grape pickers in California. I don't remember what it looked like.

S.J.: Your father got this promise of a job and he started working for the Bakman Ranch. Where did you move to?

Jackson: We rented a small house not too far from here on Olive Avenue. We lived there for maybe a year and the Bakmans built a house for us. We lived in a house that they built for us—a small three bedroom house.

S.J.: Could you describe that first house you lived in?

Jackson: Oh, I've forgotten about that one. That was just a real tiny little house. Some Mexican people had been living in it. It was strange to me because they had cooked tortillas on the stove that was in the kitchen and there were little circles on the stove. It had a kitchen and two bedrooms. We used them as two bedrooms. Probably one was supposed to be a living room. That was our first little house. It was unpainted. There was no grass in the yard or anything. It was just a little house.

S.J.: Was the toilet outdoors?

Jackson: Yes, it was outdoors. It was just like a farm labor cabin or something like that.

S.J.: You lived there about a year?

Jackson: No, not that house. We only lived there a very short time and then we moved into a house that was just next to it. We still had the bathroom outside but it was a better house. It had a screened-in porch and it looked nice. It had grass in the yard and a pump for our water—which was closer to the house. At the first house we had to carry our water from the pump at the second house.

S.J.: What kind of possessions had you brought from Oklahoma when you came out? Did you bring just your clothes or had you brought
some cooking utensils and things to use in your new house?

Jackson: We just brought our clothing. A suitcase full of clothing is all we brought. When my dad stayed he sold our mules and our farming equipment. With the money he got from the farming equipment we bought furniture and a car. Everything was paid for. My father never had a charge account. They bought two bedrooms full of furniture and an icebox and it was all paid for. The stove was furnished.

S.J.: Did he save some money from his job to help buy these things?

Jackson: No, he hadn't worked that long. He got only forty cents an hour so that was $3.20 a day. There wasn't enough to save anything. That was just enough to buy groceries.

S.J.: Do you remember meeting other kids that were in the same situation that you were in--kids who had come from Oklahoma and their parents were working in the fields?

Jackson: I remember going to school with them. We did pick cotton with some of the kids who had come from Oklahoma. We weren't real close. We didn't associate much with them as I remember. I just knew them in school. After we came to California of course we didn't go to church like we did in Oklahoma. It was just not the same in that respect at all.

S.J.: Do you remember if you were very well-off as compared with many other Okies?

Jackson: No, I don't think we were.

S.J.: Do you ever remember seeing ditch camps?

Jackson: No, I didn't.

S.J.: They were by rivers or under bridges. People would just pitch tents or maybe build paper shacks.

Jackson: I do remember. Here in Fresno I see some of the corners today where I remember there used to be tents. People lived in tents. The trees are still there. One morning when I was going to school when the school bus turned the corner there was a whole camp set up there overnight.

S.J.: Do you remember anything about them?

Jackson: Just that they looked poor. They were just farm workers going from one crop to the next. Just a lot of poor people with their old cars and tents. There's places down in southern California where they would live for a long time. It's between Beaumont and Banning and Desert Hot Springs. I thought about that when
we went down that way last summer because those trees are still there. I came through there. Even during and after the war there were still a lot of people that were pretty bad off that still lived like that. They could do it in California but now they can't.

S.J.: Did you realize that most of them were either from Oklahoma, Texas or Missouri and were farmworkers?

Jackson: I did because they were the only ones without homes. The Californians all had established homes. They just didn't travel like that. It's a little bit like the Mexican farm laborers today.

S.J.: How did you feel about yourself and your family when you saw those very poor people? Did you feel fortunate that you had a fairly nice home to live in and enough food?

Jackson: Yes, I did. I felt fortunate that we didn't travel from one job to the next. I don't know if they got welfare in those days. I don't know what kind of help they got if they couldn't find a job.

S.J.: Did you ever hear anything about the government camps?

Jackson: No, I didn't know there was such a thing until I saw The Grapes of Wrath. I never heard of them.

S.J.: You mentioned before that some of the kids made fun of you and teased you a little bit.

Jackson: They did. Our clothing was a little different and of course our grammar was different. We said a lot of words differently. They teased us a lot about that. Right away we started trying to change that, but some of it you can never get rid of when you're older like I was. But we worked hard trying to sound like Californians.

S.J.: Was most of it kind of in fun? Or did you feel that they were being unfair and cruel to you?

Jackson: The older kids were being cruel but the younger ones our age just teased us a lot. In study hall once two girls sat there and talked about what I was wearing—about how long my dress was and if I was ever going to cut it off and things like that. We curled our hair a little different too.

S.J.: Were there very many other girls from Oklahoma in your high school—other girls that you might have made friends with?
Jackson: I didn't make friends with any girls from Oklahoma. The one girl I made friends with was a native Californian and today she lives about three blocks from here. I see her occasionally. But I didn't really make friends.

S.J.: So you felt very different. You felt you were being picked on—that you were being isolated.

Jackson: They made fun of us a lot. I remember once we had a debate in assembly about the Okies coming to California. We almost had a fight and the teachers had to dismiss assembly right away because there would have been a fight. It just seemed like half of the kids there were from Oklahoma and it was just about to erupt into a brawl.

S.J.: Do you remember the sorts of things they said to you or about you and other Okies?

Jackson: I remember after The Grapes of Wrath that if there was a car accident it was usually one of the Joads. My aunt married a fellow from Los Angeles and he used to tease us a lot but we really thought a lot of him. He just teased and he said every time the traffic was held up he knew there was going to be a car up there with some mattresses on top. He said most of the time there really was. People were always saying that the Okies couldn't drive—maybe they couldn't. Because we were used to riding in a wagon. We didn't have a car in Oklahoma. When we went to town we went in a wagon but my father did know how to drive.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

S.J.: Do you remember any violence between the Okies and the native Californians? Do you ever remember hearing of fights?

Jackson: No, not at my school.

S.J.: I wondered about the health of most of the kids that came out from Oklahoma. I've heard that a lot of them didn't eat the right kinds of foods and had a lot of health problems. Did anyone in your family have any health problems or do you remember other kids having problems?

Jackson: No, in my family we didn't have any health problems. I do remember some other kids that told me that they had boils and that eating raisins helped them a lot. We didn't have any dental problems or other health problems. I don't remember going to the doctor except when I broke my arm. We didn't go for a checkup or go to
the dentist for a checkup either. You had to really be sick because they just couldn't afford a doctor bill.

S.J.: Could you tell me a little bit about your dad's first job here when he was working at the ranch?

Jackson: He started in the fall and the first job was pruning trees. He did grapes, peach trees and almond trees all winter. It was a very large farm--the Bakman Ranch. I think that he did get laid off for a short time during the winter, but they had irrigation and ditch repair and a lot of things that he did.

S.J.: So he did a little bit of everything then.

Jackson: He did everything on the farm.

S.J.: Do you remember how much he was paid?

Jackson: Yes, he was paid forty cents an hour and if he ever got a pay raise I can't remember. But they did build a house for us and I think he paid them $7 a month back for that house and that included electricity.

S.J.: Was your father ever involved in or did he ever come home and tell you about any attempts to unionize the farm workers?

Jackson: No, not here in Fresno or at the Bakman Ranch. Never once did I hear about it.

S.J.: How about strikes? Do you remember hearing about strikes taking place?

Jackson: No, I never did.

S.J.: Do you ever remember seeing women and children working in the fields?

Jackson: Yes, we did it. My stepmother did.

S.J.: Did she work all the time?

Jackson: When she could—when there was cotton to pick. She worked in the figs and the peaches. We worked in the drying yard at the Bakman Ranch cutting peaches or packing peaches. We worked at whatever was in season at that time.

S.J.: Most of the time you worked was probably in the summer or after school?

Jackson: Yes, on Saturday and Sunday.
Jackson, M.

Was the work you did here difficult work—was it strenuous?

Jackson: No, not like Oklahoma. The last year we were in Oklahoma my youngest half brother was born in 1937. My stepmother couldn't help any in the field that year so I helped my dad plant the cotton that year. He plowed the furrow and we had a cotton planter that you had to hold up in your hands. It had a little wheel on it. My dad would fill that with cotton and we had a mule hitched to it and I followed him. All summer I helped him plant the cotton. That was strenuous. So what we did in California was much easier.

Do you remember if you and your mother were paid very much for your work?

Jackson: I don't remember how much we were paid for that work.

Did that help out though?

Jackson: Oh yes. We bought our school clothes with the money we earned. I paid for my school clothes that year. I just don't remember if they paid us by the box or by the hour, but I imagine we were paid by the box.

You described one time where you thought your father was laid off for a short while. Did that happen very often?

Jackson: No, just in the winter when they were all through pruning. I remember that he worked for somebody else when he got through at the Bakman Ranch and they had nothing for him to do. He could go somewhere else and work if he could find a place where they needed someone to prune. I remember he did do that.

As far as you remember he was employed just about all the time?

Jackson: Yes.

How long did he work for the Bakman Ranch?

Jackson: He worked from 1937 until 1941—four years. Then he farmed for himself. He rented a farm in Fresno County for about one year. Then he went to Madera and he farmed in Madera until about 1957. He had his own farm. Then he came back and worked at the Bakman Ranch again until he retired.

When you were first at the Bakman Ranch in the late 1930s it sounds as though the growers treated you very well. Do you remember how your father felt about his bosses? Did he like them?
Jackson, M.

Jackson: Yes, he did. They were very nice. The people helped us out a lot. They still see my dad. When we've had a death in the family they always are pallbearers.

S.J.: From what you've told me about the different jobs your father did it sounds as though he was almost like an assistant to them. He might have had a higher position than most of the other workers on the ranch.

Jackson: I really hadn't thought of it like that. When he came back in 1957 to work for them they did put him on the ranch to live in a house there that was just inside where their packing shed was. You might say he was like a foreman. I just never thought of it like that before but I guess he was.

S.J.: Did they have other housing on the ranch for other people?

Jackson: No, just my dad.

S.J.: He was the only one who lived there the first time in the 1930s?

Jackson: Yes.

S.J.: They didn't have any tents or anything like that?

Jackson: No, they didn't.

S.J.: Do you remember where the people who worked in the fields lived?

Jackson: The ones we knew who were relatives lived around there. They rented a house somewhere in the Fresno or Clovis area. There was a lot of women who worked in the packing shed that lived in the area. They didn't have a farm labor camp or anything like that.

S.J.: Do you remember ever seeing any farm labor camps at other ranches?

Jackson: No, I don't--in the Fresno area I don't.

S.J.: At that time your father had that car he'd bought. Did you use that much? I've heard a lot of people that came from Oklahoma say that one of the best things about coming out here was that they had a car and they could go on weekend trips and travel around a little bit and see the countryside. Did you do any of that?

Jackson: The only place we ever went was to Mooney Grove and I think that's in Visalia. We went there on a picnic twice and the other
times we just went to visit relatives or we came to see a movie here in Clovis on Saturday night. I think that's about all other than work. We didn't run around much. We hadn't been used to it I guess.

S.J.: For entertainment you went to a movie once in a while? Jackson: Yes.

S.J.: And you said you didn't go to church like you did in Oklahoma.

Jackson: No, we didn't. I don't know why they never started going to church after we moved to California.

S.J.: You said your mother worked when she could but she also had six kids. Could you tell me a little bit about her day? How early did she get up?

Jackson: We got up early—at three or four o'clock. She got up and cooked breakfast.

S.J.: Do you mean here in California?

Jackson: No, we didn't have to get up that early. We didn't have the farm animals. I know they went to work early but I don't really remember just how early. I think that it was still dark. If they started to work early they could take off earlier in the day when it was hot. She didn't go out to work after we came to California like in Oklahoma. The kids usually went to the field and they would play under a tree when they were real small. She would work about two hours and then go back to the house and prepare lunch and then maybe she'd work two or three hours in the afternoon. She never just went out to work. I can't remember after we came to California. I'm sure somebody kept my little brother. She probably didn't work until he was about two years old. I did. I worked in the packing shed. I can't remember a babysitter who kept my little brother when she went to work. It was a lot different in California when a mother worked out because in Oklahoma you worked for yourself and here it was for someone else.

S.J.: When you came out here did you go directly into high school?

Jackson: Yes, into Clovis High.

S.J.: Did you graduate at that time?

Jackson: I didn't graduate here. I got married and I finished school in El Paso, Texas at a high school that was a continuation school. I think they called it El Paso Tech. I didn't finish in California.
S.J.: When you quit school was it to get married?

Jackson: I really went to work. I was eighteen and I got a job that summer. I lived with some people as a mother's helper and then while I was living there I got married. I went to San Francisco to live and from there down to El Paso. The war had started and I finished high school in Texas.

S.J.: You were talking about hostility towards Okies when you were in high school. Did that continue throughout the whole time you were there?

Jackson: I think so and I think maybe we were a little hostile too. We thought we were just 100 percent American and we were coming out here and going to school with all kinds of people. I had never heard of an Armenian, I had never met an Italian and I never had seen Chinese or Japanese or Mexican people. I'd never seen anyone of a nationality different than myself and it just took a while to get used to these other nationalities. We thought their grandparents didn't fight in the Civil War or the Revolutionary War. That was a feeling we had and most of the kids that I talked to had. We resented the Italians a lot. I don't know why except that they always thought they were such good athletes. They thought they were good musicians. They just seemed to think they could do it better than anybody else and we sort of resented them. Maybe that didn't help us a lot either. But they thought we were low-class Okies and maybe we were dumb.

S.J.: These other minorities did?

Jackson: Yes. We were really a minority. I know how it feels to be a minority.

S.J.: Did you ever have those problems when you went into town to a movie or a store?

Jackson: No, I never noticed it.

S.J.: Just at school then.

Jackson: Yes, just the kids. You know children can be cruel and then when they're older they probably feel ashamed of themselves that they were ever like that. But children are that way.

S.J.: Did it bother you a great deal?

Jackson: Yes, it did. It bothered me because I wanted better clothing and I knew we couldn't afford it. It really did bother me a lot.
S.J.: After the war started do you think that people stopped worrying about the Okies?

Jackson: I think so because many of them went to Oakland and San Francisco and worked in the shipyards. I think it did change because we were all fighting for our country or working and making war materials.

S.J.: When you said you moved to San Francisco was that connected to the defense industry?

Jackson: No, I got married and he was in the service in the Coast Artillery in San Francisco Bay. I went up there to live and I started working at Letterman General Hospital. I was working there when Pearl Harbor was bombed. On Christmas Day we got the first patients from Pearl Harbor in the hospital. We worked all day that day. I was a nurse's aid.

S.J.: You said that a lot of the Okies moved up to Oakland and San Francisco to work in the shipyards. Did you know very many of them? Did you happen to run into people that were from Oklahoma?

Jackson: Just members of my family. No, I didn't run into a lot of them--just the ones in my family that went there to work. I think also people went east and wherever the government sent them to work. The ones in my family went to Oakland to Kaiser Shipyard where they worked during the war. I have met some other people from Oklahoma that worked up there. Since then I've heard people say they worked there during the war for Kaiser and other shipyards.

S.J.: You said you have seen The Grapes of Wrath. A lot of people don't think that that was a very good representation of what most of the Okies were like. Did you have any thoughts about the movie when you saw it?

Jackson: I just didn't think it was really true to life. It was kind of making fun in a way. I don't think it was like that at all. At least it wasn't in this area. But it was a good movie and I enjoyed it. I just don't think it truly represented the people.

S.J.: Were you insulted by it?

Jackson: I did feel a little embarrassed because I had gone to the movie with some of the kids that were from the Clovis area and they kind of laughed about it. At the very end I think it said, "All aboard for Fresno," and there was a lot of yelling and I felt a bit embarrassed.
S.J.: A lot of people who aren't Okies or haven't known Okies and don't know much about their situation might form an opinion of Okies just from The Grapes of Wrath. Do you think that The Grapes of Wrath gave Okies a bad name?

Jackson: Yes, I think it probably did. The part that I felt so bad about at the time was when the grandmother died and they buried her along the road. I just can't believe that they would really do that. I just don't believe that they did those things.

S.J.: Do you think the other people who saw the movie believed it though?

Jackson: Yes, I think they probably did. I wouldn't be a bit surprised.

S.J.: When the kids would tease you and call you an Okie they might think that all Okies were dumb or ignorant.

Jackson: Or dirty.

S.J.: Or dirty.

Jackson: Yes.

S.J.: Do you think the term Okie has changed since then? Do you think when someone says Okie now it means different things?

Jackson: Yes, it does. They still tease people and call them Okies when they do something dumb or maybe you have on your work clothes and you're out working in the yard and you look like they did back in those days--then they call you an Okie. I think mostly that's what they mean today. They're just teasing.

S.J.: It's not as strong or as insulting.

Jackson: No, it's not. In fact I do it myself sometimes just teasing. One time I was trying to make our son mow the yard and I said, "Do you want it to look like Okies live here?" He said, "One does.''

S.J.: So now it's just teasing instead of something cruel.

Jackson: Yes, and I really felt like they just meant people from Oklahoma. I didn't realize that it meant Arkansas and Texas and maybe somewhere else too. In those days I thought Okie just meant Oklahoma. I took it personally.

S.J.: When you came to California were you glad you came here?
Jackson: Yes. I was glad that we came. The climate was better. I was sure we'd have more to eat, be able to see our relatives and eventually have a home and just blend in—which we did.

S.J.: Did anything disappoint you?

Jackson: No, not really. I think it was always better. It just always got better.

S.J.: Did you ever want to go back to Oklahoma?

Jackson: Only in the last five years. I've wanted to go back just to see if things still look about the same. That's the only time I've really wanted to go back to Oklahoma to spend a couple of days or a week.

S.J.: Could you tell me about your children?

Jackson: I have a son. He lives here in Fresno and he has one child. He's 21. He'll be 22 pretty soon.

S.J.: What does he do?

Jackson: He works for an insurance company—Pacific Mutual. He's a claims adjuster for Pacific Mutual Insurance Company. He spent three years in the submarines and he had an injury there. They gave him a medical discharge so maybe he won't have to go back ever.

S.J.: Do you think that life is better here in California than it would have been for you if you had stayed in Oklahoma?

Jackson: Yes, I think so. I think we got a better education. Girls always got married so young back there. I can remember girls getting married at thirteen and most of them had by age sixteen. A few graduated from high school. The boys usually started working on the farm but more kids were going ahead and finishing high school. It used to be just the eighth grade and that changed.

END OF INTERVIEW
James Calvin Martin, Sr.  
b. 1900, Indian Territory  
[His parents from Ark. and Mo.]

Plossie Morgan  
b. 1903, Indian Territory  
[Her parents from Ark. and Indian Territory]

Martha Lee Jackson  
b. 1922, Lenna [now under Lake Eufaula], Oklahoma  
Education: some college  
Church: Southern Baptist

Frank C. Jackson  
b. 1910, Omaha, Nebraska

[her son] Joel Hossick Melton  
b. 1959  
Insurance claims adjuster

Mysti Leigh Melton  
b. 1980
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