

"Early History of the San Fernando Valley Oral History Project"

ANNA "QUEENIE" BILLINGS

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Early Chatsworth and the San Fernando Valley

13 December 1978

14 December 1978

Interview conducted by

Ava Kahn, Student

Transcript prepared by

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Oral History Program
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INTERVIEWER AGREEMENT

AVA KAHN

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ANNA "QUEENIE" BILLINGS

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW INTRODUCTION

The oral history interview with Anna "Queenie" Billings was conducted by Ava Kahn, a student at California State University, Northridge on December 13-14, 1978 at Billings' home in Gazelle, California. The interview features Billings' reminiscences of her family and Chatsworth. The final transcript of the interview was completed by Rebecca R. Berger, Grant Project Typist, in July 1995.

Anna Graves Billings, nicknamed Queenie, grew up in the Chatsworth area of the San Fernando Valley.

Born in 1903, she was the granddaughter of Ann Willden Johnson, who, along with her husband Niels, are thought to be the first English-speaking people to homestead in the Valley. Queenie's father was part owner of Graves & Hill General Store, that served travelers along the Santa Susana Pass in the early 20th century.

More about the Johnson/Graves family and early life in Chatsworth can be found in: Watson, Virginia. *A Child's History of Chatsworth*. Chatsworth [Calif.]: Chatsworth Historical Society, 1978, c. 1967.

Interviewee: Anna "Queenie" Billings [QB]
Interviewer: Ava Kahn [AK]
Date: December 13-14, 1978
Subject: Early Chatsworth and the San Fernando Valley

[Tape 1, Side A]

AK: ... in '78. I'm up in Gazelle, California. This is Ava Kahn, and I'm speaking with... let's see, how... how do you wish your name on this?

QB: Queenie Billings.

AK: Queenie Billings. Okay.

QB: My name is Anna.

AK: First, if it's all right with you, I'd like you to just talk about your earliest memories.

QB: My earliest memories were possibly when I was about four years old, and we kids rode the handle of a hoe or a rake or something and we were raking up leaves and stuff and we were still playing a game.

AK: This was up on the ranch? Where were you living then?

QB: Down in Chatsworth. I was born at Chatsworth.

AK: On which... was it a ranch then?

QB: On Andora Street now. It would be near where the Scheplers are. And then my school started off kind of funny, but it... I really got with it finally, and the teacher said, "You sit in the front seat," and so I sat in the front seat which was right up in front of all to see.

AK: How many children were there in the class?

QB: Enough so that they all laughed.

AK: Because they stuck you put there. Which school was this? Where was the school then?

QB: That was right in the neighborhood of where it is now, at the corner of Topanga and Devonshire...

AK: **El Segundo School?** 

QB: Yes, right in there close.

AK: **So you could... you walked to school?**

QB: Yes.

AK: **Why don't you talk about how you got your name, Queenie.**

QB: Well, my mother had had the three children and she was expecting another one. And to make all ends meet on the old farm, why my mother and dad boarded and roomed the men and surveyors that worked on the tunnel.

AK: **This is on the tunnel?**

QB: Uh-huh, a mile-and-a-half tunnel through the mountains there... and which incidentally they came within an inch when they met, when the drills met.

AK: **That's great.**

QB: And... and so that was a good job done by the surveyors... and the men came in for supper. And so dad was serving supper, and they were kidding him about it, you know, and he said, "Well, after all, I have to help out a little bit." And he says, "Where is Mrs. Graves?" "Oh," dad says. "We've had a newcomer at our house." And the head... the man who had spoken about it was... oh, I can't remember the first name... George Jones, who was head surveyor in the County of Los Angeles for several years. And he said, "Is it a king or a queen?" And my dad says, "A queen." And he [**the head surveyor**] says, "Okay. Her name is Queenie."

Well, my dad and mother had already planned to name me after my grandmother. I am rightfully named after my grandmother, which would be Anna Margaret, and it turned out that I carried that nickname throughout my schooling and business and everything. Of course, checks and such as that, then... legal matters such as that, then I sign Anna M. I always thought it was quite interesting and I at one time went in and saw Mr. Jones in Los Angeles when he was still working, and I was not very big. Well, anyhow they said they would take me in, so I went in and thanked him for giving me my nickname.

AK: **What did he say to that?**

QB: Well, he said, "I had no idea... anything about it, because we left there right after that." He said, "After we were through with our job, we left there right after that." But I have always delighted in the name, and I've tried, as my grandmother said, "You were supposed to be named after

me, but you weren't, apparently, because you go by Queenie," and I said, "Yeah, but I like it." "Well," grandmother says, "that's all right. If you will be a queen all the time, this is fine, but when I find that you're not being a queen, then I'm going to say something." And I always paid attention to my grandmother, but I didn't on that. That was my name, and it was different from anything else.

AK: Why don't you describe some of the times you spent with your grandmother.

QB: Well, I spent quite a bit of time with my grandmother because my mother had all the "Bayler" crew and what have you, you know, and run cattle and so on; had to help with the chores on the ranch, because we had several... I mean, my dad had several... hundreds and hundreds of acres.

AK: Now is this the ranch down in Chatsworth or up on the mountain?

QB: Down in Chatsworth. The one on the mountain was just leased. And the one in and around Lankershim, it was called, and the West Ranch is the one my dad had leased, and there were acres and acres to them. Sometimes they would get home and sometime they wouldn't. So it was up to me to kind of watch out for me.

And so I go up to my grandmother's. That was after they came... my aunt moved her down off from the mountain, because she said that she had to move to Hollywood to return to her teaching. They built... the two aunts and uncle built a house for here there. It's recently been demolished, and it would be right across from the new church. And so then I... she taught me how to sew, she taught me how to draw, and a lot of things that I didn't get at school. I don't exactly mean no fault of the teacher's, but...

AK: Things you'd normally learn outside...

QB: Well, they weren't very well educated themselves, some of them, and they had so many kids. And it was always pranks played on everybody and the poor little girls couldn't even get out to the little chicksails [sp] without the boys throwing rocks at us. But anyhow we got through that. I like the sewing end of it very much, and I followed that up almost more or less all of my life.

AK: How many children were there in the school? When you went, were there a lot of children in Chatsworth then?

QB: I would say that there were probably... when I was in elementary school, I would say about twenty children, maybe thirty at the most.

AK: Now may teachers? One teacher per...

QB: Sometimes one teacher and sometimes two.

AK: All different grades?

QB: Yes, and it grew as time went on, because when my folks came down there... my grandma came down there, they... there was a lot of people had moved in to the Valley and the Valley had been cut up, the ranches had been cut up, you know, more or less.

AK: Well, earlier when you showed me the pictures of the picnics, they were up on the ranch; right?

QB: Those were up on the ranch.

AK: That was when your grandmother still lived up there.

QB: And that was... I think nearly everybody that was baptized...

AK: Was in that pool?

QB: ... it was done in that pool. And only one drowning, and that was my brother. I didn't know him, of course, but he was the brother that should have been there when I was kind of getting into my teens and so on, you know, you seem to kind of rely on. And my brother Cecil was not... he was being real well and we all just loved him to death and everybody on the country did, but at the same time, why, sometimes you don't gain in the fact that you're having two entirely different lives.

AK: What was his life that...

QB: His life was... the doctors had given him up. He told him he could not... he would get better, but he could not ever walk again, they didn't think. And the folks took him to specialists and everything else. And when he first took sick, he just, I guess... he came in sick, and I guess he couldn't talk, but Mama didn't realize it and she spoke to him and he didn't answer. And so pretty soon she went in and looked, after she took care of things on the stove, she went in and looked and here he was all under the covers; he couldn't move. And this all happened so fast, none of us knew. And my mother for five weeks never knew whether he was dead or alive, and she spent most of her time listening to his chest for an indication. But he finally rallied. Thank God for the doctors. They had to come from San Fernando or further.

And they kind of got him on his feet as it were. He never could use his legs, but they had fixed up his car so he could drive it. And he took... he went through elementary school and graduated, and everybody just loved him, you know, and wanted to help him. And then he got one year of tutoring. Well, the woman was so impatient with him... she was a dear friend of the family, but she was just way, way out. And so Mama said no more of that. She couldn't... so he learned to drag his feet along by laying on this dismantled Singer sewing machine, and this is how he got his exercise and everything. Besides what Mama worked with him. And they... he took several kids through school... high school and college. Then... how they graduated, I don't know, but they did.

AK: What do you mean he took them through school?

QB: He helped them. There was always school children, especially the boys, they seem to... all of them worked on the ranches, you know, and they didn't have too much time, and all. But he, my brother was always there. And there was many, many of those.

AK: He tutored them with their work?

QB: Uh-huh. He was right there. And in other words, dear, his mind developed extremely well while the rest of his body deteriorated. Of course, he drove his own car, he managed. And he had a stick here that he'd push on with his tummy, you know, for a clutch, and so on. And he managed to get along until he died. And he took down with polio when he was about eight, and he was fifty-six... fifty-five or fifty-six when he died.

AK: Did well for many years.

QB: And he actually put these kids through school at the time. I mean he... well he would study. He was a good scholar.

AK: What about the other... how many children were there in the family?

QB: Well, I had four brother and... Oh, wait a minute. I have to stop and think. No, there was four brothers living... that's right... and the fifth one is the one that's gone. And two brothers older and two brothers younger. And this Cecil... when I spoke about brotherly and sisterly love and all, Cecil filled the space very good, but he couldn't go to any of the parties with me and things like this that schools had or programs. And I... they even had me as the... what is it?... Cinderella's stepmother? **[laughter]**... in the play; anyhow, a grouchy old thing. I didn't mind.

AK: It was fun anyway.

QB: We had a lot of fun in school. And we would... we lived in an adobe part of the house.. was adobe house... and then the folks built on to it.

AK: Now this was down...

QB: That was near Andora, on Andora.

AK: This was the West Ranch; right?

QB: Well, no. The west ranch was down near Reseda. This was Andora and just south of Chatsworth Street. And it's right in there where the Scheplers now live. I forgot what I was going to say.

AK: About the adobe house.

QB: Oh, yes. And the folks built on a couple of rooms, three rooms. And then they decided to tear that all down and build a whole house, and the house is still there; however, it's been changed so much. Timster [?] has it.

AK: Yeah. I saw the house.

QB: Did you see the inside of it?

AK: No, just the outside of it.

QB: Well, we used to have quite a few water fights with water-hoses and what have you.

AK: The house almost would have melted.

QB: And me the only girl. They run every girl off the place. They wouldn't let a girl come around and visit with me. I got so sick and tired of being a boy all the time. [laughter]

AK: Let's go back to what you were saying, the Sunday picnics and things. How did all that some about? What was that all like?

QB: Well, it's grandma's house, and whenever we wanted an outing or the church wanted an outing or the Sunday school wanted an outing... go to grandma's house. Let's go to Grandma Johnson's. So everybody loaded up in the hay wagons and cars... there was one or two of them [laughter]... and they would go up and swim. The pool is not all that deep, I mean, but it's swim-able, and it's large. It was an irrigating pool. And they... we'd take basket lunches, you know, and we would have the minister and his wife, everybody'd go. And if we were going to have a weenie bake or something like that... once in a while we would take our lunch, if we were going to be up there for a day or two... and take your lunch and go to the big rock, "Man of the Mountain." And they... we'd go in and have our lunch, you know, and just have a big time.

[Note: Pause in tape while Queenie talks to her husband.]

We would go up and help with the fruit, canning the fruit for Grandmother, and...

AK: Now this is when your grandmother lived up on the ranch?

QB: On the ranch. That was the drawing card.

AK: Is this still when your grandfather was up there?

QB: My grandfather never spent very many years up there, dear, because he came from a religious

family. And so they had asked him to take an active part. And my aunt thought it was good that he come down there and live... Well, 'cuz things weren't going just the way he thought they ought to on the ranch, so he went down and spent most of his time there. He would very seldom come... came up to the ranch.

AK: Where's there?

QB: I saw him just once, that's all, and that was up at the ranch that day, and he went on home with my aunt in Monrovia.

AK: Monrovia. He was active very much...

QB ... down there somewhere in a church, yes. And so Grandma practically run the place. And she had all kinds of food... vineyards, olives, and everything good to eat. And garden, big gardens, and many... well, had cattle and horses. My mother started taming horses and trying to ride 'em at three-and-a-half years old. And those horses would do anything for her, and it was that way even until she died. You could take a horse away from her, but she wouldn't give up.

AK: You had written me something about churning butter you said you did up there...

QB: Oh, yes. Why we had cows, lots of cows, up there. And, of course, I... probably why I'm roly-poly. But I just loved to help with the churning, and so that was the job I usually got. And I usually went when Grandma was going to churning. And I loved to lick that cream [laughter] with my fingers. And then, of course, come the job of washing all the utensils and stuff. I'd just leave Grandma do that.

AK: You liked the fun part.

QB: But I loved... and I loved to mold the butter. We had several different kinds of molds, and my daughter has the churn that my mother shot a marble through, and they put a cork in it to fix it and repair it, and it's still holding. And my daughter has that churn and my son has...

AK: Does she ever use it?

QB: No. And my son has the churn and dasher from my other grandmother and grandfather in Long Beach.

AK: Hum. That's interesting.

QB: And they stand about this high.

AK: About a foot and a half high, about two feet?

QB: About a foot and a half. And every once in a while my grandmother would have to stop and go out and make a new paddle... butter paddle, 'cuz she'd break 'em quite often, the dashers.

AK: Well, this ranch that she had... is what she and your grandfather had homesteaded up in the mountains; correct?

QB: Yes. But he didn't stay there too long. I probably could look it up in that book. There might be something in that book about it.

AK: No. So she ran it as a ranch herself?

QB: Yes, and she... My aunt finished their college... most of them finished their college education. That meant going to Los Angeles. And so that left Grandma up there alone. She had two sons later. The last two sons were quite a bit younger than the other... the rest of the family, and they had to go and make a living. So they all decided to build this house for her there in the Valley.

AK: And so then what happened to the ranch after that?

QB: Well, the ranch was eventually... well, it was divided. The acreage... boy, I mean... might say this, too, before we go into that; when my mother and dad were married, why, they homesteaded on a place just directly west, and that is part of this... I think it includes this portion for the park they hope to have. And then in a few years, why, my dad moved down to his farming, or the farming in the Valley. And that just left her entirely alone up there. So we didn't use the place anymore. They divided it into two-acre parcels and each living son and daughter got their two acres. They could build on it, whatever they wanted to, but the understanding was that not to sell while Grandma was still alive. And then they... later on, I guess they... yeah, they kept two acres for picnic grounds and they sold the rest of it, and that is what Mr. Brandeis owned.

AK: Um-hum.

QB: The rest of that homestead.

AK: That was sold to him. What are... the two acres today are...

QB: Most of them have been sold outside of the family. And there is one person living there, Harold Johnson, and his wife and it's a great playground for their children and children...

AK: And their children's children.

QB: And, one experience Mama had when my oldest brother was born; shortly after he was born, why, she was still kind of not feeling too good, you know, and she was alone and Dad was down in the Valley working. And it was just getting about dusk, and this big mountain lion come and just spread himself right over that whole doorway and let out a God-awful scream, and it just scared her terrible. She was afraid that he was gonna break in and get the baby. But she didn't move or anything, and then the lion finally left. But a lot of things happening, you know, up there...

AK: So after that she... they moved down?

QB: Yes, they moved down to the Valley.

AK: Now when did your father have the store with Hill?

QB: Graves and Hill? That was when I was in... just started high school. No, that was my last year in grammar school. They had it for a few years.

AK: That was one of the few stores in Chatsworth?

QB: Yes, it was the only store. And there was a Mr. and Mrs. Jackson owned it and they both died, and they were buried up west on the hill, west of the now-existing cemetery. And so Dad bought... and Mr. Hill bought the store. One day I was going down and I went down and got some groceries that Mama needed, and it had been raining and the roadway had a great big, rather deep water there, and of course me, I was going to go around the puddle. And the horse went straight. So I consequently lost the... I didn't have any help from there on. I walked home. The horse went off and left me. [laughter] It takes experiences like that to bring back...

I lay here and dream about things that happened. It's surely the good old days. I can't say so much for... I don't know. You... people believed in other people, kind of made an effort to, you know, do the right thing. And each one was willing to help the other one. And in some of those pictures there... we kids used to play hide-and-go-seek behind our pumpkin patch, the pumpkins were so big.

And the folks lived there until Mama... eventually she moved up to Grant's Pass, Oregon with us when we went up and purchased our trailer park. That was when my husband found out that he had diabetes, so he had to give up the trailer park. He couldn't handle it. And so she died up there in Grant's Pass. She had never lived anywhere else but Chatsworth.

AK: You had said that you went to school at the Santa Susanna School... right?... for grammar school?

QB: It was the Chatsworth School.

AK: It was called the Santa Susanna School.

QB: Yeah. It was called the Santa Susanna School. Why, I don't know exactly. I've never... although the... a lot of the children came from there, so that may be why. And then there was the same in high school.

AK: Yeah. Where did you go to high school? At the same place?

QB: Well, my cousin and I used to drive the old horse and buggy down to Canoga Park, three and a

half miles from home. And, well, we'd get there sometime in the morning, and after noon, why, we'd have to start home a little early to get back. And that went on for a couple of years. And then they... Raymond Hayworth bought a truck, or his dad bought one or something... an old ice wagon, we used to call it. It didn't have any springs in it... and we rode that. And we had to go out Devonshire to Reseda Boulevard, down Reseda Boulevard through Northridge, pick up the kids there and the Reseda... which it wasn't that name then... and then back to Canoga Park. Drove twenty-some odd miles to get that three and a half miles. And then this bus had to let us off... there must have been six or seven of us... let us off at the high school, and then they went out and got the boy and girls from out around Calabasas and through there and brought them to school.

AK: People talk about busing today.

QB: Yeah. I just can't understand it. And I don't know, we always had a lot of fun, but at the same time... well, like Mama says, "So you just grab a sandwich or a piece of bread and butter and run for the bus." That's just about the way it was. And then you were late getting home.

AK: Were both your parents from Chatsworth or just your mother? Where...

QB: My dad was living at my uncle's home in... or thereabouts on the ranch. He had a big ranch, Mr. Goodall.

AK: And so he had come as a child to Chatsworth?

QB: And so he came there... No, he came there as a young man, about fifteen or sixteen... sixteen... eighteen... seventeen, seventeen, I think. And he rode and I don't know... he somehow... well, it wasn't too far from ranch to ranch, and so Mother and he got married. And they stayed up in the mountains there for a while, next to Grandma.

AK: Where did you mother go to school?

QB: In Chatsworth.

AK: In Chatsworth. At the same school you went to?

QB: And my grandmother taught school. My grandmother taught Bible school. She helped build the church. She was the... among the higher officers of the church. And then Dad... I don't know how many years he went to school. He [Mr. Graves, Queenie's father] was from Long Beach, and he was moved out there when he was nine weeks old from Kansas. They came out on one of the first trains. And that's how they happened to be able to bring their furniture with them. And I have two or three pieces of their furniture there.

AK: So then he came from Long Beach to Chatsworth?

QB: Yes. He worked out on the ranch there. And Mr. Goodall had been... well, in those days they

didn't make it to the Valley... but he was raised by my grandmother and grandfather Graves. And they lived at Compton and Long Beach. They saw Long Beach when it was really in its youth. And so they were back and forth that way. But Mother's going was pretty well... my mother's was pretty well... she was pretty well tied down with Cecil. And Jess [**Queenie's brother**] has been following the forestry work. He's worked on the ranches quite a bit, and then he decided he wanted to go into something, you know, that would... He can put in these several years and quit.

AK: What about your other brothers?

QB: Well, let's see. I have a brother here in Gazelle, and my other... the next to the youngest brother was a farmer in Buttonwillow for several years, and he's passed away. And then my invalid brother passed away, so my youngest brother and my oldest brother and myself are all what's left.

Have you ever met Minnie Palmer?

AK: No. No.

QB: I don't know what condition she is in or whether she is alive. I haven't heard.

AK: Yeah, she's alive. I know she's alive. I don't... let's see. Lila Schepler, I think, told me that she had seen her recently. She didn't know how well she was.

QB: Well this is it, you know, to be interviewed. I don't know, but... my, oh, my. Oh, about ten years ago she had just had... I mean that woman could just do almost... live over day and day and day, you know.

AK: I think someone from the [Calabasas] Historical Society did interview her for a half hour or something and hoped to go back and do it again. I don't know.

QB: She's about 100 years old.

AK: I think she's living in a nursing home or something.

QB: Oh, is she? Well, they were friends and neighbors. And of course they didn't live... of course, they lived up on the corner of Andora and Farralone.

AK: That's more towards the mountain, I guess.

QB: Yes, where all those apartment buildings and so on are right near the little park that exists from the Blue Elk Ranch. And that... we were very good friends, and my dad and mother were extra good friends of the Buels. And, of course, he was... he went to school to be a teacher while my aunt was going to school, but he didn't live out there then. He was living in Los Angeles. She knew him in Los Angeles. He bought some of... it was part of the Graves family property they

had bought when he was living with Mr. Goodall.

AK: What was Chatsworth like when you were growing up?

QB: Well, it was pretty hard to say. We had a blacksmith's shop; in fact, two blacksmiths' shops. And I can remember this one... he was on old... [unintelligible]. He was a real nice fellow, but, ooh, he was big, big, burly fella, so big.

AK: Were you scared of him?

QB: Kinda. And then, there weren't very many houses; everybody on well water, you know. And if they had the water they could irrigate and have gardens; and if they didn't have enough water, why, they had to do without. And Dad had a great big windmill and a huge tank... awfully big... and my brother used to go up and oil the thing for him. It was... two of us... I'm one of them... can't go up high places very well, and so I... it wouldn't do for me to go up there. But they did manage to keep the windmill going.

AK: And they used the mill for flour and everything?

QB: They... yes, they irrigated for... of course, like their grain crops and stuff, that had to rely on the weather for that. But all of the places had fruit and so on. And Mother... I can remember so plainly... this is after I was married and had my first child... that one year the Valley then had lots of peaches and apricots, and the peaches were so big that my mother had to quarter each one of them to get them in those wide-mouth jars. And I just couldn't get over it, you know, to cut up those beautiful peaches.

AK: They had to can them.

QB: Yeah. And we always had... of course Mama... it was just like cooking for a mob. All the neighbors' kids were... are boys, and the boys were over there to be with Cecil, you know, and Jess when he was home. And, dear me; pies, cakes, anything like that never lasted very long. Mother'd have to find or hide her pies.

AK: Or they'd be eaten.

QB: And, well, one day, why, this is just what happened. And she went to look for her pie and she couldn't find it, so she knew somebody'd stole it. And so everybody had to go through the routine of being it to see if they were the guilty ones. Nobody could find the pie; nobody. [Laughter]

We had a pantry and it had lattice work shelves on it, and you could slide stuff way back in there, you know, and still get the cool air. And Mama went to put a pie in there one day after that and slid against that something up in the cupboard, and here was that old mildewed pie. [Laughter]

AK: So nobody had eaten it.

QB: Nobody had eaten it. This'd teach you about somebody.

AK: After you went to Canoga Park High School, what did you do?

QB Well, I kinda... I don't know. Dad and I never saw eye to eye. Of cours't I was the only girl, and of course, dear me, they couldn't pick on me or anything else, you know. And so I just told Mama, I said, well... I started to finish my last year in high school, and I had been down to my aunt's... I lived with here for six months, and they thought maybe...

AK: Where did your aunt live?

QB: In Monrovia.

AK: In Monrovia? Oh, this was the same aunt where your grandfather...

QB: Yes. Yes. And she thought maybe that I could get more subjects down there, 'cuz I wanted my home economics. And I had one year of dressmaking, I had one year of cooking, and I couldn't get... when I came home I told Mama, "I'm not staying there any longer. I'm so homesick." And so I came home and I still... That's all I could take. Well, I got disgusted, so I said, "Mama, I'm going to wait until the next semester, and I can start in September." So this is what I decided to do. So what did I do? Got married. **[Laughter]**

AK: That stopped that.

QB: I had no intentions of doing that, but I don't know. I just happened to hit the right one at the right time or something like that. So had two babies...

AK: How did you meet... meet your husband?

QB: Oh, they had lived there for years, the family had, and... up in the mountains, up in the Oat Mountains where Dad used to run his cattle. Why...

AK: Up near Santa Susanna or up...

QB: No, it was... it would be in that general direction, about direct south of Twin Lakes. I mean north of Oat Mountain... that's O-a-t. Most people think... people think it's Oak.

And, anyhow, that marriage lasted long enough; I had two children, then got a divorce. So that didn't last, about four and a half, five years. So I didn't go back and finish my schooling, which was a sorry thing, because I really couldn't... but I went on with my dressmaking. I didn't go to school for it, but I taught myself a lot, and this is where my grandmother come in and help me with sewing, you know.

AK: She was still helping you then or was...

QB: Yeah, she... we started all over again when she came down to the Valley. Why, we'd kinda... I'd go back and forth and that time...

AK: Where were you living then?

QB: I was... lived home most of the time.

AK: With your children?

QB: Yeah. I stayed there at Mama's. And then when Sy [**second husband**] and I were married, why, he went overseas, and he was a POW in World War II, and I didn't even know if he was alive for four and a half months. So anyhow...

AK: So you stayed at your mother's in Chatsworth?

QB: Yeah. And then we bought a place there when he come back from the service. And we've had two or three places since then. It's cool up this way...

AK: You wish you were back down there sometimes?

QB: We lived... what?... two years at [in] Wyoming. That's where my family is.

AK: Your children?

QB: And their children.

AK: They all moved? Everybody moved out of Chatsworth?

QB: Yeah. I, let's see:

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

QB: ... just some nephew and my brother who is here in... down around Torrance, Carson City. And then I have... they have a brother, too, over at Santa Susanna. But there is a lot of the Johnson's, several of them, I think, around the area. We liked it there, but they just began moving in until it was, you know, bumper to bumper.

AK: And they're still building. You got too used to the open spaces.

QB: Yes, that's right. And that's one thing, mother used to run to school. She said it was good going, running down the hill. But coming back wasn't so good, because she walked part of the time rather than ride the horse. And she went hiking up there at the old ranch.

I don't know whether they tore the ranch house down or what happened. But Mr. Brandeis built it all up new and beautiful. I never got to see much of the inside of the house, but it was... they say it was very pretty, and the yard was so nice. And now that was taken by fire. I think there's part of one of the buildings there or something.

AK: No. We drove kind of around the ranch, but we didn't go in when I went with Mrs. Schepler.

QB: Yeah. Well, Wanda and Carl would be awfully good to interview, you know...

AK: Yeah, I know who they are.

QB: ... because he knows. He was there several years.

AK: Well, what. We were talking about the tunnel before. You don't remember anything... when that was built?

QB: That was finished in 1903, the year I was born. And that's how I happen to remember it. And it's about... it's 150 foot long and, oh, in the... let's see. There was a cattle... we were just talking about that a few minutes ago... cattle train in that tunnel. It was... it lacks a few inches in... long in. And at least when I was first married, my husband worked over there. And so we put up a tent and lived over there, and we used to walk back and forth through that tunnel. We had to always have a light, because it was very, very dark in there and it's slimy and wet. And there isn't much room to get back out of the way of a train, if one came through. And we lived over there for a couple of years. But this time there was... I think there was three engines and the engineers... three engineers, and the other two graduate men learning the engineering work, and then the conductor and so on. And this was all cattle train. And all the cattle and all the men were killed. The, uh... something went wrong. There was an explosion so, I guess somebody turned the wrong thing or what, I don't know. But there was an awful explosion, and the fumes is what killed them all... killed them all. And they... the movies were taking pictures up at the Iverson Ranch, and they had a wind machine, so they borrowed that and they put it at the Hassen end of the tunnel... 'cuz that's what they used to call the pass, and that was over by Susana Knowles... and they got it over there near the opening of the tunnel as they could and drove the fumes out. And this happened about 1:30 in the morning.

And, we drove from Newhall over to take the children over to see it. Let's see, we got over there about 1:30 and... no, not 1:30. A little later. And this engineer's watch had stopped at a certain time. When they finally got that train out of there... they pulled it out and oh, the stench was terrible from the stock... and they got it out in the open and that... the steel and iron of those locomotives was still red hot. And they got it... that out. It was hours and hours after, 'cuz it was about 1:30 when we got over there. So that was one tragedy.

But for the kids that had gone through and run through the tunnel, the little tunnel the kids used to run to beat the train, and why in the world they ever escaped not getting hit or something, I don't know. But I think they gave some of those engineers a bad time.

AK: I guess so.

QB: And Stoney Point was always a gathering place.

AK: Now this was up... it's up on the old ranch or down by...

QB: Stoney Point is at the foot of the pass, and that road has always come down there. And we... it was a great place to climb, and I guess they have been doing a lot of mountaineering, teaching the kids how to...

AK: Climb rocks and everything over there?

QB: Um-hum.

AK: But that was a gathering point when you were growing up?

QB: Yes. And...

AK: How about when your children were growing up? They still went... people still went there?

QB: Well, there is a lot of people that my youngsters can remember and relatives and all, but most of them have moved or passed away.

AK: How had Chatsworth changed by the time you were married and having children?

QB: Well, I don't know. It seems to me like when I was about... oh, I must have been about twenty years old or more when different businesses begin coming in there. There was one... usually one grocery store. There for a while there was two, and then they'd get three, and even recently there has been a lot of growth, extremely a lot of growth.

AK: How did that affect the life of the community?

QB: Well, the old-timers didn't like it. And yet it was... for some... In other words, they didn't want 'em to buy the big ranches, and like the Porter Estate and all that. And it was beautiful. But all of them, they weren't kept up that nice. And, of course, nearly all of his had been converted into housing, and oil fields.

AK: Yeah. They have some big housing developments.

QB: But Chatsworth somewhere... I don't know now whether Minnie would remember or not... Chatsworth used to have a different name. And I know in... I think the book here...

AK: Oh, it might be in here...

QB: Yes, it mentioned something about it, but the name of it was Los Golitas. Now just how the spelling of it is, I don't know, but I remember it only as Chatsworth. And that Los Golitas is an Indian name. And there were more... mainly Indians and a few Mexicans.

AK: Were still there when you were there?

QB: Yeah, and quite a few Spanish.

AK: Were there when you were growing up?

QB: Yes.

AK: What was your... you had a...

QB: Mixture.

AK: ... of everything?

QB: Yeah. And that's one thing that made it hard for the teachers, because some of them were not equipped with the education to...

AK: So you needed to speak Spanish?

QB: Well, Spanish and such as that.

[Note: Pause in interview.]

AK: At this point we ended for the day. We ended December the 13th, 1978.

Now this is the next day, December 14, 1978 and I again went to visit Queenie Billing in her trailer in Gazelle, California.

In the letters you had written me about stories of gathering eggs, and bees, and deer up at your grandmother's, do you remember any of those?

QB: I remember the episode of the eggs. That was another one of my chores that I delighted in was gathering eggs. It didn't make any difference whose ranch it was. **[Laughter]**

AK: Everybody's eggs. You didn't care.

QB: And one time Mama was supposed to be out gathering the eggs, and she... and had a neighbor, a friend that came over and he was quite smitten on her, and so he'd obviously, if he was around, he would go hunting eggs with her, and she got pretty well scolded for taking so long to gather these eggs. And she said, well, she was having trouble with the setting hens and, of course, that meant they got in battle all the time about... So anyhow, when her family was growing up, they used to get a lot of lump brown sugar. It would come in hard... more or less hard bars or chunks. And she had a great big chunk of this brown sugar and Grandma come out to see what was taking Mama so long to get her eggs and everything, and Mama saw her coming and she didn't know what to do with this sugar, so she put it under the setting hen. And, of course, needless to say she didn't go back to eat it. But this was her only candy, and she said that Grandma scolded her terrible, because I guess she disturbed the setting hen. And then the rabbits were quite abundant. They came after the fruit and the nuts and the what-have-you, and all, and the berries. And, there were some little deer, young deer, from time to time came in there and watered, and Mama... Grandma would always feed them. And they loved that. They loved hard bread, which is kinda unusual.

AK: Yeah. They usually like sloppy things, or sweet.

QB: Yeah. But, no, the deer, we've learned, you know in the parks, as a rule they won't bother any of the food that's mushy. And we took my grandson on a trip. We went up to Sequoia quite a bit, and we took him on a trip with us. And we'd been telling him bear stories and everything about the bear. And so, we set everything out on the table that was sealed, and the other stuff we packed it in the wooden box so the deer wouldn't upset it, or the bear, whatever. We went out for a hike... Mike was quite small... and we went for a hike. And he said, "Grandma, just leave my tomato juice and my peanut butter right there on the table, will you?" And so we did. The tomato juice was a big half-gallon can. And when we came back, there was nothing on the table. Everything was gone. And a bear had made a hole in the can of tomato juice and got all of it, and we couldn't figure out what happened to the peanut butter; and we had quite a good-sized jar of that, because my grandson liked peanut butter very much.

Well, we couldn't find that peanut butter anywhere. Went down looking all around on the trails, and here the deer had sat... the bear had sat down on the edge of the little trail and eaten all that peanut butter and left the clean jar, mind you, there undisturbed. It wasn't broken or anything. Be he got that lid off from there, and it was on tight. And he cleaned out every bit of that peanut butter.

AK: You'd think he'd have a rather sticky mouth.

QB: And Mikey just had a fit to think that...

AK: That bear had eaten all of his peanut butter.

QB: ... bear had gotten his peanut butter. That just about ruined the day until we went up and

bought some more for him.

AK: Feel sorry for the bear. Couldn't open his mouth probably after that.

QB: Probably was the next day before he could even swallow. But we have had several experiences with the animals like that. And we took the other grandchild with us the next year. She had a good time, but she didn't have any narrow escapes. [Laughter]

AK: Well, you had also written in the letter you wrote to me about your grandmother seeing the whole valley from the house?

QB: Right. And in there it mentions [in *Our Pioneer Mother*] a name, and I would have to look it up again. I think I said last night... oh, no. There's a landmark there...

AK: On Balboa, you said?

QB: ... near Balboa, yes, and...

AK: Ventura?

QB: It'd be Ventura Boulevard and De Oso is part of the name. I can't think of it now. And that was a watering hole. My grandfather hauled wood, oak wood and so on, to Los Angeles for fuel. And he went... I think it was twice a week that he went down there.

AK: Well, this is when your mother was young?

QB: Yeah. And, at that time Grandmother could stand in the second story in the bedroom, where the bedrooms were upstairs and watch her... my grandfather with the field glasses. And she could see, and she...him and the team as they came in to water and while they were watering and resting. And she'd know then just what time then Grandpa...

AK: Would be home.

QB: ... be home. And she would have his supper ready or whatever, you know, something to eat ready for him. But he hauled wood through several winters back and forth. He saw quite a few neighbors of us there was in the Valley then. There wasn't very many. And, uh, this waterhole, pool, has been retained as a historical marker.

AK: Did you ever go there? Did you use... have to use the pool?

QB: No, the pool was... it's still in existence now, but it's as a decorative thing. But at that time it was a pool for the stock and the horses or wagons and so on.

AK: You don't ever remember using it for that purpose, for a watering hole?

QB: No, but I can... I can remember many times going upstairs with her and her showing me... it wasn't necessarily Grandpa that was coming in there, but he... I don't remember that, but I do remember her showing me how she could see down there and where the spot was. And, she was a person that worried, more or less. And as the family grew up, they had to get their schooling in Los Angeles. And of course there was several in the family, so they would go and stay with the older folks that had made their move to the Los Angeles area to... as teachers and so on.

AK: Now, tell me something about your aunts and your uncles. What did they... how did they become teachers?

QB: Well, they went to the normal school. I have several school books and things that they used and all, that...

AK: Where was that located?

QB: Oh, I couldn't remember. It's the... it's a very popular area, or was at that time, but I can't remember just where it was. We later learned a few things about the college in later years when Mr. Buel became acquainted with us. And he later bought the piece of ground that is now the park there on Chatsworth Street. And that was the folk's property, except there was one portion of it down on the lower end that was... belonged to the Hills, Lovell [sp] Hill and his mother and dad. I can't remember their names.

[Note: Bearchell, Charles A. *The San Fernando Valley: Then and Now, An Illustrated History*. Northridge [California]; Windsor Publications, 1988. The Library, F868.I8 B43 1988.]

AK: What, your... how many of your aunts became teachers?

QB: Well, they... in those days there was three or four that taught off and on, but they... it wasn't a school that you would make use of, really now, because there are so many schools.

AK: Well, which of your aunts did that? What aunts...

QB: Aunt Noli, which was Lenore, was a teacher. She was thirty-seven years in the Riverside County Schools and down by San Diego. She was... she taught thirty-seven years in one school. And my uncle Eastman was not a teacher, but he did help a great deal in athletics and so on in and around Sherman Oaks area. And my uncle Norman followed the forestry angle of it. And he was... he went into forestry about the same time that my brother did.

AK: They were about the same age?

QB: Uh, no, not exactly, no. But they... Uncle Norman and Uncle Eastman were two of the younger. They were quite a bit younger than the others. And other than that, I... because really the things that they require now are much different.

AK: Yeah. Well, what did your other uncles do?

QB: Uncle Charlie used to... I remember him as a bee man, the raising and the having the bee aviaries. And that was more or less his source of income.

AK: Now this was the father of ...

QB: It would be the father of Kelly. We know him as Kelly, but his name is Lovell[sp]. And that was his father. Uncle Will helped some in the bees, but he did more farming and raising of vegetables and such, and probably had some occupation, but I don't exactly remember it. And his... one of his daughters... all his family is gone now, except two. Right. And the youngest daughter died during the flu epidemic of 1918, I think it was. But she was the only one out of the family to be lost. And she and I were quite friendly because we... and that was Uncle Will's children. Then there was Uncle Charlie's, and Uncle Charlie had a daughter who died when she was about fifteen/sixteen. And she and I were very close, too. But other than that, why, we all went to different branches of living. Some of them pursued their education; some of them didn't have the opportunity, because they... you can go just so far then you have to be on your own. We ran out of teachers about that time. [Laughs] But quite a few of the teachers boarded and roomed at my mother's and dad's place. We remember one episode particularly that I think Jess was a little involved in it. I'm not real sure about that. These gals were always kinda... the men were... and boys were all, you know, teasing them all the time. And so one night, why...

AK: Because the teachers lived at his house?

QB: Well, I... they were just playing pranks on them, you know. We didn't have any other...

AK: Entertainment. Right.

QB: And so, I can remember these two teachers had the front bedroom.... and I know Dad was involved in it. I'm not sure about Jess, but I think that he was. Anyhow, they made a form like a body... and there'd been an old wig floating around there from one of the movie companies that was out there, and they put this old wig on this form and made the bed all over again and everything. And this teacher came in and she didn't turn on the lights... I mean light the lights or anything... and Dad and Mother had already gone to bed. And she just pulled back these curtains, or...

AK: Sheets. Yeah.

QB: ... sheets, and she pulled them back like that, and she just, oh, just a curdling yell. And within a second it seemed like, she landed right in the middle of Mama's and Dad's bed and said there was a man in her bed. Well. it wasn't... turned out it wasn't a man after all, she felt terrible about it. But they were always playing pranks on the school teachers.

AK: Was it hard living in the same house with your school teacher?

QB: No. **[Laughs]** And one morning we went out to run the traps. My younger brother and I, we went out to run the traps and found a wildcat in the trap. So my brother drug it all the way down to the house. And he went on... I went on back with him and we got one of the boys to come out and help him. One stayed behind with a rope and the other in front with a rope, so it was taut, you know, and the wildcat couldn't get to the horses, mules, or anything. And there was a gang of us going on a hike, a ride and a hike, to the Oat Mountain to play in the snow. And we... I think there were seventeen of us... and then we'd take turns riding, because there was seven, eight horses, something like that. And we were making a day of it and, oh, we just had a great time; had our picnic lunch with us, but we'd eaten that up pretty much going up there. But we had to hike back home.

Well, everybody got around the table except my crippled brother Cecil. And Mr. Hill was there because he was Dad's partner in the store, and he was there, and another fellow stayed there to help Jess. And the table was elegant, a great big long table. And it was just elegant with food, you know, for us. My mother looked around and she said, "Jess, where did you get the meat?" And I don't know what kind of a motion he made to her, but it got through, because she got the word, so she didn't pursue it any. Well, nearly everybody got kind of a little bit suspicious. And when supper was all over with, why, then somebody says, "That was the most delicious stew I ever ate in my life. It was wonderful!" and all these "ohs" and "ahs," you know.

And finally my brother he got up... Jess, he got up and walked in the front room, because it was... somebody was being suspicious and we weren't sure who. And so that evening one of the teachers was living there at our house; the others were down at the Gray, what we called Mr. and Mrs. Gray's place. And, so he told her afterwards, he says, "Do you know what you were eating?" and she says, "No, but it was awfully good." She says, "Where did you get such good meat?" And he says, "Well, that was the wildcat that the kids drugged in." **[Laughs.]** And they had dressed that thing out and cooked it. And the next morning was Sunday ...

AK: Did you eat any of it?

QB: Yeah.

AK: Was it good?

QB: It's sweet meat. It was good, but it was a sweet meat, and it, you know, what we call rich. You couldn't... just couldn't get too much of it down. And, of course, all the good silver and glass and everything on the table. Oh, it was elegant. The next morning my... we had what we called "devil's corner" in the church down there... **[Laughs.]**

AK: What was that?

QB: Oh, these naughty, naughty kids...

AK: They had to sit in the corner of the church?

QB: They would always hide behind the pew, you know, and kissing each other and one thing and another...

AK: Well, who told them to sit there?

QB: Well, they just did. It was a fun thing, devil's corner. Before the evening would be over or the day would be over, why, somebody was cutting up, you know. And they... a bunch was all kinda cutting up about it. And anyhow, he said to this... he reached over and he said to this... during prayer, he says, "You know what you was eating last night?" She said, "No, I have no idea, Jess, what I was eating, but I can imagine." And he says...

AK: This was the school teacher he said this to?

QB: Yeah. He says, "I... that was wildcat meat the kids brought in." And she had to jump up and make a run outdoors. [Laughs.] And she got rid of her breakfast, she was shook up about it. But this is the way our life was. It wasn't all white, but...

AK: But you had a good time.

QB: ... we had a good time.

AK: Um, you had mentioned before about sewing and how you continued it later. What... you said something about your busi... you had a business with sewing?

QB: No, no. I...my mother and my grandmother helped me, especially my grandmother, how to lay patterns and such, and it did help because I only could get one year of sewing in school. And that... the teacher didn't have the experience at teaching yet, enough, but I made a dress, and I saw it made, and I made a slip. And so I pursued that ...

AK: So how did you use it? Did you make clothes for your family?

QB: I did dressmaking for several years.

AK: Yeah. That's what I was interested in.

QB: But not... now-a-days it's so different. I feel ashamed to try and pick up anything to sew it. But it's... the materials and everything are so different, and you got to kinda keep up with the situation. But I would have... invariably... I had several customers in Newhall. Invariably, they would come in and want an evening dress. They would come in in the morning and want an evening dress and, " could I have it out by evening?" Until I just got so fed up with it that I couldn't go any longer on that.

AK: But you were making dresses for them in one day?

QB: Yes. I... there isn't too much to an evening gown, you know, but at the same time it still had to be done nicely and pressed and everything, and it was quite a chore to what they have to do to the material nowadays. The material is practically no ironing and pressing and things. And I followed that up like my grandmother said, "Keep your hands busy, and that keeps you out of mischief." And this really has helped a lot. And I made... in the last few years I made a lot of sofa pillows and things like that, you know. I've about given it up. My eyesight isn't too good, so... But I found it very interesting work. But the... well, in a small town you pick up some yardage to make something with, you see half a dozen dresses made from the same thing. [Laughter.]

AK: There's only a certain amount you can buy. You only had a certain selection.

QB: That's right.

AK: You later worked in a store, right? In what store did you work in?

QB: I had charge of a school cafeteria in... I started it, initiated it, in Ventura and I helped two others, the cook, too get organized.

AK: How did that come about, that they wanted a cafeteria?

QB: Well, particularly I was interested in P.T.A. work and such. I was...

AK: Now your children were going to school in Ventura then or...

QB: They went to school in Newhall and they went to school in Ventura and went to school in [at] San Fernando High, and so on. But I think myself that a cafeteria is a great thing. There's too many mothers that shrug their shoulders and, well, eat a piece of bread or something like that...

AK: No hot lunch.

QB: ... and no hot lunch. And I think it was five different years that I was working in a school cafeteria or in charge. Started in the dressing room of the stage for my kitchen in Ventura, and they finally built me a regular dining area and a kitchen. And one ruling was a child could not have a dessert unless they had sandwiches with them, you know, from home or such like that, so that the child would not be able to come in and just get a dish of ice cream or any dessert like that. And we found it to be quite successful in the Ventura schools. And I've put in about seven years as a pharmacist assistant or clerk in the drugstore.

AK: Which drugstore was this?

QB: I worked at Chatsworth most of the time for four brothers, the Minority [sp] brothers. And then I... let's see, I can't... oh, I worked in the Lark School, which is mentally... a mental or retarded school.

AK: Is that the one up by...

QB: Bouquet Canyon?

AK: Yeah, in Bouquet Canyon.

QB: Until I was injured by one of the patients, and he did not realize it. But it was supposed to be for children and there were, I would say a half a dozen or more people that were around fifty or sixty years old. And it was one of these boys... we called him a boy, but I was injured, and once you're injured, sometimes they keep that resentment. So I was pretty badly hurt, but there were nothing... no bones broken. But I thought my ribs were broken, but they weren't. But I resigned rather than go on with it.

AK: It was too much.

QB: Yeah. It was cooking. And then I was on night duty and I was supposed to be night nurse, and there was supposed to be a trained nurse on duty and there wasn't. I didn't like the set up.

AK: No. You weren't trained to handle it.

QB: And, of course, then we were self-employed for three or four years in a trailer park in Oregon.

AK: In Newhall?

QB: No, in Ore...

AK: In Oregon. Now, where did you live when you were raising your children?

QB: At Newhall. I was married to Mr. Bryant [sp] and we went at Newhall. That's where his family lived. I became involved in P.T.A. work when my children started school, and that's where I was president for two years. And then we went into the Ventura schools, because he was transferred up there. When we come back, I parted ways, he and I did. And the children belonged to Mr. Bryant, who is several years gone now by death. And... however, we were separated. I... between Mother, Dad and myself, why, we pretty well raised the children. And this is... as far as the children are concerned is their Dad, [Sy Billings, who was in the room] for which I was very happy. Everybody should have a grandma and everybody should have a grandpa. I've always said that. And I think... well, like my grandmother used to say, I would go and practice on the organ.

AK: With foot pedals?

QB: Yeah. And over on this side there was a vase and over on this side there was a vase. And my grandmother said, "All right. You can come up and take lessons and you can come up and practice." So, I would get to play loud, you know, and the old organ would kinda turn and

rattle, and Grandma would say, "My dear, you're playing too loud! You know that, don't you? Tone it down." So it ..I enjoyed that. And then my grandma and grandfather from Long Beach gave me their piano that they had bought in Missouri... or Kansas. And they gave that to me and it is now... my son has it.

AK: So you brought it out to Chatsworth with you?

QB: Yeah. We had someone bring it out. I can't remember who, but I remember the piano being moved. And so... and I took lessons from my Aunt Emily, who was the second... uh, the first stepmother to Kelly. And she was an organist.

AK: Did your mother play the piano or organ?

QB: Not very much, no.

AK: Did your grandmother play at all?

QB: My grandmother played, yes; hymns.

AK: Who... how'd they get the organ... the organ that she had was up on the ranch?

QB: No.

AK: Or down at her...

QB: ... it was at Long Beach.

AK: No, no. You said your grandmother let you play the organ.

QB: Oh, that was... yes, the organ. That was Grandma Johnson and that was when they moved into the "Greenhouse." They had the organ before that, but this is when ...

AK: Oh, down... when they moved down to the Valley?

QB: Yeah, in the "Greenhouse."

AK: 'Cuz, I was... did they... I wonder, was the organ made or they bought it someplace?

QB: No, they bought it somewhere. But it was a beautiful thing. It was maple. I don't know whatever became of it, but it was a beautiful organ. And I played for the church a lot, you know. I'm not that good a pianist or organist, but I had taken pipe organ at high school in Canoga Park. They had pipe...

AK: Oh, they had a class?

QB: ... pipe organs there. They built them in Van Nuys, and we got one of the first ones up there at high school in Canoga Park or Owensmonth.

[End tape 1, Side B]

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

AK: [December 14,] 1978. This is tape two, and I'm continuing with Queenie Billings. Okay?

QB: You're going to have a music box fill. **[Laughter.]**

AK: We were talking about the organ and playing in the church. How many members did the church have when you first... was it small?

QB: Well. I remember of teaching Sunday school, had class, when I was fourteen years old. And I didn't really have that much knowledge to do it, but there were several children who were Spanish that, you know, were having quite a time trying to accomplish the language. And so it was kind of an easy form of being a musician because I just wasn't that good.

AK: Did you... do you speak Spanish at all?

QB: No, but they... there were several of the children that had a hard time learning the English language when they were used to the Spanish.

AK: So the music helped them.

QB: Yes, it helped them. But at the same time, they were getting a little confidence and liking the music, which helped.

AK: It made them feel more comfortable.

QB: Yes, we had... I think all of us have been baptized in the church there, in Grandma's pool and...

AK: Now, it was a Methodist church; right?

QB: Um-hum.

AK: What I heard a story that... what she had come from, a Mormon background, right?

QB: Yes and no. Yes and no. They were... there's some history in about... is when Brigham Young was killed... there was a certain amount of history going on about that time but I... I didn't learn too much about it. And I don't know, there was some comment because there was some

question portion that they were undecided when they wrote that little *My Pioneer Mother*. And so my aunt just dropped it, because there seemed to be a feeling there that she might be, oh, not showing the respect she should to their work. But like... I think that it's possibly in that book, because she mentions the fact that she... now, the belief was not necessarily hers, because she had become in contact with it within the family. So I don't know who was involved where or what, but it was about the time of the massacre, and so she tried very hard to keep away from that particular subject. I don't know. There are several relatives back there, but I don't know who they are. Some of my cousins have been... Kelly's brother's back there, my brother was back there, and his wife.

AK: In Utah you mean?

QB: Yeah, back there to visit.

AK: You still have relatives there.

QB: Oh, yes. There are still relatives there.

AK: Did your grandmother or grandfather keep in contact with their relatives back there?

QB: Uh, pretty muchly, pretty muchly. But my aunt was... she had... well, she pretty much had to go with that belief of, "I'd rather not say," because she was teaching school and so on, you know, when this book was being written. So she had to be sure not to take...

AK: Not offend anybody.

QB: ... hurt anybody's feelings, because everyone to their own beliefs.

AK: Yeah.

QB: But I followed up and I sang in the choir. And Katherine came into the family about that time, and she was welcome to the job as far as I was concerned because it wasn't always convenient for me to go to Sunday school.

AK: Yeah. You had other things...

QB: Well, I had to kinda do the housework when my brother was so bad, you know. He couldn't get around. Why... Mama stayed. Like someone said, "Well, your mother could just as well come to church and be a Christian." I said, "She's just as good a Christian as anyone could possibly be in her way," because she was taking care of a sick boy and she was making a home for us and everything. What more could we ask? You don't have to belong to a certain denomination. I could be just as... probably just as good with some other denomination.

AK: Now, as I said that the church had changed, what... I think they originally, because there was... what do you call it?... a traveling minister...

QB: Yes.

AK: ... in a certain denomination. That's how the church became that way.

QB: Yes. We had one minister that always came to chicken dinner, if we were having chicken dinner, which we usually were.

AK: If you had chicken, he'd come.

QB: And he... Well," Could I please have a bag or something?" so he could take a piece home. And my dad always said, "Yep!" Here and have chicken dinner, and the last I saw him, he was going down the road eating a piece of chicken. **[Laughter]**

AK: He really liked your mother's chicken.

QB: Or he got kinda hungry.

AK: That, or it was far between chicken dinners. Oh, that's funny.

You had said yesterday something about that your parents had leased a ranch on the mountain.

QB: Yes. That was the Joaquin's property, J-o-a-q-u-i-n-s.

AK: Okay, q-u-i-n-s. They owned the land.

QB: They owned the land. They were people who lived in a very beautiful part of the Los Angeles and had a very beautiful, elaborate home. And, that... let's see, that and a Swiss family, we became very attached to them, too. They were friends of the Joaquin's. But they didn't live there. They had a place there, a mountain home, but they didn't live there. They'd maybe come and stay a few days something like that. And I don't know who owns that property now.

AK: But was that common to lease property out there?

QB: Yes. Running cattle, yeah.

AK: You owned where you lived, but you leased land run the cattle.

QB: And where the lookout is on the mountain back of Chatsworth, the fire lookout, that was all...

AK: Up by Twin Lakes.

QB: Oh, no. It's way at the top.

AK: Oh, I know where you mean; yeah. I went up there.

QB: And this is where we went that Sunday that we had the wildcat dinner, was up at the lookout.

AK: That's where you found the wildcat.

QB: No. We found the wildcat in the backyard. But the people that went up the snow went...

AK: Oh, I see.

QB: Yeah, they went on. And that was all cattle ranging, horses up in there. And my dad had quite a lot of cattle.

AK: So these weren't homestead acres; they were people who had bought land...

QB: They were homestead pieces of land, but not necessarily... there were several different owners. And there was a cult opened up over in the Simi or on the Santa Susanna side and up that canyon there. I think you'll find it listed in one of these maps here. Let's see, Pasca Grande[sp].

AK: Oh, yeah, Michael Schepler was telling me about them.

QB: Yes. And that was quite interesting because... I didn't do any riding, 'cuz I stayed home and go to school and help the boys, get the meals and one thing and another, and stay with my brother. They rode, oh, sometimes three and four days at a time to get the cattle all in and get them marked and all, branded. And they had that for several years, and that was after they had moved to the Valley. I was...

AK: After the cult had moved to the... after who had moved to the Valley?

QB: When... well, let's see. Jess was the only... Jess and Cecil were both born... and Theodore were all born on the small homestead that is just west of the... was part at one time of the property owned by the Brandeis. And then when we moved down to the Valley, we gave up the... my dad gave up the ranch, when he got hurt again and he couldn't ride. So that property, someone else has the lease on it now or owns it or something. I don't really know. There are several pieces up there that's been homesteaded. Then Dad gave up his cattle. Then the kids began to get married and have other occupations down in the Valley, why, he gave up his lease. And he wasn't able to work after that. He'd been injured two or three times and practically torn apart, you know. Ruptured, and soon...

AK: What was the main crops on his ranch? Cattle?

QB: Cattle, yeah. And he came clear down into Browns Canyon there back of the area... Twin Lakes area, because Twin Lakes... I can remember when that was made in there.

AK: Well, tell me something about that.

QB: Well, Gray's had a... people by the name of Gray had a dam back in there in the Browns Canyon, and that Browns Canyon is the one that goes clear to the Lookout Mountain, you know. And the folks lived for a while up... Grandma and Grandpa lived for a while up near what we called the "Greenhouse." But it was in there by some falls, near some maiden hair falls.

AK: Was this back in the mountains?

QB: Yeah, about half way to the summit, that range... this would be behind Twin Lakes.

AK: And they lived there all the time?

QB: They lived there for a while. And...

AK: When was this?

QB: This was Grandma and Grandpa. And then I don't know...

AK: This was before...

QB: This was before... that was about the time she was born, I think: Mama. Then they moved on to this homestead property that we now are debating, you know, with 'em about where the Washington Rock is and where Grandma used to go. So I don't know... from there on, I don't know what has happened to the property or who owns it anyway.

AK: About what years were the ranches starting to be divided?

QB: Oh, dear me, I think that was... it must have been... it must have been before I was born, because Mama and Dad...Cecil, my cripple brother, was born up there... and Dad and Mother were taking out their lease... not lease, but...

AK: Homestead.

QB: Yeah, homestead, homestead is what I was trying to think.

AK: They homesteaded below then.

QB: They homesteaded just west...

AK: Of the... of your grandmother's...

QB: ... of Grandma's place. And then they moved down to the Valley and it was later on they moved up to the Joaquin's Ranch. So they just back and forth when Dad was able to have some cattle and one thing and another. As I say when we grew up, we all went different ways.

AK: Yeah, but when you were children you were on the cattle ranch.

QB: No, it was only the children. My children had just been born, both of them, when we were up on the cattle... when... I went up there for quite a while then and stayed when they were drilling for oil up there, and then I finally moved back, too. I walked most of the way... I drove my car up there one day to go home, and I had told the men folks there about what time I would come in. And I got the groceries and everything I needed... had a good car... and I got about halfway up there, got up near the **Greenhouse**, right at the Greenhouse location... nobody living there by then. And by golly, I had get Betty to walk. She was just, you know, little.

AK: This is your daughter?

QB: My daughter. And she walked... and it was cold, and we had sweaters and coats... and she walked and I carried the baby, the boy... and he was twenty-seven pounds then... and I walked halfway up that **[mountain]**... it'd be more than halfway up to where I was living up there. And all the cattle in the pastures, I think, came around to see... they'd not seen before. And I never was so scared, I don't think, in my life, as I was.

AK: Having to walk through the cattle.

QB: And I couldn't get that car started, so I walked all the way. And I started... we got down into the canyon there just before we could see the house. And I began calling and hollering, hoping that somebody'd hear me. And I got clear up to the dining room and opened the door before they even knew I was on the place. And it took me about... it took me until it was almost dark. And then they went down to get the car and it started all right. So whether it was flooded or what, I don't know, but I couldn't fix it.

AK: Needed a rest.

QB: And I had an experience like that just once and I didn't leave myself open for anything more. 'Cuz nobody knew just exactly where I was or what time I was going to be there.

AK: Now, so then you moved down to the Valley?

QB: Yeah. The children were not too well, the girl wasn't. And her Dad went into the oil well business, working on the oil dock. But the contact with their step-dad has been extremely wonderful, for which I'm very glad, because it's not every man that can come in and take a father's place like that.

AK: What... where did he work when you were first married?

QB: Well, he was in the service when we were married. And we had... I had turned our home... you know, the other man and I were separated. So I had an open house... we had extra bedrooms and everything... I had open house at the time of the flood when the dam went out,

San 'squite [San Francisquito] Dam went out. And so I... when the soldiers began coming in during the war, then we had this open house for the boys and all. And we had an old what we call the wailing room, and that's, you know...grown man could cry. I mean, it was their way... or they had to get this out of their mind, you know, having to give up their families and everything. And so, then we'd entertain the fathers and mothers that come out from the east, because all the boys that came out here were from the east and they sent the western boys back east.

[Note: For more detailed information regarding the San Francisquito Dam disaster, see the Andrea B. Nordskog Collection, Urban Archives Center CD988.W441 1906]

And so everything went along beautifully. And then Sy and I decided to get married. He came in to the command post. That was what was there in the school yard was the command post, and that's where I met him. And we've been married over thirty-five years.

AK: After he got out of the service, what did he do?

QB: Then he went into the oil fields and worked. He drove a school bus, one of these big buses, in Los Angeles. He drove a school bus for twelve years. Then we were in business for ourselves for a few years in the trailer park. And then he was... he worked... when he first came home, he worked for two or three months in the wrought iron furniture place. But he knew that wasn't to be permanent. The fellow went broke. So other than that, why, we haven't been very busy.

AK: I think you have been busy enough.

QB: I kinda keep busy. It's a good way to keep out of trouble.

AK: That's true.

Do you have anything else you would like to add about Chatsworth, the history of Chatsworth?

QB: Well, I... I just wish that everybody could have the grandma that I had and the mother that I had and the Dad that I had. I just wish they could, and realize that a home can be happy. And I feel that God has been good to me, to take care I of me all of these years... seventy-five... and that our family, will grow up. They're all in Wyoming now.

AK: Both of your children are in Wyoming?

QB: Yes. And all the grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

AK: What made them move to Wyoming?

QB: Well, I don't know. When one moves they all move, I guess. Well, I think that about that time my son was living in Ventura. I think the world was closing in.

AK: They needed more open spaces?

QB: Right. And like the Santa Susanna...

AK: Chatsworth. It's all so built up.

QB: Yeah. And everybody is trying to get away from that and to be out in the wide open spaces. But there's a weather element; we'd be back there today if we could. And, of course, my husband's folks up from Minnesota. But then his family is pretty well gone, too. But I've enjoyed my life. I've had lots of heartaches, but not as near as many as my mother had. And I think if a person can pick out someone in their life that would be a goal to attain, and this is... well, this was with my grandmother. I just ...

AK: Wanted to be like her.

QB: I wanted to be like her. And it just nearly killed me when she passed away. I thought I'd lost every friend I had in the world. But maybe that's what it takes, you know, to get going. She had a full life and certainly went through a lot more than I ever thought of going through. But it has been nice that the people have been so cooperative and everything. And it seems like I haven't filled a very... very much of this on my own. But being away from Chatsworth... for instance, with this book here...

AK: *A Child's History of Chatsworth*

[Note: Watson, Virginia. *A Child's History of Chatsworth*. Chatsworth [California]: Chatsworth Historical Society, 1978, c. 1967. In Library, F869.C43 W38.]

QB: ... not even realizing that it involved my family or that there was such a book. And I am awfully glad that you came.

AK: I have one more thing that I just... on the side, though, that I thought that we got to. What... did you know anything about when they were shooting the movies out there?

QB: Oh, yes.

AK: What... are there any interesting stories about that?

QB: Every kid went up there to watch.

AK: Yeah. That was the only thing that we hadn't gotten into. What was that like?

QB: I... I never got too involved in it because it was something that I was supposed to kinda shy

away... I was in one sense of the word kind of a loner, and yet I wasn't. It just wasn't quite the "proper" place to be. And later on in years, we had... we've had as many as forty movies... movie characters staying overnight with us for a week at a time or two weeks.

AK: This was at your parents' house.

QB: Yeah. And they had a big five-bedroom house. And they slept in the front room on the floor, they slept on the porch, anything, then go back to Los Angeles. And so... then I used to go up and watch them take the movies, but there usually was three or four of us together.

AK: Do you remember any particular film or any particular actor?

QB: Uh, "The Walls of Judea" [probably *The Walls of Jericho (1914)*] I particularly remember and... I hardly know how to describe this, but there was a scene where there was a dinosaur...

AK: Dinosaur?

QB: ... and they made this dinosaur and, oh, he was a huge thing from here to way out there at the other walk. He was immense. And they had a fellow inside standing on a ladder that would feed him...

AK: Move the legs and everything?

QB: Well, he'd draw the hay into the dinosaur's mouth. And this intrigued me.

AK: I would imagine so.

QB: Oh, I was scared to get anywhere near it. But I always thought...

AK: But what'd they make it out of? Paper mache?

QB: Yeah. Oh, just everything, anything... burlap. Anything that they could get their hands on. And I have a picture of that somewhere in one of these boxes. I'll have to look for that...

AK: You will have to find that.

QB: ... for you. And then "The Walls of Judea" was beautiful. That was a religious thing. There was another movie made and I can't quite think of it. It was made mainly in the Iverson Ranch, and it was... well, I remember particularly how sunburned those people were. They had burns on their backs, 'cuz they were bare, just a breach-cloth. And they were so burnt from the sunshine, from making that picture that they had these great big sores on their backs and everything and... honestly. Well, it wasn't too long after that, that they really put the inspection on the situation. But those girls, those women just... it hurt so bad. There was no place they could go, they couldn't lay down on it. No place to go, but just be there. "Let's have a retake," you know. And it just seemed like it was weeks before they got through with that.

AK: Do you remember the names of any of the actors or directors?

QB: No, I don't. I remember my brother used to have to stop at the... go to the depot to meet the people.

AK: They'd come in on the train?

QB: Yeah, come in on the train. And one was a... I'm sure it was Lillian Gish, if I remember it right, that my brother met. And he had an extra saddle horse; she never even knew what saddle horse looked like. **[Laughs.]** And she... she got so sore and shook up just riding from the depot over to the house, which would probably be maybe a mile and a half.

AK: She had never been on a horse before.

QB: Scared to death.

AK: That's funny. And he came to pick her up with a horse.

QB: Yeah. I don't know whose idea it was, but, anyhow, Jess took the empty saddle horse over there, you know, and she rode it back. But, oh dear! And she... I watched several movies. Friends of ours, Pearl and Romeo Pernasimum **[sp]** used to live out in Chatsworth and they catered for years to the movies with a catering truck... coffee and sandwiches.

AK: So you'd go with them?

QB: So I'd go lots of times and help her.

AK: This was when you were older.

QB: Yes. And that was when I was living there in Chatsworth.

AK: Was this after your children were born then?

QB: Oh, yes. They were grown. Mama and Dad had my children part of the time because of a broken home, and I had to work. But we all managed and I'm no more the worst for it, I'm sure.

[End of interview]