

Interview with Irene Atwood Evins
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Interview by Jenarae Alaniz, Jimmy Lopez, and Jorge Hernandez
Transcribed by Ryann Fink, Jenarae Alaniz, Jorge Hernandez

Jenarae Alaniz: September eighteenth, twenty thirteen. Jenarae Alaniz. I'm going to interview Mrs. Irene Atwood Evins. Do you have a middle name?

Irene Atwood: Um, my first name is Rachel. Why they named me Rachel and call me Irene, I don't know.

JA: Oh! (laughs)

IE: (laughs) That's the way it was! I was named after both my grandmothers. Uh, my father's mother was Rachel and my mother's mother was Irene and that's how I got my name.

JA: How beautiful; that's pretty neat. Um, ok, you were born on the property...

IE: Yes.

JA: What year?

IE: in 1933, in January.

JA: January '33...

IE: ...of 1933.

JA: Wow, right, um, well, during the depression, right in the middle?

IE: Yes, yes. In fact, there were six of us and Barty was born, my oldest brother was 12 years older than I and he came with my parents when he was about 2 years old when they came in. And then my sister Hazel, I think she was born in Edinburg, but I'm, yeah...she was born in Edinburg...and then Jean, my other sister, was born in Edinburg. And I was the first one born after the depression actually deepened in 1933. So they had 3 children already and I was born in 1933. Uh, I have a brother, Jim, who was born in 1931 and then I have a baby brother who was born in 1936. So someone asked my father and this is a story I don't remember, but someone told me. They asked him, "Dewey! Don't you know that we're having a depression? How in the world can you afford to have so many children?" And he said, his answer was, as I've been told, "Well, when it was just Jewel and me, it took everything that I could to make to, to have a living. So then, Barty came along and then Hazel Grace, and Jean, and it took everything I could make to get along. And now I have Irene and Jim and Bud, and it still takes everything I could make to get along." (laughs) and I think that's pretty much the story of life, that it takes everything you can to make...

JA: to, to keep the whole family...

IE: ...to keep everything going.

(Both laugh)

JA: ...moving together, what was a typical day growing up when you were younger?

IE: Well, mostly, when we were children before school, before we, uh, had to go to school, we just played in the yard and we were, we were generally around where our mother was and whatever she might have been doing, we were in that area. And uh, I remember wash day was quite an event. Uh, we had a water well and we had a windmill. And the water was very bad, you could only use it for the cattle and to wash, you know, we had one of those old hand pumps that we could use it for washing dishes and bathing and that sort of thing, but we did not drink it and mother could not wash the clothes in it because it did something, it stained the clothes or something for some, whatever reason. We couldn't use it for washing and Daddy would have to

go over to the main well head oh, uh, canal where the water ran all the time and get two big barrels of water to bring back so mother could wash and she had a big black cauldron pot out there that they built a fire under and she put her soap and water in that and, and uh, she would take out what she needed and wash the clothes and then she had a tub over here where she would rinse the clothes and another tub over here where she would rinse the clothes again and do you remember that they had that stuff called Bluing, that they put in the water to brighten the white clothes? And I remember that and I remember when we had electricity finally, that my father bought her one of those old electric wa--, uh, wash tubs that had that--, uh, with the rollers where you had to, we had to be so careful not to get our fingers in there--

(both laugh)

and we were always cautioned, “don’t get your hands close to the, you know, to the rollers.” And I remember wash day as being a very um, fun filled, exciting, busy, uh, hustle-bustle day and it took all day. It was not just a few minutes where you throw some clothes in the washing machine and go off and do four, five other things and then go and put them in the dryer. It was a full time endeavor to have a laundry day, and it was always on, Mother didn’t like to wash on Monday, other people generally washed on Monday, but Mother hated that. She wanted to clean the house on Monday and wash on Tuesday, when the house was already cleaned up from the weekend and so we washed. I remember just playing around there where she was doing that and as I got older we uh, helped mother in the yard, we chopped the weeds and we, you know, we did all the kind of chores. We gathered the eggs, we fed the chickens, we, I—I did not learn how to milk a cow. I was too dumb to learn how to milk a cow and I told my brother as we got older, “you were the dumb one, because you learned and I was smart because I didn’t learn!” They always got mad at me because I didn’t do it right somehow. It was not good for the cow and so I didn’t have to do that job, but, we just played a lot. I remembered we had two big Athol trees in the back yard and we tied single string rope swing, and we would pull that up into the other tree and get on it and jump out of the tree and swing—

JA: Wow...

IE: and uh, we played, in the roots of those trees and we dug tunnels, we had little blocks of wood and pretended that they were cars. We had to make our own entertainment. I remember when I learned how to read, I would get up in a big tree and read, because I loved to read and, also, I learned to read as an escape from chopping weeds, because if ever we said we were bored, if ever we dared to say we were bored, my mother said “Well, there’s a cure for that. Get that hoe and get on the fence row and chop the weeds!” Well, people who were smart don’t say “I’m bored” anymore, they get a book and they go read. And we played all kinds of games. We, when my uncle and his children came over and we had watermelon parties and ice cream parties and things like that, we played hide-and-seek, and stay hid ‘til you’re found and Red Rover, Red Rover and you know, all of those childhood games...they don’t play those anymore.

JA: They really don’t...

IE: But we were outside, I guess, from dawn until dark, playing or we were doing our study in the house or doing what we had to do to clean house or make the beds or wax the floors or whatever we were doing we did in the house. So that was pretty much my childhood, pretty normal at, ordinary for that period of time.

JA: How was it, um, going to school?

IE: (Chuckles) Well, of course we rode the bus...

JA: Would it, uh, go all the way up to the house?

IE: I would go out to the house, there weren't many buses and there weren't many children and so our bus routes were very long and we had to catch the bus in the winter time when it was dark still, because the bus would travel such long distances. Uh, one of the times when I was in the sixth grade--...first grade, my brother was a senior, because he was twelve years older than I, and we got on the bus and we went all the way and we wound up on Monte Cristo Road and went, picked up kids all along Monte Cristo Road and got to [highway] 281 and then came to town so the bus routes were very long. And another thing: we didn't have paved roads and they weren't all caliche either. They were mud roads and if we had a rainy season like this, it was always kind of nip-and-tuck whether we were going to get to school or not. The bus would get stuck and they would have to call, you know, or go get, or whatever, somebody to come and pull us out of the—out of the quagmire, because it was very difficult to get to school actually when it was raining and the ruts would be that deep. I don't know if you remember of that when you were a kid, because it was quite dicey in rainy weather to get to school. The first school bus that I remember--that I have a recollection of--was painted blue and it was like a truck bed made of wood with wooden seats in there, and that was my first recollection of my, of the very first school bus that I rode. They changed the routes frequently because as populations grew and different children needed to be picked up and they had to adjust for those changes and at one period of time I remember that we had to walk from our house to the corner to catch the bus because they decided that there weren't enough children down our road to warrant going down Schunior so we had to walk down to Hoehn corner and catch the bus there, and that was ok, it wasn't that far and we ran all over the place and walked all over the place. And it only got pretty bad when it got cold and we had to stand there wait for the bus to come, but we were ok, it didn't hurt us.

JA: So I'm assuming all grade levels got picked up on the same bus?

IE: oh yeah! oh yes indeed. It didn't matter, I remember Jim Bates, I don't know if you remember him, lived right over there in a railroad house, his father worked on the railroad, and over there by the icing docks on Monte Cristo road is where he lived and he got on the bus and he was one of our...you know he was a senior when my brother was a senior and they were buds, so we rode that bus and he was a senior and I was a first grader and that was the way it was, everybody in between rode the same bus. I remember one time it was really, really rainy, and we had a rainy season like we've had, and my sister, Jean, who was very enterprising and very much in charge-- she was one of those people who was born in charge of other things; (laughs) she just was!—and we were on that school bus and at that time over somewhere north and west of where we lived, and I can't remember the road, but there was a canal that there was a bridge across- the canal. And it was made of wood. And there were no sideboards on that bridge. And if very many cars or things went across, it piled a lot of mud up there, and it was scary because the bus was sliding and slipping and, you know, going up all over the road. And we got there, and I'll never forget the man who was driving that bus at that time was named Wilmer Bailey, and we got close to that and he would have had to kind of go up and the bus started sliding and Jean, my sister, said "STOP THE BUS!" and Wilmer said "NO, I've got to get up this" and she said "I said, Stop the bus", so he did and Jean said "come on" and she told Jim and me, and Bud to get off the bus and she said "we're not riding that bus across that bridge because we could slide in". so we children, just our Atwood kids, tromped across the bus and she told Wilmer "when you get on the other side, we'll get back on" (laughs) that was an adventure, I remember that. It was quite adventurous.

JA: Do you remember how old you were when that happened?

IE: Bud was in school so I might have been in third grade or something like that.

JA: How funny! That's pretty cool.

IE: I remember that, I don't know why that particular incident.

JA: That's a good story, I liked it. Well, you talked about the animals earlier. You didn't learn how to milk the cow, but what other animals did you all have?

IE: Well, we had chickens and we had horses and we had two mules: their names were Ladiga and Shorty, and Ladiga was real big and Shorty was not real big, but they were a real good team of hor—of mules. And they worked together. And my father used those mules to cultivate with until he got a tractor. And I remember the first tractor that he bought, and I don't remember how old I was, but I was...I was pretty young because the Oliver tractor was green and it had big lug wheels, it did not have rubber tires, it had those...uh, lugs, and in order to protect the driver or whoever was inside there were fenders on the inside. And I was standing up on the tractor, because it was very exciting to have a new tractor, you know, that was a big deal then, and my brother Jim got up on the tractor and he was standing on the other side of the seat and he banged on the side of the fender and said "BOOOOOO!!" and it frightened me so bad that I fell off and I hit my eyes right there on one of those lug wheels, I bled like crazy, and I was very lucky. I have scars there today, I remember I was pretty little when that happened.

JA: My goodness:

IE: I have a very vivid memory of that. And let's see, what other animals did we have? My sister had pigeons. She thought she could sell the squabs and make money. She was, like I said, very enterprising. She always earned money. She bought a bicycle with her own money and we had to pay her to ride it.

JA: oh! (laughs)

IE: She...she's still a very good business woman. In fact, I found some things one time when I was going through some old papers and I found a receipt, hand-written, and it said "I, Jean Atwood, do convey to Irene Atwood two Masterpiece Seals for Two pencils." And she had me sign it. Do you remember the Masterpiece Seals? They were little seal on any kind of school books and things that you bought and they were masterpiece seals and they were worth something and if you gathered enough of them up, you could send off for things. And Jean was very good about that. She always sent off for things and was always on top of her game. So that was my sister Jean. I wish she were here so you could interview her.

JA: I would love to interview her! I'm sure she has great stories.

IE: She lives in Alpine.

JA: North Texas...

IE: Well, west Texas, it's up on the river up by, up by Big Bend area.

JA: Oh, ok. Um, I know you mentioned that you don't know why your parents ended up moving to south Texas, but where were they from originally?

IE: They were originally in a town called Cleburne Texas, in Johnson County about, what, 35 or 40 miles south and a little bit west of Fort Worth. And it was a farming community. My uncles when they went back up there, I had two uncles who went back up there and settled when the family went back and they farmed extensively in that area.

JA: How neat. Ok. Talk about—What kind of buildings were there when you were growing up? I know there was

IE: Ok. I had a, we had a corral and we kept cows and we had a barn and there was a toolshed-like thing further back and a chicken house with chicken wire fence. Those are mainly what we

had, uh, 'cause we kept some of the cotton seed in that barn and they kept the cattle feed in that barn and it wasn't huge but it was a sizeable barn and uh there was a water tank there for the cattle in the corral and of course our house and garage.

JA: The animals, like the chickens and the cattle, would you sell the milk and..

IE: Oh yes...yes...The milk I don't think Mother sold but she made butter out of the cream. We separated the cream and they sold, she sold the butter and eggs, but mostly we used it for our own benefit. We ate chicken and daddy would kill a beef every so often. And as I was explaining to Russ the other day, in my memory back in those days we didn't have refrigeration so you couldn't kill a cow and save it all for yourself. They had to make arrangements for the excess. And so daddy would sell it to a grocer here in town named Mr. Tiffin: Tiffin's Grocery down on East Harriman. This street right here used to be called Harriman, and they changed it to University Drive quite some time ago. But the town of Edinburg, if you know the streets, Globe and Chapin and Closner and Harriman and **Cretchnet** which is now Cano St., and all of those streets were railroad men, and when they put the railroad in down here they laid out the town and those streets were named for some of the big muckety-muck railroad men who helped to found the railroads down here, so that's why those street names are so weird, Schunior.

JA: They're kind of strange

IE: And you know Harriman? You've probably heard of Avril Harriman he was a big politician. It was his family that this Harriman Street was named. Or that family was a big railroad family.

JA: Interesting

IE: And so that's how those streets were named. Oh we gathered eggs, it was our job to gather eggs. Jean was the straw boss, she kept us very busy. She made sure that we did our job right and that we fed the chickens. Mother would take the skimmed milk and let it clabber. I don't know if you all know anything about clabbered milk or not

JA: No, not really.

IE: Well there are natural enzymes in milk that cause it to clabber. You've eaten yogurt and you've eaten cottage cheese and all those things, well that's what, that's a natural enzyme process that happens to the milk—to the milk and it doesn't spoil, it doesn't taste bad. It eventually does, but if you get it at the right time it's very thick, have you ever heard of eating your curds and whey?

JA: Yes.

IE: That's what that is. And the solids, the milk solids would settle and the whey, the liquid part of the milk would, mother would pour that off and then she'd gather the solids, the milk solids—the curds and put it in a cheesecloth bag and let all of that whey drip off of it, and make cottage cheese. And if you've never had homemade cottage cheese, you haven't lived. And we had that a lot. Any excess milk that we had, she let it clabber and we fed it to the chickens. And they liked it. Another thing, did you know that you have to feed chickens oyster shells?

JA: No, I didn't.

IE: Because their eggshell doesn't get thick enough and they break too easily if they don't get enough of that oyster shell. And that was something mother always bought. I think there's a picture that I have of Bardy when he was a baby and he's sitting around a bunch of baby chickens. Mother would order chickens and they would come in the mail and they would come like this, there'd be four parts and there would be twenty five chickens in each part so then we would have to have the little area with the little incubator, well not really an incubator, but that's what we called it, where she had a some kind of a warming light in there—that was after we had electricity—and keep the little baby chicks warm until they started getting their first hard

feathers. When they started getting their first hard feathers then we'd just put them out in the chicken yard and then they thrived

JA: Wow. I've actually seen that process

IE: Yes.

JA: When they come in the big box. You have all these little chicks...

IE: So that was something, when the chickens came in the mail we were happy.

JA: They still do. Going back to the property, I heard that you helped stucco the Jacal.

IE: That was not our house. That was Tony Guerrero, that was a man my father went down to over in Granjeno, and he was willing to come with his family and live on the property and be a helper to my father.

JA: Oh ok.

IE: And they, if you've been out there to my property, its on Hoehn drive or Hoehn road, at the very north end of our property there's an area over there that they lived. And I remember, and I don't know how it happened or why it happened or when it happened, but they had a little house that they made but it was made out of wood, and we had to get the...it was a clay-like mud and we patted that in between the...yeah it was a, we called them tooley shacks, but they called them *hacals*, and we helped him build his. I remember as a child we thought it was great fun playing in the mud.

JA: Was it all of you? All of your brothers and sisters?

IE: Well I'm sure they were there. I remember myself doing it, and I'm sure my—I'm sure they were there, I just have my own memory of it. But, oh it was fun. And it took us all day long, and we didn't do it but one day. Maybe they did finishing touches on it themselves, I don't know. But I remember them putting the palm leaves on the top. And they had—Tony knew exactly how to lay them so it would be dry in there, it was really quite a process and I remember it was really kind of interesting and exciting, and I don't know how old I was, but I was little. I was a little girl.

JA: How big was it? Do you [unintelligible] or quite small?

IE: It was probably 10x10 or 12x12 or something like that it was small. And it had a dirt floor, there was no flooring in it. But I remember as they discussed it, and I wasn't privy to the knowledge they were talking about, but it had to be done a certain way so the water didn't run through it. And it was an engineering process. And I remember the men talking and but we were just so busy putting the mud in and playing in the mud, but it had to be engineered so that it was dry inside for them. And I think there was a window in it, maybe two. That's about all I remember about it.

JA: that's pretty neat, I mean, I can't wait until we go out there and may take a look at--

IE: well that isn't there anymore, I mean they finally—eventually built a house and

JA: Pretty neat, were there a lot of ranch hands to help your father?

IE: No, there was another man who helped on special needs basis, and his name was Polocarpio....and I never did know his last name, my sister might know his last name. And I don't know where we found him, but when Daddy bought the land down the road and on the south side, he owned that property too...we sold that, I remember Polocarpio lived down there on that property. And I don't have a real strong memory of that particular--- I know they called that the new ground, because they had to clear that land. I remember that was kind of a big project, but they cleared it and farmed that then. I don't have too much memory...and then there were times like cotton picking and we had many, many people. They would get crews of men to

come and pick the cotton. I didn't get too involved in the cotton picking process. Mother would let us pick cotton, it was mostly just play, but we always picked cotton a little bit, my sister, Jean, however, was the big chief, of the cotton weighing situation. She was the cotton weigh-in girl. She was in charge. And they had an old iron scale that you put a weight on one side that was a predetermined weight and they'd hang the cotton bag on the other side and when it was balanced---they paid the men according to how many pounds they picked. And Jean, had her book and she kept all the information, she knew all their names and she wrote all their names in the journal and how much cotton they picked and when they brought it in and how much they would get paid, and like I said, she was the enterprising one. Big business woman

JA: Very nice. So cotton, what else was grown?

IE: my father did a lot of row crops. I remember he grew tomatoes. There was a time when tomatoes was a big crop in the valley and they had a big tomato auction, not too far from here, up by...across the street from where Sam Houston elementary school used to be. And the tomato trucks would pull up there and there would be tomato buyers on the scene and they would bid on the tomatoes. And then I remember H. Row was a big tomato man and he bought a lot of tomatoes and ran, he had a packing shed right up here on Harriman. So tomatoes was a big crop, Daddy grew corn, I remember a big crop of radishes one time, bell pepper, green bell pepper, squash, cucumbers, just a variety of things, we don't really grow a whole lot of vegetables here anymore, but at that time, vegetables were a big crop and they sold them, and people would ship them away from here

JA: Send them up north?

IE: Yeah, they would ship them in rail cars. I remember there was a place down here at Monte Cristo rd that we called *la hielera* now it's called Lull. *la hielera* means "the ice house" and that's where the trains would stop and they would put ice on top of them, it's called top-icing. And for all the fruits and vegetables and citrus and everything that went out of the valley, we didn't have refrigeration cars, they top-iced it and rolled them and that was the way they got the vegetables to market. They had to get them on the train and on the road to get them up there in time to keep them from spoiling, you know? No refrigeration.

JA: No, you had to do it quick.

IE: Yeah

JA: Pretty neat. The property right now is 80 acres?

IE: 60 acres.

JA: 60 acres?

IE: Yeah, that's the home place.

JA: The home place and then, it's still....

IE: It's still the same 60 acres the original 60 acres that was the home place.

JA: That's pretty cool, give me just one second. How did---lets go back. When did you start dating your husband?

IE: I started dating him when we were juniors in high school.

JA: How neat, and this was after that group date that you went on? You mentioned it earlier.

IE: We used to just go to parties. Someone would have a party and everyone would go. I remember one time I had a party, it was a taffy pulling party, you ever heard of that?

JA: I've heard of that, I don't know too much about it.

IE: Well it was a mess and I don't know why my mother ever allowed me to do that, because she made the taffy and we, there were about, oh 20 of us kids started pulling that taffy and you talk about sticky and a mess, but we really had good fun. And that was the kind of parties we'd have

and when we got older and started dancing we'd just go over to somebody's house and dance and play records and listen...so dating was altogether different then. And then, we didn't all have cars either. That was another thing. We double dated a lot because who ever could get a car, sometimes it would be triple dates if somebody got a car for Saturday night, everybody glommed on to that. We'd go to the movies or go to kids' canteen, or something. And then when we got old enough and sophisticated enough, we got to go to The Wagon. It was a nightclub on Highway 281—no I guess it was 83. And we got to go to The Wagon. That was only after we got to be **very** sophisticated. And then, when we **finally** got old enough, we got to go to Reynosa, and there were some wonderful nightclubs over there. We danced and had a great time, so...

JA: Neat, when did you get married? How long did--

IE: We married in 1954. We will have been married 60 years in January.

JA: Oh my goodness, congratulations! I love stuff like that. How did you, because I know you're not the oldest, how did you come to inherit the house, or stay?

IE: Well, I didn't inherit the whole property, my mother divided it up into six parts for each one of her children, so each of us has 10 acres. My brother, who has predeceased me had no family, and he left his to me. So I have a 20 acre block and the rest of my brothers and sisters have the other part. But we've kept it intact because we want it to stay in the family intact and so that's how it is. I'm just sort of the guardian, and we live on my 20. The way we happened to do that is my mother used to live right where we live. And then when she was older and by herself out there, we didn't want her to live by herself. And she did not want to live in town. She absolutely did not want to live in town. And so the solution to the dilemma was that we would build a house on the property and she would live with us. And she made it absolutely clear that she would not even consider living with us unless she was able to participate in the house. And so when we had our plans drawn up, she has her own little quarters there, and we talked about a whole apartment with a kitchen and so-forth and we decided "what does she need a kitchen for?" so we just have one kitchen. And we had a wonderful situation there with her and she lived with us for 31 or 32 years in that house, but we tore the old house down and built our house and she lived there with us. For a period of time, we were gonna build the year of Beulah. We had everything ready to go and we were gonna start in October. Well, Beulah happened in September. So, the house was already torn down and Mother was renting a little house in town in the interim, while we were getting ready to build. Well, it took a little longer than we thought; we thought she would only have to live in town for a little while, while we built the house. Well it took a little longer, she had to stay in town a little over a year, and she was most miserable; she loved it out there on the property and was happy to be back out there when we moved back out there. And I was the only sibling who lived in Edinburg, and so it was a natural process for it to be us. My other siblings lived away. You know, they graduated from college and went about their lives, and my husband and I lived here, and it just fell to us in a natural way that we lived with my mother.

JA: It makes sense, and I think you had mentioned last time that you were currently leasing some of the land.

IE: Well we have a farmer who lives down the street. He would be a wonderful subject for this study that you all do. His father, Refugio, lived on the corner of Depot and Schunior on the north side of the road, and he, Refugio had many boys and they all live all around there and they have the original

Unknown Voice: The Lunas?

IE: The Lunas, uh-huh. A wonderful, wonderful family, Refugio was a farmer and his son, and

of course, some of the boys didn't farm, you know, they got other jobs and did other things, but Ralph Luna still lives out there on Hoehn Drive and all of that property out there is the Lunas', and y'all, for next semester or whenever you do this again, they might be interested because they have that property. And now they've got a bunch of kids and a bunch of houses down there and they're old-timers and they've been here a long time. And they're very good farmers, well they farm our land.

JA: Ok, that makes sense. Where were the outhouses?

IE: The outhouse? I can show you right where it was, well, actually, our house is sitting on top of it. It was, from our house...I have those pictures of the house, it was on the north side of the house, sort-of...a little bit, not west, because we didn't go out to the west side, we went out east but it was away from the house about, at least 30 feet or 40 feet away from the back door. And it was not my favorite thing. [laughs] I remember I dropped a silver dollar in it, it's probably still down there somewhere. If anybody wanted to dig deep enough, they'd find it.

JA: So how was it like once you finally got indoor plumbing? How did that change?

IE: Oh it was great! because until we got indoor plumbing, we had to take our baths in those washtubs and that was quite a ritual; we didn't take a bath every single day like we do now. It was not easy, because we had to heat the water on the stove, pour it into the tub, in the kitchen, I remember we would, that's when we were little children. I don't know when we got our bathroom inside, but, I wasn't too very old...I have no idea exactly how old I was, but we were really, really proud of that flush toilet. We thought that was a pretty neat thing. I was probably 8 or 10 when we got...probably 8...about 8 years old when we got the inside plumbing. And it was a really nice thing. I'll tell you when we got it: we got it when...I was about 6 when we got electricity and it was pretty soon after that when we got the inside plumbing, because Daddy dug a cistern, and we didn't have that well, that windmill anymore because the water was not good. And he dug a cistern and we brought water from the canal to fill the cistern. And I remember there was a filtration area that when the water ran through that into the cistern, and of course we didn't drink that water, we brought our water from town. And I don't remember, I guess we had electricity by then because they pumped water up into two big tanks that were up on a stand and that's how we got the water pressure. And I think we had the...I think all of that was about the same time. I guess they fixed the water works and put in the bathroom about the same time, so I wasn't a very big kid, because I can remember climbing up on that big stand and walking around the big tanks up there. And the water came into the cistern and they pumped it up there and we had water pressure. I must have been about 8 years old when we got that, so in '41 or '42 when we got that.

JA: What would you do about garbage?

IE: Oh, that was a big chore, too. There's no such thing as putting all the garbage into one pail. We had wet garbage, we had paper garbage, and we had hard garbage; cans and bottles and things like that. Well, we burned the paper garbage every day. Mother would send us out there and we got to light the fires, and we burned it. The wet garbage, she put in a compost...

JA: Oh, ok.

IE: ...and the bottles and cans, she had a barrel and she mashed the cans and broke the bottles so that we could get a lot of stuff, a lot of it into the container. And then, I'm not sure what happened to it. I think daddy took it and buried it, and I'm not sure about that. After we moved out there, we continued because we didn't have garbage pickup. We continued to burn the paper trash, put the wet garbage in the compost, and we, my husband and I, took the hard garbage out to the city dump. And I don't know how Daddy handled it, but, probably the same way. But we

didn't leave it out there because it just messed up the land and that was a no-no; we didn't want to do that.

JA: Um, you mentioned that there was a pump, the water well...

IE: Well, yeah, we had that old pump like that in the kitchen, and then, when we got the water system, we had, and that was after we had electricity, and, you know, it was a process; they came and they did the things they could afford to do and the things that were available, and then as things became available and as things got better they improved, and improved, and improved. It was step by step, getting things done as soon as it was feasible, We, I remember we didn't have electricity because there were no power poles and when they brought the power poles down the road, I remember my dad came running home and he said "Guess what, Jewel? They're bringing the REA poles down the road." And so he said "I'm gonna go see Mr. Olden," he was the only electrician in town, and so he came and wired our house for electricity before we got the poles, but we knew the poles were coming. And I remember sitting there on our front yard watching those people putting in those poles and when they got to the pole that was across from our house and they put that guy-wire down to hold that pole—oh we were so excited. We danced and just were happy, happy, happy. And I remember when they brought the wire to the house and they hooked up and we had a radio then, and lights...electric lights, before that we used kerosene lights, lamps, you know. We had, an old wood stove in the living room that we were warmed by in the winter; it had a flue that went out. I remember one time a swarm of bees got into one of the...there was a place where they got in the wall and they were in there a long time and finally my dad decided it wasn't good for them to be in there and they had to tear the side of the house down to get to the bees. And I don't know who all was there, but there were a bunch of people there, and do you remember those big cans that they got lard, when they bought the lard and...you didn't buy a little bit, you bought...because, that was your supply, you know. Well Mother kept those cans and they were good storage cans. They got enough honey out of that house to fill up two of those; those bees had been in there a long time and they had to tear the wall down to get to those bees to get to that honey. So people were taking jars of honey. It was kind of exciting. And that was another exciting thing that I remember.

JA: So cool. And I'm sure that they rebuilt the wall

IE: Oh yeah. Then they had to put the house back together.

JA: Of course. Um besides that, were there any oil wells, any other natural resources?

IE: Uh, yeah, and that's been a long time ago because they drilled that well on the west side of the house. Before Mother tore her...before we tore Mother's old house down, and we've lived out there since the year after Beulah, and it pumped for about 6 years I think. And it wasn't a huge well, I mean, it wasn't a gusher...you wouldn't call it a gusher, but it was oil. And I remember they had a stand of tanks, that they drained off a substance called "distillate" and they had oil that went into a pipeline, and they had that distillate that they gathered into those tanks and then every so often a truck would come and siphon off what was in those tanks and I don't know how, or how they used that distillate but it was part of the income off of that well. And then it dried up I guess and I guess it wasn't productive enough to warrant keeping it open, and so they plugged the hole and took their junk and left. And that was the end of that.

JA: I've heard that you've found prehistoric arrowheads, what have you found?

IE: That's the only thing that I know of, that we've found. Meme, the guy that was driving the tractor, found it and he gave it to Jimmy. And it's a pretty good size point. Its probably not an arrow, its probably too big for an arrow. It probably was on a stick, you know, for a spear because it's large. And Juan, I said, I think he said was testing it for some kind of content, I don't

know and he said he thought it definitely was from this area and that it might be as much as 5,000 years old. You'd have to ask him, because he has it right now and he's studying it

JA: I believe they were actually gonna test it today

IE: Uh-huh, they're working on it.

JA: They were really excited about that. It'll be pretty neat.

IE: Yeah

JA: Hmm. Oh! Where did you live before you moved back on to the property?

IE: Oh well, when Jimmy and I married, we were very young. We thought we were very sophisticated and knew everything, but we were babies. He was in the Navy and I was at the University and we married on the weekend. I promised my mother I would finish college if she would allow us to get married, we'd already been engaged for about 5 years and we thought it was time to be married. And so, then, after he got out of the Navy and I graduated from college we married, had a weekend together, I went back to the university, he went back to the Navy, in Corpus, and we didn't see each other again until a month later when he got leave to Austin and we had the weekend and he went back to the Navy and I was there for a semester and I hurried and I finished in January and came home and I had a contract to teach school the following September. And he got out of the Navy and he went to college. So I worked as a teacher and he went to college and then he began his business life, you know, and he can tell you all about that. But he was an insurance man, but then mostly he was post-harvest decay control, he worked in Mexico quite a bit in the strawberry industry, and then he worked in the frozen food industry. And we lived in Edinburg. And then when we moved out, moved back home. But we had a house in town and then we

JA: Moved in

IE: Moved. We lived for a time in Florida because he was doing post-harvest decay control in the citrus industry over there and then we lived a time in San Antonio, just a very short time, and then we couldn't get the river water out of our system, so we came home.

[laughs]

JA: Well, glad you came back.

IE: Yeah, we are too.

JA: Um, so did you go straight into college when you graduated from high school?

IE: Yes, I did. It was just sort of an unwritten rule in our household, after high school it was grade 13. And fortunately for me, if it hadn't been for Pan American College, which was at that time Edinburg Junior College, none of us probably would have been educated. But we were able to go two years here and get our first two years and our Associate of Arts degree and then we got to go away to college. All of us didn't go to college immediately. My brother was called up into the Army and he had taken two years of college here, and he was very good at office machines and shorthand and typing and bookkeeping and all things business. Well he was called up into the Army because of the War and he became part of the Quartermaster Corps, which was the office people. And so he didn't get to finish college, but he had a very basic background in the things of business and he got "hands-on" experience while he was in the Army. And when he came out he became the manager of the co-op gin, Edinburg Co-op Gin, and when he was about 30 years old, he went to work for a large cotton company and moved to Ciudad Obregon in the state of Sonora, in Mexico, and he lived there until he passed away. And my sister Hazel went directly to, after two years of college here, to TSCW, that's what it was called then, Texas State Women's University, now it's called TWU I think, in Denton, and she graduated there and she came home and went to work at Moore Field and saved as many pennies as she possibly could so

that she could go to New York and go to an acting school. So she got to do that, she'll tell you about that if you ask her. And my sister, Jean, went to college here for two years and then she married because the War was over and her Marine boyfriend came home and they married in 1947. And she, like I've said, was a very good businesswoman, and she was one of the first, I think the only, woman cotton buyer. And she worked while her husband went to school on the GI bill. And then when he finished, and they had their children, Jean went back to college here at Pan American, they lived in Harlingen, and she became a teacher, and then a principal, and she was a principal in Harlingen of one of the elementary schools before she retired out in Alpine. They went out there because her son was a doctor out there. And Bud, my youngest brother, went to college here and then went to the university and became a petroleum engineer. And then he came home and did not pursue that as a career but he became a state representative and a farmer and a teacher, and he is deceased. And I went here and then went up there. My brother Bardy, my oldest brother, who didn't marry, was generous enough with me to help me go to school away.

JA: How would you do it? Would you live, I guess, on campus when you were coming here to Pan Am?

IE: No, I'd just drive in.

JA: I wasn't sure of the distance.

IE: It was, by then we had good transportation, and I drove in,

JA: And you said you went to which college after?

IE: To the University of Texas

JA: Ok, University of Texas. How neat! Oh, and another question, when you were growing up, how often would you go into town?

IE: Well, we didn't go very often. Certainly not every day. We rode the school bus to the school, but we got on the bus and went home. You know, I don't remember going to town very much. I remember that there was a...sometimes we went to the grocery store with Mother. We had an Ice Man, that delivered ice to us out in the country and we also had a Bread Man that came and delivered bread, and probably sweet rolls and all that kind of stuff, I don't know. And there was a product called Watkins and they would, they were salesmen. They were called drummers. I don't know why they called them drummers, but they went out and sold things, you know? And Mother bought her spices and stuff from the Watkins man, and the Fuller brush man would come and he would, whatever you needed in the way of grooming products, like hairbrushes and combs, they bought that. I'm trying to remember...gosh I hadn't thought about that in years. We went to town probably about once every couple of weeks, to, you know, buy clothing. Mother had a sewing machine that we had to, you know it was the old treadle machine before we had electricity. And I can remember standing on the other side of the sewing machine and using my feet to give her power to sew, so she probably bought stuff, you know, to make clothes. You know, she made our clothes and everything, the sheets, I remember buying sheeting and she would hem the material to make sheets for the bed; pillowcases. Just, it was a very simple, very, very, very simple life. But, a good life, you know? We had plenty. We were not wealthy, but we had what we needed and we did what we had to do.

JA: Because it was normal

IE: It was the normal way, yes.

JA: I highly doubt this but I'm still gonna ask, is there anybody buried on the property? No little family...

IE: No. no. No family plot there. Before us, I don't know, you know.

JA: That's true. We may find something

IE: Yes, way, way before us.

JA: I'm trying to think of any other questions, ok, so you said your mom would buy the spices, from the

IE: From the Watkins man, yeah,

JA: Did you have like, an herb garden or...?

IE: Oh yeah, she had stuff, you know. She liked to grow flowers, too. We had flowers too, I remember she had chrysanthemums, and she had queen's wreath, and we used to smoke the queen's wreath, did you ever do that?

[Unidentified voice] No.

IE: I don't know why we did that, but everybody used to smoke. My father smoked, my mother did not, oh no, no. But the queen's wreath was a vine and the big, the big stems were kind of porous and you'd break them off and we pretended that they were cigarettes because that was very sophisticated. And we smoked them. We put fire to the end and we would draw smoke through them. Mother didn't like that. Mother didn't like that at all, so we tried not to do it where she could see it.

JA: Did your father roll his own tobacco?

IE: Yes, yes, he did. Yes, he did. He always had a sack of tobacco here and I can see him now pulling it open with his teeth and rolling, and then drawing, and then putting it back in his pocket. Yes, and during the war, were you old enough during the War to remember? There came out a machine-like thing that, because by then they had like, Ready-Roll, Ready-Roll cigarettes, do you remember that "Lucky Strike Greens have gone to war" because the Lucky Strike package used to be green with the red dot, and that was their advertising campaign. "Lucky Strike Greens have gone to war!" so I guess they combined the Lucky Strike at the time. So there was one of those machines and you could put the papers in there and do the tobacco in there and then wind something some way, well we did that, we used to make Daddy his cigarettes, and I have some remembrance of that; kind of vague memory of that. And, I don't know, my father was very young when he died. He was only 47. My mother was a widow at 45, and things are so different now. When I was teaching school, we had a little boy that was kind of really rowdy and unruly and rude and, really, kind of a naughty boy. And I remember the counselor saying "well you have to be really tender with him because his father died", and he was probably 12, 13 years old "His father died, and he's coping with that..." and I sympathized, and I understood that, yes, we did need to be tender with him and help him through that period of time. Well my father died when I was 12. And I was standing at the stove and I remember our neighbor lady, her name was Mrs. Barnes, came down and, you know, the neighbors always gathered when there was a tragedy in the family. And she came up to me and she put her arm around my shoulders, and I remember it so well and she said how sorry she was that my daddy had died and then she said "but you know, Irene, what you're going to have to do now, is you're going to have to be better than you've ever been and you're going to have to be stronger than you've ever been and you're going to have to really mind your mother, because now, she has a really huge responsibility." And I thought to myself, when everybody was telling me that I had to be really careful with this little boy, how different the philosophies are. I was told "yeah, you've had a bad thing happen to you, but this is the time to buck up and not become a hellion and not become a bad kid. Buck up and do as much as you can, to do all you can to help your mother." And I remember that woman and I remember that so well, because I was very young my brother, my baby brother, was 10, and I remember it was hard. It was very hard. Mother had to run the farm and do all of that.

Eventually, her father, my grandfather, and her mother came to the valley and lived with us and helped my mother. And he was a, my maternal grandfather worked for the railroad in Johnson county and when he retired from the railroad he came then and was with us until he passed away.

JA: What was your mom's secret? You told me Earlier that your mom lived to be a 100.

IE: Oh I don't know good genes I think and she never did smoke ever smoke and she never ever had alcohol. She just hated alcohol, she just thought it was awful and She worked really hard; she worked really, really hard. And uh she just lived well. She ate good food and was very careful to always have vegetables. We ate vegetables like crazy when we were growing up. I think she just, all of those things. Good genes.

JA: Good genes (laughs) she took care of herself.

IE: And she took care of herself.

JA: How many children do you have? I don't remember too much.

IE: I have three.

JA: Three children. How was that, raising three kids in the Valley?

IE: I guess it's like raising them anywhere. It was different from when I was growing up but not so much. It's really different now. I could let my children do whatever pretty much what they wanted to do. I wasn't afraid for them, I wasn't scared for them. I am afraid for my grandchildren and I wasn't afraid for my children. They were just ordinary kids doing ordinary things.

JA: Times have changed.

IE: Times have changed, yeah.

JA: Can anybody think of any other questions that I'm missing?

Jimmy Lopez: Uh I remember, I'm 58 years old, my mother's 84 and my dad's 86.

IE: Uh huh.

JL: And they're still alive...

IE: Yes I'm old enough to be your mother because I'm 80.

JL: Yeah, probably, but you'd be a nice mother (everyone laughs) because my mother was really mad. But I remember things you were telling me when you were talking about, I remember a lot of that because I lived through most of that. You know I was born, I'm part of the baby boomers. I was born in 55, right after, ten years after World War II ended. I remember the idea of being able to play out in the yard.

IE: Oh yeah.

JL: We didn't have a TV til I was seven years old.

IE: And you didn't even think about it. My kids roamed all over the place. They rode their bikes every place. My daughter had a horse and she would get on Gordo and go, you know. And I never did, I didn't worry about her.

JL: Really, We lived in Mission and on Saturday mornings we'd take off about 8 in the morning and walk the tracks all the way to McAllen to go to the [inaudible] theatre and watch movies and walk back.

IE: Yeah, that was a pretty good hike too.

JL: Yeah it was, it was fun.

IE: Yeah, Yeah, I can, yeah, it was fun. I didn't worry about my children so much. Well the drug scene was just beginning all that 1960s junk was just starting when my children were becoming teenagers. I was married in 1954 and my oldest child was born in 57 then I had one in 58 and then I had one in 62. So they were still pretty little and they weren't influenced too much by all

of that garbage that happened at that time. I think it has just continued to deteriorate as far as some of the morals that we have, since that time.

JL: My dad told me when I was about 16, he said if you ever end up in jail, I'm not going to bail you out and don't come back home. [Irene: Yeah] I mean, he just, when I turned 16 and got my driver's license he said, if you ever end up in jail don't call, you're not welcome home. And When I turned 18 he said if you ever do something wrong, the army is waiting for you. [Irene: Yeah] So you got scared, you were intimidated.

IE: It's go time

JL: Yeah go time, go time. You know, you got intimidated, because back then there was no [inaudible].

IE: No, no, no. Well it's just like when Jimmy and I got married. I had to ask my mother, please mother give us permission to marry. We could have run off but it would never have been alright, for me in my own mind to run off to get married. It had to be with her blessing and it had to be right and so I promised I that would finish college and promised those things. And we knew Even though we were very young and didn't really know what we were going to do I mean I didn't have a job, he didn't have a job. He was in the Navy, I was in school but in the back of my mind, I knew I would have a job. Kids don't know that now. They don't know that when they get out of school they're going to have a job. They don't know that. I knew I would. So I went, we went forward without being afraid. We were totally unafraid but we also knew that it was up to us, that Mother was not going to give us any money. I mean, the cord is broken when you marry; you're on your own. And so we knew we had to make it by ourselves and I think that's part of the reason that marriages held more from my generation than they do now because It's a real struggle when you're young and just starting and you don't have enough money and you have to skrimp and you have to plan and you have to pull together and you have to share. This month you can get a pair of shoes, next month maybe I can get a pair of shoes and you know it's just building, building, building. And I don't think children have to do that anymore and I think it's hard for them. I think it's, I think it's a difficult life for children now.

JL: My opinion, I know this is recording but it doesn't matter, kids nowadays are children of the hippies. You know what I'm saying they had no morals, they had nothing. So it's a continuous cycle and it's getting worse and worse.

IE: It is, it's the me generation and it's been the narcissism that goes on with...

JL: Because I grew up as a child of the people who grew in the depression. (laughing) We knew what was ours was ours and you came home and had three pairs of jeans, one pair of shoes. You got your shoes off and walked barefoot and played all day barefooted

IE: Yeah, oh yeah, in the summer, we didn't need shoes the Skin on the bottom of our feet (laughing) got so tough. You know we could walk on stickers and everything else

JL: Automatically when we got home, the first thing we took off was our shoes [inaudible] and the first thing you get (Irene: Oh yeah) And you were only going to get one pair until you outgrew them.

IE: That's it, yeah, yeah and you better not have ruined them so you could pass them to somebody else.

JL: You said the Story about the school bus my dad told me the same story, he lived out in Starr County. They had an old truck that was blue that had been converted into a school bus. He went to school in San Isidro (Irene: Yeah) and He said that bus would never get to school sometimes.

IE: I know sometimes we'd wind up in the ditch.

JL: By the time he was done, he would come home and they were still stuck.

IE: Oh yes it was a whole different, but the ambiance was so good and the people were wonderful. We had wonderful country neighbors. I remember there was an old man named, Alfonso Cantú. And He was a good friend of my father's and he lived way over west and north, and every year he would have the barbacoa. [MMMM] Man that was worth waiting for. And the way he did his barbacoa, He would dig holes in the ground and he would have goats Goats [JL: and cows heads] yeah and sometimes pig and they would be down in these holes. And Alfonso would be with them all night, all night and then when we would get there they would pull up those, and the meat was wonderful. One thing that Alfonso did that I just, I still see it. and it was his favorite thing, and it was his piece de resistance . He'd take his machete and chop off the top of the goats head and get the brains out and eat those. And then he would get the eyes and eat those and those belonged to Alfonso, and then everybody else could have everything else.

JL: We'd used to have Brain tacos.

IE: Yeah, yeah

JL: We'd make brain tacos because you could buy the brains

IE: Oh yeah you could buy the brains

JL: You were talking about people going to sell we had the same people going out there to sell where we were lived at, we lived at La Reforma.

IE: En La Reforma

JL: In the Reforma, yeah, we used to live out there and we had people come out there with clothes

IE: Yeah the drummers.

JL: Sweet bread, uh anything you wanted they'd come by during every week and you didn't have to come to town.

IE: No, They were there.

JL: Or you could place an order and they would bring it the next week they would bring you a pair of shoes you know, I wore glasses and I got them through the mail, I would get my glasses mailed in. it was a lot of fun [Irene: Yeah] then the neighbors would get together every night, just get together **to talk**

IE: A pachanga

JL: Pachangas

IE: Yeah those were the days, very simple life. Very uncomplicated, oh we, we didn't have a lot of things but we didn't know we were poor.(JL: Same for us)You know because we had many things that were very valuable. We had real good families, good a, good things. Real good things and everybody was sort of the same way we were Nobody had any money. Few of the townies had some money but none of the farmers did. We all worked hard and it was good. It was good.

JA: What was considered like a specialty? Like you said they had barbacoa and that was a special treat to have barbacoa.

IE: Oh it was, it was an annual thing

JA: Were there any parties or pachangas that were special that you had?

IE: No pretty much a, like I said when we were teenagers we went to different peoples houses for parties My mother went to church...Went to church every Sunday that was another thing, in that era everybody went to church... only some very few really infidel types...but everybody had common values whether you were Catholic or Baptist or Methodist or whatever you were.. We all had common values and.. So, that was just a given we went to church and I guess we...

We had Christmas Parties at the church one time my father played the Santa Claus

I remember ... he thought he'd really, really do it up right and he bought that spun glass to make his beard, and I remember when we got home how bad his face got burned but everybody thought he was a wonderful Santa and things like that...Community things, community things.

JA: Which church did you go to?

IE: I was a Baptist

JA: Baptist, I guess let me go back to the land. What kind of animals did you see when you were growing up that you don't see anymore?

IE: oh horny toads for one, lots of lizards...we still see a few but not anywhere near the number that we had those big Tree lizards Do you remember those? With a scaly back? Every once in awhile I see one now but not like when they used to be abundant. We have a lot of black snakes on our place we don't kill them a... We used to have rattlesnakes and I haven't seen a rattlesnake out there in a long time but there used be rattlesnakes. My sister was bit by a rattlesnake when she was little, she'll tell you about that.

JA: Did you notice these animals would stop showing up after Beulah or after a freeze?

IE: You know, there was a weed that started growing in my yard that I have never seen after Beulah, and I guess it, uh, wherever the seed came from. I don't know what that weed is but it grew up tall, and I haven't seen any since like that weed. And it died, but you know that. Something that I heard the other night that I haven't head in years, frogs croaking! Do you remember when we were kids, and it would rain like this, the frogs would just croak and croak and we'd gather those little tadpoles and put them in a jar and watch them turn in to frogs, and, they weren't frogs, they were toads, but we called them frogs. I don't see that many any more. They're just not a lot of those.

JL: We don't hear any chicharras anymore either.

IE: I do in my house. The chicharras? I hear them, a lot! I [laughs] remember when my little grandson was a baby and he came from Houston to visit us, and we were out in the backyard and he heard those and scared himself so bad because they get very loud. If you all come out there at nigh you'll hear them. You'll hear the chicharras at my house.

JL: I love that sound.

IE: I do too. And they like the mesquite. That's why we have alot mesquites on the place out there in the woody area. We have them the chicharras. What else did I not...I don't see very many...uh...lady beetles, ladybug beetles. I don't see...I guess is all the insecticides, you suppose? But yeah, they're still around. I don't see any horny toads at all any more. We used to play with them all the time, catching them.

JL: Yeah we did.

IE: Sometimes they get pretty big you know. And sometimes they were little, but we played with them. Where did they go?

SL: They became extinct I think with all the insecticides.

IE: Is that what got them? Because the ants and things that they ate?

Jorge Hernandez: You can still see some in Brownsville. I've taken pictures of them. They are so small, and some of them are big.

IE: Out there at Atascosa, is that where?

JH: No. Where Palo Alto is, the battlefield. It's between los Fresnos and Brownsville. You can find them there.

IE: Oh in that area. I guess they're still around but not plentiful.

JA: What other types of trees or plants do you have in the property?

IE: We used to have some tipoguaya, some huizaches. We tried to kill those out because they're...but we have a lot of mesquites, we have ebony, and we have some thorny bushes out there. You'll see those when you go out there and look. We have Rio Grande Valley Ash, which we didn't use to have. Have an Elm tree, which we didn't use to have. Our live oaks, which we brought in here they were not native to this area. All the things that we have now they were not native to this area. Mostly what we have then was just Mesquite, Retama, Ebano, Huizache,
JL: tesajillo.

IE: Yeah, and then the tipoguaya. Palms of course, then that Salt cedar. Those Athol trees that they planted, the tree army planted, which was the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) was one of the FDR's things, back to work things, and they travel everywhere and planted trees. I think they planted a lot of the palm trees here along the roads, and they planted these Athols. We had an oleander on the place but my mother killed it out because it was poisonous to cattle. And so we killed that out. Of course the castor beans grew on the place, and daddy to kept...killed that out because they were poisonous. And there were weeds, they came up volunteer. And I remember that if a cow or something got a hold of that it will kill them. Actually, I wasn't too much into plants when I was a kid [laughs].

JA: It's ok [laughs]. I am just wondering if you could think of anything. Any birds?

IE: Well, you'll have the local birds. We used to have zillions of white wing doves. We still have quite a few. Mocking birds of course, and lots of sparrows. During the migration season we would see really all kinds of birds. Would stop out there because we have trees around and stuff, but I've never been much of a bird watcher. I'll tell you, the paisano. We used to have them everywhere but I don't see them very much anymore.

JL: I've seen them out in the reforma.

IE: You've have...Oh, at La Reforma? Yeah! But where we are not too many more. Once in a while the chachalaca sometimes come up way...One time I had a bunch of them back there and when my grandson got to be about 8 or 9 he had a BB gun, and he shot at them and they ran off and they didn't come back so I was really frustrated with him for doing that. Ah...just all the ordinary birds. We had coyotes. We used to have coyotes out there. We had a baby coyote that we raised [laughs]. We found a tiny little baby that still had its umbilical cord. And I guess the mother was carrying him, and somewhere dropped it and got afraid and couldn't come back and get it. My husband saw it on the road and we picked it up, and it was just this big. We took it home, and we nursed him, and fed him. We let soaked milk bread and let it suck on the bread to get the milk. It grew up and it was a beautiful dog. But he didn't run away! And he would hear the coyotes from back across the canal, and he would howl at them but he never did leave us. He finally...somebody ran over him with a car, but he was a wonderful dog. He was so tamed. He didn't even get wild.

JA: Ok, so you said you had three kids. How many grandkids do you have?

IE: We have three. My girls each had a girl, and my son had a boy. [laughs] And that's it. That's what we got.

JA: Were there any folktales, any stories that maybe your parents would tell you when you were growing up?

IE: My mother was so realistic and so down to earth that she didn't believe in any of those stories. She didn't tell us any of those stories. I know my mother-in-law had a bunch but I don't know all of those. You'll have to get those from my husband. I know she was very superstitious. She didn't like for a rocking chair to rock without anybody in it. That meant something. I know that if she left the house and forgot something, she would not return to get it,

what ever that meant. I know one time a bird flew into the house and she nearly panicked because that means something. I don't know all those things but my mother was very straightforward. I don't remember...

JA: That's neat. I like to ask different...I've always heard different stories.

IE: Well yeah! There are some really good stories around but they were not part of my childhood.

JA: Do you speak Spanish?

IE: I wouldn't brag about it. I have a pretty good vocabulary. I do not have the prepositions and the stuff that holds it together or any kind of grammar. And since I am an English teacher, and I believe in grammar, I am embarrassed by my Spanish grammar so I try not to speak it around people who [laughs] really are good at it.

JH: But you do pronounce good the names of people.

IE: Bueno! When we were children all my playmates were Hispanic. And that's what we did. We played in Spanish. We... and so I...since I was a little child...my father, when they moved here, became very fluent in Spanish and my brothers because they got to live, play back in the back with the braceros when they came. There were two, Marciano and Pete, were two kids that came with their fathers, and they were just the age of my brothers. And so they played all the time in the back and they ate with them, and their Spanish was impeccable. My brother Lambard was exceedingly fluent in Spanish because he was, you know, lived in Mexico. My sister Hazel lived in Mexico, and she is very fluent. I am the only one that is kind of lacking. And I can speak enough to get along and my...like I said, I have a very decent vocabulary and my pronunciation is ok but my grammar is bad [laughs].

JA: Well it's very fluent, that's why I was asking.

JH: You did mention that you went across to Reynosa to have fun. How was that experience? How was the border security?

IE: Oh it was wonderful! You never had to be afraid of anybody over there. The Mexican people are wonderful people. It is just these bandits that have ruined it. I...we were never afraid in Mexico, ever! And we travel everywhere in Mexico, and we were totally enthralled with the country, with the people, everything about it. Pues fun! It was great. But now the cartels have just ruined the country. It's just sad. It's a heartbreak because there are so many good people over there and they're afraid as we are. The rank and file people are terrified of those people. It's just sick. It's very sad. We used to go to Monterrey for the weekend, and frequently! We would leave school right after school, go there, and have dinner. We could stay at the Ancira Hotel, a five star hotel for twenty-five dollars a night. Go to the Blanca...Blanco y Negro and dance all night, have a wonderful time, sleep in late on Sunday, get up about whenever, eat breakfast in that beautiful hotel, about three o'clock drive home and go to work on Monday. It was wonderful and now you can't. You can't even go across to Reynosa.

JH: How about immigration. Did you need a passport to go across? Were they (border patrol) very strict in letting people go in and out?

Mrs. Evins: Just go across and come back. Nobody cared. Nobody cared because when people came across they came to shop and then they went home. Or in the bracero era, they came over to work and then they went home. And they wanted to be at home and they wanted to be with their families. And that was such a good program for those people, and for us was great. I don't know why we can't cooperate a little bit more with Mexico in that situation, in my opinion.