

of oil. Eventually, they found out how oil was made. Oil is made from the sediment and vegetation covering the earth. The pressure and the heat, due to the sediment, makes the oil. Later on, they had pictures which show the process. Geology is a science of its own.

T: What are your recollections about Olinda? What was the size of the town as you first remember it?

S: In my early life, the thing that impressed me was the 1918 World War. Many men went into the service and then to the war. We had a Depression here which had a strong impact on me. There wasn't much to do outside of our family life and school. Wages were low, only \$3.50 a day for ten hours of work, so you couldn't buy very much. I do remember while we were living in Olinda during the Depression, there were several bums who came to the house and begged for food. They wanted to work for something to eat. The oil people fed them and took care of their social welfare. At that time, none of the women were molested on the lease because the men were gentlemen. There weren't any killings and there wasn't any violence. It was quiet and peaceful country.

T: Can you remember any of the early businesses in town?

S: We moved to Brea Canyon in 1917, and we lived there for nine months. Then we moved to Brea in 1918. When we first lived in Brea, we rented a house on Orange Street until we could build our own house in 1930. The town was only one and a half blocks wide and three blocks long when we first moved to Brea in 1918. We had a bank on the corner, a variety store, a pool hall, a garage and a one-story hotel. That was all on one block. On another block we had another hotel which was a two-story hotel. Later, we had a railroad which went through town. It ran from La Habra to Yorba Linda and through Brea. We had a cement factory in town and tool companies. We had garages. The Potter garage was the first one here. The main part of town was only one block long, so there wasn't much here. We had two restaurants on that block, a barbershop, a dentist office, the city hall office, and a jewelry store. At that time, there wasn't a livery stable in town. There were only a few cars, Fords and Chevrolets.

T: What was used instead of cars?

S: We didn't have a car until 1925, but in 1925 we bought a Buick. The rest of the time we rode a bicycle or walked. Many people went to Los Angeles on the streetcar. See,

good, because we didn't have to cut wood. We had a big wood stove, but we put gas in the wood stove. We had gas lights before there was electricity. Our family had gaslights with little mantels on them. We had them hanging in the middle of the room. At first we had to use a regular coal oil light, a lamp which we carried around. We used that until we got gas.

T: Did the Columbia Oil Company supply you with it? Did they give it to the workers and their families?

S: Each company furnished the gas to the people who worked for them. The different companies had their own steel mills and shops. They furnished the house for the workers. The rent was free and the gas was free. The people didn't have to have a lot of money which was good because there wasn't a lot of money. The Depression hit in 1929, but it didn't affect us here until 1932. From 1932 to 1935 were our good years and 1935 was the peak of the Depression.

T: What can you remember about the Depression here?

S: In 1929 a lot of people were out of work here. A lot of them lost their homes because they couldn't pay the taxes. If they bought a house and a lot for one hundred dollars, they would have to pay a lot of interest in order to get the money to pay for it. The Depression was caused by the people who put their money in the bank, in the vault, and didn't use it; consequently, it wasn't circulating. The gap between the worker and the guy that had money was too broad. People didn't buy anything, and they didn't do anything.

T: Do you remember anything about the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camps or WPA [Works Progress Administration] programs in or around this area?

S: Yes. We had CCC camps here.<sup>1</sup> They built fire breaks around the hills to control the fires. They also built dams so that there wouldn't be any flooding. In Ontario, the fellows who worked for the CCC worked in the vineyards so as to prevent the vineyards from getting flooded. They worked for the Forestry Service and built dams up and down the coast. They built bridges and roads, too. The CCC was one of the early services for the people who wanted to work. In 1929 the people didn't have welfare programs. A guy who had

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<sup>1</sup>Civilian Conservation Corps was established in March, 1933. Works Progress Administration was established in May, 1935.

a boat went down to the ocean, caught a lot of fish, and brought it back. We had our own commissary, and the people donated the fish to the commissary. The people who needed food went there and got it. We went to Hemet, which is seventy miles away, and picked watermelon, tomatoes, and potatoes and brought back a truck load which was given to the commissary. At that time, I worked from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.

T: In the commissary?

S: No, for the fire department. We helped the people that were hungry. We had to. We didn't have welfare. The people donated their services.

T: Was the co-op in addition to the soup kitchen, or was that the commissary?

S: The co-op was different from the soup kitchen, but we had both in Brea. They called the co-op the co-operation.

T: What about the Brea Welfare League?

S: I didn't work there, but I heard about it. They also took care of the transits [transients] who came here because of the Dust Bowl. People came here because they could live under a tree. They didn't have to have a home, because the weather was so warm they didn't freeze during the winter. During the Dust Bowl period, the soup kitchens and the Red Cross helped a great deal. It was terrible at that time, but people got along by helping each other. There wasn't any money so we had to help each other. During the Dust Bowl period, people broke into stores in Bakersfield. There were four great big shopping stores, chain stores, which were broken into. The mayor called Sacramento and told them to send the militia down saying, "They're stealing us blind." The governor said, "Take inventory and we'll send you a check." That's how they took care of the problems. Today, the want is greater and there's a larger influx of people.

T: I think this is a good time to stop. Mr. Siebenthal, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

They built wooden oil derricks then, which you don't see today. Everything then was wooden oil derricks. It was very slow at that time till 1928. I drove a truck; I drove mules for a fellow named Clauson who dug sump holes. The surplus of mud and oil that comes out of the oil wells would be put out in this hole and they would burn it off in those days.

In 1928, I went to Oakland where I had an uncle. The Depression had started in some ways in the oil industry and jobs were very hard to get. My uncle in Oakland was a superintendent or a foreman for Star Motor Car Company, which eventually turned out to be General Motors Corporation. He got me a job. I worked for two years up there and came back to Brea in about 1929. Times were very hard, but we had a little boom and I got on with Shell Oil Company. They had about 500 to 700 men working out of an area on North Pomona Avenue where Lambert Street is today. Eventually, it turned out to be Chiksan Tool Company. I worked for about a year and a half before I got laid off--the real Depression had started. Six hundred of us got laid off at the same time in one day.

I, eventually, ran into a cousin of mine here, and he and I lived in a little two-room house off of Imperial for several years. At that time I was working for the WPA [Work Progress Administration] at \$1.65 a day, and you would get three days a month by being single. Well, you could buy a loaf of bread for three cents, and you could buy a can of pork and beans for five cents, and you could buy a dozen wienies in a package for a dime. May we never see anything like that again, because if we do with what the younger generation is used to today, I would be afraid even to walk the streets at night. The people are used to so much, and it's right for them to have what they have today, but it would be awful to have a recession or even a depression.

Things got better in one way; we had a commissary in Brea. The commissary was on the corner of Brea Boulevard and I cannot recall the name of the cross street but it goes into Kirkhill Rubber Company today. The building used to be the National Supply Company and it was altogether nearly as big as half a block. They let the WPA use the building as a commissary. We would go to Riverside and pick tomatoes, we would pick oranges, and we would pick lemons. We would go out of Bakersfield and to Shafter and pick up potatoes for so much and bring them back into this commissary and trade them for anything that any commissary in the county had. We would take a load of potatoes up toward Idyllwild and bring back apples. We would take oranges to the valley area in exchange for grapes. At that time, we had about two hundred families in Brea living out of that commissary. It is a very good thing because we got a lot of good, staple food to eat out of this by working there.

Eventually, things got better. I got on with the Fullerton Oil Company and worked for a fellow named John Osborne. I wasn't working steady though; maybe I would work two days a week and off five, then

## BENNETT

maybe I would work three days and off four, or sometimes I would get a whole week. Because I had a little job, I got very ambitious and got to going with a girl at the high school. I was by myself and kind of lonesome and you need company. I got laid off from the Fullerton Oil Company about the time that we were going to get married.

Well, we got married. Her father was a foreman for O'Keefe & Merritt Stove Company in a place between Barstow and Victorville called Oro Grande. They had 4,000 or 5,000 acres, O'Keefe & Merritt did, of alfalfa country up there. They raised alfalfa. We were married there in 1934. I don't know how we lived, but we did. My wife worked for fifteen cents an hour in the bakery in Brea. I would work at the boiler shop or Brown & Dauser Lumber Company, or baby-sit--I'd do anything in the world for some work to do. Then a month or two after we got married, I got on with the Union Oil Company.

During a summer vacation when I was fifteen years old and lived in Arkansas, I went to Oklahoma and worked two months in an oil field in a boiler shop. I worked in a boiler shop in Brea; I worked in a boiler shop for Shell Oil Company; and when I went to work with Union Oil Company, I went to work as a boilermaker helper. At that time, all the rigs--all the wells--were run by steam and they used boilers. Today, we use the expression of spark plugs or diesel, that means electric and electric generators that the rigs use today. But it was all steam then. I did very good with Union Oil Company by being experienced in several other places. I got advancement real quick to number two boilermaker. In those days if you wanted to be a boilermaker or a rig builder or a machinist, you had to serve out an apprenticeship. With my time at Shell Oil Company, and after a couple of years with Union Oil Company, I was a boilermaker.

In those days, that was an advancement from \$6.00 a day to \$9.00 a day. That was a lot of money in those times. Gasoline was still \$0.13 or \$0.15 a gallon. A loaf of bread was \$0.08. You could buy a pair of Levi's for \$1.98. The difference today from buying a pair of Levi's at \$30.00 or something now, and \$1.98 then, is that when you get older you wonder how did it happen? But it did. Whether it is better or not, no one has ever heard me say, "Back in the good old days."

My wife and I were a couple of happy kids. We never had any children. We lived together for forty-five years, and I lost her four years ago to cancer. Things have been hard for me since then, but I look around and think how fortunate I am to have had her that long. She was very active in high school: a cheerleader, belonged to different organizations, a very good student, and got a lot of honors. We went together for five years before she would have me. I got into activities in high school, such as track, baseball, tennis, and football. There are mighty few days of my life today that I don't go to the high school to try and help somebody and be

know whether I should be proud of it or not, but his was the first place in town that got beer, and I was working. I had about twelve people lined up that next morning. It was daylight and I served them beer. I pulled the first beer in Brea. Whether that's good or bad or indifferent, that's the way it happened. Oh, I wish I could name the people that were there to have that first beer. "Shorty" Kuish, "Shorty" Ryan, Jeff Siegel, John Osborne. In those days we had to serve a sandwich for you to come in and get a glass of beer. The sandwich was on the counter in a sealed paper sack. You could smell it, and it would sit there for months at a time, but the sandwich was there for you as required if somebody were to question it. Today, you won't see that beer, which was Burgermaster. You probably have never heard of Burgermaster beer, but that's what we had. It was the first beer in Brea.

Then later Walt Clark and Kenney Horton opened up the Imperial Cafe; a very nice dining room for Brea in those days. We used to have to go out of town to go someplace to eat, you know what I mean? There was a place in Fullerton where we would go. When I was going with my wife, in my Model T or Model A, we would go to Zoe's and have a hamburger and a glass of orange juice and go to the Fullerton Fox Theater for less than a dollar. The main thing was the saying, "Have you got a dollar?" If you have, we'll go down and take the girl friend and go to Zoe's and have a hamburger and orange juice, and come back [to the Fox Theater]. For fifteen cents you sat down below, but for a nickel more you could sit in the loge seats. It all goes back to that same question: the good old days. Maybe we didn't know any different.

Union Oil Company, at that time, had about 5,000 acres of lemons. They were in land development, too. That was east of town, east of the freeway going out on Birch Street where all the homes are out there for as far as you can see. That was Union Oil property. The two golf courses that are on Imperial Highway today was Union Oil property and some of it belonged to Graham-Loftus Oil Company. Some of it is on the old Hole Lease today. Union Oil Company had a lot of property and they had a citrus department. Leo West and his family came here, I think in the 1940s, and he took care of the orange and citrus groves for them. Leo passed away a year or so ago. He was good people, raised his family here, his wife still lives here, and he had two or three sons, wonderful people.

I don't believe there is anyplace in California that had more good people in the 1930s and 1940s than they had in Brea. We were together because we had to be together. You would go to shows where they would have a raffle and you would win a thirty-five cent package of groceries. You would have the most wonderful time in your life. The show was at the Red Lantern Theater. The Red Lantern was up in the 100 block on Brea Boulevard. Next to it there was a lady named Mrs. Stone. She didn't have as much space in her little cafe as there is in a single garage, but people would stand up and down the street waiting to get a hamburger with

Figuroa or Main Street, I don't know which now, but I didn't go anywhere. I went right back into that building and got on the red car and went back to Brea. I had never seen anything that scared me as much in my life as with all the activity these people, these wagons, and horses and mules hauling stuff, and these Model T's and Model A's running around, and the trolley streetcars, that I said, "This isn't the place for me." I came back to Brea and told my cousin. Well, he laughs to this day about it. He said, "What can I expect from an Arkansan who come out of the hills and never been anyplace or done anything." But it was quite an experience. You traveled through Montebello, Whittier, Pico Rivera, La Habra, and East Whittier, and you crossed barley fields and orange groves. It goes back to a question that I keep repeating; how about this progress? You know what I mean? The way this progress is going, the way our economy is, and the cost of living today for the senior citizen is awful. Some of us are real fortunate; some people are not. That's another thing you don't want to talk to your friends about, whether it's good or bad or what. When you get older you have to think of these things, it comes to your mind. Three years from now, am I going to be able to live? Am I going to be able to live in a house with the fixed income that I have? I know people in Brea that had to leave their homes because their income was too low. That's a subject you shouldn't bring up among friends.

Brea had an Imperial Highway Association that met once a month in Brea at a restaurant named Olson and Dyer Restaurant. Dyer was a cousin of mine. This association, the big thing they wanted then, was to get Imperial Highway paved half way out of Brea over to Santa Ana Canyon Road which was a little, old, two lane dirt road going out through there. I'm telling you, in November, December, January, and February, we used to have a lot more rain than we do now, and you had better stay up in the center part of Imperial Highway in those months, because that adobe got awful sticky and slick when you got out there in it.

Now, people discuss who is going to be their senator or congressman or state officials. One state official born and raised here in Brea, was [Edward] Ted Craig, a wonderful man with a good family. My cousin and I lived in a little two-room house between Brea Boulevard and Walnut Street on Imperial Highway. Ted Craig lived next door to us. He got to be a representative. He had two young boys, Ted and Tommy Craig. Ted, Jr. got lost in New Guinea in World War II. I would baby-sit those kids a lot when I didn't have anything to do. They were people that had means then. He was a representative in Sacramento and got to be the speaker of the house. I would baby-sit when they were out of town, and if it was night I'd get a dollar. If it was after midnight, Mrs. Craig would give me a dollar and a half. That was a lot of money.

Then there was the earthquake in 1938. My wife had gone into the Safeway store in the 100 block on Brea Boulevard, I don't remember

what she went to get, but I had my Model A. Just as that earthquake hit, I reached over to sit down in the car, and though I know it didn't, it seems to me today that that car went three or four feet away from me. What happened? Everybody was screaming and hollering. Up above was a two-story building, the Sewell Building, of which the Safeway store was the lower part. That's on the west side of the street today, as it was then, at 102 South Brea Boulevard. Dr. Jarvis had a dentist office up there, and he had a big window which was stationary that let light fall on his chair when he worked on people. Also, there were two, twelve-inch windows on each side and Dr. Jarvis, who was quite a large man, was trying to jump out of one of those small windows in this earthquake. I never will forget it. People ran up there and pulled him back in. A lot of people from the Long Beach area came into town to the [American] Legion Hall or to the Brea park and stayed overnight. The people set up a soup kitchen. It was quite an ordeal. Today, if a shock that severe happened, what with the concrete block buildings, well, I don't want to think about it because there would be a lot of people hurt and it would be a major disaster. That is just what it would be, yes.

I have lived here for fifty-five years and we haven't had many burglaries, murders, or rapes like some of the other areas have had. We are fortunate to live in an area like this. There is not a better street in town than that street [Flower Street] right there in front of my house. No, there's not. Our city government has become a big thing in Brea today. It has to be with 30,000 people. Of course, you never can agree with these politicians. You're not supposed to. We always accuse them of telling us one thing and then they do some other thing, but that's our city government. But the big deal in Brea in those early days was to do down to Anaheim to the SQR [Schumacher, Quanton, Renner] store and shop, or to go to the show, or to meet with friends down there at the drugstore or something. A lot of people who worked in the oil fields had Model T's and Model A's, and it was a big day, a very big day to take a lunch and get in your Model T or [Model] A and go down to Newport [Beach] and the sand. Now, what is it about twenty minutes driving on the freeway or something like that. I just do not believe the kids of today appreciate it as much as we did then, but maybe they do.

The police department in those days had one man, while the volunteer fire department had two, plus an old, solid tire truck which was the fire truck. We never had any major fires. Seven or eight months before I came here lightning struck the big million barrel oil tanks out here in Brea. That was in 1926 I believe. The oil caught fire and ran down through the wash and into Fullerton. It got into a lot of orange groves and did a lot of damage. That would be on about Berry Street, between Central Avenue and Imperial Highway today. There are several million barrel tanks up there. That's a big tank. Some of them were underground, and some of them were above ground. They were Union Oil tanks. I came just right after that episode. That was in 1926, I'm sure. Now, I



behind their voices they're saying, "That old fogey," and "This old man and doing this." I came here by myself when I was eighteen years old and I haven't been down to that jail, yet. Maybe I should have been, because of a few things that happened at the dance halls, but it doesn't do you any good. And the girls especially, in track today and in basketball, that is something. Gymnastics-- I went down to Cal State Fullerton gym several times to see the little one-armed girl [Carole Johnston]. Amazing, amazing. It is amazing, today, how the athletes get the energy they generate, and the energy that they can put out.

I have to tell this because it's a part of my life now. My wife and I, we didn't have any children. A year or two after my wife passed away--I have some good friends that live over here off of Lambert named the Crosses, Jackie and Wayne Cross, and they have three girls and two boys, the youngest girl is now fifteen. Her grandparents on both sides live back in Illinois and in Pennsylvania, and this little girl told her mother and her dad that she needed a granddad. She says, "I know who I got picked out." Then she said, "I wonder if Dyer would be my granddad." They said, "Well, you're going to have to talk to him." And she told her folks, "I'm not going to talk to him." Well, they told me all about it, and I would be getting a little more friendly with them as they would ask me over to eat. Today, the relationship between me and that little fifteen year old girl nearly keeps me going. What an adopted granddaughter; how loving they can be, how nice. She's very active in school and in sports, which I'm in favor of. If you keep them busy, you keep them out of mischief, and she is very active in about four sports which is too much for a little girl. She got through her freshman year with about four sports, but I think that she's dropped one this year. That relationship has sure helped me. It goes back to what I have said about there are just a lot of good people who live here in Brea. That's right.

H: A lot of things that you have said are so interesting. One thing in particular that I was interested in was the earthquake. Did you say that happened in . . .

B: In 1933.

H: What effect did the earthquake have on the holes, the oil well holes that had already been drilled?

B: A lot of them shifted. Like, if you would stick your finger, as an example, in mud or in dough and you were to make a hole in it, and if something were to happen to the lower part, it would shear off or partly close that hole. A lot of the wells had to be redrilled, pipe had to be pulled out and new pipe put in. A lot of expense at that time. That was about--but if I'm not right, somebody can correct me on it--I think that it was about equal to the shock of what San Francisco got in 1906.

Of course, the major part of it was in Long Beach. My wife had an aunt and uncle that lived in Long Beach, and we got in several times and places that we shouldn't have got in just to see them. But the destruction of Long Beach was a kind of a trying time. So many people had come from Long Beach, went into people's homes, and put up soup kitchens. They put up tents in the parks and they slept there. Some people just left and never went back, they were so scared. They just went right on through Brea and just kept going. It was that bad. Brea had damage. There was some stuff knocked off the shelves in the grocery stores. Under the earth, and in the earth was more damage to the oil fields than there was on the surface in this area. But the surface damage in Long Beach was bad. If you would find out today the actual count, I would say, there was six or eight times more people killed than what they said because people panic.

Changing the subject; in 1941 I went into the service, the Air Force [United States Army Air Corps]. I was overseas about thirty--six months in the Pacific. Very fortunate. When there was an emergency, such as there are in war, and you need help, how people will help. You never forget things like that. I met a lot of wonderful people in the service. The Air Force was, of course, I think, the greatest. It was to me. I got home and wasn't hurt and I met a lot of good people.

Because of the state of the conditions in war you're scared and you get to wondering, have I been living right? You know, that comes up every once in awhile and you get to thinking about it, and the first thing you get to thinking about is, "Well, I'll go to church Sunday morning," you know, over there. Maybe there was a little tent of a thing with bamboos on top of it and you'd be surprised how many people were there. People got to thinking, "Well, I may need that fellow bad," you know. I went in on the invasion of Leyte in the Philippines. I was in New Guinea, Australia, New Caledonia, Manila, and Japan. I have seen a little bit of the South Pacific, but war is not good. War doesn't help anybody. I get to thinking today about it and, well, why don't we just forget it and don't even talk about it. But this all goes back to the friends that I have made, and the people that I know that are just number one citizens, that's all. A lot of them in Brea, too. I'll ask you another question, is there anything that you want to bring up, any more that you want me to say?

H: Yes, one more time about the earthquake. Did that, actually, shut down all the wells?

B: Well, yes, a lot of them.

H: Was it a temporary situation or did they redrill?

B: They redrilled and straightened the pipe up. They had to go in and cut it off, straighten that old one up and put some more pipe in.

All the pipe is put in a hole. Now, don't forget, it goes 20,000 feet, 10,000 feet, 5,000 feet, or 1,800 feet down, and it's cemented to where the pressure of the earth couldn't push it out. They also cement to keep the saltwater out. Maybe there are some, I don't know where they are, that have been drilled and didn't find saltwater. If they go at least a mile deep, 5,000 feet approximately, they'll find some.

H: When you first started working for the Union Oil Company, they used what they called cable drilling.

B: Yes, cable tools.

H: Could you tell me about that?

B: Well, it's hard for me to describe, but I will try to. Cable tool was--let's talk about safety, first. Today, if you went on a drilling rig, up on the floor where that drill pipe is drilling, and you lit a torch or built a fire, they would have you over in Norwalk. In those days, on a cable tool, and I worked on a cable tool in Oklahoma and I worked on a cable tool here. They had a big furnace with bricks up on the rig floor like a fireplace, and big gas jets going into it. You would sharpen your cable tool bits in there like you would sharpen a chisel. Today, if you keep driving a chisel into something it will get dull. You have to heat it and beat it out to sharpen it again. That's the way you sharpened your cable tool bits. A lot of them was what they called dummy bits. They were big on the end and didn't need to be sharpened, but when they wore down, you would have to flare them out again. You would put them in this furnace on the rig floor and get them red hot, and then you would take a big sledge hammer and hammer them out to size again. Whether it was twelve inches, or eighteen, or sixteen, or whatever, you had to bring it back because you didn't want your hole to get smaller going down.

H: It kept hitting the ground?

B: Hitting the ground down in the hole.

H: Punching the hole out?

B: Punching the hole out. This man sat on a ladder, and he could sleep on that ladder, his hand on the rope, and the first time it hit slack, he would have a clevis that he would open up and drop another two inches of the rope or cable and let it get to making the hole. After awhile the bottom of the hole would get deeper than what the bit was hitting, so he would sit there with his arm going hours at a time, up and down, up and down. You would think he was going to fall off of there, but the first time that there was slack in that rope, he would open that clevis and drop two inches, four inches. In Texas in one place at 3,800 feet you hit solid granite. They weren't cable tooling that, that's

area you'll see or find you a fossil today.

H: There's a fault right up here that goes through the canyon which is causing a problem with the freeway. Did it cause a problem with the wells also?

B: Not unless it's real. Yes, it does in an earthquake. Are you talking about when an earthquake shakes or something?

H: Yes. Well, was there a constant flow of movement, the way it is now?

B: Yes, but it takes quite a moving. These wells have casings in them. This casing can be six inches in diameter, or eight inches in diameter, or it can be twelve inches in diameter. They just run any casing that they want to run into that hole, the size of hole that they drill, and it takes quite a shock to break that casing off. If it moves, the bottom part will stay stationary, but they know where that hole is. They pull a rig in and go back in and drill down to that hole and hook that casing together by cement and put that well back in operation.

H: Back about thirty years ago, they were talking about experimental holes, what they call bell holes where they would go down to a known fault area or movement area where the land would move through an earthquake type movement. They would dig out a hole the shape of a bell, I guess that's where it got its name, and then they would pour some kind of material in there that would harden, yet, if there was any type of earth movement it would turn into a liquid form to help absorb the shock. Did they ever try that out here?

B: Not that I know of.

H: Have you ever heard of that?

B: I've heard of it, yes.

H: You don't know how successful it was?

B: No, I do not know how successful it was. Now, I get the Pacific Oil Well Journal and read it clear through. The last month or so, I believe it's Bell Ridge Oil Company, I'm not sure, I have got the magazine so I can show you, but it's in the oil well journals that you can get all this information [on the direction of the oil industry, such as this company] going down with big bulldozers to strip mine for coal. Strip mining takes twelve feet or fifteen feet or eighteen feet or even forty feet of top soil off and there was the coal. Now, up in Bell Ridge country and Kettleman Hill country in the Coalinga area, they got miles and miles of this oil sand that they are going to heat, steam, and get oil out of it. They say that Union Oil Company is spending \$50 million to \$100 million in Colorado on the shale project. This last Union Oil magazine that came out last week shows a picture of it on the

B: Laurel School and the high school, too, after the earthquake in 1938. Was it 1934 or 1938?

H: In ~~1938~~.

B: Yes. Then times got slow. A lot of times you'd work two days a week and be laid off until next week. Maybe one week you worked five days in the oil fields and the next week two. Maybe you'd work one day and wouldn't go back for two weeks, but you still had your seniority and they would call you back. In those days you did other work then. You worked in packinghouses, lemons or oranges. Then they reinforced the Laurel School which is here on Flower Street.

H: They didn't, actually, have a lot of damage, that is, it didn't fall down, did it?

B: No, no.

H: It just needed reinforcement?

B: Just reinforcement. But I believe that high school was started the year that I came here. I believe it was. I believe the first class was in, oh, you will have to check this, 1928 or something like that. Of course, I got to going with a gal in the high school in later years, so I was there a lot of times. I worked a lot of nights in the oil field and I was off in the daytime to see the games and stuff like that. All games in the twenties and thirties were played in the afternoons then, not at night. We didn't have lights. We would go to Los Angeles to the old Gilmore Stadium, or the old Wrigley Field and see the Hollywood Stars and Los Angeles Angels play.

H: Did you have a car then or did you go on the red car?

B: Oh, we would go in the red car and maybe we would get five or six guys together and go in a car. We would pay his way and buy him a gallon of gasoline. Of course, a gallon of gasoline cost you ten cents then, you know.

H: Was there a paved road back then?

B: Some of it was and some of it wasn't. We called oiled roads paved, but they weren't paved. It just kept the dust down, and it kept you out of the mud holes. A lot of days there was surplus oil that they didn't clean up very good. We called it "sour oil." It smelled. It had so much sulfur and stuff in it that they, the refinery, didn't want it. It was too hard to process. Now, today, they'll take every drop of anything that they can get, yes.

H: So did the city or county have this available to them to put down on the road?

made by Collier Carbon & Chemical Corporation owned by Union Oil Company right out here on Imperial Highway, stored up there in a canyon. You think back thirty years ago to that Texas City fire where that big ship blew up. Fertilizer is just like TNT under certain conditions. You don't want that condition to ever happen, but if it did happen, well, there would be a lot of windows and lights and a lot of people shook up. But they don't want that and it's not going to happen. Safety today is the big thing.

H: Do you think that an earthquake could set off an explosion?

B: No, I don't think so. An electrical storm could, yes. There has got to be friction, there has got to be contact between gasoline, propane, butane, butadiene.

H: There has to be a spark of some kind?

B: Yes, that's right.

H: It survived the recent electrical storm that we had.

B: That's right, and I have been up there when an electrical storm knocked out all of our electricity. Everything was on electricity, our lights, gauges, and some of the electric pumps that go down. But everything is grounded. They are very safety conscious.

H: Did Union Oil provide any form of insurance for the workers?

B: Yes. You paid for part of it, and they paid for part of it.

H: I see. That covered hospitalization, health, and life . . .

B: Anything. Life and anything. That's right, very good. They were very good to me; I was very good to Union Oil Company. I made them money. They gave me money in exchange for my labor and my knowledge. It was a fair exchange. I get a pension today. When you get sixty-five years old and retire you do not get the insurance, but you get to keep your life insurance at a very cheap rate. They had a very good insurance policy over the years that I worked for them.

H: Did that cover families, too?

B: Anything. Anything and everything connected with you.

H: Let's say, when you first came to work out here and if you were injured, were you paid for the time that you were off?

B: It has been a policy: about a year per week. In other words, you go to the hospital a week and you have worked one year, you're going to be paid that week. You work thirty-five years you were going to have thirty-five weeks of sickness pay. Then, later, it came

B: That's right. And you got a lot of consideration about a transfer.

H: You had a choice then whether or not you'd transfer?

B: Yes. I was told to go into Santa Maria in 1936 and I was not asked to go. I was told that I was going to be transferred to Santa Maria.

H: Before the union?

B: Yes. We had a little bit of a union, but it wasn't much. They paid me for going and I made money by going, and I produced and did their work, what they wanted me to do, so it was fair in one way. A lot of times with families it's not fair, you know what I mean? Us married people then, to see a married man live in a beautiful part and get transferred to Santa Maria, leave his family here, and he'd stay up there, he would just barely get by. In those days you could not talk to supervision. Those days you couldn't have a conversation with supervision.

H: Were there jobs for women with Union Oil? Did they hire women at all?

B: Those days, yes. All in the office.

H: Strictly for the office?

B: Today, they have women in the fields. I go out and visit the plant where I worked and there's one girl up there, and I know they'll cut this out of the tape since this is not about oil, but that's all right. But Cathy said, "Dyer, I'm sure glad I'm not a working when you were here." Then I said, "Well, Cathy, I wasn't hard to work for." "No," she said, "you weren't hard to work for, if you worked. But you'd put me in that boiler, and I'm not a going in that boiler, because you'd put everybody in that boiler to find out what the work was and how hard it was." She said, "I wouldn't go in the boiler if I had to go home." Well, it's a lot of fun, you know what I mean? I enjoyed it. There weren't many days that I went to work where I didn't have fun or I didn't enjoy it. I made a lot of friends all the way from Santa Maria to down here: Coalinga, Bakersfield, Dominguez, Long Beach, Signal Hill, and the Compton area.

H: During the Depression years out here, did they allow married women to work?

B: During the Depression years? I never saw a woman work in an oil field.

H: In the office or anywhere?

B: No, most all of them were men clerks then. We had one up here, she was Ruth Wakeman and she was a part-time telephone operator and part-time clerk.

H: In the city?

B: No, for the oil company.

H: Oh, really?

B: Yes.

H: Was she a telephone operator for the oil company?

B: Yes. They had their own telephone system.

H: Oh, I see.

B: Yes, they had their own telephone system. But we had a lot of fun working. We had get-togethers and picnics and whatnot. Those days we could have a picnic or celebrate over a baby being born, you know what I mean? Or get together for a card party or something, you know. Tell you the truth, we didn't have a lot of money to go anywhere so you had to have your recreation at home. Union Oil Company was good to the employees about giving stock to them. You got so much stock given to you every month in comparison with the dollars earned and the bracket you were in.

H: They gave it to you? They paid for it?

B: Yes, that's right. After you worked a lot of years it accumulated to quite a bit of stock, and you draw dividends on that stock. You sell that stock to buy a home or you sell that stock to buy a car.

H: You had to retire at sixty-five?

B: Yes, then. Yes.

H: Do they allow you to work longer now?

B: I've heard it talked, but I can't answer that. I can't say yes or no. I do not know. I know some corporations are, yes. To use an oil field expression again, "Not any more work than the office people do, and they could work there a hundred years." Now, us guys in the field always said like that, see, because they were never out in the rain and wind and cold and never got any dirt under their fingernails and stuff like that. But we had to have them, you had to have them. You got to have those people, too.

When I first came here the oil companies had baseball teams competing against each other. They had major league players like Babe Ruth, Walter Johnson. At one time in Olinda, where the park is now out there, to the right of the road where the park is, about where the tennis court is today, there was a baseball field that held 5,000 people in wooden stands. They would come from all over the country by the red car, by the Model A's and Model T's, to see Union Oil



Christmas presents that lasted for a long time.

But I'd say that we were like a good deal of many other families in Brea. A lot of them that I know that were in Brea managed to survive that lived in the oil fields or lived off the oil fields both. I know a lot of people in Brea went on what you call now "welfare," and had food handouts and that kind of thing. As a matter of fact, there was a big building on north Brea Boulevard where they dispensed food materials and clothing goods to people that were unable to work or had no income. So I think that we were maybe one step better than they were because my dad was very proud and I don't think he would have taken too kindly to have to be on the welfare role, but I'm sure if survival was the only means, that would be what he would do. But there were a lot of others that at no fault of their own had to turn to assistance. The Depression era was bad for many, many people in and around Brea. Even the oil fields were depressed, but thanks to the gentleman, Mr. Birch, the families that I knew did not have to resort to that source of income or support.

Probably my earliest recall, as I mentioned before, was learning to spit on pipes, but we also spent a lot of time wandering through the oil fields. Not wandering necessarily alone, but going with some of the workers to watch them in their daily activities and going the rounds with the pumpers. At that time also, Mr. Birch had a lease at Venice and we'd accompany my dad in going down there because sometimes they would service the oil wells from out of this plant because all they had at Venice was a resident pumper who took care of the wells. We would go down there, riding on the back of the truck, and the resident pumper down there had a son our age. We'd go down and spend the day on the beach and ride back in the evening and that was our weekend activity, that was our pleasure for the week.

Also, they used to have what they called swinging bridges in the oil fields which spanned some of the canyons, which went from one knoll to another so that rather than walking or driving up and around you could walk across the bridge, which was suspended between two points on opposite sides of a ravine. Those are kind of fun. Sometimes we would get out there and cause the bridge to swing back and forth and vibrate one way or another. Or sometimes a young friend of ours would come up from the city and we would get him out there and we would start vibrating [the bridge] and he of course would kind of get a little shaken up, and he'd be disturbed, wondering if the bridge would collapse. We knew well and good that it wouldn't, but those were the minor play things we did. Then starting

R: This is the second interview of Leo Piantoni by Bruce Rockwell at Leo Piantoni's house on November 9, 1981, at 7:10 p.m. Leo, I have one question I'd like to ask before we go into your later years. You mentioned that during the Depression years there was a big building on north Brea Boulevard which gave out assistance and food. I was wondering if you could tell me what organization was handling that?

P: Well, I think it was probably sponsored, I'm sure, by the government, and it may have been affiliated with something of the nature of the WPA [Works Progress Administration]. What exact organization it was, I don't recall. As I said my parents never participated in it, but I do recall that there was such a facility in the building. It was a block south of Deodora [Street] at that time, which is now Lambert [Road], on the south-east corner of the intersection there, and I don't recall the name of the street right now.

R: Was that a government building at that time?

P: It was not owned by the government. It was apparently owned by one of the local firms and it was used by the government probably on a lease.

R: Leo, you mentioned during the last interview that you only went to town once a week, and that the distance from your house to the center of town was no more than two miles or about one and a half miles . . .

P: Somewhere between a mile and a half and two miles, yes, I would judge it. I never measured it.

R: I wonder if you could describe a typical day going to the town of Brea?

P: Usually, we came into town on a Saturday evening. The principal reason to come to town was to do the weekly shopping at the local store. At that time, there were two stores in town. One was a Safeway, and Gheen had a meat market on Brea Boulevard, and we usually bought most of the staples and goods for the entire week. If there was something on at the theater, that was at the Red Lantern Theater, that was of interest to my family, we'd go to a show that evening, particularly if they had an excess couple of dollars or so, so they could afford going to the show. But it wasn't anything special as far as gathering for dancing, socializing, that kind of thing.

R: All right. When we left off last week, I think we stopped at around your junior high period. You didn't speak very much about the time that you went from junior high into

convenience for the employees.

R: What change did you notice as the people moved off of the lease land and then into the community?

P: Well, my understanding, and of course this just precedes my birth, was that one of the first major movements of people off of the leases occurred about 1921, in which the Union Oil Company approached the people, some fifty or sixty people that were living on company property or lease property. They agreed and the Union Oil made provisions for housing to be built in Brea for them on the west side of town, on Walnut [Avenue] and Madrona [Avenue] on what would have been the southwest portion of then Brea, which would be about in the 200, 300 and 400 blocks from Walnut and Madrona in that vicinity. So the Union Oil Company did make provisions starting at about 1921, as I understand from the discussions with my parents, because transportation was beginning to become available, again beginning with the Model As. So transportation was becoming more reliable. Roads were beginning to be considered, be built and what have you, so they could be traveled over. That was the first and only one that concentrated, that I know of, where a company said, "Hey, we'll do this and we'll try to make provisions for you to live in a community such as Brea." Most of the rest of it stayed transient from, at least my recall, up through until after the war because the leases pretty well retained their housing and people stayed in those houses. Again, it was inexpensive rental property as far as that goes.

I mentioned that during the Depression most of the oil companies took and reduced the work hours and kept the employees on. In my recall, the oil companies were more than fair as far as how they treated their employees. I don't know of any bad instances where employees were mistreated either economically or physically or any other way. I think the oil companies tended to be, particularly since a lot of the oil companies were where a lot of them, the original developers, were drillers and wildcatters and they slept and drank with the workers and they had a camaraderie that we either make it or we don't make it. When they did make it they felt they owed some support to the people who helped them in the hard times when they were out there drilling in the wet and cold, because during those periods of time it took not small time; it took probably anywhere from four to six months and as long as maybe a year to drill a well. That's a long time on one rig with one crew. You learned who your friends are and you learned to live with each other. So I think the oil companies never [made] any major effort, as I say, to reduce the housing. One by one they were, but

I think most of them felt that it was an opportunity where, as they had been leasing and had no property rights you might say, they had an opportunity to purchase. At that time, housing was not that expensive compared to what it is today; it was probably expensive when you look at it, and I think that anytime you look at buying a house when your income is limited you look at it pretty hard. But housing was made available, and developers were coming in, and tracts were being made. In Brea there were some small tracts, no large tracts came in, I think like maybe fifty homes at a time, or twenty-five homes at a time. They were comfortable, small, 1,200 square feet, two-bedroom type houses, and adequate for a lot of the people in the oil industry, because a lot of the people who were still living on the lease were like my folks, all their youngsters were grown and independent, so they had less needs. So they didn't need a house similar to when I moved from a two-bedroom to a four-bedroom type of house. They were beyond the point of needing more space; they were at the point where they had stabilized their needs. As I say, the homes that were being built were in the vicinity of 1,000 square feet and affordable.

R: Up until that time, the people never really had a desire to own a home?

P: I don't think they had a need to. I think that my folks were paying \$12.00 a month for a house that was adequate for their needs. I'm sure that most of the housing was equally affordable rental property you might say, and most of them were happy with the life they were leading. At that point in time, there was, I think, a feeling that they were encouraged to leave. Let's put it that way. I don't think they were necessarily--some of them may have been forced to leave, but I know they were encouraged to leave because of that liability factor there that I was talking about.

R: But until that time when they were somewhat encouraged to leave, did most of the people not have a burning desire to own their own land, or own their own home like you see now in today's society?

P: Well, no, because see in--well, in the early thirties or during the thirties of course, and even in 1938 and 1939, the financial situation was such that there was still post-Depression. People had lived through the Depression, they hadn't amassed a heck of a lot. As I mentioned the oil companies spread the work around, spread the money around. There wasn't a lot to do, there was just enough to keep things going. In 1938 and 1939, of course, things were beginning to pick

is; he's not too well. I haven't seen him for some time. I thought he was a good man; he really ran a good school.

J: Do you know how other school districts around Brea operated? Could you compare [them and] what made Brea better?

S: I think we had good principals and superintendent, that's the whole secret. Fullerton had good schools, but all the schools had the same problem.

J: One of yours was getting teachers.

S: Yes.

J: Were there any other problems? What about money? You know today, the crunch is on for schools. Was there anything like that back then?

S: Oh, there's always a problem to make the budget come out at the end of the year, and keep the teachers happy with their salaries.

J: Didn't you ever get funding cuts?

S: No. Of course, I have been away a long time from schools; I don't know how it is now. We were always fighting for more money.

J: This year they got exactly the same as last year from the state, that's why I made my comment about a crunch. That means unless you cut other services you can't give salary hikes to teachers to keep up with the cost of living.

S: We never had those problems.

J: Yes, this is, I suppose, all post Proposition 13 affects that are hitting schools now, but back then there was nothing.

S: There was nothing like that.

J: Were you connected, or in any way know of how the Depression affected the schools before the war?

S: No.

J: Well, you didn't go on the board until 1943.

S: Let's see, I remember those Depression years, of course, I lived through them. Today would be a boom compared to what it was then.

J: Sure.

S: A person who had ten cents to go buy a hamburger, he was really [well off].

J: He could get a full meal.

S: Everybody was in the same boat, you know, banks were closed and nobody had any money.

J: How did it affect Shaffer Tool Works? Did you have to cut back?

S: Yes. I remember one time there wasn't any work; everybody was laid off for a short time during those years.

J: Do you remember what year that was?

S: It would be around 1930.

J: Right at the beginning of the Depression?

S: Yes.

J: Did the company cease operations all together?

S: No, we let them off for a month or something, whatever it took, and back to work they came. If we'd get an order in or something to do, why, we would put them back to work.

J: Now, did you work with Shaffer Tool Works your whole life?

S: Mostly, yes.

J: Did you start right after high school?

S: Yes, I went to business training school and then my dad passed away when I was thirty-six years old so the burden was on my shoulders from then on.

J: That was from 1946 on?

S: Yes, from 1946 on.

J: Before that you had worked in the company?

S: Yes,

J: And learned it? What kind of job did you do?

worse about it today. What kind of a community was it to grow up in?

S: Oh, it was real good. As a boy growing up, why, we had a good time.

J: What was provided for you by the community in the way of recreation or anything else?

S: Oh, the big deal was to go to a show in the evening or something like that. [We] didn't have television but we were always doing something. In those days I played in an orchestra, so my time was taken up pretty much practicing and playing. Mostly in the Depression time I made a few bucks and that was something in those days to have something where you could make a few bucks.

J: Was this a community orchestra?

S: No, just a dance orchestra.

J: Oh, did you go around to organizations?

S: We used to play for organizations and dances and that sort of thing.

J: What other kind of things do you remember about the town when it was small? Was it typical of other towns, for example, Fullerton or Whittier?

S: Pretty much, but it was different in those days. Today you go from here to any town; they have just grown together. In those days if you went from Brea to Whittier or even over to [Yorba] Linda and back, why, you were going quite a ways. In the younger days you had more time to do things like going fishing or whatever you wanted to do. (laughter)

J: They were participation type of activities?

S: Yes, I think people are losing that now. They're too busy.

J: Or maybe it's done for them by electronic games and television. It's all done for them and they don't have to use too much imagination or go out and think of activities for themselves. Did the community have any things going at all? I know the plunge was there, and you could go swimming over there; that was provided by the community, the city.

S: Well, the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] was active then.



















### THE HONORABLE CRUZ REYNOSO

A famous Brea native, the former Justice Cruz Reynoso, was the first Hispanic to serve on the California Supreme Court. He was appointed to the high court by Governor Jerry Brown on December 24, 1981. The third of eleven children, Reynoso was born in Brea in 1931 but moved to La Habra when he was eight. While he was attending Fullerton High School, his art teacher, Mrs. Irene Randall, could see the potential of the outstanding young man and invited Cruz to come live with the Randalls. He accepted the invitation and lived with them for ten years. While at Fullerton High, he was elected vice president of his senior class, graduating in 1949. Following his graduation, he attended Pomona College and then went on to receive his law degree from the University of California at Berkeley in 1959.

Reynoso began his practice in the Imperial Valley where he had the opportunity to represent minority groups in their civil rights battles. After this practical experience, he decided on an academic career. In 1968, while he was serving as a professor of law in New Mexico, he was appointed by President Jimmy Carter to the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugees. He gained much recognition in this role, which led to his appointment to the Supreme Court bench in California.<sup>13</sup>

### BILL GRIFFITH AND THE SOAP BOX DERBY

Another time Brea was in the headlines was when fourteen-year-old Bill Griffith won Southern California's Soap Box Derby Championship in August 1939. During the depression years, kids from all over the country were building these unpowered coasters, usually from boxes or any scrap lumber they could find. They added wheels from scooters and wagons, with a fifth wheel of some sort to serve as a steering wheel. They could not spend more than fifteen dollars on parts, and no welding, brazing, or soldering was allowed. No adult help, other than advice, could be accepted.

Steep hillsides offered challenges to the racers, and Brea had plenty of those nearby. Soap box race courses were laid out according to certain rules, with the racers running in heats against time to the finish line over 975 feet away. But in Brea, the youngsters often traveled much further with the accessibility of long runs. Those soap boxes with the best maneuverability and least wheel friction were the winners. It took a good deal of engineering skill to create a winning entry that could travel over twenty-five miles per hour.

Bill built his "Spider Special" during weekends and after school. Although his coaster was far superior to those of the other Brea boys, Bill surprised even his parents, the W.E. Griffiths, when he won the Southern

13. Burt Manuscript, "The Honorable Cruz Reynoso."