



***First Draft Copy***

***Book Not Yet Titled***

**By : Bill 'Smokey' Stover**

## **Introduction**

**My name is Bill 'Smokey' Stover. I am a new author. This book (not yet titled) Parts 1 through 4 is my first attempt at writing. The continuing story is divided into 4 parts and will be published and sold as 4 individual books. The books are a series of stories based on situations that really happened. I am uniquely qualified to write these 4 books because I have lived through each of the life situations that have been chronicled in these stories. Although all names and characters are fictional, each character is a composite of a type of person who lived in each of the times that are written about in these 4 books. The target market for each book is very different from each of the others. Those who may be interested in any one of the stories may not be interested in any of the others. Any individual who reads any of these stories, may find what they believe to be their own character embedded in the storyline. Many will be angry because a likeness of their character may be exposed to the world for the first time. Others may be elated to see that truths are finally revealed. These stories were written using information from many sources. They were also written from my very unique perspective. My advice to anyone who reads any of these books is to read it with an open mind and with a desire to learn more about the time and place that is the focal point of the story.**

## **About the Author**

I grew up in Earlimart, a town of 3000 in the very center of the Central Valley in California. Some people I know say that they were raised in the town where they lived during their childhood. To say that you were raised implies that someone taught, trained, nourished, loved, and fed and clothed you. Very little of these types of attention were ever applied in my family, in my town or in my environment. I grew up, or I should say, I was allowed to grow up in Earlimart, California. It is only by the grace of God that I lived to see adulthood, and then it may only be because I ran away from Earlimart in the summer of 1959 after my junior year of high school. I ran away and never looked back. Life was very hard and very dangerous in the Valley in the 1950's.

### ***My Roots!!!!***

## **The Dust Bowl Days**

### **Also Known As**

### **The Dirty Thirties**

In the 1930's the dust storms blew across the southern plains destroying crops, killing cattle, and changing the lives of all who lived in the path of the drifting sands. The Dust Bowl was created in the area of southern Colorado, southern Kansas, and the panhandles of Oklahoma and Texas. The dust storm also affected Arkansas, Missouri, South Dakota and New Mexico. The wind blew and the topsoil was blown away. The decade was called the Dustbowl Days and the Dirty Thirties.

Landowners lost their farms to foreclosure and sharecroppers were left with no means of support for their families. At the same time the country was suffering economically in a period known as the great depression. Some workers headed south while a few headed north and east. Most, however, headed west toward California in search of jobs and food. The migration of perhaps 2,000,000 people took place along Route 66. Most of the migrants found their way to the San Joaquin Valley of Central California.

## **What Brought Us To Earlimart?**

My wife and I are grandchildren of the Dust Bowl Days. Although we lived our childhoods just a few miles apart, we did not meet until we were adults. Our grandparents were from Oklahoma and Arkansas. They grew up in different towns and states and never new each other in the old country. These families crossed paths in California in the 1930's and 40's. Our parents ended up in the San Joaquin Valley because they were the children of the Dust Bowl.

In 1923, some 8 years before the Dust Bowl Days began, my wife's father, Jack Hawkins, at the age of 25, left his parents home in Maysville, Arkansas in search of income and employment. Jack had heard of an old friend in California who had jobs working the grapes in Delano, California. He thumbed a ride on a Ford Model T drawn trailer ending up in Delano about a month later. Jack was a confirmed bachelor. He remained single until he met Winnie Myers and married in 1944.

My maternal grandfather Andrew and grandmother Mary Snider were the parents of sixteen children. They were sharecroppers in McAlester, Oklahoma. The owner of their farm lost his property to foreclosure. In the fall of 1934, Andrew and Mary took their 16 kids, headed south to a farming area just south of Fort Worth, Texas and settled in to work 160 acres of farmland. Within 10 years, Andrew and Mary owned that farm. Through the years the farm was subdivided and at one time or another all of their 16 children lived in separate homes on the farm. Andrew and Mary lived on their farm until they died. Andrew died at 93 years old and 10 years later Mary died at 92 years old. My mother Mintie was one of the middle daughters of Andrew and Mary.

At about the same time, my other grandfather John and grandmother Jessie Stover were forced to leave Clinton, Oklahoma in search of income. John and Jessie's three older children were gone from the home. They opted to stay in Oklahoma. My father Carl was the youngest (16 years old) child. Dad had heard of work in Texas, so at 16 he took out on his own in search of income. He bummed around until he ended up on the farm of Andrew and Mary Snider just south of Fort Worth, Texas. John and Jessie found their way to Earlimart, California. John worked the crops for 40 years. He picked cotton, picked up potatoes, picked melons, cut grapes, and even worked some in the wineries of the San Joaquin Valley. Jessie was Cherokee Indian. She had some college and was a School Teacher in Oklahoma. She hated California so she never assimilated. Jessie returned to Oklahoma in 1952 to live with her oldest son until she died in 1965. John died in Earlimart, California in 1976.

Houston and Nora Myers left Oklahoma in 1935 with three daughters. They headed for California. Nora was legally blind. My wife's mother Winnie and her sister Florene were also legally blind with the same rare form of birth cataracts. Their younger sister Marie who had normal vision, accompanied. Houston found work in Alamogordo, New Mexico. He also found a state operated school for the blind in Alamogordo. He kept his family in New Mexico long enough for his blind daughters to progress through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in the school for the blind. They learned brail and touch typing while at the school. My wife's mother, Winnie survives her sisters and at 83 years old still communicates by telephone and by typewritten letters. After their daughter's completion of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, Houston and Nora moved the family to Delano, California where Houston worked the crops until he died. Houston and Nora both died in Bakersfield, California in 1975.

Jack Hawkins was a bachelor. He had not given much thought to marriage. He and Winnie Myers met in Delano, CA in 1943 and were married in 1944. Jack was 45 and Winnie was 22 years old when they married. Their son Von Ray, was born the following year. Paulette (my wife) was born the next year. Leotta was born the next year and their

youngest daughter, Eva, was born a year later. Jack worked in the Grape Fields until he was forced by health to quit working in 1956. He died in Bakersfield, California in 1976. He was 78 years old when he died. Winnie at age 83, resides with her daughter in Bakersfield, CA.

My father, Carl Stover and mother Mintie Snider met and married while he worked on the Snider farm in central Texas. They were very young. My father was 18 and my mother was 15 when they married. After they gave birth to their first child (my older sister), they left the farm to find work in the oilfields of west Texas. My father worked as a roughneck for two years. Shortly after my birth, the family moved on to Casa Grande, Arizona where my father worked with my uncle in the cotton gins about 50 miles from Phoenix. A few years later, my younger brother was born. Shortly after his birth, the family headed for California to join up with my grandparents in Earlimart, California. We arrived in Earlimart in 1946 and in 1948 my younger sister was born in Tulare County Hospital, California. The four of us were literally born as we were moving west from central Texas to California's San Joaquin Valley. My father worked as a tractor driver, mechanic, and night watchman on ranches and farms around Earlimart until he gave up on them. My parents relocated back to Phoenix, Arizona where my father worked as a mechanic until he died there in 1979. After my Father's death, my mother moved back to the farm in central Texas where she lived for a number of years. She relocated to live with my sister Marie, her oldest daughter, for the last years of her life. She died in 1989 and was buried in central Texas. Although my mother was forced into the gypsy lifestyle adopted by the children of the Dust Bowl, she never mentally left here home in Texas. Because my mother always missed home, we made a yearly pilgrimage to Texas for as many years as I can remember. She lived and died as the daughter of a Texas farmer. My grandmother outlived most of her 16 children. She died on the farm at 92 years of age.

All of our family members, those original migrant workers who fled the Dust Bowl are now dead. My wife's mother Winnie at 83 years old is the only remaining child of the Dust Bowl. My wife and I are only two of hundreds of family members who remain as grandchildren of the Dust Bowl and we have spent a lifetime working our way from poverty to peace.

## ***Poor and Proud in Earlimart California***

### **Chapter One**

#### **Born in the oil fields of West Texas**

My parents called me Bud until I started to high school. As a young boy growing up in Earlimart, my close friends called me Billy. I had long, curly hair that was out of control, especially when I ran a lot or while playing basketball on the playground at school. Some

of those who played together every day called me 'Wild Hair'. As I approached my teen years, some of my closest friends called me 'Stovepipe', because I was undernourished and very skinny just like a stovepipe. Because my name was William, I asked my friends to call me Bill. 'Bill' never stuck. I was called 'Stovepipe' until I ran away from home in the summer of 1959. When I was young, I had heard my Grand Father's friends call him Smokey, and later when I was a teenager I had heard my Father's friends call him Smokey. I decided that when I had the opportunity, I would have my friends call me Smokey. While in Air Force Boot Camp, I finally got my way. I told my buddies that my nickname was Smokey. Every person who ever serves in the military comes home with a nickname. My buddies were happy to call me Smokey then and the name stuck. I have been called Smokey since Air Force Boot Camp in 1960. I have told many people that my nickname was Smokey a long time before the 'Cops' took the name from Burt Reynolds in 'Smokey and the Bandit'.

I remember most of the terrible things that have happened to me from about 4 years old until now. Things that happened from my birth until just before our arrival in Earlimart, California are mostly vague as far as memory is concerned. When I was a teenager, my Father and Mother told me about Buford, Texas and the circumstances of my birth as well as some of the things that happened between birth and 4 years old. The very early years were recalled from my Mother's memory.

I was born in Buford, Texas, April 10, 1942. Buford is so small that my parents always told people that I was born in Colorado City, Texas. Both towns are so small that most people have no idea where to look for either one. Back in the early 40's, when I was born there weren't any good roads which went straight to Buford from any city of any size. Today Interstate 20 goes right by Buford in Mitchell County. If you head west out of Fort Worth on I20 and proceed through Abilene you will find signs which will lead you off the main highway to Colorado City and Buford. It is about half way between Abilene and Midland, Texas, about 250 miles west of Fort Worth.

My Father, Mother, and older Sister, came from Waxahachie, Texas, a small town just south of Dallas. They had only been in Buford for about a month when I was born. My Father had come to work in the oil fields which are the only place to find work in West Texas. I was born in a two room shack that has no doubt been blown away by the desert winds by now. The closest doctor was in Midland to the West and the only hospital was in Abilene to the East of Buford both being a minimum of 30 miles away. In those days there was no such thing as neo-natal care. Poor women would get pregnant and give birth 9 months later or miscarry sooner. Babies were born either in good health or sickly and most were born without the luxury or convenience of hospital or doctor. My birth was no exception to the rule. No matter where poor people were living at any given time there usually lived at least one or two women who could be considered mid-wives.

The two room shack had no indoor plumbing. The toilet facility was an outhouse which was placed above a hole in the ground about 100 yards behind the house. The outhouse was a two-holer. I think they made two-holers so you could have company on those cold and windy West Texas nights. The shack was on the back of another property. The front

house was much larger and nicer than the house we were forced to rent. The property was supplied water from a well and pump house which was close to the front house. Our house had one hydrant that was about 3 feet off the ground atop a half inch iron water pipe. It was at the side of the house just under the window which one might call the kitchen window. Although the cabin really didn't have a kitchen, there was a 100 year old wood stove located next to the window that was called the kitchen window. A small table made with 2 by 4s and plywood had been hand sawed and nailed together and placed inside the house just under the window. Someone had attached an old holey hose about 10 feet long to the hydrant and placed a sawed stump outside the house just beneath the window. Anytime anyone needed water they would place a large bowl or bucket on the table inside, go outside, and from the stump they would point the hose through the window and into the container, turn the water hydrant on, and when the proper amount of water was in the container, turn the hydrant off. This was the running water system that was in place at the time of my birth.

I was born at about 6 o'clock in the morning. When my Mother went into labor (about midnight), my Father sprang into action. The only source of heat was the wood stove in the kitchen. The stove always had hot coals because even in April in the deserts of West Texas, it was cold in the early morning hours. He stoked the fire and then proceeded to the storage area just outside at the back door, where he found 4 buckets. He brought the buckets to the kitchen area where he placed them on the table under the kitchen window. He ran outside, turned on the hydrant and filled the buckets with water. He came back inside and placed the buckets on the four hot plates on the wood kitchen stove. As he quickly passed the bed in the front of the house, where Mom spent most of her days and nights, Dad told my Mom to hang on for a few minutes while he went to find the midwife who would help in my delivery. He ran from the front door, jumped in and started the car and in about 2 minutes he was out again and knocking on the front door of the midwife's house. The woman answered the door, was dressed in another 3 minutes and 2 minutes later they were back in our house and getting prepared to birth me. A total of about ½ hour and Dad was ready. The midwife and my Father collected enough clean rags together and laid them on the table under the kitchen window. Dad spent the remainder of the night stoking the fire and keeping the water hot while the midwife attempted to keep my Mother comfortable. I was born at about 6 o'clock in the morning. The midwife cleaned me up, cleaned up my mother, gave my Father some instructions and left. She was finished at about 7 o'clock. My Dad took her back home and returned in a few minutes. He complained that he had no breakfast and left for work in the oil fields of West Texas. The woman who lived in the house on the front of the property stopped by at about 5 o'clock and left off a casserole for my Dad's dinner. She repeated that for the next three days. My Dad had to find breakfast and lunch for three days and he ate the free meal each evening. On the fourth day, my Mother was up and about. She cooked breakfast, prepared a sandwich for Dad's lunch and had dinner ready when Dad came home from work. The midwife stopped by each day, about mid day to check on Mom. She usually brought soup or sandwich for my mother. She also brought fruit, water and cool milk. After the fourth day she stopped coming by because Mom was again capable of accomplishing the daily chores. We had no refrigerator or any way of storing perishables so my Father stopped by the local market every evening to buy necessary items to feed and hydrate Mom and me.

There was no baby formula or disposable diapers in 1942. My Father also purchased a few of the necessities for maintaining a new baby. The baby formula was mixed from milk and other commodities. The contents of the diapers were dumped nightly in the out house and then the cloth diapers were washed nightly in a wash tub on a washboard. The gray water was then thrown out in the backyard and the washtub was rinsed near the hydrant at the side of the house. The rinse water was again thrown out in the back yard.

My Father worked as a Well Pullers Helper in the oilfields of West Texas for almost two years. He made just enough pay each month to pay the rent and the grocery bill at the local market. Dad worked hard his whole life but he didn't like hard work. He wrote letters to all of his relatives and all of Mom's relatives in search of an easier job. He finally received a letter from my Uncle which told Dad of a job in Casa Grande, Arizona.. This Uncle was Mom's oldest Sister's husband. They lived in Casa Grande, a small town about 50 miles from Phoenix, Arizona. He was a shade tree mechanic just like my Dad. He had lived in the deserts of Arizona for about 15 years and Mom said that He was a desert rat that would never live in a normal place.

## **Chapter Two**

# **Moving West – Texas To Arizona**

Dad finished out the week, collected his check, paid the rent, paid the grocery bill and packed the car. At two o'clock the next morning, Dad and Mom finished loading the 1932 Ford Sedan and together with my Sister, we headed for Casa Grande, Arizona. Mom said that Dad always started trips, especially desert trips at 2 o'clock in the morning so that we could get as many miles behind us as possible before the afternoon sun was too high and before it was too hot to travel.

It is almost 800 miles from West Texas to Casa Grande. We spent almost 3 days on the dusty desert roads before we finally pulled into Casa Grande. My Uncle had set up the job and a place to live just outside of Casa Grande. My Dad would work for the next two years as a mechanic in the cotton gin where most of the cotton in the region was processed, bailed and shipped to textile mills all over the world. My Uncle was a foreman on the work crew that moved trucks and cotton trailers around all day as they emptied trailers of cotton and loaded processed and bailed cotton onto trucks for shipment. Dad worked in the hot gin 12 hours each day to keep the plant running while they were ginning and bailing. He worked 10 hours a day on the maintenance crew to repair all of the mechanical equipment and to ready the plant for use for the next production cycle. My Uncle worked as a mechanic during the down cycles to ready all outside equipment for the next production cycle. Most of the workers at the gin lived in company housing that was paid for as rent on a monthly basis. We were no different than everyone else. We lived in a 30 year old, 20 foot long, 8 foot wide trailer house. The trailer houses were placed in circles of 8 trailers per circle.

There were 3 or 4 circles of trailers. In the center of each circle was an out building that was used by all of the people from the circle. The out buildings were all built from the same prints. Each building had facilities for washing clothes. The laundry facility consisted of two ringer washing machines and two rinse tubs and sinks. Each out building had toilet facilities for men on one side and for women on the other side. The men's side had four open commodes, four sinks, and four showers without curtains or doors. The women's side was the same except the commodes and showers were in stalls with curtains for privacy. Boys and men of all ages used the men's side and girls and women of all ages used the women's side. All residents were told to use their own facilities unless you had to go when your facility was full. Mom said that on numerous occasions either Her or Dad had to use one of the other facilities because the number of people using ours was far too many for the number of units available at certain times of the day especially morning and evening.

We lived in Casa Grande for about two years before Dad had had enough of the very hot and heavy duty labor which he had to do each day. Within a year, Mom was pregnant again. She gave birth to my younger brother, just about six months before we left the cotton gin and trailer house. There were a number of midwives in the trailer park so it really wasn't hard to find a woman to assist Mom in childbirth. The owner of the gin and company housing was somewhat benevolent in that he paid a doctor to visit the camp about once a month. The doctor staged his patient visits in an office building located near the road in front of the gin. He would see as many children as he could on one day and then see all of the expectant mothers and other women the next day. If any men required the doctor's services, he would return on Sunday afternoon so that they would not have to miss work for a visit. This was the only care my mother had ever received during any of her pregnancies. The doctor would try to get back to his infirmary for deliveries of babies but usually he did not make it so most babies were delivered by midwives. My brother was born in the early morning, delivered by midwife with my Dad's help. A few months after my brothers arrival Dad started writing letters to his Father and Mother who lived in Earlimart, California. Earlimart was situated in the heart of the San Joaquin Valley. The Central Valley, as it was called by those who lived and worked there, produced much of the truck crops, fruits, and nuts for the world.

Dad had saved as much money as he could during the two plus years in Casa Grande. He had enough money to pay the company store bill including enough food staples to get us to California. He had an extra \$100 so he traded up from the 1932 Ford Sedan to a 1937 Ford Sedan.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Moving On – Toward the Great Valley**

We pulled out of Casa Grande, Arizona at about 2 in the morning on a hot, windy, and dusty day in August of 1946. We always left on any trip at 2 in the morning. My Dad was punctual. He wanted to get some distance down the road before the desert sun was too

high. When the sun was high, it would be 100 degrees or even hotter in the deserts of Arizona and California. We had no Air Conditioning and there was very little shade in the desert. The old cars always overheated in the hot afternoons in the desert. Most afternoons were spent sitting under any shade that could be found and waiting for the sun to go down so we could get a little further down the road before resting for a few hours. This day was no different than expected.



We left Casa Grande in a 1937 Ford Sedan. The old Ford was a four door with what they called suicide doors. The front doors opened to the front while the rear doors opened to the rear. The doors were called suicide doors because if you opened a rear door while in motion, the door would be blown open very violently. Many of these doors had been blown off the cars when children in back seats opened the door while in motion. My Dad was very proud of the family sedan. The car had a Flat Head V-8 Engine, with 16 inch wheels. Dad was a mechanic of the back yard/shade tree variety. He had been trained at the school of hard knocks. He carried a toolbox with the eight to ten tools needed to maintain the car. He also carried the five parts that may be required to fix the car when it would break. The parts inventory required for any trip of 50 miles or greater was a fuel pump, carburetor, spark plugs, breaker points, and fan belt. Dad also carried a big jug of water, brake fluid, and a 5 gallon jerry can of gas for the car. Dad spent about a week getting the old Ford ready for the trip to California. He rebuilt the carburetor, rebuilt the brakes, and purchased and installed four retread tires. The Ford was a Square Back with a big trunk. My Mom and Dad fit in the front seat while the three kids were jammed into the narrow back seat. The top was equipped with a makeshift carriage rack that my Dad made with his own hands. We carried some items on the rack that were for ready access such as clothes and shoes and cooking utensils and a few bags of food items such as ears of corn, potatoes, fruit and vegetables, sugar, salt, flour, and coffee. There was no fast food or money to buy it with in those days. When we stopped to eat we built a fire and cooked something to eat. The back bumper was outfitted with a trailer hitch that Dad had built with his own hands. We pulled a small trailer. The trailer was the bed from a 1932 Plymouth pickup. It was fitted with board sides about 4 feet tall. The trailer carried all of

the worldly possessions of our Family. My Dad built the trailer with his own hands. We left Casa Grande with four one gallon milk jugs of ice water and two jugs which contained regular tap water. My parents asked us to drink the regular water until it was gone then we would drink the ice water. Cold water was hard to find in the deserts of Arizona and California. The old Ford had two bumper guards on each bumper. Dad purchased four water bags before we left on our trip. The water bags were made of thick, tightly woven canvas. Each bag was left to soak in fresh water overnight. Just before departure, the bags were filled with water and hung by rope straps over each bumper guard. They were made in the wineskins model. As the Ford rumbled down the road, the wind blew past the water bags and the water inside was cooled a few degrees. We traveled with all of the latest technology.

By sunup, we had traveled about 150 miles. We three kids always got car sick as we made the curves and went over the bumpy roads. We also had to go to the bathroom quite frequently. We had made a number of pit stops before the morning sun. We had also stopped to allow my younger brother to throw up at least once because of carsickness. We had devoured a box of saltine crackers by morning but we were very hungry and we wasted no time in complaining about our hunger. We found a rest stop just outside of Vicksburg. My Dad built a fire (it was already 90 degrees in the desert) and my Mom cooked up some food for the hungry brood. We had fried potatoes with pancakes. Mom cooked some sugar water for syrup for the pancakes. She mixed a little orange Koolade with some of the cold water and our meal was complete. From parking to cleanup, we were stopped to eat for about two hours and then back on the road again.

The old Ford got about 15 miles to the gallon of gas. The tank held 10 gallons and gas was 10 cents per gallon. Our range was about 150 miles at a cost of about \$1.00 each pit stop. We gassed up in Vicksburg and filled as many water bottles as were empty. We found a place with ice and bought enough ice to make the water cold for 25 cents. We left Vicksburg with hopes of reaching the California border without any major problems. At about 10 o'clock with the temperature at 100 degrees, the Ford began to overheat. Dad drove until he spotted a big mesquite tree just off the road. He parked the car on the shady side of the tree and began to wait for the radiator to cool down. It takes about two hours for the radiator to cool from the overheated condition. As soon as possible, Dad removed the radiator cap and refilled the radiator with the water that he brought just for this occasion. Dad pulled back out onto the road, knowing that if the car overheated before the next town, he would have to use the reserve water in the water bags. He slowed to about 40 mph in hopes that the old Ford would not overheat. We were about 40 miles out of Kingman when the car began to overheat again. After another two hour wait, Dad used the water bags to fill the radiator and we were on the road again. As we crested a long hill we could see the first signs of the radiator giving off steam one more time. It was late afternoon now and it was at least 120 degrees in the desert of Arizona. As we started down from the top of the hill, we saw Kingman about two miles ahead at the end of a long decline. The hill was steep enough for a quick decent into Kingman. Dad knew the road and he knew the car. He knew the capabilities and the limitations. He pulled the floor shift gearbox into neutral and let out on the clutch. He left the engine running in case he needed to reengage the transmission to act as a brake. He told us to hold on because we were

beginning a fast trip to Kingman. The old Ford growled along as we came down the mountain, reaching a speed of about 60 mph tops. The tarp on the trailer was just about blown away as we finished the trip down the mountain. The road leveled out and the coasting Ford slowed to a crawl as Dad steered it into the first gas station we passed in Kingman, Arizona.

Dad filled the radiator, water containers, water bags and the drinking water jugs. He purchased enough ice to make the drinking water cold. He gassed the car, asked the attendant for directions to a rest stop, and steered the old Ford back out onto the roadway. It was about 3 miles toward California when we exited the road at one of the few rest stops in the Arizona desert. The kids were hungry and road wary from the long hot ride in the summer heat. Mom decided that it was time to eat and Dad just wanted to close his eyes and rest for a while. Dad gathered some mesquite limbs from the desert just outside of the rest area and found a few pieces of wood from what appeared to be a broken palette. He placed the wood in a pit that had been used many times for fires and started the fire. In about 5 minutes Mom was prepared to cook the meal. She quickly peeled some potatoes. She pulled two large canning jars from the carriage area. The jars contained lard and bacon grease. The materials were normally solidified but because of the heat they were almost completely liquefied. Mom poured about 1 cup of lard with a few tablespoons of bacon grease into an iron skillet. She threw in about 8 hands full of chopped potatoes, about 1 hand full of chopped green onions, stirred in salt and pepper, and began to stir the potatoes over the fire. As she prepared the potatoes, she mixed some flour and corn meal with salt, pepper and sugar in a tin bowl. She mixed in some water and a small portion of canned milk. After removing the potatoes from the skillet, Mom poured another cup of lard into the skillet. As the lard began to bubble, she dropped a number of half cups full of the flour mix into the hot lard. Mom used a large spoon to remove the fried bread from the boiling skillet. As the bread was placed on a cloth, she sprinkled sugar on the bread pieces. We all ate this dinner as if it was a seven course meal. As Mom began to clean up after the meal, Dad took out a blanket, placed it on the picnic table, climbed up onto the table, laid down, and fell asleep. The patio cover provided enough shade so that Dad was out of the direct sunlight. The kids gathered under another patio top in order to sit on the benches and out of the sun. Mom finished cleanup, placed all utensils back under the roof carriage covering, and joined the kids at the patio table. As always, she tried to control the chaos of the activities of the three screaming, hitting, running, and jumping children. Dad was tired and even with the noise from us kids, he slept for a couple of hours.

As the sun was going down, Dad awoke with a start, pulled on his boots, and announced that it was time to get started toward California. Mom had anticipated his mood and had readied the car for travel. Everything had already been returned to their right places. She yelled loudly at all of us advising that we use the restroom facilities. Mom would always say that it was our last chance and that if we did not go now, we would have to pee our pants if we had to go in the next three hours. We all used the facilities and reported to Mom that we were ready to travel. It was dark by the time we loaded into the old Ford. Dad counted heads, slammed his door, and we were underway again. He up shifted to high gear and in a few minutes we were traveling at 60 mph. The kids played around for a while in the back seat and then fell asleep. We pit stopped in Mojave, CA where Mom woke the

kids and told them to use the bathroom and get a drink of water. Dad went through his ritual of gasing and watering the car and within 30 minutes we were back on the road again. We were traveling at night and the car was running cool so we were making good time. Some hours later, I remember my Grand Father waking the kids and telling them to come into the house and find a place to sleep. We were in Earlimart, CA which would be my home for the next 13 years.

## Chapter Four

### Life begins in Earlimart – 4 Years Old – 1946/1947

I don't remember much about religion before the age of eleven or twelve. I do remember life and how hard life was while growing up in Earlimart, California. Earlimart was a dirty little town in the Central San Joaquin Valley of California. Agriculture was and still is the main industry in the Valley. Regardless of their ethnic or racial backgrounds, most of the people in Earlimart worked the crops or worked on farms in some capacity.

Have you ever watched the movie 'Grapes of Wrath'? That movie is a very good rendition and portrayal of the life of those who fled the dust bowl of Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas and ended their trip in the Valley in search of some of the gold of the Golden State. My grand father came from a farm in Oklahoma to Earlimart with those early arrivals in search of his part of the American Dream. Some years later, my father brought his young wife and family from the oilfields of west Texas to settle in the 'Big Valley'. The year was 1946 when we first came to Earlimart. The region was very poor. The school had no kindergarten and no one started to 1<sup>st</sup> grade until after their 6<sup>th</sup> birthday. I couldn't start to school until September, 1948 which was well after my 6<sup>th</sup> birthday.

I remember that something was very odd about the relationship between my Grand Parents. My Grand Mother lived in a very nice house made with blocks on the far north end of town. My Grand Father lived in a very small wood frame house on the far south end of town. Grandma did not have a car nor did she drive while Granddad owned and drove a well maintained Plymouth Sedan. Anything Grandma wanted she got. Granddad stopped by her house almost every night on his way from work. If Grandma had requests, Granddad would stop by the market or 5 and dime and the Post Office and then stop by her house to deliver the goods. Grandma was a big eater and a busy writer so food, stationary, and stamps were always in demand at Grandma's house. Some years later, my Grand Father explained the relationship in this manner. 'Your Grand Mother and I cannot live together. She nags me to no end. I have never done anything right since we were married. I built the blockhouse that she lives in when we first came to California. After a number of years together, I decided that I had better move out before one or both of us got hurt. That's when I bought the lot and built the little frame house that I call home. We are both Christian. Neither of us believed in divorce so, I made a deal with your Grand Mother. The big blockhouse was hers for as long as she wanted to stay there but only if she would stay on her end of town and leave me alone. I agreed to take care of her needs including pickup and delivery of necessities and driving her to the doctor on the rare

occasions when she had to visit his office. We both grow a large garden at each of our homes. She grows certain vegetables and I grow the others and then we share when the crops come in. When we have visitors from Oklahoma or Texas, we see them at her house. Anytime we need to feed a number of people, we eat at her house. My house is much too small for visitors and because her house is much bigger, we meet relatives and friends at her house’.

My Grand Mother’s house sat on about 2 acres of Valley Sandy Loam. She always produced a big garden on about one acre. When we came to Earlimart, there were three tent houses semi-permanently situated on her side yard. As friends and relatives moved to Earlimart from Oklahoma, my Grand Father would assist the male members in putting up a tent house. The three tent houses had been erected sometime during the previous three years. I remember that my Grand Mother did not enjoy children in her home. She was sharp tongued with us and on many occasions ejected us from her home with a great verbal assault. She reluctantly allowed us to stay in her house until my Father and Grand Father could build the ‘new’ tent house. In about 2 weeks, we moved into the tent house which became the fourth in the tent city which was on my Grand Mother’s property. The tent houses had become popular in the late 30s and early 40s as people came from the ‘Dust Bowl’ in search of income and living quarters. These houses were very unique in architectural design and efficiency. Long poles were laid out on the ground. Big boards were nailed around the perimeter and flooring planks were nailed to the poles. Eight foot poles were placed at about 6 foot spacing around the perimeter. A twelve foot pole was placed in the center of the north and south perimeter walls. A four foot wall on all four sides was constructed of crude cut and unfinished 1 by 12 boards. A four foot wide doorway was finished into the center of the west wall. Another twelve foot pole was affixed to the very center of the house. A beam was hoisted up and fixed to the north, center and south 12 foot poles. All 8 foot perimeter poles were tied together with beams around the outside walls. Beams were affixed at 6 foot placement between the 8 foot tall beams and the twelve foot tall beams. These last beams provided a truss system which would give support and form to the tent material. The tent materials were spread over the frame and quickly took on the shape of an A-Frame dwelling. The tent material was draped over the frame almost to the ground on all four sides except in the door area. A flap was fixed in the door area and a hinged door was built to the four foot level of the wall. Air Conditioning was simple. When we needed air, we would roll up the side or sides to get flow through ventilation. A kerosene heater was placed near the center pole for heat. We slept on cots or single beds and in the winter when it was cold, we just pulled the beds close to the center of the room so each one could feel the heat. Mom cooked meals on a wood stove cook top that was placed on a wood floor just out of the door area. Dad built a poled area with a roof to cover the stove. The men got together and built a shower room out back. They rigged a big galvanized bathing tub on a platform about 18 inches off the ground. A garden hose was connected to a hydrant just at the back of my Grand Mother’s house. The men rigged four poles around the tub that supported a tarp that acted as a shower curtain for privacy. They left a flap for entry and exit to the rear of the shower room. A pipe and faucet was attached to one of the poles and the garden hose was attached to the bottom of the pipe. To take a shower you had to go to Grandma’s, turn on the hydrant and then get in the tub and turn on the faucet. When finished you reversed the process. They drilled a

hole at one end of the tub and affixed a length of hose that served as a drainpipe. The drain water gravity flowed out the hose into the back yard where it stagnated and eventually perked into the sandy loam. We lived in the tent house for about one year. We saw a number of improvements that year. The men from the tent houses got together and built two larger outhouses. They dug the holes deeper and wider and then built two two-holer outhouses. They labeled one HERS and the other HIS. Although we had outhouses for many years after this, these were the first and last gender based outhouses I remember. About six months into our stay in the tent house, Dad came home one night with a dilapidated old trailer house. He pulled it in close to the north wall of our tent house where it became a private bedroom for him and a cooking facility for Mom. Dad and Granddad built a covered wooden deck in front of the old trailer house and a large wooden picnic table. This became the dining room and dining room table.

The women in my family were very mean to the children. My Grand Mother did not want kids running in and out of her house so she made them afraid by hurling verbal abuse at them until they stayed clear of her house. Mom started whipping us early and by 1947 whipping had evolved into a form of recreation and entertainment for her and the other tent house women. When any kid from the tent houses was being punished all of the women including my Grand Mother would run out to watch the show. We learned at a very young age that we should be out of sight and thereby be out of the minds of those women. My Father was busy trying to earn money for food. He was either working at a pickup job or he was out looking for long term employment. Dad got up and left early every day and usually returned in time for dinner at night. Sometimes he stayed gone until late in the evening. On those occasions, when Dad came home late, he would be chastised to no end by my mother. I watched my parents through the years and later in life began to understand why my father stayed gone as often as possible. My older sister was in school so she was gone most days until late in the afternoon.

Together my younger brother and I survived the rest of 1946 and 1947. We decided early on that life was much more peaceful when we were away from home. We also learned that the major requirement of us was that we had to be home before dark. We tested our abilities in timing and we began to explore and go further and further away until we often got too far from home and did not make it home before dark. On those late returns, we would take a good whipping before dinner and then sent to bed early. As we successfully found our distance limits in all directions, we could get as far as 3 or 4 miles from home and then get home before dark. We were basically free to explore anything we felt like getting into and on many occasions we escaped situations just short of being killed by someone else or just short of killing ourselves.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Rough Beginnings – 5 Years Old – 1947/1948**

The year 1947 ended very badly for me. I spent most of 1948 in the hospital in Tulare, California. Tulare was about 25 miles to the north of Earlimart. The county seat was in

Tulare as well as the only poor people's hospital. We never visited a doctor unless we were deathly ill and at least three times in 1948 I was deathly ill. While on the road, I had survived the Whooping Cough, Measles, Mumps, Chicken Pox, Jaundice, Scarlet Fever, and Food Poisoning on a number of occasions. Who knows what other deadly things had contacted me but didn't stick?

Late in 1947 I began to experience many physical ailments. The first time I became deathly ill in Earlimart was sometime around Christmas of 1947 or New Years of 1948. I began to have breathing problems like no one in my family had ever seen. The women of the tent house city took turns at looking at me. After my Grand Mother examined me, she, my Mother and the rest of the women decided that I had Walking Pneumonia. It seems as though my Father and other men that they knew had spent time with Walking Pneumonia in the past. After about a month of coughing almost to the point of coughing up blood, my Mother decided it was time to go to the doctor. Early the next morning my Granddad drove up into the side yard, stopping in front of our tent house. He got out of his Plymouth Sedan and walked up to the door. He yelled at my Mother asking, 'Where is old Bud'? I heard him from out behind the out houses where my brother and I were playing in the mud that had formed in the shower drain water. I came running toward the house coughing very loudly as I slowed to a walk. The lack of oxygen made it difficult to run especially in the dust from the sandy loam. Granddad stooped down to talk to me. He asked, 'How do you feel today, Bud'? I told him that I really didn't feel very well. He went into our tent house to talk to my Mother and after just a few minutes, returned to talk to me. He had retrieved a bar of soap, a wash cloth, and a towel from my Mother. He took me to the shower, picked me up, and placed me in the tub. He went over to Grandma's house, turned on the hydrant, came back and after turning on the faucet on the shower pipe, he gave me a bath with soap. It was really cold water and I hadn't had a real bath with soap for months. He toweled me off, picked me up and walked quickly to the tent house. 'Get old Bud dressed, He needs to go to the doctor and he needs to go today', He told my Mother. Mom dressed me in a clean plaid shirt and overalls.

Granddad and I drove to Tulare to the poor people's hospital. On the way to the hospital I asked Granddad why He was taking me and not my Mom and Dad. He said that Dad had to work and that Mom had to stay at home to watch the other kids. It took about an hour to get to the hospital. Granddad and I sat and waited for about two hours before we could see a doctor. There were about 100 people in this big waiting room and every one of them was coughing and sneezing and blowing their noses and rubbing their eyes. Eventually, a doctor came to this big waiting area to examine a number of the children who were waiting. He was apparently a children's doctor because he only examined children. He began to isolate and separate groups of children. He divided the boys from the girls and then separated each into groups according to their symptoms. It only took a few minutes and I was separated out with a group of about 10 young boys aged from about 4 to about 10 years old. After a few minutes, the doctor stood in front of our group and announced that whoever brought us should meet with him for a brief consult. Granddad came with the other parents to talk to the doctor. The doctor was very quick and straight to the point. He said that there was a serious problem in the valley with kids and a number of sicknesses. He told this group of adults that this group of kids had Pneumonia. He said

that the hospital had a ward that was full of boys with pneumonia and that I would have to stay there until I could shake it. With this bit of information, I began to live through the very rough year of 1947. We waited for another hour before a nurse came in to collect the group of boys with pneumonia. We followed the nurse to a room down a very long hallway. There we were each given a light blue gown to wear. It was one of those hospital gowns with a single tie in the waist area of the back. We piled our clothes just in front of our feet as commanded by the nurse and pulled on the gowns provided. We were each given in which we packed our clothes. We lined up and walked in line to the other end of the hallway where we gave our bags to those who brought us to the hospital.

We said good-bye to our friends and relatives and returned to the room where we were being dressed. Granddad waved to me as I disappeared into the dressing room. The next time I saw my Grand Father, he told me that he had taken my clothes back home and that my Mother has washed them so they would be ready to wear upon my return trip home. We were paired off each with another boy of similar age or height and told to tie the other boy's tie string with a bow tie knot. We were told that in the future we were to tie and untie the unreachable tie string for our newfound friend. I hadn't had very much experience tying because I had never had a pair of shoes that fit well enough to tie or to untie so I faked it and tied a hard knot. I remember paying a dear price for the indiscretion of tying a hard knot. I can't remember the exact schedule for changing gowns but I do remember the first time we changed gowns, I could not untie the knot in my tying buddy's tie string. Each of our gang attempted to untie the knot to no avail. I finally summoned the nurse to untie the knot. She unleashed a verbal assault on me that none of us would soon forget.

I spent most of the next 6 months in the poor people's hospital in Tulare, California. I learned quickly to tie the right knot in just a few days and from then on the tying exercises went just fine. Children could not come inside the hospital, so on the rare occasions when my brother and sister would visit, they would communicate with signs from the lawn outside. My ward was on the third floor of the hospital so I would go to the window to read the signs below. I remember Merry Christmas, Happy Easter and Happy Birthday signs.

Mom soon fell into a routine for visiting me in the hospital. She had to use all of her powers of persuasion in order to make the visits. She rode the late afternoon Greyhound Bus from Earlimart to Tulare every Wednesday and then returned to Earlimart on the last bus from Tulare. On one of her first visits, I heard Mom have a very heated discussion with the head nurse and a doctor. When my Mother decided that she needed something from anyone, she would get just as loud and noisy as she needed to make the requirements known. On this occasion, she got very loud and when everything settled, she came over and told me what deal was struck. She had advised the hospital staff that she would be coming in on the late afternoon bus and then leaving on the last bus every Wednesday night and that she would require transportation to and from the hospital. I asked Mom what she promised them and she simply said that she promised them that she would be quiet from now on. It was apparently a good deal for the staff because they agreed to her deal and from that day on, she was afforded transportation to the hospital and back to the bus station on Wednesday nights. I remember a few nights when Mom's connections didn't

work completely right and she spent the night on a chair in the pneumonia ward. Almost every Sunday afternoon Mom would visit me in the hospital.

Dad came just a few times. He was usually working or out looking for work. My Grand Father usually came to visit because when my Father couldn't or wouldn't bring Mom, Granddad brought her. Granddad was always more of a buddy than was my Father. Sometimes the adults would bring the kids and friends to visit and that is when they would stand on the grass with signs for me to read. I didn't know at the time but my mother had to negotiate a number of deals in order to make the visits work. I questioned how Mom could afford the bus ticket for Wednesday night visits. I also wondered how she got to and from the bus station in Earlimart, especially the late night trip. My Granddad explained it to me sometime after I got out of the hospital. Even though my Grand Father was always nice to my mother, she always seemed to hate him. She was only nice to him when she wanted or needed something. Granddad told me that Mom asked him to drive her as required on Wednesday nights. He said that he was willing to do 'most anything' in order to keep my mother calm and quiet. He also told me on another occasion that the Greyhound Bus was free. He said that Mom had told the bus driver about her situation and that the driver told her that she could not ride without the fare. Granddad said that she got on the bus so that the driver could not open the doors and then she laid into him with a verbal barrage that would humble anyone. Out of self defense, the driver told Mom to take a seat and be quiet so that they could get on the road. He said that she almost had to repeat the process again but the bus driver was quick the second time to offer her a seat. From then on, the deal with bus driver was understood. He would let her ride, and she would be quiet. My Grand Father knew how the deal was struck because he was the one who took Mom to the bus station on Wednesday nights. He had witnessed my mother in action as he had so many times before. I asked Granddad how the deal worked on the return trip to Earlimart each Wednesday night. He said that the bus driver was the same man on the return trip. It seems as though he started his day in Bakersfield, drove with local stops to Fresno, and then finished his day/night in Bakersfield. Mom would make the trip with a stopover in Tulare for a two hour visit, return to the bus station and ride back to Earlimart with the same driver. Can you imagine what that poor driver went through every Wednesday? It probably got much easier as the months went on and on. I'm sure that Mom expected to ride the bus and the driver expected her to be quiet for the trip to Tulare.

The hospital was a pretty quiet, controlled and dull place most of the time. A few things happened along the way to break the monotony. Early on, my mother started to bring bubble gum on her visits. She first brought a few pieces for me but one day she brought enough for all the boys on the pneumonia ward. She passed the bubble gum out just before she left for the night. Mom had not been gone for five minutes when the bubble gum became a major problem. Some of the boys started blowing big bubbles and gum ended up in their hair and in the bed sheets. Those who could not blow bubbles began twirling and snapping the gum. As the gum became stringy it would fly uncontrollably away. Within about ½ hour, bubble gum was all over the ward. Needless to say, bubble gum was banned from the pneumonia ward. The next time Mom came for a visit she was greeted with a 'NO BUBBLE GUM' sign and she had to check her bubble gum at the nurse's station. My

mother became very angry but as the nurse explained to her what had happened, she calmed down a bit. She transferred her anger to me as if I could have controlled those 15 young boys with bubble gum and ignorance enough to lose control.

Penicillin was the new wonder drug of those years. They were starting to use it to fight every disease known to man. What better place to test the potency and dosage than on a pneumonia ward full of poor, helpless, and sick boys? Within a week, the entire ward was regimented to the schedule and ritual of penicillin shots. It took only a couple of rounds to find those who were allergic. Two boys had violent reactions to the shot. One of them almost died. They were removed to another place where they could be dealt with differently. The remainder of us were put on schedules for medication. The boys were divided by bed rows. Every hour, twenty-four by seven, one of the four rows would receive a shot of penicillin. This schedule was repeated endlessly. The first shot came to the left shoulder. The second to the right shoulder. The third to the right buttocks and the fourth to the left buttocks. I peeked at my chart and saw the lines of script which noted meds. The first line read; Mar 15, 1948 – 1. 0000xxccls, 0400xxccrs, 0800xxccrb, 1200xxcclb, 1600xxccls, and 2000xxccrs. Each line was for 24 hours and contained the date and 6 meds received in that 24 hour period. After just a few days it was uncomfortable and within a few weeks was almost unbearable. Most of the boys were brave in front of their peers but at night you could often hear the younger boys crying with pain. I remember quietly crying myself to sleep many nights for many months. We had no choice and we were told daily that the shots would cure us and that we would probably die if we did not take the shots. Some days I thought that dying would be preferable to another round of penicillin shots. Our shoulders, and buttocks' became bruised and callused and over time our senses became numb to the pain.

The boredom was broken a few times by sporting events. I had been in the hospital for about three months when a couple of older boys were temporarily assigned to the 'young boy's pneumonia ward'. The boys were about 13 or 14 years old. They were much more adventuresome than us younger boys and they immediately began to search for 'things to do'. One day they went on a scavenger hunt for neat things. They returned after a few minutes with two wheel chairs. One of the younger boys asked what they were going to do with the wheel chairs. One of the 'older boys' told him to shut up and watch. They hid the wheelchairs in small storage area at the end of the ward and waited for night to come. The night nurse almost always dosed between 10 and midnight. I was sound asleep at 10 o'clock when I heard a terrible commotion out in the hallway. It seems as though the 'older boys' decided to race in the dimly lit hallway. They had crashed together into a gurney and had left one of them almost crippled. The night nurse had called for backup and a couple of very big orderlies were dragging the boys back toward their beds. The nurse also called for a doctor. By the time the doctor arrived in about ½ hour, I was beginning to dose back into a sound sleep. Needless to say, the next morning brought an hour of scolding and punishments. The two 'older' boys were immediately removed from our ward to more acceptable quarters. The rest of us were told to stay in our beds and ask for permission to get a drink or go to the restroom. This went on until the nurses were driven crazy with requests. Everything returned to normal in just a few days.

Sometimes a number of younger women from a nearby church, I think they were Baptists, came to read for us. They would have some of the school aged boys read for them and then they would read to the boys. The young women who visited with me would read stories for me. I'm so glad that they never asked me to read because no one had taken the time to teach me at all. I enjoyed the reading very much and I learned early that when you get involved in a story, you can travel the world over without leaving the hospital. My mother had just a third grade education. She never read to us kids. Maybe it was because she felt uncomfortable reading out loud or maybe she just did not want to waste the time. I do know that many years later my mother read 'Romance Novels' all day, every day. I think she could transport herself into a better life through reading.

Time dragged by between Mom's visits. She would bring bubble gum for me and I promised that no one else would get any and that the nurses would never know. I managed to hide the used bubble gum and Mom would remove it on her next visit. Winter turned to spring, and spring turned to summer. They would not release me on the weekend so Mom and Dad made a special trip to Tulare on the last Monday in May to take me home. I was weak from a lack of exercise but I wasted no time in getting back into my routine of ranging out as far as possible each day. I kicked the last feelings of weakness as the hot days of June came and went.

My Father had secured a new full-time job while I was in the hospital. He was working at the Texaco Station. The Texaco Station was on the north end of town just a few blocks from our Tent House and my Grand Mother's house. My Mother was completely fed up with my controlling Grand Mother. My Father was tired of dealing with water and dust in the Tent House so they were looking for 'better' quarters. My Father always worked nights and the Texaco Station Owner worked days. Some days my brother and I would hang around the station until the owner would get fed up with us. He would tell us to 'get the hell home' and we would take off running toward the tent house. He eventually told my father and we paid the price for messin with the boss. One day my Father came home for breakfast and immediately drove back to the station. My brother and I sneaked down to the station to see why Dad had gone back. In a vacant lot across from the station, they had dragged up about 30 railroad ties. There was a stack of rough cut lumber and a load of other construction materials. Off to one side of the lot was a truckload of old grape box sides. A crude foundation was already laid in place. My Father, Grand Father and Texaco Station Owner began to manipulate the building. We could see that they had come to build a house. The owner spent the morning helping with the building. He would run to the station when anyone would pull up in a service isle. He would gas their vehicle, check their oil, clean their windshield, receive their money and then return to building. As the day moved along and the business got busier, the owner stayed at the station to serve the customers. This building ritual lasted for about two weeks, until the house was built. I remember the house well. The railroad ties became the wall supports. The big grape box sides became the exterior wall siding. The inside walls were ¼ in plywood from packing crates. The walls were insulated with old newspapers. The grape box sides were bowed and cracked and in some places you could read the newspapers through the cracks and gaps. There were also places inside where you could read the newsprint because in some places the packing crates did not completely fill the gaps. The electric company would not

okay the house for electricity so the men of the construction crew affixed a pole to the roof of the house and another to the roof of the station. They ran regular electric wire up the pole on the station, across the street, and down the pole on the house. They brought the wires down inside the wall and at the base of the wall they ties a bunch of wires together and stapled them along the base of the walls to other areas including the kitchen. We moved a few items into the house and set up house keeping while my Dad and Granddad finished the roofing. They finished moving over the next few weeks. Dad pulled the old trailer from the tent house so that we would have cooking facilities and we were resident in our new home.

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