



## ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

An interview with  
**Cordelia Shippam, 1899-1992**

**December 30, 1980**

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### INTERVIEWER'S NOTE

**MARGUERITE REEVES:** This tape is being made December 30, 1980, at 3049 Island Avenue, San Diego, California, in the house that Cordelia and Isidora Shippam's father built in the early 1900s. The second informant will be Cordelia Shippam.

Miss Shippam, what about starting with school, Miss Wade and Home Economics.

**CORDELIA SHIPPAM:** You mean when we went to Sherman? Well, we went to Sherman Elementary School and as I grew up they had cooking classes in the seventh and eighth grades. We learned to make simple dishes in cooking and we had to report each week of what we had done at home. I had always made hamburgers and a cake at home so I always had pretty much the same report: you wash your dishes and do what little cooking you made. I always made either a sponge cake or a butter cake, but that was my report each time. We had two cooking teachers. It was interesting. We also learned to sew in the seventh grade. They taught you how to do the different stitches. We didn't have any sewing machines then, but mother bought me one when I was big enough. We still have a sewing machine, but it is a different one than the one she bought. It was a White treadle [machine].

Now this one is what they call the drop-head and I still use it. We never got an electric, so I still use the treadle machine. When the power goes off you can still use this machine.

**MR:** What about when you used to have dinners for the school board?

**CS:** For the girls to practice, they used to give a dinner and all the school board would come. We learned to serve and we cooked -- each pair of girls had a stove and we cooked whatever the teacher told us to. Then we served the dinner to the school board.

**MR:** Now about your stove here. That came from Kalamazoo [Michigan].

**CS:** At home here we have what they call a 'Kalamazoo-direct-to-you' stove. After mother had passed away, Dora and I sent for it back there and they shipped it out by truck. That was about '41 and we've had it ever since. It's a combination -- gas on one side and wood in the other. It gives good heat - - we have no heating facilities except the stove. Every Wednesday we still bake our bread in it; we like homemade bread.

**MR:** Your father used to bake bread, is that right?

**CS:** Yes, when he was in England. If mother was poorly, why he would bake it.

**MR:** And you told me some store about when in Liverpool, about the bakery.

**CS:** In England they had the bake ovens in which to bake bread and then the boy would bring it back to you when it was baked. You'd make the dough and the boys used to take it to the bake house. Mother asked, when she came here, where was the bake house and there was none so she had to bake her own. They bought a wood burning stove; that was before the gas came. There was no gas or electricity here when we first came.

**MR:** What kind of lights did you have?

**CS:** At first mother had a gasoline stove and she warned us, "Don't ever touch it; don't attempt to light it; let me do the lighting." So we never touched it and we never got burned. Then brother got electricity in down to his shop for his lights, and for the wireless before his radio. It was wireless with a telegraph key. Then one of his friends was out at the Chollas Station, out at those big towers up there. Brother would play the phonograph records sending it (over the wireless) to Long Beach and then he'd say, "This is Shippam in San Diego" and would give his call letters. Then he would say, "Now I'll play some musical selections." And he would announce what they were and put the records on. And then we had that first electric light bulb that was still good. When brother passed away, Dorothy said, "What shall I do with this." We said, "Well, send it back to the radio museum in Washington, D. C. He had made a silver key to use for the Morse Code -- the telegraph -- and that silver key is now in Washington, D.C., in the National Museum of Radio, along with the light bulb. That was the first electric light bulb that he had had and it was still active and able to burn, and so those went back with some of his other wireless equipment.

**MR:** Wasn't your brother the first one who started taking pictures?

**CS:** Well, he just had a little Brownie then. And we had a little camera.

**MR:** And how did you get that camera? And when was it?

**CS:** By picking berries in a neighbor's garden -- I earned \$14.00 -- and she said what would we do with the money. I said I would buy a Brownie camera. We used to develop our own negatives and prints. It was printing out paper in those days, She wanted someone to pick the berries who wouldn't squash them. I was out of school then; it was when father was still alive.

**MR:** What about the story she [sister Isidora] told you to tell about the glass negatives.

**ISADORA SHIPPAM:** When they were tearing down the Y.B. Allen Music Store to build the new Jessop's store, there had been a photographic place there. I had never received a graduation picture. One neighbor had another friend who had been working on tearing down the building and they came across big boxes of glass negatives.

**CS:** Oh, a friend -- our neighbor -- he was in town one day and there were a lot of these negatives that had been put out from some studio, disassembled, pitched out and were being thrown away with the trash. He asked if we wanted to make a glass house out of the glass plates -- they were all glass negatives. He took some of them and before he wiped them off, the film, he looked at a lot of them and found some that looked like familiar grade school pictures, and it was our graduation class. He printed one then and it turned out that there were he and I in our graduation picture, which I had never had. He gave me that for a birthday present one year. I forget what year it was. Our class year was 1913, but I forget what year he gave it to me.

**MR:** Who was Mr. William H. Griffiths? Wasn't he involved with the Raja Yoga School?

**CS:** He was a friend who was a photographer by trade, and he was a Theosophist. He was the one who really developed the photography and printing for Madame Tingley. He was there for ten years.

**MR:** What about taking the picture of Mount Miguel when it snowed?

**CS:** I had taken one but it was a poor film -- a Japanese film -- I wished I had never bought it. It didn't turn out properly; it was real gray. But the snow was right down to the ground on San Miguel Mountain. I don't remember what year that was.

**MR:** Also about Mount Miguel: You didn't walk up there, but your father used to walk up every year?

**CS:** He walked up San Miguel five times. Dora was with him one of those times.

**MR:** Was there a trail? And what was up at the top?

**CS:** No. They just walked up the north side. Up at the top was this jar with all the names of the previous walkers. The last time he'd been up there the jar had disappeared, someone must have taken it, or stolen it. The last time he went up, I wouldn't know, but it was before 1927 because he passed away in '27.

**IS:** It was like the Ancient Mariner. "Water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink." There were two Otay Lakes and the Sweetwater Lake, and we were on top of the mountain. We had drunk most of our water -- it was in September, on Labor Day -- and it was very hot. We stayed there and rested up for a while and finally we came down another way. We saw two hunters who had their guns. They asked, "Where have you been?" "We've been up and down San Miguel," we said. "Not walking!" "Yes, of course," we said, "That's the only way you can get up there." Daddy said, "By the way, you don't happen to have any water around, do you?" When he'd been up before they had had a faucet and no fence all around Sweetwater Lake but by

then they had the lake fenced so no one could get in or fall in and be drowned. So we couldn't get any water. We drank all we had taken; we took about a quart of water. And they said, "Yes, we have a big tank of it over there in the back of the car, but if you haven't had any water for a while, don't over-drink, sip slowly, and you are welcome to it." So then we had a drink of water. Later on we came on farther along towards Spring Valley way and we heard water running. We went looking and there was an artesian well, natural water. They'd had a bottled water place there at one time and that water was the best I had ever tasted. It was ice cold and we filled our little water canteen with it.

**MR:** Do you think it is still there?

**IS:** We never did find out where it was. You can't go on up the mountain now so much. They have radio towers on top.

**MR:** Yes, because there is a canyon that I used to go into when I was a kid and it had a spring in it. I finally realized about a year ago that it is near some road that they've built in the last twenty years that goes right through this canyon and I thought, "This is the canyon [in which] I used to roam around years ago."

**IS:** I don't know if you can remember when we had the floods in Mission Valley about 1917 or so. It was before America went into the War.

**CS:** It was 1916.

**IS:** We could go up on the top and see the river running over the whole valley. And the big concrete bridge went out. That was the year that the two Otoy dams broke, and Sweetwater dam spilled over.

**MR:** I don't know if we mentioned [that] Bessie was the first cow.

**IS:** Bessie was the first. Then we raised a heifer from her and called her Nellie. We sold Bessie to some man in Mission Valley -- a Mr. Paul Whitehead. He had a dairy. Nellie grew up to be a cow and we milked her. Her milk was rich so it made good butter.

**MR:** Did you ever enter any of your stuff in the fair?

**IS:** No, we never did. They didn't have fairs then like they do today. Like the 4-Hers.

**MR:** Then after cows you had goats.

**IS:** Yes. Well, after Cecil got married, mother said she wasn't going to keep the cow. Well, we couldn't because they had the lot up there, so we sold the cow Nellie.

**MR:** Oh, so the cow used to be next door.

**IS:** Well, we couldn't keep the cow any more because they gave the lot to Cecil, Mother was sort of ailing a little bit with a nervous stomach and finally goat milk was recommended for her. So we went up to this friend -- J. Walker, up on Commonwealth -- and he had quite a little group of goats. He raised goats to sell, so we got one from him. Her name was Bernie and she was a great pet. She was a Nubian, but she used to make a lot of noise. When she didn't see me, she would holler and holler. I was her milker and later on we got another goat. Mother got better with the goat milk and we all liked it so we bought another goat and we had two. We didn't raise the kids -- they had two of them -- but we did away with them at birth. Dad did

that. We raised one -- Tillie -- she saved the little baby's life. That was the one we got from Tecolote Canyon. When the city zoned us out, then we couldn't keep goats any longer, so we gave her to our friend in El Cajon, to Bessie Van Hook. She had these Sannon goats. She was a breeder of the Sannon goats. So we gave her Tillie.

**MR:** What is a Sannon goat?

**IS:** It's a breed. You see, there are different breeds: Togganburghs, Alpines and Nubians, and Sannon is a new breed. They have hardly any ears. You know most goats have ears sticking out or down. The Nubians all had theirs down, the droopy ears. They are funny looking for they don't have much ears. She had them at the fair. This Bess, she used to be in Jamul, but she has moved now up the coast with her sister to Manteca. Everything was so high down here. I guess she sold her place. They had her on TV -- they had her on the evening program "PM Magazine" [for] an interview as a goat breeder. She had all her goats named and all her goats knew her. She'd holler for one and he'd come up. We went to see her twice. At first we couldn't find her; then we finally found her after I spoke to one lady and told her she had the goats. "Oh, the goat lady, I know who you mean, she is just up the road. Take the next turn and you will find her. You'll see the big trees."

**MR:** This was here, not up in Manteca.

**IS:** This was here in Jamul. She only had a poor little house; she wasn't any kind of a housekeeper; she was a goat lover. Goat lovers don't clean much, they are out with the goats more than they are in the house.

**MR:** Let's see, I have a note here about a trip to San Francisco in 1939. Tell me about that.

**IS:** Oh, in our Model A [Ford]. Talk about the scarcity of cars. We were 125 on the list. We had to put our name down on a list: "After 124 Fords come in you'll be the next person to get one." Our cousin was a salesman, then.

**MR:** And the Model A was the second car you had after the Saxon?

**IS:** Yes, the Saxon was my brother's car; then we got the Model A.

**MR:** And he got the Saxon because he wanted a motorcycle and your mother wouldn't let him have one. Then who went to San Francisco? All of you or just ...

**IS:** No, just Dora and Delia went up to San Francisco in the Model A. When we first had the Model A we went with mother up to Sequoia and Yosemite. It was after dad's death -- I guess it was about '28. We got the car in '28. We wanted to go farther but my brother had said, "Don't go any farther than half of your money, or you won't have any [to get home on]." Gasoline was 11¢ a gallon. It was 8¢ and 10¢ when we first got the car, in some places.

**MR:** Then that means that you had the Model A 30 years? Then you got the Hillman. And that is the one Neil Morgan -- What did he say about it?

**IS:** Yes, 32 years. He said we had bought the car to fit the garage. The garage actually was a barn. He had us in one of his books. The gas station man told us that. I think I have a copy of it down there somewhere. The part of it was that he said his father was born in Wales -- Neil Morgan's father. His family on Neil Morgan's father's side were Welsh people and they came to this country. So he went back on a tour to Europe and went to Wales. Then

he wrote in his column. So I cut the pieces out and put them in the scrapbook. Then I wrote to him and he said, "Well, I didn't think many people had been over there but the response has been good."

**MR:** Now the first car was a Saxon.

**IS:** A Saxon, a little roadster. That was our brother's car. Three people could sit in it, the seat was quite wide. It was a storage battery, dry-cell powered. And then we bought a battery for it.

**CS:** I learned to drive on that one. It had a straight gear shift.

**MR:** Tell us about the experience in Ocean Beach.

**IS:** Our car stopped one time when we were riding to Ocean Beach and we didn't know what was the matter. So we went to a garage and the man came but he didn't seem to know anything. He said he could tow us back home. So we told him we would have the tow and he towed us from Ocean Beach to back here for \$5.00. When we got home dad found out that the little connections to the dry cells had come apart and that was the reason the car stopped, because it didn't get full circuit; the power was lost. So after that we bought a storage battery. The storage battery had to be recharged often because there was no power to make it like today's cars. It had gas lamps -- acetylene gas.

**MR:** Now you made the walkway to the house, is that correct?

**IS:** Oh, do you want that story? In the alley there was a big pile of cement that had once been a sidewalk. The kids were breaking it up and throwing the rocks everywhere. I said, "Let's take them in so they won't be able to throw them." So we took in all that was there in the alley. We had thought of making us a walk with this new kind of material. It looks like flagstone. We had thought it was quite expensive so we thought what was wrong with making them out of pieces of sidewalk. They were jagged and of different shapes. I tried to put a few together from the front steps to the front door. So I made a sidewalk by mixing the cement in the dishpan, placing them and putting the cement around the different pieces, with crushed rock underneath. So it made quite a nice walk.

**MR:** What about the fishpond? Did you make that about the same time?

**IS:** No, that was before that. I had seen dad make cement so we knew pretty much how to put cement and sand together so it made good concrete. I only mixed it in a dishpan so as not to mix too much at one time.

**MR:** This was during the same time you were working at the cannery, is that correct?

**IS:** Well, it was after the cannery work had stopped, when I was working with the cement, because we weren't working at the cannery anymore.

**MR:** At the cannery, did they ever have strikes for higher wages, or anything?

**CS:** That one time when I got on they had a strike. That was when they had the union. After a while, they agreed and they went back to work. That was how I got on because they had had a strike, and some of the women wouldn't go back to work. I got on to be a cleaner. But I didn't work very fast. Dora was a packer. I wasn't too fast at cleaning; I was too particular. They said not to waste any white meat and then you picked all the little bits up,

but most of them would just crush it with their hands. They wouldn't let the foreman see them, but they did do that and throw it down the shoot. They made fish fertilizer out of the bones and skin.

**MR:** When you worked for Consolidated [Vultee Aircraft], then that was afterwards?

**CS:** The war took a lot of the fishing boats for coast patrol duty. The Government just commandeered them and then there wasn't too much work because the fishing boats didn't go out. Then the aircraft wanted workers and this friend said, "You'd be good, Delia, go on over there." So we took a training for five or six weeks at the Ford building [in Balboa Park] where they had a little group. Then you hired on there after you got your operator's certificate that you had passed this training period. Then you went to Consolidated -- then it was called -- and you got hired.

**MR:** What could you operate; what kind of work did you do?

**CS:** I was a machinist. In the machine shop, they called it. I worked on the swing shift from 2 o'clock till 11 o'clock or 11:30 at night. Then I would come home by bus. We used to get a pass for a \$1.00 in those days, for a week. Gasoline was rationed and they had blackouts and you couldn't get tires for the car.

**MR:** Tell us about the camouflage.

**[CS?]:** Yes, it was all over [the buildings and the street]; it was chicken feathers over wire, all glued on.

**MR:** They did that here, but somewhere in Los Angeles I remember they had little houses built over it, so from the top it looked like a village.

**[IS?]:** Here they just had the wire and then it was all covered with chicken feathers. I don't know where they got all the chicken feathers, but that's what it was. Then they couldn't see what it was from the air, and they wouldn't know what it was. But they [the Japanese] did get near. One submarine was seen off La Jolla, down below Scripps Park. They claimed they did. They said they saw the periscope come up.

**CS:** They had an army camp down there. That was a surprise.

**MR:** They had -- I don't know what they call them -- but they were big cement holes in the ground over there by UCSD.

**IS:** They are thinking about making war shelters again. Well, we tried to do our bit, that's all. They said they were thankful that the women were available during the war. We got pretty good money. The most that I got was \$1.15 an hour, but you got Saturdays time-and-a-half. We were talking about butter the other day. It's up now to \$2.23 a pound. During the war it was 80¢ and you could only buy a half-pound at a time. We had the ration tickets and we had the one Safeway at 12th and Market and another one on 12th where the Pep Boys store is, across from the Lincoln School. So after we'd get through work, with Rosie -- she was an Italian girl - we'd say, "Go on down and see if you can get some butter. Come on, Rosie, you can ride with us that far and then you can take the bus to go back home yourself." I said, "I'll go in here at 12th and Market and you go up to 12th and E. If they've got butter there, you wave both arms. And then when you come I'll hold your butter for you and then you go down to the store at 12th and Market. Then my sister can hold the butter and I'll go in and get some with the other ration coupon." So that way we would have a pound of butter. They had the red stamps and the blue stamps.

**CS:** We never used our meat coupons much.

**IS:** We'd use the butter ones. Sometimes people would trade them and say, "I am running out of meat coupons, so will you trade? I'll give you some of my blue ones." You weren't supposed to; they were not transferable, but they did it anyway.

**MR:** Isn't that when we had the Nucoa, or margarine -- whatever they called it - it was that white stuff. Then you had the little yellow envelope to color it.

**IS:** We never used it; we never like it.

**MR:** I guess if you grow up with it you think margarine is a fine thing, but I like butter.

**IS:** But it was greasy tasting, it didn't taste like butter. We've always eaten butter. And you know some of these health fadists say that butter is far better than the margarine.

***END OF INTERVIEW***

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