

# Release Form

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**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**NARRATOR:** Lila Penner

**BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:** Lila Penner was born in 1923 in Bakersfield, California the youngest of five daughters. She attend Tabor College at Hillsboro, Kansas and there met Vernon Penner, who she married on September 6, 1943. She now lives in Cimarron, Kansas.

**DATE OF INTERVIEW:** January 11, 2003

**INTERVIEWER:** Kasandra Gurtner

**LOCATION OF INTERVIEW:** Cimarron, Kansas

**NUMBER OF CASSETTES:** 1 video cassette  
1 audio cassette

**LENGTH OF CASSETTES:** 60 min.

**LENGTH OF INTERVIEW:** 43 min.

**SUBJECTS DISCUSSED:** Stock market crash and its affects; Dustbowl in Kansas; Pearl Harbor; Home front of World War II; the affect of the Dustbowl and Great Depression in California.

**Lila Penner  
Narrator**

**Kasandra Gurtner  
Interviewer**

**January 11, 2003  
Cimarron, Kansas**

Lila Penner – **LP**  
Kasandra Gurtner – **KG**

**(Beginning of side A)**

**KG:** This is an interview with Lila Penner. I am Kasandra Gurtner and I am the interviewer and this interview is taking Saturday, (January) eleventh in Cimarron, Kansas.

Ok, when and where were you born?

**LP:** I was born in Bakersfield, Californian in July the fifth, 1923.

**KG:** Ok. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

**LP:** Yes, I had uh, four sisters. I was the youngest of five girls.

**KG:** Ok, so you haven't lived in Kansas your whole life. When did you move here?

**LP:** Well, when I came here was that, that was, I graduated from Fort in uh, from high school in 1941 and then uh, when we uh, when I went to school there in 1943, then we were married. I went back to California. We were married in California and then my husband was, was . . . at that time, he had already gone to Kansas City for a pre-dental, uh, and so then when we were married, then we moved to Kansas City, or I went to Kansas City because he was there in Kansas City. So that would be in 1943 and then he graduated in 1946 and that's when we came over, over here to Cimarron. He, he actually comes from Ingalls. He grew up in Ingalls.

**KG:** Ok. What was your maiden name?

**LP:** Schmidt.

**KG:** How do you spell that?

**LP:** S-C-H-M-I-D-T

**KG:** What was your family's background?

**LP:** My background was we lived in the, in the city not on the farm. My dad was a uh, he worked for the Santa Fe Railroad and uh, my mother was, she loved to cook and so she like, had several, I guess, times when she uh, either cooked our . . . or had a café or something like that that she basically was [unclear] too. And that would be in Bakersfield.

**KG:** So you went there in high school. Did you go to college?

**LP:** Two years. [Unclear] at Tabor College in Hillsboro.

**KG:** Ok. What was your spouse's name?

**LP:** Vernon Penner.

**KG:** Ok, when were you married? You were married happily right?

**LP:** Yes, in California. And it was uh, uh, Labor Day, September sixth, 1943. And we would always kid each other that we got married on Labor Day and he had always said that he'd been laboring ever since.

**KG:** Uhm, do you remember where you were or what you were doing . . . Ok, I have information that the stock market crashed on the week of October twenty-ninth in 1929. That's when it crashed. Do you remember . . . ?

**LP:** I was only six years old.

**KG:** Oh, you were six? Ok.

**LP:** So I don't remember too much. Of what I do remember, ok that's looking back. When I was born – As I said my dad worked for the railroad – but we lived out at that time we lived on a uh, ten acre piece of ground and then uh, we uh, I guess there . . . at that time . . . see around Bakersville it's oil wells. And uh the place where we were living evidently, if we would have known it, my dad failed to keep the mineral rights. And uh, so there were I guess a couple - now this is stories. I was born and am far from remembering all this but as far as stories . . . and then he uh, the fellows offered some money, you know, to buy the land and uh, as a result we moved into town and uh, a little bit later on they had oil wells on that piece of ground. We did not have our, the rights to the mineral rights so that was uh, one of the places where my dad, you know, just didn't think or anyhow, as far as, uh, richer, if you like. We're not rich. So uh, yeah that's when we moved into town. Let's see what else did you ask?

**KG:** Uhm, just if you were [unclear].

**LP:** [unclear] oh, ok. So then I would have been about six years old about that time so that's when we would have moved in and uh, at that time there was a uh, kind of a small

station, uh, that gas station, in the picture . . . with the house and uh, so that's probably where I was living at that time. And it was on the corner, and uh, cars would come around that way and then, they would go on up to what we were . . . [unclear] it was kind of like a park. But then, for some reason or another, they . . . the kind of hardships, you know, that you go through in life . . . then they uh, they uh switched, some how or other, the people did not come around that much any more. They did not get gas. My mother was one of the kind of help uh, that . . . so in the art of, [unclear] left us high and dry you might say. And uh, so that would be, I guess, some of the stories that I would know about that time. And my dad, then as he was working at the railroad, he was only working for four days, uh at that time, uh, [unclear] when the stock market crashed so uh, you know that's probably about all that I remember. I know that we never did have to go hungry or anything like that but I think out on the west coast, maybe it wasn't quite as bad as it was on the east coast. For some reason, I have that in my mind. It probably was the case.

**KG:** Did you have to, were you old enough, like did you have to find a job to help out with your family or just . . .

**LP:** No, I didn't but my oldest sister did. Yeah, she was not, she was uh, still in high school and uh, so she was able to get work with a, uh, wealthy family. And so she helped with the family, our family needs.

**KG:** What did she do for that family?

**LP:** It was keeping house, uh, cleaning house, house work.

**KG:** So there, you didn't have any shortage of food but did you have like shortages of like gasoline and sugar, like did you have ration cards?

**LP:** That I don't know. I don't, World War II when we were married in Kansas City that we had ration, ration cards but that would be in the forties.

**KG:** Ok that's fine. Ok, Ok what was the weather like growing up?

**LP:** In California? Well, uh, we had fog in the winter time quite often but that's really, and hot [unclear] summertime. Pleasant.

**KG:** Ok, and when you moved to Kansas City – that's were you moved to?

**LP:** Well, no, afterwards we got married, you mean? Yeah, Kansas City.

**KG:** What was the weather like there?

**LP:** Well, in September?

**KG:** Well, when you, when you moved to Kansas.

**LP:** Well, just about like it's now. Snow in the wintertime, and I don't think it was as dry. Well, you see after, after uh the uh when the uh, what was it? Now uh, I forgot my mind. That's what you'd say a senior moment. When the Dustbowl then that's when things got very dry here, but, so, actually it didn't start – and of course Kansas City was not as affect as much as it was out in this area, the farming area. Kansas City was not affected like that. As a whole I think we had uh, uh, plenty of snow and rain and hot weather and good weather.

**KG:** Do you remember any major dust storms?

**LP:** Only what my husband said. He grew up in Ingalls, and as far as - now this is a story that he told. He and his uh, he had, let's see, he had two older brothers and uh and sister and then he had a younger brother that he was, and so this was on a Sunday and uh, he and his younger son, I mean brother, stayed at home while the others, they went to Dodge City. They were going to, the three older ones and then the sister, were going to sing. And I think they - and as I recall it was going to be on the radio - and the parents had gone visiting, when all of a sudden . . . and so my husband when he was younger and his brother, they loved to make uh . . . what was it? Some kind of candy. They loved to do that and so they were by themselves and so they thought, 'well that was what they could do.' They could go ahead and make the candy. And about that time the dust started building up. This is out in the country, it started building up and it got so dark that they couldn't see out and uh, they thought that the Lord was returning because it got dark [both laugh]. So yeah, and uh, of course then I know during that time that uh, I think it was the two brothers and the sister they were together with some others and it got so dark that they had to, drove off the road and uh, at a farm house on the way to Dodge so it came up very suddenly, the wind and all of that. But I, and so it got to be pretty, pretty, pretty bad.

And I remember, see I was, at that time I was still be in California and uh, I was going to high school and of course just like you had to read, well at that time, read papers and all of that and so for some reason I was, I was very interested in this part of the country, hearing about their dust bowl, uh dust that came up, their problems that they had. And for some reason - I don't' remember why - I was interested in Western Kansas and low and behold I came, ended up coming out here to live, you know, how the . . . I see how the Lord led because I met him in [unclear] after he graduated and dental school, until then. And so, it was very bad. And I know he uh, he, he was going to graduate that year to from high school and it got so bad they had to close the doors, the schools. Uh-huh, yeah. Got so bad, so, yeah, I think he finally did graduate. Anyhow, let's see what else would be with that story. But I know that they had to, uh, when they, the dust just crept into the house and it was, they couldn't you know, they wipe the table off once and then you'd be able to eat and then it would be cover up again. It just, it was not fun to live in. And then he came, uh, after he stayed out a year from going to school because there was no money really, as far as that's concerned, but he had worked on the farm and uh also did some uh . . . At that time CCC . . . that's when the president Roosevelt uh . . . that's not what it was called. Anyhow they, he uh, tried to help the young people, you know, out here in the area at least have some work to do to earn some money. And uh so

he did a little bit of that but . . . so then this comes then into the year of nineteen, I think it was nineteen thirty . . . Let's see he went to school then in 1939, '39. He had been, and that's when it started getting better, about that time. So that would be about ten years after the Depression so you can imagine how thing got kind of bad. But he was driving a tractor that day and he kept going around and around and he said to himself, "There surely must be a better way of making a living." So, anyhow after that he went to Tabor College and went on to . . . So that's just a little bit of the stories.

**KG:** So did you, yourself every experience a dust storm?

**LP:** Well, later on, but not then. In 1954 we had a dust storm and we had dust storms in town here in this area in 1954 but it didn't get as bad as . . .

**KG:** Earlier?

**LP:** Earlier.

**KG:** Did you ever experience any grasshopper plagues or any jackrabbit drives? Are you . . .

**LP:** Only hearing about it.

**KG:** Do you want to tell me about, or what you heard about?

**LP:** Well, the, the uh jackrabbits were so bad that they were able to have drives where they would . . . kill them because they would eat the plants and what not and all so they had to get rid of them. So that's really all I could tell you because I was not living here then at that time.

**KG:** Ok. Uhm, you said it closed the school before, the dust storms?

**LP:** Well uh, that, out in, that period of time and, and then uh, of course he did graduate. It was only just a short little period of time. Oh I know what I mean, mean to say. He was supposed to graduate then and they had to close it up and so they did, he did not really graduate, have any . . . uh . . . no uh graduation exercises.

**KG:** Oh ok, so what did you do for entertainment growing up? Like for fun . . .

**LP:** Growing up? Oh my, for fun, oh, oh well for fun I know I liked to play with jacks and I liked to . . . you know, that kind of stuff. Is that what you meant?

**KG:** Yeah.

**LP:** Oh, yeah, played, oh I loved to play jacks and uh, of course I loved to play with dolls like that. And let's see, oh I remember I liked to . . . we lived, we lived out of city limits so that if on one side of our, where we lived then to the north of us there was no houses or

anything like that. It was all just land and uh, so I liked to go out and one time I remember going out there and uh, making a house, you know, drawing a house on the ground and I even dug a hole to for the . . . uh, I played by myself a lot of the time. And uh, even uh dug a hole like it was a sink and then also for the bathroom. It was just sort of like an outline and I thought that was sort of fun. Yeah, that I remember but I never did learn to skate or anything like that. I was, I uh got some skates once for Christmas and I had to go where there was a sidewalk because where we lived there was only ground and uh, so I fell and that was the end of the, end of the, the, trying to skate [laughing].

**KG:** Uhm what sort of news did you hear about World War II?

**LP:** What sort of . . . Oh, ok, that was the first year I was in Tabor. I went there in September and uh, in December – I think it was the seventh wasn't it? Yeah, seventh. That was on a Sunday and we girls had been invited over to a family's for Sunday Dinner and uh, then we were there in the afternoon and that's when we heard the president Roosevelt come on the radio and gave his speech. Yes, that's very distant in my mind. And of course then that meant, you know, have to go into war then. It left a lot of questions, but as a result there were a lot of the boys that had to go on into the service and from the college there but . . . Now my husband uh, he didn't have to because by that time he was in Kansas City, see. 'K, but I was still in Hillsboro when that happened. So he, ok, I don't know if you want me to add . . .

**KG:** Yeah, go ahead.

**LP:** Ok, well because, the reason he didn't have to go was because at that time the army uh had a uh, you could enlist and join the army but then you could also continue studying because he was going to be a dentist and uh then he would uh, so that's what he did, so the first, that would have been now in forty-

**KG:** Forty-one.

**LP:** Forty-one, wasn't that, yeah. And uh, so then he was able to go on into school and finish. And uh, course that leads on into the time when the war was over with by that time. And uh, we had had a son born on January the first of 1946 and uh, so when he graduated, since he was married and had a child they were not going to take him into the service so that's kind of that story. But yes, I remember that very much and of course it . . . I went on a, we went on a train one time to, we were coming home, I guess, it was on Christmas, we were going to come out here for Christmas. No, actually it was Hillsboro, because the folks lived in Hillsboro, his folks. And uh, uh, he had uh, in order to earn some side money – oh, now I have to close, I have to start backing up because he did not continue to be in the army the last years. So as a result he had to take uh, he, had to, he worked at night time then most of the time to earn some money loading cars, railroad cars, and uh so uh that, but then, so he knew how to get down in to the uh, where you load the train, you know. So when we wanted to come off, come, come out why were able to get a seat because we went down in the . . . [laughing] while the others would . . .

so then the, the uh train was so crowded that people stood in the aisle and I remember that we held somebody's baby on our lap or I did during that time. So there was . . . and you know, something like that yes and then as far as our ticket, our, we had to have uh . . . what's it called? What did you call it?

**KG:** A ration card?

**LP:** Yeah, ration cards. So we would stand in line sometimes to get certain items and I know that there was a little grocery store not too far away from where we lived and you know, if we wanted soap, we needed soap or something like that, since we had gotten, you know, we had, we always got our food there at that store, sometimes they would save things for you. So I remember getting some soap one time that way. So yeah, there were lots of things that we went through there at that time but it wasn't anything like were they had actual war. That we have left with a lot of things that we didn't, we did, just didn't have.

**KG:** Uh, did your father enlist?

**LP:** My father. In the First World War, well as far as uh that time of the - now this is kind of an interesting way. Uh, see the Germans, Germans, Germany was, had in the First World War . . . Germany was in the Second World War also as far as that's concerned but on the First World War my dad was, at that time, working for the railroad but he was a cook on the, on the uh section of railway that when, when there was something wrong with the tracks or something like that, why then he was uh, cooking, a cook, the one . . . the kitchen. And so when the war started then since he was Schmidt - it's a German name- and uh, so they didn't let him cook anymore because they were afraid he was going to poison the people, but then, then he worked in just as a man that, it's, the uh boxes, box cars. But uh, and then, so that would have been in the First World War and the Second World War, in California, that's when the Japanese got, uh they were the one that had to, a lot of them were put in behind bars and not bars but they had uh . . . well camps like that. So, then the Second World War like that the Germans, oh, we didn't have that much trouble I don't think.

**KG:** Uhm, during the Dust bowl, did you have to clean your house often?

**LP:** They did.

**KG:** They did? Did they like hang sheets up on the windows?

**LP:** Yes.

**KG:** Uhm, is there anything else I should ask you? Do you have any stories for me, that'd like share that you haven't already?

**LP:** Well, you're basically wanting to know about that period of time as I understand where you're . . .

**KG:** Anywhere from the 1930s to the 1940s is . . .

**LP:** Uh-huh. Well there would be a lot of . . . My story of getting married, that would be very . . . [laughing].

**KG:** Well, if you want to share it that, that would be lovely.

**LP:** Well, ok, because see as far as the transportation is concerned, uh, they, at that time they didn't have a lot of airplanes and things like that they moved, moved things fast like they're doing now so . . . (break in the tape) . . . and uh, so when they had, were transferring troops uh, they uh, well, trains like faster the trains were very, very full. . .

**(End of side A, beginning of side B)**

**LP:** . . . married, we didn't have much money but my, Vernon and his parents came . . . Well, ok I'll tell, start the entire . . . I had graduated in 1943 in, in like, in May and then I was going to go, I went home on the train. I went home for the summer. And we had decided that we were going to get married at Christmas time that same year. Well, then during the summertime, Vernon was able to leave school and to come out here in the summertime to help with the harvest. At that time they actually did get some, started having good crops and uh, so then that's when, that was just before he, he uh, was going to join the army so he could go ahead and stay in school. Uh, he uh, when, when he, when we decided to do that then we also – we had to do this all, you know, mostly by letter because you didn't use the telephone to call as much as we do now – and uh, so then uh we would discuss things. Of course for us getting married, my mother really didn't want me to get married to begin with to somebody who lived out here because I would not get home, you know. And uh, but then we decided we were going to have to get married before Christmas and uh, so uh, to make a longer story, uh, so we had to, each one of us had to decided uh, talk to our parents, you know . . . So it ended up being that we had three weeks to get, get ready to go, I mean to get everything ready to get married. Of course we wanted to a church, church wedding. So he and his parents uh came out by bus, you know, to California and uh, so then when we got married we didn't have anyway to get back either but there was uh, in the uh, where I lived there were a couple of boys that were coming out here to go to Hillsboro for to Tabor College and they had a car. So we ended up coming back here with the two boys and another girl and she and I and my husband sat in the back seat and the boys sat in the fronts seat [laughing] and so, then uh, you know, that was you might say, at least it was a way to get . . . and uh, it only cost us thirty-five dollars to do that instead of more than that. So it's just things like that that you can just remember. But as far as the way it is now a days, you know, you know my granddaughter got married this summer and they got this long, long, long uh, not an ambulance but uh, from the uh, uh, the uh . . .

**KG:** Her wedding dress, you mean?

**LP:** No, the car.

**KG:** Oh the car.

**LP:** A great big long –

**KG:** A limousine?

**LP:** Limousine, yeah, limousine to ride in but we didn't have anything like that. So uh, I don't know, as far as, I think as far as uh, they had a hard time as far as that's concerned because here during the uh Dustbowl days . . . Oh, I could tell you too about living in California and having all the uh, a lot of people left this part of the States to go out to California so we had lots and lots and lots of people. We called them, like Okies, coming from Oklahoma, Okies and I know I had a cousin that uh, he had come out there to California, he was from Oklahoma and he had come out there to California to work to like in the potatoes and uh – we had lots of food and things like that – and uh so one time he heard somebody call him a Okie and, oh man, he right away, oh, went uh got his suitcase and was going to get a train and leave but anyhow that was kind of not a very good thing. But yeah, things in general, I think, even in, even though it was hard here, still it affected everybody as far as that's concerned, I think the Dustbowl . . . Because the people that came out there, they needed work and a lot of them didn't have work, but most the time I think uh, they would work out in the fields.

There's a story about, about that too as a far, where I was concerned. Now, the school that I graduated from was uh, just a new school. In Bakersfield we had one great big high school and then that would be on the west side and I lived on the east side so then they uh, went ahead and started building another high school and uh, so I was able to graduate and be the first graduating class from that new school. But uh, the girl that ended being our Valedictorian, she was one of these that came out from . . . well actually I think she was from Arkansas with her family. Uh, they made uh baskets. The mother would make these paper . . . the dad would make these baskets out of, well, kind of like pieces of trees, not very thick but they would make, if you can put that, get that in your mind, make little baskets. And then the mother made paper flower and then the, this girl uh and her younger sister, they had to go around to all these different houses as they'd moved to different towns to try to sell these baskets to make some money. Well, so then they finally got down then to uh California and where I lived in Bakersfield. You know the underpasses like we have here too? She and her family camped under an underpass. But she was the kind of girl, she was smart and uh, she came to uh to the school where I was going and she was very smart, but uh I was not really that close to her. But it was not until later on that I learned that she was a really needy person and, but as far as when she graduated from high school uh . . . One of the boys that was in my class, his father had worked with the uh, county and he signed uh, his dad signed a paper that allowed her to go get some clothes to graduate from high school. You know it's just things like that that you don't want to go through. So you know life, life in lots of ways was hard on . . . well it is now to, in a lot of ways too for people who are without jobs.

**KG:** Uhm, is there anything else you would like to add on World War II or Dustbowls or anything else?

**LP:** Oh, I don't know. Uh, basically I think uh . . . I would just have to say that in life we uh go ahead and uh – and as far as I'm concerned – I know that I trust the Lord to direct me, you know, and I have him. He had people through lots of things that would be . . . So I don't know, I, what else I might say but does that give enough at least . . .

**KG:** Yeah, that's fine. Ok, that's all the questions I have for you. Thank you for sharing. It was very informative.

**LP:** So you're a freshman?

**KG:** I'm a junior.

**LP:** [unclear] watermelon and we were going to . . . and my dad sitting on uh a [unclear] chair and I went up to him and I said – I called him Papa – “Papa, don't know have at least fifty cents that you could go ahead and go buy a watermelon.” So he did. So I think it would be pretty close to that time because as far as really remembering much when I was a baby, I don't know.

**KG:** Ok, that's all I need.

**(End of Interview)**