

BERTA WILLIAMS Interviewed by CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN
September 4, 2009

Transcription of tape 1, side 1

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CHARLOTTE: Today is Friday, September 4th, 2009, my name is Charlotte Cushman and I'm here today with Berta Williams. Good morning, Berta.

BERTA: Good morning.

CHARLOTTE: How are you today?

BERTA: Oh, I'm fine... a little nervous.

CHARLOTTE: Okay. And what address are we at right now?

BERTA: Right now we're at _____ in Tucson Arizona.

CHARLOTTE: Berta, can you tell us where you grew up?

BERTA: I was born in Benson, but I grew up at Redington.

CHARLOTTE: And where exactly is Redington?

BERTA: It's about 45 miles over the mountains, the Catalina Mountains.

CHARLOTTE: Forty-five miles in which direction?

BERTA: East.

CHARLOTTE: From Tucson?

BERTA: From Tucson.

CHARLOTTE: So that's actually in Pima county, right?

BERTA: Right.

CHARLOTTE: And when was this? What year were you born?

BERTA: I was born in 1925.

CHARLOTTE: And how long did you live in Redington?

BERTA: 'Til I was about 19 years old.

CHARLOTTE: And then you moved ...

BERTA: To Tucson.

CHARLOTTE: And who lived on the ranch with you?

BERTA: Well, there was my mother, my dad and my three brothers and then we had neighbors. Mostly there were just ranches.

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CHARLOTTE: Um hmm. Can you tell us your mother's name?

BERTA: My mother's name was Rosa Rhodes.

CHARLOTTE: And what was her maiden name?

BERTA: Ronquillo.

CHARLOTTE: And what was your father's name?

BERTA: My father's name was Bill Rhodes.

CHARLOTTE: And how about your brothers?

BERTA: My brothers...my oldest brother was Fidel, then Ben and then the youngest one was Frank.

CHARLOTTE: And where were you in family?

BERTA: I was the second.

CHARLOTTE: That's a lot of brothers!

BERTA: Yeah. Then when my dad's other two boys that he had from his first marriage would come, I had five brothers. I was the only girl.

CHARLOTTE: Oh , my. Were there other girls at the other ranches?

BERTA: Yes, yes.

CHARLOTTE: That must have been nice. Well, what was life like on the ranch?

BERTA: Oh, everybody thought it was boring, but it was so exciting. We had horses. I had my own horse. And my brothers and I would go out riding. And doing the round-ups, my dad would allow us to go one day with him. We looked forward to that.

CHARLOTTE: What happened on the round-up days?

BERTA: Well, they would gather the cows, mostly the cows that had calves and they would bring them, drive them to the ranch where they had corrals and they had a place where they did branding. And they'd brand the young calves, which was ... sometimes they'd bawl and, you know, sometimes you felt sorry for them, being branded.

CHARLOTTE: Yeah. And did the children get to help?

BERTA: No, no. We just had to sit on the fence and watch.

CHARLOTTE: But it still sounds like it was a special day.

BERTA: Oh, it was. We looked forward to it.

CHARLOTTE: And all the different families would come?

BERTA: Sometimes.

CHARLOTTE: Uh huh.

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BERTA: It was exciting.

CHARLOTTE: And what else happened on the ranch?

BERTA: Oh, we had like for Thanksgiving, we'd have a get together where everybody would bring a dish, you know, and we'd eat and have fun. And at the end of school, we would have a picnic. We'd go out along the San Pedro River. There was a beautiful tree and we'd sit under there and eat and play and we'd have fun.

CHARLOTTE: Was that kind of a school trip?

BERTA: Yes.

CHARLOTTE: So all the classmates?

BERTA: Yeah, the kids and their families.

CHARLOTTE: And did you have a routine on the ranch? When you got up, and what was a typical day like?

BERTA: Well, when my mother had the post office, the post office at first was in my bedroom, so my mother'd wake me up at six o'clock in the morning to go to their bed 'cause my dad had already left for his duties. So I could get a couple of hours more sleep. 'Cause she didn't want me in there while she was delivering mail.

CHARLOTTE: So when you say delivering mail, what was she doing exactly?

BERTA: She was...well, they'd come to the window. My dad fixed a window for her. And they'd come to the window then she'd hand out the mail to them.

CHARLOTTE: And that was at six o'clock? It started at six o'clock?

BERTA: It started at six o'clock, some of the ranchers would come in early.

CHARLOTTE: And what kinds of business were they doing when you said they'd come to the window?

BERTA: People from the ranch, they'd order from a catalog. There was either Wards, Sears or Spiegel. And they'd come, you know... sometimes my mother would help them fill out the forms. You could buy stamps too, mail letters, packages.

CHARLOTTE: When you said she helped them to fill out the forms, were there some that couldn't read or write?

BERTA: Yeah.

CHARLOTTE: And what about language? Did everyone speak English?

BERTA: No, there were a lot of Spanish people.

CHARLOTTE: So these catalogs, I'm sure they were all in English.

BERTA: Right. My mother had to help them fill out the order form.

CHARLOTTE: So, at six o'clock and then what happened after that?
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BERTA: Well, then, in between, she'd fix our breakfast and send us off to school. Then she'd go back to her office. She had things to put down, you know, how many money orders she'd have sold and this and that.

CHARLOTTE: Kind of paper record-keeping?

BERTA: Right.

CHARLOTTE: Okay. And I imagine life on the ranch with four children, she would have been busy every day with just housekeeping.

BERTA: Well, she had a girl come in and help out.

CHARLOTTE: And what did that girl do?

BERTA: She fed us lunch, and sometimes Mother'd have her do laundry if she didn't have time to do it through the week, well, she'd have her do laundry. We had an old Maytag that

my dad had a gas motor put in and I remember it would go putt, putt, putt. It made a noise, but it'd do the laundry.

CHARLOTTE: Yeah. It was a big family and you'd want a machine and not doing it by hand. Where did your water come from?

BERTA: The well.

CHARLOTTE: And did you have electricity?

BERTA: No, no electricity, no phone. We had a wood stove.

CHARLOTTE: And how did you take care of your food?

BERTA: We lived at the foot of the mountain. My dad had this man cut a hole and make a little room out of stone. And it was cool. And that's where they kept...my mother used to make butter...that's where we kept butter and meat and stuff like that. She canned and we kept her jars in there.

CHARLOTTE: So it sounds like you had a big garden. Your mother must have had a garden if she was canning.

BERTA: Yeah.

CHARLOTTE: What kinds of things would she grow?

BERTA: String beans, carrots, corn and watermelons, cantaloupe, radishes, onions.

CHARLOTTE: And did you have animals? Did you have cows?

BERTA: Yes, so we had meat, she canned meat too.

CHARLOTTE: And she must have milked the cows. Somebody was milking the cows.

BERTA: My brothers.

CHARLOTTE: Any chickens?

BERTA: Yes. That was my job to feed the chickens, take care of them, see that they had water.

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CHARLOTTE: And did you get a lot of eggs from them.

BERTA: Yes.

CHARLOTTE: So you really were able to be kind of self-sustaining with the food you were growing.

BERTA: Right. That's why I didn't think too much about the depression because my dad would come to town only for staples like flour, coffee and stuff that we couldn't grow or didn't have at the ranch.

CHARLOTTE: And when you say came to town, would he come all the way to Tucson?

BERTA: Yes, uh huh. At first, before they made the road over the mountain, he'd have to go around by Benson or by Oracle.

CHARLOTTE: That's a long way. How long would that take him?

BERTA: They usually stayed overnight.

CHARLOTTE: And how did he travel?

BERTA: By car. A little Ford... I think it was a Ford with a rumble seat.

CHARLOTTE: Oh. Was that his car?

BERTA: Yeah. And later on, he purchased a truck and a car. I remember it was a black Dodge sedan.

CHARLOTTE: I think we have that in one of our pictures that we can look at in a little while. And what was your father's job?

BERTA: He was a cowboy.

CHARLOTTE: Did he work for someone?

BERTA: Yes. He worked for the Carlink ranch.

CHARLOTTE: And what kinds of things would he do in a day? You talked about the branding of the calves.

BERTA: He'd go out and repair fence and put out salt blocks for the cattle. He'd do other little odds and ends and see that everything was all right. That was for the Carlink Ranch .

CHARLOTTE: Did he come home at night?

BERTA: Oh, yes, every night except when he was on the round-up. They camped out.

CHARLOTTE: And how long would they be gone?

BERTA: It all depended. Sometimes it was three weeks, sometimes it was two weeks. It all just depended.

CHARLOTTE: What year was your mother born?

BERTA: She was born in 1886.

CHARLOTTE: And where was that?

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BERTA: At Redington.

CHARLOTTE: She was born in Redington?

BERTA: Yes, it was so odd. Well we thought it was. My dad had a ranch. It was a sheep camp out in the Galiuro Mountains. He sold it because he was away too much. He was always so concerned about my mother because she had heart problems. So he decided he was going to sell it. So he sold it. He bought a ranch right up the San Pedro River about four miles from Redington. And in that place that he bought, less than half a block there was a ruins where my mother was born, an old adobe ruin.

CHARLOTTE: Really? So just that close. Wow. And how many brothers and sisters did your mother have?

BERTA: She had twelve. She was the last of the bunch.

CHARLOTTE: Did she tell you stories about growing up in Redington...what her girlhood had been like?

BERTA: Well, she said at the age of six she said she knew that she wasn't going to relish ranch life. She wanted to do something better with her life. So she always had that craving...that she wanted to learn, go to school. When she was six she asked her father if she could go to school. He said "no". And she asked him why. He said women are supposed to grow up, get married and have children, and take of the family. She didn't agree with that. So, she worked hard. They had to get water from the river. At the Ronquillo homestead, they didn't have a well yet. So they had to go to the river to get water in buckets. So that was her morning duty...to help bring the water from the river. And they'd have to boil it so they could drink it. What they used for the laundry, they had barrels where they put water so they could use it for their laundry. The boys did most of that, but the drinking water, the girls had to do that. She and her sister, Victoria.

CHARLOTTE: And how did she convince her father that she should go to school?

BERTA: She didn't. She was about ten, I think, when they received a letter. She got a letter from her sister and her husband that lived in (Salomonville?) Her brother-in-law's boss had heard about my grandfather being a real good farmer so he wanted my grandpa to go there and farm. So, they agreed so they packed up and went to (Salomonville?) and mother was very disappointed. So my grandpa died while they were there. So after a few years, my grandmother decided that she wanted to come back to Redington to the homestead. So they came back. And yet my mother had the craving. She said it was eating at her. So one day, she was already in her twenties, and one day she asked her mother if she could go to the school and ask the teacher if she could help her learn. And her mother agreed; she was

willing to let her go. So she made a trip to school, which was just right up the hill from the Ronquillo homestead and she talked to the teacher. She asked the teacher if she could help her around like, you know, clean the blackboard, the erasers, dust the desks, and sweep and the teacher said of course. So she did. So she went there, she went to school there for about a year...I think a year and a half. And then the teacher told her about this lady in Tucson that needed someone to take care of her little girl. And that maybe she could go and then maybe she could go to school. So Mother was very excited. She talked to Grandma about it and grandma was willing. So she went. She came to Tucson and she got a job with ...their last name was Tennison... and the little girl's name was Rhoda Ann. And Mother took care of her and then I don't really remember... if it was through the Tennisons or someone that worked for them, she learned about this teacher, Mrs. Herndon, that taught out at the Indian school out at San Xavier. So Mother's ears perked up and then she went, got a hold of her and talked to her and Mrs. Herndon told her sure, she'd be delighted to have her. So Mother left the Tennisons and went to stay with Mrs. Herndon who lived out at the reservation. And my mother was there for that year and part of the next year. And Mrs. Herndon was very impressed with my mother and when she was ill and couldn't attend school for some reason, she'd have my mother take over. And then, I think she was about half-way through the second year when her brothers came to get her. Her

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mother was very ill and, of course, she had to go home. But she had learned enough, like Mr. Roberts said, to take over the post office. In fact, I have a picture here, if it's in here, of Mrs. Herndon.

CHARLOTTE: Maybe you could tell us about this picture. So we're looking at a picture that says....

BERTA: Yeah, she's a school teacher. Here's where they were out at San Xavier. But my mother wasn't in this picture...just the teachers.

CHARLOTTE: What about that outfit and her hair style?

BERTA: Yeah, she wanted to be like, you know, dressed to be like the Indians.

CHARLOTTE: She had a headband on. Do you know where Mrs. Herndon came from?

BERTA: No, I don't know too much about her, but I did get to meet her when I was a little girl.

CHARLOTTE: Uh huh. Well, that's so unusual that your mother was so strong about wanting to go to school. Did any of the other twelve brothers and sisters go to school?

BERTA: No.

CHARLOTTE: Just her and the youngest and a girl at that.

BERTA: Yes, when she was going to school, well she was in her twenties. I don't know exactly twenty what, but it was in her early twenties. I know that. The kids would make fun

of her, they laughed at her. Even her own brothers would say “Gee you’re too old to be going to school”, blah, blah, blah. So when she had the post office, those same people that made fun of her came for her to help them write letters, order from the catalog and, you know, help them.

CHARLOTTE: I bet they weren’t making fun of her then.

BERTA: No.

CHARLOTTE: When things turned around.

BERTA: Mother said she used to say to herself. She didn’t say anything but she used to think to herself “Hunh, and you made fun of me”, but she didn’t say anything.

CHARLOTTE: Well, you said she moved back to Redington when her brother was sick.

BERTA: Her mother.

CHARLOTTE: Her mother, when her mother was sick. And did she have a job right away or did she take care of her mother for a while?

BERTA: She took care of her mother until Mr. Roberts wanted to talk to her, you know, about taking over because they wanted to leave.

CHARLOTTE: Shall we look at this letter from Mr. Roberts then? Can you see it well enough to read it to us? I think it’s dated...

BERTA: September 20th, 1922

CHARLOTTE: And it was written ...

BERTA: Yeah in Redington, Arizona

[Berta reads letter – see posting on Arizona Memory Project]

CHARLOTTE: That’s quite a letter. Do you know how Mr. Roberts learned about your mother?

BERTA: Well, she used to go pick her mail up from the post office. The post office at that time was right on the Carlink Ranch which wasn’t too far from the Ronquillo homestead so she used to walk, you know, and she got to talking to them and she said they’d invite her in and Mrs. Roberts would make tea or coffee and they’d sit and chat. So they took a liking to her. So then, you know, they talked about retiring and they thought that maybe my mother would be a good candidate to take over. So that’s how she got the post office. And she had it for fourteen years.

CHARLOTTE: Fourteen years.

BERTA: She'd have had it longer but on account of her health problems, my father called us together, we talked about it and we decided that she should quit because she was having one spell after another. She'd have this rapid heartbeat...tachycardia I guess it's called. And I remember in the summer time that many nights my dad would wake us up, and wake my brother up to take care of it. He'd have to wrap her up in a blanket and he'd run up the hill with her where there was always a breeze so she could catch her breath. Then when she felt better, he'd bring her back down. So he just said he'd had enough and he made her quit. It was too much. And she was so unhappy. You could tell she missed it..

CHARLOTTE: It had been her whole life for so long. Fourteen years is a long time. What year do you think that would have been? This letter was dated 1922. Do you know what year she started with the post office?

BERTA: I think she started either the end ... What was that, in September?

CHARLOTTE: This one is written September 29, 1922.

BERTA: I think she took over the first of '23 and she had it until I think it was 1936.

CHARLOTTE: So was she married to your father at that time then?

BERTA: Well, um, yes.

CHARLOTTE: Do you know how they met each other?

BERTA: Yes. Well, she was a postmistress at the Ronquillo homestead at first. He worked for the Carlink Ranch and he'd come and pick up his mail.

CHARLOTTE: And they just started chatting that way. Now the way you're describing it, it sounds like the post office moved to wherever the post master lived. Is that right? It was on the Carlink Ranch.

BERTA: But it wasn't exactly where Mr. Roberts lived. It was a house down from there. Just a little ways down the hill from the main house.

CHARLOTTE: Was it a building that was especially for just being a post office?

BERTA: No, it was just a home.

CHARLOTTE: It was his home, where Mr. Roberts lived. Okay. And then you said it moved, the post office moved to the Ronquillo homestead?

BERTA: Yes, it moved to the Ronquillo homestead. That's right.

CHARLOTTE: And that was before your mother was married?

BERTA: Yes.

CHARLOTTE: And that was her girlhood home.

BERTA: And then, after that, it was moved to right on the Carlink property where they had this house. Mr. Bayless thought that we could live there and there'd be more room because we were kind of crowded on the Ronquillo...

CHARLOTTE: Tell us about who Mr. Bayless is.

BERTA: Mr. Bayless was the owner of the Carlink Ranch.

CHARLOTTE: And we have a photograph of him, I know. Do you remember Mr. Bayless?

BERTA: Oh, yes. Oh, he was such a kind man. I remember my dad would bring us to town once a year. He banked at the bank where Mr. Bayless was the president of the family bank. And we'd go to the bank with my dad. And before we'd leave, Mr. Bayless would say come here and we'd go. And he said "Open the bottom drawer". My oldest brother'd always open it. And he had candy and stuff. So he'd tell us to take a handful.

CHARLOTTE: Oh, how wonderful for a child to open a drawer of candy.

BERTA: Oh, yes.

CHARLOTTE: I bet you looked forward to those trips.

BERTA: Yeah.

CHARLOTTE: What did you do when you came to town?

BERTA: My dad wouldn't take us to the Santa Rita 'cause that was a fancy hotel. We were kids. So there was a white hotel...a white building. It was called the Parkview. And he'd rent three rooms. And we'd stay there. And we'd go to the movies. He made a deal with... he got to be friends with this man that own a restaurant. So he told the man, you know, that his family was there and about us kids. And he said I want the kids to go have their lunch there...and their breakfast and lunch. And at the end of the day, I'll come and pay the bill. We'll come and eat dinner there and I'll pay the bill. So that's what we did.

CHARLOTTE: Wow. What a treat for a child.

BERTA: And when we moved to our ranch and we named it the Diamond R because that was my dad's brand

CHARLOTTE: The Diamond R

BERTA: We'd work hard in the fields. He'd get us up at four o'clock in the morning to go and hoe weeds, and do this and that...feed the pigs. And we'd work real hard so just before school we'd just work. And just before school would start, maybe 2 or 3 weeks before school would start, he would bring us all to town and we'd stay there maybe from four (days) to a week depending on how things were at the ranch. And we'd stay at the Parkview. And we'd

go to the same restaurant. The same thing would happen. We'd go and eat there and at the end of the day, Dad would go pay the bill. But that was his way, he told us, to show his appreciation for what we did.

CHARLOTTE: Well, it sounds like you worked hard to earn those trips. What did your mother think about the trips?

BERTA: Oh, she liked it but she wasn't too excited about it like we were.

CHARLOTTE: What would happen on the ranch and at the post office when your family was a way?

BERTA: Well we When we came to town, it was usually just Dad and us. She'd stay and she'd have somebody come and stay with us because my dad didn't want her to be there alone. But when we moved to the Diamond R, then we'd all come to town.

CHARLOTTE: And would they close the post office?

BERTA: She didn't have the post office then.

CHARLOTTE: Okay.

BERTA: When we moved to the Diamond R, my dad had already made her quit.

CHARLOTTE: You mentioned that people started coming to the ranch and to the post office as early as six o'clock in the morning. Would they come all through the day then?

BERTA: Uh huh.

CHARLOTTE: And how late would they come?

BERTA: Well, sometimes Mrs. Stiller, she and her husband George Stiller, had a ranch up by the Red Hill Canyon and she would come kind of late. And my mother and dad didn't want her to go back when it was late. They think what if she had a flat tire or something? You know, there's no one around to help her so she would stay over night. And, of course, our house was like Grand Central Station. Everybody heard about...my mother was famous for her yeast bread, her jelly roll and her beans. So, they would come and sometimes they'd stay. Like I say, somebody was there all the time. And then it was so funny. We'd have Mr. Pilot who had a little place north of Redington and he had beehives. He would come; it was always so funny. He would come either real late or about noontime just so he could eat.

CHARLOTTE: Did your mother know to expect these people? Would she make extra food?

BERTA: Yeah. She'd work at night and make yeast bread.

CHARLOTTE: And she would have baked it in your wood stove then.

BERTA: Yeah

CHARLOTTE: I always am impressed when people can do that. It's not easy to control the temperature.

BERTA: It was just fun.

CHARLOTTE: Did you have a radio?

BERTA: Yes. We had like a windmill that would turn and that would charge the battery. We had a battery for it.

CHARLOTTE: And what did you like to listen to?

BERTA: Oh, "Little Orphan Annie" and the boys "Superman". And I don't know what other..."The Adventures of Jimmy Allen" or something like that.

CHARLOTTE: Did other families have radios?

BERTA: No, they used to come to our house. Amos and Andy. Families would come to hear Amos and Andy.

CHARLOTTE: So, it was a busy place?

BERTA: Oh, it was, it was.

CHARLOTTE: Now, you said that the customers came from neighboring ranches. Were there sometimes people who were just passing through who would stop by?

BERTA: Well, they'd stop by, yes, like to ask directions. And then, of course, my mother would always ask if they would care for something to drink or eat. That's what people did in those days.

CHARLOTTE: And there wouldn't be any place that they could get food or something to drink besides stopping and asking.

BERTA: People that would travel from Benson to Monmouth or from Monmouth to Benson...they'd stop, you know, along the way to ask for water, food.

CHARLOTTE: And was there a sign that said Post Office in front of the house?

BERTA: Yes.

CHARLOTTE: Do you think that they would come because of the sign and they saw that it was a post office?

BERTA: Probably, yeah.

CHARLOTTE: So, it would be a little different from a private home then. Now you talked about what was involved with the job a little bit. How do you think your mother felt about having the job?

BERTA: I think she was in heaven.

CHARLOTTE: 'cause she loved it.

BERTA: Oh, yes. We could tell that she wasn't happy when my dad decided that she had to leave the post office.

CHARLOTTE: When she was a little girl and she had this dream about learning to read, do you think she had any idea what she would do with her education?

BERTA: Well, she said she was interested like in writing. I have some papers there. She wrote a poem one time and sent it to I can't remember if it was "Ladies Home Companion" or one of those magazines. And they said they were going to print it, but I don't remember if they did or not.

CHARLOTTE: But you have the poem?

BERTA: Pardon?

CHARLOTTE: Do you still have the poem?

BERTA: No. I think it went in the trunk that was stolen. After my folks died, my brother Ben stayed at the house and he had a stroke so I brought him here so I could take care of him. So the house was alone. It was on Acardia Blvd. So they broke into the house and they stole a lot of things. And they stole the trunk. I don't know why I didn't think of going and bringing the trunk here.

CHARLOTTE: I was just going to say sometimes you don't think of that until it's too late. We don't know; we think it will be safe.

BERTA: It was full of stuff, you know, that she had: letters and her writings, her diaries. Some of her diaries. I'm glad that my daughter Morenci went and got them. We took them. Well she took them to the University. They're there at the University.

CHARLOTTE: So some of the diaries did survive?

BERTA: Yes, some of them.

CHARLOTTE: Do you think your mother kept a diary before that?

BERTA: Yes.

CHARLOTTE: But those were stolen.

BERTA: She started that when she had the post office. And I really don't know why they would take a trunk that was full of stuff that they knew nothing about. But they did.

CHARLOTTE: Did your mother want her children to learn to read and write?

BERTA: Oh, yes. She kept after us, after us. After I graduated from eighth grade... my oldest brother went to town and he boarded with this family and went to high school. And I wanted to go but my mom and dad said no. And I was thinking to myself Mother was something like her dad because she didn't trust me I guess, coming to town. But I thought I'm getting away with something, I don't have to go to school. But she learned about some place in Chicago, I think it was that had workbooks. So she ordered the workbooks.

CHARLOTTE: So you could do it at home... correspondence. So you had to do the work anyway. It sounds like she was more interested in your education than you were then.

BERTA: I wanted to be outside riding my horse.

CHARLOTTE: Did you want to be a postmistress?

BERTA: Not really. I think I broke her heart.

CHARLOTTE: What did you want to do?

BERTA: I wanted to be either a singer or a jockey.

CHARLOTTE: You must have been a good rider.

BERTA: Yes. My brothers used to say I was better than they were. And they were good riders. But I'd ride horses they wouldn't ride.

CHARLOTTE: Oh, really? And here your education was supposed to be about math and reading but you got a big education just being around the animals and learning to ride and do other things.

BERTA: Well, they didn't want me to go to school so I had to learn at home.

CHARLOTTE: Now when you were a girl you went to school in Redington before eighth grade. Tell us about that school.

BERTA: It was a one-room adobe building and they had classes from kindergarten to the eighth grade and had one teacher. And toward the last...I think it was two years before I graduated...they added another room.

CHARLOTTE: So they divided the children then?

BERTA: Uh huh. And the teachers. They had two teachers.

CHARLOTTE: Do you remember how many children would be there at any one time?

BERTA: I think maybe about twenty-four or twenty-six.

CHARLOTTE: That's a lot for one teacher 'cause there all different ages. What do you remember about your teachers?

BERTA: Well, some of them were very nice and others it seemed like they always picked on me because I was naughty, I guess. In those years we had arithmetic books that had the self-testing drills where it was oral and my dad would always help me because I didn't like math and I just didn't like to do it. And my dad would help me. And my dad was on the round-up and he couldn't help me. We had, I think it was on Thursdays, we had this self-testing drill. And I hadn't studied; my dad wasn't there to help me. So we always had it right after recess. We had an outhouse; we didn't have a running bathroom. So we were out playing and I saw the teacher going to the bathroom, so I thought, "Hmmm, this is my chance". So I went and locked her in and I thought, well, I'm not gonna let her out after math is over. So I told the kids, and I don't know why they listened to me, I told the kids not to let her out. So we didn't let her out. And she was saying, "Let me out, let me out. Help, help, help". And of all things, my mother's nephew was going from my mother's house to his house and he had to go right by the schoolhouse. And he went and let her out. Well, you know what. I got spanked.

CHARLOTTE: Oh, dear. And was the teacher the one who spanked you?

BERTA: No, but she went right away and told my mother, my mother told my dad.

CHARLOTTE: So she knew it was you? You couldn't blame it on someone else?

BERTA: She knew it was me.

CHARLOTTE: Now you had a newspaper when you were in school also, "The Little Cowpunchers".

BERTA: We would write stories about things that went on in school.

CHARLOTTE: Did you like writing the stories?

BERTA: No, I didn't like writing.

C: But they asked you to do it?

BERTA: I had to because I knew I'd get punished at home.

CHARLOTTE: If you didn't?

BERTA: Yeah, my mother.

CHARLOTTE: Now, you've told us some wonderful things about living on the ranch and how happy your mother was with her job. Were there any problems that she ever had?

BERTA: Well, the only problem was, there was almost a robbery at our house. One morning Mother got up and went in the post office to work a little bit. Then she went about nine, I think it was, nine, nine-thirty to fix our breakfast and there was somebody. My dad had left to go to work. So my mother, after my dad left, would lock the doors. So there was somebody pulling on the back door on the north side of the house and saying "Let me in, let me in". So my mother, I don't know, she was scrambling eggs or something, so she went to the door and he said "Let me in". And my mother said, "I cannot let you in; I don't know who you are". And he said, "I said, let me in". So at that time my brother, oldest brother, heard her talking and he went to see and he saw this man there at the door we used to call them at that time. And my mother whispered to him to see if the front door's locked. So he went to the front door. And then the road used to go right by our house. So he saw another man out there, another hobo. And he had a gun, a rifle. So he got scared, you know, but my brother, thanks to his quick thinking. He said, "I think my dad and the cowboys are coming; I hear the hoof beats". And this and that. And so he, you know, he scared him, and he took off. And my brother ran back to the front and he said he saw him running down toward the river. So after a while, my dad, I guess he sent a guy to get first to see if the corrals were in use drive the cattle in so this man, used to call him Chino Barraras, he came and then my brothers ran out and told him what had happened. And Chino said, "I'm gonna go check real quick and then I'm gonna go and tell your dad what's going on". So he did, and my dad came but he and another guy went looking for but they didn't find them.

My mother got very scared so then she wrote to Washington to tell them that she needed someplace to be safe. So they...soon afterwards they delivered a cage for her.

CHARLOTTE: What did the cage look like?

End of tape 1, side 1.