

## Interview with Imogene Chapin from Arvin Farm Security Administration (FSA) Camp in California, August 1, 1940

**Imogene Chapin:** September the 28 was when the paper was printed. I think it was something right near there.

**Interviewer:** Here in the camp paper. What's the name of the camp paper?

**Chapin:** Tow-Sack Tattler.

**Interviewer:** Tow-Sack Tattler. And it was in the issue of September 29th, 1939. You wrote it just around that time. Where did you come from?

**Chapin:** Marshall, Arkansas.

**Interviewer:** How long ago was that?

**Chapin:** A year ago last June. This last June.

**Interviewer:** How did you happen to write that poem?

**Chapin:** Oh, I am always writing something little 'ole verses on everywhere, up on a tree and everything, and I just wrote this down and they asked me to let them print it in the camp paper.

**Interviewer:** Uh huh. How does it go?

**Chapin:** Should I read it all?

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Read the whole thing.

**Chapin:**

We left our home in Arkansas. 'Twas in the month of June.  
To find a job out way out west, of course we find one soon.

We headed for Missoura, the [inaudible] we stay.  
The jobs were scarce, they all told us, your just a little way.

The night to Kansas we did go, the state that grows the wheat.  
In harvest, we would work awhile, we'd have good things to eat.

Here's work for everyone we thought, in fact we almost knew it.  
The only ship that hasn't sailed, the hoppers beat you to it.

We would not let our spirits sink. We'd find work on the farm.  
I've heard it said most all my life, the third time is the charm.

We go to Colorado, where all the lettuce grows.  
We had to cross the Rockies. We almost froze our nose.

We thought we'd stop and ask for work and find a place to stay.  
The sandstorm beat us to that job and blew it all away.

They told us head to Utah, some work we'd surely find.  
The cherry trees were ripe with fruit, the people all were kind.

So once again we headed, our [inaudible] down the hill.  
There was no doubt we really knew our pocket books would pill.

But like the other places, a freeze just struck there.  
And there was no job for us at all. The cherry trees were bare.

No work in Arizona or Nevada, so they say.  
So on to California, we started on our way.

They said in California, that money grew on trees.  
But everyone was going there, just like a swarm of bees.

We landed here one summer day, how hot, I can't quite tell.  
I'll leave the rest for you to guess, I know you can quite well.

The goat heads punctured our old shoes, the sun baked our brain.  
We stayed out here about three months before we saw rain.

The ants – they bite. The flies – they buzz.  
The mosquitos call you cousin.  
And when you try to take a nap, they bite you by the dozen.

We drank our coffee from tin cans, eat sardines by the pack.  
If I could catch a fisherman, I'd break his gosh darn neck.

We eat beans three times a day, we sleep from a floor.  
I guess you're tired of reading this, or I would write some more.

I guess you wonder who wrote this, I know you think I'm crazy.  
You did not miss it very much, my brain is rather hazy.

I tried so hard to find the trees, from which the money grows.  
I've walked through this hot sand so much, it's blistered my poor toes.

Perhaps the money is all fell off, or just a little late.  
I went and wrote this crazy thing livin' in cabin 228.

**Interviewer:** ...Arkansas?

**Chapin:** It was just a week.

**Interviewer:** Do you think you'll ever go back?

**Chapin:** No, I want to stay out here. I've changed my mind a lot about California since I've been here.

**Interviewer:** You have. What did you think it was like?

**Chapin:** Well, I was a little disappointed by the looks of it, but well I just didn't like it when I first came here. But in fact we landed here with just 7 cents and so if we hadn't stayed — well I'm glad we did now.

**Interviewer:** How long have you been here now?

**Chapin:** A year in June.