

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Depression Project

Life Experiences

O. H. 596

ELIZABETH PORTER

Interviewed

by

James M. Porter

on

July 16, 1974

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Depression Project

INTERVIEWEE: ELIZABETH PORTER
INTERVIEWER: James M. Porter
SUBJECT: Politics, life, job conditions, independence
DATE: July 16, 1974

JP: This is an interview with Elizabeth Porter for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project on the Depression, by James M. Porter, at 729 Whipple Avenue, Campbell, Ohio, on July 16, 1974, at 11:00 a.m.

Mrs. Porter, did you know many people who were out of work long during the Depression?

EP: Yes, I did. Nearly everyone I knew was out of work.

JP: How did this seem to affect them? Were they largely bitter about it?

EP: No, they didn't seem bitter. They were worried, just looking forward to better times.

JP: How did people who were out of work feel about accepting welfare?

EP: Some of us were proud and waited until we just had to ask for it, and others were eager to get it and they were more in a hurry.

JP: What did people tend to think of Hoover during this period as compared to Franklin Delano Roosevelt?

EP: All I remember about Hoover is that he promised, but we didn't get much from him.

JP: What did he say he would promise?

EP: He promised that prosperity was around the corner and that there would be a chicken in every pot. He had soup lines

and when President Roosevelt became president we had WPA and CCC and we would go to work and get checks and money and buy our own food and work for what we got.

JP: Were the people immediately optimistic to what Roosevelt did or did it take a while?

EP: They were, I believe, immediately looking forward to better times as soon as he became president.

JP: What made you say that?

EP: I believe because it was so long the other way that they just figured a change would take place and people were so happy they cried. People sat down in the street and cried.

JP: Did people worry much about what was happening around the world at this time, for example the rise of Hitler in Germany in the 1930's?

EP: I was fairly young then; I don't remember any talk about the outside world other than the United States.

JP: In what age bracket were you during this period from 1929 to 1935? Were you in high school or grade school?

EP: I was in grade school.

JP: From 1929 to 1935?

EP: I was about ten years old.

JP: What did people think about the Democratic party during this period?

EP: I couldn't answer that.

JP: What, if anything, did people feel about the Russians, the communism during this period? Did they know of communism at that time?

EP: I never heard it discussed.

JP: Do you remember how well supplied grocery stores were during the Depression?

EP: They seemed to be pretty well supplied. There was no shortage of anything.

JP: Were the prices high or low?

EP: They were very low compared to now.

JP: Did the fact that some people raised a part of their food affect grocery store prices in any noticeable way?

EP: I don't believe so.

JP: I'm going to ask you a couple of questions about your home life and education and religion and entertainment. Did lots of people raise gardens as sometimes is said, and what about the people who didn't?

EP: I believe most everyone raised gardens. The people that didn't, I don't know about them.

JP: Did families try to get extra money? Were women and girls encouraged to find work, and if so what did they do?

EP: I don't believe there was any extra money; people just tried to get what they could to live on. Women and girls mostly looked for clerking in the five-and-tens and waitress work in coffee shops.

JP: Do you remember any of the sewing parties where they used to get together and knit and crochet and sew things and then sell them?

EP: No, I don't remember any of that.

JP: Did many people tend to leave home during the Depression or did young people tend to remain at home longer than otherwise would have been expected?

EP: I think they remained at home longer than children do now. They want to get out on their own as soon as they can now.

JP: Would you be able to say whether family life improved or suffered during the Depression?

EP: I don't believe family life suffered during the Depression. I believe they were closer in the Depression.

JP: How would you remember church attendance during the Depression?

EP: I would say it was about the same.

JP: Did many people not complete schooling as a result of the Depression and could you give any examples?

EP: I'm in a family of eight children and there were only two of us that graduated; the rest of the family all found jobs before they were eighteen.

- JP: Do you remember kids as being more or less generally independent of their parents and their parents' opinions during this period?
- EP: I believe they were more independent of their parents at that time because they would go out and find jobs, but I think they considered their parents' opinions more than they do now.
- JP: How did people feel about obeying the laws during the Depression? Was there any decline of law and order?
- EP: No, I think there's more of a decline in law and order now than there was at that time.
- JP: Who had radios during the Depression?
- EP: Very few. Our family was very fortunate and had one of the first radios to come out; it was a Crosley radio.
- JP: What were the most popular shows during this period?
- EP: As I remember it was "Gene and Glen", and "Amos and Andy"; that's all I can remember.
- JP: "Gene and Glen", what was that about?
- EP: It was two men who each disguised their voices and acted as two different people.
- JP: In other words, they were like four different people?
- EP: Yes. "Gene and Glen and Jake and Lena" was the name of the program.
- JP: What were your own favorite programs then?
- EP: I believe I liked "Gene and Glen" the best.
- JP: Did many people go to the movies during the Depression?
- EP: Yes, I believe much more than they do now.
- JP: Why would that be during the Depression when you're trying to save and skimp and scrape?
- EP: They were very, very cheap. We would go for 5¢ all day on Saturday, from morning until dinner time. The shows were no more than 10¢, 15¢.

JP: Who had the automobiles during the Depression? Were there many?

EP: No, there were very few.

JP: The few who did have them were they the ones who were the rich people or were the ones who believed they needed the status symbol of an automobile, or was it a mixture?

EP: I'd say a mixture.

JP: Were there any people who went to college? A lot or comparatively little?

EP: There were very few who went to college then.

JP: Did they survive or after a couple of years did they drop out because of funds and things, or did they generally make it?

EP: They usually made it. I don't know of any that didn't at that time.

JP: Were there any such things as grants and scholarships?

EP: I don't believe so; I didn't know of any then.

JP: Thank you, Mrs. Porter.

END OF INTERVIEW