

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Shenango Valley Depression Project

Life During The Depression

O. H. 330

MARIAN MILLER

Interviewed

by

Marilyn Lees

on

July 28, 1982

## MARIAN F. MILLER

Marian Frances Miller was born on January 4, 1914, in Masury, Ohio, the daughter of Richard and Gladys Samuels. Her parents had emigrated from Wales and her father worked at Sharon Steel in the ten inch hot mill. Nine years later after Marian was born her brother, Bill, was born. During the Depression, Marian's father only worked four days a month so her mother had to do housework outside the home. After her graduation in 1932 from Brookfield High School, Marian could not find employment in the Shenango Valley so she obtained a job as a live-in housekeeper in East Palestine for two years with wages at three dollars a week. Marian still regrets the fact that her parents did not have the money to send her to college at this time.

In 1936, Marian found employment at Sharon Steel in the employment office. She married Albert Miller in 1941. Marian remained in the employment office of Sharon Steel until 1946, when she became pregnant. Marian and her husband have two children: James, born in 1947, and Marilyn, born in 1952.

Due to her husband's poor health, Marian got a job at J. C Penney's in 1965 and worked there until she retired in 1975. She enjoys her retirement now by being active in the senior citizen's programs and various church organizations.

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INTERVIEWEE: MARIAN MILLER

INTERVIEWER: Marilyn Lees

SUBJECT: Life during the Depression, Shenango Valley

DATE: July 28, 1982

L: This is an interview with Marian Miller for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Depression in the Shenango Valley by Marilyn Lees in Masury, Ohio, on July 28, 1982, at 2:00 p.m.

First of all, how long have you lived in the Shenango Valley, all your life?

M: Yes.

L: When were you born, what year, and where at?

M: I was born January 4, 1914, on Syme Street; that's in Masury.

L: In Masury, Ohio? What were your parents' names?

M: Gladys and Glen Samuels.

L: What nationality were they?

M: Welsh.

L: Welsh?

M: They were both born in Wales.

L: They were both born in Wales and your father and mother immigrated here to America, together?

M: No, father came first. He came to Pittsburgh. He

worked in a steel mill there. Then when Sharon Steel . . . it was called Hoop Mill, he came to Farrell, Pennsylvania. He roomed and boarded there. My mother came over, she came over with an aunt; her mother and father never came to this country, she came over with an aunt. She came to Farrell, Pennsylvania and worked in what they call a tin mill. She lived right next door to my father. She was being raised by an aunt, and he roomed and boarded next to him; that's how they met.

L: How many children were in your family?

M: You mean my mother and dad's family? My dad's, let's see.

L: No, in your family.

M: You mean my brother and I? Just my brother and I.

L: Yes, how much older are either?

M: Nine, I'm nine years older.

L: You're nine years older than your brother?

M: Yes.

L: What did your father do for a living?

M: He worked on what is called a ten inch hot mill down in Sharon Steel. His position was a chiller.

L: Did your mother work at this time?

M: No, she just had to do housework during the Depression, that's all.

L: When the Depression hit in the 1930's, your mother then went out to work?

M: She worked to help, because my dad only worked four days a month at Sharon Steel.

L: Four days a month?

M: Four days a month, it was really tough.

L: What kind of work did your mother do?

M: Housework.

L: Just here, around the neighborhood?

M: Yes, just in the neighborhood; she didn't go any farther.

L: Where did they live in Masury?

M: We lived on Syme Street. I went to school for four years when we lived on Syme Street. Then, we lived up the street, on the Pennsylvania side; there's a little bungalow there, right below Bell Street. We lived upstairs; I think it was three rooms. While this house was being built we lived in that three-room apartment.

L: When did you move into this present home? Can you remember how old you were?

M: Yes, it would be my first year at Addison, and they built Addison in 1923 or 1925. I was trying to think what's on the building.

L: I think it's 1923.

M: We moved here in 1923.

L: What were some of your duties as a child, around the house?

M: Dusting, which I hated and I still do, taking care of my brother, and I was always mean to him. He had a little buddy-L dumptruck, and I was so mad because my mother made me mind him, that I pushed him down the street and he fell out and got a terrible cut lip and I got a good whipping. They knew because he was so much younger.

L: Anything else that was expected of you, around the house?

M: No, my mother would never let me in the kitchen when she was cooking or baking. I had to learn all that after I got married. My mother didn't allow me in the kitchen.

L: What kind of games did you play as a child?

M: We were just talking about that last night with the neighbors next door. We played hopscotch, and Red

Rover Come Over; the kids were playing that last night.

L: What did your family do for recreation at this time, during the Depression? Since money was tight, what kind of things would you do as a family?

M: We always liked to sing a lot. Our family would sing old songs.

L: Did anyone in your family play?

M: My mother played the piano; that's right, mother played the piano and she had a sister who could play the piano.

L: Your family then would come to a house and just sing?

M: Yes, and sing.

L: Oh, that's nice. Did you go on picnics at Buhl Park?

M: Not too many, but sometimes when myaunt would come, the one down in Pittsburgh, we would go up by Conneaut, Ohio. We used to go up there a lot on a picnic when they would come to town, but otherwise we didn't go much.

L: Where did you go to school?

M: I went four years to Lafayette and then Addison was built; I went there. You see, a lot of my friends from way back, they went to Brookfield Avenue School, but I never did. My mother thought it was too far, but it really wasn't. I think it would be about the same distance to Lafayette as it would be to Brookfield Avenue.

L: But you lived in Ohio?

M: I've always lived here.

L: But you went to a Pennsylvania school?

M: We paid three dollars a month when I went to Lafayette.

L: Then you went to Addison Grade School?

M: When it was built.

L: How many grades were there?

M: Five, six, seven, eight; they had four. They had all eight grades, but I started in fifth.

L: They had one through eight there, and you walked to school, probably about a half of a mile?

M: Yes.

L: Then where did you go from there?

M: Then I went to Brookfield, the old Brookfield High School. It's a junior high now.

L: It's a junior high now? How did you get to school?

M: We went on bus then.

L: They had a bus?

M: You know how we went? We went out the old Yankee Run Road all the way around up to the high school.

L: You didn't go right up old 82?

M: No, we went way out Yankee Run Road and picked up all those kids. It was a long ride.

L: That would be. Of course, the highway wasn't built so you went out that way.

M: No, there was no road.

L: What were some of the subjects you had in high school?

M: American history, arithmetic, and I don't know because I took all commercial sciences.

L: What was discipline like?

M. In school? It was strict. I never did anything to get in trouble. In high school it was really strict. Addison is where we had more trouble. Miss Minnick was a good teacher, but the boys were so bad. They would get up and hit her and everything else. Oh, we had a bad bunch down there. Frank Kish lived on Brookfield-Warren Road, he used to beat up on Miss Minnick.

L: And nothing was ever done?

M: There were a couple of coloreds that used to beat up on her. Oh, that poor teacher, she was always getting hit.

- L: In high school, did some of the troublesome kids, did they just drop out?
- M: They didn't go. They were too poor and they didn't go on, they didn't graduate, Frank Kish and those colored kids.
- L: They just simply dropped out?
- M: Yes, they dropped out Those kids didn't go on.
- L: Do you remember any of your favorite teachers?
- M: Yes, Henrietta McConnell was going to come to our reunion, she was our English teacher.
- L: My dad talks about her.
- M: Oh, I liked Margaret Elk; she's still living. She moved over to Pennsylvania. She was the typing teacher. Those two were very outstanding.
- L: You went to school then, during the Depression. What type of school activities did they have for you since money was tight?
- M: I played girls' basketball. I wasn't one of the outstanding ones, but I always played. Even down in grade school I played girls' basketball. We didn't play baseball and softball.
- L: But they had sports for boys and girls?
- M: Yes.
- L: Did they have a band?
- M: Yes, they had a band.
- L: And chorus?
- M: Yes, I was in the chorus. They called them operettas then.
- L: They had school plays?
- M: They had school plays.
- L: What was your favorite school activity?
- M: I liked the chorus really well, and I liked the basketball.
- L: What year did you graduate?



M: 1932.

L: 1932? What did you do after graduation, because this would be really into the Depression years then?

M: Well, I stayed at home for a little while, maybe a few months, then I got a job in East Palestine, Ohio.

L: You worked then, in East Palestine, Ohio? How did you get there?

M: I had to go by bus, because my dad worked turns. They both weren't so thrilled. They were really angry at me for going away from home to do housework. I said I couldn't stay there; things were bad and they didn't have any spending money. Your parents couldn't give it to you anyway. I said, "Well, I'm leaving home. I'm going away to work." I did, I just got the Youngstown bus and went, and then I'd come home on weekends.

L: How did you hear about the job?

M: The lady down the street. It was her sister, so she said, "You'll like it." She said, "It's not like going to a strange family, because it's my sister." They needed somebody and they couldn't get anybody, so she said, "Would you like to try it?" I said, "Yes." That's how I got it.

L: How much did you get paid?

M: Three dollars a week.

L: Three dollars. That was to do all the household chores?

M: Yes.

L: Did you do anything extra?

M: After the one girl got married, after she graduated from college and she had a baby, sometimes they would bring the baby there. I'd have to babysit the baby, with nothing extra. Then I worked in his office at night, and there was no extra credit.

L: You lived right there in the house?

M: Yes. It wasn't bad, the money was so bad. It was pleasant surroundings, and you're there all day by yourself. It wasn't hard work, even though there were ten rooms. They were well-to-do people and everything was just so.

- L: At this time, what kind of things did young people do for fun? Where did you go on dates, and things like that?
- M: My girlfriend, she's still my girlfriend, her husband lived down by Sharon Steel Hoop Office, and my husband lived down there. None of us had a car. Her boyfriend Ned, and Andy and I, the four of us would walk way up on East State Street to a drug store. I can't think of the name now, and Deneen's Dairy, but there was a drug store, our favorite drug store. We would go over there and have a soda or a sundae and walk back down home over here. We would walk, walk; that's all we did was walk.
- L: That would be, it was on East State Street, that would be at least three miles one way.
- M: We walked, we couldn't go every night because they didn't have any money; money wasn't plentiful. A couple of times a week we would go, or we would go maybe if there was the Gable. I don't know if the Columbia was there yet. We used to go to the show maybe once a week with them.
- L: How much did it cost to get into the show?
- M: I think around five cents.
- L: A nickel? My dad said he could just sit there and watch the same movie over and over again. Can you remember anything else that you used to do? You mentioned before that you went to prom. Did they have dances like that?
- M: I don't think they had any dances. You only had that one prom, my junior and my senior year. I never went to any dances. There were dances; I know some of the kids in Brookfield went. I think it was around Cortland where they used to go roller skating, but I was never allowed to go. Then there were dances out in the country somewhere where they would go, but I wasn't allowed to go. I didn't have transportation anyway, unless you had some boy that had a car; I didn't.
- L: Did very many people have cars around this area?
- M: No.
- L: Everybody walked?

M: You walked.

L: What other kind of transportation was there?

M: There was a streetcar.

L: There was a streetcar?

M: There was a streetcar.

L: That went where?

M: It would go from out by Sharon Steel main office down there on Irvine Avenue. It would go way up on State Street. I don't know where it ended though.

L: They had buses?

M: If you wanted to go to Youngstown, maybe save enough and your boyfriend or date would take you on the streetcar all the way to Youngstown to Keith's Palace.

L: What was that?

M: It would be some special show like the big bands. Long ago they would have state shows and things like that. We would get to go once in a while to one of those.

L: How much was it, do you remember, to ride on a streetcar?

M: Ten cents or a quarter

L: Then to get into the show?

M: It was maybe fifty cents, a little more than down here.

L: That was considered an expensive evening?

M: Yes, an expensive evening.

L: Where did you go shopping at this time, grocery shopping, shopping for things for yourself?

M: Where Jill Richie's mother . . . It was Morgan's Store, because that's where we used to get the bus. They had a grocery store there; we used to go there a lot. Where else was one? I guess there was an A&P a long time ago; my mother always went to the A&P.

L: Did they have a system where you could charge things, you could buy on credit?

- M: Yes. The Shafron's Store on Irvine Avenue, down by that big place where they sell parts for automobile repairs and stuff, down at the bottom of Davis. Over there where there used to be a barber shop and all that, there was a grocery store, Shafron's. We would charge there. You paid, I think, once a month. I think you had to pay. When you did, they gave you a big bag of candy, when you paid your bill. You would get suckers, all kinds of candies, I remember, all kinds of candies.
- L: Were there places in downtown Sharon to shop at?
- M: Yes. I think there was a Moore's Store, which would be like the old Sharon store; it was Moore's and Anspach and Mayer. I forget the modern name, but those were the stores we went to.
- L: What were the holidays like at this time? Christmas mainly, Christmas during the Depression years?
- M: We didn't have a turkey in those days. Mother would always have chicken; she would always have the chicken, and she would make fruitcake and pies and things like that. We never had turkey or anything.
- L: Did you have a tree?
- M: Yes, she always had a little tree.
- L: Was it a family affair?
- M: No, because we didn't have any relatives. The only relatives my mother had was a sister across the street. We didn't have any other relatives here. My mother and dad didn't have anyone, they were all still in Europe.
- L: Did you have a stocking?
- M: Yes, we always hung a stocking.
- L: What kinds of things did they put in it?
- M: It was just an old, black stocking in those days. It was nothing fancy. I had an uncle that came from Cleveland; he would visit us around Christmastime and he always put an old potato, a lump of coal, and onions in our stockings, to tease us.
- L: What was the mood of the people like during the Depression?

- M: Everybody was happy, even though you didn't have much. Everybody seemed so friendly, it felt like they wanted to do more for you if they could. It was a different atmosphere all together. You just wanted to help one another.
- L: What kind of things did people do to help each other out?
- M: Some people would bake a lot of extra loaves of bread, and ask if you needed a loaf of bread. My aunt across the street, she had five children. They would make popcorn quite a bit and they would always share that.
- L: Do you think people shared more?
- M: Yes. They made homemade fudge and things like that.
- L: The neighborhood, was it more friendly?
- M: Yes, you knew your neighbors then.
- L: Did you do anything as a neighborhood? Did you have neighborhood parties or get-togethers?
- M: No, nothing like that, but it seemed like everybody wanted to help one another. They weren't like that, that neighborly. They were neighborly to me when I lived in those apartments on Erie Street; that was like six families together. We shared every Christmas, and this had nothing to do with the Depression. That was after, a long time after, when I was first married. Oh, we never had so much fun. We would have a party about every week out in the backyard or at somebody's apartment there. Boy, that was just friendly!
- L: What church did you go to at this time?
- M: First Methodist.
- L: First Methodist?
- M: Yes.
- L: Did the church help people out in any way, can you remember?
- M: They probably did, but I had no access to that. I imagine they did; I'm pretty sure they did.
- L: Can you remember what the reaction was toward F.D.R.'s [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] New Deal, when he was elected President?

M: People were just so happy. You would have thought it was . . . sometimes I think they thought it was a lord coming, or something. They looked upon him like that.

L: Do you remember his fireside chats?

M: Yes.

L: Your family had a radio?

M: Yes.

L: Did you listen then?

M: Yes, everybody did. Oh, you had to go listen to that.

L: Did you schedule your nights sometimes around that, so that you would be home to listen to him?

M: Yes, around him. Last night I was angry, that radio didn't come on and I wanted to watch the man. (Laughter)

L: Then people in this area, they looked favorably upon him?

M: Yes.

L: They thought that his programs were going to turn out to be good, have a positive effect?

M: Yes.

L: Are there any other personalities that you remember at this time, like in the government or just around here, well-known personalities?

M: I don't remember any.

L: Were there any actresses?

M: I'm trying to think. Bing Crosby and Barbara and Perry Como, that type.

L: Did some of your songs, did they reflect the mood, do you think, of the people?

M: Yes.

L: Can you remember any of them?

M: No, I can't remember any, I'm trying to remember.

- L: About all I can remember is "Happy Days Are Here Again".
- M: Yes, "Happy Days Are Here Again". This one had a real easy waltz. It was a funny type of a song, but it was about that time, and it said what the mood was.
- L: What kind of changes did the Shenango Valley go through at this time, can you remember any? Were any roads paved, things like that? Was State Line Road paved at this time?
- M: No, it was dirt. Not too long ago someone was telling me about Syme Street, and about some streets going off Syme Street. They said that I should remember that one. I don't remember talking about Syme Street and the streets leading off. I said, "I don't remember them."
- L: Did you know anybody that went into the C.C.C. [Civilian Conservation Corps]?
- M: Yes, that's another thing. Right catty-corner we used to have, it's still there, a great, big stone at the end of my yard. The little house next to the pizza shop, their yard comes down. Lina lived there. Her and I would always go through the little bit of valley, and go. Where did we get the bus at? We got it at Davis Street. Yes. No, we got it at Morgan's Store, Richie's Store; we got the bus there, at the corner Her brother, he didn't go on to high school; he went to the C.C.C. A lot of boys went, and it was good, very good. They just lived out, they had little camps. They cut down trees They went far away; they weren't around here. They got really good food. I forget how much they were paid, but they all liked that. They thought it was wonderful.
- L: They did?
- M: Then the fellows worked on the W.P.A. [Works Progress Administration] too. The C.C.C. for the young people, it was wonderful.
- L: People around here went?
- M: Yes, they all went.
- L: My Uncle John went.
- M: He went didn't he? I thought he did.

L: Yes, he was sent to Toledo my dad said.

M: I think he went out west somewhere if I remember. He used to send pictures home. Oh my, big forests, it was beautiful.

L: Did he send money home?

M: Yes, I think they had to.

L: Looking back, would you consider these the good old days, as some people refer to them?

M: As far as the people, I think they were so much better then than now.

Now I know that their name is Davises. Of course, we became quite close days ago, but they're going to move now. I'm going to really miss them. As far as the Davises are concerned, she works, he works, the kids go to school. The brother and wife live in the back and they have three little ones, but they don't even say hello; they don't say good-bye. Now when his mother lived there, she was a really good neighbor, but they're not. They just don't pay any attention to you. It's not that we're mad; we've never had any fights or anything, but they just go on with their business; they don't care whether you are here or there or what.

Now her, she has been there three years. Now she'll come out on the porch and she'll say, "Hello. How are you today? Are you doing anything," or "Do you want to go somewhere?" She asks me. I said, "No, I have an appointment at 2 00." She'll always say, "Do you want to go somewhere? We're going here, we're going there." I made my garden; they have a son that's fifteen, he dug up my garden for me. If I needed a nail hit on the wall, or anything in the house--Jimmy isn't good at stuff like that--that kid would come over. I never had such good neighbors; he would do anything for you.

L: That's what it was like during the Depression, except it was the whole neighborhood?

M: Yes, the whole neighborhood was like that. Now, you don't know your neighbors. One woman across the street, she's an old maid, and she has a sick sister that lives with her now and the other sister lives on Davis Street. They eat all their meals together, and they are lovely people.



Across from my aunt's house, they are new people and they don't speak to anyone. That's how the neighborhood is all the way down. Nobody bothers anybody. Is it like that with your mom? They're the same neighbors.

L: Yes, they had the same neighbors for a long time.

M: That's different. When you have them moving in and out . . .

L: Do you think times were safer then?

M: Oh yes. I could go out at night. Of course, a lot of times we used to play ball out in the front here. I would be the only girl; there were all boys in the neighborhood. We would have all these telephone poles for bases. Then we used to climb the trees. A girl, Farges, lived on Lucy Street. I would go up to her house at night, come home at night. There were some on Syme Street I went to school with. I would walk all the time.

L: Did you have street lights?

M: Yes, but no one was afraid. Now, I wouldn't even go around the corner.

L: Did you lock your house?

M: No, the doors were always open.

L: That's unusual.

M: Unless you go and get robbed. Now, when we go out, he closes every window in the house, locks every door. It is so hot when you come back, but he won't leave that window open.

L: Getting back to what you were doing during the Depression, you worked over in East Palestine. Then what happened after that?

M: I came back and went to work at Sharon Steel employment office.

L: Do you remember what year?

M: 1936. Yes, 1936 until 1946, because Jimmy was born that year. Then I quit, which was a big mistake. I should have taken a leave or something, and went back. Look at the pension I would have had.

L: You worked, then, in the employment office at Sharon Steel?

M: Yes.

L: What year were you married?

M: 1941. Is that right? Yes, I was married in 1941. I started at Sharon Steel in 1936. Yes, that's right. When I was younger I did a lot of things to pass time; I read a lot. Then my mother taught me embroidery and I did that. I never learned to knit.

L: Was there a library?

M: Yes, we would walk to Buhl Library. About two nights a week we would walk to Buhl Library to get books.

L: Was it free?

M: Free.

L: To anybody?

M: Yes.

L: Now, if you live in Ohio, you have to pay.

M: We didn't. Our address was Sharon, Pennsylvania. They didn't know the difference. We would meet boys going and coming to the library. That was a big deal to get out and look at the boys. They knew we were going to the library, but they didn't know what we were going for.

L: You came back with books?

M: We came back with books.

L: How do you think you might have benefited living through this time, even though it was hard times?

M: I was disappointed, though, Marilyn, because I wanted to go on to college, especially business college, and I couldn't go. I was very disappointed.

L: Your father just couldn't afford to send you?

M: No. When our Bill came along nine years later, he had the chance, but he didn't want it. Their finances were different then. I always resented my parents saying, "You couldn't have done that for me, but you were on the ball for your son."

- L: It just wasn't the right timing.
- M: It's just one of those things, it wasn't the right timing.
- L: Are there any ways that you might have benefited though?
- M: Well, I think I have a better outlook with people. You overlook a lot of things that some people, I think they would resent. I think I'm more broad-minded.
- L: Can you remember what people did that were unemployed?
- M: A lot of the fellows would play cards.
- L: Was there a lot of gambling?
- M: They didn't have it for money, they didn't have it. A bunch of them used to go down in to Sharon Steel. There were more railroads; they had the watchmen. They used to always go down there to play cards.
- L: Just to pass the time?
- M: Yes. I think some of them made home brew at home, and bottled it up and took it too.
- L: Oh yes. What would you do if a member of your family got sick at this time? Would the doctors come right to your home?
- M: Yes, because my brother was born at home and I was born at home on Syme Street. You never went to a hospital. No, the doctor would come to your home when you were sick.
- L: If you didn't have money, could you pay him by some other means?
- M: We didn't. It took a long time to pay a doctor bill because the income was so bad. We would pay a little bit each month. Whatever money they could scrape up they paid the doctor. Five dollars or ten dollars a month, it was very small.
- L: Did your family have a garden?
- M: Yes
- L: That helped?

M: Yes, we always canned

L: Your mother canned?

M: Oh my, we canned everything. People don't know about hard work, my mother did.

L: Did you have any pets or any animals?

M: Yes, we always had a little dog, and my mother had a couple of cats, too.

L: Did you have any chickens?

M: Yes, she always raised chickens, too. We would kill them every Sunday and have a chicken dinner, go out and kill one of the chickens.

L: Did you get your eggs from them?

M: Yes, yes we did.

L: Could you think of anything else you would like to add?

M: I think that would be it.

L: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW