

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Depression

Personal Experience

O H 1754

LIZ KLINE

Interviewed

by

Cynthia Marsh

on

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M This is an interview with Liz Kline for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Depression, by Cynthia Marsh, on November 18, 1995, at Mrs Kline's home, at 2 15 p m.

Can you tell me a little bit about your parents and where you grew up?

K I was born in Youngstown When I was a year old, my dad was made city engineer in Girard, Ohio, and we moved to Girard My mother played the piano pretty well

M Did your mom ever work at all that you remember?

K She used to love to work in the public library in Girard She did that off and on when they needed extra help or something Other than that, no My brother was two years old when we moved up there, and I was one year old About five years later, another brother arrived So she was pretty busy [laughter]

M: Can you tell me a little bit more about your father's job as engineer?

K He did all the surveys of the community around and about, and surrounding areas all over around Girard, Youngstown, Niles, and Warren if anybody needed a survey He laid out most of the roads in Girard There were not that many when we moved there The things he did, it takes about two or three engineers to do now

M Wow

K He laid out and engineered and built the big swimming pool they have and the bridge in Girard that goes to McDonald He surveyed and engineered that, designed it When you are growing up with your family, you are really the last to know all the things the family does and to appreciate I just remember him tramping in all kinds of weather He surveyed all this land through here, right where I live here now on Wildfern, all of the big mansions up there He laid out all these lots Booth Property it was called then

M That is very interesting During the Depression, how was your father's job affected?

K. He was paid by the government taxes that people paid, and he was a civil servant When people could not pay their taxes, he did not get paid So he would come home with all kinds of produce from surrounding farms. Other than that, there just was not anything I can remember What would I have been? About ten or eleven, something like that My mother was a very good cook, so

she could do things with a little bit of food that maybe a lot of women could not do. I can remember I never liked to eat much. So, naturally, I was nice and skinny so it did not bother me. [laughter] I am not now. She would make wonderful vegetable soup, and we would have that and this bread. Many meals we just had maybe one or two things. There were people that fared a lot worse than we did. Our next door neighbors, I cannot think where he was employed. It might have been in the mill. He was German. He was from Germany. Daddy would bring things home, and we would share whatever he had with them. My dad had a wonderful sense of humor. So I never remember being real sad about it, just that we were very aware of it and that we just could not buy things. As I said to you before, the two things you were lucky if you had a grocery store or sold shoes. You really needed something on your feet and something in your stomach. With that in mind, you could make do with old clothes. You could mend them, but shoes are a little difficult for the average layman to do much with.

M Do you remember a lot of families being on relief?

K Oh, yes. The one friend I had, her father was not a dentist, but he made teeth. He made false teeth. They always seemed to have a little more than we did because people, I guess, need teeth, too, when you get right down to it. [laughter] They were pretty well off, but the rest of my friends did not have that much either. Their fathers would try to find work anywhere they could. I never thought much about that. A lot of the fathers, I really did not know what they did because you really did not talk about what your father did that much. Except, my dad was rather prominent because everybody knew him.

M Right

K I remember her father, we used to kid about him making teeth. He had his own little studio, and he had a place where he worked. Of course, the people would get toothaches and need things done, so the dentist was pretty well off. I had one friend whose father was a dentist. He was our family dentist. When you were a child, you kind of rolled with the punch in this sort of stuff as children do everywhere all the time, except that I was very aware of it.

M. What did you do for entertainment? Did you go to the movies a lot with your friends?

K Yes. We would go to the movies when we were hungry. My mother and dad would say, "Well, we can afford to send them to the movies because at least while they are there they are not hungry." I can remember them discussing that, whether to spend the money on a movie or not. They decided that it made the

time go faster, and you just did not think that much about it. I think they were more worried about our reaction to it, my brothers and myself. They were more worried about how we reacted to it than, really, we were worried about it. I do remember that

M Do you remember any of FDR's [Franklin Deleanor Roosevelt] relief programs? I know that you had mentioned your father helped with public works projects

K Yes, I remember PWA. But my dad did not think much about them because he said one man would be digging and five men would be leaning on shovels. So he was not real pleased with it. He did not think it was all that great.

M Can you describe your home a little bit to me, the house you grew up in during the Depression?

K Yes. It was like a bungalow-type home. I had my own bedroom downstairs, and my dad had refinished. The upstairs had never been refinished, and he refinished that. He was great with wood working. He made a lamp, and he made a beautiful big desk. The boys, my brothers, were all upstairs, kind of like a dormitory thing. There were just the two bedrooms downstairs and a bath, a big living room, big dining room, big kitchen. But it was a nice house. It does not look that large from the outside. Some of these houses, when you walk in, it is bigger than you assume it is from looking at it from the outside. It had nice all natural oak wood inside. It was a nice house. It got to be a little small, finally. By the time we all got to bickering about how small it was, my brothers and I were off to college. My youngest brother was kind of a surprise to my mother, and Phillip was the only one left home, still living at home. So he did not really mind it.

M Do you ever recall any times where you had to go without electricity or food for the night?

K No. We did not get quite that bad. Of course, my dad owed everybody. Everybody owed everybody and tried to pay them back the best way you knew how, just like my dad was paid. The lights were never out, and we had a coal furnace. My dad would go and a friend of his, they would get a truck and go down and bring up the coal themselves. We would go to bed at night, though, and I can remember now the house would be cold. It would be really cold when we got up because I can remember my dad would bank the coal. I used to go down and shovel coal. I had a fight with my brother once, and threw one of his games into the furnace when I was shoveling the coal to get back at him. [laughter] The utilities, as I can remember, all stayed on. I do not know how, but they did.

M: I have heard a lot of stories about neighbors being very generous. They would make a big pot of soup. Did your mother do this a lot, or do you remember any neighbors being overly friendly and making sure that the neighbors had enough?

K: Yes, we did. My mother did. She would cook up big batches of soup, and I suppose she gave some to the neighbors. I did not pay that much attention. I know we were always helping the Timmerman's out because they were in bad shape. Luckily, they only had the one child. He just did not have any money at all. He had no way of getting. I think my dad finally got him a job on a trash collection truck or something like that.

M: That is interesting. What was your first memory of the Depression, the first thing that really just sticks in your mind?

K: I do not really remember anything. It was kind of gradual to me. It was not any one day we had the money, and the next day there was not any. It just kind of dawned on me that, I cannot do this and I cannot buy this and I do not have money to run down. When we lived in Girard, every Saturday we would all go down to eat. My friends and I would go down and have a soda or something at the drug store and just hop around like a bunch of girls do, go to the movies once in a while. Everybody just kind of quit. It just kind of faded away, and that was when it kind of dawned on me that things were not the way they always were. That is about the only thing I can say. I would want clothes that I could not have.

M: Do you remember ever getting any hand me downs from relatives or neighbors or anything?

K: Well, my mother sewed a lot, and I had an aunt, really not my aunt, just a close friend of the family's. She was wonderful at sewing. I hated them at the time, but I had a lot of what I call homemade clothes. I admired my friends because they all bought their clothes ready made. When I look back now, my clothes were so pretty and so beautifully made, and theirs were cheap clothing from just wherever they got them. When I would go to school, I would stay over across the street with my one friend, and I would talk her into wearing some of my clothes if she would let me wear hers. My mother used to get so angry about it [laughter] I just loved hers. My mother always made homemade ice cream, and I hated that. There was nothing better than an Isaly's ice cream cone compared to my mother's homemade ice cream. Now, I look back on it and think, "How stupid can kids be?" Here are these beautiful clothes I had made for me, and I had this same lady, my Aunt Alice. Her sister lived in New York, and she would sew for these wealthy families. She would bring me dresses and things from there, and they were beautiful. When I went away to college, I had all these

gorgeous handmade clothes and these dresses from New York that my Aunt Alice would make over to fit me. I had quite a wardrobe when I went to college.

M: Wow. How nice. You mentioned earlier that your father received produce as a form of payment. What else did he receive as payment instead of cash?

K: Well, this one Thanksgiving, he brought home a live turkey, a huge big turkey. My mother said, "You are not bringing that thing into this house." He said, "Well, it is this or we do not have any turkey for Thanksgiving." So he tied him down in the basement. You came in the basement staircase to go down to the basement or up to the kitchen. He thought he had the turkey pretty well tied down in the basement. I suppose one of my brothers sneaked down maybe and loosened him or something. We left one of the doors open, and out went the turkey. We are chasing him across the field because across from us was this big farm, and then up onto Churchill Road there was a little restaurant. My dad swears for about a month they specialized in turkey dinners because they caught the turkey and ate him. [laughter] We never did have him.

M: Oh, no.

K: That was funny.

M: Can you tell me a little bit about your college?

K: I went to Kent State.

M: I am interested because I feel that it was a period in history where a lot of women were not going off to college. They were staying home or working in the factories because of World War II. I find it interesting that you went off to college.

K: I was interested in art. What I should have done and I did not do and I did not have a say in it, really. I should have gone to an art school like New York or Pittsburgh or Cleveland or something. My cousin was at Kent State, so my mother and dad thought it was far enough away and there was somebody there. So I went to Kent State. When I got there, they did not have an art course, but you could get a lot of art classes if you took education. So that is why I took art education. Needless to say, I loved it. I did not care about anything but my art classes. The only thing I did really well in was art. Then, of course, the first year or two you do not get to take the classes you want. I had seen a lot of college pictures. So my first year I just bounced around and went out on dates, and I had the best time of my life. I did not even buy books to half my classes. Most of them I did not even go to because I did not think it was necessary. I just did

not get the picture, really I was just free, and it was wonderful So they called me in and said, "You either buckle down and get to work and buy your books and get to class, or you are out of here " I thought, "If my parents hear that, I am dead " They did hear So I had to be monitored, and I had to sit in the library the whole first year and study so many hours

M: Oh, wow

K After that things smoothed out I caught on to the idea you had to go to class and buy books and study. As time went on, I got better and better I graduated with a 3.0, which is not too bad, and I did practice teaching up there in the school It is interesting I got further in and had all the art classes and sculpting and stuff I really loved it It was great So it is probably just as well I went there I do not know If I had it to do over, I would go to an art school I would not have gone to Kent State

M When you were in college, did you notice a huge enrollment of females at the time?

K No When I was there, the first year I went was the first year Kent State was a state school. My cousin was there Of course, she was involved in a sorority, which I never really cared about I just thought there was just about an even amount of males and females There might have been more boys maybe, but I would be guessing if I said that It did not seem like a preponderance of boys to me

M You mentioned earlier that your brothers went to college also So your father was paying for two of you in college?

K By then, of course, things were easing up a little bit. When was the Depression over? I have no idea

M I always looked at it as 1940 or 1941

K My brother, Brooks, went to Michigan, and he worked while he was there I worked part-time at school, too. I decorated a couple of windows in the town in a couple of village stores, and I did lettering and stuff at the dime store a couple nights a week But my brother had a harder time because he went from a small Girard school to Michigan, and he was not mature enough to handle it very well He just had a terrible time He wanted to join a fraternity, and my dad could not afford it Kids in college do not understand if you cannot belong He worked up there part-time, but I do not what he did. He started out in medical school and then went in the army When he came out, he was too old to pursue it, so he

went into science research. He got a lot of awards and research grants and all that kind of thing.

M. So your dad paid, and he did not take out any loans or anything?

K. I think he did. I am pretty sure he did, and I think he let his insurance lapse. When I went to school, I think that I remember hearing him and my mother. That was another thing. The insurance men would come to the door, and my mother and dad desperately wanted to keep up their insurance. They would just pay him like 50 cents or a dollar or a quarter or something, whatever they could do just to hang on to that insurance. They did not want to lose it. I think he used part of it to help my brother, borrowed on it to help my brother with college.

M. Did your family ever have a car or any vehicle?

K. My dad had a car. At one point, I think they possessed it, or whatever the legal term is for that, to pay some bills, and we finally got it back. I do not really remember the details, just that the car was there for a while, then it was not there, and then it was back. I am not quite sure what that all involved.

M. Looking back now and thinking about the Depression, do you think that it was a terrible time for your family or you just made it and you really do not think about it?

K. Well, at the time it seemed terrible only when it came up to something personal with me. As far as people helping people, sharing their food and things, that is never bad. Any disaster that brings people together, there is always a good side to it. People are more aware of each other and that they are all suffering from the same thing. To help each other is what it is all about. I did not think it was terrible. It was just something we had to all live through. I am kind of an optimist where I always think things are going to get better. It has to get better.

M. Can you think of anything else you would like to add, any stories about the Depression?

K. Outside of the old turkey we lost, that is about it [laughter]

M. Thank you very much for the interview.

K. Okay. Thank you.

End of Interview