

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

The 1930 Depression Years Project

Personal Experience

O.H. 963

MRS. REX E. LYNDON

Interviewed

by

Maribeth Harry

on

May 17, 1976

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: MRS. REX E. LYNDON

INTERVIEWER: Maribeth Harry

SUBJECT: Games, inflation, unions, Will Rogers, Isley's Dairy

DATE: May 17, 1976

H: This is an interview with Mrs. Rex E. Lyndon for the Youngstown State University Project, on Youngstown in the 1930 Depression Years, by Maribeth Harry, at 406 South Main, on May 17, 1976, at 12:00 p.m.

L: I was born and reared in Lorain County. I was married in 1916. My husband and I were very pleased, because he got what we thought was a real nice job at the National Tube Company in Lorain. Of course, as the hard times began to show up, they began to talk about reducing operations in the mill. He had a buddy, another turn foreman. I was so naive that I thought that we were established for life. I remember talking with the men about it saying, "Well, they never could get along without you fellows." They said, "That is what you think!" We learned the hard way when they were reduced to one, two, or possibly three days a week, which made a tremendous difference in our income.

But, we carried on. We had a simple social life. We had a mortgage on our property which, of course, we had to make arrangements for at the bank. They were very lenient with us. We have learned to practice petty economies, and we take pleasure in very simple things. However, we continued to have formal dances. I remember one petty economy I had was that I learned to do my husband's dress shirts almost as professionally as they

did at the laundry. My girlfriends and I learned that we could sew far better than we ever anticipated. We made hook rugs and braided rugs out of that material that we were able to get at garage sales, not really garage sales. They weren't in vogue yet. But, we somehow accomplished getting them.

When I look back on the Depression years, I remember them very pleasantly. We did learn to do simple things and get great enjoyment out of them making pretension of doing these and more. Is there anything else you would like to ask about?

H: Yes, I would like to know what you remember about your parents and your family?

L: Well, I was reared on a farm. I attended a rural school.

H: A one-room school?

L: Yes, it was a one-room school. My father was always a farmer. He had a large farm here in Oberlin near the college. So, I spent my early childhood on the farm until I moved to Elyria.

H: And then, you moved in to Youngstown?

L: We moved to Youngstown in 1935.

H: Tell me something about your childhood, the games you played.

L: I think we just went out and took pleasure in Breeze's butchering. I have many snapshots of hanging around while the men were butchering. My mother would always save the fetters of the pigs back then. I don't know whether young people know that you could have a lot of fun. It is like a bean ball. We would play ball with it. Of course, after a while it had to be just full of stones. We did several things. I admit I don't recall doing anything. . . . Of course, I was only about nine years old when I left the farm and moved to Elyria. So then, our life was just like an average town.

H: What was your favorite candy? Do you remember, lico-rice?

L: No, but I can remember that we had what we called a butcher. He came with a horse and truck. He always gave my brother and me a wiener.

H: Oh, my goodness.

L: I think it was once or twice a week, and that was the big deal when he would come. We would look forward to him, and my mother would buy whatever she needed. Of course, on the farm, why, you could slaughter your animals, and you had eggs and chickens and that sort of thing. So, you didn't have to buy too much from hucksters.

H: How did you keep things under refrigeration then?

L: There were icehouses.

H: Was it large?

L: It was as big as a small shed. They kept the ice with sawdust. They would bring out of sawdust. I don't think my father cut the ice. I think he bought it from someone and then stored it in this icehouse.

H: How long would that last?

L: It would last pretty well through the winter.

H: What about the summer?

L: Well, I mean we put it in. It could last, oh, not until time for the next piece. I don't know. We always kept things pretty cold. Of course, we had a cold room where lots of things were. . . . For instance, pies were made. We made pies. If you made one cattle pie, well, you made five probably. You could keep going, because it was cold enough.

H: Tell me, you did mention that your schools were rural schools. How many classes were. . . . It was a one-room school, didn't you say?

L: Yes. I don't know. I loved that school. I started when I was five years old. You would have to walk about a mile and a half. I got tired, and the teacher always put me down for a nap on what they called a recitation bench down in front of the school. I had a little nap in the afternoon, and of course, we always had recess. The children all went out for a period, to play and get a little fresh air.

H: What would be your school day, from what time? Do you remember?

L: No, I don't. I presume, though, that it was eight.

H: Until four o'clock.

L: Yes, probably four o'clock.

H: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

L: I had one brother.

H: Oh, two in the family.

L: Yes.

H: And what was your father, then? His profession was farming?

L: That is right.

H: His whole entire. . . ?

L: Yes.

H: Then, you only remember the farm more, then.

L: Yes.

H: Then, you moved into Youngstown in 1935, so the Depression was still. . . .

L: We were still feeling hard times, then.

H: Do you remember the soup kitchen?

L: No, but I worked for the Red Cross. I volunteered for the Red Cross doing the dispensing of flour every week. Twice a week, I worked at a central location, and we dispensed flour.

H: To people that would come?

L: Needy people.

H: How much would you probably give to a family?

L: I think probably five pounds. It is not too clear in my mind.

H: What did you think of President Hoover?

L: I don't think I can say. I guess I wasn't politically minded then. Wasn't he the one that talked about the chicken. . . . I'm not sure where that originated from.

H: What did you think of FDR [Franklin D. Roosevelt] and his New Deal? Social security did come out under FDR? Were you pleased?

L: Well, a lot of people were very skeptical of social

security, because they felt that it just wouldn't work, that the first ones who participated in it would lose their money.

H: I'm sure you probably remember the run on the banks.

L: Yes.

H: Did that affect you, personally?

L: It affected my family. I always felt very proud that I had an uncle who was the head of the Lorain Banking Company in Lorain. He was always considered a very tough man to deal with. He profited by it, because his was the only bank in Lorain County that wasn't closed because he was secure. He had never given loans that weren't safe, so the bank was solvent.

H: That is interesting, because many weren't. Did you find in your future years that you doubted the banks, the credibility?

L: No.

H: Many people did. I mean, if they were putting their money in their mattresses. . . .

L: I think maybe, I didn't ever have so much money to be concerned about.

H: Now, Ruby, I know that you have always been interested in antiques; and I have known that you have dealt with antiques, selling and buying. When did this begin?

L: Well, I inherited some things, and I guess I just had a genuine affection for old things. The older I got, the more I became intrigued with family things and valued them more highly.

H: Do you remember about the year when you actually were selling?

L: I started in 1915 to have a little shop in my home, which started out in an exchange shop. People brought their things, and I sold them on a commission basis.

H: I see. As I remember your home, you still lived in your home, then. Tell me, were you aware of sections called Hoovervilles during the Depression?

L: No. Is that local?

H: No, it was national. They just named them after the people who lost everything who tended to migrate.

L: That was just as bad at home.

H: What do you find that has changed the most today from 1935 until 1976? What is it that you find is the greatest change or changes since then?

L: Oh, I think the inflation of prices and of salaries probably have been more noticeable. It seems like everything is just completely out of reason, priced that way. I attribute that a great deal to the unions.

H: Your husband. . . .

L: I must say I'm not in favor of unions.

H: When your husband began to work, there were no unions.

L: Yes, well, when he started. But. . . .

H: When you were married.

L: Unions cause a great deal of trouble in industry. No man, superintendent, foreman, or anything is a free man. They are always subject to disapproval by the union. They are a buffer between the workman and the union, and most men in any capacity liked being a foreman. They don't belong in the unions. My husband never belonged to the union, but he was always a buffer between the men. [He was] trying to get out production and trying to hurry the men, so they wouldn't worry about converting and that sort of thing.

H: I see. Were there a lot of pressures on him to belong to a union?

L: No.

H: Today it tends to almost be impossible. There is so much peer pressure.

L: Peer and management though.

H: Peer and management.

L: I thought.

H: What time did your husband go to work when you were first married? What was his work day?

L: Well, I think he had to be at work at seven, because he left the house at six. It was a long walk to the trolley to get himself to the South Lorain Riversdale Mill's River.

H: Then, do you remember when he came home?

L: It was not an eight hour day. I'm sure it was a longer day than that. I don't remember anything about that.

H: Do you remember, maybe was he on hourly wages?

L: After the first number of years, then they finally gave him a salary.

H: Do you remember, maybe approximately. . . .

L: After I talked to you I was trying to remember what our income was, but I know that once [back then] I had one dream that, if my husband ever made \$250 a month, that would put us on easy street.

H: You mentioned inflation. Can you remember what has really been inflated, a product for example, perhaps Coca Cola?

L: Well, I can figure bread. George Old sold wonderful bread for \$.05 a loaf.

H: Now, it is some \$.60 a loaf.

L: And milk.

H: Do you remember what that was. . . .

L: Oh, I think we used to pay \$.10 a quart, but I couldn't swear to that.

H: The milkman, has he been around. . . ? Has that pack-
age delivery been around?

L: I used to have my milk delivered by a milk truck, until I moved to Poland in 1941. I had my milk delivered.

H: You mentioned that you were in Youngstown in 1935, and where. . . .

L: I moved to Poland in 1941.

H: Then, where did you live in Youngstown?

L: On the Northside, on Alameda Avenue.

H: Then, you moved to Poland. Looking back, what changes would you like to see?

L: Oh, general things.

H: Anything particular that stands out in your mind?

L: I can't think of anything. I suppose I will after you

have gone.

H: It is more or less a transition, I believe.

L: That's right.

H: Now, tell me, about Isley's. I have always been interested in it. Were you familiar with the Isley's?

L: Well, of course, it was quite an innovation when they first started. You could go in and buy ham, milk, ice cream, cottage cheese, and everything. I guess we have all become accustomed to it. It is just one of the modern things.

H: Was he. . . . Was that . . . more or less in the area?

L: I think Isley's were about the first firm to have their stores, at least in this community.

H: They sure were. Do you remember Fred Allen?

L: Fred Allen.

H: On the radio.

L: Yes.

H: Do you remember him?

L: Yes.

H: Tell me a little bit about him?

L: I don't know. I can think more of cowboy, Hoot Gibson.

H: I remember Tim McCoy.

L: He was killed in an airplane accident.

H: Oh, Will Rogers. . . .

L: Will Rogers. I always liked to read his things in the paper. He made some wise sayings.

H: Can you remember any of his sayings?

L: No.

H: I remember reading him. I always liked him too, but I don't know.

L: I recall being on a vacation. We went into a filling station to get gas. The attendant said, "Will Rogers

was killed." I was just. . . . I felt terribly shocked. I thought, "What a loss!"

H: Okay, Ruby, tell me about how you feel about the family structure, when you had children and with your grandchildren today, the difference?

L: I think it is a sort of unhappy comparison to me. My observation of families anymore, it seems to me that parents are not in control. The young people are running the world. They seem to have the attitude that they have lived and that they have experienced everything which naturally they all know that their parents experienced probably more. To me, it is regrettable that there is not more of a better family relationship. I feel that there will be like a cyclone. I think it will return where the parents have more influence on children.

H: Do you know what I have noticed? There has been a revival in interest in old things. I remember when I was young at twelve years old that, if a person . . . some of the homes in Canfield. . . . People said, "What a dump." These people. . . . Now, these homes are so valued. They are the bicentennial homes, and I have noticed this. I hope that it will maybe go into the family unit also. Do you think?

L: Well, in my family it has. Most of my grandchildren all seem to have a great interest and affection for the old things that our family has carried over.

H: I hope so, because today there is such apathy. I have noticed. . . .

L: I think that young people are, at least the ones that I happen to know. . . . I can't think of these hippies being particularly interested in old things. But, in homes with some culture, I'm sure there is a renewed and a revived interest in things that have been brought down in from family.

H: You know, I have always been interested. They say that appearance, the dress length is going to be short. It has been long for so many years. Can you tell me how it has changed from your early married years? What was the length? Was it mid-calf? Was it long?

L: I think it was mid-calf.

H: And then, where did it go? Did it go up or down?

L: Well, in the 1920's it went up.

H: In the 1920's. . . . Oh, tell me about the roaring

twenties.

L: I don't think I'm qualified.

H: You weren't a flapper?

L: I never was that type. My husband and I enjoyed good music. Now, who is this orchestra leader who comes to Idora now that is so popular?

H: Oh, not Dorsey. The big band.

L: Yes.

H: Guy Lombardo?

L: Guy Lombardo. He is playing the same thing now. That sort of music is what my family has always enjoyed.

H: What about Rudy Valley?

L: Well, I remember him.

H: Did you like him?

L: Yes, I did.

H: Who was the one that sang with the, "Boo, boo?" no, not Rudolph Valentino.

L: He didn't sing; he was an actor.

H: You witnessed the talkies and the silent movies. Tell me about them.

L: Well, of course, we used to go to the movies and get great enjoyment out of it. Not a word was spoken. You just drew your own conclusion or color, I mean.

H: What was the price of a movie?

L: I think it was like \$.10 or \$.15 on a Saturday afternoon for the youngsters. I'm sure it wasn't over \$.25 at night.

H: It was much different than now. I heard that Youngstown used to be a wide open town. Do you feel. . . ?

L: I don't know, because I didn't have an occasion to experience that. I don't think. It would give more movement to work. It was on that kind of basis.

H: How many children did you have?

L: One, just a son.

H: Do you know what has always been of interest to me? Now, there is dog food; there is cat food; everything in the market is for animals now. Was it this way, say, when you were twenty-five?

L: No, the dogs ate what was left from the table.

H: Do you remember when that became popular? I don't.

L: No, I don't, but then again, I think about all the money people spent for the care of their lawns. We never used to buy lawn fertilizer and weed killer. I always think of it, and yet it seems that we always had lovely green grass.

H: When television came, were you glad it was here?

L: I don't know what to say about that. I still am not a great television fan. I would rather read than watch some poor thing on television.

H: So would I, but now the children always watch television. They would rather do that than read, many children, I think. Is there anything else you would like to add?

L: I think that is about it.

H: Okay, we'll go out to lunch now. Thank you so much.

END OF INTERVIEW