

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Great Depression Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 366

BELL GUTHRIDGE AND JESSIE JONES

Interviewed

by

Jean Jones

on

July 17, 1974

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Great Depression Project

INTERVIEWEES: BELL GUTHRIDGE AND JESSIE JONES

INTERVIEWER: Jean Jones

SUBJECT: Presidents Hoover and Roosevelt, CCC, NPA, Mill Creek Park, Politics, Steel Mill Strike, Stock Market Crash, Mayor Oles

DATE: July 17, 1974

JEA: This is an interview with Jessie Jones and Bell Guthridge for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Depression by Jean Jones on July 17, 1974.

Did you lose your job because of the Depression, and if so, did you become unemployed, and how long were you out of work?

JES: My husband was out of work. He lost his job through the Depression and he was out of work for about two years.

G: No, I can truthfully say that my husband wasn't out of work. He helped others that we have in our family and our neighbors and we did the best we could to help those that weren't as fortunate as we were.

JEA: Did you know many people out of work?

JES: Yes, very many people.

G: They were depressed somewhat. I think they couldn't help but be when they had families, and we all had young families at that time. All we could do was help those that needed our help. I'm thankful to say that we were able to.

JEA: How about you?

JES: I think most people were in the same boat. Most people were in this Depression, not all, but most of them.

G: Most of them didn't have the work.

JES: Didn't have the work to go to.

JEA: How did people out of work feel about accepting welfare?

G: I think they were glad they were being helped. Don't you Jessie?

JES: Yes, they had to be helped, especially if they had little kids.

JEA: Do you know of any local projects that were designed to help people out of work?

JES: Yes, the WPA, it was roadwork for men

G: It was roadwork for men that were glad to get any kind of work at that time. Every little bit counted, especially if they had families.

JEA: There were the ration corps and the Mill Creek Park one too. Did you know any people that worked at Mill Creek or on the CCC?

G: Yes, they worked down in Mill Creek Park.

JEA: What did you feel was the main cause of the Depression?

JES: I don't know what it was.

G: It would be connected with the government in some way, not buying or selling. In fact, people didn't have the money to buy things.

JEA: Do you feel the president at that time had something to do with it?

G: Who was the president?

JES: Hoover.

G: Yes, I think so.

JEA: A lot of people from other recordings said what they felt about the president at this time.

JES: They didn't feel good about him because we were in the Depression for a long time.

JEA: What view did people take of the state government's efforts to relieve the Depression, the federal government's and the city's?

- G: I think the men were willing to go out and do anything at that time, especially if they had families. They didn't make a great deal, but every little bit helped.
- JEA: What individuals did you think were blamed for the Depression?
- JES: I don't know who was to blame at that time.
- G: Hoover.
- JEA: How about a comparison between the state that our government is in now to the Depression, do you think we're heading for another depression?
- G: No, I'm not going to think that way. I won't accept that. I think our government is above having that happen to our country. I don't think it is good for something like that to happen to a country as good as ours is right now.
- JEA: Okay, but there are a lot of problems.
- G: I know that.
- JES: There's a lot of talk about it, sure. There is a lot of talk about depression right now. We'll have to wait and see.
- JEA: What did people think of Hoover during the Depression, and then as Roosevelt took over right after?
- G: Not being a Democrat, of course, and my husband wasn't a Democrat--they were all Republicans at that time, not all, but most--I thought it was terrible for our country to have to go into something like that.
- JEA: Do you think Roosevelt did more than Hoover because people seemed to praise Roosevelt more?
- JES: I think Roosevelt helped to take it out.
- G: I believe so.
- JEA: The people praised him more. How did people feel about what was happening around the world at that time, such as the rise of Hitler, or didn't they hear the news much?
- G: We didn't get the news like we do now. Do you think we did Jessie?
- JES: No, we didn't.

G: No, not so much. People weren't up on it like they are now.

JES: We didn't get the news like we get today. We didn't know what was going on in Russia or anywhere. We know everything now, but then we didn't know anything. It was all kept quiet.

JEA: Did you get the Vindicator?

JES: Yes.

JEA: Some people bought one Vindicator and shared it with the block.

JES: The Telegram and the Vindicator, they had two papers then. He would buy it and then pass it to someone else.

JEA: Could you tell us where he worked?

G: Sheet & Tube.

JEA: How much money did he make?

G: I don't remember.

JEA: Was it five dollars a week?

G: No, my husband made bigger money than that.

JES: It was a lot less money then.

JEA: How about the strike, do you remember the steel strike?

G: Yes, my husband had to stay in the mill then, too.

JEA: He did?

G: Yes, because he was general foreman. The heads like that had to stay right in. He looked terrible when he got back home because I think they were in for over a month.

JES: They were out for quite a while.

G: Yes, they were. The heads had to stay right in the mills though.

JEA: They were there the whole time?

G: Oh yes, they were there all the time.

JEA: What did people think about the Democratic party during

this period and the Republican party, or didn't they exactly share their feelings?

G: We were always Republican. Jack Fleets family were Democrats, definitely were Democrats. They blamed the Depression and everything else on the Republicans. The family did not agree at that point.

JEA: Were there any times during the Depression when people seemed to think things got better or they were getting better?

JES: Yes. We were all hoping for it to get better anyway. We were all praying for it to get better.

JEA: When did you think that it would get better?

JES: When they started taking the men back into the works we knew that something was going to happen. They would take a few at a time until they got all of them back.

JEA: Your husband worked at United?

JES: Yes, and he did engineering.

JEA: What did people feel about the Stock Market Crash, or weren't they involved?

JES: We weren't involved in that because we didn't have any money in there. It affected a lot of people, yes, and a lot of people lost whole savings in those things.

JEA: Again, about the strike, were people reluctant to go on the strike or did they feel that it was necessary?

JES: No, they didn't feel it was necessary. They didn't want to go on the strike. The little people didn't want to go on the strike, it was the higher-ups that were putting . . .

JEA: Do you think it was the union?

JES: I don't know if there was a union then or not.

G: I don't think there was.

JES: Bigger men would put the strike on; I don't know if it was the union or not.

JEA: Were there any people who discovered surprising ways of making a living during this time, any people that you know?

- G: People that I knew were glad to go out and do anything, especially if they had children.
- JEA: Such as what, selling apples?
- G: Selling anything that they could get.
- JES: They also went out and cleaned houses, and freshened rugs, and landscaping to have a dollar a day at that time.
- JEA: How many hours a day did he work?
- JES: He worked all day. A dollar an hour was as much as he got for landscaping. He would bring that home and pay the gas and electric. We had to have some light and we had to pay that.
- JES: Did you know anyone who was able to start a small business during this time?
- G: No, I didn't know anybody at that time. I think they were all in the same boat.
- JEA: Do you know anyone who became a hobo?
- JES: The younger folks might have, but, of course, our boys were little at that time; we didn't have older kids then.
- JEA: Did they stay in school during this time?
- JES: They stayed in school, yes.
- JEA: Were there a lot of people who let their children stay in school or did some let them go out to work?
- JES: Most of them went to school because they were fed. There was flour given away and there were things that you could get from welfare. The children didn't starve, they had enough to eat. I don't think anybody starved, do you Bell?
- G: No. Those that did work were helping other people.
- JEA: Do you remember the grocery stores that the government sponsored during this time? How supplied were the grocery stores? Were the prices lower so that you could afford?
- JES: The government gave us the flour.
- G: They gave a lot of things away.

JES: There were places that we could go and pick those groceries up. If you didn't have anything at all in the house they would see that you got something.

JES: Where was this at?

JEA: At Welfare down in Youngstown.

JEA: Down at the courthouse?

G: Yes.

JEA: If people had regular jobs, what did they do in their spare time?

G: My husband would help other people because he had a job. I had to help my family, my sister; she had three little ones and her husband was out of work. He was down at United.

JES: They were out for a long time. We shared with all of them. I'm glad that we could share, believe me, because it was a pitiful time, it really was.

JEA: Did you have gardens?

G: Yes, they did. People that had lots that they weren't using would give them to people that wanted to have a garden because that would provide something for them.

JES: The government would give them seeds to put in the garden, like onion seeds and all that.

JEA: Your husband had a job, was he able to save any money during this time?

G: No, we didn't save any money because we helped others with what we had. They weren't making money like they do now anyway, not at that time.

JEA: Did you know other people who had jobs? Were they able to save any money?

G: No, the people that I knew, most of them were out of work. It was a depression that affected very many people. Those that weren't affected were usually kind enough to help others.

JEA: What did you think about the district banks?

B: I don't know, I didn't have that much money.

JEA: Were they closed down?



JES: I think they did close there for a while, didn't they?

G: It seems to me that they did.

I never want to see another one like that again for any of you young folks. I don't think it will.

JEA: I hope not. How did families try and get extra money? You said odd jobs, anything else?

G: Anything they could find they would go out and do. They would get very little for it.

JEA: How about on Wick Avenue, did your husband work there?

JES: Yes, he did.

JEA: Do you remember any of the people's names that had money?

JES: Wicks, and there was another family, I don't remember their name. It was a big home, my husband took me there one time.

JEA: They were the millionaires of this time?

G: They had money and I suppose they did a lot for welfare and everybody.

JES: Who were the other people up there?

G: I lived on the north side, do you mean me?

JES: Yes, I mean you.

JEA: Were women and girls encouraged to go out and get jobs?

G: There weren't many jobs to be had at that time.

JEA: What were the jobs that they would find?

JES: Housework, cleaning, servants.

G: And they got very little pay.

JES: A dollar a day is as much as they had. I went out and cleaned for one dollar a day.

JEA: How about the boys at this time, the young men, where did they find jobs?

JES: They couldn't find jobs; there were no jobs to be found at that time. The only thing they would do was walk the streets and clean to go in the grocery stores.

JEA: Did many young people tend to leave home during the Depression?

G: I don't think so.

JES: Ours were too young to go.

G: I don't know what they would leave home for, they were affected all over.

JEA: To look for jobs.

JES: Oh yes, to go to other cities, yes.

G: Yes, but the Depression was all over.

JES: It was all over, yes. They would go from one place to another to look for jobs.

JEA: Do you think that family life improved through the suffering of the Depression, people became closer together?

JES: Yes, we did get closer together.

JEA: More than now?

JES: Yes, more than now. Right now you don't know your neighbors hardly.

G: Yes, they got closer together all right.

JEA: Do you remember church attendance during this time?

JES: Church attendance was very poor at that time.

JEA: Why do you think this was, because people were too busy trying to survive?

JES: Yes. People didn't have money to go to church.

G: Everybody didn't have cars then like they do now.

JES: They would have to walk.

JES: How many people do you think completed their schooling during the Depression? Do you think more young people dropped out of school to find jobs?

JES: Yes, I would say more people dropped out of school to go get jobs.

G: Even meager little jobs so that they made a little bit.

JEA: Do you know any parents that felt that their children should go to school to a certain time and then drop out and find a job?

JES: I think a lot of families did that.

G: Any of them were glad to get some little thing to do. I hope we never go through anything like that again.

JEA: Do you remember kids as being generally more independent or less independent during this time?

G: I don't know what they would have to be independent for, they didn't have that much.

JEA: Did you think they were independent of their parents or more dependent on their parents?

JES: More dependent on their parents. They were different then than what they are today.

JEA: How did people feel about the laws during this time? Did they obey them, respect them?

JES: Yes, we did obey them.

G: More so than they do now.

JEA: Do you think there was any decline in law and order through this period, more or less, like stealing?

G: I don't remember that, do you Jessie?

JES: No.

G: It's not like you hear about things now. People were closer together then. That Depression brought people and families closer together. They all wanted to help each other.

JES: That's right.

JEA: Do you remember people's feelings about paying the income tax and the federal personal income tax that began in the 1930's?

G: They didn't have that during the Depression.

JES: There were no taxes then.

JEA: Were veteran organizations active during the Depression?

JES: Yes.

JEA: What kind of things did they do?

JES: In the Depression there were different British War vets who would meet, and different organizations would meet at that time. We did anyway, because I remember going to them.

G: Your husband was a British War veteran.

JES: Yes. We kept that up and that was in the Depression.

JEA: Were women's organizations active during the Depression?

G: Not quite as active.

JES: No.

JEA: Do you remember any groups such as sewing groups that got together and made clothing during this time?

G: Oh yes, they made clothing, and churches especially.

JEA: Churches?

G: Yes, they would sew to give to the poorer class of people that didn't have any.

JES: They had clubs of women during that thing.

G: That material was given to them, wasn't it Jessie?

JES: Yes.

JEA: Was there any talk of ecology during this time, and conservation, such as giving the men work on the Mill Creek Park project? Was there a lot of talk about that?

JES: Yes, there was a lot of talk about the men going into work, how they would go and dig ditches and different things.

G: Anything to make a few dollars.

JES: PWA, Public Works Administration.

JEA: Do you remember any people that had radios during the Depression?

JES: There weren't many. Some people had them, but there weren't very many around at that time.

G: When was the Depression, the 1920's?

JEA: In the 1930's.

JES: We're too old to remember it.

G: You didn't see all the cars on the streets like you do now either.

JEA: You said you don't remember people that had radios, did you know anybody who had one or made one?

JES: Yes, they did, they made radios at that time. We would all go to one house and listen to it too.

JEA: What programs did you listen to?

G: I don't know.

JES: What kind of things did they have, like news or talk shows?

G: They weren't anything like they are now.

JES: There would be plays on it and opera.

JEA: Do you remember the movies of the 1930's?

JES: Silent movies?

G: They didn't have talking movies then, or did they?

JES: No.

JEA: Did you go to movies during this time?

JES: We didn't have any money to go to the movies, but if we had a couple of pennies to spare you could go into the movies for about ten cents. For ten cents or a quarter you could go into a movie at that time.

JEA: Do you remember the elaborate movies they had? Do you think this was to cheer the people up?

JES: I don't remember any of the movies.

JEA: Some people said that they went to the movies to get away from their problems for awhile.

JES: Yes.

G: Was that 1930?

JEA: In the 1930's somewhere, during the Depression.

G: I was thirty years old.

JES: I was too.

JEA: Who had automobiles during the Depression?

JES: Not very many people.

JEA: The people up on Wick Avenue?

G: Oh yes, they had them.

JES: The well-to-do people would have them.

G: Even the middle class didn't have cars then.

JES: The people that weren't working, they didn't have any cars. There were very little cars around then.

JEA: When did you get your car?

JES: The first car we had was in 1932 or 1933.

JEA: What kind of car was it?

JES: We got an old touring car.

B: That had the curtains on the side.

JES: It had curtains on the side. We thought we were John Rockefeller. Nobody had cars hardly then. You didn't know what way to drive it. One day my husband said, "I'm going out, do you want to come out with me?" I said, "No, I'm not going to come out with you." He said, "I'm all right, I've been out and I can drive it." I said, "I'm not coming out and the kids aren't coming either." He went out and he came back and he said, "Come on Mom, I can drive it." We all got in the car and we went for a ride on a Sunday morning. I'll never forget that.

G: Just think how we've come along. Just think of the improvements in everything in all walks of life.

JES: How about vacations during this time?

JES: Vacations were out. Nobody took vacations at that time.

G: They were all glad to get a little bit of work. That PWA was it, remember how hard those men worked on the streets and everything just to make a few dollars?

JEA: Did you know any young people who went to college at this time?

G: I didn't.

JES: I didn't either.

G: My children were young.

JES: I didn't know of anybody that went to college at that time.

G: You didn't hear much about that.

JEA: Were you or anyone you knew a union member during the Depression?

G: I don't think they were as strong on the unions then.

JES: I don't think there were many unions around at that time.

JES: How about in Youngstown, do you remember the mayor?

JES: Who was the mayor at that time?

JEA: The people that I talked to said he was a real crook.

G: Oles was a mayor at one time. He gave a lot of food too, out of his pocket.

JES: Yes, he did. Who else was mayor at that time?

JES: Do you remember anything that he did?

JES: No.

G: I know that when Oles was mayor he was very good. He helped the people. He had that Ole's Market.

JES: I don't think this was the same one. There was a different one.

G: Yes.

JES: Is that it?

JEA: Yes, but you can go on. I want to hear everything about it.

G: I remember Ole's, but who was before him? He had a big food market.

JEA: Do you remember fruit stands and things like this, where they were at? Did a lot of people go out and was the food expensive or much the same?

JES: No, the food wasn't expensive like it is today. You could get an order for five dollars; you can get two

things for five dollars now.

G: A lot of people had to go on welfare to be helped out.

JES: Most of the people were on welfare.

G: I didn't have to be because my husband had his job where he had to be in the mill. We helped others though, believe me, and I'm glad we did. I did a lot of canning and everything and we filled boxes and gave them away.

JES: A lot of people did a lot of canning at that time.

JEA: How about travelers at this time, did people stop at your house?

G: No. People didn't own cars at that time either.

JEA: Do you remember the people that lived down by the railroad?

B: Yes, it wasn't very desirable.

JEA: They said there were boxes that people would throw away and these people would get them and live in them and the police had to go down there and disperse the crowd.

JES: Yes. Down along the railroads there were shacks, and white people and colored people lived right down there. They were all mixed up down in that part.

JEA: Do you remember ever seeing that?

JES: Yes, I remember seeing that. We lived on Ridge Avenue and we would walk down to Mahoning Avenue. From our place down to Joseph Street were colored and white people. Across the street from me was a colored woman, and down the street lower they were all colored. There were two streets where they took them out and put new roads in.

END OF INTERVIEW