YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

The Depression

The Depression's Effects on Family Life

O. H. 76

MRS. ROBERTA HOWARD

Interviewed

by

Dan Flood

on

January 27, 1976

MRS. ROBERTA HOWARD

Mrs. Roberta Howard was born in the 1920's, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Robert H. McCallister. She considers hers an "average family . . . Protestant, white, and middle class." She began grade school at Sheridan when she was four and a half years old. She first felt the effects of the Depression when a small bank account she had kept through this school was cancelled.

Mrs. Howard continued her education at South High School, and though she was a good student, she went to work instead of college upon her graduation from South.

After one year of work experience which included working for a printing firm contracted by the Board of Elections, Mrs. Howard began college at Youngstown University because of the difficulty she was having in finding permanent work. She graduated from Youngstown University in 1963 Magna Cum Laude, with her B.S. in the field of Education.

Mrs. Howard is now a teacher working for the Poland Local School District.

ELIZABETH A. REITZEL
June 19, 1978

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

The Depression Years

INTERVIEWEE: MRS. ROBERTA HOWARD

INTERVIEWER: Dan Flood

SUBJECT: The Depression's effects on family life

DATE: January 27, 1976

FLOOD: This is an interview with Roberta Howard for the Youngstown State University Depression Project by Dan Flood at approximately 4:00 p.m. on January 27, 1976, at 7661 N. Lima Road in Poland.

Could you give us some background on when you were born, and the type of family living you grew up in?

HOWARD: Well, I was born in the 1920's. I guess my family was an average family. We were Protestants, white, and middle class. I went to school at the neighborhood school. The very first time that I realized there was a Depression was when I was in about the first or second grade. Our next door neighbors were more affluent than we were. They had quite a bit more money than we did. Their father owned and operated his own business while my father worked for a salary. This man owned a really good portrait business. He was a photographer.

At that time whenever there was a special event, we used to have newsboys that came up and down the street and called, "Extra, extra!" right in the neighborhood. This usually happened at night, but it could have been at any time, and everybody would jump out of bed to find out what the news was. I remember there was an extra out in the neighborhood when the Lindbergh baby was kidnapped, for example. Well, this particular time, it seemed to me, it was

at night or very early in the morning. I could see because it was daylight. There was a boy coming down the street, and he was calling, "Extra, extra!" When he got close enough for us to hear what he was saying, he said, "The stock market crashed." Well, the man next door pulled up his bedroom window, and he yelled down and asked him, "What has happened? What was the calling about?" The paper boy said, "The stock market crashed." The man next door said, "My God, I'm ruined." To my knowledge, he never worked another day. He closed his business and I never saw him go to his business again. Later on, he had a little business in his home, but actually his studio closed that day. He never worked another day.

F: Do you think he had just invested a lot of money into the stocks, and this is why he lost the business?

H: I think so. At that time, people were buying stocks on the margin. He'd probably done this, and he probably had to sell all of his assets to pay his stock broker's bill. That's probably what happened. Later on the banks closed, too. This was a very real thing to me even though I was just a very young child in the first or second grade. At that time, they encouraged children to save money and the schools ran a bank. You brought money on Fridays and you had a bank book from some local bank, and you deposited money in it, maybe just ten cents or a quarter. It was to teach children habits of thrift and something of economics. I think that was kind of unusual so long ago.

F: They are trying to do that with schools today, the same idea.

H: The bank at our school had funds in an account with the bank in the Central Tower of downtown Youngstown. It was one of the few banks that never reopened. So, all of the school children knew that their funds had just gone down the drain. Your account, however big or little it was, was gone. It made quite an impact on us because we had started this little bank account, and suddenly they stamped our books "cancelled" and that was the end of it.

F: What school was that?

H: It was Sheridan School.

F: Was it located in the same place it is right now?

H: Yes, it was. In fact, I started Sheridan School when I was four and a half, the day it opened. The first day it opened I had started kindergarten there. So, I think that children were very much aware of the Depression because most of them had their little bank accounts. My parents also had a small savings account in this bank which they had only opened a week before the bank closed. They had never been able to save much money, but they had made a start when this bank closed.

Well, we were on our way downtown going down Market Street, and about Myrtle Avenue everybody was in turmoil. People were just milling around in the streets. Little groups everywhere were talking about the stock market and the bank closing. You just can't imagine! It was a terrible tragedy and everybody was bewildered. They were gathered around there talking about it. We were going down Market Street and there was an elderly woman on a corner. She really looked in very bad shape. She had a big, black shiny shopping bag, and was dressed very poorly. She was shaking her fist at every car that went past and she was yelling at us, "You're all in the same boat with me!"

F: Everybody was poor.

H: She wasn't kidding. The stock market crashed and the banks closed. I don't think in my real early years that I was too much aware of it, except for the fact that my parents were very worried about losing their home. They had built a home on the south side of Youngstown at the very place where my mother had taken her cow to pasture when she was a little girl. She considered it the beauty spot of the world. So, you could see that it was not only a home, but it had great sentimental value to her, and we feared we might lose this. My mother was a person who always really loved her home. Well, I heard this talk to the extent that pretty soon, even though I was a rather happy-go-lucky child, it started to worry me a lot. I didn't know what was going to happen to me if we lost our home.

Then, too, my father and my mother were very dedicated Republicans. My father served on a number of Republican

Committees and worked for campaigns. I believe he'd have voted for the devil if he'd run on the Republican ticket. Then Roosevelt became President, and through those Reconstruction Finance Corporations a lot of people like my parents who were on the brink of losing their homes, suddenly were able to refinance them and save them. My mother felt great gratitude to Roosevelt, because for a middle class white Protestant American to cross party lines was very unusual, especially in the fifth ward of Youngstown which was traditionally Republican until just about the last election or two. Then they elected a Democratic councilman. Up until then it's always been Republican. They lived in the fifth ward.

F: Is this in the St. Christine's area?

H: No, this is the area closer to St. Dominic's.

F: St. Dominic's is farther down towards Mill Creek Park and that area.

H: Yes, this area just was always traditionally Republican. So, when Roosevelt ran for the presidency the second time, my parents had had their home saved due to his political efforts. My mother felt a lot of gratitude toward him, and that voting day; it was a terrible day. . . pouring rain, a bitterly cold, windy, raining, November day. My father always stopped for people and got his car full of people, and took them to vote, to vote Republican. So, he took my mother down to vote and on the way back he said, "Don't you hope that (whoever was running, I think it was Landon) makes it?" My mother said, "No, I voted for Roosevelt." He didn't speak to her for about two weeks. He said if he'd known that, he would have never taken her to the polls. He was furious.

F: She voted for Roosevelt because of the home?

H: It was her gratitude toward him for refinancing our home and for his saving it.

Some of the things that stand out in my mind are little things that were peculiar to the Depression. One thing was how little money there was for recreation. We barely had money for food and fuel, let alone spending any money on recreation, no matter how cheap it was. One night, I had all of the money that was in our entire family. I was about thirteen or fourteen. I had twenty cents; I had

two dimes. That was the only money in our family that night. I wanted to go to a movie at the Uptown theatre, which was near our home.

F: Was it located at the same place then as it is now?

H: Yes, same movie theatre. Twenty cents would have admitted my mother and me. The name of the movie was "Star at Midnight" with William Powell and Myrna Loy. I never let my mother forget it. I took her to the movie that night with my last twenty cents, the last twenty cents we had. Anytime I wanted a favor from them I'd say, "Remember when I took you to see 'Star at Midnight'?"

I remembered, too, that there were so many desperately poor people. I mean tramps and transients. There was barely a day that went past when we didn't see people that were really in a starving condition, just in rags. They would come to the door and ask for something to eat. Little as we had, and we didn't have very much, my mother never turned one away. In fact, I used to think there was some kind of a gypsy sign out on the telephone pole in front of our house. We got everyone regularly. She wouldn't let them come in the house because they were pretty unwashed. Their clothes were just a mess. You see tramps today and you just wonder whether he is a tramp or not. They don't look all that bad, but during the Depression you had no doubt about it, they were in rags. My mother would fix their dinners on a plate and hand it out to them with a cup of coffee. This went on all the time. People came to your door and asked for food. Today if anyone came to the door and asked for food, you'd probably call the sheriff. You'd be afraid to even open the door. People had a lot more confidence in each other then.

During the Depression my father had a very good job. He was the general manager of the Cadillac agency up on Wick Avenue. Can you imagine how many people were buying Cadillacs in the 1930's? Absolutely no one. Even the people who had the money to afford it were afraid to use their money for such an item. So, one day my father was very discouraged. They put the manager on a commission, where before that he'd had a small salary. The salary was nothing wonderful, but at least it was steady. One particular day they put him on commission, which was just about saying that he could just starve to death because he wasn't going to get any commissions.

Right next to the Cadillac agency at that time there was a great big Standard Oil station. It was very large. I believe it was located on the corner of Wick and Linden. My father went to that station for gas when he'd demonstrate the Cadillacs, which used a lot of gas. The manager of the station waited on him and he said, "You're really lucky, you get to ride around in a beautiful car like this and have a white collar job. You never get dirty like we do." My dad said, "I would change places with you any day." What happened was one of the supervisors from the Standard Oil Company was there and heard him. My father was a very well known salesman, very successful and the first automobile salesman in Youngstown or one of the first. He said, "Do you really mean that? Would you come to work here?" My dad said, "I would." He said, "You can have a job." My father started work the next day.

That was pretty hard for him, being thirty-nine years old, and going from general manager of the Cadillac agency to just a grease monkey in this service station. He wasn't used to working that hard. That was very physical work. He used to come home very tired, but he really didn't stay there very long because they soon saw that he had a lot of ability in selling, and he went on to be a salesman for the Standard Oil Company, which he was until his death. He was a very successful one. It was really a black day in our lives, though, when my father went from a wonderful job selling Cadillacs to something that seemed kind of menial in comparison.

F: What were his attitudes towards his change in position and employment?

H: Well, I think he was a person that rarely complained. In fact, I think he might be alive today if we had realized that he really was not well. He never complained about his health or his circumstances and had a very happy outlook on life. When he died, they had calling hours at the Hofmeister's Funeral Home, which is not in existence now. It was converted into a music store on Hillman Way. They sell pianos and everything. It was pouring rain the night he died, and fifteen hundred people stood in line to come in and see him. He just had a wonderful outlook on life and was very easy to get along with. He just accepted that, too.

A peculiar thing happened to me which I really didn't notice during the Depression. As far as school was concerned,

I never had very many clothes to wear until I went to high school. I went to South High, and the classes were huge. We only went a half day because the faculty was used for two sessions. For example, I went to school in the morning and just had my four major subjects, and I was through at noon. I just walked home. There were four hundred and seventy-nine students in my class who graduated with me. I assume they were probably there in the tenth grade also. In order to balance the budget or keep the school budget down, they graduated people in January as well as June. If you were in 10B, you were in the first semester of school. If you were in 10A, you were in the second semester of tenth grade. So, they used the faculty this way; if you were in 10B, you went from 8:00 a.m. until noon, and if you were in the 10A, you went from noon until 4:00. That way, they only needed the one faculty for all these people. It must have been quite a strain as far as paper grading is concerned on the faculty involved there.

I remember, too, in the ninth grade something I will mention here that perhaps not a lot of people know. I had one of the outstanding Latin teachers in Mahoning County, without any doubt. He was one of the very best. Later on, he left teaching Latin. I was always rather sorry about this, because he was certainly good at Latin and English. He went into broadcasting, and his name is Don Gardner, the sports announcer.

F: That's why he's so gung-ho about South High School?

H: Yes, and that's why he has a marvelous vocabulary. Did you never know him to be at a loss for words? He never is. He was my Latin teacher.

So, when I went to high school, I only had about two outfits that I wore practically all through high school. I alternated them different ways with some jewelry or a scarf and one pair of shoes. I had one pair for school and one pair to keep for dress. Nobody in my group had several pairs of shoes. I considered myself really fortunate.

F: In my family at Easter, we'd get new outfits or new clothing. During the Depression did you see any change in this custom?

H: Well, I was so young I wouldn't have noticed this before the Depression, but during the Depression we made an effort

to always have a new outfit for Easter. I would say the outfit wasn't anything elaborate. We might still have last year's coat, but they were very big on pretty straw hats then. I usually had a new hat and a new dress even if my coat wasn't new. My shoes would be new then; they were the shoes that I was going to wear all through the summer with whatever I got.

I remember the people took their circumstances in pretty good spirits. At least the people that I knew did. They would have little funny things going. I remember one thing; everybody had a Depression plant. This was really a big lump of coal, and wasn't a plant at all. They poured something on it. I wish I knew scientifically what it was. There was a chemical they would pour over the lump of coal, and then they would just put it in a dish and let it go. It formed the most beautiful colors. It would start to grow; it was like a fungus growth. The fungus grew all over the lump of coal in brilliant colors. Almost everyone had one of those, and they called them "Depression plants".

F: I've never heard of those.

H: Our church was located in a place where we really got the brunt of the really poor people. These were the people living in the downtown districts. Even today you find some pretty poorly dressed people in the downtown district. Where the Mahoning County Courthouse is located there's a parking lot right across the street. Our church was built there. In fact, the parking lot which is there now still belongs to that church. I'm not a member of that church anymore, but the parking lot provides a steady income for them. They franchise it out to the man who runs it.

We also operated a soup kitchen every day of the week. All the transients could come in and get a bowl of soup along with really delicious homemade bread and coffee. The women of the church made pies and they would also give out pieces of pie. Now, that might not sound like it's the most vitamin-packed diet, but a bowl of vegetable soup with some meat in it, a piece of pie, and coffee certainly seemed to sustain those people. The church offered that service for a long, long time, for years.

F: As far as the people out of work, were they from the downtown district? What do you remember about this district during the Depression?

H: I remember that we had no pollution then. When you used to come up over the Market Street bridge you could look out over all those mills. You never saw so much as one curl of smoke coming out of them, nothing.

F: Why was that?

H: The mills just weren't operating at all. People used to long for pollution. They complain about it now. I can remember a time when we would have given anything to see some smoke coming out of the stacks, to know that there was some employment for people. There was none, just absolutely none.

I was seventeen when I graduated from high school and I was a good student. I was on the honor roll and my parents would have liked to have sent me to college, but they simply couldn't afford it. So, my first year out of school I went to a business school here, and then tried to get a job. Well, there was very little employment and my father, through his political connections, was able to get me a temporary job. It was a dreadful job and I'll never forget it. I worked at the Board of Elections typing up lists of eligible voters. They would do this for people who wanted such lists for various reasons. There was a table full of us working together, all of us really needing the money. They wouldn't tell us how much we were getting for this work. Talk about unions or anyone protecting you, here we had no one to protect us. We were really being paid by a little print shop which had the contract to do this work. They would send a woman over to check on us and what we were doing. We had to make twelve copies. Can you imagine typing an original and twelve copies on a manual typewriter? Some nights my fingers ached when I came home. I didn't see how I could go back the next day and type again. But, I was only seventeen and things don't bother you as much when you're that age. So, this was a two week job. At the end of two weeks the woman from the print shop said that she would let us know what we were being paid for our work. We had been working blindly for those two weeks under unmitigated torture without even knowing what we're getting paid for it.

She also used to do another thing that no one would get by with today. She had soft-soled shoes and she would creep up behind us and check on what we were doing. So, we couldn't talk to anyone. We just had to sit there and

type like robots because we never knew when she was going to creep up behind us. She nearly scared me to death one day. I threw all my papers and copies on the floor and I jumped out of my seat.

At the end of two weeks she came in and had a little box with envelopes in it. There were maybe ten or twelve of us working at this particular project. She handed out these pay envelopes and said they were based on what she considered to be our worth for the two weeks' work. She told us the least we could get would be fifteen dollars. Fifteen dollars for working this murderous job for two weeks! If we only did a few of these a day, our work was worth more than that. The most each of us could get was thirty-five dollars. Well, people have false modesty. We should have ripped those envelopes open right then and there to find out what we were getting, and then really made an issue out of it. But, people were afraid during the Depression. They were thankful for anything. We were afraid to make an issue out of it. Instead we all crept out of there like a bunch of elves and went to the ladies' restroom. No one even said, "Well, let's get together and . . ." We just did. Everybody was ripping pay envelopes open. I was pretty sure I would have thirty-five dollars; not that I was worth any more than anybody else, but because my cousin was the county auditor and my dad was very active in politics. I just couldn't picture under these circumstances not receiving the maximum pay, which I did receive. Some of the girls just had tears in their eyes because some of them had only fifteen dollars. There wasn't any skill to it. We all worked one as hard as the other. It's just that she figured some of us were more timid and she wasn't going to get any feedback on what she did. So, she balanced the budget by paying them the least she could.

A lot of people during the Depression worked for experience. That was a good gimmick. If there was finally a job available the employers would say, "Well, if you work for two months for experience, then we'll let you know if we're going to hire you." So, they got free help. That happened everywhere.

F: What about the women as far as employment? Because so many men were out of work, employers would say, "Let's get rid of the women and go towards the males."

H: That's exactly what happened. I don't think there was a more flagrant example of that than in teaching. In Youngstown, until a fairly recent time, a married woman could not hold a job. This policy encouraged a lot of secret marriages. I knew a lot of teachers who really were married, but they couldn't say so. So, you might say they were encouraging people living together without benefit of matrimony, by such a rule. Those who were married couldn't tell anybody. It was an unhappy situation. I had a very attractive art teacher and I knew she was married. I saw her husband come for her all the time, but she couldn't say he was her husband. She had to go around using her maiden name. If a woman got married, she knew that she would be discharged.

F: Was there any fight over this policy? Did they put up a stink about it or anything like this?

H: As poorly paid as they were, nobody even complained. Anytime anyone seemed to stand up to things, it was not a very happy situation. I never had any respect for General Douglas McArthur. I wouldn't have cared what he did in World War II. What he did during the Depression would have finished me with him regardless of what a hero he was otherwise.

F: What did he do?

H: The veterans of World War I; many of them were out of work.

F: The bonus march?

H: The veterans had this bonus march on Washington, and McArthur actually would have had them fired upon. He was the one who gave the command for that. Those men were really poor, and they didn't want any great big sum of money. They would have been satisfied with just a little token amount. They were the men that had served our country, and to think he had so little regard for them! I wouldn't have very much respect for him.

I had no respect either for one of the banks in Youngstown which foreclosed on people for the smallest amounts of money. If you owed two or three hundred dollars, with great glee they would foreclose if you couldn't come up with even that. They couldn't have scraped up fifty dollars. The banks would foreclose and then sell your house

because of this small amount of money which you owed and could not pay back. It was just dreadful! I have no respect for that bank.

F: As far as recreation or amusement, do you remember Idora Park? What was the end of the trolley line, itself? They'd have the cable car?

H: Well, the street car came right to Idora Park and turned around. That was the end of that.

F: Right around your neighborhood, or did you live close by?

H: I lived walking distance from there. I lived closer to Newport Theatre on Idlewood.

F: It's just a couple blocks down, then, from Midlothian?

H: Yes, not too far from there. We used to go out to Idora Park a lot. Sometimes we'd walk there. Where Kiddie Land is now located was one of the most beautiful swimming pools I've ever seen. I always thought it was too bad they closed that. It was very large and it had a tower in the center. Somebody drowned there in the pool, a couple times they had a drowning, and it kind of gave the pool a bad name. It wasn't too successful after that. People got a little bit afraid of it. The pool did drop off suddenly for anybody who was just a beginning swimmer. It was round. It didn't have one deep end and one shallow end. It had the shallow at the outside perimeter, and it went deeper as it went towards the tower in the center.

F: Was it like Northside Pool?

H: I've never been to that pool, but is it arranged that way?

F: Yes, it's deeper right towards the middle where the diving boards are. You have to walk in from all different angles.

H: Somehow that isn't always a good arrangement, because you couldn't rope off the shallow end. Anyhow, they had some problems like that and some complaining. The pool just closed. It was a beautiful pool. It was really nice. The bath houses are still there.

F: How about skating in Mill Creek Park; was there any swimming there, too?

H: I used to go ice skating on Lake Newport every night that it was opened for ice skating. There was a lot of ice skating in the winter. I don't know whether we had more severe winters then or not. It seems to me that we must have, because I couldn't have gone ice skating all winter long last year or the year before that.

F: Do you remember any swimming down there at all in Mill Creek Park in the lakes at that time?

H: No, I can't remember any swimming, but I remember the first time they opened Newport for fishing. It had been only a reservoir for a long, long time. Probably it was during the Depression years when they opened it finally for fishing. Well, it was opened at daylight on a certain day and later on in the morning we took a ride down through there to see how it had gone. I had never seen such a thing. The fishermen were actually standing shoulder to shoulder around Lake Newport.

F: Was that when the boat dock was built, or was that built later?

H: Yes, the boat dock was built then, because when I was in high school my cousin kept his canoe down there even then. So, there was some kind of a thing over there where the canoes were kept. It might not have been as nice as it is now. In fact, I don't think it was. At least there were racks and you could keep canoes there. I had friends that lived on Arden Boulevard, who kept their canoe there. I used to go down lots of times and go canoeing with them.

F: Were there many people who went to Mill Creek Park for Sunday walks or things like that?

H: The park was very popular. We often had picnics all during the summer. People didn't have picnic areas in their backyards the way they do now. I really don't see any reason why they didn't. I mean, a picnic table isn't all that expensive. It seems that when you went for a picnic you left the house and went someplace.

Churches had a lot of big picnics. Our church did, and I belonged to the Girl Scouts, at one time. They had a lot of picnics. I also belonged to the Camp Fire Girls, and I get amused today when I see how concerned parents get about their children doing the least little amount of

walking or anything. The parents are right there with the car to transport their children everywhere.

Once the Camp Fire Girls had a Saturday morning movie, and then we were going to have a picnic. The movie was at the Warner Theatre, which is now Powers Auditorium. The movie was horrible. The name of it was "Tiger Shark" and I remember that it was really gruesome, sort of like an early "Jaws". After the movie, they walked us in a parade. That entire theatre was packed with Camp Fire Girls. They walked us all the way to Slippery Rock Pavillion in Mill Creek Park. Imagine all those people; all the traffic had to be stopped and everything. Well, when we got there we were simply starving, but they didn't have much money. It was in the Depression and they just didn't have much money to feed all these people. So, Wonder Bread Company, which has its plant up there on Mahoning Avenue, had furnished the bread, and Isaly's had donated the orange drink. I don't know where they got the lunch meat. It was something like ham salad, sort of ground up meat. Well, we had two pieces of bread, a little smear of this in the middle and a carton of orange drink. That was the picnic. We were starving. I never thought I'd ever be that hungry ever in my life. They said, "You could come back for seconds." I was never a very belligerent or very aggressive child and the more pushy people had gone and gotten seconds. There was nothing left when I went for more. In fact, I don't think seconds served more than ten or twenty girls. We were starving. After the picnic they disbanded us right then and there at Slippery Rock Pavillion.

Can you imagine this today? Everybody would be there with their cars again to transport the children home. No one was transporting us. We were supposed to walk home, down whatever avenue. Well, we started to walk, and my father, as I told you, was a really good natured person. He knew our circumstances, and he brought his car down. I was never so glad to see a car in my whole life. We were exhausted, hungry, and disgusted. Why, today I think the Camp Fire Girls would be drummed out of existence if they treated the girls like that, walking them from Powers Auditorium to Slippery Rock Pavillion.

F: Were there a lot of educational facilities in the park at that time, or was that really something new?

H: I think the picnic areas were about the extent of what there was. There was a lily pond and the Old Mill Museum was in existence then. We used to walk down to that to see if there was anything new in it. It didn't have very many exhibits. It did have those dead birds, though. They've added to the dead birds collection. It was there, then. Often on Sunday afternoons, we went for walks in the park, long walks. There wasn't anything much else to do. I also went to the library a lot. At one time, I had read the entire children's section at Southside Library. I took out three books every other day. Then they let me have a card for the adult section because there were no more books. They didn't have as big a book collection, but I was an avid reader.

F: Well, would you think reading was popular at that time because there was no television?

H: That's right. We also did a lot of bicycle riding and roller skating. I don't see many children roller skating today. Then, they skated a lot. I roller skated regularly from my home on Idlewood down to Southside Library, which is about two miles.

F: The only time they roller skate today would be in a roller rink.

H: That's right. I roller skated frequently all the way down to the library and it was two miles down and two miles back, skating.

F: During the 1930's, do you remember any particular radio shows, movies, and the gangsters in Chicago, Al Capone?

H: Well, everyone listened to "Amos and Andy" in the evening. It was on about seven o'clock. Then, there was a program after that. They were two old men who were really very funny, called "Lum and Abner", and everybody listened to that show, too.

In the morning, there was also a program, but I can't think of the name of that one. Anyhow, the three characters were a man and a woman named Vic and Sade. They had a son named Rush. This doesn't sound as if it would be very humorous, but it was extremely funny. I've often been sorry, and the radio people are sorry that none of that was on tape. So, it's just gone. None of it is available

today. If it were on records, I'm sure it would be extremely popular. It was a very humorous show.

I can remember one little situation in which they always wanted to have imprinted Christmas cards with their names on them. It was during the Depression and that was a pretty expensive item, to go and have your name printed on a Christmas card. They finally saved up the money to afford it, and they could hardly wait to open the box. It was supposed to say Mr. and Mrs Victor Gook, that was their last name, and their son Rush. When they opened the cards, it said Mr. and Mrs. Victor Gook and their son, Mush. What a big disappointment that was!

I can remember another time; Vic was a great lodge member. They made fun of all the middle class interests. He was a great lodge member and his lodge was called "The Sacred Stars of the Milky Way." He finally got to be, whatever it was, Grand Dragon or something, in the lodge. They had a parade and he'd just been waiting for that. They were too proud for anyone in those times to have their own uniforms. So, any of those lodge groups would hand down uniforms. He'd inherited a previous uniform. He could hardly wait to get it on to go to this parade. So, he rushed home from his job in a hardware store to get his uniform, to get it on, and to get into the parade. When he went to put the pants on, he had very little time. Then he found out the man who had had the pants before him had been a one-legged man, and he had had the one leg sewn up. He couldn't get the pants on. This was such a humorous show that it stuck in my mind.

F: Did they have any shows on the radio at all that would be something like an Archie Bunker, "All in the Family" type of show; where there would be prejudice on the radio?

H: No, I think people were more of an innocent type then. Not innocent, but I think we were ignorant to what was really going on. I really had no idea of the race problem. It would have been in an absolute foreign country to meet anybody who mentioned that. I'd never thought about it though I went to an integrated high school. There were a lot of black students in my class. When we had our senior class dance, the black fellows danced with some of the white girls and nobody thought anything of it. It was really integrated. I guess there were instances of prejudice. I had heard that in the theatres downtown,

the black people had to sit in the back of the theatre. That may have been true, I never really saw it, but I'd heard that that was true. I know you never saw any black people in Strouss' grill or in McKelvey's grill. They just never came in the restaurants where white people were. In fact, they were unwelcome.

I think people were just ignoring what was right there. They were just pretending it didn't exist. I remember my mother in her Sunday school class. There was a woman who always passed as white, but she surely must somewhere in her background have had some black ancestors, because she was definitely a throwback to someone. She had very negroid features and skin tones. I'm very fond of her. She's living today in excellent condition for her age. I always really thought that somewhere in her background there were some black ancestors. Well, they always had a terrible time whenever we'd have the Christmas party. They couldn't go in a restaurant because they wouldn't serve her.

F: Was it a family-type Christmas party?

H: No, it was their Sunday school class. Tea rooms were popular then. There was one on the corner on Ravenwood and Market Street called the Annie Laurie Tearoom. You would rent it for a party of this type. They were very popular. If they would rent any place like that, as soon as they saw this particular woman, they wouldn't serve them. So, they almost always had to have all their functions at the church because they knew that Marion was going to be insulted somewhere.

F: What about the Ku Klux Klan, do you remember that?

H: There was a branch of it in and around Youngstown. For a short while my father had belonged to it. He was kind of a joiner. He'd have joined most anything, just for the social end of it. Most of the time they had corn roasts, the Ku Klux Klan around here. I mean, I'm sure there must have been more to it than that, but I wasn't aware of it. They just always seemed to have picnics and corn roasts and such things as that. He didn't stay in it very long, because he soon found out that their purposes were really not in line with anything he believed. I think he just joined it because he liked to join things.

F: Did the Ku Klux Klan have many parades like various other groups did in the city?

H: I never saw any of them. We had a lot of parades, but the biggest parade I can remember was just a masonic parade. It was some very large convention in Youngstown of all the various branches that you could belong to in masonry. They had a huge parade right down Market Street. The parade included various minor celebrities who had been invited to come join the parade. I just don't remember all of them, but one that stuck in my mind went by in a little car, a little open-top Austin, one of the original Austins. It was a convertible and the top was down. He was sitting up on the top, the folded up top, and it was Johnny from Phillip Morris.

F: Oh yes, I know.

H: He had on this little bell hop outfit. I remember, too, that when I was in high school in the 1930's, we had a lot of vaudeville acts at the old Palace Theatre. Some really were good ones. We used to stand out in front of the Palace Theatre afterwards, because invariably the performers would come out and they'd stand out front. They'd really like people to recognize them, at least they did then. We would get to talk to them. I've talked to an awful lot of celebrities in my time because of this.

One that sticks in my mind, that I always tell my classes because they get a big kick out of that, is when I stood and talked at length one night with my girl friends to the Three Stooges. They had appeared at the Palace Theatre. They were very small and very Jewish looking when you saw them. They gave your mind's idea of a Jewish person. Mo, the one who had black hair, had had it cut sort of like an institution type cut, kind of straight above his ears. Then Curly, the original Curly, was very bald and then they had shaved what hair he did have. Larry had a bald head with that stringy hair hanging out of the back and that was bright red, that stringy hair in the back.

I also talked with Tony Martin, the singer who's married to Sid Charisse. Edgar Bergen was there one night with Charley McCarthy that was his dummy. Also, I met The Ink Spots, and then there was a singer who sometimes appeared with them that was very popular, a one legged black singer called "Peg Leg Bates." I talked to him and the Mills Brothers. If we just stood outside, they always came out. We were high school girls and they would like to talk to us; they wouldn't mind. So, I got to

talk to a lot of them, but for some reason the Three Stooges stick in my mind more than anybody else.

F: Right after high school, you went into typing with the city. Well, not really under the city but it was under a printing contract.

H: It was a printing firm that was doing work for the Board of Elections.

F: Did you have to have a business education in high school to get this job?

H: I had been in the college course in high school but I had also taken typing. I was always glad I did, because I went to college then, after that first year that I was out of school. It wasn't a real hardship because I was only seventeen when I graduated from high school, so I wasn't that much older when I started college. My parents borrowed money so that I could go to college because they were unhappy with the direction my life was taking. I couldn't find permanent work.

F: Was this in the later years, like in 1938?

H: Yes, this was about in 1939 and 1940. We were just starting to come out of the Depression then. We really didn't come out of the Depression to any great extent until the World War II. World War II started in 1939 and not in the United States, but it started in England. So, we did benefit from that and we were selling England a lot of equipment for the war, trucks and a lot of transportation equipment. So, the war started to affect the economy, things got better. My father at Standard Oil Company, was doing better and he made more money. Between his increase in salary and what they could borrow, they sent me away to college. I was very glad they did that. I went to Ohio University.

F: Did you attend college during the war years?

H: I was there until the end of 1942. Then I was married. I hadn't finished college but I got married and left school then. I guess the biggest thing that worried me during the Depression was that I think, like most people, I never noticed anything about a lack of food. My mother is an excellent cook and could make do with very little. She could make a really tasty meal out of not too much.

It really worried me about losing our home, and I think a lot of people did. I saw so many of my friends drop out of school when they were about sixteen and go into those work progress administration courses, one of those WPA projects and Civilian Conservation Corps. I thought that was kind of sad because they had to leave home; a lot of those things were located all over the United States. I realize now that they've done a lot of good and substantial work which is still standing. It was still hard to see them all dropping out and going away from home.

F: Was there a break up in the family during the Depression? I've heard so much about teenagers just on the road; just hundreds of thousands of kids who have left home not to be a burden to their parents.

H: There was an awful lot of hitchhiking. People walked across the country back and forth in no particular danger that I ever heard of. Of course, occasionally you would hear of a murder or that somebody was robbed. As a rule, however, there was just a lot of hitchhiking. You went every place and people lived under dreadful circumstances.

I remember one of my husband's cousins in New York. He got married and they had no money and no place to live. They put up a tent behind a billboard. They lived behind there for the entire summer and fall because the billboard sort of furnished one solid side. This was not unusual.

We had a thing called Hoover City, and I think they sprung up all over the United States. People would take great big packing cases and build with them. For example, the refrigerators used to come in a big wooden packing case, thin wood, sort of like what fruit crates are made out of. They would put several of these together. Big radios were popular then also. They came in those crates too. They'd put them together and make kind of a crude house. At least it kept out the wind. There would be a whole group of the tents and these packing box houses and they'd call them Hoover Cities.

F: Was this in Youngstown?

H: Yes, they had one here, too.

F: Where was it located?

H: If I remember correctly, it was located on the east side of town, out more where there were fields. It was not right in the way of most houses, but farther out on the east side. Then there were an awful lot of transients. Everytime you went downtown on Federal Street, you just saw so many poor people.

F: Did robbing and crime rise very high because these people were so poor?

H: I don't remember if it did. We never had anybody rob us, and no one in our neighborhood was robbed. I never knew anyone to be held up and robbed. I suppose they were. There were a lot of major gangsters whom I remember reading about, like John Dillinger. But, with petty crime, at least in our neighborhood, I never knew a single person to have their house broken into or anything taken.

F: Do you think there was a return to religion? I've asked a couple other people about this and a few people said that yes, during the Depression they went back because of some kind of security that was there with God.

H: I think the Church had a lot to offer because it was interested in you. I mean, you were looking for anybody that had your welfare at heart. I think the churches did what they could, but churches are like the government. They only have whatever money people give them. They could only do with whatever they had.

For one thing, our recreation was rather limited. Churches supplied a lot of that. There were youth groups; everybody went to a youth group on Sunday night. Those youth groups had hay rides and parties. I think the Church had a major role in recreation then, more than it does now. I go to church every Sunday, but I don't go to anything else. Back then, we went to everything. There was hardly a night in the week you couldn't have gone to some kind of a church function. We had visiting missionaries and evangelists come. It was like a social function. I just loved to go hear missionaries. It was sort of like hearing an adventure travelogue or something. Churches were very popular, I think, for this reason too; they were a form of recreation.

F: Looking back,what changes would you have liked to have seen instituted in the town government at that time, for example, as far as taking care of the needy?

H: I guess there is one thing. I think that the government should have recognized sooner the value of helping people keep their homes. It was well into the Depression before anything was done about that. You can face a lot in life if you have the security of knowing you've got a home. You could even face starvation if you know you've got someplace to stay. I think that was a terrible mistake that they didn't do something sooner than they did to help people keep their homes.

There is also another thing that they did do, and I sometimes wonder if this still wouldn't be a good idea. You might have thought that the children would suffer medically and dentally in the Depression. Yet, they really didn't because they had a visiting doctor and dentist that came right to our school. Our school was no different than any other. They checked our teeth every six months. They had it on a little sheet and they marked whatever cavities they found. They filled our teeth and took excellent care of them. In fact, the dentist that came to my school later on became nothing but a consultant, so you know she was a good dentist. She was an excellent dentist, Dr. Wise. Her fillings held up so well, I had her same fillings for years and years before they ever had to be replaced. Also, we had a doctor that came around and checked the children regularly, and they don't do that anymore.

F: Did they have food programs in the schools?

H: Nobody ate lunch in our school. Everybody was a walker and went home. Now, this was just a neighborhood school. There was one little girl whose mother worked. Women could very seldom find work. She had to bring her lunch to school, and the teachers acted really quite put upon that she had to be there with her little lunch. She had to sit out on the playground and eat her lunch when it was nice weather and in the room when it wasn't. Everybody felt quite put upon that that one youngster stayed for lunch.

The first time I knew people ate lunches in school was when I went to Princeton. There they had a cafeteria. I never had the money to eat in it. Anytime I had lunch, I had to carry my lunch. I never had money to buy it.

F: Did they close down? Did you see it even in the school, itself, as far as closing down the cafeteria or reducing the employees?

H: No, the cafeteria was pretty much self supporting, and the cooks were the home economics teachers with one helper. They weren't spending any big sum for cooks. We all had to help get the lunch ready in home economics class at Princeton. There were a lot of things that we did. We got the hot chocolate ready and the milk ready. Really the students did that.

F: I think that would be a great idea to get them back involved, but today, because of the rules and regulations schools probably wouldn't go along with a lot of that.

H: They probably wouldn't, but they actually did the cooking, the home economics teachers. I don't suppose they had very elaborate meals, but they were also having classes at the same time. I can't imagine being a home economics teacher today and not in our cafeteria.

F: Is there anything else you'd like to include?

H: I can't think of anything, Dan. I really wasn't working then and I don't really know the problems of working people, except for just my father.

F: Well, to sum up then, you'd probably say, as far as your parents were concerned and you, yourself, the home was one of the main priorities.

H: I had an extremely stable home life. I had a wonderful childhood and I didn't really feel, even though I had very few clothes and certainly plain, but good food to eat. I really didn't feel deprived.

F: I'd like to thank you very much, Roberta, for giving us this information. I certainly appreciated it.

H: You're welcome, Dan.

End of Interview