

Dr. David L. Crowder Oral History Project

Beulah Richardson – Life during the Depression

By Beulah Richardson

March 29, 1976

Box 2 Folder 30

Oral Interview conducted by Cheryl Wilcox

Transcribed by Maren Miyasaki November 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho

CW: This is an oral history, and today is March 29, 1976. I am going to interview Mrs. Beulah Richardson. The general topic will be on the Depression. Mrs. Richardson, where were you born?

BR: Taylorville, Idaho.

CW: How long did you live there?

BR: I went to the fourth grade in Taylorville.

CW: Until you were in the fourth grade?

BR: Yes.

CW: And then where did you move?

BR: Shelley, Idaho.

CW: Shelley Idaho, and how long have you lived there?

BR: I lived there about six years.

CW: And then did you move to Salmon Idaho?

BR: No, I moved to Lost River Valley. My mother remarried, and I had a step father that had a sawmill.

CW: Is that about the time the depression started?

BR: Yes. My stepfather couldn't even sell lumber so most all of us had to go to work. My stepbrothers and sisters and I and [my] real sister and brother had to snake out wood, and sell by the cord to help with the family finances. And during the school year, my mother had to move from the sawmill to a little town so we could go to school. And I got a job as a cleaning girl, shelf stocker, in a little grocery store. And I worked every night for seven hours after school. And my paycheck was one can of food, such as a can of tomatoes, sardines for every eight hours I worked.

CW: How long did you work there?

BR: I worked there through the eighth grade.

CW: And then did you get another job?

BR: Yes, I had to move to the city, and I got a job on the PWA, and I was only about seventeen at that time. And I worked for a dollar a day sewing for the poor. And then I would go with the welfare worker to deliver the goods we made at the sewing center.

CW: Did you find that many people were hit hard by the depression?

BR: Very hard. There also was a drought at the time. There was, there was so many people that had nothing to eat except canned beef the government had to send in, and we were only a small town, we were not hurt like the cities even because they could raise some of their food where we were. But still and all there were a lot of people, babies that were starving, and had disease. And as we went to the homes to take the food and the clothes we made to these families, the babies would be wrapped in, sometimes burlap was all, on bare floors, not even a bed to sleep in.

CW: Which town was this in?

BR: At this time, this was in Mackay, Idaho. It's a small town near Arco where the AEC project is now.

CW: When did you marry?

BR: In 1934.

CW: 1934, so that was right after the depression?

BR: The depression was nearly over at that time.

CW: How did the depression end?

BR: When Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected president, he started the CCC Camps. And it took all of the boys, the young fellows, that were not working in the cities out of the cities and put them out in the camps. [They made a dollar a day. They built bridges through the mountains and wherever bridges were needed. They built roads.] And they gave them their pride back. They were working if only for a dollar a day.

CW: What about those young men who had families?

BR: Many men that had families were in the CCC's, at least they had a job.

CW: Were they able to support their families?

BR: No, not entirely. Most people had to depend a little on the government, the food the government sent them.

CW: During the depression years, what did you do for recreation?

BR: We made our own fun. We made our own skis; we made our own toboggans and sleighs. We made ice ponds and we had parties, skating parties. And we had parties at our home. My mother played the organ and we all would sing, and we had family living and family home, love.

CW: Do you believe that family unity was very strong during the depression?

BR: *Very* strong during the depression.

CW: What were the prices like?

BR: Well, hamburger was about ten cents a pound. Beef steak was about twenty-five cents a pound. You could even go to a restaurant and order beef steak for forty cents. Prices were very low, but then so were wages. A dollar a day didn't go very far.

CW: Did you find that you could live on a dollar a day with the government's help?

BR: Yes, we had to, there was no other way.

CW: Have you found how the depression has affected your life? Have you learned to appreciate the things that you have now more?

BR: Very much. It taught us to do our job well. Because there was so many to take our place, just waiting, if you didn't do your job to the best of your ability, even better sometimes than that, you didn't have a job. It too taught us to budget our money.

CW: It really helped you then realize the difference between then and now?

BR: Very much, it made us appreciate what we have now.

CW: Mrs. Richardson, is there anything else that you would like to talk about on the depression?

BR: It would take so many hours to tell you everything I know about the depression.

CW: Well thank you then, Mrs. Richardson, for your time.