WO: This is an oral history. I am Wade Orgill. Today, December 2, 1974, I am going to interview my uncle, Lowell Orgill. The general topic will be “Life in the Depression.” Mr. Orgill where were you born?

LO: I was born in Egin, Idaho.

WO: How long have you lived in Egin?

LO: Fifty-nine years.

WO: Where were your parents born?

LO: Mother was born in Wilford, Idaho. My father was born at Draper, Utah.

WO: What was your occupation? In the Depression, what were you doing? Did you hire yourself out to others to help at home?

LO: Yes, I did. I worked on the side considerably to supplement the family income. The Depression hit in 1929. The stock market crashed almost overnight. You could sell your produce for practically nothing. At this time we hauled our potatoes out in the dump and dumped the potatoes. We had no price. Our crops was a total loss.

During the Depression days, we worked for a very small wage, a lot of times [for] one dollar a day for ten hours. During this time, we received as low as twenty cents a bushel for our wheat, fourteen cents a hundred for number one potatoes sorted. Some of this time we worked on contract. The dealer would furnish the sacks, the sorters, the twine, electricity and we—the laborers—would furnish the help. Whatever the proceeds was when the potatoes were shipped and returned determined our wages. Sometimes we went as low as six dollars a week, sometimes nothing.

We were lucky during the Depression days, during the dark days of this depression, to have sugar on the table. On the farm, we had our meat and our potatoes and eggs and milk and things of this nature. In the city they didn’t. At this time they had bread and soup lines. People had no jobs. This was a very difficult time for about five years.

During this dark depression, we bound our grain, thrashed with the old steam thrashing machine. No one had any money so the neighbors would get together and change help in order to get the grain thrashed, and this is the way we got our crops harvested. In the fall, we had our water assessments and taxes to meet. We would work on the canal with scrapers drawn by a team of horses. This way we would work our assessments out in order to get them paid because we had nothing on the farm to pay these debts with. A lot of farms were lost during the Depression days because of these depressed prices and no income to meet the payments.

WO: One thing I’m interested in was the politics of the day. Were the people around here conservative in that they were backing the government in their decisions or was there, you know, sort of a silent protest?
LO: Well, I think they were backing the government. At this time we were under a Republican administration. President Hoover was our president. He was defeated in a landslide by Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932.

At this time there were a lot of banks that went broke. People had lost what savings they had, whatever money they had in these banks. The banks went broke, they lost their money. In months to come, President Roosevelt organized the CC camps, which put a lot of the young men to work for a dollar a day and their board, which we were happy to have because at this time there were no jobs for anyone.

WO: Did the people around here think it was Hoover’s fault that the country went into a depression?

LO: Well, some did, yes. Some thought it was President Hoover’s fault, but who am I to say it was?

WO: You said earlier that living in the country was a little bit better than living in the city because there was some self-sufficiency. You had your crops, you had your animals, whereas the city folks depended on the farmers, who when they couldn’t get any prices couldn’t afford to give it away. So what sort of self-sufficiency did you set up? By that I mean, what did your father and mother do to keep the family together during these dark days?

LO: Well, during these Depression days, we had no money to buy clothes with. I was only 17, but I remember these things very well. My mother sewed, made our jackets. There were four of us boys in the family. She made our jackets, made our gloves, and things of this nature because we didn’t have the money to buy these necessities with. So mother sewed and made these things for us.

WO: During these dark days it would be hard to keep the faith up, hard to keep spirit. What sort of things did you do for entertainment because now days kids can go just about anywhere they want and do anything? What sort of things did you do during the Depression to lighten the mood up a little bit?

LO: During the Depression days, we had no money to go anywhere, not even to town for a movie, so we would have community dances. This orchestra would come and play and contribute their music, and we would take baskets and have basket lunches and things of this nature and make our own entertainment. We just didn’t have any money to go anywhere.

WO: You have seen the world today and the world of yesterday, do you think the family ties were a lot closer in the Depression days than they are today?

LO: Most definitely. The family ties were far closer knit than they are today. In fact, if we should have a depression today, I don’t know how the younger generation would cope with it.

WO: One thing I have always wondered about the Depression days was the medical aid. How did you folks go about the medical aid because I know you didn’t have the money to go to the
hospital and have some of these things done? So what was the medicinal procedures for some of these illnesses and deaths? How were these things taken care of in the Depression days?

LO: Well, at this time we had one hospital in Rexburg which was known as Dr. Harlo Rigby’s Hospital. This was the only hospital in the Upper Snake River Valley. And at this time we had midwives who would come in and take care of the ladies during the birth of their babies and during illnesses we used our home remedies. Anything serious the doctor would come to the home for a very small fee and always when he was called he would come.

WO: Okay, today they have got such elaborate funerals and, you know, methods to take care of the deceased have changed. What were the methods back then? I imagine they varied quite a bit from today!

LO: Well, the methods back through the Depression days were…That’s right they were far different than they are today. The burials were far cheaper, of course, cheaper material and everything else, but people would have to buy the cheaper funerals to get by. In fact, in a lot of cases we had county burials where the county paid the funeral expenses.

WO: What was your general meal like—what did a meal usually consist of?

LO: Well, during this time, we always had our grist of flour in the fall. For breakfast we always had our cereal, our toast, our pancakes. Mother would always fix some gravy and mashed potatoes for dinner. We always had a little beef or pork or something of this nature. And at this time the housewives did more home cooking and things of this nature. We didn’t have these supermarkets to run to everyday or two, and we would just get along with what they had. I remember my folks made one trip to town during the winter. They’d get a bill of groceries, whatever they could afford, the very necessities. We would have to get by with this.

WO: You hear so much about the Depression and everybody starving. That does not seem to be too much of a factor in this immediate area. Is this pretty well true?

LO: Oh, through these farming communities we always ate, but we have another situation. This high cost of machinery, parts, and so forth. If this should break and we should plunge in a dark depression, I don’t know how the farmers would cope and pay for this high priced equipment when we are using today and this high rate of interest on this equipment. There would probably be a lot of it lost.

WO: Do you remember any prices on the machinery in the 1930s? I think it would be sort of interesting to contrast that to today’s prices.

LO: Back during this period, during the ‘30s, in this area most of our farm work was done by horses. There were very few tractors. But a tractor at this time would probably cost around $650 to $700.

WO: I have heard my father talk about the country spirit of giving in time of need. He brought up the example of how a person may have been killed and then they would pass around the hat to
get something for his family. In the Depression days I imagine there was quite a bit of helping each other out. Could you bring some examples if this is true?

LO: This is very true, Wade. Anyone is trouble, death, sickness; they always received aid from the community. This little farming district of Egin Bench in which I live is highly noted for this. Anyone in trouble is the neighbor’s trouble also, and during these Depression days we always helped one another out. If someone was short on something, we would give or someone else would and change back and forth. And we made it through, but it was really rough going. And at this time, if you had a job for one dollar a day, you had better be there because if you weren’t there, there were others there to take your place. And also during this period of these low wages, many and many a day we took our lunch basket and walked to our place of work in the potato warehouse, and as I mentioned awhile ago, we worked for very little wages, sometimes on a contract; but what little we got we were very grateful to get and it was used very wisely.

WO: As a matter of opinion, what do you think the trouble is today because if anyone gets in trouble, most people say, “Well, it’s their tough luck and we’ll let them fight their way out of it.” I, personally, would like to see a return where people would help each other out in times of need. It’s a disappearing fashion now days. Do you know what could had contributed to this?

LO: Well, I couldn’t hardly say, but I know, at this time that my generation, boys would learn to work as soon as they are able to accept responsibility. They had their chores. Each one had their chores lined out to do. Each one had their task night and morning and this was done, and I think responsibility for any young person is the best thing in the world.

WO: We credit President Roosevelt as being a great president, which he was. But what programs did he institute that helped the most do you feel?

LO: Well, a few moments ago I mentioned the CC camps which he took a lot of young men off the street that were willing to work, but there was no jobs for these men. And also, President Roosevelt organized another project, which was known as the WPA. This employed a lot of men hauling gravel on the roads making bridges in the country and things of this nature. Anything to employ these men and to let these men earn an honest living which they were seeking and where there was no work to be found. So I think President Roosevelt was a great man.

WO: It seems today that a man that can’t find a job that he wants to work; turns to crime. Now, was this much of a factor in the Depression days?

LO: During the Depression days we had very little crime, and people accepted this and went about what work they had and did the best they could. We had very little crime during that time. That is, in our area. Thieving or anything of this nature was very little known. If a person needed something, they would go to his neighbor’s and say, “Well, we’re out of such and such, would you have something to loan us?” Sure they would pass it along. We never had no problem in this community ever during this time.

WO: In the 1930s, early 1930s, there were lots of sports heroes, but were there also a lot of gangsters? Who did the kids of that generation tend more to look up to because I know that even
for awhile, you know, I glamorized the gangsters. I liked reading about them. But what was the
general feeling about the gangsters and the sports heroes at that time?

LO: Well, as far as gangsters, I don’t think the young people looked up to them, but at this time
it was Al Capone gang and Pretty Boy Floyd and Bonnie and Clyde and a few of those gangs.
But really I don’t think the young people of that time looked up to them. This thing was more or
less looked down on.

Our sports during that time consisted of ball games and things of this nature. We had our
ball team here in the community. Every Sunday afternoon, we’d have a big ball game with our
neighbor community Heman near here. And this is the things that we had—ball games and
dances and house parties, cards and lunches and things of this nature. We made our
entertainment because we had nothing to go anywhere with.

WO: In today’s world whenever a crisis arises, many people appear to fall away from the belief
of God. What was the general view of God during the Depression days?

LO: I think during that time people did live closer to the Lord’s teachings than we do now. In
fact, this is very evident today, this uprising crime. And I think, in fact, I know that people lived
closer to the Lord and His commandments than people are today.

WO: Alright. Sort of in conclusion, are there any things that you want to make specific or add to
what you have already said?

LO: Well, I’m a firm believer through living during this dark depression, I’m a firm believer in
an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay which, in some instances, today we don’t have any.
I think in a lot of cases, this public welfare we have, not speaking of the aged or the breadwinner
though through sickness or something of this nature probably we should have it, but I do think in
a lot of cases that Public Welfare is abused where people who are able to are not going out and
earning an honest living.

WO: We know that you went through the Depression and today. They are both tough times, but I
think a good quote to conclude with is Charles Dickens, “It was the best of times, and it was the
worst of times.” If you could, would you go back to the Depression days over today?

LO: No. I would hate to see this happen. Although I think it taught me and my generation a lot
of things. We learned responsibility. We learned to work and respect and take care of what
money we had. And I think today that if the younger generation would have to do these things
they would appreciate this more. Because they’ve been brought up in better times, and in a lot of
instances, the young people expect more from the parents. I really would hate to see another one
because I don’t know how the younger generation would ever cope with it. I’m afraid we’d have
riots and other things here in the country.

WO: Thank you very much. This tape will be placed in the library at Ricks College for use by
future researchers.