

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Genevieve Anderson Insley-  
Experiences of the Depression

By Genevieve Anderson Insley

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Box 2 Folder 2

Oral Interview conducted by Kellee Bartholomew

Transcribed by Victor Ukorebi      January 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho

This is oral history. I am Kellee Bartholomew. I am going to interview Mrs. Genevieve (Anderson) Insley. The general topic will be the Depression.

Kellee Bartholomew: Mrs. Insley, where were you born?

Genevieve (Anderson) Insley: Downey, Idaho.

KB: How long have you lived in California?

GI: Eighteen years.

KB: Where were your parents born?

GI: Salt Lake City, Utah.

KB: How old were you during the depression?

GI: Ten.

KB: Would you like to tell us about your childhood year during the depression?

GI: Yes, I recall that it was very difficult to get work, but my daddy usually made out because he was a very hard worker. The government provided for people who couldn't get work to participate in a PWA which was the Public Works Administration in which they could be employed for about 90 cent an hour to do work that the community needed to be done. In Shelley, Idaho where I lived at that time, my father tells me that their project was to make a sewer line to dispose of the waste of the city. I recall a long trench down the street in front of where we lived and how the men would come there and work. They had to put in thirty hours a week, at least. Nobody could participate in that program who had a regular job. It has to be someone who was out of work. Sometimes the poorer people had the privilege of taking government issue commodities which consisted of canned goods which were not for sell. You has to sign up and go and receive those. They has to be cleared before you could receive them and it depended on how many members there were in the family whether you be eligible. In some towns this project included the building of parks, swimming pools, stadiums, community centers, auditoriums, and whatever the community really needed and would be benefited by.

In my family my mother worked very hard. She would go to somebody elses place who had raspberries to pick and she would pick those on share and give two-thirds to the owner and bring one-third home. She did this also with corn and she'd bring the corn home dry and it and she only got to keep one-third. I recall at one time that my father walked a great distance to work all day on a farm for one dollar. I also recall that a little later when I was in High school I worked at a honey company for 10 cent an hour an I'd put in a good long day so that I'd have a dollar. I also recall that we were able to pay our light bill and we had to have the lights turned off. We really missed the radio. At that time radio was our main source of entertainment.

My parents always had a garden and we lived from the garden in the summer and we lived from the cellar in the winter because my mother always canned a lot of fruits and vegetables. This situation was a great worry to the parents of large families, but I, as a member of a large family, do not recall having suffered through it. We were healthy enough so that we didn't have to worry about doctor bills nor dentist bills though I suppose some of our dental works were neglected because we couldn't afford to get that done. Even as late as 1935 when the Recovery Act came about, where the youth could participate; my sister and I would correct papers at school and we would receive about eight dollars a week on the National Recovery Youth Act which was to help students get a little extra money. And I recall that when I got my class ring when I graduated, I earned the money to pay for it by working on this project.

KB: Mrs. Insley, did your father work for the PWA?

GI: He did for a short time. I recall that he was one of those who set the pipes in the sewer and he did a very good job. But he had an opportunity to unload a box car of coal during the evening. Now they would call that "moonlight", and it wasn't allowed for him to work on this public works project and have other employment so he was dismissed. But when the state inspector came around he didn't approve of the part that had been done since my father had quit and they had to tear it all out and do it again. And he asked where the man was who had done it previous to that. They told him that he was no longer working there, and he said, "Call him back because we need this done right and if there isn't anybody else in town who can do it, we'll pay him more if he'll come back and work to do this job right." He did go back and continued working on the project until the sugar factory opened in the fall. Then he resumed his job as foreman in the warehouse in the sugar factory in Shelley, Idaho.

KB: What was your father's name?

GI: My father's name was Frank Anderson.

KB: Could you tell us a little bit about the operation of the sugar house?

GI: Yes, the sugar house was south of Shelley and its where the Utah and Idaho Sugar company did the manufacturing of the sugar. He farmers would sell their beets to them and they would go through the entire process from field to where the sugar was ready to be sold on the market. I recall having my father take me through the mill and showing me the entire process step by step from the time it was unloaded from the trucks or the wagons, which they mostly then, until it was in the warehouse.

What we thought was really fun was to watch the men who were called "noodle trompers". The sugar beets would be shredded into long strips like spaghetti and they would be in huge tanks or vats and the men would wear high hip rubber boots and they would get into the tanks and tromp around to mash the noodles down. Part of the other process was interesting how the juice came out and then it would be tested and be put through other machinery and gradually it would come to the point where would spin it. It

would be quite dark in the syrup form but after much testing and spinning it would become white. The last step in this process was to put it into white one-hundred pound sacks, made of cotton probably, and those sacks were put into burlap gunny sacks that were sewed at the top. And while they were still hot they would put on a conveyer and taken into the huge warehouse where my father was the foreman. It was fun to be near those warm sacks of sugar when we came in out of the cold and sit on those sacks of sugar until we got warm. And my father was an expert in stacking these sacks so that it would settle just right and the large stacks would not topple over. They would fill the warehouse all the way to the rafters. Here's where it would stay until it was used to fill orders on the market.

KB: Were the sacks carried away by train or by cart?

GI: They were put into box cars and shipped all over.

KB: You said before that you had a large family? How many are in your family?

GI: There are eight children in our family.

KB: Are you the oldest?

GI: I'm the second one.

KB: Do you recall any other occupations of your father?

GI: Yes. My father worked as a night cop in the little town that we lived in and he had some interesting experiences doing this. Other times he worked on farms and he was able to do about anything he was called on to do. He was very efficient in whatever he was called upon to do. I always felt secure because of his and my mother's ability to stretch the dollar. My mother would sew for us and she would have a knack of making things go along way, that she knew how to put meals together that were nutritious. She kept all of us healthy and we had a happy situation in spite of the depression.

KB: Were materials to make clothing hard to get during the depression? Such as needles and thread and cloth?

GI: Yes, there was a limited supply of all of these things, but it really helped that people who had more would share with the people who had less. And it was up to the women of the family to make over things to fit the needs.

I do recall one winter when my sister and I didn't have any overshoes and our shoes were getting wet and worn. It was quite embarrassing, but a girlfriend of ours noticed this and she talked with her parents and she insisted that we come down to the Penny's store at noon one day from school, it was only a block away, and try on some overshoes. And she arranged that her parents pay for them.

We were most grateful, but we were also quite embarrassed. I think of it now how generous she was and how thoughtful she was to do this for us.

KB: You mentioned you had an older sister. Could you tell us her name?

GI: Yes. Her name was Louise.

KB: And her last name?

GI: Anderson. (Price) She was working for awhile in High school office as a secretary. She had graduated as the valedictorian and even though she had great ability with shorthand and typing she couldn't afford to go on to college so she worked at different jobs that she could get around town. And one of them happened to be in the office here they distribute the commodities for the people who couldn't afford to buy their own groceries. She was a real help there.

Another time I recall she went to Pocatello and worked for a family for one dollar a week and board and room. Of course she got a lot of experience about being away from and being able to take instruction and use the skills that she had learned at home under my mothers teachings. This was always nice that we had so many girls in the family because all the people in the town who knew the Andersons had lots of daughters were coming to us all the time to get one of the daughters to help them when they needed them because they felt my mother had plenty at home still to help her so that she could always spare somebody. And we would go out and babysit or sit with the sick, or clean or do what ever they needed. They were always glad to get us because we knew how to bake bread.

KB: Did you have all sisters?

GI: I had one brother, but he was too young during those days to be of much help to the family.

KB: What's his name?

GI: His name is Don Anderson.

KB: Can you tell us what effect the depression had on your own education?

GI: Yes, I feel that we would have gone on to college if we could have afforded it, but since we couldn't we had to wait until later to get our education.

KB: I know that a lot of times when there's a lack of money people will go untreated for their illness. Can you recall any cases such as this?

GI: I can recall a time when somebody came during the night to get my mother to help out for a sickness. A woman living in a little cabin over in the city park was going to have a baby. Someone had told them that my mother was a good nurse and they had sent for

her. She went out with this man in a terrible blizzard during the night and she took what she could along with her that she thought would be needed. But when she arrived and found out the circumstances, she wouldn't go ahead and deliver the baby until they had called the doctor which they had felt they couldn't afford to have. But it was unlawful to deliver a baby without having the skill or the authority to do it, so after the baby was delivered my mother helped out by coming each day and bathing the baby and the woman seeing to it that they were kept fed and clean. She did much practical nursing during this time for people who couldn't afford to have professional nursing. I was always very proud of my mother's compassionate service.

KB: What was your mother's name?

GI: My mother's name is Martha Anderson.

KB: Where does he live now?

GI: She lives in Jerome, Idaho now.

KB: Did the people of Shelley get together or have any activities during the depression?

GI: Yes, it seemed that they had a very good spirit about the whole thing. They would still carry on their social affairs, having ward activities, picnics, dancing, ward reunions, and I recall that many families who lived in certain areas would invite their friends to their home. Everybody would come and bring something good to eat with them and bring all of their children. It seemed that you could call it a family affair being that everyone was involved and in this situation it seemed that they had very good times such as bringing a violin and other musical instruments and having square dances and talent shows and everything the people could enjoy. It seemed to carry them through another week.

KB: What religious affiliation are you?

GI: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

KB: What type of transportation did the people in your own case use?

GI: In the winter-time they didn't use to plow the snow from the streets. Most of the cars would be put away and they would use a team of horses drawing sleds. I recall having my father take my class at school on a sleigh ride party. And he drove the team of horses with the sleigh bells attached right down on the frozen canal. Of course, the kids just loved this. We'd sing songs and have a great time and always end up coming home to something hot like chili or popcorn or something really good.

KB: How many were in your class?

GI: About thirty. He had a big sled and some strong horses.

KB: Do you remember any of the Christmases that you had during the depression years as a child?

GI: Yes, I recall with fun the Christmases were then. My parents and even my grandparents always saw to it that we had plenty of things to make us happy. They would make doll cradles, they would make little dish cupboards, little chairs and tables out of just scraps of wood that they had around. My grandmother always saw to it that we had dolls dressed pretty and she never failed to send us a package with a lot in it and plenty of goodies; lump sugar that rattled before we even opened the box and I recall that she never failed to send a large Christmas cake that was Norweigen Jule Cake. This cake was more like sweet dough bread made with lots of eggs and butter and it had currants in it and the Danish spice called Cadamon. How good that always was. It was braided in the shape of a wreath or horseshoe and trimmed and decorated that was the highlight of our meal at Christmas time.

KB: What did you do for Easter? Did you have Easter eggs?

GI: Oh yes. My mother always helped us to color Easter eggs and we would go find them. And what a lot of fun that was and somehow we managed to have little Easter baskets to gather them in. And there was always the story of the Easter Bunny bringing them and for the little kids this was the real thrill.

KB: Did you buy store bought dyes or did you make your own dyes?

GI: Some of the dyes were bought at the store, but we found other ways to make dyes; like onion skins for yellow, and beet juice to make red, and other things to make the blue and the green.

KB: Do you recall having Halloween and going trick-or-treating?

GI: We didn't go trick-or-treating in those days but we always made jack-o-lanterns because there seemed to be plenty of pumpkins available and when we could get big apples we would make miniature jack-o-lanterns from the apples. It was always fun to pop corn and to bob for apples and when we were in school there was always somebody in our school who had a Halloween party where we'd have a spook alleys and all sorts of fun, scary things to make it a hilarious time.

KB: How about Thanksgiving? Do you recall if you had turkey?

GI: We had turkey party of the time and part of the time we had chicken because we didn't have turkeys on the farm and we has plenty of chicken so that's usually what we had for our Thanksgiving meal. I recall how good the puddings tasted and the pies and all the wonderful things that my mothers baked.

KB: DO you recall any Fourth of July celebration? Were there parades or fireworks or parties?

GI: Yes, I recall going to Shelley to a Fourth of July celebration in which they has a large platform built out of Main Street where the master of ceremonies kept things moving right along. There was a lot of community singing and a lot of booths where you could buy good things to eat and they'd have a street dance in the evening and everybody would have a good time. It seems that the little towns around Shelley would take turns holding the celebration. I recall going over to Goshion to one they had over there. It seemed that everybody like to have homemade rootbeer at that time so we'd have it in a tub of ice water and oh, that tasted so good. Then we would have homemade ice-cream about that time of the year the new peas and the big red potatoes would be ready to eat, that was an added treat, and also the big red roosters from the new spring crop would all be ready to fry so we'd have fried chicken along with that. I also recall how my dad use to love to go fishing trips with his friends. So many times on the Fourth of July we'd go on a fishing trip up to the canyons of the hills nearby and we use to take watermelon along with us and plenty of good things to eat so if they didn't catch any fish we'd still have plenty, but we would save our fire-crackers and our popguns for when we got into the mountains because we loved to hear echo. For when the noise would sound it would reverberate through the hills and we could hear it over and over.

KB: Are there any other holidays that you recall having?

GI: Yes, I do. They started having Spud Day in the hometown in Shelley where they have such wonderful Idaho russets. This was to promote the sell of them, of course, but it really helped the people in the community to take a great pride in their wonderful product. They would have a celebration which included a parade and many contests. I remember my sister being in a potato picking contest in which she won. She was the fastest at it. Of course, she'd had a lot of practice along with me and the rest of the family. My dad was even in a spud loading contest which he very well because he was so well practiced. He could lift those heavy sacks of spuds as the truck moved along Main Street and he could do it as fast or faster than anybody in town. They also got him into the boxing ring and the people really applauded when he was the winner against his opposition who could a younger person.

On Spud Day the High school had a special football game. Even their football team was named the Russettes. And they would have a Spud Queen which the people would sell tickets for way in advance and she get a special prize or even a trip if she became Spud Queen. He would stop our work at the harvest time which we usually had two weeks of harvest time free from school so that everybody could help with the harvesting. That way they could earn their money for the winter as well as to help the farmers harvest their crops which were mostly potatoes and sugar beets. It was another interesting point when they would stop the trains and the buses that came through town and serve them all free baked potatoes with plenty of butter on it. This helped advertise the product and I'm sure it promoted the raising of even better potatoes. One time the governor of Maine, which is one the rivals for potatoes, came for our Shelley celebration and he competed in speeches



with the governor of Idaho because they both had this thing in common it made for great entertainment.

KB: Do you remember his name?

GI: (Shake of head)

KB: Do you think that the people of today are prepared for another depression?

GI: No, I don't really believe that the general public are prepared for the disaster that we had before. And I believe the reason for this is that they've been living in a period of great prosperity and they have never learned the value of real honest work and they have never learned how to be thrifty, be economical, cut corners. We've just been in a land of plenty and I don't think they possibly know how to deal with it and I don't believe they even believe it or take it seriously when we get the warnings that we're in a very precarious state at this time.

KB: What did you learn during the depression years that have helped you in your life?

GI: I believe the greatest lesson that I learned was the value of work. Work is such an important thing that many people of this day don't seem to put much stock in it. And I believe I learned how important it is to not waste.

KB: Would you go through it again?

GI: I wouldn't welcome it, but I feel that I am prepared and capable of coping with it if it happened.

KB: Thank you very much. This tape will be placed in the library at Ricks College for use by future researchers. The interview was recorded on December 1, 1974.