

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Glen James Fife-Experiences of the Depression

By Glen James Fife

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Box 1 Folder 36

Oral Interview conducted by Don Neale Hazared

Transcribed by Sarah McCoristin February 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho

This is an oral history. I am Don Neale Hazard. Today March 27, 1976, I am going to interview Glen James Fife. G-L-E-N J-A-M-E-S F-I-F-E. Glen James Fife. The general topic will be the Depression of the 1920's and 1930's.

Don Neale Hazard: Mr. Glen Fife, where were you born?

Glen James Fife: Riverdale, Utah, October 3, 1900.

DH: How long have you lived in the place where you now live?

GF: Thirty-six years last December the 14th. Then I was married on the 25th of March in 1924. Times was really hard then. I don't just remember what we got for wheat, but it was less than a dollar. We didn't raise very many. You could buy cattle for ten and twelve cents a pound. I've lived in Filer thirty-six years. I was born October 3, 1900.

DH: Where were you parents born?

GF: My father was born in Riverdale, Utah, Weber County. My mother was born in Logan, Utah, Cache County.

DH: Okay, then your occupation is?

GF: Farmer and Rancher. My father used to run sheep for a while. Him and his brothers together and then after they had sold the sheep, why they just had a few cattle and farmed. We lived in Riverdale until I was fourteen or fifteen years old, then we moved up to Trenton in Cache County. Lived there until I was married. Then we bought a ranch up between Weston and Dayton. My brother and I, we moved up there a couple of years before either one of us was married. We worked up there in the summertime and we raised sugar beets, and hay, and grain, and a few cattle, and had fifty seventy-five head of sheep that we kept there on the farm all the time. In the wintertime, we went back down to Trenton and stayed in Trenton with our folks. My brother got married a couple years before I did, and I stayed with them one summer. Then the next summer, I got married in 1924. Then I lived in Preston, went out to the farm every day and worked out there. We didn't have a house out on the farm for me. Then my father stayed down in Trenton for three or four years, well just a couple of years, then my mother died. One winter she got awful sick and was in Logan in the hospital for a couple months and then she died. My brother was the oldest, he was about twenty-three and I was about twenty. There was eight of us and my youngest brother was about three years old when mother died. In four or five years after that, father sold his farm down to Trenton and moved up to Preston and lived in town. He lived there for three or four years and then they fixed the house out to the ranch and he moved out there. Him and Wilbert lived out there. My wife and I, we lived in Preston for about a year and then we rented a house that was right close to our ranch out there. We lived in two different places there. We all farmed together. Then there wasn't enough there for all of us, so I still lived down there by the ranch. I rented ground up between Dayton and Weston on the Nash farm. They had a lot of land up there. I rented up there for five years. Then my wife and I, we moved back down to

Trenton and I rented a place down there. We stayed down to Trenton. Then in '38 we came out to Filer and signed the contracts to get a place out here but then we couldn't get on it for about a year. So I went back down to Trenton and I worked that summer. We moved up here in 1939. We're still on the same place what we came to in 1939. We have five children. Max, who lives up to Rupert, and Jorene, our oldest daughter, lives in Jarome; Barbara, lives in California; and Denis, our second boy lives in California; and Dallas lives in Twin. They were all born in Preston and down to Trenton but Dallas, he was born in Filer. Now ask me another question.

DH: What do you think about the Depression as a whole? I mean how was it for farmers and that?

GF: Now you know that you can't just imagine how the Depression, how people had to live during the Depression. Everything was so cheap that people just didn't have hardly enough to get along on. There wasn't any Welfare or anything then; the only help that they got was brothers helping brothers and children kept their parents when they got old. In them days, they didn't have many nursing homes. I guess they had some but I never did know of any that was right around where we were. The farmers really had a hard time with everything; we just didn't hardly get a lot of stuff to pay the expenses. On the wages, of course, we got our beets stopped and loaded in the fall for 90 cents a ton. I think we only got about 5 dollars a ton and then I think they come up to seven we get seven dollars a ton for beets there for a while. You'd only get from five to seven dollars for a ton of hay; grain was only less than a dollar a bushel. We had a neighbor that had a dry farm and I think he finally had to let that dry farm go back. He couldn't pay for it. There was a lot of people the same way.

Some of the people that had come in the early days, and got quite a bit of land, they seemed to get along pretty good. Then it was right in that time then automobiles got so that people could get a few. The first automobile I got was a used one; I gave seventy-five dollars for it. It was a Model-T-Ford. I paid a little down on it and I had a harder time of paying for that car than anything I ever had in my life. But I finally got it paid for. Then pretty near everybody then got some kind some kind of car. There was a lot of people that could afford to buy new ones and a lot of people just bought used ones, especially young folks when they first got married. They got a used car. The gas wasn't very much; you didn't have to have no driver's license or anything like that. Of course, the roads were so rough; your tires didn't last very long. I remember the first car my father bought was in 1918. I don't think the tires that come on it didn't go over about five hundred miles. There wasn't much an hard surface roads, it was all just dirt roads or gravel roads. That was awful on tires. I don't think the tires was made near as good as they are now and they didn't last very long. In the wintertime, we couldn't drive the car out where we lived then because it got too much snow and they didn't keep the snow off the roads. So we had to put the car in the shed or cover it with something and leave it until in the spring when the snow went off the road. We used bob sleighs down in Cache Valley in the wintertime. Two or three times there we could use them up to pre near the first of April. Now they didn't have that kind of hard winters any more. When we moved up to Twin Falls, we didn't have the snow in the wintertime, it was cold but we

didn't have too much snow,. We never did have a sleigh. We could use the cars there all winter. For a few days sometimes we'd be snowed in and couldn't get out. Our kids had to walk to school there for the first two or three years after we moved to Filer. When it was right cold or bad why we'd take them in the car. When the weather was good, they'd walk with the neighbor kids. There was quite a few of them that would walk up there to school. After three or four years they consolidated. They was some of the old people there that they didn't think we needed school buses, they walked to school or road a horse when they went to school and they thought the people could do that now. They finally got consolidated and our children then went over to Moroa school and went on a bus. In two or three years why they done away with the Moroa school and they all went to Filer. I think all of our kids graduated from high school in Filer. When Max graduated, well before he graduated, he had to sign up for the service. So right after he graduated why him and another boy went up to Portland and wanted an examination. They wanted to be Navy pilots but then neither on e of them got in on that. He came back home and a month or so after that he graduated from High School, why he went and enlisted. They let him get in the Navy, and he spent two years in the Navy. But he never did get over in the war. He was in the Great Lakes in Chicago for about a year, and then he went to Oklahoma and went to school down there. Then he went up to Seattle and thought the was going to go out on the carrier but when he got up there, he went into a printing shop and worked there all the time until he was discharged from the service. The second boy Dennis, he joined the army. He went to BYU after he graduated for one year and then started the next year and then he got kind of discouraged. Him and another of his friends joined the Army. Dennis finally went to Germany. That's where he met his girl over there. After he'd been home, she come here and they were married.

Dallas, our youngest boy, he was in the Navy for in this stretch in the service. Our girls Barbra, our youngest girl, she was married and then her husband before he graduated from college, he'd signed up for the Officers Training. They went back to East to Quanico, Virginia. He was a Lieutenant in the Marines. Then they come to Eltoro, California and that was the first trip we had took to California was when we went down to Eltoro and stayed a couple of weeks. Our oldest daughter, she married a boy from Trenton. He worked in a radio station all the time when he was young. They worked in Twin, and in Burley, and then he finally now he owns a Radio station in Jerome.

While we was down in Utah, we just rented off of different people down there. Prices were so low we didn't hardly make anything . we finally saved up four or five hundred dollars and come up to Filer. We got this place on a contract and only had to pay just a little bit down on it, then in three years we got the deed on it. We really done better after we came up to Idaho because we had our place and we got all of the crops. We had to milk a few cows and got along pretty good. We still don't have very much money but we got along as good as the average people around.

DH: Did they have very many Hovervilles and stuff like that?

GF: Hubert Hoover was president when the Depression really got bad. Of course, I think it would of come anyway because they was hard times all over the world. People kind of blamed the administration for the hard times in the United States, but it was really tough. The first big trouble they had, the veterans of the first war, they was wanting to get a bonus. They'd been promised a bonus but they wasn't suppose to get it till 1945 and they wanted to get it early. A lot of them lost their jobs, and they didn't have any homes, they'd been renting and a lot of them just moved up they moved into different lots, anywhere there was a vacant lot there was tents. In Washington DC, the biggest Hoover Ville was right next to Washington DC. They just moved in there. They had houses made out of paste board boxes. The only friend they had in that group in Washington DC was the Chief of Washington DC police. He tired to do everything he could for these people. Let them move into a lot of vacant government places. Then got the army to let them have tents and they fixed a big mess hall so they could prepare food for them. Finally there was a lot of people who didn't believe in giving people any, a dole. These people was moved out of these places, but some of them didn't have any place to go and they just went around anywhere where they could fix a little shack of any kind to live they had and some of them went awful hungry. It told about some places where there was little children that died on account of not having the right kind of food.

DH: Was it ever that bad in Idaho?

GF: Not really, it wasn't that bad in Idaho. Of course, there wasn't as many people in one group. The first year we was over in Filer, then we thinned the beets in the spring every place around there, there was a miners strike on then. There was a lot of miners out of work. Every little corner or vacant place around there was tents and there was people there. When we thinned beets that spring, there was about fifty people come there. They worked by the acre but they didn't make, I don't know if they made a dollar a day some of them. Then they'd go back and live in these camp, in these tents and that around in different places. That same way that fall when we was harvesting the beets, why them there tractor people were just going around like that and working. After that year, I didn't notice it was so bad.

DH: What year was that bout?

GF: That must have been about 1940, '39 or '40. then when Franklin Roosevelt was elected president, Hoover he was having all of this trouble. He was running for reelection but everybody blamed him for all of the hard times. Now we can see where he couldn't really help himself very much. Franklin Roosevelt was elected and right then he first went in there then the banks was all closed, there wasn't any banks open. Franklin Roosevelt the first thing he done was pumped a couple of billion dollars into the banks and got them open. Then he started what he called the New Deal. He had Public Work Projects going all over the country. Instead of having the big names, they went by the letters in the alphabet like the WPA and the ERA and all, I don't remember what all of them things was.

DH: Did that help? Could you tell a difference in Idaho?

GF: There was a lot of people worked that unemployed everywhere in Idaho and all over worked on that WPA. In the farming country, they come out and they doctored nocuous weeds and just done anything to help things. One of the biggest things for the young people was this CCC camps. Any young boys that didn't have anything to do could join that CCC. Then they went like they was in the service and they worked in the forest service, they made roads, and they made, oh everything to improve things, and recreational places, they fixed all of them up. Made camp grounds and all this. I think them boys got a wage which most of them would send home to their folks because the biggest part of them boys was that CC, their folks didn't have too much it and it helped them out too. All of these people that was on WPA, they just worked out like doctoring the weeds, and they help fixed all things around in the communities and that, it really was a big help. Then the country felt that and things just a started picking up right then. That was right when the automobiles was coming on plentiful, and there were a few airplanes was a going, and the radios. There was a lot of work for, because everybody if they didn't have a job of their own; they could go on some government deal. The government then financed a lot of projects like in the little town where we lived down in Utah; they needed a well water there. It was all service water; the water was real close to the top of the ground. So they got in one of them government projects. I was on the town board down there, and we went up by Clarkston to develop some springs up there and run that water down and put into in a big reservoir up on the hill, up above Trenton. They piped that water down there and I think they got 70% of the money the government appropriated, 70% of the money. Then the people there, the tax payers, only had to pay 30% and they got that on a long payment plan. That water system is still going. That was the life save for that country because their drinking water there wasn't fit for humans to drink, any of the time. A lot op the times the people had them open wells and you could go out there in the spring and dip the water right out of the well without any rope on the bucket, it'd come up so close to the top of the ground. In the wintertime there when I first moved in Trenton, they had a farmers worked on the WPA, or I think it was the WPA, we hauled gravel. Graveled the roads were on, and they kept the snow off the roads, and they hauled gravel in the wintertime there. When it was way below zero when you haul gravel all day there but it just kept people going pretty good.

DH: At this time, you were using horses and stuff, right?

GF: Yep, we used horses. When we come up to Trenton, we just used horses. I brought six horses up from down to Cache Valley with us. Then I traded some of them off. One year I traded and I got 2 colts. I broke them, that was a good team. They were natural born pulling horses. We used to have little pulling matches around there with the neighbors. Then there they just was born with that there, it just seemed like right from the time I broke, they was good to pull. We had a lot of fun with that. Once in awhile we'd get together, and pull them on slops or put a tractor in low gear and then pull it backwards. We'd keep a loadin them slips and then pull them on that.

There was some good horses around there, but them colts that I had, a boy they really surprised a lot. One day I took them over to Reeds and they had this stone boat loaded there. Nod says, "Hook your team on that and pull it around over here where

we're going to pull." The reason he didn't think that they'd do it, that they'd pull it over there, he didn't think they'd pull it. They just popped the front to that thing right off the top of the ground when they sat down on that. Pulled it right around over there. Then I had one big old black horse, he'd pull it by himself. You could stand out in front of him and he'd lay down on pulling a stump out or anything. Them were the, I think, the best pulling horses that I ever had. I had one old team when I was not very old. We had two colts born, he kinda promised them to me. I always claimed them. So when I got married and went out for myself, I took that team. They were old then but I worked them all the time, and so I had them. Well, I finally let some guy have one of them, and I kept the other one until it died. I was always wishin that I would of kept both of them till they died because I don't know whether the other one got a very good home after I let him go. Then in the second war come on, you couldn't get equipment sometimes. We put in for a tractor, we had to go to the ASC office and put your application in. then as your name come up, you got a tractor. Finally a guy, a dealer, there I think about a year after a dealer in Twin called up and said they had a tractor over there we could get. So we went over and got that. It was moleene R. We got the tractor and a plow and a cultivator, would , of course, they're better outfits now, but they would cost eight or nine thousand dollars for a tractor and plow and cultivator like I got them for eleven hundred dollars. You know when Franklin Roosevelt was elected president, he really had a lot of things h. he called it the New Deal. He really had a lot of good ideas. When they come up for the reelection, the poor people and a big lot of the well-to-do people, they really thought he was some. He was campaigning once and he met a big crowd of people at one station there were he was going to make a little speech. He says, "My you people look a lot different than you did four years ago." He was reelected a couple of times after that. I think that he was one of the best presidents, he brought us out of the deepest depression we've ever had. Probably one of the best presidents that we ever had. Yet he was a kind of invalid, he, he was in a wheelchair all the time he was president of the United States. He was really a great man.

DH: How was the church going at that time? What did you think about what was going on then.

GF: When we moved up to Filer, there wasn't a church in Filer. We belonged the Bual one week after than then we decided that we could be living in Filer, so we'd better go to Filer. We had church up over the bank building and a dance hall up there. We'd have to go in there Sunday morning, and build a fire, and they had had dances and sweep the cigarette butts up and that up. Had church up there for a couple of years, then we moved a little building in from down to Rogerson up to Filer and fixed that up for church. Got along pretty good there. My brother was the branch president for a while. I was a counselor. I was also when they first started the Mutual . I was in that, and in Sunday School. We pretty near all had two or three jobs. We used just the one little building for the three or four years. We finally built onto that building and had a pretty nice church. Then I forget just what year it was, but we used that several years. We got a ward, we made a ward then. Bishop Barlow was the bishop. That church caught on fire and burnt down, and boy everybody was really sad. Finally the fair board said that we use the building down to the fair grounds. We had church down there for awhile but that was

cold. They didn't use that old, the old central school house in Filer anymore, and we had church upstairs in one of the rooms in the schoolhouse there for a bout a year until we got this new church. Then with the fire insurance that we got off the old church, and then the new church started to paying 70%. We really built a nice church house that we have in Filer. Now we have pretty nice ward and it's a real nice church that we have in Filer. We have about between three and four hundred members in our ward there now.

DH: OK. Well thank you very much. This tape will be placed in the library at Ricks College fro use by future researchers.

GF: Thank you.