

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

# Max Benson- Experiences of the Great Depression

By Max Benson

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## Box 1 Folder 12

Oral Interview conducted by Brian Schmidt

Transcribed by Sarah McCoristin    February 2005

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This is oral history. I am Brian Schmidt. Today is December 2, 1973. I am going to interview Max Benson. The general topic will be the depression.

BS: How old are you Mr. Benson?

MB: 60 years.

BS: Where were you born?

MB: Moreland, Idaho.

BS: When were you born?

MB: 1914.

BS: Where have you lived off and on in the United States?

MB: Well, I lived in Blackfoot and Rexburg. I lived at Provo, Utah and went to school at B.Y.U.

BS: Where were you parents born?

MB: Plain City, Utah.

BS: What is their name?

MB: Ed Benson and Julie Benson.

BS: How long have you lived in Rexburg?

MB: Let's see, about 38 years.

BS: What have your different occupations been?

MB: I've only had one occupation that being an accountant.

BS: How old were you when the depression began?

MB: About 17.

BS: Did you have an occupation?

MB: No.

BS: Schooling?

MB: Attending schooling and worked on the farm in the summer time.

BS: Do you remember what your parents' occupations were?

MB: Farmers all their lives.

BS: So they were never forced to go to work or anything?

MB: No, they done the farming.

BS: So you didn't have any of the problems of standing in the welfare lines in the cities?

MB: No.

BS: Did your parents have any money in the banks or in the stock markets that they lost?

MB: They had money, but they didn't lost any of it.

BS: Did you notice if any prices went up or down during the depression?

MB: Well, I don't remember too much other than that they didn't vary up or down very much. They held quite uniform, but they were down.

BS: For the city people anyway, was food and gas harder to obtain during the depression?

MB: well, it as those that were working it was no problem. Those that weren't working it was a problem.

BS: Did they use food stamps and gas stamps during that time?

MB: I don't believe any gas stamps were used. I don't know I wasn't involved in having to have tamps, so I don't know whether they used them or not.

BS: So work was hard to find then?

MB: Work was hard to find for some people, yes.

BS: When you got out of school, was it very hard to find out?

MB: When I was out, it took me about three months to find a job.

BS: Who was president during that time?

MB: Roosevelt.

BS: In your opinion, was he a good president?

MB: I guess there's pros and cons that depends on your politics. There's things he did that I didn't agree with, there's things he did that was alright.

BS: Do you think he helped the depression out at all with his programs?

MB: Yes, in some ways he did.

BS: During this time, because some people couldn't work and get much food, was there more disease and sickness at that time?

MB: As far as I know I didn't look into it, but I think it would be true. It would hold true to it that those that didn't have work and get medical expenses, would have more problems; but personally I had none.

BS: Did crime rates increase at that time at all?

MB: I couldn't tell, I didn't know of any increases.

BS: Did anybody try to come out to your farm and get some food that was growing there?

MB: No.

BS: So your family really didn't feel the effects to much of the depression?

MB: The only way we felt the effects of the depression was you didn't have as many of the luxuries of life that we now have. We lived on more necessities. Lot's of things people call necessities now were luxuries then.

BS: Did you use power driven machines or more horse drawn equipment?

MB: More horse drawn.

BS: When did you feel the depression started easing off on everybody?

MB: About 1939-1940 along in there.

BS: Were jobs easier to find then?

MB: Well, I don't really know. I found a job after I got out of school in three months. And it was harder for people to find work yes, it took about three years to come out of it.

BS: During the depression did lack of food and jobs cause a lot of stray animals, hungry animals like dogs and cats, running around?

MB: None in our area, I don't know what it was like in the city.

BS: Where was the exact area you lived?

MB: West of Blackfoot, Moreland.

BS: What did you grow?

MB: All the crops. Wheat, potatoes, hay and grains and all those types of things.

BS: Did you sell them very easy during the depression?

MB: No problem selling crops.

BS: But the prices were down.

MB: The prices were down with the level of the economy.

BS: Do you have a memorable experience which sticks out in your mind during the depression?

MB: Well, I don't know what I have any particular experience that I might ell, but when I went to school we used to go to a movie a double feature for 10¢. Compare that to your prices now. When I started work in the business I went in, they were paying labor at 23¢ an hour during the depression. Those things are hard to realize for people that haven't gone through a depression. The younger people now wouldn't know what a depression would be like.

BS: Was food a lot cheaper too, then?

MB: Yes, food was down the same way.

BS: Could you give an example like flour or sugar?

MB: Oh, eggs were 15¢ a dozen things like that. Some of the food items are not as far out of line now as other things are now.

BS: Did very many cars or anything sell during that time?

MB: Of course, when there as plentiful as they are now, people couldn't buy them because they couldn't make the payments, so they couldn't buy them. But we had a car, so I don't know really what to say here, we had no problem.

BS: Was gas pretty cheap at that time too?

MB: Yes, we used to pay around 20 to 25¢ a gallon. Gas really hasn't come up in price much since then as the other items.

BS: Did you remember anything about the depression you really didn't like?

MB: Well, I guess the main thing is like, some of the necessities we always had those and we never went hungry or anything. I've seen some people when I was attending school didn't have all they wanted. The main thing about a depression you don't like is that you feel depressed and there is a lot of things you'd like to do that you don't have money to do it. But the basic necessities why, I never did experience going without those.

BS: Did you eat more food off your farm and hunting and fishing, then you did going into town and buying it?

MB: Back in those days most people that lived on a farm, bought very little in town. They got the bulk of their food off the farm. There was some food bought, but nothing like they do now.

BS: So, you had animals there too, that kind of helped out?

MB: We had cows and pigs and sheep. We had all the meat we wanted to eat and all the milk and butter and everything like that.

BS: Did you go hunting often out there?

MB: No, we went hunting, but not too much.

Later on after the tape interview had ended, I was discussing with Mr. Benson about how hundreds of men every day would pass by his farm house on top of boxcars looking for work. He also told of how they marked the houses along the railroad tracks to tell others which houses gave handouts.

Also, we discussed the school lunch programs. Mr. Benson didn't know what it was like in the big cities, but he took sack lunch to school. He didn't have a hot lunch program in his area, and with his permission he let me release this tape interview.

Well, this concludes my questioning on the interview, Mr. Benson, and thank you very much. This tape will be placed in the Library at Ricks College for future use by researchers. Thank you.