

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Rulon Ricks-Experiences of the Depresssion

By Rulon Ricks

November 23, 1975

Box 2 Folder 31

Oral Interview conducted by Suzanne H. Ricks

Transcribed by Sarah McCoristin February 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho

This is an oral history. I am Suzanne Ricks. Today, November 23, I am going to interview Rulon Ricks. The general topic will be the Depression.

Suzanne H. Ricks: Mr. Ricks, where were you born?

Rulon S. Ricks: At Parker, Idaho.

SR: How long have you lived in Parker?

RR: All of my life.

SR: Where were you parents born?

RR: Father was born in Logan and mother was born in Farmington, Utah.

SR: What is your present occupation?

RR: I work for the agriculture department as a potato inspector.

SR: What was your father's occupation during the Depression?

RR: He was a farmer?

SR: Did you lose your farm during the Depression?

RR: Well yes, immediately after. As it was coming out of the Depression was when he lost his farm.

SR: He kept it all through the Depression then?

RR: Pretty well, yes.

SR: Did you ever have to destroy any of you livestock or crops because you couldn't afford to take them to the market?

RR: No.

SR: Do you know of anybody that did?

RR: Not in this area. We had a sad time sometimes keeping feed for them. Sometimes the hay was so expensive and so far to go to get it that we had a bad time sometimes to find food for them.

SR: How did the Depression directly affect your family? Did you have enough food and money and things to take care of your needs?

RR: We had plenty of food. We were never hungry. Being in my teens, early teens, why I can't remember too much about food problems. Mother and father always kept me well clothed, but I know from different circumstances that there wasn't any money, just mostly barter. We traded butter for sugar and eggs for different things and there wasn't any money so that was the way we did it.

SR: Did the Depression directly affect your family? Did you have enough food and money and things to take care of you needs?

RR: Well, I don't feel like it did. I think we were pretty close-knit family. I know a lot of people that were having a worse time than we were, but my father was a good provider and like I said before, we had plenty of food. During the Depression we had school teachers stay at our place and that no doubt helped some with the money. Then there was always kids gathering there. My older brother and sister always had their friends there and my older brother had an orchestra- was in an orchestra- and they used to practice there. They used our home as a kind of a hub for all their activities plus the school teachers and we had parties every night, popped corn and one thing and another.

SR: How about bring your neighbors closer together? Did it?

RR: I think so, because my father was in the bishopric and they were always helping different neighbors and seeing that they had plenty of wood and fuel. We didn't have coal; we couldn't afford to buy it so we cut wood on the river banks and canal banks for our fuel. We always...I remember many a time that my father was over to the widows to see what they needed with food or fuel or something.

SR: Were you still living at home with your parents during the Depression?

RR: Yes.

SR: During all of it? Did you have to leave home at all?

RR: The latter part of the Depression, in the early thirties, why then I was home in the winter time and in the summers I went away to town in Montana on one of the ranches there, at the Island Park Railroad Ranch. I worked there for two seasons. I went to work in the mines for one season and that was in the early thirties as the Depression was slowly, gradually coming out. Father was having a hard time. I know that because he told me if he were I, he'd go out and get him a job somewhere and I asked him where he'd go and he said, "Well, son if I knew I'd go there." So that was when I left home the first time and went to work in the mines. It was a rough time.

SR: About what were your wages?

RR: Well, when I worked in the hay ranches in the summertime, I received thirty dollars a month and my board and room. But when I worked in the mines, if I remember

correctly, I only got three dollars a day working one eight hour shift in the mines underground.

SR: Were you always paid in money?

RR: Yes, we were always paid in money with the exception of around home. Why we worked for different farmers and we'd help the farmers put up their hay, then we'd take hay for our pay...bring it home at night and put it in the barn so we'd hay for our stock. Then come thrashing time all the farmers joined together and everybody changed hands. We'd go from one farmer to the next and do the thrashing and then when it come our turn, why the whole crew could come up to our place. Then womenfolks would get dinner for us. There were two or three thrashing machines around in the area and that's they way we got all the work done was by exchanging work and also we exchanged machinery. People were real generous with loaning their machinery to their neighbors...wagons, and plows, and mowing machines, and everything they had.

SR: Do you remember the cost of things during the Depression?

RR: Well, I remember wearing work shoes that cost less then a dollar, J.C Penney work shoes, and bib overalls less then a dollar. Seems to me like sixty-nine cents was the going price for bib overalls. Gloves, cotton gloves, were ten cents. My father bought a new car in 1929 for eighth hundred and seventy-five dollars. It was brand new right off the floor. Of course, then it was in the early thirties when things got really tight and we'd have probably wished that we didn't have a car because we couldn't hardly afford to buy it even though gas was only twenty-five cents a round. We worked in the potatoes in the wintertime for, I think, the lowest was fifteen cents an hour. A dollar and a half for ten hours work.

I don't remember any suffering and we weren't ever threatened with malnutrition because we were fortunate to have plenty of milk and butter and eggs and meat and flour and I remember taking wheat over to Teton. They had a grist mill there and traded them for flour. That's the way we'd get flour, by trading.

SR: What about the prices of land?

RR: I really don't remember too much about the prices of land with the exception of the one place that father bought and if I'm not mistaken, he bought one hundred and sixty acres for ten thousand dollars and couldn't pay for it. Then another man bought it for twelve thousand dollars and, I think, the last time now it changed hands it was worth well over one hundred thousand dollars.

SR: Were you married during the Depression?

RR: About the tail-end of the Depression is when we were married. In 1936. Things weren't real good, but we thought we were old enough. My wife was twenty-three and I was twenty-five. My wife worked for ten dollars a week and I had a job for twelve

dollars a week, but we got along marvelous on that much money. We were one of the more fortunate ones.

SR: So, you weren't really that much affected by the Depression? Maybe as much as people who didn't live on the farms?

RR: I think we were more fortunate than most people because this never was a wealthy country. We all worked for what we got and we never demanded a lot of things. So as the Depression came in we were pretty well steeled and ready for it because luxuries we never had. We were fortunate to not have to worry about TVs or automobiles or a lot of luxuries, so it really didn't hurt us too bad.

SR: Do you remember any times of maybe places you wanted to go or activities you wanted to participate in that maybe you didn't have enough money?

RR: Yes, I can remember. My father was real strict about not letting us children go to anything if we didn't have enough money to pay our way and be a sport. I can remember a time or two when I'd ask my father for money to go to a dance or something and he'd say, "Son, I just can't give it to you." He asked me one time if I had any money and I told him, "Yes, I have fifty cents." But he said, "You won't have enough to pay anybody else's way if they don't have any money or you'll have to be a cheapskate." And so he said, "You'd better just stay home." So I thought maybe that was a good lesson.

I took a sleigh load of kids to the show one time with the team and the sleigh. We went up to St. Anthony, five miles, and mother gave me a dollar bill and I bought all the kid's tickets, there were nine of us, and I had ten cents over for popcorn out of the dollar. So, our shows and dances we had here in Parker, we had almost a weekly dance. Sometimes we had an organization with the M-Men and we sold season tickets for the whole year. If I remember right, they were seven dollars and fifty cents for a season's ticket that let you come and go to all the dances. This one gentleman, Roy Grover, said he didn't have any money but he had a sow pig with five little ones and so we took the pig and the five little ones and sold them to my wife's father for even and a half and that paid the tickets. Bought him and his wife's father for seven and a half and that paid the tickets. Bought him and his family's tickets and seven and a half was for the whole family. But we have lots of good together, us young married people. We had almost weekly parties at each other's homes and we'd have popcorn and chili. Nothing extravagant but we used to really have good times. We enjoyed sleighing all during the wintertime, it was the party time.

SR: Do you know anything or have any ideas about why maybe the Depression got started?

RR: Well, really I hadn't given that too much thought. The Depression happened gradually, about like what we're into now only the opposite called a recession and it comes on gradual. I know that if we'd educate ourselves to the fact of what was going on that we wouldn't have to worry too much about it. But then in those days there wasn't

anything like income tax and a lot of things that the government was after. We had to pay our property taxes and our home taxes and this and that, but our electric light bill was only two dollars and a half a month and taxes were not very much. Of course, a dollar was a lot of money then, too.

The Depression was worldwide. The banks all at once had loaned out money and then commodities weren't worth anything. Farmers and people couldn't pay off their mortgages and therefore the banks went broke and when the banks went broke, Wall Street and the economy got panicky and wouldn't loan any money and the people that held the mortgages, they just foreclosed them and took the places. After things started to come back...almost like a new regime...and bought the mortgages at the big discounts so the banks could get what money they could out of them. Then after the Depression started to get better, the insurance companies sold the farms back to the farmers at a good price and a low interest rate and got everything back going again and the economy started to pick up.

SR: Do you remember the banks in this area going broke?

RR: Oh yes. St. Anthony had three or four banks and they all went broke but one and there used to be a big bank in Sugar City and it went broke. "Purtner" all the banks went broke and it was real sad when they did. I know my father had a few dollars in the bank and they just closed the door. People, it was real sad, they stood out in front. I don't remember too much about it because I wasn't that much interested, didn't have any money in the bank. But they stood out in front waiting to get in and there just wasn't any money. Finally, when the banks counted what they had, their losses and all of this and that, then they paid everybody a token payment. The head officials came out pretty good but mostly the poorer class just got a token payment for what money they had in the banks because there just wasn't left.

SR: What was the token payment?

RR: Well, I don't remember. Maybe twenty-five cents on the dollar or I don't know for sure just how much they paid back. I know father didn't have enough in there for them to worry about. He never did go after it, I don't think, because it was just such a small amount.

When the economy get to such a state that all the banks all go broke, then everybody goes into a panic and the banks that aren't broke...the people who don't need it go in and draw all their money at all and that's what broke a lot of the banks because people wanted their money. I guess piggish. But anyway a few years after then things started to brighten up a little bit, but many of the banks never did bother to open up again because then the government insisted that they be guaranteed for so much money and like they have now with the Federal Reserve or somebody like that. They can't loan any more than the government will stand by. So really, I don't think they'll ever unless the whole bottom falls out of everything, then they have no initiative and those kind of times are more than anybody can stand.

SR: Maybe you weren't old enough but do you remember how you felt or how some of the people in this area felt about Franklin Roosevelt and his policies that he used?

RR: Well, I guess maybe it was a trend and I don't want to sound like I'm more for one than the other, but during the Depression, President Hoover got a lot of the blame for it and then the economy started to come back a little bit and tighten up. They put Hoover out of office then they voted Franklin D. Roosevelt and he went four terms, one of the longest terms that's ever been as President. People thought he was a real savior to the economy. Of course, maybe his policies and this and that, but I rather think it was a trend, that it had hit bottom and there was no other way to go but up and so he had everything to gain and not much to lose when he was finally elected.

Of course, we always complain about a President regardless of what happens, whether it's been too much or too little. I was a little bit too young to worry about politics and my father never meddled into politics too much. We didn't talk over too much at home which we should have done. I think parents make a mistake of not spending more time with their children talking of world affairs and politics and explaining some of these things to them so that they're ready when they come voting age.

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