

An Interview On The Depression

Interviewer: Would you please state your name and where you now live.

Mr. Morgan: Kenneth Morgan, and I live at 516 North Gibson Street, Princeton, Indiana.

Interviewer: How old were you during the depression, and where did you live then?

Mr. Morgan: About 23, 24 years old. I lived at English, Indiana.

Interviewer: Did you have a family?

Mr. Morgan: Not at that time?

Interviewer: What was your proffession during the depression, or before the depression?

Mr. Morgan: Well, I come out of high school in 1925, and work wasn't just too good, but I got a job in maintainence department for Southern Railway, and I worked about two years and a half. And I just got tified of the job and quit, and hired us in the transportation department as a brakeman, on the Southern Railroad. And when I hired, and we had to go out and make student trips to learn the work ,so when I hired, they didn't have any work for me, and I was cut off. In other words, I was just out of work. So, I was single at that time, and I went down to my dad's just worked a little contract work and on the farm, till that fall. And I got a job at Bell Telephone Company. And I worked with them, then, till 1933, and in the meantime I got married, in 1931. And then I got layed off from the Bell Telephone Company, and I was out of work about three months. Then I got a job with a telephone company whose headquarters were in Seymore, Indiana, that went bankrupt. So, they were in the hands of the receivers, and I went to work with them then, at thirty cents an hour, for nine hours a day, doing line work. So, I worked for them about six years, and I was called back to the railroad.

Interviewer: Since you did have a family, did the depression affect them in any ways?

Mr. Morgan: Well, it most certainly did, as it did everyone else. We just had to get by on the best we could. I didn't have any children till 1938, and I worked about another year for the telephone company till I went back to the railroad.

Interviewer: In between jobs, when you were out of work, were there any agencies that would help you by giving you food or clothing, or anything?

Mr. Morgan: There was later on, but to start with there wasn't anything, until about 1933, Then they came out with WPA and a lot of relief work, but I never did work on them. I always had a job that I didn't have to depend on them.

Interviewer: Did you feel that the WPA was an effective program for other people?

Mr. Morgan: Oh, it most certainly was. People just couldn't get a hold of money, and they did at least get some money, and it did some good.

Interviewer: What is your most vivid memory of the depression?

Mr. Morgan: I guess being deprived of things that we would have liked to had and we couldn't afford an automobile. And couldn't go places when we'd liked to. We'd just have to get our entertainment by going to baseball games-something that was free.

Interviewer: Do you remember any political problems back then?

Mr. Morgan: There was quite a few. Now if it was the parties that were in power, whether it was their fault or not, I don't know. They blamed it on the Hoover administration, but still, it might have happened under any administration. It just so happened that it was just that way and that's all there is to it.

Interviewer: Do you think the country learnt anything from the depression?

Mr. Morgan: They most certainly did. Lot people after the depression, they watched their dollars. And a lot of people put money away and owned their own homes that probably wouldn't have if they didn't.

Interviewer: Were your parents living at the time?

Mr. Morgan: Yes, m'am.

Interviewer: Did it affect them in any ways?

Mr. Morgan: It sure did. They were getting old and they were farmers and didn't have to much land to farm. Then my older brother, with two children, got cut off the railroad. He came down to live with them, and I tried to help them all out the best I could. After all, I was the only one who was working and making any money at all. And then, during the time, about a year or so after I was married, we had our home burnt, house burnt, and we had to replace it. Of course, that caused more hardship on everyone, and finally my brother got a little work back on the railroad, and went back to New Albany. And so that relieved things a little bit. But the depression just affected every one, everyone's lives.

Interviewer: When you went back to work for the railroad, was your employment any better?

Mr. Morgan: Yes, m'am, it was. I made more money, and it turned out so that I had been cut off for eleven years, and during that eleven years, my seniority was going on, and building up all the time, and so after I came back, it payed off. And I could work where a lot of other fellows couldn't that hadn't been there as long. So, I took a job down at Rockport, Indiana on a brank local. And I went down there, and I had to hichhike. That is, it was the best way I could get down there and back 'cause I didn't have an automobile. But I worked on that job for nine months and one day without getting displaced, and which was a God-send to me. Because I needed the work so bad, and when I first went down there, I didn't know how long I was going to get to work--whether it would be two weeks, a month, six months, or whatever it'd be. But anyway, I was happy to have it and, so even with hitchhiking down there and paying board, while I was gone; I was gone about six days a week, and I was off over Sunday. We could save a little money, because we hadn't been use to any money to save. And so, it helped us start a little nest egg, and of

course, we had one son at that time, but we just stayed where we were living, where we could get cheap rent as long as we could, in order to just get a little bit of money ahead. And from then, why business just kept picking up on the railroad, and war was coming on, so they kept hiring more men, and running more trains, and moving more merchandise. And from then on, I was pretty well set, as far as work was concerned. Oh, once in a while, I would be cut off, well wouldn't be cut off, but I'd be maybe not work to good on extra board for, oh, a week or so, and then it would pick up again, and I'd work. So, from then I'd done pretty good.

Interviewer: What do you really believe brought us out of the depression?

Mr. Morgan: Well, personally, I just have to believe that that political party that got in power- Franklin D. Roosevelt- in 1933. And as soon as he got in power, he started trying to do things. The first thing he done, he closed the banks. To make them safe. For before, the banks had been closing up and people had been losing their money and they didn't have any confidence in the banks, government, or anything else. And it give people a, well, it gave them a believe in their government. And, then he started this relief work, which was something for people to do, which they hadn't had anything to do for so long. And they just looked forward, and he kept promising. Of course, one thing that did cause business to pick, the war clouds were getting darker all the time. And they started making munitions and they started a CCC camp. They took young fellows in the camps around all over the United States, and out in California, to clean up around the streams, and old buildings, and just something for them to do. They didn't make a lot of money, but they paid them their board and give them their uniforms, and I think, if I remember right, they got a dollar a day- thirty dollars a month.

Which was a God-send, because they didn't have anything to do. They couldn't make any money anyplace at all. And I had a friend who worked in the CCC camp out in California and they had a fire out there. And several of them got burnt up. Of course, my friend didn't. He lived to come back. But just to show you the things they've done just in order to give people work and to get things moving again. But, it worked out pretty good.