

**Remembering
The
Great Depression**

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by

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Introduction

Some things, though painful to read or think about, are well worth recalling, because it gives us perspective. From time-to-time I have grown dissatisfied with my life here. Then after a trip to a third world country I came back quite happy with my situation, after I witnessed how much of the world lives.

Such is The Great Depression. It was a terrible time in our history, but few today know much, if anything, about it. I was born in 1938, so remember the situation well. My parents were married in January 1936 on a farm near Olive, Montana. Jobs were few and far between, so in August of that year my parents boarded a train for northern Idaho, where Dad's brothers had found work. I was born there in August 1938, and shortly thereafter the job was no more. So in September we, my grandmother, mother and I, headed back to Miles City on the train, while dad drove the car he had purchased. Back we went to the log cabin in the country near Olive.

Out living was quite primitive – no electricity, no phone, no running water - (There was a 34 foot deep well in the front yard that granddad had dug by hand.) and there was an out house in the backyard with an old Sears catalog for toilet paper. Dad found little work in Southeastern Montana between September 1938 and September 1939. That year he made just \$52, so in September 1939 off we went to Nebraska where he heard there was the possibility of a job. By the way, that \$52 in 1939 would amount to about \$1,100 in 2025 dollars. Imagine a family trying to live on \$1,100 for a year today.

The plant in which he had hoped for a job never materialized, so back we came to that little cabin in February 1940. Near Olive was a coal mine and it was there that Dad found work with a salary that was far above average. But, as you know, coal mining is dangerous work and twice his high paying job nearly cost him his life – but that's another story.

It was a perfect storm during the Great Depression. In the mid 1930's the weather turned hot and dry setting records all over, causing crops to fail. And, if that wasn't enough, crickets and grasshoppers came by the millions, so crops that survived the weather were food for these little creatures. With about one-quarter of Americans out of work entire families rode the freight trains, moving from town-to-town looking for work. Even into the 1940's people knocked on our back door, asking for food, since we lived near the railroad.



Above is that cabin we came back to owned by my grandparents, Daniel Franklin and Sarah Elsie Wilson-Ducello. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked our naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii and that began changes that led us out of the Great Depression, eventually. In April 1942 we moved to Miles City, Montana, where Dad got a job at the airport. Because of the war effort the runways were being improved and expanded. Even with that job we still were pretty poor. Dad rented a small two-room house with a front porch, but money was so tight that he gathered drift wood from the banks of the Yellowstone River to burn in our stove, not having enough money to buy coal or normal firewood.

Actually, though it was primitive I loved living in this cabin with my grandparents. Even after we moved to town I spent much of my time there. But I think you can see why, after a beginning like this, the little Brook Haven house we had built in 1966 (only 1,000 square feet in size) is like a mansion to me. And I never wanted anything more.

On the next page there is a short description of the Great Depression, followed by what local Prophetstown residents recalled about that time. Our small community was devastated with the failure of the Citizens State Bank and the closure of the Farmers National Bank. Because fear was rampant people ran to their local banks

to withdraw money and hundreds of banks failed. The Farmers National was saved because the town's people agreed to take less than what they actually had in their bank accounts. Also remember that there was no FDIC (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation) then. In other words, bank deposits were not insured as they are today.

I have also included an interview I did with my Dad, Vernon Delmar south, who witnessed this event first hand.

The Great Depression

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



Unemployed people lined up outside a soup kitchen in Chicago during the Great Depression

The **Great Depression** was a severe global economic downturn from 1929 to 1939 that affected many countries across the world. It became evident after a sharp decline in stock prices in the United States, the largest economy in the world at the time, leading to a period of economic depression. The economic contagion began around September 1929 and led to the Wall Street stock market crash of October (Black Tuesday). This crisis marked the start of a prolonged period of economic hardship characterized by high unemployment rates and widespread business failures.

Between 1929 and 1932, worldwide gross domestic product (GDP) fell by an estimated 15%. By comparison, worldwide GDP fell by less than 1% from 2008 to 2009 during the Great Recession. Some economies started to recover by the mid-1930's. However, in many countries, the negative effects of the Great Depression lasted until the beginning of World War II. Devastating effects were seen in both rich and poor countries with falling personal income, prices, tax revenues, and profits. International trade fell by more than 50%, unemployment in the U.S. rose to 23% [Keep in mind that most wives did not work. So when a man lost his job most families had no other income.] and in some countries rose as high as 33%. Cities around the world were severely affected, especially those dependent on heavy industry. Construction was virtually halted in many countries. Farming communities and rural areas suffered as crop prices fell by about 60%. Faced with plummeting demand and few job alternatives, areas dependent on primary sector industries suffered the most.

Economic historians usually consider the catalyst of the Great Depression to be the devastating Wall Street Crash. However, some dispute this, seeing the crash less as a cause of the Depression and more a symptom of the rising nervousness of investors partly due to gradual price declines caused by falling sales of consumer goods (as a result of overproduction because of new production techniques, falling exports and income inequality, among other factors) that had already been underway as part of a gradual depression.

What Prophetstown Residents Recall

From the *Echo*, 1974.

Fred Bridgestock: Farmer during the depression.

"I was renting a farm during the depression and I remember farmers raising corn and getting ten cents a bushel for it. Hogs went down to around \$2.50 a hundred and if it was a poor grade of hogs, it wouldn't hardly pay the freight bill when you took them to market in Chicago.

A local farmer I knew was just about busted and he took a load of hogs to Chicago. They offered him about a dollar a hundred weight for those hogs. He knew he was busted anyway and so he told the drivers to take them out in the city and turn them loose. And they did. They turned them loose on the south side of Chicago. People chased them down and caught them and had some food for the table. As for me, I was rather lucky. I had a few thousand in the bank and that went a long way then. And I was in the right bank. I had my money in the Farmer's Bank and that one didn't close. Others were not so lucky."

Mabel Blackert: Housewife and mother during the depression.

"We were living in a town in Wisconsin and my husband worked where he could get work. We gave \$10 a month for rent for our house and sometimes we couldn't even pay that. They would just have to wait. My husband rented a garage for \$10 a month and sold cars out of it and it had a large display window. Even so, there were a lot of times when we didn't know if we would have anything to eat or not. Sometimes I wondered how in the world I was going to feed the kids. We could get eggs for ten cents a dozen and hamburger for 10 cents a pound and it was good hamburger. And you could always get a small loaf of bread for a nickel and a big loaf for a dime. But the prices didn't mean much when you didn't even have the dime.

Back when my oldest son George started to school I didn't ever have much to put in his lunch bucket. He had to learn to eat just about anything I could manage to gather together. And he learned. Of course, prices were down then and sometimes I think when you did have a dollar, it went farther than five dollars does today. That's no kidding.

Glenn "Polly" Lancaster: Worked for Eclipse during the depression.

"I think it was Shorty Underhill who just went over and pulled the main switch at the plant and everyone just gave up and quit working. Then the NRA came in and they paid everybody a minimum of 35 cents or 40 cents and cut our working hours to 40 a week. They paid us \$16 a week roughly and we thought we were really making it. If you didn't want your job there were 40 other guys standing around waiting for it."

Vance Randall: Track Foreman for the railroad during the depression.

"I think I remember the hobo camps best. You know they had a little camp just on the edge of town near the gravel pit along the tracks. The reason it was such a good camp was that there was a fresh water spring there and they could get water.

There used to be quite a few in there at one time. They used to keep their cooking gear there. When they would leave the camp they would leave a coffee pot behind and some other utensils. But they always cleaned them up before they left. Then others would come to the camp as they got off the trains and they would use the same utensils. They were generally clean people when conditions would permit it.

They had quite a system for getting food. When they would get off the train they would go around trying to bum food at the various houses in town. One of them would go after bread and another would maybe go after potatoes. Another would go after coffee to drink with their meal. Then they would take all of the food and coffee back to the camp and have a meal of it. It was a good strategy.

A lot of them used to be hobos just to see the country. There weren't any jobs around and so they didn't have anything else to do. They just toured around by train and lived out of the hobo camps.

I have known some of them to come through here and they would practically be on a regular schedule. They would go north, south, east and west and come back through here again. They went around the whole country and I have talked with many of them and a lot of them were bright and well educated. They knew what was going on in the rest of the country because they had been there. You could learn a lot about what was going on elsewhere just by talking to them. They had been around.

They also had another little camp over near a stream by Walnut. You see, fresh water was important to them. They could shave and clean themselves. After that they would go into Walnut and get some food and then they would all help fix it and all help eat it.

Generally they were alright guys and didn't cause trouble. Those camps were something in those days."

Walt Sommers: Operator of a small business during the depression.

"I was located in a small building on Main Street and sold refrigerators and radios. I paid \$30 a month rent for the building and \$30 a month rent for our house. It was tough to make those rent payments. People just weren't buying anything and I was selling luxury items.

I remember one thing that happened. I was selling refrigerators and at that time refrigerators sold for about \$170. It was somewhere in that range. I didn't buy any refrigerators one spring and the distributor finally came to me and told me that the company had so many refrigerators they didn't know what to do with them all. He offered to ship out three refrigerators for me to put on my floor and he asked me to save the crates. If you don't sell them by September, just put them back in the crates and ship them back to us, he said. We'll pay the freight both ways.

I decided I couldn't lose and so I took him up on the offer. But I couldn't sell them. Nobody could dig up that kind of money. It was out of the question. The people who had the money weren't spending it and the people who wanted to buy couldn't. They didn't have any money.

When September came I just crated all three refrigerators and shipped them back. You just couldn't get a prospect.

About the only thing that saved my neck was that the only entertainment people had was radio and I could fix them. I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't been able to fix radios."

Atkinson where they thought they could get the coal cheaper at the mine. They sold the corn and it wouldn't even pay for a load of coal. They couldn't get enough for the corn and Julius said, The hell with it. So they burned ear corn for heat the rest of the winter.

And another thing. I had four men on my route who lived within a couple of miles of one another. All four of them committed suicide. They were losing everything they had worked all their lives to get. Two of them hung themselves and the other two took poison."

Kenneth Fenn: Druggist during the depression.

"We used to sell quite a bit of paint at the store and every morning we would get some ready for delivery. If a fellow would come to get it, there would be four or five or six painters standing outside the store asking where the paint was going. They would ask me who was going to apply the paint and I would tell them to go find out and away they would go. And that was it. I don't know what they were getting an hour then. I suppose it was 40 cents or so.

They would almost fight out there to get that paint job. They were looking for anything they could find that would give them some income."

Lawrence Kiner: Worked for the post office during the depression.

"I had a postal route, a rural route during those years, and I remember a family that lived on my route. They had eight children and that family was just as hard pressed as they could be.

I stopped in there one morning to deliver a package and the kids were all home and the mother said she couldn't send them to school because she didn't have a bit of food for their lunch buckets. She couldn't fix them anything because she didn't have anything.

I came back to the post office that day and all of us got together and fixed a box of food and took it out to that family. Later I talked to the teacher of those kids and she told me that if those kids had anything for lunch it was generally potato sandwiches or cold pancakes. Those kinds of things kind of got to you. That kind of deal always got to you. It was rough. You just can't imagine how rough it really was.

I remember a fellow who was working for Julius Verdick down on Washington Street. He told me about a time they needed some coal on the farm so they took a load of ear corn to

Mrs. George Nelson: A housewife during the depression.

"We got along alright. The depression didn't bother George and I that much because of his dentistry business. But my folks had it bad. They had it very bad. It was terrible for them. They were on the farm and oats were seven or eight cents a bushel. Corn was about 14 cents a bushel. If it hadn't been for George they would have lost their farm.

At that time, George would extract a tooth for 50 cents. I think he charged \$1 to fill a tooth. I don't remember what he got for dentures but it wasn't very much. You can be sure it wasn't very much.

One of the reasons we managed to get along is that we were living in a flat on Main Street. It was very economical. He had a pretty good business and lots of people would bring us chickens and eggs and butter and things like that to pay their dental bills.

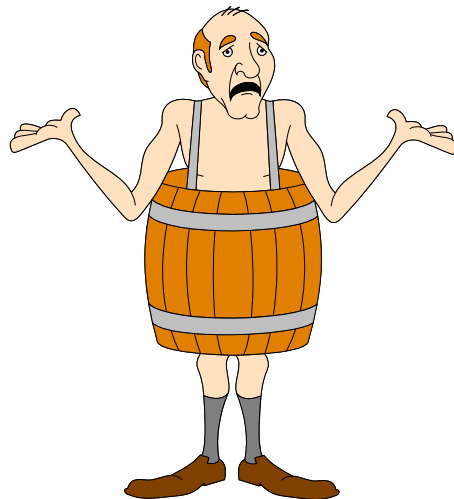
I remember when I found out about the Citizens Bank closing. I had been at my mother's. I used to get up around five in the morning and go down there to do their washing and ours. When I came home, George was still in bed. It was on a Monday morning as I remember and I had heard on the way home about the bank closing. I told George and he got up and came out in the other room. He was stunned at the thought that the bank was closed. He was simply stunned. But still we lived. He had money in his pocket and as we went along he would help people out as best he could. It was quite an experience. You learned a respect for money that you could never learn without having gone through something like that.

So many people lost farms. These were farms they practically owned. They just couldn't pay the interest. Many of the people in town were even worse off.

Of course the Warners, the people who owned most of the stock in the Citizens Bank when it went under, they had always lived well. They were very nice people. I guess they were the real aristocrats of the town and they had nice homes and lived comfortably before the depression.

As things got worse they had to put up twice the amount of money on deposit in the bank just to keep it running. They didn't have it to put up. They gave everything they had and as a result, in later years when they should have been able to live comfortably, they had to live so very economically. They never were able to recoup although I believe they eventually paid back nearly 100 cents on the dollar to the depositors.

Toughing It Out:
*Making It Through the
Great Depression*



Toughing It Out:
Making It Through the
Great Depression

by

Vernon Delmar South

as told to

Fred S. South
in Miles City, Montana,
February 1996

Introduction

Like the interview regarding transportation, this began in September 1995, in Miles City, Montana, when we were home for the Great American Cattle Drive, and continued by telephone over the course of the next four months. The topic dealt with Vern's view of what happen during the Great Depression.

Vern wrote his memoirs in which he had some to say about life during the Depression era. It was obvious, though, that he remembered a lot more than he had written. Having been born at the tail-end of that time period, I have a few memories, but mostly of trivial things. With that in mind, I determined to have him set down in print what he recalled about this aspect of his life. Both my generation and those that came after have lived during a time of unprecedented prosperity. With those before us, that was not the case, and it is beneficial for us to learn more of what they experienced. If nothing else, it should make us more grateful for what we have.

In the interview, you will see the names of Tom, Leo, Irvin and Joey. These were Vern's brothers.

F.S.S.

The Interview

Q: How old were you when the stock market crash took place in October of 1929?

A: I was 19 years old.

Q: Where were you living then?

A: I had returned from Montana and was living in Auburn, Nebraska.

Q: What kind of work were you doing?

A: I was shucking corn [picking corn cobs by hand] for Cecil Williams, 2 miles north of Howe, Nebraska.

Q: What was the pay?

A: Six cents per bushel.

Q: So how much would you make in a normal day?

A: I averaged 80 bushel, which would be \$4.80 and that was with board and room included.

Q: Would you consider that pretty good pay for those days?

A: Very good, yes. Better than I could have done at carpentry work.

Q: What was the first evidence you saw of the Great Depression?

A: Well, first of all I would like to make another statement. In that summer, after I returned from Montana, no, it was before I went to Montana, actually, there was a big billboard sign between Auburn and Nebraska city. On this sign they had a large cornucopia and above it the sign read: "Absolutely nothing can stop America." I wanted to say that as a preface to the rest of this.

Q: Well, they really thought that in those days.

A: They did. That's exactly what they thought. Everything was fantastic.

Q: When the Depression came, how did it affect your job?

A: Well, there was just as much corn to shuck, but the price went down. The normal way to figure it was that we got 10 percent of the market value to shuck the corn. It had been 60 cents per bushel and they were paying me 6 cents per bushel to shuck it and place it in the crib.

Q: When you say the price fell, how far down did it go?

A: It got to 9 cents a bushel in 1932. Matter of fact, farmers were burning corn rather than coal, because it was cheaper. I don't know how many carloads of corn they shipped out of Howe. But the buyers paid the farmers 9 cents for it and I assume they might have gotten 15 cents out of it.

Q: At those prices, how much would you make a day?

A: Well, I went back from Montana to shuck corn in 1932. Corn was, at that time, 15 cents a bushel. I got a cent and half per bushel for shucking and I shucked 2,500 bushel, put it in the crib, scooping it 12 feet high to get it in - all for \$37.50.

Q: How many day's work was that?

A: Probably between 40 and 50 day's work, because a lot of the corn was down and it slowed things up. Eighty-bushel was the best day I ever had, under those conditions. Some days I could only get 60 because it was snowed under.

Q: What was the most serious affect you saw in your family and friends from the Depression?

A: So many people lost their jobs and, of course, like I say, the market went so far down for farmers. In Nebraska and in Montana it was largely agricultural, so when agriculture went down, everything went down with it - services, merchandising, and all of business.

Q: According to government records, the Great Depression hit its depths in 1932-33. Was that your experience?

A: Yes. Here is an example of that. This guy that I shucked corn for paid me a cent and a half per bushel. By the way, I voted my first time for Franklin Roosevelt and after he took office, which was in March of 1933, the government put a loan value of 55 cents per bushel on corn. But I never got 5½ cents out of it. I still got 1½ cents per bushel. The farmer got the difference. From then on, the farm program did help the country. There is no question about that.

Q: How did the Depression affect what you had to eat?

A: Not a great deal, because when your wages went down, the prices of things went down, too. If you don't have enough demand for your products, you have to lower the price.

Q: Did you go hungry at all?

A: Not at all, except later on in Idaho. In the early part of the Depression - no.

Q: Did any of your friends or family go hungry?

A: Not to the best of my knowledge. There were some that did, but they weren't friends or a part of the family.

Q: I have read that some people ate out of the city dumps. Did you know of any that did?

A: Well, there was a fellow about 23 years old or so who lived in an old car body in the Sandpoint, Idaho, dump. The engine and seats were gone, but the doors and glass were still there. I think he ate out of the dump.

Q: Did the government begin giving food away during that time?

A: Later on they did, but not in 1933. They were called surplus commodities, mostly canned goods, like liver pate [liverwurst], canned pork, and canned beef.

Q: Did you folks eat wild game during the depression?

A: No, we never did.

Q: How did the government help those without jobs.

A: In 1934, the government started the CWA, the Civil Works Administration, to put people back to work. People went out and helped build roads and things like that. They were paid \$40 per month, which was a livable wage at that time.

Q: Did you work for this organization?

A: While in Idaho, I worked for the WPA [Works Progress Administration], laying a water line in Sandpoint. We started in January or February and about primary time [April or May] one of the bosses came around to collect \$1 from everyone for the Democratic Central Committee. There were about 200 men employed on that project and 7 of us refused to donate. Come Monday, we didn't have jobs. I didn't blame Roosevelt for it; it was really just a local problem.

Q: Did any of your brothers work for the New Deal programs?

A: Ervin worked in the CCCs [Civilian Conservation Corps]. He was in the first time for about

1½ years, first at Mystic in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Toward the end of that term, they transferred him down to Beatrice, Nebraska. When he got out, he, Leo and I went to western Nebraska to get work in the sugar beet fields, but didn't find any. In 1935, Ervin headed for Montana, stopped in the Black Hills and hooked up with a guy who went with him to Palouse Country in Idaho to work in the orchards. He came back to Butte, Montana, stayed with Aunt Ethel and Uncle Hank [Egge], hoping to find work in that area. Having no luck, he came back to Nebraska and enlisted again in the CCCs at Beatrice. When he finished that term, he, Leo, and I headed for Montana.

Q: Did you try to join the CCCs, too?

A: Yes, I did, but they wouldn't take me. They were doing some work in Alaska and that's where I wanted to go. They said that only one member per family could enlist. I still don't understand that, because Harry and Dan [the Ducello brothers, who were to become Vern's brother-in-laws] both enlisted in Montana. Anyway, they wouldn't let me in.

Q: In the election of 1932 you said you voted for Roosevelt.

A: First and last time.

Q: Do you think that election made quite a difference?

A: It made all the difference in the world! But I think it would be fair to say that President Hoover tried to do many things, but Congress would not give him a dime to do it with. Then they turned over a blank check to Roosevelt. I'd like to insert that.

Q: Were you in favor of most of Roosevelt's programs?

A: At that time, yes, definitely. Many of these Hoover had wanted to put in place, but Congress would not allow him to.

Q: Congress was evidently controlled by the Democrats?

A: Yes, apparently.

Q: Did you participate in any of Roosevelt's other programs?

A: I worked on WPA for 6 weeks in Idaho, and that's all. [Works Progress Administration. Later renamed the Works Projects Administration.]

Q: You lived on the Ducello farm for a time, out on Double Corral Creek [southeast of Miles City, Montana].

A: Yes, I did.

Q: Did your father-in-law, Frank, get involved in any of the New Deal programs?

A: Yes, he did. In 1937, they had what was called the WPA, Works Progress Administration, putting these farmers to work graveling roads. He took his team over on Pumpkin Creek and worked about 6 weeks. Of course, he got in on the farm program, too. What little he got out of it.

Q: According to the government statistics, unemployment reached about 25 percent in 1932. From your experience, would you agree with that?

A: Yes, I would.

Q: What did people do when they were unemployed? There was no unemployment insurance at that time.

A: And no welfare, as we know it now. The Red Cross came through with a lot of help, to the

best of their ability, with what they had to work with.

Q: Did the churches or the Salvation Army offer help?

A: They did, but their ability was limited, just like every ones. They did what they could.

Q: The government came out, eventually, with unemployment compensation. Did you take advantage of that?

A: After we came back to Montana from Idaho [September 1938], I drew \$30, from my jobs in Idaho. It amounted to \$5 a month for 6 months. Some of the companies I worked for out there didn't work long enough in the state to pay into unemployment, so I lost out.

Q: During the midst of the Depression, you moved to Idaho.

A: Yes. We left the Ducello place and came to Miles City on the Mizpah Stage. That was on the first of August 1936. We stayed at the Gilmore Hotel that night and left for Idaho on August 2nd, arriving there about 8:30 p.m. the next day.

Q: Why did you do that?

A: Because everything was completely dried out here [in southeastern Montana]. There were grasshoppers and locust; there was nothing to do, whatsoever.

Q: Tell me about the grasshoppers.

A: They came in June of 1936; a few had come in 1934, but nothing like in 1936. A few hatched here, but millions came from somewhere else. They ate absolutely everything. There was not a green thing in sight. They ate the leaves on the trees, all of the gardens and the bark off the trees. They even ate the leaves off the sagebrush and some of the smaller stems. After all of that was gone, they ate holes in the oak wagon wheel spokes and the hickory hoe and shovel handles, and you know how hard those woods are! One latched onto my lip. I pulled his head off and the thing lived for a long time, crawling around on the ground. The only green thing we saw was by the irrigation canals near Miles City.

I was working for the Allen Brothers and we planted 960 acres of spring wheat. Only 30 acres of it came up and lasted just one day, before the hoppers got it. When they left, I looked up into the sky with a 20x telescope and as far as I could see there were hoppers, millions and millions of them! One commercial pilot, who flew from Great Falls, Montana, to Anchorage, Alaska, said he ran into them at 10,000 feet, even up over Alaska.

Q: Weren't there crickets that year, too?

A: Yes, there were. They were called Mormon Crickets and were 1½"-2" long and were a shiny brown color. They had wings, but didn't fly as much as the grasshoppers. They marched straight ahead, through or over everything. Driving on the highway was like driving on grease and they made a "crunching" sound as your car went over them. Trains had difficulty starting or stopping, because of the hoppers and crickets on the tracks. We couldn't even eat our eggs. The chickens ate the hoppers and crickets, causing their eggs to have a horrible taste and the yolks looked like blood.

Q: Wasn't there any poison that could be used?

A: The government provided a type of poison that people mixed with oats in 50-gallon drums. They then pulled them through the fields with a tractor, truck, or old car, spreading it as they went. The hoppers that ate the mixture died, but there were millions of others. It didn't do much good at all.

Q: This is in Montana?

A: Yes, in Montana, out at Olive. Previous to our going to Idaho, Tom, his family, and Leo had moved to Sandpoint, Idaho. Leo wrote a letter and said that everything was beautiful out there and that he and Tom were working. It seemed like a straw to grab at.

Q: Why did they go to Idaho? Did they know someone out there?

A: No. Leo, Ervin, and I had been in Idaho in 1932 and we thought it was a great place. Dad was there in 1891, also. Tom had lost his job in Nebraska. They put a mechanical grading system in and, since he maintained a gravel road with a horse drawn machine, he lost the job. There were no other jobs, so I guess they thought that [the move to Idaho] was the best thing to do.

Q: Did you land a job in Idaho?

A: Yes, I did. I built a fox farm to start with. This man I worked for was running a fox farm for another owner on shares. Now, these were silver fox, basically black with silver hair, and they were very popular for throws and coats, etc. He had gotten some money from some place, had bought another place, wanted to take his share of the foxes and move. Then another guy would take his place. So, I went over and built that. Jean [Vern's wife] worked at the Wayside Inn for \$5 a week for 7-8 weeks and it was a big help.

Q: How long did the construction take?

A: I was there about a month or slightly more. I had to build all of the pens, the meat house that was the place where they cooked the food for the foxes, and all of the kennels. The kennels had to be made out of cedar, because foxes are prone to have lice and mites, chicken mites. The pens were 8 feet high with a 2-foot overhang, as they could climb easily. Chicken wire was buried 2 feet in the ground to keep them from digging out. I got 25 cents an hour, for the carpentry work.

Q: What would that amount to for a month?

A: It amounted to \$2.50 for a 10-hour day.

Q: Did you work a 6-day week?

A: Yes, a 6-day week. So I earned about \$15 per week.

Q: Was that considered fairly good money back then?

A: That was all you could get, so it had to be good.

Q: Wasn't your oldest son born in Idaho?

A: Yes. There in Sandpoint at 9 a.m. in the morning on the 27th of August, 1938. The house was located at 823 Erie Street, in the southwestern part of Sandpoint.

Q: The doctor was called to the home, evidently?

A: Yes, he was.

Q: How much did that cost?

A: Thirty-five dollars.

Q: You were able to pay for that out of what you were making at the fox farm?

A: No, not at that time. This is now two years later. I was between jobs and without money and Jean's Grandmother Wilson sent us the money. [This is how short money was. To pay for my delivery and doctor's care my Great Grandmother, Elizabeth Jane Stokes-Wilson gave Dad the money.]

Q: The doctor charged \$35?

A: That was it – everything - prenatal and all. He was a young doctor in business with his dad. They were both named C. C. Wendel. A very nice young man.

Q: After finishing the fox farm, what did you do?

A: I built another one, for another fellow. This guy was a stonemason who had come to this country in 1906 from Switzerland. He had come to work in San Francisco, after the earthquake. After that, he ended up in Spokane [Washington], where he worked on the Great Northern Railroad, first as a brakeman, then as an engineer. By this time, he had retired and bought a little place west of Sandpoint, where he had a one-horse operation and I mean that literally. He wanted to raise fox because of the money that could be made. So I went out there and built a fox farm for him for the same price--25 cents an hour. It was 3 miles out there and I walked both directions. By that time, we had moved into Sandpoint into a Humbird house. Humbird was a timber and lumber company and lumbering was perhaps the basic reason for Sandpoint being there. Tom and his family lived down stairs. Upstairs there were two rooms and that's where we lived. We didn't have a stove, but this old fella had one in a junk pile. It was what we called a monkey stove, made of cast iron with oven doors on both sides and four cook holes on top. It had probably been in the pile for 30 years; was rusted all over. I asked if I could have it and he said: "No, no." "Well, how much will you take for it," I asked. He said he wanted \$2.50. That was a day's work for the thing! It took three cans of stove putty to plug the holes in it so we could get a fire going.

Q: Did you work at anything else in Idaho?

A: I also worked for the forest service for 6 weeks. And worked for Alaska Junk of Portland, wrecking out old mills and did some roadwork and a few add jobs.

Q: Earlier you said that food prices had dropped during the depression. Could you give some examples?

A: A small loaf of bread was 5 cents; a large loaf was 9 cents. The large loaf was one pound. Hamburger was 12 cents a pound, but we didn't have it very often, for obvious reasons.

Q: Did you have any problem getting milk?

A: No, we actually didn't. When living with Jean's folks, they had about 6 or 8 cows, so milk was no problem to them.

In Idaho I bought a goat for \$10, which gave about a quart a day. Shirley, Joey's daughter, needed the milk. The thing wouldn't drink water, just ate rolled oats and alfalfa hay. After a year, I sold the nanny for \$5. That's about the way most of my financial adventures went.

When we did move to town [into Miles City in 1942] I had enough money to buy milk.

Q: I understand that some farmers, rather than sell their milk for the low price they could get, dumped it on the ground, or into creeks or rivers. Did you witness any of that?

A: No, I never did, but I heard about it happening.

Q: I was told that for Christmas dinner one year you had an unusual meal.

A: That was Christmas at the Humbird house in 1936.

Q: What was it you had for dinner that day?

A: Well, Jean's Grandmother Wilson had sent her a package that had two little boxes of Jell-O in it. I think they were either cherry or strawberry - it was red. There was nothing else in the

house. Jean prepared it, but there really was nothing to put on it, except some black pepper. That's what I put on mine. Jean ate it plain. That was it. That was Christmas dinner, 1936.

Q: Was that the worst off you were for food during the Great Depression?

A: Yes, in the Great Depression and in my whole life, by far.

Q: Wasn't there one time when you made some pancakes out of something unusual?

A: [Answered by Jean South, my mother] I had put some boric acid into an empty baking powder can and written it on the label. One morning I came downstairs, smelled the pancakes, and saw Joey eating some at the table. I asked: "Where did you find the baking powder?" "Right there in the cabinet," Delmar [Vern] answered. "Look at the label," I said. He did, noticed it was boric acid and Joey about choked.

[Answered by Vern] They were the most beautiful pancakes I have ever seen, nice and golden brown. They didn't seem to hurt Joey, either.

Q: Didn't you finally leave Idaho?

A: Yes.

Q: When did you leave?

A: In September 1938.

Q: Did you leave because you couldn't find work?

A: Yes, I had run out of work and at that time they had received rain back in Montana and I thought maybe I could do better back there. I wanted to eventually get started farming. So we went back to Montana.

Q: What conditions did you find in Montana when you arrived there?

A: Well, not like I had hoped. I got one job haying, helping a guy finish up. I think I worked a couple of days threshing. From September 1938, until we left Montana in September 1939, I made \$52 that whole year. Many people make that in an hour now. We didn't die, thanks to Jean's folks.

Q: That was for a whole year?

A: For the whole year. Of course, Jean's folks had milk cows and a garden, so nobody starved.

Q: So when things didn't work out in Montana, what did you do?

A: I went back to Nebraska. Dad had written and said that the manager of the Harding Creamery in Omaha wanted to put in a cheese plant at Auburn and they wanted somebody to gather the milk, so that's basically why we went back there. But then it kept dragging on and on, until it was time to shuck corn, so I went and shucked corn.

Q: At what point did you move to Nebraska?

A: We left on Labor Day, 1939, the first Monday in September, with our little guy [Fred].

Q: What conditions did you find in Nebraska? Was there more work there than in the early years of the Depression?

A: No, you couldn't say that. First of all, I had a friend out south of Brock who was raising a truck garden and he wanted someone to peddle his vegetables in Auburn and that's what I did for half. We got half of the money we sold it for. In October, I started shucking corn. I shucked corn until about the first of the year.

Q: What were you earning at that time?

A: I was getting 5 cents a bushel and one place I averaged 80 bushels a day, until I sprained my wrist, then I cut down to 60 bushels. It was very painful, even at that.

Q: At 80 bushels you would be making \$4 a day and that would have been considered pretty good money.

A: Very good. The best I could get in Montana was \$2 a day and that was for 10 hour's work--haying, harvesting, and threshing.

Q: How much did guys working on WPA make?

A: Forty dollars a month; that's all they ever paid.

Q: So in a six-day week you would have been making about \$24 or about \$100 a month.

A: Yes.

Q: Isn't it true that during the Depression one of Roosevelt's programs called for farmers to shoot their pigs or cattle?

A: Yes, it did.

Q: Did you ever see that done or know of it being done?

A: I knew of it, but I didn't actually see it, though.

Q: Did your father-in-law, Frank Ducello, ever do it?

A: Yes, with two cows and several calves. They got \$20 for a cow and, I think, \$5-\$10 for a calf.

Q: What did they have to do to get that money?

A: They had to kill them, then prove that they had by taking in a piece of hide with a brand on it.

Q: What did they do with them after they killed them?

A: Buried them. You weren't supposed to eat them, but a lot of people did. They canned the meat and ate it.

Q: With a lot of hungry people around, and the government having farmers and ranchers shoot and bury their animals, didn't that cause a problem? What was the reaction of people when they heard about that?

A: It wasn't very good. The farmers kept a lot of it, canned it, or dried it, but the people in town didn't have that recourse; they were out in the cold. It was a dumb idea!

Q: Did the government come out and inspect?

A: Yes, they did and, if they found out that you were doing something wrong, they would cut you off. In the corn country, you had to do the same thing with your pigs - shoot and bury them. They did that so that the supply would go down and the prices would come up, but that's idiotic. That's one of his [Roosevelt's] programs I couldn't agree with at all.

Q: When did you see our country coming out of the Depression?

A: It started in 1935, I believe. Prices began coming up, because of the world market. You see, Europe went down with us, and when they began to come back up then the market became more active and prices came up. Also, in 1935 it began to rain, so it was a good year in this area [Montana]. Then 1936 was bad, but in 1937 it began to come back again.

Q: So the problem on the farm was more than just the economy; it was the weather too?

A: Yes. Two of the worst years in US history that I know of for poor weather were 1934 and 1936.

Q: When you say poor weather, what do you mean?

A: No rain, even in Nebraska. They had to cut all of their corn [in Nebraska] for fodder and ranchers came from as far as Wyoming and Colorado to buy the fodder to keep their cow herds alive.

Q: Was there any other problem besides lack of rain?

A: No, not from the farming aspect. All of the farm prices had a floor placed under them by the government programs; they would guarantee you so much. In 1934, I cut all of Lute's [his brother-in-law] corn for fodder and shocked it to sell to these cattlemen further west. I got 10 cents a shock. I was cutting that corn with a corn knife and some of it was 12 feet high. It got high, but it wasn't mature, because of the lack of rain. I got 10 cents a shock and would do 20 shocks a day, big shocks, some of them were 8 feet in diameter at the bottom and all for 10 cents each.

Q: You did 20 a day, so you earned . . . ?

A: It was \$2 a day and that's about all there was to do. As a matter of fact, Ervin and I went out and picked up potatoes for a farmer who raised 2 or 3 acres of potatoes. We picked them up for 75 cents a day, for 10 hours work. And we had to take the pay in potatoes. How would you like some of that?

Q: So you had a lot of potatoes to eat?

A: A lot, yea! We didn't go hungry, because everything was cheap and you could go pick spuds and they would give them to you and it was the same with fruit, because they couldn't afford to hire anybody to pick it. In 1931, the folks [his parents] were living in Brownville and I was back there at that time. Brownville was fruit country. They had big packing sheds. They brought in a big machine from Portland. It was so big they couldn't ship it by rail. Instead, it came by boat, through the Panama Canal and up the Missouri River to Brownville. That machine graded, weighed, removed all of the residuals, like leaves and stems, polished and sorted the apples and placed them in bins. They didn't have anything to do with the apples. The vinegar factory had closed down. I bought 13 barrels of apples - a barrel held 3½ bushels - for 25 cents and they hauled them up and dumped them in the backyard. All I did was pay the trucker.

Q: What did you do with all of those apples?

A: Ate what we wanted. Mom canned a lot of them, also made applesauce, and had lots of apple pie. Lots of apple pie! The rest of them lay there and rotted. Had nothing to do with them.

Q: Did you work in the coal mine during the Depression?

A: Not really during the Depression. The Depression was largely over when I worked in the mine. I started there in 1940.

Q: Did you have any problem getting clothes during the Depression?

A: No, I didn't. You could buy a pair of bib overalls at Penneys for 89 cents. You could buy a shirt for 59 cents and a good pair of shoes for \$1.98. So, if you had any money at all, clothes weren't a problem.

Q: I've heard it said that people who had money in the Depression actually did better than they had before.

A: Oh, much better. If you had any money at all, there were opportunities galore. You could invest in a lot of things to make money, if you had any money to start with. The big problem was that most people didn't have any.

Q: I've also heard that during the Depression many people had to live together in houses; is that true?

A: Yes, they did.

Q: Did you experience that?

A: Yes, I did and many people did, because separately they couldn't make enough to pay the rent, but together they could. When we moved to Idaho, we lived with Tom and his family from August 1936, to April 1937. He had taken the option on a 20-acre place in the country. Originally, there were no windows or doors in the house. By the time we got there, he had the doors in and was putting the windows in as he could afford them. We lived upstairs in two rooms. They wanted \$1,200 for the place and Tom could not come up with it, so we moved into Sandpoint and rented a Humbird house.

Q: What did you cover the windows with, until the glass was in?

A: Nothing. They were left open.

Q: How much rent did you pay for the Humbird house?

A: The rent was \$9 a month.

Q: That doesn't seem like much.

A: Now it doesn't, but it was hard to get a hold of then.

Q: Did you live with anyone else in Idaho?

A: Yes, we lived with Joey and his family, from August 1937, to August 1938.

Q: Did any of the rest of your family live together?

A: I think Ervin and Joey did, but that was back in Nebraska.

Q: Did you notice people losing their farms and homes during the Depression?

A: Oh yes, that was common.

Q: I understand that there were a lot of people riding freight trains?

A: Yes, there were.

Q: Did you do that?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: Describe your first experience at riding a freight.

A: My first experience of riding a freight train was before the Depression started. We were in Butte [Montana] rustling the mines [looking for work in them] and couldn't get anything. I and my cousin took off on the Milwaukee Railroad, came down through Miles City, to Aberdeen, South Dakota, and as we left Aberdeen we were riding on top of a box car, when a young fella came up in a Ford or Chevy coup and held up two fingers, which meant that he wanted two workers for harvest. We were moving about 5 miles an hour, so we piled off and went out to his place. They were Germans and were pretty good sized wheat farmers. This was at Ipswich, where they lived. His father owned a threshing rig, as well, so he hired us out for

threshing.

Q: During the Depression, you rode trains, too?

A: Yes, Leo, Ervin, and I left Miles City in 1932 on the 5th of July to go to Washington [State] to work in the harvest.

Q: Were there a lot of people on the train?

A: Yes, from all over. And I might add that some of these people were lawyers. One was a doctor. Others had held good salaried jobs in banks and so forth. Banks had gone broke, so they were riding the trains. On one train, which we rode from Spokane to Pasco, the Oregon Shortline, there were 150 people. One guy had his whole family.

Q: Weren't there what they called hobo villages, where people could get off the train and spend the evening?

A: No, they were called hobo jungles.

Q: What were those like?

A: Well, most of them were around a bridge, where it crossed some kind of a waterway, where there would be water, so that if you got some spuds or carrots, you could cook them in a can. You could also make your coffee, if you had any. They called them jungles, but they were a kind of hobo camp. Most of these people were not bums; they were men looking for work.

Q: Was there any danger there? Were people likely to steal from you?

A: I never had any money, so they couldn't steal that. I never had any food stolen. People would come and ask for food. Anybody who had some would give it.

Q: I have read that sometimes milk deliveries, which were left on people's doorsteps early in the morning, ended up being stolen.

A: We didn't experience that, but we knew people who did.

Q: Did you ever experience your clothing being stolen off the clothesline?

A: No, not clothes, but your mom had a sheet or two stolen off our line here [in Miles City, in the 1940.s], but that was by the Indians. They didn't need it; that was just their habit.

Q: Why do you think, with times so difficult, there was so little stealing?

A: Apparently people were more honest then than they are now. Of course, it was difficult to embezzle money because few people had any.

Q: Was there anything good that came out of the Depression - for you or for the country?

A: Yes, there was for the country, because it taught people to pull together. A neighbor was a real neighbor and there weren't nearly as many divorces, not nearly as much domestic trouble during the depths of the Depression, as there is since people have become more affluent. That was the good part of it. Another thing was that people depended more upon God and not on themselves, for the simple reason that there was no place else to turn.

Q: Did you see any bad things coming out of the Depression?

A: Yes, I did, a few. There were a lot of them, but I only saw a few. There were conscientious people who found there was no way they could make it and keep their family; they committed suicide. That was rare, but it did happen. And that was the sad part of it. But all in all, I think that the Depression was good for America. It brings me back to that billboard, which said that

absolutely nothing can stop America and this was what did stop America.