

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

The Depression

INTERVIEWEE: JOHN MANNING

INTERVIEWER: Cynthia Marsh

SUBJECT: The Depression

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CM: This is an interview with Mr. John Manning for the Youngstown State University Oral History Department. By Cynthia Marsh at 2509 Cardinal Drive, Youngstown, Ohio on November 27 at approximately 1:25 pm.

CM: Mr. Manning could you please tell me a little bit about your family and where you grew up?

JM: I grew up, well I was born and raised on Kensington Avenue, 1440 Kensington Avenue, and it was four houses from McKinley School. There were seven children in our family, but two died young. They died during the flu epidemic. My dad and mother were born in Ireland. I couldn't understand why they made it so tough during the Depression; it didn't seem to bother them. Then when I would visit Ireland and see the conditions that they were used to, living in America was a picnic compared to what they had. They had all outside toilets, for some reason, no running water and a dirt floor. The conditions that they were used to compared to what we had in America was like a picnic

and that is why it didn't seem to bother them. My dad was out of work for four and a half years during the Depression. They had the soup kitchens down in old St. Columba Hall and even though anybody could go down there, all they had to do was bring a pail down to the hall and they would give you a great big pail of vegetable, hot vegetable soup. My dad though, he was too proud, he wouldn't do that. The way we got by was, my uncle had a farm out in Poland, the road was New Springfield Road at the time but now it changed to Youngstown-Pittsburgh Road. Yellow Creek runs right through it, it's right before five points. He had 46 acres. He raised horses and every year we'd go out we'd plant every kind of vegetable you could think of, he had a hundred fruit trees, we were out there every morning at eight o'clock and we'd work until at least five. My dad, my uncle, old Patty Ferguson we worked the whole time, we took care of the horses, we cut all of the hay with a hand scythe and hauled it in from the fields. My dad and my uncle were very, very strong, they cut that hay up and put the pitch fork in it and stacked it in the two car garage he had there and he had a shelter for, well he had as many as 25 horses there at one time. He had a total of 46 acres so he had plenty of room. We planted every kind of vegetable you could think of, we planted so many potatoes that we could bring home 1100 pounds of them. We would put them under the cellar steps and we would have to turn them over every so often, so that they wouldn't rot but we had plenty of fruit, what we would do was, my uncle would bring a couple gallons of water and we'd stop in Poland and get a couple of loaves of home made bread and we would slice that and we'd go out in the garden and get tomatoes and peppers and that was our lunch, with the water. It was very tough, but when I look back on it now it wasn't that bad I mean we always had enough to eat. And of course my uncle was a patrolman with the Youngstown Police

Department; he drove the paddy wagon. To tell you the truth, I don't know when he slept because he would go out and work all day on the farm, he did that six days a week, Sunday we would just go out there to visit the place. My brother Ed had a paper route and I helped him with the papers from the time I was four years old. So Al Goodman had a drug store on the corner of Elm Street and Bissel Ave. When I was five years old, I used to deliver prescriptions for him. I got a nickel for every prescription I delivered. Of course you had to walk and, at that time around Gypsy Lane and that area was all country. In fact, where the fair grounds were is where the gypsies used to come in; that's where the name for Gypsy Lane came from. Gypsies were there, where Belmont Ave. is now; they had that whole area that was all rural at that time.

CM: Wow, I never heard that before.

JM: Yeah, that's how they got the name Gypsy Lane. I carried the Saturday Evening Post, The Liberty, The Ladies Home Journal, and The Country Gentleman. I remember The Liberty went out of business during one of the presidential elections. They came out with false information, it was false, but whether it was purposely done or just a mistake is unclear; actually that's when The Liberty went out of business. It was a magazine at that time. We did real well on the papers; we used to take care of the people who were well to-do during the Depression. I had Kensington, Bryson, Florencedale, Elm, Ohio, Gypsy Lane, Broadway, and North Heights. Now, I remember when the market crashed, up on Bryson Street, this was about four o'clock I got there I saw this guy hanging out the window. I found out what happened. He was buying stock on 10% margin and at that time all that you had to do was put down ten percent and this guy really got caught. As if that wasn't bad enough, I went up Broadway, over Fifth Ave., down North Heights and I

see a bunch of guys at 265 North Heights. Powers Smith had just blown his head off because the same thing happened to him. He bought stock on a 10% margin and there was no way that they could possibly make up for it. The Depression had a devastating effect on a lot of people. Some people came out of it really well. My dad was really lucky; he lost three houses and he lost a lot of money in the stock market but, the house we had on Kensington he got to keep that and the reason he got to keep it is because we paid with the money we made from the papers and the magazines, with that, we made enough and with what I made up there at the drugstore, we gave it all to my mother and that is how we kept the house on Kensington. Very few people were lucky enough to do that but there were five of us, my two brothers, two sisters, and myself so we were fortunate enough to make enough to keep the house because we all worked when and where we could.

CM: Did your mother work at all during the Depression?

JM: No, she stayed home she was an excellent cook. She could make do with very little. I remember one time, she used to make vegetable soup in a great big well, she had a great big kettle like that, and she'd make vegetable soup; of course, it was better the second day than the first. One time, she had twelve people come down from Cleveland, our relations, in two cars. They were her relations and I'll be dog gone, she stretched that soup and everybody had enough and it was really something. She was a fantastic baker and she could cook anything and she did a great job, she knew how to stretch things.

CM: So overall you think that the Depression didn't affect your family as badly as it affected other families?

JM: Well if I remember right the shoes that I had weren't too good but when I got home from carrying papers in the snow and that you know we had the coal furnace, we heated with coal at that time, and every time I'd come home my mother would tell me to take my shoes and socks off and she'd put my feet over the heater and rub my feet, boy it sure felt good. It was great, really it was. And we were lucky really we were, I think the reason why we took it so good was that it didn't seem to bother my mom and dad too much so if it didn't bother them it didn't bother us. Of course we worked for everything we ever got, we didn't have anything handed to us. I remember one time Mr. Feathers, he lived on Florencedale, he had four daughters and they were beautiful girls, but he didn't have a son and I guess they were having a father and son banquet down at the YMCA and he asked me to go and I said, no, I can't go. So he called up my mother and asked why? And she said the reason he can't go is he didn't have a suit. So he took me down to Richmond's over on Federal Street and bought me a suit, so I went to the banquet. He was a great person. I used to collect once a week and he gave me a dollar tip and at that time a dollar was really something. If a guy made five dollars a day during the Depression, he was considered a capitalist. I'll never forget a lot of the fellows used to hang around down at the corner of Bissel and Elm, and Fred Todd he used to live where the Bergman home is now and they had a swimming pool around back. He was a great guy, he would come down and he would talk to all of the guys. He was really well off but he just enjoyed people, and he came down this one day and he said, "Gee I made enough money today to pay for the swimming pool and Eddy Nickels (none of these guys had jobs) said, "Well, how much did the pool cost you?" He said "five thousand dollars" That is how much he had made that morning. Five thousand dollars then was probably

like well over a hundred thousand now. So Fred was really a great guy. Another who was really an excellent guy, he was councilman, Mr. Colleran, First Ward Councilman; he lived on the corner of Broadway and Elm. Boy, what a great guy he was. He was well off financially but he would always come down and talk to the fellows on the corner. Yeah, those fellows on the corner none of them had a job but they'd help somebody out or help with something and they would make a half a buck or so. What they would do was on Saturday night they would go to the drug store and get gin, Al Goodman was selling the gin to them for a buck a fifth and they would probably get a gallon of gin and there were probably twelve guys and they would get all of the girls around and they would have a party every Saturday night. They didn't have any money but they had a lot of fun because when they went to one of the girls' houses or one of the boys' houses they had this little wind up record player that played records and they danced. They'd scrape up some food someplace and Chuck Muleen, he had the A&P grocery store there on Elm Street at that time and he'd have extra stuff and he would give it to the guys. Everybody seemed to help everybody else during the Depression. Well I'll tell you what one of the greatest guys I'll never forget as long as I lived was Art Waldman. My dad used to get coal to fill the coal bin. Every September he'd call Art and he'd say Art I want you to fill the coal bin up and it took eleven tons of coal. He'd fill it up with eleven tons of coal and as soon as he'd fill it up my dad would pay him. Well this one year, Art called and he said "Hey Mr. Manning I didn't get your order for coal" and he said, "The reason why you didn't get the order is because I don't have the money to pay you." Art said "Did I ever ask you for money?" He filled that coal bin up for four years until my dad went back to work and my dad paid him five bucks every week until he got it all paid off but Art

carried him for over four years, I'll never forget him. Art is deceased. He lived up there at the Northwood Apartments, at 465 Gypsy. His wife died not too long ago too. I'll never forget him as long as I live because after that I started to play the market. Art was a stockbroker for Butler Wick so, I figured Art you scratched my back and I'm going to scratch yours. I dealt with Art until he retired which was about five years ago. I never forgot that.

CM: That is very interesting, would you say that was probably one of your first memories of the Depression, this guy filling up all of the coal?

JM: No, we didn't have any food in the house, the food we got came from the farm.

CM: That was the first memory of the Depression?

JM: Oh yeah.

CM: Well what did you do in the winter, how did you keep the fruit from rotting, I understand the potatoes you turned but what about the other produce, how would you keep that from rotting?

JM: Well we'd keep it under the cellar steps it was actually cold. I mean it wouldn't deteriorate, peppers and tomatoes and all of that, it was cold enough that we could salvage that. My mother would bake bread and soup she'd make. We'd have soup a lot of days; sometimes we'd have soup three times a day. I used to work for Charlie White the baker, he was right next to where the A&P was there on Elm Street there. I remember one Good Friday, well Charlie White had the bakery and I used to go up there at 5:30 in the morning and I'd work until 7:30 before school and I baked the doughnuts for them and cleaned all of the pans and I got fifty cents for that. But this one day, he gave me seven dozen hot cross buns and that Good Friday we had hot cross bun for breakfast. Of

course eggs at that time, eggs were only fifteen cents a dozen. You know my uncle had chickens, and we'd get our eggs from there, but eggs were only fifteen cents a dozen. In fact milk at that time was only five cents a quart. You know if you looked around you could make a nickel, I used to cut lawns and I used to use the old push mower. I think I started out one day and eventually I cut 22 lawns.

CM: In one day?

JM: In one day, and I used the push mower. I used to have to take that thing apart to keep it running, and I had a little file I sharpened the blades on but when you think about today, you know today it is really a snap. That kept me strong. Al Goodman had the liquor store and I used to handle all of the cases for him. I was only ten years old at the time, and some of those cases weighed ninety pounds, but it kept me in shape.

CM: I bet.

JM: It was really funny, I'd take the inventory every Friday, upstairs and downstairs and it would take me about three and a half hours to open up every case and count what was in the case, and count what was on the shelf. Three and a half hours, in the state of Ohio, they'd send somebody in about every three months, send three guys in and it would take them three days to take the inventory. So you know I mean old Al used to laugh at that because he couldn't believe it, those three guys they were doing more talking than they were doing actual work, but I would do the whole thing myself, upstairs and down.

CM: So what other little odd jobs did you do during the Depression, you delivered newspapers and.....

JM: I delivered newspapers and delivered magazines, I cut lawns and I washed walls and steamed wallpaper off, you know people wanted their wallpaper off. Some of them

would have six or seven coats on them and we would have to mix the vinegar with the water to cut it down and scrape it down to the bare wall. You get to learn a lot of tricks. When I first went to work after high school I bought a '29 Pontiac from one of the fellows that I used to unload the truck with down at McKelvey's. It cost me forty bucks, He sold it to me for forty bucks, and I paid for that with ten bucks down and two bucks a week, which I made from cutting lawns. I drove that for two and a half years, and boy my mother loved it. Because what we had to do was, we used to have to take the streetcar when we wanted to go and at that time when somebody died they had the wakes in the home not in a funeral home like today. They'd have it in the home, so what I would do is from seven to ten in the evening, everybody would bring food over and somebody would stay with the body all night and this actually happened and it is hard to believe but they would have booze there and this was over on the east side and we lived over on Kensington but all of my mother and father's friends were over on the east side, and this actually happened this one guy got drunk and he took the corpse out of the casket and put him up against the wall and started to beat the hell out of him.

CM: Oh my god!

JM: (Laughter) It took four guys to stop him from doing it. It actually happened, I'll tell you what if they could've had a movie of that today it would have made all kinds of money.

CM: I can't even imagine that.

JM: Well my mother loved it because you know what she used to have to do was she used to have to take the street car downtown and she'd always have real heavy bags and I'd always meet her at the corner of Wick and Thornton there and I'd carry the bags

home, but after I got the car what I'd do was she'd say okay, I'll meet you at a certain place in an hour and whatever she bought, you know I'd put in the car so that she wouldn't have to carry them, then she'd go and do some more shopping then she'd say to be back at a certain time which I did, but one thing she just looked forward to was an ice cream. I worked at Goodman's from 7-10 every evening and they had a soda fountain there so what I would do was I would bring her an ice cream cone home every evening, and she just loved that. Also when we had the car we'd go out to, well maybe we'd go for a ride out in the country or something and then we'd stop someplace and have ice cream. I could tell she really enjoyed it so I didn't mind doing it. In fact I really enjoyed doing it because I was really fortunate I had a great mom and dad. I really appreciated them.

CM: What about your friends during the Depression, could you tell that their families really suffered, like compared to your family?

JM: Well some people, they couldn't handle it and then what they'd start to do was, they'd start to drink. You know like there was one family up on Bryson Street, the guy, he go and drink all day and then he'd come home, he'd come home about 3 o'clock, I don't how he knew the time because he was so drunk when he got home but he came home about three o'clock everyday and he'd go and beat the hell out of his wife right on the, this was on Bryson Street. He'd beat the hell out of his wife every single day. The neighbors, I don't know how they stood for it. He had two sons, Joe and Bill; and one was twelve and one was thirteen. They said this is enough so they waited for him. When the dad started on the mother, those guys they beat him so bad, they knocked him down there were four wooden steps and then there was a layer of cement and then there were

eight other steps and another layer of cement and then eight more steps down to the sidewalk. Well the dad ended up down on the sidewalk and the guy after that never took a drink, but he died about four months after that, but he didn't take a drink after that. Those kids just beat the hell out of him and you know all of the neighbors, they clapped when they did it.

CM: What about your friends that were your age, do you think their families really struggled, do you think any of them were on the relief? Or do you remember any of them?

JM: Oh yeah, they'd all go down to the soup kitchen, oh yeah you could go down there and that soup that they had down there was really good. You could actually live very well on it, of course you'd have to get bread or something to go with it, but oh yeah that was a great help but the ones they've got today are much better like St. Vincent DePaul and St. John's, St. John's church down there on Wick Avenue. They do a much better job today because they get a well-balanced meal. I mean they give them a well-balanced meal. In fact, my boy, what he does is, if he has any day-old baked goods, he'll take them down to St. Vincent DePaul. Then on Sunday at St. John's he comes down and feeds the poor on Sunday, every Sunday. They do a great job today, they give them a much better meal, and more people today are living a much healthier life because they have a better balanced diet. Of course I was always in really good physical shape because if I wasn't working out on the farm then I was cutting grass or doing something, you know. But I always worked; I hopped the truck at McKelvys. McKelvys used to have a grocery store, I hopped the truck over there on the east side and the people there were really great. They didn't have much but they always had a piece of pie or cookies

or something for me. They were really great; of course I knew a lot of those people from going down there all the time. The one kid, Judge Joyce, the Judges, his mother and dad were real good friends with my parents. The Kerigans, Judge Kerigan's grandparents were good friend with my parents. All of the Fergusons over on the East side, they were all very good people. In fact Judge Joyce and I worked at Youngstown Sheet and Tube Cold Strip Department, we went to Ohio University together and we were in the service together at Fort Eustis, VA.

CM: What did you do for entertainment during the Depression, you and your family or you and your friends were there any certain games or what did you do?

JM: Well what we used to do is we had the old Victrola, and what we'd do was all of the older people, would roll up the rugs; they didn't have a carpet like we do today. They would actually roll up the rugs and they would have the Victrola, the old folks of course were there and most of people who came were Irish so we had a lot John McCormick's records and all of the Irish records. Oh they'd have a great time because everybody would bring a little something and they'd all have something to eat and something to drink. Whenever they had one of those get-togethers there always seemed to be more than enough food and drink. Those Irish they liked to put away that Booze. At that time a lot people liked to make their own beer, they made root beer also.

CM: Oh yeah.

JM: OH yeah they made root beer at that time. So there was a little bit for everybody.

CM: I just didn't know if there was certain card games that your family might have played or...

JM: Oh yeah they played cards, oh yeah. They played cards; they'd have a certain night for cards. Sunday was usually dancing at somebody's house, you know they'd do the Irish jig and all that, but every other night same thing, they 'd play cards for hours and hours and hours.

CM: Do you remember your father working any little odd jobs or trying to work anything besides helping your uncle out, during the Depression?

JM: Well he was a puddler in the steel mill and, being a puddler, he had arms on him that big, he was a strong, strong as a bull. He worked for the old Byers Mill up in Girard and the funny hours that he worked, he had to walk to work because the streetcars didn't run. He went to work at two o'clock in the morning and worked until two in the afternoon. Of course he had to walk to work, which wasn't easy. Well it didn't seem far to us at all, but now it would be far to walk. He walked to work and he would have to leave an hour ahead of time to get there on time. They made that puddle pipe, made out of puddle steel that you could put it in the ground and a hundred years from now it would be the same as the day you put it in there. They don't make that, of course, the puddlers were unionized and they made really good money so they made very, very good money in fact they'd make as high as a hundred dollars a day. When my father got home from work my mother would have a double of whisky for him while he was getting his shoes off.

CM: Really?

JM: At that time yeah, because they were in the union and they got a bonus and in fact that is where my dad got into the stock market, and he was able to buy those other houses with the money he was making and of course when the stock market went down, he

didn't buy anything on margin, if he couldn't pay for it, he wouldn't buy it but he lost the houses and he lost his money in stock market but he, and my brother and I pitched in and helped to save the house on Kensington. In fact my brother just sold that house on Kensington. My dad paid \$3000 for it in 1916, \$3000 for the house and my brother, to get rid of it he sold it for \$3000 about four years ago.

CM: For only \$3000?

JM: The house was torn down last year. Well yeah, see it's a bad neighborhood now, in fact there were three houses between McKinley School and me and our house and the only house that is left now is our house on that whole side of the street. I remember the water, we didn't have fresh water, they had a pump, down in the back of McKinley School and we had a couple of pails, that was one of my jobs to go over there and pump and get the well water. It isn't like today you go to the spigot. We'd have to go there a couple of times a day to get enough water for the family, you know.

CM: What about your sisters, did they help your mom cook?

JM: Oh yeah, they helped with the cleaning, the house cleaning and that, but not so much with the cooking. My mom kind of liked to be alone with the kitchen, do her own thing. They did the housework and that, so they kept busy there. My one sister, I was in the service and I got a letter from her and she, I was down in Fort Eustis, Virginia and I got a letter from her and she joined the marines down in Cherry Port, North Carolina. Boy, she knew I'd be mad. You know she joined but she quit a very good job down at McKelvys, she had an excellent job making real good money, but of course my sister Clara was a 4.0 student. She was an excellent student and as soon as she got into the Marines, that test she took she scored so well on that they sent her up to college in

Indiana to further her education. Then they sent her up to El Toro Marine Base up there, and that is where she met her husband. So they are still living out in California. My other sister, she stayed home, she worked at McKelvys for forty-two years.

CM: What was her position there?

JM: She just helped in the wrapping department and that. She was very sick all her life. She had a pretty tough go of it. In fact she died about two years ago.

CM: When you went to school during the Depression, did you see many different, I don't know how to phrase this, ways in which the children behaved, like was there a distinction between those who were really poor and those who were really well off?

JM: I'll tell you what, now this was up at St. Ed's, I went up to St. Ed's in 1926. Now we had kids who came in chauffeured limousines. I remember Dick Murray, Dr. Murray. When we used to have a picnic, St. Ed's would have it's picnic out at Idora Park and his grandfather, Christe Diebel, owned the park so he says "Johnny are you going out to the picnic?" and I said, "No I don't think so." And he said "Well I think you should." I didn't want to tell him that I didn't have any money, but he must have sensed it because he brought me a whole roll of tickets for all of the rides, there must have been 250; I couldn't even begin to use them all. So he gave them to me, but he didn't ask me how I was going to get out there and they had the streetcar running out there at that time so I walked out and I met him out there at lunch time and he said "John did you eat yet?" I said, "No I didn't eat." And he said, "Well come with me." And there was a lunch counter down at the main drag in Idora Park and he says, "Give this kid anything he wants, I'll sign the tab." I tell you what; my stomach was all messed up. I ate and I ate and then after I finished eating I went on a few rides. About five o'clock I met Dick

again and he says “When are you going home John?” I says, “I think I’m going to leave now.” And he said “Come on up here.” And what he did was he told the guy “Give this kid some ice cream.” It was really like frozen custard because this was a hot day and he knew I was going to walk home, and I walked home. But that Dick Murray, they can say whatever they want about him but I think he was the greatest guy in the world because I’ll never forget how he took care of me out there. Also he took a month off every year to go over to China to operate on those people and he paid all his own expenses.

CM: Wow.

JM: He did that for a month every year. A lot of people criticized him but I think he’s a fantastic guy.

CM: So do you remember a separation among the kids? All of the average kids hung out together and all of the rich kids hung out together? Do you remember that?

JM: No, down on the East side they all stayed together, they were all Polish and Hungarian and they all stayed together. What we used to do was, every Sunday we’d visit five different families down there and those five families would come and visit my house on the North side on the sixth Sunday, so we did that and then of course we would always have the Irish picnic out at Idora Park. So we would go to the Irish picnic, they would have Irish soda cake, and what we would do was all of us, the kids even, all of us would have something to carry because we would have breakfast, lunch and supper out there, we wouldn’t get home until we’d take the last streetcar home which was midnight. They had everything, they had all kinds of Irish dancing and then because of Mike Jennings, he was a good friend of my mom and dad’s, and we’d get to swim out there for nothing, I’d have to walk out there to go swimming, which was a good, probably seven

miles, but I'd walk out there because although you could take the streetcar, I didn't have the ten cents. It was tough but I think that they had showers out there too so then I wouldn't have to take a bath when I got home.

CM: Can you think of anything else you might like to add about the Depression? So you'd say that overall it wasn't extremely horrible in your eyes, you got by?

JM: Well no, because I think the reason why we didn't think it was that bad because of the way that my mother and dad handled it. They handled it in great shape, so I mean they were setting an example for us so, actually what it all amounted to was we didn't have anything to begin with so really since we didn't have anything to begin with we didn't have anything to compare it to really. Like some of them were brought up with a silver spoon in their mouths and then all of a sudden they don't have the silver spoon. Those people would be hurting, but in our particular case, even though my dad was making good money at that time, he never was extravagant or anything like that. So it really didn't affect us. I really felt sorry for those kids who used to come to school in the chauffeured cars, they lost everything, they lost their chauffeur, they lost their car, they lost their house, they lost everything because they were real heavy into the stock market all of those families. Oh they were real heavy on the stock market and if they lost everything they were probably buy it on margin, that is why the SEC change the ruling, now to buy a stock on margin you have to put 60% down. At that time then all you had to do was out 10% down. So you can't get hurt as bad today as you could then. You can get hurt, but nothing like you could before. Like those guys who killed themselves, actually because they were wiped out, they lost everything they had. That is why the Security Exchange Commission put that law through that if you want to buy a stock on

margin you've got to, if the stock costs a hundred dollars you have to put a minimum of sixty dollars up front. Then the broker will balance the other balance or lend you the other forty percent. Those kids I really felt sorry for them. They had everything handed to them and I mean you know they were treated like kings and then all of a sudden they don't have anything and I mean they not only lost their cars, they lost their house, they lost everything, they just didn't have anything. They had the clothes that were on their back but that was it. If you're not used to something or if you never had it, you don't worry about it.

CM: Right, well thank you very much for your interview and your time.

Added Note by Mr. Manning: About three and half years ago I took my entire family to Ireland, 36 in all. Husbands and wives and 13 grandchildren. We had our own bus and could tell the driver what we wanted to see. At the dinner when I announced that we were going to Ireland because I made a nickel in the stock market. My little granddaughter said to me, Grandpa that must be an awful big nickel.