

My interview started when I came in Mrs. Bowers house and she and I sat down in her living room. She started off telling me that she did not remember a whole lot of information about the depression. She was born in March of 1926 and this year she will be 83. But when I started mentioning questions that I had to ask, she wanted to hear them so that she would be able to answer them.



Mrs. Sylvia A. Bowers

Great Depression Interview

March 1, 2009

Interviewed by: Jennifer Delahoussaye

(Mr. Ashley-U.S. History)

My interview started when I came in Mrs. Bowers house and she and I sat down in her living room. She started off telling me that she did not remember a whole lot of information about the depression. She was born in March of 1926 and this year she will be 83. But when I started mentioning questions that I had to ask, she wanted to hear them so that she would be able to answer them.

She started off telling me that she didn't know what being "poor" was and everyone around her was the same. So she could not tell if it was a depression but she does remember her mother making her clothes and underwear (which were called bloomers at that time) and she wasn't alone in wearing them because her friends were wearing them too. They were made out of feed sacks or brown domestics. Eating wise, it was a treat to have blackberries or peaches for breakfast. They didn't have eggs too often because they were too high and people could not afford them. Her mother made bisquits and they would eat the blackberries with them, sometimes she was even fortunate enough bring meatloaf to school. Bread was also high and her family couldn't afford it, even if it had been invented. It also costed only 15 cents for one small loaf.

It was difficult to walk outside because she didn't have nice shoes to walk on the rocky roads. Telling me that she would cut pieces of cardboard and tie them to her feet with rag strings sounds we have the better life now. Back then they didn't have concrete roads like today. The old town gate was the city limits and there were no interstate highways like we have today.

Everyone in her neighborhood, had outside toilets and tin tubs to wash clothes in. They had scrub boards so that they could scrub their clothes clean. No electric stoves, washing machines, vacuums and etc. were invented until her teenage years. But they did have ice boxes (related to what we have today called refrigerators). They had homemade benches to sit on in church and pot-bellied stoves in their classrooms to give heat inside the rooms. In school years, she remembers how she only had knee high stockings and how they had "sunday shoes". They were shiny and looked like patten-leather but once they got wet, the shoes would tear really easily.

Out of 3 children, including her, the way she explained how christmas was seemed very harsh. They would receive a brown paper bag with an orange or apple and stick candy or a gum drop or 2. They would decorate their christmas tree with newspaper if they could afford it and make it into chain links and wrap it around the tree. No lights or electricity was invented yet. They had kerosene or oil lamps to see at night.

At school they had lunch programs where it would only cost 5 cents and some of the food did not taste good to my understanding.

Then after she explained her lifestyle to me, I began asking her questions. She said the difference between the life today and during the depression was that life today was a 200-300% better today than back then.

Life going to school was not too different to her because everyone was the same. But she does remember that after graduating high school they did have more. During grade school she didn't realize it was a depression until she got older.

The prices back then were a whole lot cheaper, but to her it was a little high priced for groceries.

She lived here in Greeneville, TN during the depression. She couldn't really tell me if this was an advantage or disadvantage because she was young at the time and did not know.

Her family managed the best way they could. It wasn't easy for her but, they never went to bed hungry, they always had full stomachs. Her mother made sure they were dressed in the proper clothing and were always clean.

During this time, there wasn't a such thing as "family". "The children had their own thing and the parents had theirs..." as she would put it. As a child, she would play hop scotch and hide and go seek. But she told me she was a professional jack rock player because she would play it all the time.

She wasn't aware of her families financial problems because she wasn't too worried about it. If it was called a depression she would not know at the time because she was young. She said the the depression was at its worst when all the families had just about everything and you wasn't aware that you were called poor.

She didn't work as a child, only the parents carried the money for everything. Her mother worked a domestic work and her father worked at a rock quarry. Being the oldest of three, she did what any other child would have done. It was her place to learn how to cook, scrub and wash clothes, iron clothes, and help take care of her younger brother and sister. But as far as money was concerned, she did not have a job.

She didn't have any bad memories of the depression because it was not such an awareness to her and she knew she wouldn't get the things that she wanted so she did not expect it. She remembers the TVA and something about dams being built. Many men left Greeneville to go to work on those dams for money.

FDR was not a big influence on her until she grew older into high school. Then and now she has a deeper appreciation for him.

I asked her about how different the automobiles were back then. She said, "I guess i thought they were pretty...", and we both laughed. After I got through with asking questions, my mom was ready to leave. So I gave her a

hug and told her good bye.



Mrs. [illegible]

Great [illegible]

Inter [illegible]