

THE DEPRESSION



1994

DP: Now, tell me, what was Ridgewood like during the Depression [1930's]?

...

OC: I think Ridgewood survived the Depression very well because Ridgewood was lucky. We had no manufacturing, never had had any. Ridgewood was a bedroom community made up of—quite a group, I would say, of affluent business people commuting a good part of it to New York City, some to Paterson. And I vaguely recall, you know, a little suffering. But I don't really recall too much great hardship for us during the Depression.



1994

CC: As you remember, I grew up during the Depression. I mean, like, I was at school all during the Depression. And so there wasn't—that's why there was more picnics than anything else.

IN: Tell me about what it was like during the Depression. ... Were you aware that you were poor?

CC: No, no. That was—and it was but I—it didn't—because all our friends were in the same boat. And it didn't really depend on—I mean, we wore each other—hand me downs and it didn't matter. And my mother had to get a—worked in the bakery for awhile. And—and I know my dad had to take a lesser job and we did all our own repair. My dad did all his own repairing of cars, changed the oil himself, put into parts on it.



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DW: World wars, the stock market crash and the Great Depression affected numerous Ridgewood families, but always seemed to bring neighbors closer together.

DP: Could you elaborate on that at all? How it affected Ridgewood families?

DW: Well, there were several men after the crash who committed suicide. And we children were horrified; we felt so sad for the families, the children. And in the Depression, neighbors really shared. I remember my mother baking big dishes of macaroni and cheese to bring to a neighbor, because they were—money was scare and supplies were scare. And meat was—I remember meat and sugar were very scare because war. Before that, things were sent to the soldiers, you know.



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DP: Tell me. Do you remember the Depression in Ridgewood? Did it affect anybody very much?

MC: Well, it affected me because my father lost his job. And my—no, we just didn't have any money and my parents couldn't sell their house for the amount of the mortgage. So my husband and I, who had only been married a year or so, and we both had jobs, we came and took over my parent's house. And that's how we got started in owning our own home. So I—I remember—see, I was in college really during the Depression, during most of it—

DP: Yes, mm-hmm. You were sort of isolated from the whole—

MC: So, yeah. I knew because that October when—when they had the big market crash I was—there was a big dance at college. And I was expecting someone to come up from—from this area, actually. And I guess he telephoned and said, "No, way," because he was a runner or whatever you call it, on Wall Street.



2002

AM: Okay. How about during the Depression? During the '30s? ... Now, what can you tell me about that time in Ridgewood?

GM: Well, my father was out of work for five years. His company went bankrupt and I remember he finally got a job with WPA and had to—he was an engineer. And he had to work in—supervise groups that worked in [unclear]. He used to put newspapers under his coat. And he got \$15 a week. Well, that's when I graduated from high school and I was going to college until everything fell through. It took me a year and a half before I got a job because I wasn't—I didn't take any courses, you know, to—besides, the Depression, was hard to get it. But I finally did get a job as a file clerk for \$15 a week. And when the government found I was getting \$15 a week my father was laid off. You could only have one in the family. [laughs]

AM: So how did your family manage during those years?

GM: It was hard; it was a struggle.

AM: My goodness! Did you know many families that had similar—

GM: Several of them were [unclear], committed suicide.

AM: In Ridgewood?

GM: Oh, yeah. Mm-hmm, people I knew. Yeah.

AM: Oh, goodness.

GM: In fact, I—when I got my job, it was in New York. And one day [we went] to lunch and a man jumped out of one of the buildings right in front of us, and from one of the high stories and landed right on top of a car.

AM: Oh, my goodness.

GM: No, it was very common.

AM: I know. So did your—how did your mother change her household? How did she manage the household during those years she—

GM: Well, we lost our house so we had to rent. And when my father still didn't get a job we had to keep going to cheaper and cheaper places. [chuckles] And, you know, I'd rather not go [on].

AM: That's very difficult, yes