

Violet McCarty
Interview 108a
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Jennifer Williams, Interviewer
Retyped by Elaine Lawrence

Abstract: In this interview with Jennifer Williams, Violet McCarty reminisces about life during the Great Depression. As a newlywed at the beginning of the Depression, Mrs. McCarty learned to make due and cope during the troubled financial times after her husband lost his job. They moved from Diboll back to family land in Burke, where they grew vegetables and raised livestock and cut firewood for sale to support themselves. She recalls The Cannery and all the tomatoes raised in the Burke area and all of the programs sponsored by the federal, state, and local governments to teach families how to support themselves.

Jennifer Williams (hereafter JW): I am talking with Violet McCarty on the Depression. The date is December 7, 1986 and my name is Jennifer Williams. First, Mrs. McCarty, how old were you when the Depression began? And give us a little background on the Depression.

Violet McCarty (hereafter VM): Jennifer, I was very young when the Depression came, I was nineteen, and of course, it began with the stock market crash in 1929. In May of 1931 there was a credit crunch that caused International bank ruptures and unemployment. There were about twelve million jobless in the U.S.A. in 1932. Worldwide trade was affected by tariffs and strikes. It was just a general upheaval in everything. When the stock market crash came, people who lost all their money – we remembered hearing in the news about people jumping out of upstairs windows, taking their own lives because they had lost all their money and everything. That's the way some of them met it then. When we heard the news at first we didn't think so much about it because we didn't realize just how the extent of what a calamity it was going to be for the whole nation. But, eventually, it became aware in our area that times were getting gradually worse, we didn't have that complete shock of it, all of a sudden, and we sort of gradually went into it. At first, as I said, I was a young married lady so it was a challenge to me in two ways. I had to learn the adjustment of being a housewife and learning to cook. I didn't even know how to cook, I was an only girl in the family and spoiled, so there was quite a bit of adjustment for me to make and then came this depression, so it was a big challenge. The company that my husband worked for was closed down at this time, which put an awful lot of people out of work. So – but I want you to know that through this time I was never afraid, it was just – not such a change that I couldn't meet it.

JW: How did your life change during this era?

VM: My life, as I said, had already begun to change because I was newly married and having to learn all about family life and how to deal with the problems that you find there, but mainly, it didn't change so much in other ways because, in our little

community, we all lived on about the same level and economically, we had the same problems, so the biggest change came with the fact that we were without a job, as well as many others.

JW: What were some of the ways you had to cut back?

VM: Losing a job meant less money, of course, but there again, our standard of living was good but we were newly married and we were already on a budget of trying to save and prepare for the future, so in this manner we had to cut back a great deal. We didn't buy clothes but we certainly went without food and the essentials that we had to have, but we also had to cut back on something else that was a drastic change for us that dealt with money and that is, we had bought some land and we, of course, could not meet the notes as they came due, so we had to cash in a twenty year policy to pay off this property and we never were able to reinstate ourselves in that policy, so we lost a good deal of money in that because, at a twenty year length of time, we could have cashed it in for the full amount plus interest but, anyway, it saved our property. We cut back in other ways, in travel and vacations and all were not considered so necessary then. In general, our life style toned down a good deal.

JW: When your husband lost his job, how did he provide for you and your family?

VM: Well, there again, I had great confidence, my husband was ten years older than me and I felt like he could meet any emergency and see us through it. I felt perfectly safe about it, so I didn't go into this with any kind of fear at all, just faith and confidence. But the way he provided was that we were fortunate enough to have some property that could be cultivated. We had to move back to Burke from Diboll where we were living. After we moved back to our home in Burke we had this property, which he shared with others who were out of work. They produced vegetables for canning and for our own food. They raised grain for the stock so we had plenty of meat of all kinds. We canned meat and vegetables for the future. Besides that we had some timber on this property so he and a friend, who was out of work, got together and cut firewood and sold it to people who were working and used it. At that time firewood was very important, so that was another means of support. It just really boiled down to people being able and willing to work. It wasn't that we were so deprived of food and the essentials for life, but some people were more energetic than others, and it happened we had the property and the will to work so we just went happily on our way providing.

JW: In what ways was the community involved?

VM: We banded together, as you will find in most calamities of any kind, people learn that they love their neighbors more and they want to help each other, so that particular thing happened in this community because people worked together. Not only that, the government supplied a lot of help for people in the communities to work together. For instance, the home demonstration and the county agent worked together and they installed a cannery, a little canning house here and it was labeled "The Cannery". People brought their produce there and they had large steam, big pressure cookers, and the

government provided teachers to show people how to use these cookers safely, and canned their vegetables. They raised a lot of tomatoes during this time, so that was one of the main things that was canned. Then the home demonstration club taught people more about how to use their time in home improvements and cooking and saving in so many different ways, then sewing. Of course, the men were provided with information about raising different crops that they had not tried before. In general, the community banded together and met and I think it was just great and the fellowship was wonderful.

JW: Do you feel that you were fortunate to be living in a small community than you would be in a large community and how?

VM: I feel that being in a small community and small area like this I, more than likely, was prepared more to meet an emergency of this kind than if I had been living in a city because, as I said, our standard of living did not change that much because we – everybody had about the same and we were not used to so much to begin with. There are not a great deal of change in that manner. Didn't change that much.

JW: Tell me about some of your social life in the community at that time.

VM: The social life, actually the church and the school were more or less the hub of our social activities, as it had always been, but young people got together in the homes and there was some square dancing, there was country music style. We still met in homes and had little get together that we labeled singing. We would get together and sing, we had little forty-two parties, we played cards, too. We listened to the radio, we read books and I guess there was just about the typical type of entertainment that you would think about in that time. You wouldn't know it by now in the type of entertainment that you have, but in that time it was pretty typical, I guess, in most communities. But the church and the school was still the main place to get together and the social life really occurred. That's what people were so interested in, activity that pertained to school or church. But there were also other things, we had little parties but, mainly, people worked so hard, you know there just wasn't that that much free time. It seemed like the work, at that time, turned out to be a social affair almost, most people got together and visited while they were working. So, they had quilting parties and just so many things that I am sure I have forgotten a lot of it. As I said, I was young and all this because I had been spoiled at home so I didn't know how to do a lot of things. It was a great learning process for me and prepared me so much for the future.

JW: What newspaper headlines brought concern to everyone in the community?

VM: Well, in general, I'd say the news, this particular news shocked the nation. You wouldn't know about it, but I know you know of Charles Lindbergh and his great flights and all, but at this time their baby was kidnapped, that was in 1932 and it just shocked the whole nation. It was something so tragic, probably now we hear of kidnappings so often that you couldn't imagine how that was at that time, how shocking it was. Today we hear it and we have compassion and all, but as far as it being a shock, we hear it so often that it almost commonplace, kidnappings and things of that nature. But this baby was

kidnapped and when it was found it was found dead. So that was quite a bit of news that the nation shared together that I particularly remember.

JW: Can you think of any other event in your life that has changed or would seem different from anything you would expect?

VM: I might like to comment on the fact that my first baby was born in the home, not in a hospital, and that wasn't so unusual at that time, but it is something I will remember and really cherish because it was an unusual event, of course, but the fact that it could be taken care of at home taught me a great deal about the stamina of mothers and the strength she had to meet these things. How she could cope with her loved ones around her to give her support. I felt like that was one event in my life that was very outstanding.

JW: How did the Depression prepare you for your future life and your family?

VM: The fact that I was a spoiled child at home meant that I was sheltered, I was very sheltered and protected, but I was taught all the good basic principles of good character and life that would be the right kind, Christian and dedicated, in that way at home. I didn't realize it at the time, just how much this meant, how much it would mean to me later on in life because I was a kiddo growing up and, you just don't always see those things. When these challenges of the Depression came in my new married life all the principles that I had been taught in my home began to come to mind and I exerted the kind of foundation I needed to cope with these things. So naturally, the Depression only impressed me more and more about the real values in life. In that manner, I certainly established it in my home, my husband and I did and tried to instill in our children what life really means and the things that are more important and I think the Depression, I know one thing it did for me at that time, it turned me into a very mature young woman and a grown up who could meet things better. So, as to the many things that happened in our life that seemed at that time, to be so drastic and so bad, if we have been brought up in a manner to take life as it comes and do the best we can with it, we usually, and a lot of times, can see the things that look so bad at one time, work together for good, as the Bible says, to those that love the Lord. So that was a basic in my life and has been ever since. Many things have happened since then that were a lot worse than the Depression but the Depression is noted for being referred to as being such a bad time in life, but I can truthfully say it was one of the happiest times in my life and it wasn't all that bad, but it was for many people who had maybe less to do with. We were fortunate in many ways and fortunate in the fact that we knew how to work. My husband has always been a good provider so that part didn't change. We weathered it very well with the help of the Lord, friends and loved ones. So many, all around us, did the same way so it was community of people ;who got together and met these problems and mastered them and came out of it a little better than when we entered it, I think.

JW: You have lived in that community many generations, do you feel if there was another Depression, this community would be able to handle it?

VM: It's true I've lived in this community a long time, I'm a native but I have lived in the city some, too. After my husband had to retire. We enjoyed it there and city life was a lot different, we made a lot of new friends and we saw and enjoyed some of the opportunities that city life provides but we are awfully glad to get back to our own little community. Yes, I think it – I think we have had some what they call Depressions, that have shown that people have not been able to cope with as well and it is adhered to a number of things. The standard of living is so different for people who are young now, it would be awfully difficult for them to go into a real depression. I pray we will never have anything of that nature because the world is not geared up to stand it and cope with it as it was in my time. I still have a great deal of confidence in the American People, I think that whatever the situation the majority will always rise to it and come out winners, so I think my greatest concern it for young people who have never know what it is to be without anything, and that is the fault of we adults, parents, because so many parents have said "I don't want my children to be deprived of the things that I was deprived of when I was small." So then they shower them with all the extras and the expensive things that really do not count, that they don't find out about until something does happen that makes them think about the real values of life.

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