

TOUGH JOBS

The opportunity to interview Mr. Tom Champion about the Great Depression was a most interesting learning experience for me.

Tom Champion, by his nature, is a very modest man. He was born on December 8, 1903 in the small village of National Mine where he was raised and spent most of his life. During the early years of the Depression, Tom was 31 years of age and supported a family of five children.

"The worst part of it was the winter of 1933. We had to dig ditches over in Negaunee by the Old Maas Mine for ten hours a day. The entire months of January, February, and March were anywhere from 30 to 40 below," was Tom's response when I questioned him about the worst part of the Depression. He was referring to his time in the W.P.A. His job was to dig ditches and widen the roads with shovels and wheelbarrows. Tom was a very hard-working man. That's how he got his two days of work and five dollars a week. "We had to walk from National Mine to Negaunee rockcut to get our days work in most of the time, and walk home after that-a ten hour job."

Tom said he never felt poor compared to others. "Everybody was out of work and we didn't judge what the other fella had because he didn't have much in them days anyhow." He also felt that he had a sufficient amount of food and money because he remembers doing odd jobs on the farm, such as cutting wood. By doing those jobs the farmer would give Tom vegetables and money. With this money he could purchase the necessities of life. During the Depression most people had gardens. "Everybody had a garden. Those that could work on the farm did it to help the farmer and the farmer would give them a lot of help with the teams of horses to be able to bring in your wood for the winter and stuff like that. They would give you a lot of garden stuff too. The farmers were a real help to the people."

Tom said meat wasn't too hard to get because the forests were densely populated with deer and rabbits, and fish could be found in the lakes and streams. The Salvation Army would also help by giving out bread and clothes. With those big, heavy clothes Tom's family would make shoes and mittens. His family never had anything new.

During the Depression Tom had a Model A car. "The Model A was the best car they could have made for the working man. The car was real important because

it helped you to get your groceries home when you went to town with your twenty dollar check for the month."

To sum up his thoughts about the Depression Tom replied, "Well it was hard times. The minute you could find anything to do for a dollar you would do it."

The Depression was a time of despair. It forced countless numbers of people into poverty. Fortunately for Tom, he was able to live through these hardships and relive and share his past experiences with us.

Jerred Racine