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Honors: US History 2
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Graham, Frank. Personal interview with the author. Manheim, PA. October 14, 2015

Overview by Rylee Mellott:

Frank Graham is my great grandfather. He is astoundingly 95 years old, and he was born in 1920. Which means he lived through a lot, specifically the Depression! Frank has an amazing memory and loves to share his history. He was apart of a middle class family during the time of the Depression, but he was very aware of the country's economic standpoint. His dad was few of the very fortunate families that actually had a job. In Frank's later life he married into my family in 2000.

Question (Mellott): What do you remember from the great depression?

Answer (Graham): Well things were so ordinary you got accustomed to it. I was fortunate that my father had a job. He had worked most of the time.

Question (Mellott): What was his job?

Answer (Graham): Well he was a machinist. I guess the thing is I was at an age that I didn't hear of the hunger and what the other parts of the country faced. I lived in York (PA). There was a stable economy so there was manufacturing and agriculture. Jobs were scarce, and the pay wasn't much. And there were people that couldn't get a job (like)that there are today. Redline,s they called them redlines then. You'd line up for coffee and just something like a piece of bread. Today we have the churches. They have taken the task of feeding some. We were kids and we adapted to it, to what our parents had, or had not.

Question (Mellott): What was a big issue during your childhood?

Answer (Graham): Camping as a boy at Caledonia State Park in Gettysburg and Jamesburg Route 30 42 miles from York. Our folks had a car not everyone had a automobile. We had street cars and buses that the people were on. My father always had a car, and he was always paying for it. and in order to help his paycheck he used to wax cars.

Question (Mellott): What was a normal day like as a child in the Great Depression?

Answer (Graham): I was in school at the time. I guess school was from 8-12 or 1-4. I was running track, or playing basketball, or playing football in the evenings. More sports we used to play... well we'd shoot marbles and ride bicycles and throw together junk (for a scooter we'd make. Generally, we didn't create any problems for the police. Of course during the start of the Depression too there was prohibition. You couldn't go ahead and buy liquor or beer.

Question (Mellott): Since you grew up in the Depression era, what was your first job?

Answer (Graham): First job... my first job was in a roofing company, Papermill. During the time of the facts we had opening up bags of trash paper and rags and and vases for the people that we made. And in the warehouse I came through a neighborhood that had a job at the Papermill, that was Labor. Strong back in the week wind.

Question (Mellott): How old were you?

Answer (Graham): I was probably 16 to work.

Question (Mellott): Did you ever experience a speech, or a Fireside chat, from President Roosevelt through a radio?

Answer (Graham): Yeah I heard some Fireside chats with Mr. and Mrs. Roosevelt, the President. I remember he would get on from time to time to kind of boost each other's spirits. Try to tell them things were going to get better and to just hold up. I remember the radio was the one thing we had. We didn't have a TV, and the reception wasn't very good either.

Question (Mellott): Have you ever seen or experienced a Hooverville?

Answer (Graham): No, I only heard of them through the newspaper and the radio. It wasn't given great publicity. It was one of the things the government wasn't happy about people, veterans of WW1, had been promised a bonus and because of the Depression they triggered the time and they'd lose the bonus that they'd be paid. and they gathered in Washington. and the army, the president had the army, force them out of town, and it was kind of disgraceful. Veterans were under fire, and I think there were some casualties. I don't remember deaths or not. but it hurts upon the reputation of the government.

Question (Mellott): How publicized was the fact that America's economy was failing, and that the Depression was getting worse? Was it a big deal, or did they kind of keep it a secret?

Answer (Graham): No, they were above board pretty much, and they took such steps to help relieve it. The government established certain agencies. They were putting work for government agencies like schools, high schools building for them to give people jobs. In the intention that we build now and pay later! They had National Youth Salvation. It seems it was a time that building sidewalks could provide more money. And it was these jobs that gave jobs to people.

Question (Mellott): Did your parents, or as a family, talk about how hard it was to get money or the economy?

Answer (Graham): No, in general if you wanted a toy or something if the money wasn't there they'd say no you can't have it. We don't have the money! Soon they'd just start saying no, no, no! Because there wasn't any money and the likelihood there would be getting a job. It was something we talked about, but it was something we didn't as well. Some used to say, "Hey mister can you afford a dime?" Beggars on the street, asking, can you afford a dime? or a cup of coffee?" So you had the street beggars. Not so much in the small towns as the large cities where you had masses of people.

Question (Mellott): When did you hear about banks closing, and people running to get their money? Like Bank Runs?

Answer (Graham): Most people had faith in the banks, and the banks closed, the bus came. And the money they thought they had wasn't there. The banks closed. They were closed 3 days until the government stepped in tried to make reservations people who market would proceed to work. But that expend issues were worth while. The banks closed for 3 days I think it was, and you couldn't get money in, and you couldn't get any money out. And a lot of the banks, local banks, they do it now. They had it turned and used their money to buy stocks and bonds from other banks, and they couldn't get their money out either. So it took a while to sort things out. They had a bank Holiday they called it. People who deal with large money, and the local banks had a hard time finding sources and financing.

Question (Mellott): Do you have any memories that you think are important?

Answer (Graham): I guess my life was similar to those of my friends. They had parents that had jobs, and they went to them. and if they didn't have jobs they found a way to make

some jobs. and find a way to get money. and of course I was young enough to experience it, but because it was so widespread that everyone, it affected everyone. And we didn't complain... we might've complained but there was nothing you could do then other than complaining you just had to wait until things got sorted out. And we were raised... got the public back to working again. The farmers in the West, about that time, experienced Dust Storms. Turned so much land in a week, and it was fine as long as the crops grew, and there was rain. But when when the crops died for not just one year but several years in a row, people just picked up and moved. No work there. They couldn't grow anything! Their crops just blew away. They knew of these things, but didn't do it first-hand. The farmers in our part of the country had small farms, and they didn't produced a large amount in a week in our country. They over speculated, and didn't make as much money as they possible could've.