

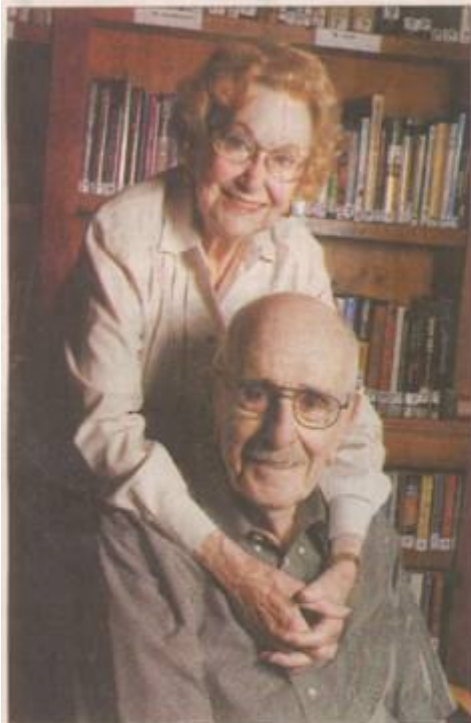
NEW CDS

Reviews of the latest from Lucinda Williams and more ■ E3

THIRSTY?

Willie Nelson's new venture conjures drinking water out of thin air ■ Tuesday in Life & Arts

ECONOMY ■ CHILDREN OF THE DEPRESSION



Lorraine and Marvin Bruck, left, Brian and Phyllis Moses, center, and Rex Davenport, with wife Yvonne, are among Sun City Texas residents who reminisced recently about growing up in the Great



Deborah Cannon photos AMERICAN STATESMAN

Depression. Many of their memories are happy — homemade dolls, treats of ground beef patties — and they grew into adults who wasted little and avoided debt.

Memories of a downturn



Charles Ogilvie kept these dolls that his mother, an artist, made from stockings for her children. He and his brother received the same bicycle, repainted by their father, each year for Christmas.

Sun City residents recall the lessons life taught them — and say subsequent generations haven't learned them

By Helen Anders

AMERICAN STATESMAN STAFF

GEORGETOWN — They are children of the Great Depression. They remember wearing flour sacks to school, eating a lot of beans and putting their pennies into a bank account, only to see the banks fail and their savings vanish.

Now in their 80s and 90s and living a life they characterize as “comfortable” at Sun City Texas, they watch the U.S. economy founder, and they worry.

They fret for themselves and their shrinking nest eggs, but they agonize much more for their children, grandchildren and the rest of us who didn't live through the Depression. They've seen

us spend more than we earn, go into debt and not save enough.

They're not sure we can handle deprivation, if it should come to that.

“We never bought anything we couldn't pay for,” says Lorraine Bruck, 87, of herself and her husband Marvin, 88. “That's the crux of all this. You'd think that our children would have learned from us, but they didn't.”

Growing up in a time when every penny had to be pinched taught the Brucks' generation to be frugal.

“It's a lot different now,” says Rex Davenport, 80. “People are used to a higher standard of living, so it's going to be harder for them to cut back. I think it's really going to hurt.”

Beans and spaghetti

When they talk about life during the Great Depression, they smile. They talk about playing with homemade dolls or hitting a rock or bottle cap with a stick or broom handle — their version of baseball.

The Depression “just led to so much inventiveness,” says Phyllis Moses, 82, who grew up

in a tenant-farming family in the Rio Grande Valley and remembers playing with paper dolls in houses drawn in the dirt with a stick, furnished with pictures of furniture torn from catalogues.

Even the memory of a dress made from a flour sack is a fond one for Moses.

“Some of them had puffed sleeves. My mother was really clever,” Moses says. “Everybody that we knew had clothing made from flour sacks from the mill.”

“I didn't know we were poor,” says her husband, Brian, 83, who remembers his family raising their own vegetables in Minnesota and bartering for other food. “We didn't have money, but who else did?”

“Everyone was poor as we classify poor now,” Bill Bolick, 86, says. His father was a St. Louis grocer; his family never lacked food. But he remembers that his father wouldn't buy him a scooter because he'd wear out one shoe faster than the other scooting it along. Shoes were expensive.

See DEPRESSION, E6

DEPRESSION: Period instilled frugality, work ethic

Continued from E1

Marvin Bruck talks about walking the dog with his father in a park in the affluent section of New York's Bronx where they lived.

"He said, 'Son, I've lost quite a lot of money in a place called the stock market. Things are going to have to change a little around here.' And nothing ever changed." His father, a manufacturer, kept the family fed. What brought the Depression home to the young Bruck was losing \$3.25 in a savings account at a bank that put up a sign: "There is no more money - go away."

The Brucks and the others trading stories in a meeting room at Sun City last week were very young during the Great Depression, which began with the stock market crash of 1929 and was banished only after the U.S. entered World War II in 1941 and manufacturing orders soared. It was their parents, they all agree, who felt the brunt of the Depression. The children took it in stride. They thought that's just the way life was.

"My mother would sit at the kitchen table and tears would roll down her cheeks and she'd say, 'We don't have anything to eat,'" Phyllis Moses says.

When a hurricane wiped out the family's crops in 1933, they moved to Fort Worth, where Moses remembers her mother buying hamburger meat and dividing it for three meals: a meat loaf, meatballs and "a special treat" — broiled patties served on homemade bread.

"We had a lot of spaghetti," says Ernie Columbus, 88, "and beans." He remembers picking wild berries and watching his mother can tomatoes for sauce for a lot more spaghetti.

"Mom was a frugal cook, and we had well-balanced meals, but she used economical meats," Davenport recalls. "We had tongue and spinach, brains and eggs, heart and dressing."

"Pigs' knuckles," adds Lorraine Bruck.

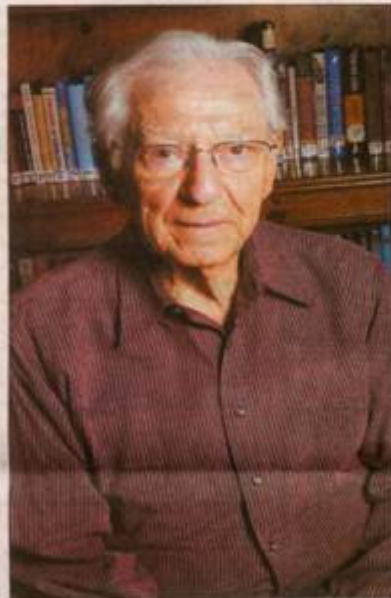
Almost all remember having a family vegetable garden and a mother who did a lot of canning, pickling and churning, as well as hand-washing and ironing.

"My brother was 12, and every day my father would give him a rifle to take to school, and whatever he killed on the way home was the meat we had for dinner," says Charles Ogilvie, 80, who remembers a lot of extended family living in his home from time to time because they didn't have enough money to live on their own. His mother made dolls



Deborah Cannon photos AMERICAN STATESMAN

Charles Ogilvie, with wife Chomel, recalls that when his brother was 12, 'my father would give him a rifle to take to school, and whatever he killed on the way home was the meat we had for dinner.'



'Everyone was poor as we classify poor now,' recalls Bill Bolick, who also notes that his father was a St. Louis grocer and his family never lacked food. But the habits of 'careful living' stuck with him: 'When you leave the room, you turn the light out.'

from stockings and toys from paper towels for the children to play with.

Treats were simple: a hunk of ice from the ice man or a piece of penny candy.

For Davenport, oatmeal was a treat, not just because it was oatmeal, but because the box often included a promotional prize. He proudly displays a blue glass cream pitcher with Shirley Temple's face painted on it. "I still remember Mom reaching into the oats and pulling it out," he says.

He says his mother sent him to school each day with a peanut butter and banana sandwich, "and my teacher, Mrs. Dale, would eat half. I was rather proud of that."

"I would've bitten her arm off," Phyllis Moses interjects.

A shortage of childhood food is what has made her and so

many others her age into food boarders, Moses says. Her pantry and freezer, and those of her friends, are overflowing.

"We overbuy because we worry about running out," she says.

Almost all remember sharing their Spartan meals with strangers who came to the door.

"There were, constantly, men who would come to the door and want a piece of bread," Lorraine Bruck says. "You just couldn't turn anybody away."

Phyllis Moses says her mother, too, fed anyone who came to the door, "and I feel that taught me generosity."

Waste not, want not

Christmas epitomizes what these Sun City people see as

The Great Depression

Started: 1929

Ended: Recovery began around 1934, but it didn't really end until the U.S. entered World War II in 1941.

Stock market plunged: Markets lost about 80 percent of their value between 1929 and 1933.

Banks failed: 11,000 of the nation's 24,000 banks

Production dropped: By 1933, industrial production was a third of its pre-Depression level.

Jobs lost: About 13 million jobless in 1933, about a fourth of the national workforce

Sources: Britannica, Encarta, National Archives



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At the height of the Depression, unemployment hit nearly 25 percent, and workers sought free meals.

the underlying problem with the U.S. economy. On TV, we see all the lovely things we can buy with credit cards. We fill our houses.

Ogilvie remembers what Christmas was like during the Great Depression.

"My oldest brother got a very, very second-hand bicycle for Christmas," he says. "The next year, he got it again. The next year, he got it again. Then the next brother got it for three years. Then I got it for three years. That was our main Christmas, that bicycle. Dad would repaint it and put new grips on the handlebars."

He says this fondly. These people aren't bitter. They know their versions of the Depression weren't the worst. They were fed. They had a home. Some didn't.

And these people's lives have all turned out well. They own their houses, free and clear, in Sun City, a community of about 6,000 homes where the average age is 65. Sun City has two golf courses and a third on the way, along with a social center, pools, tennis courts, a computer lab and more. A few of their neighbors, they say, have had to move because of the downturn in the economy. But only a few.

"Financially, we're as well off as we've ever been," Ogilvie says. He and the others in this room say they feel fortunate, but they worked to get where they are.

The Depression, they say, launched their work ethic. They took on jobs as children to help the family. Ernie Columbus had a paper route and sold Cloverdale salve. Bill Bolick sold magazines. Brian Moses raised a pig that his family sold for \$20.

When bailouts are mentioned, these people remember a partial solution to the Great Depression in the form of work programs of the mid-20s such as the Works Progress Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps. Columbus worked six months for the CCC, earning \$1 a day.

These folks don't know what to make of the banks and Wall Street bailout, but they say they're angry when they learn about huge bonuses paid to managers of rescued companies.

They also worry about the future of federal programs into which they've put their

hard-earned money over the years: Social Security and Medicare.

"We'd all be dead if it weren't for Medicare," says Lorraine Bruck. Her husband backs her up with a list of the week's bills: \$3,200 for a hearing aid and \$2,300 for dental work.

Federal programs help, but these people all say it's the way they've lived their lives that has fortified their household economies. They've saved money and avoided debt.

"It's careful living," Bolick says. "When you leave the room, you turn the light out." And, he says, nothing goes to waste. Leftovers are used in other dishes rather than thrown away. "I remember my mother saying, 'A willful waste is a woeful want.'"

"Mine said, 'Waste not, want not,'" Phyllis Moses adds.

The stock market's fall, of course, is wreaking havoc on many nest eggs. Davenport has seen his investment portfolio sink from \$500,000 to \$300,000 in recent months, although he also has retirement accounts in church bonds that have remained steady. As head of a Sun City investment education club, Davenport has seen worry on the faces of others.

"They are concerned, and they are growing more concerned," he says. "When you see your life savings evaporate before your very eyes and you don't see prices come down ... you wonder what on Earth is going on in our country. And I'll tell you another thing. You feel helpless. That's a terrible feeling."

Still, Davenport thinks he and his wife will be OK.

"We pay our credit cards off every month, and our house is paid for. Our car is paid for," he says.

"We learned it from our parents," says his wife, Yvonne. "To my knowledge, my folks didn't have any debts. We grew up that way. We just thought if you want something, you save for it. We don't believe in debt. That's not true of our children and grandchildren. But for us, being in debt is not an option."

"That's the reason we're surviving today," Lorraine Bruck says. "We've lived very comfortably. We never deprived ourselves. We were just careful."

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