

just barely glowed. I remember my mother smiling. When they came on full, tears started to run down her cheeks. After a while, she said: "Oh, if we only had it when you children were growing up." We had lots of illness. Anyone who's never been in a family without electricity—with illness—can't imagine the difference.

From there, I went to my grandmother's house. It was a day of celebration. They had all kinds of parties—mountain people getting light for the first time.

There are still areas without electricity. Coal oil lamps are used, with the always dirty chimneys. But there are more and more electric co-ops, which first sprang out of the New Deal. And the power companies are still fighting us. . . .

Emma Tiller

Her father had a small farm in western Texas. The first depression she recalls began in 1914. "We were almost starvin' to death. Papa had some very rich land, but those worms came like showers. The cotton was huge, you never seen nothin' like it. You could just sit in the house and hear the worms eatin' that cotton. You had to check all the cracks in the doors because the kids were scared and the worms would get in the house. . . ."

In 1929, me and my husband were sharecroppers. We made a crop that year, the owner takin' all of the crop.

This horrible way of livin' with almost nothin' lasted up until Roosevelt. There was another strangest thing, I didn't suffer for food through the Thirties, because there was plenty of people that really suffered much worse. When you go through a lot, you in better condition to survive through all these kinds of things.

I picked cotton. We weren't getting but thirty-five cents a hundred, but I was able to make it. 'Cause I also worked people's homes, where they give you old clothes and shoes.

At this time, I worked in private homes a lot and when the white people kill hogs, they always get the Negroes to help. The cleanin' of the insides and clean up the mess afterwards. And then they would give you a lot of scraps. A pretty adequate amount of meat for the whole family. The majority of the Negroes on the farm were in the same shape we were in. The crops were eaten by these worms. And they had no other jobs except farming.

In 1934, in this Texas town, the farmers was all out of food. The gov-

ernment gave us a slip, where you could pick up food. For a week, they had people who would come and stand in line, and they couldn't get waited on. This was a small town, mostly white. Only five of us in that line were Negroes, the rest was white. We would stand all day and wait and wait and wait. And get nothin' or if you did, it was spoiled meat.

We'd been standin' there two days, when these three men walked in. They had three shotguns and a belt of shells. They said, lookin' up and down that line, "You all just take it easy. Today we'll see that everybody goes home, they have food." Three white men.

One of 'em goes to the counter, lays his slip down and says he wants meat. He had brought some back that was spoiled. He said to the boss, "Would you give this meat for your dog?" So he got good meat. He just stood there. So the next person gets waited on. It was a Negro man. He picked up the meat the white man brought back. So the white guy said, "Don't take that. I'm gonna take it for my dog." So the boss said, "I'm gonna call the police."

So the other reaches across the counter and catches this guy by the tie and chokes him. The Negro man had to cut the tie so the man wouldn't choke to death. When he got up his eyes was leakin' water. The other two with guns was standin' there quietly. So he said, "Can I wait on you gentlemen?" And they said, "We've been here for three days. And we've watched these people fall like flies in the hot sun, and they go home and come back the next day and no food. Today we purpose to see that everybody in line gets their food and then we gonna get out." They didn't point the guns directly at him. They just pointed 'em at the ceiling. They said, "No foolin' around, no reachin' for the telephone. Wait on the people. We're gonna stand here until every person out there is waited on. When you gets them all served, serve us."

The man tried to get the phone off the counter. One of the guys said, "I hope you don't force me to use the gun, because we have no intentions of getting nobody but you. And I wouldn't miss you. It wouldn't do you any good to call the police, because we stop 'em at the door. Everybody's gonna get food today." And everybody did.

The Government sent two men out there to find out why the trouble. They found out this man and a couple others had rented a huge warehouse and was stackin' that food and sellin' it. The food that was supposed to be issued to these people. These three men was sent to the pen.

When the WPA came in, we soon got to work. The people, their own selves, as they would get jobs on WPA, they quit goin' to the relief station. They just didn't want the food. They'd go in and say, "You know, this is my last week, 'cause I go to work next week." The Negro and white would do this, and it sort of simmered down until the only people who were on relief were people who were disabled. Or families where there weren't no man or no one to go out and work on the WPA.

I remember in this Texas place, they had twenty-five people come in that day saying they wouldn't be back any more 'cause they signed up and they was gonna work on the WPA the next week. Some of 'em had to sort of stretch things to make pay day 'cause it really didn't come to what they thought it would. But they didn't go back after any more help.

You sort of like to know to feel independent the way you earn your own living. And when you hear people criticize people of things like this today it gets under your skin.

What bothered me about the Roosevelt time was when they come out with this business that you had to plow up a certain amount of your crop, especially cotton. I didn't understand, 'cause it was good cotton.

And seein' all this cattle killed. Bein' raised with stock, to me it was kind of a human feelin' we had toward them. We had this cow and calf raised with us. I'd see these farmers, terrible big cattle raisers and they didn't have the food to feed these cattle, and there was drought, so they had these cattle drove up and killed by the hundreds of head.

I would go down and look at those cows—to me it was sorta like human beings, because they would just groan and go on—when they was killin' 'em and they wasn't dead. I remember one day I went down there, and all of a sudden it hit me. I seen the war.

When I listened to those cows and looked at how they were carryin' on, then I seen how horrible wars were. I thought then: Why do they have wars? To me, those cows were like women, moanin' over their husbands, their children and the starvation and the places where they were, everything was wiped out. I ran up to the house and I sit up there a long time and then I went to cryin' because they was doin' these cows this way.

Sumio Nichi

A second-generation Japanese-American.

WE HAD A BIG FARM near Salinas, California. Lettuce, celery, cauliflower, broccoli. . . . In 1934, I bought a truck for \$1600. Paid everything back within a year. I bought another. In 1936, I bought four trucks and trailers for \$24,000. We had our own packinghouse. It got rough in '37 and '38. There were too many crops, over-production. In those two years, we lost almost everything. We wound up owing the bank \$78,000. In '39, '40, '41, we covered up our losses. The day I was to report to the assembly center, in 1941, we brought that mortgage down to \$9,875. The

day I left for the internment camp, I walked into the bank, paid them \$9,875.

We had an inventory of \$80,000 worth of equipment. The people around, the whites, knew we had to leave. They were just standing around, waiting. I was thinking of storing it, but they told us we couldn't do it. It would be hampering the war effort. So they set up appraisers. I got \$6,000 for it.

After the war—I wound up in the army, counter-intelligence, would you believe it? (Laughs.) I took a trip back to Salinas. I couldn't lease one acre of land. Nothing available. The people who took over our place, they're doing quite well. (Laughs.) So I came to Chicago, and here I am. (Laughs.)