

every single day, whether they had anything to wear or not. 'Cause it was warm, the classroom was warm.

The Mexican and Negro children were more used to being poor and hungry. The Italian and Greek children and their parents were stunned by it. You hear the saying today: if you really want work, you can get it. My nephew, not so long ago, said to me, referring to the Negroes: Ah, if they want a job, they can get it. I said, "If you ever say that again—I don't care if you're damn near forty years old—I'll slap you! Your father couldn't get a job in the Depression, and he wanted one." Of course, he's forgotten. But, ohhh, I felt all that old rage coming back.

The parents of the children I have today are working, but some of them are very, very poor. During the Depression, when you were poor, you weren't looking around and seeing . . . here's a society in which everybody has something except me. What's wrong with me? What's wrong with my parents, that we don't have these things? By God, I'm gonna get some. I can't blame them. They watch television, and everybody has everything. Why not me?

In the Depression, it wasn't only "not me," it was "not you," too. The rich, then, had an instinct for self-preservation. They didn't flaunt their money, if you remember. They didn't have fancy debutante parties, because it was not the thing to do. They were so God-damned scared they'd have a revolution. They damn near did, too, didn't they? Oooohhh, were they scared! What's more scared than a million dollars?

The Depression was a way of life for me, from the time I was twenty to the time I was thirty. I thought it was going to be forever and ever and ever. That people would always live in fear of losing their jobs. You know, fear. And, yet, we had, in a way, a wonderful time. We were young.

Remember? The one great thing was the end of Prohibition. The liquor we drank before was awful. Whoever thought about enjoying a drink? I'm talking about the bootleg. To this day, I can't drink gin, because every time I get a very fine Bee-feater martini, all I can remember is that white stuff I drank during Prohibition.

How can you talk about the Depression without talking about F.D.R.? I remember when he was at the Chicago Stadium and all of us ran from school to get there. He came in on his son's arm. We didn't realize that he was really and truly crippled until we saw the braces. He got up there and the place just absolutely went up in smoke. What was tremendous about him was—with all the adoration—his sense of humor. He acted as though he didn't take himself seriously.

And Eleanor. Eleanor. I think she's the greatest thing that ever happened to anybody. I think of the way they talked about her, about her looks, about her voice. I used to get so rabid. Why I didn't have high blood pressure, I don't know.

Not so long ago, one of the parents said to me, "You know, you kind of

talk like Eleanor Roosevelt." I said, "You mean her voice?" She said, "Oh, no, your voice isn't like hers." I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "I don't know. You just talk like Eleanor Roosevelt." Wasn't that something?

Sergeant Vincent Murray

A police headquarters on Chicago's South Side.

"I worked for the American Express Company for ten years. In 1933, I was laid off. I was out of work for a year. I went to different aldermen, but there were no jobs to be had. I was recalled by the express company when business picked up a little. . . ."

I JOINED the force in 1935. Five hundred young fellows were sworn in on that particular day. We were saddened when a reporter announced that Will Rogers and Wiley Post were killed in a plane crash in Alaska.

Our starting salary was \$2300 a year. We purchased our own uniforms, guns and shirts, et cetera. At that time, there were very few policemen drove automobiles. We'd come to work in a streetcar in uniform. When we'd get to the police station, there'd be fifteen or twenty policemen in uniform on that streetcar. Ninety-five percent of us went to work on streetcars.

I look outside the window there, and to my right, looking west, I see 150 automobiles owned by detectives and owned by uniformed men. What I'm trying to bring out is the difference between 1935, '36, '37, '38 and 1968. Now when I go and ride a bus downtown, I never, never see a uniformed man on a bus. They come here to work in all kinds of cars, Fords, Chevies, Chryslers, you even seen 'em come up in Cadillacs, Mustangs. At that time, we lived within our means. We didn't live over our heads.

These young fellows in the police department today, ninety percent of them are living over their heads. They have cars they can't afford. They have colored televisions they can't afford. And some of 'em are talking about summer houses. And every one of 'em I will say are in debt over their heads. It's impossible on what they're gettin'. If they want to keep up, their wives will have to go out and work. Or else, they moonlight, get extra jobs. At that time, they couldn't get two jobs. They were lucky to have one. Just here in the last month, they have allowed policemen to moonlight by driving taxi cabs.

Today there are twenty squad cars where there used to be two. They probably had fifty foot men around the Loop. Now they might have ten foot men, the rest of them are in squad cars. It was interesting working in

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the Loop, back then. Every twenty minutes, we were stopped by visitors from out of town. They'd see a policeman in uniform and they inquire about different buildings, different restaurants.

It was at the tail end of the Depression. Around the Loop, you had quite a few employment agencies. And we had an epidemic of con games. When these fellows would come out of this employment agency, this confidence man would walk over and pat him on the shoulder and say, "Pardon me, are you looking for a job?" He'd say, "Yes, I am." "Well," said this fellow, his name was Parsons, "I've got a job for you right now over in the Garland Building. Running an elevator. The job pays \$30 a week." Now \$30 a week is a lot of money at that time.

So the two of them go over to the Garland Building. This confidence man would take this young fellow on the elevator to the office of the building, and he would tell him to sit in the corner. And he would converse with somebody in the building. He'd walk back and say, "You got the job. You start to work tomorrow. But you need a uniform. The uniform'll cost you \$50."

So they'd get in a cab and they would go out to his house, and if this fellow didn't have the \$50, he borrowed it from his in-laws or his neighbors. He was so desperate to get that job. So he'd give 'em the \$50 and Parsons'd say, "O.K., report tomorrow morning, and I'll have your uniform for you."

The following day, the fellow would go down to the Garland Building and he would go up to the office and he would set there, and he's looking for this fellow, Parsons. Mr. Parsons failed to appear. Then he'd go over and talk to the girl. She'd say, "I don't know any Mr. Parsons."

We had about fifty complaints about this Parsons, who was taking these young fellows. Things got out of hand. The sergeant of the district took about ten young fellows and put them in plain clothes and told them to go around these employment agencies. We had a good description of him.

We found him. About thirty people came in, and all thirty identified him at the show-up. We put that fellow in the penitentiary for five years. That gives you an idea how desperate fellows were to secure work. They'd go for almost anything.

Did you have any encounters with strikers at that time or labor organizers . . . ?

There was nothing wrong with those fellows organizing the CIO. Left wing is a term that was used, where you don't go around with the rank-and-file. They organized the fellows that worked hard for a living up at the stockyards. The American Federation of Labor did nothing for the laborer, nothing.

I can remember when my father worked at the stockyards when I was a little boy. That's fifty years ago. His salary was ten cents an hour. My

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brother worked up there for the same. He worked ten hours for a dollar a day. If they mentioned unions up there, they'd get fired. American Federation of Labor did nothing for these men. It was during the Depression, the CIO came along.

That's when they started calling 'em left wings and bolsheviks and so forth and so on. Personally I don't think they were any more bolshevik or Communist than I was. They just wanted an honest living, that's all.

If all this happened today, I think the people would take it in their own hands, the way things are going. They're a different breed now. More educated today, more educated.

There was no basic race trouble at that time. The colored stayed by themselves, they never marched into any neighborhoods. People were more or less indifferent to them.

Earl B. Dickerson

President of the Supreme Life Insurance Company. "It is written largely on the lives of Negro people. Now we are seeking to move into the mainstream, due to the fact that competition is coming in from white companies. All this has happened since the 1954 Supreme Court decision."

He has been president of the Chicago Urban League, as well as of the National Bar Association, the Cook County Bar Association and the National Lawyers Guild.*

From 1939 to 1941, he was a member of the Chicago City Council as alderman from the Second Ward.

"The Depression was like a hurricane. Fortunately these 'Acts of God' are not prejudiced. They kill whites as well as Negroes."

THE SOUTH SIDE was very much as it is now in the ghettos. People standing around on corners. The streets were crowded whether it was Saturday or Monday. People who didn't have carfare to even seek jobs. Hopelessness on their faces, as they sat on stoops. . . . Almost all the Negro companies went out of business. The banks in the community were closed. Though they catered to black depositors, they were operated by whites.

At almost every meeting of the City Council, delegations came down from the South Side, asking for better relief treatment. Many times on the floor of the Council, I argued for more consideration of their needs. The Council was grudging and niggardly in its response. An alderman from a West Side ward † accused them of being lazy: "That's why so many of them are on relief," he said.

* An association of black lawyers.

† Popularly known as the "West Side Bloc," celebrated for its close syndicate connections.