





"In the Depression, the men could not get jobs, and especially the black men," Bridgeforth says. "Here was my father with a degree in chemistry, and he could not get a job."

It was a time of terrible suffering. The contradictions were so obvious that it didn't take a very bright person to realize something was terribly wrong.

Have you ever seen a child with rickets? Shaking as with palsy. No proteins, no milk. And the companies pouring milk into gutters. People with nothing to wear, and they were plowing up cotton. People with nothing to eat, and they killed the pigs. If that wasn't the craziest system in the world, could you imagine anything more idiotic? This was just insane.

It was rough, but everybody was in the same boat. Nobody had anything. Every room had a stove then, we didn't have furnaces, you know. And a lot of people didn't have wood and couldn't afford coal. People were actually burning their corn for heat. You couldn't sell it, so might as well do something with it. We came home one night and somebody had broken into our house and stolen all our food. They didn't want money, they just had to have food. We had livestock so we always had meat. We were pretty self-sufficient in that way. The people who were really hurting, I think, were the people who worked in the cities. The people who had jobs at manufacturing plants that went broke. Dad kind of griped about it, said, "All those guys who went off and made a lot of money in Detroit or Chicago or Toledo, now that they lost their jobs, they come back and try to get a job on the farm."

My mother never went to work. At that time, the only jobs available for women in the workforce were as cooks or janitors or something like that and my mamma wasn't going to do something like that. It wasn't a good era for women to be working. She never worked.

As the Depression progressed into 1938, people would be coming around and knocking at doors, asking for something to eat, for a piece of bread or something of that nature. My father left orders that no one would ever be turned away. If anyone ever came to our door and they were hungry, they would be fed. We had a rather large porch and there were always table and chairs out there. My father would bring them out there and feed them on the porch and sit and talk to them in a very casual manner. These were total strangers.

The Depression is really hardest on those who can least afford it — the people who are not in great health, the people who are not educated, the people who are not gifted or blessed with good fortune.