

# The great depression essay sample

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



## **Introduction**

The Great Depression is one of the most iconic events in America's history. It was an event that would affect millions of people and have serious economic repercussions for the nation. The Depression lasted for a period of 10 years, from 1929 to 1939. It is classed as the longest as well as the most severe depression that has ever been experienced in the world. People who lived through the depression often give horrific tales about the poor status of their lives during this time. My grandfather is one of those individuals. He was born in 1919, and he was, therefore, a teenage boy at the peak of the great depression. In a bid to get more insight into the Great Depression, I decided to conduct an interview with him. I realized that I could get more accurate information about the depression from a person who had experienced it firsthand than from books or other works of literature. My grandfather was naturally excited when I brought up the idea of an interview. He was very enthusiastic about telling his story to me.

As mentioned earlier, my grandfather was only a young boy when the Great Depression struck. He recalls that during the Great Depression, food prices were very down. This is quite interesting but another interesting thing is that in spite of the food prices being low, people hardly any note to buy food or even clothes.

My grandfather recalls his father explaining to him the causes of the Great Depression. The Great Depression resulted from several factors. The late 1920's were characterized by a sudden boom of stocks. The shareholders were reliant on the success of the stocks so as to buy even more stocks using loans. However, this boom of stock was not authentic. It was also

unsteady mainly because its basis was borrowed money accompanied by false optimism. My grandfather went on to state that this was followed by a loss of confidence by investors. This was then followed by a collapse of the stock market that paved way for the Great Depression.

According to my grandfather, another factor that caused the Great Depression was ineffective government policies. The general belief in the government and amongst politicians was that business was critical to the economic success of any nation. Consequently, it did not take any action when it came to unwise investing. The government failed to realize that the national wealth was unevenly spread and the economy was becoming more and more unstable. The huge share of the national wealth was concentrated among few individuals.

The supply in the nation exceeded the demand. The final effect was the crash of the stock market on October 29, 1929. This iconic day popularly referred to as “ Black Tuesday” was the beginning point of the Great Depression that according to my grandfather would render havoc to the American nation for the next decade.

Some of the poorest people went for days without taking any food. In an effort to alleviate the extreme conditions, the government in association with charitable organizations opened up several bread and soup centers. There were long lines at these centers day in day out. My grandfather particularly remembers how his parents would wake him up early each morning to go make a line at the soup kitchen.

My grandfather states that in spite of things being inexpensive, for example shoes, they had no money to buy them. People often resulted to improvised

versions of common items such as shoes and clothes which they made at home. It was hard to come across a kid nagging his parents for new shoes or clothes because they knew that the answer would be a big and resounding no. The priority was on food. As my grandfather explains, as a young boy, he knew better than to ask for luxurious items from his parents.

At this time, my grandfather lived in a tiny boarding house in New York with his parents. Most of their neighbors were in the same dire economic conditions. The little kids would help with the basic household chores while the parents and the older kids went out to look for the little income that they could get.

My grandfather's father (my great grandfather) worked at an old milling company for 14 hours daily. He would live very early in the morning and would not be back till late in the night. My grandfather remembers that this was particularly very hard for him as he rarely had time to talk or interact with his father. It was only on weekends and during the summer holidays that he at least got to interact with him as his father would sometimes tag him along to his work place to help him with some handy work.

### **The mother made some home sewn shoes and clothes that she would see and get a little income.**

The small income made would only be sufficient for basic needs. The family could only afford simple foods. My great grandfather would work the entire day for 75 cents. Almost all of this was used for basic house commodities including food while the rest would be saved for the weekly rent that was 2.75 dollars.

Most families including my grandfather's skipped some meals. For example,

some would only eat breakfast and supper, and they would skip lunch. My father recalls that their breakfast comprised of crunchy biscuits and thin syrup. On a good day, corn bread and turnips were taken for supper. For refreshments, most families too water as other forms of refreshments like soda or canned juices were considered luxurious, something that most families could obviously not afford. My grandfather told me that it was only on special days like Sundays that the family was allowed to take tea. My grandfather also recalls that he rarely took any coffee as it was hugely unaffordable.

As my grandfather explains, life was depressing. This was particularly true for parents who found it hard to support their children. In fact, many parents opted for few kids that they could support. Although some kids that the situation was not that good, most of them did not really understand the full implications of the depression. My grandfather, for example, was quite oblivious to the effects of the Great Depression, and it was only after some time that he started coming into terms with the fact that the country was in a dire economic situation.

Another thing that I sought to understand from my grandfather was in regards to the presidency at the time. The president at the time was Hoover. My grandfather was very critical of the president, and I realized that he did not have much love for him. According to my grandfather, President Hoover did not in actual sense admit that his country had plunged into depression. He would occasionally get on the radio and try to deny that there was a crisis facing the nation.

This went on until finally he was replaced by Roosevelt, who my grandfather

seemed to be less critical of. President Roosevelt initiated a couple of strategies meant to alleviate the effects of the Great Depression.

The Great Depression also had a significant effect on education. My grandfather tells of how many children were denied the privilege of getting an education because of lack of money. Many communities were forced to shut down schools especially between the years 1932 and 1933 which were the peak years of the Great Depression. My grandfather was among the lucky few who managed to stay in school. This was because of his father's insistence that all his children must be educated.

There was high malnutrition among children, those in schools as well as those out of schools. My grandfather recalls that diseases were also very rampant at this time. The reason for this as my grandfather explain was because many did not enjoy the luxury of adequate food such as fruit, milk, eggs and fresh vegetables.

In worse case scenarios, some children became so sick that they perished. My grandfather recalls with sadness two of his friends from the same boarding house who perished when the conditions became too dire. In fact, the death rate of children was so high that many parents were afraid to have kids as they did not know whether they would be able to make through the depression.

My grandfather had an uncle who lived in a farm just out of Baltimore, Maryland. As my father explains, life for the farmers in the Great Depression was also very bad as my father found out when he visited his uncle during one summer holiday.

Farming had already been on a downward spiral because of industrialization

and the Great Depression only made things worse. For instance, my grandfather's uncle had resulted to subletting some of his land to peasants and outside tenants. He had also started selling and renting out some of his machinery. Food prices had undergone so much deflation that farmers like my grandfather's uncle found it impossible to make any profits from their products. In fact, many of them refused to sell and stocked their stores with products hoping that things would get better.

The situation was made even worse by a great drought experienced in 1932. From there onwards, owning land no longer meant being able to produce a stable income. Farmer's like my grandfather's uncle were unable to get any money from the farms they owned. Most of them ran into enormous debts. They could no longer pay for machinery and other payments on their land. Many became victims of foreclosure from the banks that had loaned them money. This was what happened to my grandfather's uncle whose land was foreclosed due to debt, and he was forced to move his family to New York in the hope of finding a better life. In fact at one time, the two families lived together from 1934 to 1935 as they tried to assemble their resources to make ends meet.

The Great Depression was accompanied was by loss of jobs. The major sector affected was the banking sector where many banks closed. My grandfather's mother had in fact been a cashier at one of the banks in New York before the Great Depression struck. She lost her job when the bank closed and resulted to her home sewing job.

As days progressed, things got a little better. Many people however never fully recovered. As my grandfather explains, many people had been forced to

readjust their lives, and they found it impossible to go back to the way things previously were.

The interview with my grandfather was an eye opener. I learnt a lot about how hard life was in the Great Depression. I have always known that the Great Depression was a trying period for the nation, but I did not fully understand the enormous effect that it had on normal Americans. From my grandfather's interview, I learnt how various factors can in combination bring about an economic downturn for the nation and the effects that this can have on people. I also learn about the basic history of people during this period as mentioned; many people perished during this trying period and a lot of potential future families. As my grandfather says, his family was lucky enough to make it and that is the reason that me and my family are in existence today. In conclusion, I hope that politicians and government officials and in fact, all people in the American nation learn from this tormenting experience that is the Great Depression and, therefore, never engage in activities that might plunge the country into another major economic depression.