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Mr. Cavanaugh

[00:00:00]

Interviewer: Mr. Cavanaugh what is the first thing that you remember about the depression?

Mr. Cavanaugh: Well of course the when we first came, I was with the YMCA in Wilmington and we were affected primarily by my cut in salary. And that was universal of course and everybody was part of it, because it affected all fields of activity character building as the YMCA was as well as business and industry. So coming just out of college, graduate school, it was rather impressionable to have a cut which was a normal thing. And second year of it we were cut another 5%. So it was a financial setback for all people. It just wasn't hard but we recognized that in our program as being one of the things that we need to device plans of helping people to find their way in the condition of financial straits and as well as finding helping them find themselves in the overall affairs of a depression here.

Interviewer: How was the state *[inaudible]* [0:02:18] that was special program.

Mr. Cavanaugh: Well they initiated a program that would help people to become more actively engaged in activities which would help to take their minds off of the some of the cares of their office or their financial problems. And it even helped them to develop their other skill, any other skill that they might have and helped them to keep physically fit in a period that sometimes they were mentally distressed. So our program at YMCA was aimed primarily to give that kind of assistance to the man and the boys. And of course that affected the whole families of the people and our rapture such that most people were able to avail themselves of the YMCA privileges at that time without undue the stress or strain on their individual financial.

Interviewer: Was any charity work undertaken by the YMCA?

Mr. Cavanaugh: No, no stress we, the YMCA is not considered to be a charitable institution as such. It is more of the character building type of institution. However, there were, we had opportunities of serving some people and people who were beginning to be a trenchant kind of living for some people. And we helped them, the travelers to find lodging, we cooperated with the other agencies in the community which might have been of the relief nature and we assisted them in providing lodging and some cases food for travelers, particularly young men. There was more of

a movement of young men or of married men who were seeking employment who came without their families and we tried to bridge that difficulty in their lives.

[00:05:25]

Interviewer: Do you remember were you acquainted with any particular situations, personal situations with people coming there that you recall?

Mr. Cavanaugh: No we, no particular one. We had, we found that many of the young men were not able to financially pay their room rent, men who had been living here who were permanent residents. And they had difficulty in of keeping their room rent paid. We extended credit to many of them for a longer period of time than what we normally would have. Some of them, most of them came through all right. There were a few who found that they were not able to write off the depression and we were not able to collect all. But a majority of them did and even after several, after a few years we found that they were still living in Wilmington in the area or in the YMCA. They paid up what they owed.

Interviewer: You were living in Wilmington at that time?

Mr. Cavanaugh: I was living in Wilmington, yes.

Interviewer: Was the government didn't seem particularly badly hit by that?

Mr. Cavanaugh: Not perhaps as much as some other communities. Wilmington had a rather stable. We didn't have the bank closings that was experienced in many of the cities. Many of our, of our wealthier people in the community rallied to the support of banks and institutions. And so we didn't have any noticeable run on banks or on any other institution that seemed to be financially in trouble. It wasn't that apparent. And they, people generally here rode the depression period without a great deal of... well there some, there were some who had some rather strained financial experiences and even amongst some of our wealthier ones who had rather heavy investments in stocks and they had some difficult times. But by and large, it was not a crisis experience here in the Wilmington and the area generally because of a very strong position here among our good industries and banks.

Interviewer: Were there others ... excuse me, but there were soup kitchens and there is small missions that never *[inaudible]* [0:09:17].

Mr. Cavanaugh: Yes, yes there were those. In various parts of the city there were missions that were most helpful and there soup kitchens. And of course the rationing for food and gasoline and other commodities was quite evident. And people took those things in their stride, they didn't seem to be any hysteria and they were lined up for their tickets and for food and for gasoline and... but those things I think by and large were taken without too much feeling that it was it was a hardship. It was a hardship of course but yet we were all a part of that, the whole situation.

Interviewer: How did the depression affect you personally?

Mr. Cavanaugh: Oh I it didn't affect me or my family. We had just come out of, my wife and I had just come out of graduate school, we and no children and we rode it along very well and it didn't hurt us. We didn't lose faith on in anything. We took those things in a stride without any giving or blaming anybody or getting too greatly disturbed about it. We knew these things would come around.

Interviewer: And did the fact that you had studying *[inaudible]* [0:11:37].

Mr. Cavanaugh: Yes. Yes, that's quite, quite true. And we were all part of this and our YMCA family of employees and staff and general employees were most helpful to each other. And we had a very fine as YMCA in Wilmington always has had a very fine group of unusually strong men of the community who were members of the board of directors of the YMCA. And it was... they were most helpful in every way.

Interviewer: So, the impression I have been getting from a large number of people was that there was a great deal of cooperation.

Mr. Cavanaugh: Extremely so, yeah. Extremely a great deal among the institutions and among individuals and among organizations, churches. Everything worked together to make the people who were having any difficult difficulty to make it as easy as possible for them.

Interviewer: Were most of the clientele of the YMCA white?

Mr. Cavanaugh: In fact yes. By nature of the organization, there was a small group of Negroes who were a part of the organization but not right at that time. They were, they came a little later when the Walnut Street YMCA was built, which served that area and served both white and black in that particular area so that... but during the depression it was largely the white men and boys who used the facilities, yeah.

Interviewer: When you came out of graduate school which was it 1930?

Mr. Cavanaugh: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you experience any difficulty finding a position?

Mr. Cavanaugh: No. I came out of a... I took my graduate work at Vanderbilt and also at YMCA Graduate School both of them right there in Nashville. And I had two offers for a position at that time. I call it perhaps just before the greatest impact of the depression. And while there was some other employment in 1931, it was not as, not as many positions were open. '30 was just, they were just, we were just beginning to get the feel of it. So I, as I said I had two offers for a position and so I did not experience any difficulty.

Interviewer: A book I was reading entitled The First Chapter of the *[inaudible]* **[0:015:55]** depression was the Gloomy Depression of Herbert Hoover, and the second chapter was called The Exhilarating Depression of Franklin Roosevelt. Was there a change, subject changes *[inaudible]* **[0:16:10]**?

Mr. Cavanaugh: Of course Hoover was... it was not any more his fault than the whole nation's fault. He, of course that doesn't imply that he is the gloomy, a gloomy ... because it mentioned Hoover, I am, I feel that Hoover was just a victim of the circumstances as things were developing that had come up through a longer period of time. And he just happened to be in office at that time and caught the full blunt of the blow or impact of the blow. But there are here in Wilmington in Delaware area, they didn't consider that it was too gloomy.

And however when Roosevelt's program began to come into operation where it gave a lift to many, many of the people and it helped to flourish and it... there was no other way to go. We were down by the floors *[inaudible]* **[0:17:51]** a country would like to get or ever be, but saw that Roosevelt's optimism and encouragement, the the program that was initiated by Roosevelt in congress seemed to give some hope of recovery.

Interviewer: It seemed that Roosevelt offered more than anything a psychological change.

Mr. Cavanaugh: Yes, yeah. That's right. It was, it was and maybe and others would have done the same thing, I don't know but he did and it was *[inaudible]* **[0:18:42]**.

Interviewer: Was there many WPA groups around Wilmington?

Mr. Cavanaugh: There were some. There were not as many. As they say the this business stability of the community was such that it didn't lend itself to as much as WPA program as it would have been in some other communities. But there was some, yes there was some of that and it was rather effective, some of the work which they did and it gave them employment and encouragement and they did some good things.

Interviewer: Did you know, I mean were any of the people like the YMCA involved in these programs?

Mr. Cavanaugh: Only to the degree that they were part of the overall planning and overall involvement. I don't recall that any of them were... that our program developed anything that, except to assist in a general way I think.

Interviewer: Also what I especially meant was the people who lived at the Y, were any of them involved?

Mr. Cavanaugh: Yes, yes there were some. There were some of the young men who found somewhat who found the opportunities through WPA to find work and thereby maintain themselves until other jobs opened, yes.

Interviewer: Particular interest of mine is the radio *[inaudible]* **[0:20:48]** the history of the radio. Did you have a radio at that time?

Mr. Cavanaugh: Yes, I think we did have a radio. It was a very small kind of a radio. I don't recall just now the style of it, but I think we, I'm sure we had a small radio.

Interviewer: Do you recall at all anything that you listened to?

Mr. Cavanaugh: No, I don't. Our interest in radios and in Television now is along the lines of what might be musical or anything that would be of an educational nature. I don't recall that any special program. I guess Amis and Andy was on then I'm not sure but I *[crosstalk]* **[0:22:23]** yes, I that just comes to mind and it probably, we probably listened to that and I think we did as part of the culture that they...

Interviewer: Did you ever hear any Roosevelt's *[inaudible]* **[0:22:44]**.

Mr. Cavanaugh: Oh yes, yes. I'm sure we did, yes. And I always felt that he said something worthwhile and encouraging.

Interviewer: The people remember listening to the Mercury *[inaudible]* [0:23:04] a particular broadcast that also *[inaudible]* [0:23:07].

Mr. Cavanaugh: I didn't hear that particular, no I didn't. I don't recall. I know there was, there was a great deal of comment about it of course, but I we didn't hear it.

Interviewer: I see. Did you get to the movies at all?

Mr. Cavanaugh: Yes, yes we attended movies in those days. There was a movie house up on Delaware Avenue that was a very nice one up around New Jackson, Delaware, New Jackson Street, somewhere up in there and it was a very, very nice movie. And we walked to, it was a walking distance from where we lived and we went over there once a week or once a month or something. I don't know, it depended on the movie, the type of movie that was there.

Interviewer: Were there any special films that you would recall?

Mr. Cavanaugh: Well those were the days when I suppose I'm not sure. It was before the depression came before Nelson Eddie and Janet McDonald may have been some, may have been some of those in there that was particularly interesting. And I and it was musical was always very interesting type and I think of course the sound was here then. And so Carrie Grant may have been, not Carrie Grant but Copra may have been a part of that and may have been there. But I don't know when Gone with the Wind came in but.

Interviewer: It was the late 30s.

Mr. Cavanaugh: The late 30s, yeah. But some of those, what we consider outstanding performers in the in the movie industry we enjoyed them. Yes I specify any more than that I don't know, we enjoyed anything that's good.

Interviewer: Many people, something that I wasn't aware of before I began talking to people many people attended the theater. Did you ever go to the theatre?

Mr. Cavanaugh: Yes. We attended, we attended some. We didn't make it... we were not a subscriber to any guild, so we had a guild of program. We attended some that were here. We went to Philadelphia for some things. I remember Barren Anderson, I'm not sure of the year those came, but we went to The Academy of Music in Philadelphia a few times during those early periods in order to be a part of those things. Though sometimes those

things in our position was not, was a little beyond our pocket book too and so we didn't...

Interviewer: Did you rather go at the UPA Theater? There was one in Wilmington *[inaudible]* [0:27:21].

Mr. Cavanaugh: No, I don't recall if we ever went to it. I don't recall a firm where it was located at, but I guess I just was that I don't recall it, no.

Interviewer: Were you employed at the YMCA throughout the 30s?

Mr. Cavanaugh: Yes, yes, yes I was there almost 25 years.

Interviewer: Did things change materially in there as the 30s progressed?

Mr. Cavanaugh: Oh yes, yes it began to recover nationwide of course and locally. Y programs increased and interest increased and it yeah, the YMCA became part of the general advancement of more normal life, more normal living.

Interviewer: I ask about the people if they were at all comfortable with the European situation with the rise of Hitler and Mussolini and also the operations of Japan and in Asia, the conquest in China. Did you at all... were you at all concerned with that?

Mr. Cavanaugh: Well yes. It somewhat came somewhat after the depression. That is the impact of the rise came after the depression. I, this may be a side, I was over in Europe in 1938. And I was visiting YMCAs in Europe and the Middle East. And I was in Greece at the time, about the time of the invasion of Hitler in Austria. And the strain of that particular period was evident to many of the people in that area.

And I was down in Egypt and that there again you began to sense that there was tension. And then up in Palestine, Jerusalem there was the early uprising between the Arab and the Jews and the tension there was quite, quite bad. The YMCA which is located in Jerusalem is one of the most beautiful YMCAs of the world, it was at that time and still is rather a strong beautiful Y building. But a curfew was on in Jerusalem during the time I was there. And there was a lot of strife going on, bombing and of railroads and of streets and buses, things of that nature. But I kept going without too much interference. But I could feel the tension building as it got more into parts of Europe and so I got home before things got too bad.

Interviewer: Was there much concern at home around this?

Mr. Cavanaugh: There was some, yes there was some concern because the rise of Hitler invading these lower countries seemed to give to the people in United States a feeling of concern of course. And because they didn't know how far it was going to go and what he was taking in all of that that was territory so easily they... and it was just riding *[inaudible]* **[0:32:20]** over all the people. So there was apprehension of course.

And in fact this building that we're in here now in the late 30s money was raised for a new building to replace an old house that was here that we had been using for the Sunday school program of the Grace Church. And but the war situation came on and it looked like in 1940 that we shouldn't do anything. And we had some money already and the decision was that we should go ahead and build this church house.

So we did go ahead and got the last boiler that was available in the city and it was built this building was built of concrete, no steel was available and it's a good strong building now of course and. But and it was built and dedicated in December '42, but that was during the war period of course.

But the buildup was rather... there was apprehension of course, but yet the people felt well here's something that we need and we ought to go ahead and build it because if we don't, after the war it would be a long time before we recover from this financially or building wise. And so do we need it? Let's go ahead and build it. So there was optimism to the degree of that they should go ahead.

Interviewer: Do you think that there is a lesson that the depression has taught us as a country?

Mr. Cavanaugh: Well, I think it has. I think it taught our financial people, our brokers and stock markets that we couldn't ride the way the high crest of buying and selling stock that was just in paper and without... and we buy as they did it's such a small margin that's where it caught so many of our people. They were buying at a very small margin and they over extended themselves. They thought well this is going nicely let's and they just overdid it. I think that in itself was a revelation to our financial people that here this thing can't continue.

And I think what they did following that depression in the money markets of United States and the world as far as it goes, was to see that such a

thing wouldn't happen again. For that and that was good. Saying anything good came out of all this it was a good thing.

Interviewer: Has it taught the people perhaps a lesson?

Mr. Cavanaugh: Well, it did. It put reigns on them too and the people themselves were saw the, the value of being a little more conservative. But not only that but they were limited. They couldn't buy on such a small margin. That there were laws which were affected or were inaugurated that would limit some of their extravagant buying and selling and spending and so forth.

Interviewer: One of the affects, well what has been pointed out as an effect of the depression was after the war the quest for security people tried buying homes and buying cars, materials in the sense out of the experience of wanting and needing.

Mr. Cavanaugh: Well, yes there was. As I they began to find themselves in better positions and come out of those things while they were beginning to buy some of the things they needed and to help the economy of the country. It was, it began to open up. People began to get more money and they were able to move ahead. Yes the economy got stronger as we ran along.

Interviewer: Do you think that there is a possibility that we could have another depression of such magnitude?

Mr. Cavanaugh: I don't think so. I think there's curbs which have been put on our financial institutions and our financial leaders and our government, I think they have developed us to a degree that we would, as far as I can see not be prone to get into a depression quite as severe as that particular one was.

Interviewer: This is in a sense a speculative question, it was based on the last question, but if there would be another such depression, if there was by any chance, how do you think the young people of today would react to it as compared with the reaction of the young people who *[inaudible]* **[0:39:26]** like yourself?

Mr. Cavanaugh: Oh I think, I think the young people would, would accept and would be able to adjust themselves to a depression. There would be less, of course less work. Right now some of the men coming out of colleges are having some difficulty finding employment, the PHD as well as some of the undergraduates. But they, I think they I think they would find themselves. I think they have the strength of character and motives and dedication that they would find themselves all right, I think.

Interviewer: Looking back on the depression, some people see it as a time of trial, as a time of regret because some of the chances that *[inaudible]* **[0:40:50]** and other people see it as a time of adventure because of becoming a hardship. How do you view this period?

Mr. Cavanaugh: Well, I don't think generally that people were so badly affected. But there were a few, there were a few there were found suicides. I think those were brought on not only because of the depression, but because of some mental strain and they couldn't make it we still have suicides. But I think by and large that is our experience here in the Wilmington area was such that I think people took it in their stride and went to... when they had to make plans for the future they'd do it. They didn't feel that this would last.

In fact I often look back now as I say if I could, if I'd had many people, other people say the same if I had a little extra cash I could have bought some of the stocks while they would have been at a better financially fix but people didn't, they didn't regret too many things. A few did but I think by and large you didn't hear too much discouragement, I don't think, here in Wilmington at least. And I say I think we were, Wilmington was favored in many respects. We didn't have the panic and the... of the bank closing and that in itself is a very disturbing kind of experience and it catches like wildfire and spreads around the community. Well we didn't have that, fortunately.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you very much.

Mr. Cavanaugh: Yeah, I could... but the president of the *DuPont* Company during part of that period lived out here not too far away and he'd ride his bicycle into work on Delaware Avenue in the morning passing the YMCA. And one of the vice presidents of the company lived not too far away and he would walk every morning into his office and in the afternoon you'd see him walking back. So I think from a standpoint of some of our leaders and others they took the cue from that that it wasn't too great a hardship to walk, it helped us. And to ride bicycles it helped us physically, so there were good things that came out of the depression that are I think helpful.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

Mr. Cavanaugh: Yeah.

[00:44:02] **End of Audio**