

INTERVIEWER: With me this morning is Percy Bigler, a native of Elizabeth, West Virginia and a participant of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's highly acclaimed, yet widely controversial, Civilian Conservation Corps. Good morning, Percy.

PERCY: Morning, ma'am.

INTERVIEWER: I know the purpose of the CCC is to take young men off public assistance, to provide for their families financially, and to build or improve the country's infrastructure, among other things. How did you come to enroll in the program?

PERCY: When the stock market crashed back in 1929, it took a while for its effects to trickle into West Virginia. During the five years since, that trickle's washed away livelihoods, swept food off the tables, and drenched folks with fear. My family managed to tread water until 1934, but when the incessant flow hit flood stage, it was time for me to man the lifeboat and get them out of harm's way. It was President Roosevelt who tossed the ropes to me, and it was in the form of the CCC.

INTERVIEWER: That's an unusual way to frame the consequences of the Great Depression.

PERCY: Flooding is all too common in the hills and hollows, so I reckon that's why it seems a fitting comparison. Truth of the matter is that some counties in West Virginia have unemployment as high as eighty percent.

INTERVIEWER: Oh my. In that case, *flood stage* may be an understatement. Tell me about your experience with the president's program.

PERCY: Some people are downright scornful when it comes to the CCC, but I'm proud of the work we're doing. Sure, it takes a heap of money to set up a work force like President Roosevelt designed, but we're saving forests, preventing fires, building roads and dams, and employing conservation techniques that protect our land. A hundred years from now, when someone snags a fish out of a lake in a national forest, or a father takes his family camping at a state park, evidence of our work will remain, and I hope those folks know that it was the men of the CCC who prepared the way.

INTERVIEWER: Is it true that you have been the subject of disciplinary action?

PERCY: Yes, ma'am. I'm embarrassed to say that the sergeant overseeing my training at the conditioning camp and the camp commander in Nevada both took me to task.

INTERVIEWER: Would you mind sharing what happened?

PERCY: I'd rather you got to know me a mite better before I spill the story, especially since my defense won't sound credible without retelling the events that led up to each indiscretion. I will say that I'm a peaceable person who practices compromise, but in both situations, I ended up on my backside before I could offer another remedy. It's funny how fast things can go downhill—not that either occasion was laughable. That's not what I mean.

INTERVIEWER: My notes indicate your education ended after the eighth grade. How do you account for your vocabulary?

PERCY: I may not be schoolhouse smart, but I'm what the folks in the hollow call book learned. They pronounce that *ler-ned*. When I saw the hundreds of books at the CCC camp library, it set my mouth watering. Shelves overflow with books about history and science, and good reads by authors like Mark Twain. A good story can take you anywhere, don't you know?

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever imagine your real life travels would take you to Nevada?

PERCY: No, ma'am. It's as hot out here as the tin roof on Bigler's General Store, but this is where the CCC sent me, and I aim to make the best of it.

INTERVIEWER: What about your personal life, Percy? Do you have a sweetheart waiting for you to come home?

PERCY: No, ma'am. I will say that I met a nice looking gal who lives here in Hawthorne, but she's nothing like those from back home. Pretty and smart as she is, I think she scares me more than she entices me. I reckon I'd be better off with one from my own neck of the woods, one who delights in the simple things in life. One like . . .

INTERVIEWER: Why, Mr. Bigler, I think you're blushing. Would you care to enlighten our readers?

PERCY: No, ma'am. That's all I have to say on that subject.

INTERVIEWER: Then, let me ask one more question. What do you fear, and what do you hope to find, when you finish your work with the CCC and go back to West Virginia?

PERCY: First off, I try not to worry. It takes more effort than living the day that's set before me. That said, I hope the depression ends before I go home, because I'll need a job once I get there. I hope that when I return, I'm just a grown-up version of the country boy who left. I have faith that regardless of what I find when I walk into the only place I've called home, the Good Father will determine my next steps.