Tales of the Great Depression

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STAFF WRITERS

It was the waning days of the Great Depression when Marie Slack showed up on Evelyn Hight's doorstep. The 15-year-old Slack, who was going to be a high school freshman, needed a job. And it just so happened that Hight, a teacher in New Britain, needed help cleaning her home.

"She doubted me, being only 13," Slack said. "But she gave me a chance. And it worked out fine."

The newspaper asked readers for their memories of the Great Depression, and the response was overwhelming.

Most were just children on Oct. 29, 1929, the day the New York Stock Exchange crashed and sent the nation sliding into its worst economic disaster ever. But they remember vividly the sacrifices their families had to make as jobs were lost and everything was scarce.

Here are some of the responses.

Evelyn Hight, 106, Doylestown township, and Marie Slack, 83, Chalfont

Hight, who celebrated her 105th birthday last week, said the decade-long Great Depression didn't directly impact her. She earned a good salary as a teacher. Before she was married, she lived in a boarding house during the school year with other unmarried teachers. During the summers, she'd live, rent-free, with her parents.

Her father, who owned a general store, "had a great many people on the list of not payers," said Hight, who lives in the Pine Run retirement community in Doylestown Township.

"They would say, 'I'll pay you when I get the money,'" she said. "Many of them never did."

Times were more difficult for Slack, whose father lost his job in a paper mill during the Depression.

"The food supply was nil," she said. "I used to have to dig worms for my dad so he could go fishing. That was the meat supply. We had a friend who had a farm, he would bring milk and eggs occasionally. That was the extent of our food."

The difficult times lasted long after the Depression ended, Slack said. Her family was so poor they couldn't afford to buy her clothes so she could attend college. So Hight sewed her an entire wardrobe. "She's like a second mom to me," Slack said.

Pete Hunter, 81, Hainesport N.J.

Pete Hunter, who grew up in Philadelphia, was inspired by the Great Depression to write "Sonny ... a Very Different Philadelphia Story," a book that was published recently.

"I was born on Friday, Jan. 13, 1928," Hunter said. "The family joke was that I caused the Depression."

Hunter said people learned to cope with what was happening.

"There were good times and some not so good times, but there were lessons to be learned," he said. "You adapt and you cope. The important thing is kids in that age could still do a lot of laughing."

In his book, Hunter recalls the strong sense of community that existed during the Depression.

"There was no need for bars on the windows of our homes," he said. "Entire neighborhoods were kept safe as well as clean by the neighbors. Mother couldn't imagine having dirty front steps, or a dirty porch."

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