

Dominick Gadamowitz of Flushing Joins the C.C.C. by Robert Gadamowitz

During the depression, unemployment was especially severe for younger workers. An estimated one-third of all young workers between ages 15 and 24 were unemployed. They made about one-third of the total number of unemployed workers. Two New Deal programs attempted to deal with this problem, the Civilian Conservation Corps (C.C.C.) and the National Youth Administration (N.Y.A.). The C.C.C. was founded in March, 1933. During the next seven years, more than 2,250,000 young men between ages 17 and 25 lived and worked in 1,500 C.C.C. camps located in every state. They performed heavy outdoor labor, including building trails and emergency roads in National Parks. Even at its peak, the C.C.C. could accept only one-sixth of the applicants.

My name is Dominick Gadamowitz. I born in Flushing, New York in 1918. I was the eldest of my parents' eleven children. Like most of my friends, I had to drop out of school at a young age because of the Great Depression. I was thirteen at the time. Leaving school in 1931 was a damaging but necessary choice to make as a young child. My dad asked me if I would come and work with him on construction sites for three or four days a week. I felt as if I had an obligation to help Pop feed the rest of the family because we were really beginning to feel the effects of the depression. The construction industry was in a sharp decline. Therefore, my dad was only working when he was needed. Things got so bad that every time Pop had to put up a new building, the only job he could get for me was a water boy position, even though I became a skilled worker shortly afterwards.

In 1935, at the age of seventeen, I decided to sign up in the Civilian Conservation Corps (C.C.C.). This was a program set up by the Roosevelt administration in order to create jobs for young men all across the country. The government paid teenagers thirty dollars a month, twenty-two of which went home to their families to ease the pain of the depression. This was my chance to get away from all of the problems at home and still be able to help provide for my family. My best friend, James Kelly, and I enrolled in the C.C.C. at our local post office. Within two weeks we were sent to Fort Dix, New Jersey for a medical, which we both passed. It was there that we learned that we would be working at Battle Mountain, Nevada. We were sent home to gather our clothes and inform our parents of where we were going, how long we would be there, and any other necessary information that they might have needed to know. Later that week, we rode across country by train to Nevada.

When James and I arrived at Battle Mountain we were given a rough outline of what work we would be doing over the course of our six month stay. Six months was the length of time that one could be enrolled in the C.C.C. However, after your time was up, you could enroll again. Basically, we built roads and worked on a project called Cricket Control. Locusts had been destroying land that was used to raise cattle. I was our job to prevent this from happening. We put up tin fences around miles of the infected area. We dug holes in the ground about every 150 yards apart at the base of these fences. The locust would fly in the tin and follow the fence right into the holes we had dug. Once the holes were filled with a large amount of locust, we poured kerosene in the holes and burned them. I also did kitchen patrol in the mess hall after dinner a couple of days a week for some extra money. Living out west for six months was the experience of a lifetime. We did things that a city boy could only dream about doing. I remember how scared I was exploring the unattended parts of the Betsy Ann Gold Mines. The only souvenir that I have from Battle Mountain is a tatoo on my left forearm. It is a picture of an eagle, the coat of arms which represented the C.C.C.

The next three years of my life I spent travelling around the country on freight trains with James. I figured that if I went out on my own may parents would have one less mouth to feed. James and I loved Nevada so much that we decided that we just had to see what the rest of the country was like. We managed to see forty-seven of the forty-eight states, missing only Washington. Throughout these three years we held several low-paying jobs. I wrote my family every month and sent them about twenty-five percent of my earnings. James and I never stayed in one city for more than five or six weeks. I must admit that Arizona was the state that I enjoyed being in the most. The Grand canyon is the most breath-taking sight I have ever laid my eyes upon. We returned home in January, 1938 because we could not keep up our life styles. We were sick and tired of staring death right in the face.

Questions

- 1- Where did Dominick Gadamowitz grow up?
- 2- Why did he drop out of school?
- 3- What did Dominick and Jim Kelly do in the Civilian Conservation Corps?
- 4- Why did Dominick and Jim travel around the country instead of going home?
- 5- How did the New Deal help Dominick survive during the Great Depression?