

## Excerpt 1 from Oral History Interview with Helen Thomas

Helen Thomas was interviewed in 1987 by CSUN faculty member [Dr. Thomas W. Reilly](#). She grew up in Detroit, Michigan as the seventh of nine children to Lebanese immigrant parents. After she graduated from college she moved to Washington, D.C. to work as a journalist. She was a presidential correspondent for United Press International during the Kennedy administration. Here she talks about experiencing the Great Depression as a teenager.

### Transcript:

TR: Did you say, “I’m going to college,” or did they say, “Helen, you’re going to college”?

HT: It was just automatic, we all knew.

TR: That you were gonna go.

HT: Yeah.

TR: Did most of the children then, most of the nine end up going to college?

HT: All of them went.

TR: All of them.

HT: I don’t know, one brother I think didn’t finish college but he certainly had the opportunity. It was just sort of assumed one way or another. And we would all work, you know, have our jobs, but my dad really paid for our tuition. But of course it was not horrendous going to Wayne State. But two of my—my youngest two sisters went to the University of Michigan so—they had moved into a different realm.

TR: Um-hmm.

HT: But mine was the Depression era and so was my sister and so forth so we all went to Wayne.

TR: Yeah.

HT: Which was—going on a streetcar.

S: Did you work in your family’s grocery store? Like, was it a family business?

HT: No, my brothers did but I worked—by this time my brother had a gas station and I would help with the books, I was terrible—gave me a job. Then I worked at Wayne State—worked in the library and we all did these odd jobs. And in high school I think we sort of helped out, I don’t think we got paid, but we would—I know that I worked to pick up all the shoes for the kids because they were giving—it was really the Depression—and you’d pick you the shoes in the different classrooms and take them to a different room where they would be fixed, repaired and—all these services. It’s a real different world and kids were poor, families were poor!

TR: You said there were eleven of you then, living in—

HT: Nine children.

TR: Nine children and the parents.

HT: Yeah.

TR: So—rather close quarters, I guess.

HT: No, we had a home, and we had four or five bedrooms. No, I mean, we didn't feel that deprived, I can assure you. It was amazing. And my father, I felt, was feeding the whole neighborhood, you know, with groceries. My mother was very, very generous and hospitable. Whenever we had anything we would share it and—and my mother would loan money always to the woman next door who was being beaten up by her alco—drunken husband every night. And around us that people were living on \$15 a week welfare checks. I think all of these things sort of made me realize life is unfair, to put it mildly.