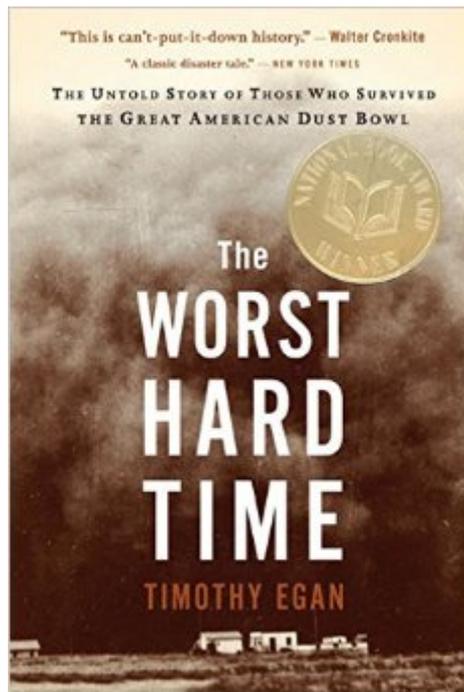


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# The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story Of Those Who Survived The Great American Dust Bowl



## Synopsis

"The Worst Hard Time is an epic story of blind hope and endurance almost beyond belief; it is also, as Tim Egan has told it, a riveting tale of bumptious charlatans, conmen, and tricksters, environmental arrogance and hubris, political chicanery, and a ruinous ignorance of nature's ways. Egan has reached across the generations and brought us the people who played out the drama in this devastated land, and uses their voices to tell the story as well as it could ever be told." — Marq de Villiers, author of *Water: The Fate of Our Most Precious Resource*

The dust storms that terrorized America's High Plains in the darkest years of the Depression were like nothing ever seen before or since, and the stories of the people that held on have never been fully told. Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times journalist and author Timothy Egan follows a half-dozen families and their communities through the rise and fall of the region, going from sod homes to new framed houses to huddling in basements with the windows sealed by damp sheets in a futile effort to keep the dust out. He follows their desperate attempts to carry on through blinding black blizzards, crop failure, and the deaths of loved ones. Drawing on the voices of those who stayed and survived — those who, now in their eighties and nineties, will soon carry their memories to the grave — Egan tells a story of endurance and heroism against the backdrop of the Great Depression. As only great history can, Egan's book captures the very voice of the times: its grit, pathos, and abiding courage.

Combining the human drama of Isaac's *Storm* with the sweep of *The American People in the Great Depression*, *The Worst Hard Time* is a lasting and important work of American history. Timothy Egan is a national enterprise reporter for the New York Times. He is the author of four books and the recipient of several awards, including the Pulitzer Prize. He lives in Seattle, Washington.

As one who, as a young reporter, survived and reported on the great Dust Bowl disaster, I recommend this book as a dramatic, exciting, and accurate account of that incredible and deadly phenomenon. This is can't-put-it-down history.

— Walter Cronkite

"The Worst Hard Time is wonderful: ribbed like surf, and battering us with a national epic that ranks second only to the Revolution and the Civil War. Egan knows this and convincingly claims recognition for his subject — as we as a country finally accomplished, first with Lewis and Clark, and then for 'the greatest generation,' many of whose members of course were also survivors of the hardships of the Great Depression. This is a banner, heartfelt but informative book, full of energy, research, and compassion." — Edward Hoagland, author of *Compass Points: How I Lived*

"Here's a terrific true story — who could put it down? Egan humanizes Dust Bowl history by telling the vivid stories of the families who stayed behind. One loves the people and admires Egan's vigor and sympathy." — Annie Dillard, author of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

The American West got lucky when Tim Egan focused his acute powers of

observation on its past and present. Egan's remarkable combination of clear analysis and warm empathy anchors his portrait of the women and men who held on to their places "and held on to their souls" through the nearly unimaginable miseries of the Dust Bowl. This book provides the finest mental exercise for people wanting to deepen, broaden, and strengthen their thinking about the relationship of human beings to this earth." —Patricia N. Limerick, author of *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I was raised by German immigrants much like the folks Egan describes in this book. When I was a teenager I was in part frustrated and perplexed by the scars the Depression and Dust Bowl left on them and our household 40 years after it ended. They were frugal people in the extreme. They made a sport of seeing how much money they could put aside with each paycheck. They never, ever spent money on vacations or in movie theaters. Spending money to eat in a restaurant was a huge deal to these people. Grandma insisted on making all of my clothes until I got a job to buy store bought jeans and t-shirts. Grandpa grouched mightily if I wanted anything that cost more than \$5. They hoarded everything from nails (new and used) to toilet paper to toothpaste. For the three of us Grandpa put in a massive kitchen garden in the spring, and Grandma canned enough fruits and vegetables to feed the 9th Calvary every autumn. Whenever I'd tease them about their ways, I'd get a stern look in return and a lecture about living through the Depression in the Dust Bowl. They'd tell me time and again how lucky I was not to have gone through it, and each time my child self would shrug as if to say, "Whatever." I didn't really "get" the Dust Bowl or the Depression until I read this book. We're all lucky not to have gone through what these folks did. Imagine having to decide which

of your children will get to eat dinner. Imagine being forced to slaughter your starving farm animals because there is absolutely nothing left to feed them. Imagine watching your brothers and sisters slowly choke to death on dust.

My father Bill Downing, was born on a homestead in Indian territory on April 13th 1906, one of eight children of a dry land farmer and livestock trader who drifted from Iowa to the high plains scratching out a living from virgin grasslands. My mother was born in a dugout close to Delphus switch on the Santa Fe line somewhere near Clovis, New Mexico, Dec. 8th 1910. I was born on July 7th 1935 in Canyon, Texas, three months after Black Sunday. This book came to me like a "ghost from Christmas's past" When I heard an interview with the author on PBS radio I knew I had been deeply touched by my family heritage. I confess I am a child of the depression and of the dust bowl era. For me this was a hard book to read but impossible to put down. The stories of the real people and events were at times so imbedded in my heart before I read them that I sometimes had to take time to catch my breath and wash the blow dirt out of my eyes and hair before I could read more. Timothy Egan did his interviews and research on this historical event very well, and has artfully woven them into a true story of heroism, stubborn persistence, ignorance and individual, governmental and societal greed and incompetence. The combination destroyed the great grasslands of North America and the dreams of millions of families and left a scar on them both. He has also told the story of those on the farms and in government who asked the questions. "What went wrong?", "Can it be fixed?", and "How do we heal a two-fold disaster?" His window into the government and all levels of politics of the period will inform the reader concerned about government and politics of today.

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