

Gary Lipscomb & Keith Cordial

4/14/86

Ram Charger St. George Bridge

Michael: What is the date today?

Gary: April 14, 1986.

Michael: Give me your full name and title.

Gary: My name is Gary L. Lipscomb. I'm sheriff of Tucker County.

Michael: And how long have you been sheriff?

Gary: Oh, about a year and five months now.

Michael: Were you in law enforcement work before then?

Gary: Yeah, I was deputy sheriff for four years.

Michael: Before that?

Gary: Yeah.

Michael: What did you do before you became a deputy?

Gary: Oh, I've done a little bit of ~~everything~~.

(delete)

Michael: Tell me a little bit about last November 4th. It had been raining for quite awhile....

Gary: Yeah, it rained for maybe two to three days. I don't know exactly how long it had rained. Trooper Cordial come by the office for some reason, I don't know if he just stopped to say "hello" and we talked. And about 4 o'clock I said, "Lets go look at the rivers. Let's go check the streams." And from there, things changed quick.

Michael: Tell me exactly what you did. Where did you go first?

Gary: Well, I think originally we started in St. George and looked at the river down there and at 4 or 4:30 there was nothing really... so we came up Holly Meadows and Hambleton and Hendricks, and come back on in to Parsons; we stopped and made a phone call for some reason, I don't even know what we made a phone call for, and then we got a call that a school bus was having problems up Pheasant, water coming out over a culvert or something, and he was afraid to

cross the bridge or the culvert with the bus with all the kids on it. So we went up to assist him. And they walked the kids on across and the kids got home safely. And the bus came on out. We came back to town and by that time the water was coming up over Slew (?) Bridge up here by Schwartz's garage. And then we received a call of some people having some problems in St. George. Margaruite Halpern called us. They got it by radio that the people on down below them....there was a little stream, that comes down off the side of the mountain, and she was afraid it was going to come right through their house. And we went to St. George to see just what the situation was, and we got to St. George, there was water across the road there at the St. George bridge. And we crossed it. And then we started back....and it washed us away.

Michael: What do you mean?

Gary: Well, the water just....a wave of water come and just washed us off the approach to the bridge.

Michael: A wave?

Gary: Yeah. I don't know where it came from but it came. And it just washed the Ram Charger off the bridge, or the approach to the bridge. And then it was a long night. It was a long night.

Michael: I can't imagine that. You're in the Ram Charger, and you were approaching.....

Gary: Yeah. See we had crossed the bridge once and were returning. And we looked....the water didn't look like it was any higher than the first time we went through. And we got about halfway through there and a wave of water came and just....I guess the water came up right now....or something broke loose, or whatever, and just washed us off that approach. And from there, we were on our own.

Michael: What happened?

Gary: Well, it's a long story. I'm going to have to back up a little bit. Before we left town here, the firemen was needing some rope, and things like this, so we got somebody from the hardware store to go down and open up. And we got two roles of rope. And just luckily, part of the rope, the firemen didn't need at all, and

we happened to have a piece of it in our Ram Charger. So when we got washed off we had the rope in the Ram Charger. And just luckily there were some people standing on the bank that we could throw the rope to. And Steve Carr was who it was. And he tied the rope off to a fence post, and we tied it off to the Ram Charger, and hand over hand to get out of there. If it wasn't for that, we would have never made it. Because the water, you know, we got in the water, the water just held us straight out, it was so swift. We just hung on the rope. Then we went to B, Minnear's where we ended up at. By that time, we couldn't even get through on the phone or nothing, did we Keith? Finally after about an hour, of trying to get somebody on the phone, we finally got through to Elkins and we told Elkins, where we were at and what had happened. And then the phone went dead. That's it. We can't talk to anybody. And we were there till, I don't know, what time was it when George and Rocky got to us? About 2 o'clock in the morning, something like that. They had to come around by Aurora (?) and Limestone to get us out of there. There was nothing we could do but just sit there and watch. Nothing we could do. We were helpless. Remember old Bill Minnear? Sitting there looking out that window.

Michael: Can you go into a little more detail about where the rope was. It was a new rope....

Gary: Yeah, it was a brand new rope. It was just a rope that we had stopped at the hardware store to get for the firemen. The firemen were saying they needed rope. You know they were evacuating people and like I said, we got one roll of $\frac{1}{2}$ inch rope and then there was another piece probably 100 or so that for some reason the firemen didn't take and we had it. That's how we ended up with the rope. And it's lucky we did have it.

Michael: And which of you threw it?

Gary: I don't even remember. But I can remember Steve Carr and his wife up on the bank. He tied it off to a fence post. And we tied it off the Ram Charger. I believe you baled off first, didn't you Keith?

Keith: Yeah.

Michael: So you threw it from standing on top of the vehicle?

Gary: On top of the vehicle, yeah. Well the vehicle washed off and it settled down on....like the vehicle was gone. And it started to turn and it looked like it was going to tilt over or whatever, and then it settled on something. To this day I don't know what it was. The vehicle hung up on something. It stayed there for a few minutes so we had time to get out of there. But to this day I don't know what it was hung on. Whether it was something that washed in there or what I don't know. But it settled and hung there for awhile on something. Because if you ever look at that approach down there, it's a pretty good drop off there. But the vehicle went off and then it caught on something. Just long enough for us to get out of it.

Michael: So you ended up back on the St. George side of the river.

Gary: Yeah. We were on the St. George side of the river. Up there at....what is Bill Minnear's boy's name? I guess Bill too. I'm not sure. But we ended up at his home.

Michael: So what happened after 2 o'clock then?

Gary: Well, finally the deputy sheriff and the game warden, Rocky Spencer, came around by Aurora and Location then and picked us up. And we finally got back around through Davis and Thomas and then got back down to Hambleton and Hendricks and then you know there wasn't much could be done then, it was already done. We more or less just helped people get into the school up there at Hambleton and Hendricks anduntil daylight. Until dayoight when we could really see. And then the water was up....you couldn't even move in town. At that time there was still water down here at the red light until the next morning. And it was finally.....it was almost dark when I finally came across there. It must have been right after 4 or 4:30 5 o'clock when I crossed the Blackfork Bridge, and crawled down over a tree and came out Pennsylvania Avenue to check on my family.

Michael: What did you see on Pennsylvania Avenue?

Gary: Oh, it's hard to describe. Homes that were there were gone. And there were trees across the road. And the road was gone. There were holes washed, you know, it's just hard to describe. It's just

hard to describe. The further down I got, seemed like the worse it got.

Michael: You said that you had said goodbye to your wife just before you left.

Gary: Oh, I don't know what time was it, Keith? We had stopped earlier in the evening probably 7 o'clock or whatever. And my wife was at home. I stopped to get a raincoat. And I told her then if the water really gets any higher, I went out and looked at the river you know, I've lived on that river for a long time, and I've seen it higher than that lots of times, I said I don't think you have anything to worry about. But if it does get any higher, don't worry about the house, just get out. And that's what she did. The water started coming up and she got out.

Michael: So you didn't know where she was?

Gary: I had an idea. Well, I thought she went to her mother's but she didn't, she went to a friend's house, she lives over there next to St. John's church is where she went. People live right on in behind the church. I thought she was with her mother, but it was the next afternoon before I had any contact with her at all. I had no idea.

Michael: What did you do then from early morning....

Gary: Just more or less tried to assist the people there in Hambleton and Hendricks and that area. The damage was done. We were just seeing that the people were safe. There was nothing you could do. There wasn't a whole lot you could do. The people that were washed out we were trying to get up there to the school, so they'd have a place to stay or something to eat or whatever.

Keith or John: You found a body that afternoon.

Gary: Yeah, that's right we did. It was Mr. Bonner. That's right. I forgot all about that.

Michael: You found what?

Gary: Found one of the drowning victims from up around Gladwynn.

Keith: I can remember his wife's name, I can't remember his.

Gary: Raymond.

Keith: Raymond and Dorothy Bonner.

Gary: Yeah. Discovered his body up the Dry Fork, hanging in a tree.

Michael: Hanging in a tree? Where was that?

Gary: It was about four miles above Hendricks on the Dry Fork River.

Michael: Was it way up?

Gary: He was hanging up in a tree probably ten feet. But back off from the river bank probably seventy-five yards. You know where Doug Long lives. Right above Doug's trailer there....Doug's the one that actually found him or saw him. Doug saw it and couldn't get to it, because the water was up and he had to wait until the water went down to really find out what he was seeing. But they found him hanging in a tree.

Michael: What was the state of communications in the county?

Gary: Very bad. Very bad. And at that time all the phone lines were out and our radios work by the phone lines. The trouble with this county is my radio frequency is different from the state police and they're different from the emergency squad and they're different from the fire department. Nobody could really talk to anybody. It's a funny feeling when you are within a mile or two of each other and wanting to relay information but you can't talk to each other. It's a bad situation really. And it's something that needs to be corrected. There's no sense in everybody having different radio frequencies. There's no sense in having EMS personnel out there and firemen and police officers when they can't talk to each other. It just doesn't do any good at all.

Michael: So how did the county begin to come to terms with this?

Gary: Things were really a mess the next day and even two days later. And finally with Bill Rose(?) and the emergency service people they started to take things under control. Somebody had to take charge.

Keith: We didn't have a meeting for what, two days?

Gary: Yeah, I think it was two days. Two or three days we finally sat down. At first, one person was going this way and one was going that way, and nobody knew what each other was doing. Don't get me

wrong, we've never had nothing like this before.

Michael: So you had people running off in different directions?

Gary: Yeah. And finally we sat down and had a meeting of everybody and things started then...coming together. They decided where we were going to put the flood victims, what schools were going to be designated for what. How they were going to be fed or whatever. But for the first day or two it was something else. Nobody has ever had anything like this and we just didn't know which direction to go in.

Michael: Did you get a lot of help from surrounding counties? What role, for example, did the Randolph County authorities play in any of this? I know, myself, in Elkins, I woke up the next morning and I had no idea. If you would have told me what happened in Parsons I would have said you were exaggerating.

Gary: Well I think that was the problem. I don't believe that anybody realized in the surrounding areas just what really happened. I don't know as far as Randolph County or anything...we never really got any help until later. Just like....the next day after the flood, we found out finally we had a flood. People finally realizing the next day that....them people really did have a little bit of water over there. Wasn't it Keith? And his own people....not to say that they were wrong or who was wrong or who was right, but to get his own people to admit that we had that much water. They were more or less....like I have a brother that lives over in Pennsylvania, he was born and raised over here in Tucker County. And I called him after a day or two and tried to explain to him what happened and he wouldn't believe me. And I think that was a whole lot with his people. They thought he was exaggerating. "You don't have that kind of water." It just took a day or two for it to sink into them.

Michael: What happened with your brother then?

Gary: My brother finally came in 2 or 3 days after the flood. He stayed five or ten minutes and just turned around and left. He said he'd seen enough of it and he didn't want to see anymore. He

said, "You know I was born and raised here and I don't want to see anymore." He said, "I remember how it was when I was a kid, and I don't want to see anymore if it." And he left.

Michael: Was the plan that finally emerged after 2 or 3 days, was it based pretty much on local knowledge and local authority or did you have a lot of people coming in from state capital or state authorities...to take over and run it?

Gary: Well, the politicians finally got involved in it. Everybody wanted to play a role. Finally the state sent a sargent in here.

Michael: What's been happening since the flood? How has Tucker County responded to all this?

Gary: Well I think Tucker County really has...faired decent. I would have liked to have seen it go a little smoother, since the actual disaster is over....people are trying to rebuild or get back on their feet or whatever. And myself included. I applied for small disaster loan to rebuild my home and I haven't had anything but a hassle since I did that.

Michael: What happened to your home?

Gary: It was destroyed in the flood. I'm rebuilding now. I got with the SBA people and they set this thing up to help people, but to get anything out of them is two different things. And I don't like to condemn the federal government but it's not right.

Michael: It hasn't been real smooth....

Gary: No. Not by a long shot it hasn't been smooth. They've got a bad thing of losing papers and stuff like this and they want you to sign your life away and they think they're giving you something and it is a low interest loan but they're still making a profit on it really. You talk about borrowing money at 4%, they're not giving it to you at 4%. It's a lot better than going to the bank and paying 10, or 11, 12 or 14% but still they're not giving you the money. They say at 4% it sure helps but that's not giving it to you. You're going to pay it back with 4% interest. Is what it amounts to. And they're dragging their feet, bad.

(delete)

Michael: One more question. You said the DNR played an important role the first day or two after the flood....

Gary: Yeah, for the first day or two. If it hadn't been for the DNR I don't know what would have happened in this county.

Michael: What did they do?

Gary: They were the only ones who really realized what happened. And they got their people in here and whatever they could do, they did. People that needed help....they saw that they got it. Like I said, not the state....it seemed like they drug their feet a little bit. But if wouldn't have been for the DNR the first couple days....I don't know.

Michael: They got some vehicles in here and some things.

Gary: They got their people in here. And worked their people 24 hours a day. And told them, "You won't go home. You'll stay there and work." As long as it takes. Don't worry about how you're going to get paid or who's going to pay you, just do it. Stay there.

Michael: That's a real treat.

Gary: Yeah. Sure is.

Michael: Can you tell me your full name?

Keith: Keith W. Cordial.

Michael: And your title?

Keith: I'm with the Department of Public Safety. I'm a trooper stationed here in Parsons.

Michael: How long have you been here?

Keith: A year tomorrow.

Michael: A year tomorrow. Some year.

Keith: Yeah.

Michael: Somebody said you were from Fayette County.

Keith: Yeah.

Michael: Whereabouts?

Keith: Meadow Bridge. Just on the edge of the county.

(delete)

Michael: Without feeling like you are repeating what Gary just said, I'd like to hear your full story about...even though he's

told it, I'd like to hear all the detail of it again.

Keith: It had been raining for, I think, all weekend. At about 4 o'clock, like the sheriff said, I came in here for some reason, I don't know why. And he said, "Let's go check the water." And we went out at 4 and started checking the water and he told me, he said, "Oh it isn't that bad. The water's got a long way to go." So we were just driving around checking and we went down to check on the school bus and they got it out before we got there. And the water was up a little bit on the road out there. In a couple places. And we came back and I called the corporal, just let him know what was going on. We went and got the Ram Charger. And at about 6 or 6:30 we decided we better start trying to evacuate some people that lived right along the river. I guess that's Water St. We went down and were telling some of the people that they better be getting out and they were worried about getting their oriental carpets up off the floor and getting all their things up out of the water. There was just no way we could do that. We would have been on that one street all night. So we warned a few people and then we got with the firemen and we were standing down here at the Sluice Bridge when the car went under. We were standing there at the Big T, and the water was over the road, and we saw this car... float down under the Sluice Bridge. Where it came from or where it went to, I still don't know. And there was a car stuck in the curve right there. And the firemen started hollering for rope. So the sheriff and I decided we'll just go get some rope somewhere. And we went and got somebody that worked at Atkinsons's (?) and they let us in and they gave us two spools of rope. And after we got it we went down to the fire department and they didn't want all the rope then. So we gave one to either the fire department or the ambulance people and we kept one. Why we kept it, I don't know. And we went out again, and that's when we got the call from Elkins. About the lady down in St. George stranded. The neighbor called and was worried about them. So we went down there and we went across the bridge fine. And down the ramp. And the water was deep

but it wasn't completely over the tires yet, would you say?

Gary: No.

Keith: And we went down to the lady's house that called, and the people had already get out, because I believe he came up while we were standing there talking to the lady. So we decided we better get back to Parsons since that's where most of the population was and we figured they needed the help. And we were coming up the approach, and the water was a little deeper than it was, but I don't think it was that much more deeper. And we get about halfway through, and like the sheriff said, that wall or wave of water, whatever you want to call it, just hit us and I think I said something like, "Here we go Sheriff!" Or something like that, and then it spun...

Michael: So you approached the bridge...

Keith: We started back through the bridge and it was deep. But it still wasn't high enough to flood out the truck, the Ram Charger. And we were going back through it, and the wave or wall, just seemed like the water broke loose all of a sudden, and it hit us, and we spun, and we started going, and it started to tilt, to tilt back towards my side. And I started thinking, "What do we do if it tilts?" And then it just sat back down and just sat there. We've been up there several times and looked at it, and the only thing we could see that would have possibly held us was the culvert. But we don't know for sure if that's what it was or not. We climbed out on top, and the siren went off. Scared me half to death. That siren went off. I don't know why we didn't think of the rope at first. We didn't. We were just sitting up there trying to figure out what to do and looking at the current thinking the current would carry us to the bank but the current was going towards the center. So that was a bad idea. And then we remembered the rope and the sheriff went back in and got the rope. I don't remember if it was in the front or the back of the Ram Charger. And he handed me the rope, and it was still on the spool, and we tied one end to the light bar and then I threw the rope on the spool, to the boy on the bank. And he and his wife. And thank God they were there. Because if not, we'd have been gone.

Gary: Otherwise, we'd have been down around Rowlesburg or somewhere.

Keith: And they tied it off, and like he said, we hand-wlked it out, because as soon as we hit the current, you just went straight. I was scared. I think we both were a little scared. I think that's why we were laughing after we get in the house, we were so scared. I hit my leg on the....something. Still don't know what I hit my leg on. Had a little gash in my leg. We went in there and these people treated us real good. Gave us some chili to eat. They were good to us.

Michael: How far did you throw it?

Keith: I don't know....it's hard to say. Fifty, sixty feet. Hit him right on the hands. Made Dan Merene proud.

Michael: How did you throw it?

Keith: Just like a football.

Michael: Overhand?

Keith: It was lucky though. If he hadn't have caught it on the first try we would have been gone.

Gary: Just lucky he was standing where he was standing.

Keith: Yeah. Lucky he saw us. I still thank that boy everytime I see him.

Michael: What hour of the day was it?

Gary: I almost want to say ten o'clock.

Keith: I was thinking it was ten or after ten.

Michael: How could you see?

Keith: How could I see?

Michael: It was pitch dark, wasn't it?

Keith: It was dark but I saw him. I don't know. I couldn't tell you.

Gary: I guess people had their yard lights on or whatever.

Keith: Well, no. There was nobody in that house right there.

Gary: No, I'm talking about the house we went to.

Keith: Yeah. I saw the blue house, yeah. But that light wasn't really that much. I don't know.

Gary: But we saw him, like I said, I don't know how, but we saw him. He was there.

Michael: You tell this story as though it were daylight. And somehow, you got back in the Ram Charger and found the rope. How did you do that?

Keith: And it was under water.

Gary: I crawled back through the window.

Michael: But how did you find it in the dark?

Gary: Well, I don't know. It was there. I just got lucky.

Keith: It was lucky, we went right to it. He was lucky. As a matter of fact, we climbed right out the window to get on top of the Ram Charger. I've never really thought about that. But it was dark and I don't know how he did it.

Gary: Seems to me, I could see that boy just as plain as day. Him and his wife. And they were standing there grinning at us. Because the boy's wife had a smile on her face.

Michael: What's his name?

Keith: Steve Carr.

Gary: He works for Lambert Chevrolet. Over there at the body shop. You know he had to walk down from where the water was across the road at the intersection....he had to walk down that field along that fence line to even get down to where we were at. Why he was there, I don't know.

Michael: Was it raining?

Keith: Yeah. It was raining pretty good.

Michael: So it was all odds against anybody being there.

Gary: Well, I think he just came down to see what the water really looked like. But why he was down that far along the river, I don't know.

Michael: So you were as much as fifty feet out. There must have been stuff floating by you too.

Gary: I couldn't tell you.

Keith: The only time that I really saw anything floating by was after we got out and we went in the house. Because we sat in the room with that one poor old guy in the wheelchair.

Keith: And he sat there, and we sat there and watched the houses float by.

Gary: And he asked me was that his house? And I said, "No, I don't believe." I didn't have the heart to tell him "Yeah, I believe that was your home that went by." You could see the top of the house go by.

Keith: That poor old guy sitting there.....I don't know.

Michael: This river that came up and washed this Ram Charger which weighs 4,000 pounds, off of the approach to the bridge, how high is the bridge normally? Above the river at that point? I mean how much was that water up when it hit you?

Keith: When it hit us? I don't know. There's a drop-off from the top of the approach down to where the farmland or the ground is, about twenty feet.

Gary: The bridge is kind of built on an arch type thing. The approach comes up and we were probably half-way up the approach to the bridge. The way the bridge was built it might...it was designed for excess water and it got to be much for it to come up over across the road and go on around or whatever.

Keith: They just finished that bridge this summer.

Gary: That's the way the bridge was actually designed. In case you would ever have high water like that, the water would more or less go around.

Michael: Take the approaches out rather than the bridge.

Gary: Right.

Michael: Do you think the water was up 15 feet or...30 feet?

Keith: I'd say at that approach, about 15 or 20 feet, wouldn't you sheriff?

Gary: It's hard to say. But I'll tell you how it came up after.... after we got out of the Ram Charger and got up on the bank. Now we had to walk to Mr. ___?'s house, a steady uphill grade, and before the night was over, that water was in his front yard. To the bottom step of his house.

Keith: All the cattle were already up to high ground right against

the fence. And they went out of the house and moved their equipment three or four times. It was up.

Michael: How long was it, then after that before you had contact with the headquarters in Elkins?

Keith: About an hour. Forty-five minutes to an hour.

Michael: You were able to make contact with the...

Keith: The phone. I tried from the time we got in the house for about 45 minutes and the phone...I'd call people and I wouldn't know where they were or who they were.

Gary: You'd get anybody. Or you'd get halfway through a number and it'd go dead.

Keith: Or you'd pick it up and there would already be somebody talking on the line. It was just crazy and you just had to keep hanging it up and lifting it up, hanging it up and lifting it up.

Michael: Did you establish contact with the Elkins State Police?

Keith: Yeah. That's the only contact we had. Was that phone call. Then the phone went dead. I informed them what had happened. Where I was. Told them we were all right. And then the phone went dead.

Michael: You didn't have time to get a reaction from them?

Gary: We didn't really have time other than to tell them that we were washed off of the St. George bridge and that we were all right.

Keith: I'm glad I wasn't there to hear their response.

Gary: They'd probably say, "What's the matter with them dumbies?" It wasn't like we could pick up the phone and call them and sit there and talk to them for ten minutes. All Keith could really tell them was that we had lost the Ram Charger off the St. George bridge and that the sheriff and he were all right and the phone went dead. And that's it. You couldn't get through to anybody.

Keith: And somehow somebody got....did you get through to Tucker Compson (?) to get in touch with George or....how did they get George down there?

Gary: I don't know whether Elkins finally got a message to him saying where we werethat's the only thing I can figure.

Keith: Because earlier I told him when he went back up on the mountain if the water was up on the road up there to get my wife and just tell her to drop everything and go home, don't worry about

what your boss says just go home. If he doesn't like it, fine. And that's what he did. He went and took her home. And where he came from, I don't know, but we were glad to see that uniform. I looked out that window....and I tell you what, that was something. Old red-faced George was coming down that hill and I was glad to see him. Then we went back up, like the sheriff said, the long way back up through Thomas, and I stopped at the house to get some dry clothes and we came on back down the mountain. And went to Hambleton and Hendricks to see what we could do there. We hardly had any communication with anybody. The communication was so bad it was pathetic. Like you said, we can't talk to each other in this county because their radio is on one frequency, the fire department is on one frequency, ours is on another frequency. If we want to talk to each other, I have to go through Elkins and they'll call his dispatcher by phone....or something like that.

Michael: Whose decision is it to set the radios up like that?

Keith: I don't know. Somehow it goes through the FCC and they assign frequencies or something. So I don't know.

Michael: It's not a decision that's made locally?

Keith: No. I don't think that was really anybody's fault locally.

Gary: You can't blame anybody local. It's just the regulations they have....the FCC says that the counties will work on a certain frequency....the fire department has another frequency, the EMS has another frequency.

Michael: That's insane though for any kind of a disaster....

Keith: Yeah, that's true but the reason they do that is...so that when you start listening to this county radio, with all these counties on it, and then the state, you couldn't hear what anybody was telling you to do. And the reason they are separate is to keep the traffic down. We have enough traffic on our radio...and then on the sheriff's radio. A lot of times what a lot of the cars have in them is scanners. That way they can cross-talk.

Gary: What really is needed is the radio set-up where if I wanted to talk all I would have to do is push a button. If I wanted to talk

to the fire department, just push a button. Or if I wanted to talk to talk to the EMS, just push a button.

Michael: Have some options.

Gary: Yeah. And if I didn't want to talk to them, just shut them off.

Michael: The weather service....you guys didn't have a whole lot of warning about this....

Keith: We got the warning about 1:30 or 2 o'clock in the morning when we were sitting in that house....that was the first warning that was put out for Tucker County. We were sitting there and we kept wondering why there was no warning put out for Tucker County. And at 1:30 or 2:00 was when the warning came out. They were naming off all these counties and nobody mentioned Tucker County. We wondered about that too.

Michael: Was that a case of communications being knocked out so early in the evening that the weather service didn't know?

Keith: No, I don't think so. I don't know what happened but the communications weren't gone until 10 or 10:30 or 11 o'clock. It was from 6:30 on when we started moving these people. The road was covered down here at 6:30 two hours after we started checking it. And surely somebody could have got the word to somebody between that time. You're talking about 6 hours since we started checking it.

Michael: Nobody had called from Bowden or anywhere? But then on the other hand, you guys probably didn't call Rowlesburg either did you? As far as I know, nobody did.

Gary: As far as I know, nobody did.

Keith: One problem we had here though was all the emergency service people were tied up on this end of the county. There was nobody over in St. George or that area. Nobody. I can't fault the firemen or anybody because they were busy, but there is some type of plan needed in this county, just like at the schools, we have to go find the janitor to let us in the school...there is some type of emergency plan that should be implemented for such a situation. If somebody's assigned job is to go to open the school, there should be some type of radio set-up at school...set it up so one unit of

the fire department can go north, one can go south....because they were all in this area. And there was nobody in St. George.

Gary: What little bit of help they had in Hambleton and Hendricks came from Thomas and Davis. St. George just didn't get any because there was no way to get there. They were shut off completely.

Michael: Regarding that....very thing we were talking about... God forbid, but if another flood of this magnitude were to hit again, would the county, at this point, be set-up to react any differently?

Gary: Be ready for it? No.

Keith: No.

I was through a tornado when tornadoes hit the southern part of the state in April of '74. I was living in the path of the tornado. And I lost the roof of my house and my neighbors were all gone. That county today is still the same as it was before the tornadoes hit down there, and I figure ten years from now, this county is going to be exactly the same way. Well it was 10 years ago, nothing to worry about, it's not going to hit again. They're not going to change.

Gary: Yeah, that's what I'm afraid of. People forget so easy. So quick that they're going to say, "Well, this will never happen again."

Keith: That's just the way it was when that tornado hit. I'd never seen anything like it when it tore the roof off my house. But you can go down there now and people hardly even remember it. So you know...maybe I'm bad luck Sheriff. Maybe these things follow me around.

Michael: You guys are a couple of pretty tough hombres. You pull people out of wrecks, you've been in some rough jams...what effect does this flood have on you? Have you had any bad dreams about it at all? Does it come back to haunt you? Being in the water like that is a terrifying thing.

Keith: At the time, it seemed like it was taking us forever to get out of the water. But really once we got out and looked and sat... it wasn't really that long. I couldn't tell you how long we were in there. But it wasn't as long as I thought it was. And as far as

being affected like that you know, I don't think it's changed my job or my home life. I'm still as weird or crazy as I was before it. It showed me the things like...it can happen. It can happen to you. It's made me a little more cautious. But other than that....as far as bad dreams....no. None for me.

Gary: I've never had any problems either with anything like that. Seems like that particular night...it went on forever....but then the next day we were just so busy that from then on you never really thought about anything else. Busy trying to do your job and do the best you could....three or four days you went without sleep and then finally you laid down and slept for awhile.... it hasn't really affected me. No. Or my family either.

Michael: Did you have anything approaching a spiritual or religious experience when you were out there with all that pressure? Did you appeal to your maker to save you?

Keith: I always....when I'm in a bad situation...I always talk to Him. You know...He's always there. He's right there where I can reach out and talk to Him. I mean that's just the way it's been on everything for me. I know I get out of here a lot of times and don't act like it but...you'll find most policemen are.... have a little bit of religion in them. It's the only way you can handle some situations. Get the courage up to go into it. Just like when we went in I thought to myself, "Here I come God."

Gary: Just like I told you. If the good Lord wants you, He'll take you.

Keith: I think you'll find that anybody...they might not act it... of course policemen have to keep this image that they get. They don't want to ruin that image but if there's a situation that I'm worried about I'll talk to Him before I go into it. And try and get myself satisfied that I'm trying to do the right thing.

I think that's the way about everybody is. So it's not just that one situation...you know, there's a lot of things out here you can do that can kill you. So you've got to have somebody there you can talk to.

Michael: Have you had any thoughts about that wave of water? They claim....the dike up here broke. Does anybody know what time that happened or was it that all the streams had risen at one time? Have you ever been able to....

Keith: We got hit right after the fire truck did. We found that much out after it was over with. The fire truck got rolled down here and the wall of water that hit them or caused them to lose control of their truck must have been the same one that hit us.

Gary: It's possible that the water did break over up here at the Black Fork bridge and Shavers Fork at about the same time. That caused that one surge of water....I don't know for sure. I don't know exactly what time either one of them really broke over.

Keith: Because when I called Elkins they told me that they problems with one of the fire trucks. Remember? One of the fire trucks and eight men or something like that. Junior firemen...But you know, we've set...and the sheriff and I have set and made a lot of jokes about it.

Michael: Jokes? Like what?

Keith: Just some sick jokes that these son of a guns keep pulling on me here. Wanting to buy me a badge with a periscope on it. But you know...we've sat and talked. Neither one of us can really explain it. I don't think. Not unless you can figure it out.

Gary: No. Like I say...if it was our time to go the good Lord would have taken us.

Keith: No doubt in my mind.

Gary: That's what I told Keith. This might be our time. But nope. He's not ready for us yet.

Keith: You did, didn't you?

Gary: Yeah.

Michael: Is there anything else you can add?

Gary: Just hope I never see nothing like this again.

Michael: One flood is enough, huh? One of the women that worked down in the kitchen down at the Parsons Elementary School, when I first got down there....I started singing to people down there in the evenings...she said to me, "Why this wasn't no flood. I've seen floods all my life. If you want to know what this was, you'd have to look in the book of Revelations." In her mind it was clear

out of the category of any flood, anything she'd ever seen.

Keith: Yeah.

Michael: So it almost had a biblical quality.

Keith: I'm sure there's a lot of people that thought that. Because not many people in their lifetime have seen anything like this.

The next morning when we went up on top of Blackmun Flats, and looked down from I don't know whose yard, and the whole town was under water...it was just like the world was coming to an end. Because it was gone. There was water.

Gary: Just like the next day when we finally....I got a hold of Forrest Bloom, the game warden, I said, "Hey. how about going to check on my wife?" He said, "I can't get there.!" And he's right there in Parsons. And I said, "You're telling me the water is still up?" And he said, "That's right. I can't get there."

It was 2 or 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Before he could actually get on through town. The next day.

Keith: We'd be out here stopping people telling them, "Hey! You can't get across the bridge." And they would say, "You got to be kidding me. The water isn't that high." And they wouldn't believe it. So...it's over and done with.

Michael: Thank you very much.