

Michael Kline: What is your full name?

Thomas Bonner: Tom Bonner, Thomas L. Bonner.

MK: Thomas L.?

TB: Yes.

MK: Were you born right here?

TB: Yes, right over here.

MK: That is your brother's house?

TB: Yes, that's our home, basically. That's where his home.

MK: How many generations of Bonner's live here?

TB: Just us, me, and my family.

MK: Your dad?

TB: Yes.

MK: Was this following...

TB: We came here in 1918. He came all from Mountain and over to [inaudible] over there. The CWWNS, when AES means sitting on [inaudible] Harding for freight agent. After he came here, then he had sort of got in. He was working for (Lindsey?). Then another fella had the store and he got old, and he wanted to sell it out. So, my dad finally bought it, and he took the job. Then later on, I took a job as postmaster and then he had all three of them. That's how we got here. I don't really know them Days' not around there, not their granddaddy. Lloyd Day as freight agent here in the St. Lloyd, the Army [inaudible].

MK: Who is your mother?

TB: Smith. She was a Smith, Van Smith. (Hayley Van Meter-Smith?).

MK: From?

TB: They were from the [inaudible] over here. He was and she came from over at Petersburg. She was a Van Meter from Petersburg. Her granddaddy was from over here on the [inaudible] within that area.

MK: What was it like here growing up when you were a kid?

TB: It was a lot of fun [laughter]. Railroad trains are around. It has a lot of excitement. We had trains about four times a day here in two lines. There're a lot of big freights that went down through here. So, maybe it had twenty-five or thirty cars at least once or twice – sometimes twice a day. Toward the end, they had used to pull coaches, you know what I mean? They pulled the passengers on behind and then freight in between. At the end of the long toward the end, whenever it got slowed up by then they had a special bus they called it Jitney. They were in it twice a day just like a regular bus on a regular day. It's twenty-eight or twenty-seven Chevrolet converted into a bus rent on a track.

MK: So, you were not really very isolated?

TB: No, you could go down in the morning, come back in the evening. You want to go to the store to shop in Parson or Hendricks. You could go down at 11:00 a.m. and come back at 3:00 p.m. I think it got to Hendricks at 12:00 p.m. You'd have from 12:00 p.m. until 3:00 p.m. to shop in Hendricks or Parson. You got to wait to get to Parson and come back until 4:00 p.m. It cost 50¢ to get down and back.

MK: What year were you born?

TB: [19]21. 1921. It was about thirty-four or thirty-five, [inaudible] I can't remember. Thirty-five, I figured, whenever they sold this out and then they tore the [inaudible] out. But Ryan Andrews had come and intercepted the area, went out over there, probably somewhere about 1923. But I can remember, I was old enough to remember at twenty-three or twenty-four, another one here too long went out in the thirty. That'd be 10 to 12 years he was in there.

MK: How many kids were there in your family?

TB: Ten altogether.

MK: Ten?

TB: Yes.

MK: What were their names?

TB: [laughter] Well, Ralph is the oldest one living. We had one brother, died, the first one died. Then Ralph, then myself, Tom, then Raymond, the one that drowned, then Jack, Norman, Allen, and George and there was a girl -- and Ted. Then there was a girl in between somewhere -- is in between Jack and Norman, just one.

MK: What was her name?

TB: (Naoma?). She was born and just died just a little bit after she was born. The same way with our oldest brother.

MK: She never lived.

TB: Yes.

MK: So, just boys?

TB: One was a boy, and one was a girl. But there were eight boys – no, nine boys. There's nine of us all total with.

MK: Did you go to school right in here somewhere?

TB: We went to grade school here. You had to go to high school at Parsons up until when the railroad went out and they had put the bus on. The other part went to Davis from then on. About 1937 or something along, I started going to Davis. Buses started running in it. We had grade school here though. What year did our grade school?

MK: [19]50s something?

TB: Probably in the [19]50s, I think. Somewhere around 1950.

MK: What was it like going to high school?

TB: I never went. I never got to go to high school.

MK: I mean to the grade school?

TB: I think it was all right going to grade school. I mean, we had a small school. At that time, there weren't over a dozen of us.

MK: Did the teacher board in the community?

TB: That's right. Well, sometimes she'd stay over at home and sometimes she'd stay with (Ted Long?). He lived here at that time and stayed with Andrew Teeter, my wife's granddad in this community. Over in the mountain, I'd stay with Isom, Judy, John Parsons. Then they'd stay with [inaudible]. Yes, they stayed right in the community. I only got home on a weekend or something. Whenever the weather was too bad, but I didn't do that, call us back. Some of them you'll see why a lot of them had to walk in here or ride on a horseback. Whenever the train was out, there was no way out and in here, only to ride a horse or walk. So, they opened up the railroad, graded come down in here the road [inaudible].

MK: So, was it like up to eighth grade then?

TB: Yes. I went to the eighth grade, that's all.

MK: I bet you got a pretty good education then.

TB: To my way of thinking, it amounts as much to eighth grade just what to high school would

amount today.

MK: You could read and write and figure pretty well?

TB: Right. Yes. I think most of the kids seem like everybody had run up close to eighty or ninety average at that time in grades. The teacher taught all grades, just one teacher. I think you got more out of it than what you would today on the account of having so many different people to work with. Well, the way I think, one teacher will do for you. Maybe if you work with the same person, you understand her and she understands you and I think that she can do more for you, where if you have a lot of teachers, it makes it more confusion.

MK: There were not as many distractions?

TB: There weren't as many distractions. There weren't so many things going on like in grade school where we went here, if we all work, which was a small school. We had the afternoon off on Friday and everybody really worked hard all week to get a half a day off Friday. If you got a half a day off, if everybody was good then you'd go on a hike or you'd have a ball game just like it goes now between the school in Virginia like Janet Sterner, Shavers Mount, Red Creek. But you didn't have no bus to ride, you had to walk. [laughter] You can't just play ball in. But you'd have a lot of good time.

MK: Some pretty good ball teams?

TB: Yes. I never will forget whenever we'd play Shavers Mountain – like she was from Shavers Mountain, I was also glad when we had Mr. Harvey [inaudible]. Delbert, he's dead, but Delbert, he had taught over in the mountain. [inaudible] teach here because it was easier for her. On Friday, they'd come over and Boyd Delbert. He slobbered a lot anyway and he'd get all mad. Her oldest brother, he'd gone to get mad, [inaudible] water and he'd get mad [laughter]. We'd have an awful time. Everybody get all stirred up over, just about like it is now. It all seemed like it was a lot more fun. I don't know, maybe the kids enjoy it better than more than I would.

MK: Would they play ball a while and then you'd have to fight after?

TB: No, they didn't allow no fight and you just get, you know what I mean? [laughter] No, they didn't allow any fight. If anybody got to the point of fighting, that was the end of the situation.

MK: I thought maybe after the game, he had to whip the people at once though.

TB: No, the only time I ever done any fight was coming home from school. That's whenever between home whenever you want for any differences that would always come out. Never hard to come out at school. We'd always come out like go on, we had to walk clear up on the hill where our still sits up there. I always liked the cars in the Plaughers, Eldon Plaughter, and a lot of the car boys, it's down around Hendricks and Parsons. Now, we all went to school [inaudible] Delbert cars. He's dead but [inaudible] still with them or not, but their children live down there. I think that two or three girls. Back then if there's a young teacher qualified to teach, maybe they don't have to go to school. At that time, they would graduate from high school and then they go

to college for just a few hours for a summer or so. Then they start them to teach. They teach for eight months, eight and a half or nine. Then next summer, she'd have to go back to where they got their degree, you know what I mean?

MK: Yes.

TB: But they would let them work their way up. They didn't have to have it all at one time. But anyway, the board education then if they were somebody from Parsons or Thomas or Davis, they had to come to these little schools to teach before they had led them in Parsons or mountain air you know what I mean? They always started them in the back school. A young teacher, she always got a country school. Then they eventually work their way back to the big school. But the last of the three pair who taught here, I know (Alice?) stand out whenever she came here. [inaudible] is the first one. Delbert Arby and his wife – I started [inaudible], she taught me, but of course, she's dead now. She is my [inaudible]. Me and Russell, we knew the [inaudible]. They were all number one teachers. We all got along now and then, but he wasn't as good, you know what I mean? It seemed like he was strict. But we didn't like him [inaudible] but he was a good teacher.

MK: Did they have spelling bees at that time?

TB: Yes, we had lots of that.

MK: One school against another.

TB: Right. Always had big church, Christmas programs maybe last for two hours.

MK: Plays and things?

TB: They call them dialogues and maybe ten or twelve different people or something.

MK: Dialogues?

TB: Yes. Everybody would have just like we're talking here, Christmas stories and you'd act them out. So, they'd pick the story and then it would be acted out in plays. Everybody would have so much to talk about just how like a soap opera or something when it was all about Christmas.

MK: After you finished school then did you mostly stay right here?

TB: Now, after I finished school, I worked on the farm here with my daddy. Of course, my oldest brother was in high school. We both couldn't afford to go to school at the same time. Of course, they kind of figured out well whenever they got him through high school then I could go. By that time, it was too late for me, of course. My oldest brother had to miss a year because he didn't have the money. He had some problems getting started because he had to pay for board, had to go downtown board. But I worked on the farm and then I thought I wanted to do something. So, I went to see [inaudible] in the 1940. I stayed in there for twenty-two months.

On December 17, they declared war. I had that summer, August that summer, so I hung out there only in the spring. I knew [inaudible] service and I thought I wanted a break from it. So, I worked with my uncle and had him write him a letter that I could make more money out than I could then, you know. Of course, she didn't have to make a lot of money then because she's only getting \$1 a day. But I had to prove to him to get a couple of months' vacation because I had to go to service in a couple of months. But I had to prove too on there that I wasn't making more money out than in to get an honorable discharge. So, my uncle and my daddy wrote. So, I took my AWOP from them to lay fixed up a letter. I started driving truck for them. They were in the lumber business. That's how I got out there. I got two months' vacation and went to the service until 1945.

MK: Where was this camp?

TB: Well, I was in Parsons. I went to Parsons. Parsons broke up, I went to North Fork over at Petersburg. But whenever I was in Parsons Camp, I spent most of my time up here in the old 566 [inaudible] up here that broke up. So, Parsons used that area for a side camp. So, we worked up in this area in [inaudible] road construction, stabilizing road banks, and timber survey, anything like that. We surveyed and potted all of these timber in here before the war that they sold after the war for the service. Then they plotted it and then after the war or while the war was going on, they started selling all the timber in this area. It was already done by us in the CC Camp. Telephone crews, we built telephone line all the way from up there at Red Creek to Parsons, government line in the ranger station at Parsons. We built it from the Ranger Station at Parsons through the Stuart Park, it was a federal thing. Through the Bickle Knob Recreation Area there, Roosevelt Park, they just finished Roosevelt Park. Then we built that place down below Parsons. While Parsons was going, I worked down there in the wintertime, usually down at [inaudible]. The federal part, we built that Wall of CC Camp. Of course, they built Roosevelt Park. But that was before I went in there. But I know when I worked down below there, I don't know whether you ever heard of smoking harsh or not, he used to be over the state park over here. That's for smoking. He was a leader at Parsons whenever I was there. Then he went to some state park and he spent most of his time. And they had him over here where he retired from Blackwater smoking. He was the leader down when he has built the Horseshoe. They built a lot of roads. We built and service that road all the way from Roosevelt Park through the Bickle Knob down Stuart drive. We used to service and stabilize that all the time. Same way all the way down from Stuart Park and narrow it down to Parsons, that route all the way down there. We had telephone line on that. We built that too. I know I was driving truck and you get time to rest sometimes. I put on a pair of climbers up in about wherever my car lands. It was moving the line but not [inaudible]. And I got a pair of climbers on just going along in that kind of practice. They'd pot up the new and taken down old. There's a big high ledge went out over the road, must have been fifty feet above the road and old crooked tree and water was fast. I climbed up the tree. I didn't climb over at ten feet, right? But the darn thing went out over the ledge. I unhooked the wire and started to come back down. I looked to see how high I was and I just couldn't get back down. [laughter] I had to look up in the air for a while before [laughter] I got me down. I am not too good at heights anyway, but I hadn't come that far from the ground but the worst troubled when I'm over the ledge.

MK: That one scared me.

TB: [laughter] It scared me too.

MK: So, you lived in this CCC Camp too?

TB: Yes, I stayed.

MK: What did you do for entertainment?

TB: Well, to tell you the truth, we had a day room. What they call a day room? Just like service, you had poo rooms and everything. You didn't have to really leave, you know what I mean?

MK: Yes.

TB: You can buy your pop and candy and stuff like that. But just like down in Parsons, we'd usually walk out down across the railroad track. We went to the Victoria Theatre all the time, maybe once or twice a week or Saturday night or whenever there's a good movie on.

MK: What was showing back then?

TB: I don't remember. [laughter]

MK: [inaudible]

TB: Yes, there's a lot of good movies that's really more interesting than I always thought from what are now.

MK: Do you remember any that you saw at that time?

TB: Not really, names never meant all that much to me. I'd walk in and watch him only time, I just never paid...

MK: A lot of Westerns or...

TB: Yes, Westerns mostly, a lot of Western. Like, I remember, I believe, John Carroll was his name, I know I'd seen him a lot and he was a movie star. I know dad saw him in North Africa. After the draft demand an army. I'd seen him on the screen and mainly in North Africa. I picked him up. In the Air Force, I'd picked him up there in transportation one time. [laughter] I know he is a movie star because I'd seen him in pictures, either down day [inaudible] or down the park. That's the way we light up here. Whenever he is up here, it was about maybe fifteen mall [inaudible]. We used to go in every night. If everybody was good, like I say, your discipline had a lot to do with the whole camp like up here at Gladly where they would let us go out. We had to stay there pretty much confined, especially through the fall that year. They wouldn't let you out to counter fire season. We had a lot of forest fires. But if everybody was good, they'd always try to let so many go to the show or in Elkins whatever you'd wanted to get into. If he is a drinker

and want to drink beer go poo-poo or sap up a lot of beer, whatever your personality was or go to movie until 11:30 p.m. and that truck left brought you back in. Now, they do that Wednesday night and Saturday night. But then to go home, like if you want to go home Friday night, the truck would go to Elkins to take everybody in. In Sunday night, 11:30 p.m., it left Elkins to come back to camp for the week. If he was free to go and didn't have far details or [inaudible] or had to be somebody there to run the place, you went on some kind of duty.

MK: I always thought that there were such good training programs then and we have never had anything since that...

TB: That's right.

MK: [inaudible]

TB: I remember there's a lot of criticism like there are today. But I think that they got more done just like what you see going today and what you see going in like, "Well, you just take this road up here for instance." Now, it draws a lot of criticism. They say they've got their problems towards back whenever I was a boy, and they built this road up this mountain and they'd say, "Well, you never get it done," you know what I mean? But they build it in about 1932 or thirty-three. I can take your parents and show you the work of them guys done then. It's just as good today as it was the day after they finished. But the worst trouble for them guys. He was only making a dollar. They only made a dollar. Every day they spent there, they made a dollar. Maybe it wasn't too much money. Where now, you see a lot of standing around, you know what I mean? Them guys wouldn't let you stand around then because they went from place-to-place, but they didn't ride. They walked. It would be a form in ever so many for us kids. They kind of kept you moving. You could mess all in front of them a little but not too much. They kept you moving around. I don't know, there are not as many idle hours then than what are in the country today. I think for a dollar, they got more than what they do now. [laughter]

MK: So, after the war then did you come back here to stay?

TB: I came right here, right here.

MK: Right here is where you have been?

TB: Yes, we turned up and we've set right here ever since 1946. In one winter, we stayed in the logging camp for this winter.

Unknown Female Speaker: We stayed up there in [19]45.

TB: [19]45 and [19]46. The spring of [19]45, I saved enough money and I paid for this, but I had to sell my car. [laughter]

MK: You raised, what did you tell me, five kids here?

TB: Yes, five kids.

MK: What were their names? [laughter]

Unknown Female Speaker: Gary, Dean, Jane, Jim, and Tom Junior.

TB: She can remember. [laughter]

Yes, that's as far as we got. That's why I stayed on the line with one of these fellas down here well. Tommy, our youngest boy, still comes up and helped over and he said, "Daddy," he said, "You could go somewhere," and he said, "Buy a farm." He is ready to straighten this up. I looked over and I said, "Yes, but I wouldn't be home." [laughter] Here's where I'd been. I guess I've spent more time here than any other member of the family. I've been a member of the family, but I didn't leave. Of course, I left but I just returned. I didn't leave because I wanted to. I left because I had to. That was back when I went to CC Camp. When nothing is going on, you couldn't make anything. Well, I went work for my daddy in 1937, right after going up here. And things they just wasn't enough for us all and we were all home and my oldest brother is going to school. I picked up odd jobs here and hell, I'd sometimes I'd let him have ten or \$15, as you know, that was a lot of money, right? Of course, he didn't have to borrow any money. He is borrowing money to go to school. So, I drifted of CC Camp. I know I'd have a check coming plus you got your clothes and everything was furnished, your medical bills and everything. So, I hung out there. I saved enough money in there to buy my first old car with \$5. The way they had set up, you'd send \$25 home or else, we can give it to your daddy or mother to help with the family or you could put in soldiers' deposits. I helped my daddy with what I could. Then I saved a little then I bought my first car from the service, secondhanded, and it was three or four years old. Then he used it all the time while I was in the service. Then when I came back from the service then I kind of got him out and we'd go to different places. In some places, we had board and then come back and do the farmland until he retired.

MK: But this place always held you?

TB: Yes, I never...

MK: Why was that? What is it about home that is so important to you?

TB: It kept me alive while in there. [laughter] I just never couldn't be happier and relax. Like, you can just get up. You get tired, you can just get up and walk out. You can do what you want. I don't know, I just like nature just like it is. I mean, I never did care a whole lot. It didn't take me long to get away from fancy things. I don't care too much about anything. Like a new car, I used to think I'd always like a new car but I went too long. Well, the way I was raised up, if you didn't have it then you thought you wanted it, and then you found out that there was a lot of things in life that you just couldn't have it, other things was more important. So, you learn to live with what you have, that's all. Just like a car, you have to have it now, but you don't have to have a Chrysler or a Cadillac. You need a car that will take you and bring you. I think that's what's wrong with the country today. Everybody went too fancy.

MK: Try to get above their reason.

TB: Right, spend too much money. Me, I couldn't live here – well, that's the only reason I can say that I stayed here really because I learned to live on little, where other people wanted more. But still in the end, I'm just about as well off as them, you know what I mean? It went away. If you look, it all goes and comes, I think. I mean, if they only get so far, it doesn't make any difference. There are peaks in everybody's life. I think there is a peak in your life, there is a peak in my life. You will do well to a certain point and then you start going back down right away, just like age, your financial problems, I think the same way. [laughter]

MK: So, you have lived along this river all of your life?

TB: Right. Just like my brother, for instance, but he'd been gone for 30 years.

MK: Which brother?

TB: The one that drowned. Me and him and oldest brother, we were closer because we were raised up more together than what the younger ones is, because we were the three first ones. We had just a little bit of stronger ties because then after we grew up to a certain point, and they were all small, the rest of them, we had to leave. Of course, I was more acquainted with all of them really than what my oldest brother and what Raymond was because both of them, they left, you know what I mean? Like, my oldest brother, he left here in 1941. He spent little time at home. He never comes back that much. Raymond was gone – he's been gone for thirty years and he'd just come back. He'd been back fifteen months. But he'd come back every summer on vacation. That's how he built his house.

MK: Where had he been living?

TB: Pittsburgh. When we came back from the service, like I say, there were not much to do here. Some drifted off. They had a period, they drifted off too high. I know then later, they started drifting off to Virginia. Like one of my younger brothers, he went to Virginia because back then the school system picked so many people and they got him a federal job of some kind, like FBI, CIA. They'd come around. They don't do that anymore. But I have one brother who worked for the CIA. He's been in there ever since he graduated from high school. But they picked him in the Mountaineer High School, him and I forgot who else was in his class. They picked him and he's been there ever since. He's got educated in that plus he went to college, made his way on to college. He lives down there. My oldest brother, he went to the Marines, but he graduated from Morgantown in the spring of [19]41. I know he owed a lot of money going to school and he worked and drove spikes. They were redoing Thomas Mountain at that time. They got him a job on the railroad. He drove spikes after coming out of school that year. His hands were all blistered. But he was going to the service and he had graduated from (RNR?) [inaudible] in agriculture. Then he had decided that he was going to service because there is more money. Like agriculture, it never has been that good. But he would been an instructor in high school. When I called him, teaching profession was slumped too. It was no good. So, he wanted to go in Army and they had canceled his call. So, he went to work on the railroad up here against a mountain. My mother wanted him to teach school and he said, "No, he had no money in school teaching. It couldn't pay his bills. So, whenever they canceled him out then he

just got in his car, and he went to Washington enlisted in the Marines. They called him a couple of weeks. But he lacked two or three pounds to being heavy enough at that time. You had to have real good health at that time. They told him what to do and to come back in three or four weeks and try it again. That he did and he made it. He stayed in there thirty years. [laughter] He lives down in Alexandria. He's a real estate agent down there, but he finished college. He went to school all the time that he's in service. He went from first lieutenant to colonel. He'd been all over.

MK: But Raymond had been in...

TB: Raymond, he left.

MK: Pittsburgh?

TB: Yes, he left here about 1947 or around like that and he stayed in Pittsburgh. He went to work in the steel mills. Then he got on the railroad in the (Dixon Park?). He hung that out until fifteen months ago then he took his retirement. He's still only fifty-nine years old. He hadn't gotten his railroad retirement, but he has drawn his mill retirement. But he was getting pretty good vacation, so he bought this lot up here and then he came back down here. He'd save his money and build his house. He kept doing that until he had it done when he retired. All he had to do is sold his property up there and move back down here. He just lived fifteen months. He had a lot of money tied up here.

MK: How had the river behaved all those years? You said you saw it high beforehand?

TB: Yes, but not this high. Well, probably I spoke in 1918 or something like that, I cut the tree down there where you come in at the gate. Now, all of our cars live there. I've heard him talk about it, running through that house, right down there by the road two feet deep. That was about as high as I'd heard of, but you know what I mean? Somewhere in the [19]50s, whichever year that Hazel, Hurricane Hazel, tore around, whatever year that was [19]54, [19]52, and it was up to the edge of this bank down here. It covered part of that bottom over there. It comes down to and crossed over there. But it mounted to about what I'd heard of back in the teens, I believe 1918 or somewhere in there. I know my barn. So, like I said, after where my barn was, they'd left the door open when they milked that night and there's a fork and tree went in the barn door and around the side of the barn. It was up in my barn probably two bales of hay high. That was like this time, whenever I went out there, it was about that deep again. That was pretty running down through here pretty good to cross over there. But I never thought about my barn to go. It was plump full of hay from the ground up. The sheds were full and stalls were full. It was full up there. That I had the rake, milling machine, and hay tedder in one side downstairs. I had double doors where you could drive through the shed. It was up against the door, buckled the doors when I went around there. I asked my wife, I said, "If she had drove the cows out and made her over, and she said she had and said the water was running across the culvert out there then. She had weighed and had trouble getting the cows out. But I had been out then the first six or eight feet deeper and was trying to push the doors in on the shed, but I had them locked at the top and at the bottom and there was a buckle in it. I thought if I just get over there and open them doors, the water would flow through it, maybe it saved the doors. I didn't think about getting that deep.

Then it went on about an hour later. Then my brother, Raymond, he was right over there hung up in it and there was no way to get to him. We called right straight across here. He'd come down in this low place right over there trying to come out. He's right straight across right there.

MK: Inside of the house here?

TB: Yes, right straight across. See over there, that pole broke down. Right there, he went lost. He's struck while he tried against that. When he first came down there, he'd come down right over there and horse it down over there then turned it around. Now, as long as they had got out of the truck, and he was in the back. The water held him in because the truck was headed down this way and down the river. The water was coming in behind, so they kept climbing. So, that fence down through there, there's a load more fence all the way down on there. It held on there. It dammed up against the fence and it protected them. I had gate, post, driveway and over there four feet deep in the ground. That woven [inaudible] and it just kept in the [inaudible] with that and made a dam. They would just sit on either side of it, though I have to tear the fence down, right? When the fence broke, it went over there and then the truck turned around and then it went backwards. It kept taking him backwards lodged against the tree down there. He was still in the back of the truck, but this way up here in the water. Then the way my one brother said that it seemed like a log or something came down. Then he shucked that water up over, and that was the last time we saw him. But the water hit the windshield or something and it just went clear over the top of him. That was about the last time that anyone ever saw. That was probably around 12:00 a.m. when...

Unknown Female Speaker: No, not that late.

TB: 11:30 p.m.?

Unknown Female Speaker: Probably.

MK: From where you were standing out, there was forty to fifty yards?

TB: Yes, with water see, the water was right up there. They had trucks parked over there. Then fire department come in toward the end. They saw him washed out, I didn't. But they had lights over there so they could see him. But it was clear up there in the [inaudible]. But I could hear him. I could sit right here and hear him holler at around 11:30 p.m. Then I'd come in the house and they were still out there watching. Now, you could hear him holler, but you couldn't holler over there to him because where they sat there, see, they were between two main curves. Ray was in the middle, right? The main current went down that way and then the main current went down this way. That left him in deadliest water there was from here [inaudible] it was in the high part in the middle of the street. It was making so much noise for them. Now, you, from here, you can hear him. I could hear him from right here.

MK: Who was with him?

TB: His wife, him, and his wife, [inaudible]. I know my other brother came in here and told me they had to go and try. Try, I know when they used the term try because I know they couldn't get

over there. That's about time it turned the truck around, that was the last time I saw him because there was no way getting over there. I'd say after 6:00 p.m., it would have been an impossible task. Well, some of them come in here and said, "We better call for somebody." Well, our phone had then went out. They said the phone over Norman is still on. But anyway, my son lives up here. He had a radio and we had this one. I heard him on there and I didn't want him to come down across that bridge up there because whenever I'd crossed it, it was up to it. This was an hour later, see, now, I'm talking about an hour late. So, I know that he couldn't cross that bridge, but I know he might try. So, I picked him up [inaudible] and I told him stay away, not to come. But then I told him about my brother over here, and I said you get back up and call for help and he said he would. He said not to worry that he would go and he could get some help. But I didn't think that would do any good unless they'd get a helicopter. They had called for a helicopter. They wouldn't let any helicopters out. The fire department came probably an hour or so later but they just got here in time to see more shop and they couldn't have made it anyway. There was no way. I've seen that try, you couldn't do much stuff. No way to anchor. If you could anchor it over there, you couldn't get over it. It'll kill you before you go over there. They call us and went, "No, wait.". Now, I saw that tried in Italy one time and it worked, but there was no debris. But this was full, you know what this was like? It started picking up debris around. Well, at the time they came down there, he wasn't picking it up you know what I mean? Just like Raymond up there where he lived, everything he had was coming down through there. Now, he had probably thirty-five, forty cordwood, it was coming down through there, sticks of wood. Can you imagine crossing that much water with wood, a day-old hay, pieces of buildings? Even if it had a rope tied over there, you couldn't get there because it can kill you and break the rope. There was no way. But I always thought if he went back on the time before – if he had either back up the road, on up the road maybe 300 or 400 yards, they could have survived. But see, they come down here and got in right where it was going back to the river and that's what got them. If they've been up...

MK: Were they trying to get here to your house?

TB: Well, they couldn't get in here. He was just trying to get away from the water wrecking. But see, he was coming into more water. What he's really doing, he is leaving the edgiest part of the water, but he was water bound then. If he had to stay even at his own house, he would have been in less water. But he'd come down here before it comes in above his house. Then right over here, he started going back.

MK: He has gone back?

TB: Yes, he swung back. He was right where it was swinging back into the main river. Over there where his truck's headed, turned it around, took it off the road, took it over at the edge of the riverbank, and the truck caught right close maybe ten feet near to the riverbank caught on a tree. But there was nothing there and after being in the water there, probably four hours, he was in – Ray was in such a shape. They couldn't held on the net and got a hold of it like a tree or something. But we could still see him flash his flashlight up a tree there. But the tree that was there was just a straight tree, there was no way to climb it. There were no limbs on. We'd seen the house come down and everything. That bale hay is 1400 bale hay just from my barn coming down. There's three acres of saw ledge from right about that come down.

MK: So, you had to sit here and watch him on that truck and you knew?

TB: We all stayed here and watched what time we can stand to watch what is happening. We couldn't do nothing. My brothers were here. One brother and his wife and his boys were all here.

Unknown Female Speaker: Our daughter-in-law and five grandchildren.

TB: There were all here. Everybody was here but we can do nothing. There's Norman, other brother, and his son-in-law and his daughter were over there, but there was nothing nobody can do. If we had something like a do real phone had down there in Parson while we couldn't get in and beg him. But first, you couldn't get in. Just for an ordinary tractor or ordinary truck, two-ton truck, wouldn't face it. That big truck was already wet from trying to pull a house trailer and it was all messed up. But if he got up in there, it couldn't back out because it was in the dark and he'd probably missed the road to come out backwards because he couldn't get turned around. Yes, that's a mess when there's nobody can do, just really hard to take and keep going and do the best you could. [laughter]

MK: Oh, man, I cannot imagine. Do not tell me about it.

TB: I said it was really worse than war, and you know what I mean? Like, in war, most of the time you're separated unless you have some real close buddies that gets hit or hurt, but you shake it off. But to watch something like this, it's hard.

MK: To have it go on and on way into the night.

TB: Yes, it was going on. Well, it started around 5:30 p.m., I'd say. First, between 5:30 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. Like, time, it's hard to get that time in there because the time you just couldn't keep track of time. That's the last track of time I really had until the next morning was whenever I got to Jennings and that was about 4:30 a.m. From then on, time didn't mean much. [laughter] I know whenever I got up there and I crossed that bridge. But I never left the grade school in Thomas, the secretary came out and gave me a list of phone numbers. Now, I know that was bad even before that because one bus driver came in. I stayed at school all day. It rained all day and the bus driver came in and he told me, he said that part of his route has been washed out. He told me about the bridge in Lanesville being washed out. So, we left there, and drove over to grade school. While I was loading up, the secretary come out and gave me telephone numbers of people that was already – didn't want their kids to come home because they had then left. They gave them phone numbers that the kids were supposed to call before the other bus – I had to [inaudible] before he brought them. So, he had nowhere to take them. Instead of taking them home, he took them somewhere. I kept going pretty good and, of course, few runs like Blackwater was on the road. You kept doing all you could because you know time was all you had, and all the runs were across the road. I've not had the best of my bus the way it was for running. I know the last water I came through up, Red Creek, my heaters and lights started going off, the brakkers were waterlogged until it was a kick in my main breaker out front, the one that controlled the system. So, I cut everything off on it, all of it, just the motor, that's all

I had left. It wasn't getting too much because it was wet. Whenever I come at Jenningson and I come around at the bottom there, I thought maybe we were completely cut off from home. I knew if I could make the bridge, I could get home. I only had seven kids yet to get home. I was kind of shocked when I came in seeing the Johnson bottom covered, that's when you come down big run there and look across the Dry Fork and grew up around. When I got to the bridge, it was right up close to the bottom of the bridge. So, I dropped it back in low gear because it didn't have much power and I didn't want us to die on the bridge. [laughter] I dropped back in low gear and be able to [inaudible] in there. I made it across there and my daughter-in-law was waiting on other side up against the hill. I had two kids for up in the middle of Jenningson Road. So, I told her to follow me because I didn't know whether that thing was a go run or walk in it. I made it up to where I'm parked back some years ago. Rose girls' daddy was there waiting just in the pouring rain down. I pulled it off in that parking lot and I said, "I'm going to leave it here." He said, "It might not be here when you come back." I looked at him and laughed, I said, "I've waded in got him before." He said, "Looked up there," and we looked up through the bottom there. The foam was coming down there. The white foam was coming down through that bottom, I'd say, three to four feet deep in. That was clear and above his house. He hollered at the girls to get to the house and get what clothes they wanted, and "Let's get out of here." So, we jumped in the car. My daughter-in-law had the car turned around me and the five kids jumped in that car and we took down to the bottom. I think before Charlie came out, them girls daddy, while they were waiting for water, the water was first to come out and we hit them out. Then her brother came in. He lives on above them. The wife's brother and he came in right behind me and he tried to go up. It has given him trouble and he made it just above that house. He thought he could make it to his house. He lived about a half a mile and it got too crowded for him too much. He turned round and the water pushed him back out and he came down, and he went to the top of the mount. You can see the house up there as you go down the mountain for you come to this big curb and come down in Jenningson Road, that's where her brother is. If you probably been there, man, you have [inaudible] and that's how he got home at night. But we came around this mountain until we got down here. That water was already all over here. We had waded in from over there and we parked the car over there. I told my daughter-in-law to leave the keys in it because my brother, at the moment, he got all tore up. He was tearing up trying to move stuff around. It got up in that car before they got moved out of the away, sitting over in the driveway. But it was running across this here two or three feet deep. That's how quick it got down here until we just went up around and come down, probably. I'd say, we came around, it may have been seven or eight minutes that night went along. Then about an hour after that, then Raymond came down over there. It was dark, rainy and foggy in the dark. I know that an hour before that, that you couldn't get to him because I'd been out there. I lived around the hill and looked at my barn. I was telling you about the barn and ran through the barn. I'd looked up to his house and his truck. He used his truck all the time. He never had his car out. He had a new car. His truck was right by his patio door. I never seen that in them, no lights or nothing. So, I figured my brother was right over on the bank to try. I came back to the house and we'd eat a bite of supper. I was sitting there and my other brother came in and said, "Raymond went over there." I said, "Well, if he's over there, you have to sweat it out." We still didn't think about getting that deep. But there wasn't a way to get over there. He had already tried the truck and he couldn't get in. But he was walking to ride inner tubes over but I don't think he'd ever got back if he had gone over because there's too much stuff coming in the dark and it was raining. I mean, daytime, it might have some little chance. But he had two-wire fences to face, barbwire fences, and plus the

stuff that was afloat. It was just one of them things. The only thing I couldn't figure out, why he stayed that long? But see, around his house from the last report I heard, from what they claimed, it was coming in at his upper patio doors and his upper patio doors were at least two and a half feet off the ground level, you know what I mean? Now, that's how deep it was when he left the house and that up there is the highest part. So, he came down here and he drowned it out. But they said he didn't get out and cut his fan belt. But I don't know whether he did or not. But I think really what he was waiting on, he thought that Norman could get up in, which he failed on that. But if they'd gone back up the road, held on to that fence, they might have saved themselves. But you couldn't get over there too and you couldn't tell them what to do. Like, Jack got up there, my other brother, he tried to holler over and tell him not to get down here but see, he couldn't hear him. You could hear them, but you couldn't talk to him. It's got too much noise between as the river was roaring too much.

MK: Do you think he had been away from home too long and forgot about the river and what it could do?

TB: No, I think just like everybody else, he just underestimated. I think we all did. I mean, I don't think anybody ever dreamed of it being that high until it just kept pouring in. He just backed off too late that's all. I still think he could have got out, maybe himself at first. But she was not used to water and was afraid of water and he couldn't – what much he can do? So, he just stayed with her, probably. He just stayed too long. Now, he knew. He had been here all day and the rest of us had. He'd been up and down the road down there. He was a demo on some of them other boys about getting out. Now, whenever they moved them trailers up through there, them boys come out to my barn, two of them. One was my...

[end of transcript]