

Michael Kline: Forest Blume's house in Parsons. Last time I was over here, you waited until I had the machine put away. Then you started telling me about how you went to Buffalo Creek. Was it the day right after the flood that you went out?

FB: It was the following day. Our boys had been down there. They'd went the night before. Then we got called the next day to start on our way down there. Well, as I remember, we ate supper in Parkersburg about 7:00 p.m. and proceeded on in there that night.

MK: Could you be a little more specific about who called you?

FB: The captain called. He wanted two car-loads of us go, four men. We were to report to Fairmont and pick up a different four-wheel drive vehicle and a boat. We took the Bronco and couldn't get the boat on it. The Bronco was small. So, we took a seventy model Chevrolet with a boat on it. So, we were to report to, I believe it was a lieutenant in Logan, to help any way we could with the flood. So, none of us had ever been down there before. I hadn't. The boys with me hadn't. So, we proceeded down in there. Well, when we got there, some of the boys had come in off and had been working around the clock since they'd been there. They were trying to relieve them. They had a temporary morgue set up in the grade school. They were trying to put people in different spots that were worse for looting and so on and so forth. There'd been several bodies that hadn't been recovered yet. The National Guard was pretty well set up at the time we got there to help on securing the area for looters and so on and so forth. But we were to block the major roads going in and out and just more or less be on the lookout for looters and to help any way we could. When we first got down there, well, we had to take all of our extra tetanus shots and everything. That's the first thing they did to us. Then they were having problems getting anybody to volunteer to stay in the morgue. They had a temporary morgue set up in the gymnasium, and they were bringing the bodies in. Just more or less clean them up a little bit and bring the doctor in to sign the death certificate on them and so on and so forth, dousing them down with disinfectant and so on and so forth until the undertaker could get to them. It was too much there all of a sudden for them. I don't remember whether the undertaker was wiped out far as buildings or what the deal was. But anyway, they were using this, and for identification also. A lot of these bodies, I didn't see any that were messed up all that bad. But the way people had been through this, a lot of them, they couldn't get nobody to come in and identify the bodies. Well, we had one old gentleman there. We even cleaned him up and put a suit on him after he was embalmed temporarily. They embalmed him there and nobody would claim him. So, they would come in and decide, "Well, that's Uncle Charlie." So, we'd tell them, "Well, you've got to make arrangements over here to take care of the funeral and so on and so forth." They would mill around a while. They'd decide they didn't know Uncle Charlie. Maybe that wasn't him after all. I don't know. But anyway, he stayed there, I understand. I came back. I wasn't down there too long. Things got up, and they sent us on back. But I think he was still there when all the men pulled out. Finally, they decided they were going to bury him in a pauper's grave. Somebody did come in and finally claim him and put him in a cemetery. But he was a man probably in his mid-50s, rather nice-looking man, and well preserved for his age even, I remember at the time. But he was a loner and just didn't nobody want to take responsibility for him. So, I've been in the service in the medic. So, I told him I would work the morgue. I tried. I didn't know how to make out, but I tried. So, that night, oh, about an hour after I was there, we got three bodies in, which was no problem at all. We were making along pretty good there. In

the wee hours of the morning, they brought a baby in, probably, oh, I'm guessing 3.5, 4 years old, a beautiful child. Her hair was all in curls and everything. It was curled from being wet. You have seen hair that curls every time it gets wet. To all of us, it reminded us of the movie – all of the older ones – of Shirley Temple, how she was. That got to me. That was the only thing that ever got to me. That got to me. So, there were two or three of them standing around there that hadn't been assigned to jobs. So, I told them if it was all the same to them, I'd hit out in the field. I'd rather spend my time out there after this deal. I could take it. I finally told them, "If you can't get nobody to volunteer, I will stay." Well, one old boy there he was ready. You're going to have to work if you go out in the field. So, he volunteered for it. So, at this time, we went on out, went to the upper end of the holler where the Salvation Army came in, and set up a trailer. This boy had been working around the clock, I was told, ever since he got there. He started immediately too there. I believe he came from Tennessee. I'm not sure on that. But I believe he drove in from Tennessee. I know we went in there about 4:30 a.m. We'd seen some people come out there just a few minutes before. Well, we decided we'd go in and see if he had any coffee or anything to drink. So, we went in. This boy was stretched out in the little walkway he had there, asleep. Well, he was right up. There wasn't too much for him to do for us. We apologized for waking him up. He said, "Don't apologize. That's what I'm here for. I wouldn't have it any other way." This went on the full time I was there. That man would catch everybody out. He would hit the floor, maybe get ten minutes of sleep, right back to work again. This went on all the time. Right there was when I made up my mind that those people were on the ball. They were really sincere, and especially, he was. I was really surprised when this happened here in Tucker County, to see that the Logan division of the Salvation Army was one of the first people here. At that time, I'm sure they had never even heard of the Salvation Army probably in that part of the holler. But they did have their division here at that time. So, day break came and we started moving the cars around a little bit. We had been patrolling a little bit all night. But we started pulling into the area and talking to different people and running people off from houses they didn't belong there and couldn't prove it. A lot of them were back trying to salvage what they could off their houses and so on and so forth. But then they had an awful bunch of people just trying to get anything they could get to sell for a dollar or for their own benefit or anything. But in talking to the people down there, I found several very interesting stories that came out of it, that at the time we were just listening to what they had to say and spending a little time with them and moving on. Because it seemed like a time like that, that's what they needed more than anything else, somebody to listen to them. This one fellow was telling them about them coming down through there hollering for them to head for the hills, that the water was coming. He said he never thought too much about it, that he walked down on the porch and said he could hear it coming, said he grabbed his wife and kid and started up the hill. He had the kid in the middle – I believe the kid was something like 8 years old – and told him to hold hands, whatever, then hold hands. He started up the hill – it was very steep down there in the back of the houses – pulling them. He said the wave hit him. When it did, he thought they were all gone. But he said he grabbed hold of a limb or of a little shrub or something and held on. He scowled for them to hold on. Well, he said he felt the load lighten. But he didn't know. He just thought the water might have hit him and pushed him up a hill or something. He said it broke them loose. He grabbed on. Uphill he was still holding on. Well, when he got out of the water, he found his wife. He got talking to the kid. The first blast of water had taken her away. He said he just sat there with his head buried in his hands. The fire person, well, after the water went down, said, "Why don't you go on there where your wife is at?" He said it irritated him. It

made him mad because he thought somebody was poking fun at him or something. Being on the edge, he said, "I don't have a wife. She drowned." The fireman said, "Damn, she didn't either. She's sitting down there, a few yards down the river." He said he went down. It had taken her and threw her so far up on the land. If she had any water in her lungs, it knocked it out. She was all right. She was bruised up a little bit and skinned up, but she was all right. Of course, there's just different tales on how they watched their house go. Some of them were on the back porch when the house went out from under them trying to make a run for it and so on and so forth. I understand they had sounded a warning whistle. But they had never been prepared for floods. So, nobody knew what the whistle was for. Everybody was interested to see what was on fire or what the warning was all about. This is when somebody got a vehicle and went through, I guess, just literally shouting out the window, "The water's coming. Get out of here." I never realized at that time that water was destructive as it was. We went back up the holler after the water went down where the slag pile busted. It had busted in a V shape. It had actually done the same thing it had done here in Tucker County. It had rolled the hard road up. I never will forget the first thing that stuck in my mind when we turned up the holler and made a right turn up to the dam. There was a large culvert there, and there was a Volkswagen car. This looked like it had been through one of those crushers and crammed down in that culvert head. It was literally crammed down in there. Got on up there and the big rail for the railroad, it was all tore loose. There were several of them just looked like a horseshoe where that water had actually ripped them and twisted them in a shape of horseshoe on the way down there. But you get about quarter way down the holler from where the dam busted, there was a big coal tipple. Of course, it was up on stilts and everything. It looked like it was undisturbed completely. Of course, there's a house or two washed into the base of it; big, concrete post office building just wiped right off. The foundation was still there, but it was wiped completely off. A large house about the same size as this, washed down two lots and was sitting up against another smaller house. I know it looked like an old Jenny Lind house, if anything, the post office. But it held that big house in it too. It had moved it, but it hadn't moved it that far off from the foundation. I was asked by several people after this happened, how I compared Buffalo Creek to the flood here in Parsons. All I can say, this one was a lot bigger and a lot worse and covered a lot more territory than that one did. There, it had done a lot of destruction in the small path it'd taken. But the bigger part of the house coming out of the holler was on the right side of the creek. There were a few houses. The tipple was on the left side. The company store was on the left side. There was, I would say, a few houses. Down there, the houses where they built them were 10-, 12-foot apart. It was this small area. There was a small row there above the company store that was pretty well wiped out. But about probably a fourth of the houses on the left is what there was on the right. It just literally wiped all the houses out, come into Logan, which, well as I remember, that holler was about 5.5 miles long. It had come out before it hit the main part of town. The next morning, we went back down to make arrangements. Well, they told us to come back in after daylight. They'd reassign us to what we were going to do. Then it was when we really saw what destruction had taken place. Of course, the ones that had been there the day before had seen it. But there were cars under the main bridge there on the main highway. I believe that was Route 10 in there. This literally rolled and cars piled on top of each other, looked like they parked them in that one area up there. It just looked like it was a parking lot full. Maybe one car would be on the top and one sitting on its wheels right beside. It looked like it had been parked in there that way. Well, really, it looked like a fellow took a wrecker and set them in there. But there's rows and rows of them there just jammed together; one on its wheels, one on its side, the next would

be complete on its top and all the way. Where it hit the cars and everything, it probably hit more of them in one area than it did here. They were scattered out here a little more. It actually looked a whole lot like it did at Lambrecht Chevrolet garage. The next morning for, oh, probably 0.5 mile down that holler, there were cars like it. Now, this got so much debris. It wasn't as much mud. There wasn't as much slate coming down. But there's a lot of debris washed in and so on and so forth. After they went over all this stuff on foot, they put big shaker pans on the dump trucks and were actually loading that stuff with shovels and sifting it for bodies. Now, while we were there, they came up with the arm with a bulldozer. So, they stopped right there. Anytime they came up with anything, they had to stop immediately. But as soon as they found that arm, they just went back there and started looking. In ten minutes, they had the rest of the body and dug it out of there, unharmed and all. It just happened to be on the side, and the bulldozer had cut an arm and taken it off. But other than that, some of them, it's just like it was here. I understand that some of them were warned and wouldn't leave their house. They didn't believe it could happen to them. But go back up there and look at that. It just looked like somebody took a cutting machine of some sort and cut a big V in the side of a mountain. That's the way that dam looked. Just looked like a big V in it. There was still a little water running down. But I'd say it probably cut two lengths of a power pole from the top to the bottom of the V there in that dam. It was a very large dam. Of course, we heard all kind of tales, what had happened, that there was supposed to have been a man up there working a bulldozer and put off some kind of explosion, and different things. But I never did know just exactly what broke it away. Because I was always interested to know what happened to the man in the bulldozer. If he was in fact up there, did he get out of there, or did it bring him down with the debris and stuff or what? Well, I thought at the time, what I had seen going on the following night, I didn't notice exactly how to take it at first. They formed dances in the street. They had country music bands in there playing to entertain the people that were left. I thought, "How can this be? How can they be doing something like this?" But after I was around there a little while, I realized that something had to be done to get these people's mind off of their problems and so on and so forth. They had them in temporary housing and so on. Their homes were gone. Nothing to do but sit and worry. So, later on, I got to know one of the boys, Roger Bryant, that was up here. Did you know Roger? He played for them. He was one of the musicians down there.

MK: He was a Logan boy, I believe.

FB: Yes. He was from that part of the country. He had just come back out of service. He said their band played. They were asked to come in there and do anything they could to entertain the people, get their minds off of what had happened to them until they could get something done. Now, the National Guards were in there in large numbers at the time. They set up about halfway up a holler. Of course, it was the engineer part of it. They were trying to get the roads back and so on and so forth. Now, I didn't see anything take place like it did up here. It was mostly the National Guards doing all the road construction and then building the roads to get them back up into it and everything. By the time we got down there, we could cover probably two thirds of it by the roads that they had made. One of our guys got washed. He was going up through there and the mud slip came. He went off the road and was sitting there, teeter-tottering back and forth. Someone came by and tied a chain to an old piece of a fire pole into his Bronco until he could get out of it. Somebody finally came along with a large truck and jerked him out there.

But he was just driving up the road, and the road gave way with him. It was a high thing. We got hills up here, but they're straight up and down. We went up to relieve some boys. It rained while we were up on the hill. Was coming back down and they made a big, long sweeping turn. It was straight down. There was nothing you could do. I started around to turn that Bronco. It wouldn't go over a big hill. I had a guy by the name of Billy Sirk riding with me. He was an older guy than I was and been into it. He talked me in that Bronco around that turn, literally talked to us around that turn. I was doing everything I could think of. He was telling me everything I couldn't think of to do it right. We made it but with the skin of my teeth. That thing, another foot and it would have rolled and rolled and rolled. So, we tried to warn our buddies, but their battery went dead. We had to boost them to get it started. They turned the radio off. So, here they come in a seventy model Chevrolet. The car held better than the Bronco did for some reason or other. They had some tense moments coming around the turn. So, we got back down to school and warned all our people to watch it up there because it was a clay-type mud. Once you got a vehicle moving, there just wasn't no traction at all, nothing you could do. Just ride it out, that was all there was to it, and hope to stay in the ditch. I made the mistake getting out of the rut. But all in all, I'd say, compared to Buffalo, both of them were very destructive. But I would say this in comparison with Buffalo, Buffalo Creek was probably a half worse. The waters were half worse up here from the natural causes than it was from that man-made dam down there bursting.

MK: I remember when we were talking before about it, you said that you were prepared in the morning to see all kind of bodies here washed up by the flood. But I guess that was from having been at Buffalo Creek.

FB: Right. Here, you saw that water cape coming up and up and up, knowing that there are a lot of elderly people in the town, knowing that there are a lot of cantankerous people that don't want to leave their home, which you'll find anywhere. It's not only Tucker County. But we just didn't know what to expect the next morning. We went down to get the girl out of the tree that had washed down that you got the tape on. Well, we could hear somebody across the river hollering in a house down there. We didn't know whether it was the people who lived there, people who were washed in there, or what had happened. We assumed it was the people that lived there. But we had no way of knowing this. Then they got to telling about somebody going back to the trailer park down here before the trailers went away. We pretty well know that he had gone down river, not knowing what happened to him. The way it came down river, what was really my worries at the time, how many washed down river from Hendricks, Hamilton, even up at Harman even. Unbeknownst to me, two of them had washed down from way up in the Gladwin area.

MK: Jenningson.

FB: Jenningson, Gladwin area, right, which could have been easy coming out of Red Creek and all these places. Now, this covered, I'd say, oh, probably fifty times more area than what Buffalo Creek actually did, just in this county alone, not compared to the twenty-nine counties that they had a million. I'm sure, from what I've been reading, Pendleton County was probably hit even worse than Tucker County was as far as land-wise and so on and so forth., not populated areas maybe. Yes, we just didn't know what to expect. We didn't know whether the dispatchers were

going to get out. After we finally found out the police that went around to try to get the jailers or the prisoners and the dispatchers out, whether they were going to make it. There were doubts if they were out there, which I thought there was in that boat, that they would make it. Because there's no way a little jon boat could speed up in that river. Then as morning came and people got to hollering here or there and yonder, and you got to wondering how many were there, how many houses had washed out, and so on and so forth. I'd heard the trailer court was completely gone, which it was. It was completely gone. Then after going to St. George and seeing them have to break the upstairs window and let 8 to 12 inches of water go in the upstairs window of that house, you wondered just how many people were caught unaware of it and left in their house that panicked or actually got caught in the water with the house still standing there. Was very thankful to find out that, as far as we know, three people are all we lost here in this county.

MK: That is a miracle.

FB: Yes, it's very much a miracle. But everybody says if it happened later in the night, there had been hundreds, literally hundreds. I don't know. I think the EMTs, the fire department really – evidently, I wasn't there when the bigger part of it was going on – but evidently, they really went out of their way to evacuate the people and convince the people. Because it's hard to convince a person to leave his home. Many a time when Old City Hall was on the river – and my wife worked there. On different occasions, they had put stuff upstairs because high water was coming. So, I think it had been hollered wolf too many times. I don't think people were being convinced that this was actually going to happen to them, that this kind of water was coming. I understand that somebody from Harman did call and tell them, "Hey, there was much water coming this way." But I don't think anybody could even start to realize this is how much water was on its way down. I've heard several people since say, "Well, if I had known there'd been 8 inches of rain in Canaan Valley and Elkins, I was here in the [19]54 flood, I'd have been moving a lot faster than I was." Because we had 5 inches at that time. Now, I don't know whether this is true or not, but I have heard several people say that. For the [19]54 floods, there were 5 inches of rainfall compared to this. So, I don't know. I'm just hoping now since it is over with, instead of these people thinking about this damn foolish thing of building a winter guard and everything, they get the river banks and stuff taken care of. The worse can happen to us again. I'm hearing reports now, this is not actually what happened. I understand from people that should know at the one they built in the Fortney Mill bottom, when the water is up high, it's coming straight into it and this could go at any time. I worry a lot about the vegetation back on the river. Every time I ask anybody where the money is coming into about this, they say, "Well, the Corps of Engineers are going to take care of this." But I wonder or are they going to build the dams, or are they going to move on down the river and leave us? Because without vegetation, it's not going to take much water to be getting there.

MK: You are talking about setting trees?

FB: Setting trees, get some kind of vine, some kind of plant food going on that stuff to help tie it together. Over on Clover, Roane, here across the hill, the CCC's built a wall. They covered with what looked like chain-link fence wire. That was way back in what? The early [19]30s? It's standing today. This is good. I think there ought to be more thought put into channeling these rivers or whatever. Several people have told me with the way they've channeled the rivers

between here and Harman, if we ever get a hard rain, we have never seen nothing yet to what we're going to see. I hope we're wrong, but it makes sense or no little eddies will not slow that water down.

MK: Keeps it just straight.

FB: It makes sense if it's going to be like a canal coming down through there. It's just going to be wide open. Like I said, right now they seem to be some, or there was I think probably passed, the money's available to do different things. I think there have to be more emphasis put on getting these rivers back to take care of this stuff, so we won't have to go through this again. I don't believe these people could survive going through again, in the near future, what they just went through. I don't believe they can go back in and shovel out 3 and 4 foot of mud and start over again. I just don't believe it could happen. I believe the bigger part of them will throw up their hands and head for the mountain somewhere. Well, I've talked to several who said they couldn't do it again. They couldn't. It's going to take a long time. It's like being operated on. It's going to take a long time for it to heal. I think there is a lot of fear here yet – every time the water gets high. We've got a wonderful bunch of law officers. Sometimes I think they go overboard with it. But every time the water has been high, the river has been monitored all night long. The people should sleep pretty peaceful knowing that. I don't know if they know it though. But they spend the night, just like Hank here and the chief of police, 3:00 a.m. and 4:00 a.m., they're still out there watching the rivers. If they don't start going down, they stay until daylight until somebody else takes over. So, this is a nice feeling to know that somebody is watching out after you when you up here asleep. But I don't know how much more the people could take if it would happen to them again.

MK: Some people have left Tucker County, have they not? Does anybody know how many? I have heard maybe a hundred families have just –

[talking simultaneously]

FB: No. I can't believe that a hundred families have left. Some of them left. Some of them came back. My wife would probably answer that better than I can. She works there at city hall. They do deal with the water customers and everything right here in town. But I don't think there have been that many left. There are some families that have left and went to relatives to live out of the county and so on and so forth. But I would say a hundred is way out of line on it, would be my guess. Now, we gained some – these people come in nobody ever heard of after you see the trailer start going in. Well, we got tracking them down. We found they were from around somewhere and had relatives they were staying with around here. But there were a lot of new faces that ended up in town about this time that this happened.

MK: Maybe looking for a trailer to live in there?

FB: Well, some of them were actually here staying – maybe all of them – here staying with other people that did get flooded out and so on and so forth. She came in about every evening there for a while asking me if I know so-and-so. No, I never heard of them before. Of course, we traced them down. They did have ties here. They were staying with somebody or something

to this before was losing it. Like I said, my wife could probably give you a better guess on that theory in Parsons. Now, I don't know about Hamilton and Hendricks. But I believe they're all about there. They may have been one or two families that left. See, that first day you filled this low-income home they called it up at the court in (Lakers?), it filled up almost overnight. But then soon as people could get back to their homes or anything, they left and came back. They left. Several of them have put in cedar trailers. Some of them have gone back to their own homes that were up there. But elderly people had preference over that, which probably was a good thing. Because it did give them some place to go until it was over with, until they could get back on their feet and at least see what was going on after the waters went down and everything. Of course, I guess, Buffalo Creek and this is about the same as far as the water coming and going. It probably left out down there faster than it did before. Now, the first night down there, we had several men almost got in troubles with boats and so on and so forth trying to recover people. Actual people were floating. One boy there in Elkins that could probably tell you more about it than I start to, Kenny Painter. You know Kenny? He's the sergeant in our department over there. He was one of the first. He got orders to leave Charleston immediately.

MK: Kenny Payne?

FB: Painter.

MK: Painter?

FB: Yes, the sergeant in Randolph, Pocahontas County. He was one – I think, it probably got worse out of the boat a time or two that night. Actually, the boat capsized on him a time or two. The lieutenant I went to work for up here, he was in this county as this officer when I went to work eighteen years ago. He was more or less in charge that first night, and he finally just ordered him to dock the boats to get them out there before somebody did get killed. But I think Kenny was probably out of the boat two or three times.

MK: The flood happened around about 8:00 a.m. at Buffalo Creek, did it not?

FB: Yes, I believe it did. But they started immediately to evacuate.

MK: There was still high water by that night?

FB: That day as soon as after they got there, I was there that night because I was fire and rescue.

MK: But the high water went on for twelve hours.

FB: By the time I got there from Charleston, it was still high water. The river even at the mouth of it there where it went into the river is where they got in trouble at with it.

MK: Oh, I swear. I always had the feeling it was just one big wave.

FB: One big row.



MK: But I do not know. It was just a feeling I had. I have never talked to anyone about this.

FB: Well, in talking to him, I would say it took – and it looks that being there – I'd say it took probably eight hours for that water to run out of there. There was a lot. I never did hear the amount of gallons there was in it or so on and so forth. But there were trillions and trillions of gallons of water coming out of that holler. I think that first blast did the bigger part of the damage. I think after the first blast, the water did drop down several feet and then remained pretty well at that. What I can gather and what I've seen up there, it just kept the dam going. Once it got started cutting, it just cut like a torch with it, right down through there. Yes, I'm pretty sure I heard them talk about dark coming on. The water was still rolling good that day. But that first, big blast was the main one. I think it had done all the destruction and probably killed 128 or 127 people, whichever it was. But like I said, if you could get to talk to Kenny on it, he was one of the very first officers there. He could give you a better run-down on Buffalo Creek more than I can here. So, anyway, we went in the following evening late at night to get some supper and things had calmed down considerably. The lieutenant asked, since we were some of the furthest away, he's going to send some home, did we want to go? Of course, I volunteered really quick. So, the boys with me decided, "Well, let's wait until the morning to go." I said, "No, let's go tonight." So, we went that night. The next morning, they reevaluated things and decided they really needed this back. But they took some other men there. They called and offered me, but I declined on going back a second go around on the thing. But then some of the boys that didn't come home stayed as much as ten days after that, stayed down there on the thing. Food was a problem down there, getting food down to the people. Now, we were driving plum up to another county to get places to sleep and places to eat. Oh, as well as I remember, it was about an 18-mile drive out Logan to where we had to go to even find a motel. Well, we were in a basement of a motel. It was a motel where they usually kept construction workers. That part of it is where we ended up staying, which was fine because we were tired. We could have slept on the concrete, and it wouldn't bother us a bit. But a lot of the boys who were there earlier could tell you a whole lot more about it than what I could.

MK: I was interested to hear you say that you just spent a lot of time just listening to people talk about it all night.

FB: Right. Because they had to. You saw it right away, same with this in here. What these people went through, they wanted to talk. It seemed like the best thing you could do for them is just sit and listen to them for a while. It seemed to help them. They got it out, and it seemed like it felt better after this, just like the man you interviewed there today. I haven't got to talk to him. But I've talked to several people that have. I talked to him briefly but just in passing. But the man lives across the road from him where they're putting their house back, now I spent considerable time talking to that old gentleman there. He's 84 years old. He was wringing his hands there for a while. He has got a lot of help. A lot of his relatives come in from Ohio and different places. The boy lives next door that his house got washed away in a trailer, he's gone over and helped him repair his house and so on and so forth. To start out with, he wasn't going to move back into it. After a few days, he decided, "Well, for \$4,500 they'll put back on the foundation, I'm going to try." They had lived there for years and years and years. We call him the mayor of St. George, or I always have. But he ran a little store there for years and years. Most of them say he's a little cantankerous, old fellow. But I always liked the gentlemen. He

always was straight with me. I spent a lot of times – they just take you and show you the damages. It seems to relieve them to be able to talk to anybody about it instead of bottle it all up in themselves.

MK: I gather that was one of the problems with the FEMA evaluators going out. They never spent enough time anywhere. Somebody like that would be wanting to tell them about a whole lifetime's worth of work or property that had gotten washed away. They would be licking their pencils and filling out forms and moving on.

FB: Right. I talked to an old gentleman up at the Jenningson Bridge. He didn't get washed away. His house sits right there on the bridge.

MK: Talked to him too.

FB: You talked to John (Chisum?)? I don't know who went in there and helped him out and gave him a heater and so on and so forth. But he thinks it's the Red Cross. It possibly was. That man can't sing enough praises for that outfit just because that woman took time to sit and talk to him. I've known the man for eighteen years. I always spend, probably every time I go through there, at least thirty minutes talking to him because he's a very interesting, old gentleman. It used to be all he knew was trucking. But now, since he doesn't do any trucking, he's picked up a whole lot of stuff from talking to people and so on and so forth. I find him very interesting. I guess our job consists of a whole lot of that in the county, listening to the farmer's problems with their deer damage and so on and so forth. I found if you just sit back and listen to them, it gives you a good relationship with them. It seems to relieve them in their problems and so on and so forth, also. Once in a while you get a cantankerous one you couldn't help at all. But the bigger part of them, you'll just sit and listen to them. It takes a big load off of them. But some of these people that went through, literally don't know which way to turn on this. They're on fixed income. They thought they were set for life. All of a sudden, it's gone. They have nothing. So, they don't know which way to turn. They don't want to live in a trailer for the rest of their life. They're too old to start rebuilding. So, what are you going to do? They don't want to leave. Now, the sheriff's sister, they were born and raised in the Lead Mine area. Well, immediately, she's going to Lead Mine. She went down there. Her brother's got a store and some apartments there, and she got an apartment. She was going to spend the rest of her life there. Well, since then she's bought the lot beside of her where her house washed away. Well, it didn't wash away. They had to tear it down. She fell in then to either put a trailer in on them two lots or to build a small house. Well, I don't know her finances. But her husband was semi-retired. He was working for the Forest Service part-time. I guess he was getting social security. He got killed in a hunting accident and just left her, turned her world plum upside down here. Oh, it'll be three years in the last part of this month since he had been killed. But now all she can talk about is getting back. So, I think a bigger part of them are going to come back, whether it's in a FEMA trailer or another trailer or whatever. I think they are going to come back. Of course, now we've got a certain amount here in town – I'll call them hobby-totty people – that would like to see the trailer's outlawed. Well, that's fine, outlaw the trailers under normal circumstances. But what's these old people going to do? What's these young people going to do that's working for a minimum wage that lost everything? I say put some controls on them. Don't set them too close together. Put some ordinance in the town to take care of this and let her fall where she may. I

own a trailer on this lot. I don't think it offends anybody. It's set up. But I've got people living over there now that you'd never know they're there. Unless they come over to visit or something like that, you'd never know they're there. I think I'll put it up against any of these people's big homes. But one fellow was dead set against him and has lived in the trailer for the past two years. Of course, he's building a house now. But it was good enough for him to live in, but it isn't good enough for these people to live in. I had a couple say, "Oh, you're not going." I've had the misfortune of being on the crew that went around hunting spots for FEMA trailers. When you go up around their land, "Surely you're not going to set them old trailers in here." Only thing I'd say, "Yes, I figure we are if this area is picked. We've got to do something for these people." Of course, we overdid it. I told them at that time was going to overdo it. But they wanted to make sure there was nothing. They kept finding more areas, more areas, more areas. Now, we've got a trail court sitting on Blackman Flats without a trail around it. Sixty-five units already built and ready to move in with not a trailer or one in it. But what the FEMA didn't realize, or they act like it didn't realize it, winter was coming. These people had to go somewhere. Now, if they got them trailers in here the first week, they could have filled just as many as they could have got on the road. But once the fellows got settled down somewhere else and settled in, they weren't about to pack up and move their life around again to get in a FEMA trailer. Some people would. Now, some people could, to an extent too, get into it because it was rent free for a year to eighteen months. But the majority of them at really lost wouldn't. They had to find some place. They had to either move in with their relatives, friends. I guess every house filled up immediately, every vacant house. We didn't have much vacant houses until they built this senior citizen thing down here. Then they got to be a few houses around in Parsons about all the time that were empty. Of course, everything filled up really quick. But I think eventually, the majority of them will be back either in a trailer or in a house of their own. I really think they do. Some of them went over and bought trailers that were damaged in the Elkins but weren't damaged to a large extent where they could fix them and brought in here and set up immediately. Like I said, some of them went to relatives. Now, I do know three or four people found –

MK: You were talking about people's desire to come back to where they had been pushed out of by this flood. I know a lot of people in this United States of ours, if they go and get stuff, they will just pick up and leave and go somewhere else, that a particular place is not important to them. America is largely a transient population. But here in Tucker County, I was talking a couple of weeks ago to an older woman from St. George that her house was blown away down there. She is talking about going back there and building. She is an elderly person. She is in the Tucker Manor up there. Well, it is true in many parts of West Virginia. What is this thing about people being identified with a particular place and not ever really being able to leave it? You know what I am saying?

FB: I really don't know how to answer you. But it seems like the roots up here are stronger than any place I've ever been in my life. It seems like if your great-grandpa was born here, and the family tree traces down from, well, as far back as you can trace it, which a bigger part of them do here. I don't know what draws them here. But they have no desires whatsoever to leave for any reason. I've seen them go through terrible hardships when they could be somewhere working, making good money for their family. We had a renter over here one time in the trailer. He got cut off. He was saying he was going to get cut off. Well, he came to us. He told us, he said,

"I'm going to have to move. I'm going to get cut off. I don't know how long I'll be gone. But I'm going to have to get out. I'm going to have to move in with my mother now." They're very careful, a bigger part of them, to watch and not get themselves in such a rut they can't get out. They will go to hardship. Now, this boy even went to college to be an architect. Of course, he got married and had a kid. That ruined his college. I believe he got one year in. He's a foreman over at the shoe plant right now. But I believe he would rather be here in Tucker County for \$3 an hour, as he would have to leave here and make \$12 an hour. It just seems like they've got a tie to the country that just won't quit. When I first came here in 1968, one thing that threw us a loop, there's no young people here. There is either school age or elderly people. That period in time, they had to leave. There just was nothing here for them. They had to leave. They started opening the mines up around the Tucker-Grant County line there. I believe every one of them came back. I think they all came back. There may have been one or two that stayed. But just as soon as there's anything here that they could possibly make a living, back they came. Around [19]72, you started seeing young families come back into the area. Since then, you'll find, once in a while, they will have to leave. But it's short lived. They'll be back as soon as there are opening events coming at Tall. I've talked to several of them that have been to Baltimore, made good money and so on and so forth. But they spend every weekend in Tucker County, every weekend at home. They never even considered out of Tucker County home. My home is where my heart's at and where my family is at. But they just move where they can make a living. But they just don't see it that way. I don't know what it is. Wish I did know what it was because I've thought about it considerable, what draws them here, what keeps them here. But it's just a way of life with them. They've always been here where there is plenty of hunting and fishing. Another thing, we never heard of cutting school off first day of hunting season until we came to this country. Now, first day of hunting season, schools, everything stops here. Vacation is involved around hunting and fishing. It's not involved in where I can take my family to the beach, it's when the hunting season comes in. We found many a times we got calls 11:30 p.m., 12:00 a.m., "When's the new hunting panthers coming in, so we can plan our vacation?" Well, far up, Thomas told me, he said, "They're born hill people. They'll die hill people." Now, what he meant by that I don't know. I guess he meant this was their way of life, and they didn't want any changes. I think this is the whole story of it. I think it is a way of life with them. I think they're happy. More power to them, I say, if they are.

MK: This does not apply to Fayette County, though?

FB: I don't think. We've been knocked around either in Fayette County, you went to work in the coal mines, or you got the hell out. Now, that's just about what it amounted to. Of course, they had an alloy plant there. Then in later years, since I've gotten away from there, there have been a few things that went in, like long ore docks and making the mining equipment and so on and so forth. But in Fayette County, I found, when a bigger part of the men especially grew up to the age where they were inducted into service, I'd say 50 percent of them never returned after that, including myself. I returned to Fayette County and spent thirteen years working in a barrel factory. But it wasn't the fact that I had to be home where my mother and dad and my grandpa were. It was just the fact that, that was where I ended up finding a job. I walked the streets of Cleveland and Middletown, Ohio, and different places trying to get a job. But I came back out of the service at a very depressed time. There just weren't no jobs to be had. I worked on a farm for over a year for \$3 a day, seven days a week in order to live until I did find work. But I would

have left in a minute for a better job, but I stayed. Only reason I stayed where I was at for thirteen years was out of necessity. I was making a living, but the hardest. That was the only reason I stayed there. Of course, it was nice to go home on the weekend. Of course, my dad had died the age of 53. Us boys had to help out these four boys and one girl. Of course, about all the rest of my brothers were gone. Well, after coming out of the service, I was the only one back in the state. I guess felt the obligation to be around to help her out where I could. But other than that, no. I don't think Fayette County's as tight to the community and to the county as they are here in Tucker County. Matter of fact, I've never been anywhere in my life as tight as they are here. I don't know what it is. But once they're here, well, they intend to live and die here. My boy, when he graduated from high school at 17, he left and went to work for the tax department in July 1st before his eighteenth birthday of August 28th. He's been gone ever since. Of course, he's been to different places. He started out in Clay County and ended up in Parkersburg and finally ended up permanently out in the Martinsburg area. Of course, they work a big area. They work this area here even. But it didn't seem to bother him. But the kids that he went to school with are right here. They went to the shoe plant, went to work, and went to charcoal plant and went to work. They don't have no desires to leave for a better job or anything. They want to stay here. So, if you ever figured it out, let me know why.

MK: Yes, I am working on it.

[AUDIO GAP 00:55:57 - 01:21:56]

[end of transcript]