

Tucker County, West Virginia Flood Audio Recordings

Ona and Helen Dotson Hovatter Oral History

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Location: Tucker County, West Virginia

Length of Interview: 01:02:28

Interviewer: MK – Michael Kline

Transcriber: NCC

Michael Kline: 12/3/1985. I'm at 231 Virginia Street at the home of Ona –

Ona Hovatter: Hovatter.

MK: Hovatter.

OH: H-O-V-A-T-T-E-R.

MK: Hovatter. In Parsons, West Virginia, where we had a – what was the date of that?

OH: Fourth and fifth. The evening of the fourth and the fifth – morning of the fifth. Monday evening and Tuesday, come Monday evening. I didn't get back in here until Wednesday evening – or Wednesday morning, I believe it was, I got back in here. I had five foot and three inches of water in this living room right here, and mud. Oh, I'm telling you, that was the first mud ever seen. You'd just clean and sweep and wash with hose and turn around directly, and it was dried off. There was mud again on it. You never seen such a thing.

MK: Just couldn't get it.

OH: Yes. I've lived here for probably forty years. I've seen the flood in [19]54 and I didn't have any water here. No water here at all. That's why my youngest son come along and he said, "Get ready to get out to here." I said, "Oh, I've been here in floods." I said, "I'm not afraid." He said, "If you're not up in my house in fifteen minutes, I'll be back after you." So, I just locked up the house and never moved a thing. Amplifiers and everything were sitting downstairs here. Just got in my vehicle and drove up to his house, and the flood came, five foot and three inches in the living room of water.

MK: How tall are you?

OH: What?

MK: How tall are you?

OH: About five foot and five, something like that.

MK: Okay. About as much water as you are.

OH: Yes. Yes. Yes, sir. I never seen anything like this in all my life. I'm past eighty-one years old and never seen nothing like this. I don't think we ever had anything like this. I heard about the flood in 1888, but this was more water than in 1888 as far as I can tell because there were marks on trees down the river. I had a home down the river. My youngest son and I and his wife. We had a nice home down there. It was twenty-eight foot by thirty-four foot long. Twenty-eighty feet wide and thirty-four foot long. We had it back up there way, and the people said – older people now, said, "Oh, you need to ever be afraid of this ever getting flooded." Well, it was clear over the top of our house down there. Moved it, just taking it up and taking it down around the hill and shoved it back up again the hill.

MK: Where was that?

OH: It's down the river here below St. George. Yes, I never seen nothing like this. I don't think anybody else ever did around here.

MK: So, you think this was more water than –

OH: More than eighty-eight because the marks down there on the trees where them old fellows showed me, this was way higher than the 1888 flood and more water. Yes.

MK: Old people were still talking about that flooding?

OH: Yes. The older people back years ago or a few years ago when I was talking to some of them. When we built our home down there, well, the old fellows come along and said, "Oh, you need never be afraid. You're up high up there all the way." Then the wire fence coming along above our home there, back up above, it was clear up there at that wire fence over the top of the building. You've been down the river St. George and below there?

MK: No.

OH: You want to go down, see there, and see it. I'm telling you, that's something to look at. You can't believe. You can't believe it. The water was down. People just drive down along there and look at that. Where it was over the road, I'd say it was down 72 there below all over town. I'd say it was twenty foot over the road, up over that all the parks and down through there's gone. The trailers and campers and everything's gone. Just forced everything away.

MK: I was down in Holly Meadows the other day.

OH: No. On below Holly Meadows too, down around below St. George where our home was down there. There were three campers over there. Some of them were out of Grafton. Their campers there had these where you haul and put places, there's all gone. Yes, I never seen anything like it. I hope I never see anything like it again.

MK: Once is enough.

OH: I tell you. If this would've come after midnight, Monday night, there'd been a lot of people drowning because they'd have been home in their beds. But it did come in the evening. That's why more people didn't get drowned in. We had two people from – well, three from here at your – one of them has never found yet. I can't think of any Harper. Yes. Stillman Harper and his brother, taking a load of cattle and sheep and stuff to Moorefield on Monday morning to sell to stock sale. While they were on their way back, they got washed away. Well, they found Stillman Harper, but they haven't found his brother. Maybe never find him.

MK: He was about your age too, wasn't he? Stillman?

OH: What?

MK: Stillman was about your age too, wasn't he?

OH: Yes. You know Stillman Harper. Harry, you probably knew Harry. They've never found Harry. Yes, Stillman and I used to go to the square dances and go to the Elkins, the senior citizen square dance and down here at the square dances around. Yes. Yes. Never seen anything like it.

MK: What time did your son come to –

OH: About dark. Just about dark or around there sometime.

MK: Had you been going out and looking at the river?

OH: No, I didn't pay attention to that river. There were no warnings. There was no warning given to the people to get out, you see? There are people right up here from Wisconsin. Katie Little's brother is from Wisconsin. Come in when he had an [19]81 automobile. He had it parked up there beside of Katie's house right over there. Well, that car washed down and come clear right here in my backyard on the walk back there. How that car ever got down through there and got back on my back walk back there? It didn't hit my house either. That car wasn't skinned up there. Nothing. I had an old station wagon sitting down there where I'd parked down there and didn't use anymore. It just sat down there. The other old mobile washed down there. Come clear down there to there. Yes.

MK: Where does your son live?

OH: One lives up on –

MK: I mean the one that you went –

OH: Up on Second Quality Hill up here. Now, I have another son who lives down here on the other end below the shoe factory. This Virginia Street used to run on through. Well, when (Dom and Mills?) run this big plant down here, they built – well, they condemned Virginia Street and built. They've got a whole – more than a city block down there in that plant. I worked for them for years. Then they sold out to United Merchants – Dom and Mills did. United Merchants run a little while and they quit. They junked everything. All of them years I worked for them people, I lost all my retirement. I never got a thing out of that hospital insurance or nothing. The only thing I get anymore is just social security. If I'd have worked for some other company or if they'd have passed that law that they got now, maybe I wouldn't have lost all that. But all the years I worked for them, I lost everything I ever worked for. Yes. Oh, I don't know. Maybe we'll make her some way. The good Lord been watching over us, I reckon. Yes, sir. I don't know.

MK: So, you think God was on your side in this flood?

OH: Yes. He had to be. Had to be. Yes, sir. Or they wouldn't have to come and said come and go because these floods before you see, it never bothered here. But that's what you can't believe all that water. See, the lower end of the town in [19]54 was flooded. I put on my hip boots and helped carry people out down on Elkins Street, but I didn't have a bit of water here. Then this comes along and I have five foot and three inches of water in my living room, mud, and all. Oh, I'm telling you. Well, the good Lord had to be watching over us or there'd been more people drowned and everything. I'm telling you, I just drove over to Pennsylvania Avenue and looked at all of them big homes over there. If it was you over there in [inaudible]. Do you know you'd been through there before this flood and all of them big homes were – I think old Satan had done this to try to shake us up a little – some people up a little, you see. Warn them. It says, in the latter days, all these things are going to happen. Wars and rumors of wars, nation against nation, floods and earthquakes and things like that. That's what we're having right now. I think we're in the latter days.

MK: Some people think that Halley's Comet has something to do with it.

OH: I don't know. I don't know. I think old Satan getting after us.

MK: Looks like if he'd have come up to Elkins, he could have stirred up a lot up there.

OH: What?

MK: Old Satan could have stirred up a lot of stuff at Elkins.

OH: Yes, he did, didn't he?

MK: Not very much. He sort of let us off the hook this time.

OH: He did. I haven't been over there since that. I've got to go over though. I've got some things I got to get. I'm blind and stuff, but I don't know. The big end loader there, loading that, hauling stuff out from the shoe factory. You seen down there when you come around, all that stuff piles up out through there. That's the Mill shoe factory. They lost everything in there.

MK: How many people worked there?

OH: I think about 230, something like that. I believe that's what they said. Something like 230 altogether.

MK: They're not working there now?

OH: No. They haven't got nothing in there. Everything's out. I think the dozer run in there and just shoving everything out. Yes. I don't know why that – Kingsford Charcoal's right up the road. I don't know if you know where it is. But they said they're going to start back up and run again. They're cleaning up our place too. But I don't know whether Parsons will ever get back. I don't think I'll ever live to see it ever cleaned up and get back the way it was. It's going to take years, don't you think?

MK: I don't know.

OH: Yes.

MK: What was the reaction here in the community? Did people pull together pretty well?

OH: Yes. Yes, certainly, everybody wants to help everybody they can. But all these people around through the bottom here were adamant, you see? But they helped each other and friends and everything. But, yes, that –

MK: Tell me more about that evening. You went up to your son's house.

OH: Yes.

MK: When did you know that the high water had really come in?

OH: Well, in the evening, the electric went off and the telephones went off and cable went off. Everything about 9:00 p.m. We know then about 9:00 p.m., there was really something happening. So, we come out on the hill right up there and look down in the valley here, what we could see. Then the next morning, on Tuesday morning –

MK: What could you see? Was there a little –

OH: Water.

MK: Was there a little moon?

OH: No. Well, it was kind of light enough. So, we could kind of look down over here.

MK: Was it still raining then?

OH: No. It had quit raining. It wasn't raining right then when we come out. But then on Tuesday morning, we come out up there and look. The water went down, but the main current was over towards the railroad track over on here. It was really coming down. But my place here, we could see under the apple tree out there, some green grass. The water went down. That made me think maybe I didn't have too much water. But then when we did get in, maybe it was on Tuesday evening. We'd taken a four-wheel drive and come in around. I could see where she was in my house there on the windows back there. I haven't washed them windows. You can still see back there when the windows were up in the second sash there. Oh, I don't know.

MK: Well, the Shavers Fork –

OH: This is Shavers Fork right here.

MK: – did this all by itself without –

OH: Yes.

MK: – any help from the Black Fork?

OH: No. Black Fork don't come in until down –

MK: Until Pennsylvania, yes.

OH: Yes. Yes. Well, if we'd had both of them together here, that's why sailing down the river, that's why it was – much water or both of them comes together down below town here, and then it's called Cheat River there, see? Black Fork and Shavers Fork form Cheat River. That was Cheat down there, you see. That's why, well, that water – and well. I just drove down there and looked at the stuff up in the trees, down where our home was there on the river. Oh, it's the islands down through there, the timber's all just laying over that way flat. Great, big trees, just – everything's just laying down like that. Yes.

MK: How come there wasn't any warning?

OH: I don't know. It's a wonder they hadn't warned you on television or gone round and somebody found out and something. But there was no one who got told. Now, it was, I think next week after the first week, I think they come around then and said, "Get out. There's going to be another flood come." So, everybody got out. But the flood didn't come. It didn't deteriorate. But I said, well, if it comes again like that, I'm through. I'm getting too old to do all this work over again. So, I said, forget about it. I'll whip the Tucker Manor or someplace and stay up there. You know where the Tucker Manor is up there, where the old people go?

MK: Yes.

OH: Yes. Yes.

MK: You've got a lot of independence left in you yet. I can see that.

OH: Yes. Got a fighter out here and get things going again. Get the workshop going again and make some stuff. Yes.

MK: What year was it you said you come here to this place?

OH: I was here in [19]54 when that flood was. That was in [19]54 when we had another flood. But we didn't have no water here around these homes. But on down there, they had water from the Dom and Mills on down through Elkins Street and down through that way. They had water down there. We went down there on Elkins Street and carried – taking the Jeep down there, put our hip boots on and carried some of the people out of the homes down there – the old people. But there was no water here. There was plenty of it this time though [laughter]. Yes. I don't know.

MK: Where were you born?

OH: Down below St. George, on a farm. Let's see. There's five brothers and two sisters. There's seven of us. We lived down on what they called Bull Run. Had a home there on Bull Run on the farm where we were all raised there. One of my brothers lives in California and three of my other brothers live here. One lives up here on Quality Hill – First Quality. One lives down below (Lincoln Bottom?) there, next to Huntersville. Another lives up on Bull Run. Got a home up there.

Helen Dotson: Yes [laughter].

MK: Well, he's pretty well given the story. What is your name again?

HD: Helen Dotson.

MK: You live at Limestone?

HD: Yes, limestone.

MK: You were telling me your daughter and –

HD: My daughter lost everything she had. She had all electric home. She's got two kids. They lost even the ground where the house sat. The basement took it out. She was down in the basement doing her laundry, and she didn't know it was going to happen. It never happened here before. She saw it coming down in the basement steps. So, she thought it was time to get out. So, she'd run out and jumped in her car. Her kids and her husband, they got out. But then a couple days, her car gave up. So, they've got it going now. But, yes, it's been bad, I'll tell you. Yes, we're above the water, but still, part of my check goes into her [laughter].

MK: Yes. So, you were saying she was going to get one of these trailers?

HD: Yes. I promised to put a trailer up Smokey Hollow. I don't know if you know where that's at here – over here on the other side of town or not. I don't know. Of course, she'll have to take it from where – she doesn't have no place else. So, she'll have to take it. But I'm sure she can't – she'll have an awful time adjusting to it because as I said, she's a country girl. She was raised down in the country. They've always had a big garden and she canned an awful lot and froze – had freezer. But of course, all that's gone now. So, yes. So, we on the outside get touched a little bit. I mean, it hurts when you see things happening to your kids like that. Yes.

MK: But you said it was one thing for your daughter there. She's young and they can start over. But –

HD: Oh, yes. Some of these older ones, it's going to – you know on Pennsylvania Avenue, there's some elderly people over there that it's going to be so hard for them to ever adjust again. I don't know how they'll do it, really. Like there's several retired schoolteachers here in town. I don't know how they start over again. Down St. George, there was an elderly lady. A few years



ago, she lost her husband. A couple years ago, I think it was, she lost her son. That's all the family she had. She had had a stroke. Well, they had to carry her out because she didn't want to leave her home. So, some of the rescue went in and picked her up and carried her out. So, I don't know if those are the ones that's going to really, I think it's going to have time adjusting. Because now, I think he's adjusting real well.

MK: Yes.

HD: [laughter] There's several of us, looks in to see if he's still here.

MK: What about your daughter's children? What ages are they?

HD: One is just barely three and the other one is twelve.

MK: What were the effects of this on them?

HD: My little granddaughter, she keeps crying, wanting to go home. I went to see them one day this week, and she started crying. She'd want her books. I have given her lots of little books along, and she keeps wanting her books. To some people, those are not really important. But to little kids like that, it is. Now, my grandson, he's older and he doesn't seem to say – he's just sort of rolling with the tide. I really don't think it's really hit him yet because he isn't back in school yet. Or maybe he went back. No, they're not back and he'll go down here to Parsons. I don't think it's really hit him yet. But it will because he had a lot in science. I mean, a lot of science books. I had gotten him an encyclopedia, which he worked with, and science magazines and things like that. Of course – let's see. He wasn't much on music, but I'd gotten him a drum trap. He rode his four-wheeler out, and, I don't know, I think it was through shock more than anything else. When the storm hit, he jumped on the little four-wheeler and took out through the flood. Somehow, they got out, but I don't know how. His other granddad lived across the street. They had to push his car to get it out. When they got out in the car and started, his aunt started crying, wanting her cat. So, somebody had to run back and grab the cat. Of course, she's about thirty years old, but she kept crying for her cat. Then they had to push the car out. Couldn't get it out. So, now, I don't know how people's going to adjust. I really –

MK: So, it was a pretty narrow escape over there, huh?

HD: Yes, it was. But at the time, they didn't realize how narrow. Well, just like now, the water came in through the kitchen and down the stairs to the basement before my daughter even knew it was there. When she saw it coming down through the basement steps, she run then. Of course, there was no time to get anything. You just left. So, yes, that was pretty near escape, but they made it all right.

MK: It took the house just right off the –

HD: Yes, even the basement floor, just took everything.

MK: Oh, it scooped up under the –

HD: Yes. Just took that whole section off. See, the street went down to the river almost, and it just taken that whole corner of dirt and all.

MK: That was right in Hendricks?

HD: Yes, it was down at the edge of the river, down the alley there. Yes.

MK: Did they have any hesitation about building there? Did they think it was too close to the river?

HD: No. Whenever they built there, no, it had never been there because, see, it had been in generations – a couple generations, and it never happened before. That's why they were never worried this time. That's why she was down in the basement doing her laundry because it had never happened before [laughter]. So, yes, there's a lot of strange things. I mean, when you look back, just like one of the neighbors down to Orville Town. Or one of the friends that goes to church with us, she didn't leave her trailer until it started moving. Then she jumped out and left. There's another one down in there that they were in bed and the water started coming up. It was in first floor and no one could get in to get them, and they couldn't get out. So, they went up and spent the night in the attic. So, [laughter], yes, there's been lots of narrow escapes. Yes.

MK: What do you think the Lord had in mind to send water like this? How do you feel about that?

HD: Well, I think that actually, it's sort of telling us that we have no control over nature. We hear the weatherman telling us what's going to happen. But actually, it's just what the Lord has control. We might as well admit it and go with it. We have to do the best we can and have a little trust in him, and he takes care of us. That's the way I raised my family, that they needed to trust in the Lord. So, my kids made out. They're safe yet. So –

MK: So, do you interpret this as that the Lord is mad at us or that –

HD: No, I don't think so. I really don't think that he's mad at us. He doesn't approve of everything that everybody does. But it's telling us that we need to trust in him. No, I don't think the Lord's mad at us. Someplace in the Bible tells you, the more you try to do right, you'll have problems. I think we'll always have problems. We can't expect everything to be perfect. Now, I don't know. I don't know what it says in the Bible, but he's my reference. I teach Sunday school and he's my reference [laughter].

OH: [Inaudible] say about my little six-year-old daughter. We were going down the road one Sunday morning to Sunday school. We get down in the country to Sycamore Grove to Sunday School. We were going down the road and I said, "Well, that weatherman fouled up this morning." She says, "Papa?" I said, "Yes." She said, "The weatherman don't control this weather. God controls this weather." Six-year-old.

HD: He and I teach Sunday school together. I do the teaching [laughter] and when I run into

questions, I ask him [laughter]. He's my reference book. But, yes, we've taught for several years now, haven't we? I don't remember how many, but –

OH: A whole room with [inaudible].

HD: At one time, we had twenty-some of these preschoolers [laughter]. They loved to sing.

OH: Yes.

HD: They've got a little bell that I crocheted a band around her hand and then a bell about this big around on that. That's the way they keep music. We don't play with the piano or anything. They make the music and they sing the songs. Then we don't sing little kids' songs. We sing regular hymns. So, yes, he's the backbone [laughter].

MK: Backbone?

HD: Yes. He's the backbone. I'm just the one that sort of pushes along [laughter]. Yes. His little granddaughter has been down there ever since she was pretty little, and smart. I'm telling you, now, we study the Bible. I mean, we read stories of the Bible, yes. But we study right out of the Bible and we ask questions back. They can tell you pretty much the life of –

OH: [inaudible] commandments. The other Sunday morning, she gets the ten Commandments and she turns them over this way for each one. I said, "Now, listen, class," I said, "I wonder how many I'm going to get to read to them this morning." Little six-year-olds like that.

HD: Some of them, not even six.

OH: Some of them only three.

HD: Yes. They can just barely talk.

OH: Yes. I said, "How many of them am I going to get to read this morning?" You know I didn't get to read to one of them. The little fellows, not even one of them. Thou shall not kill. Thou shall not steal. Every time she'd turn over, they'd tell you what was on that. Oh, I tell you, that's something, isn't it?

MK: Kids are something anymore.

HD: Oh, aren't they?

OH: Yes, sir.

HD: Now, I don't ask questions the same every day. Every time, I ask questions like when was Christ born and which part of the Bible? I change the questions around so they know what they're talking about.

MK: Think a little bit, huh?

HD: Yes. Every Sunday, I add a new fact from the Bible and review back. But I don't review back the same way. I mean, I mix up the questions. But most of it is questions and answers and things like that. One period, we study the Bible. Then we keep them through – well, preaching services. So, church services. We have another hour. Well, we'll read them a story of – fictitious story, little kids' books. Give them a soccer. Then we come back with stories of the Bible. But we've got it planned out so they don't really get bored. They just learn.

OH: Did they have any questions about the flood, those kids?

HD: They have never talked much about the flood. Not yet anyway. Of course, they haven't gotten back in because they're from all over. Some of them from up here in town, some even up more. No, they haven't asked no questions yet.

MK: What do you suppose they're thinking?

HD: I don't know. But whenever they start getting back, I'm going to talk to them. I'm going to ask them. Because those kids, you can ask them any kind of question almost about everyday living, and you'd be surprised what they know. That's where a lot of people make their mistake. They wait until the child is older. You wait until they're older to start teaching them. But if you don't teach them while they're little, you might as well forget it. I think that's where a lot of their juvenile delinquents come. Because I work with juvenile delinquents; the Davis Camp –Boys camp. I think a lot of them, talking to them, they know such a little bit about the Bible, and they're so confused with it. Actually, there's so much that they don't know. They have had to tell each other or find out about daily living, which is not always a good solid foundation. That's where you have to start out real young. Now, my kids, I start them as soon as I got them home from the hospital [laughter]. I started them in Sunday school [laughter].

MK: What's been the response of the community to this flood over the past month?

HD: Well, as I say, I really don't know. My son teaches in Arch Moore Center High School. He's been out here running around all the time helping some place; any place he could. I mean, they help each other an awful lot, what they can. I think really, a lot of people are in shock. I mean –

MK: Still.

HD: – I just really think they are. They you can talk to them – some of them, and they couldn't repeat back to what you said. They'll answer you. They talk to you. But I really think still, it hasn't really hit. That's what I'm worried about. When it really settles down, what's going to happen then? Just like the help that's coming in, it's not going to last forever. Just like these people that don't have a home. They're going to have to come back to earth someday and start living, pick up their pieces. It's not going to be easy. I think that's when it's going to hit them the hardest; is when they start back to everyday living. You take a lot of these people that have lost their homes. Well, they're going to be relocated. They don't like it, but they're going to be

anyway. Their churches are gone or moved or damaged or something. I know my little granddaughter, the very first day that the flood was, she started crying because her church house was gone. It was just moved. I mean, she was just three years old and she started crying because her church house was gone. She didn't think about her house was gone at that time. See, this is right after it happened. She started crying about her church house. Now, I think it's going to hit people pretty hard. It's coming, and I don't know how it's going to ever be. But I think if they just keep helping each other, maybe they can get through it. But I don't know.

MK: What did St. George look like when you saw it?

HD: Well, this happened on Friday, and I didn't see it until Monday morning.

MK: Wait a minute.

OH: It happened on Monday evening.

MK: The flood –

HD: Then the worst part of it happened on Friday evening, didn't it?

OH: No, on Monday evening.

HD: Monday evening? Well, anyway – so, well, how come I didn't have to go to work the next day? [laughter] Anyway, when it happened –

OH: I thought it was Monday.

MK: Yes, it was Monday.

HD: Monday. Well anyway, I went up through Sugarland's up the – but through St. George, it just wasn't there. I mean, nothing. Of course, it was raining and foggy. I was going up one street there, and this looked like a spider web down over my windshield, and here I was under a wire. I got out from under it then. But the telephone wires and everything, electric wires, all was mixed up, down on the street. Of course, I had to go through it anyway. So, there's no place else to go. It's been pretty bad there. The old academy is still standing. They moved it, and it's still standing right there. I said it was strange because there's two trailers right above it moved. The schoolhouse was damaged quite a bit, I guess. But the old academy, they had it raised up. They've moved it, but it hasn't been placed, or the foundation isn't completed yet or what they're going to put it in. I don't know. There are big houses that have just turned around and gone. One big house is over against the neighbor's house. It's really bad.

OH: What did Parsons look like the first time you saw it?

HD: Well, it was quite a bit before I saw it because I couldn't come down in here. When I first saw it, there was one big house, there was a big hole under it where it's washed out under the house and the house went down. I don't know how it happened. It looked so strange. I don't

even know whose house it is. But the whole house had just dropped down in this big hole. But one thing I've noticed is these big holes in houses. It must have had an awful force. Like the gymnasium, the whole big square was washed out of it. Big apartment house, or the apartment house over there, just cut off. Let's see. NAPA, it took one wall out and left a whole pile of mufflers. They were just laying there. But it just took a wall out and left those mufflers laying right there in sight. So, no, I haven't been around Parsons very much. I just come from work, stop and look about him and go one down this main street [laughter]. Try to dodge the equipment [laughter].

OH: Oh, we come down. We drove down off the hill and sat over at the other end of the bridge. The old railroad bridge crossed above the town bridge. I think that railroad bridge saved the town bridge. There are trees coming down there and just come down and hit that railroad bridge. Some of the limbs come right up through the bridge there – that town bridge on the Route 219 and runway up there twenty foot in the air. But I think the railroad bridge with all that stuff there saved our bridge across the river here. We sat there with the car lights on and watched over through the town there. You couldn't believe that the water was in there, though. There was (sweetie?) Harper's garage that just wiped it out and there's a senior citizens building that still stands there. That's why you can't believe it. Just what all had done to it. Now, this railroad track goes down over here. It's higher that way. All this water comes down. That formed a big dam in here because the water couldn't go down through under the bridges. It overflowed back into St. John's Church over there into the basement and up as high as it is gone back up through there. Then when the railroad bridge – or when the railroad track gave away there behind the tech station there – Bob Bishop Station, when it broke through under there, well, all that water went down there, right down through town. It got both banks, got everything down through there. First –

MK: Saw logs and everything else.

OH: Saw logs, cars –

HD: They had logs on this next street over here.

OH: Cars and everything else. It just wiped everything down through there. Yes, saw logs and everything.

MK: The saw logs were acting like battering ram.

OH: Yes. Yes. See, we have a sawmill up in the upper end of the bottom here. They lost all their logs and everything.

MK: Was there a pond like up there? A dam?

OH: Yes, there was a pond up there.

MK: That broke too.

OH: Yes. See, the dike broke and that's why it left all such a force of water come down through here, from down through over there. It just upset everything and houses and everything else. I think old Satan, back of it all. He's telling us, "Better get on the good side of the Lord here now."

HD: Now, Satan don't tell you to be good. He tells you to be bad. [laughter]

OH: Yes. He's back of it. He's the ones that's doing all this dirt. The good Lord, he doesn't do things like that. No. Then another thing, I think this is good. It has helped because people pitch in and help each other. Before, maybe they'd pass along and they didn't speak to each other. Now, they speak to each other, they talk to each other and everything. I think it's something that's got to get the people closer together. I think that's –

HD: Well, it must be pretty close when out here at the high school, there's a lot of them sleeping out there at the high school. Or I mean, at the grade school.

OH: These things out there very much.

HD: Yes. Aren't there several staying out there?

MK: Thirteen, I think.

HD: Yes.

OH: What?

MK: Thirteen still.

HD: Well, can you imagine thirteen people even sleeping in the same house? How many of them sit down and eats together? I know I said I didn't even want two closer neighbors [laughter].

MK: Well, I've been impressed with the spirit up there.

HD: I haven't been up there myself.

MK: These wonderful women, they're cooking in there, and night, after night, after night, after night.

OH: Yes, sir.

HD: Yes. But isn't it amazing how well they get along together?

MK: Yes.

HD: You take a bunch of women, they can pick and pick, especially these that don't have

anything else to do [laughter].

MK: Yes. I think you're right about a disaster like that bringing the –

OH: Yes. Everybody's working together, and bringing the people closer together all the time. I think they help each other. I don't know how it's going to turn out or anything, but –

MK: You think Parsons may be a stronger community then?

OH: It should be, and I believe it will be. I believe people will try to do the right thing.

HD: Where I work, it's supposed to be boys that's been in trouble. It's a boys' camp there. Some of them have worked here in town ever since. In fact, there was some, I think went to St. George today. But a lot of times, the people were afraid to even talk to these boys. Now, they don't know the difference. [laughter] At one time, I think there were twenty-four scattered around here in town, working right along with the people. They never stopped to ask them if they had ever stolen anything or if they were criminals [laughter]. But they just love to get down here and do what they can to help. They're really not all bad boys. But I've heard a lot of people say, "Well, aren't you afraid to work with them?" You're not afraid to work with them. They're just people [laughter]. But that's one thing I have really been amazed at. Because I have visited down with the senior citizen several times. That's one of the things they ask me so many times, is if I wasn't afraid to work with them. But they've been down here. I know there was a picture in the paper not too long ago, just a few weeks ago where the superintendent was in front of the courthouse there. We picked out several of the boys who was right there in the crowd with them. They didn't know the difference. I don't guess [laughter]. But well, they were over here on this next street over here and down here at the feed store. A bunch of them helped clean that out. They've been all over town here.

MK: So, it's been good for the boys to –

HD: It's really good for the boys, yes. But I would like to see the public realize the fact that they're just boys. I mean, they're teenagers, but they have feelings same as anybody else. You don't have to be so afraid of them just because they have been in trouble. Maybe they made a mistake. Maybe they'll never get straightened out. But they're just people and they need the outside company too. But that's one thing that really amazes me, though. So many of your pictures and things that's in the paper, they have these boys. They're right there. Of course, they can't give their names because they're underage. But they're right there [laughter].

MK: Right in the thick of it.

HD: Right in the thick of it, yes. There was one boy that, he had been there in the camp, and he went in service while he was on furlough. Do you know he spent his furlough right here in Parsons? His whole furlough. Then he had –or just about all of it, through the –

MK: Helping with the –



HD: Helping here and he was muddy. The day he left, he came to me to tell me goodbye. He was dressed up in his uniform and he had to go back to camp. I said, "Boy, you look so different cleaned." He was clean [laughter]. Because here, he had been down here with high boots on and all muddy and everything, and had worked right down here, right among it all. I said, "Not many people will spend their furloughs like that from the army." But, yes. Oh, there's some really nice kids there.

MK: Yes, I've done some of them.

OH: That's what I said, it's bringing people closer together. I think that's getting people closer together. I hope it continues.

HD: Oh, yes.

OH: Yes, I do. I hope it does.

MK: What do you think, why do people get so scattered out?

OH: I don't know. They just kind of drifted away from each other, and I don't know. They're not like they used to be when I was back as a boy. When one of our neighbors got in trouble or was sick or something, we all gathered up and went and helped them. But they don't do that. They got away from that and they don't do that anymore. But now, I hope this continues; to help each other. If someone's sick and needs help, that they'll still continue to go help them. But that's the way it used to be years ago.

MK: People didn't wait around to see what the federal government was going to do. They just jumped in.

OH: No, they just jumped in and started to work and helping each other and doing what they could.

MK: Do you think people anywhere would've done that? Or do you think there's something special about people in Tucker County?

OH: Well, I don't know. But I think people in Tucker County, I think they're banded together now. I hope they continue to help each other. Oh, they drifted away like it used to be. They drifted away and didn't care about each other. But now, it seems like they do. They try to help each other. I hope it continues.

MK: Maybe that's the message the Lord is trying to send.

OH: Well, that's –

HD: It could be. The people in Tucker County, I really don't think that – I mean, they care about each other, but you didn't go over to say, "I've come over to help you." But if you would go and ask them to help you, I don't think anybody hardly would turn you down. I know I had a

flat tire down here at the MP lot one time. There was a guy who come over and wanted to know if he could help me. I said, he sure could. He said, but he was a little bit afraid to ask because some people do take it the wrong way. I told him anytime I had a flat tire, I wouldn't take it the wrong way [laughter]. But I think that's the way – I mean, they're there, but they won't extend themselves. But if you go ask them, they seem to be willing to help you. I don't know what it is, but Tucker County has a lot of good people here. They're just an awful lot of good people. I graduated from high school here and then I left after. Then I came back when I had a family and come back here. I've worked all over the Tucker County. I mean, well, I worked –

MK: Where were your people?

HD: Ashby's, down in Limestone. Frank Ashby's my father. But I think that's a lot of it; is the fact that they're waiting to be asked. Our business manager, it's a lady up at the camp. She's worked down here an awful lot, right along with the guys. They've been right down here working. She'd say, "You walk in a house where everything's wet and muddy and stuff." She said, "You walk in and you'll ask them if they need any help." They'll say, "No. They don't need no help." But she said that they just started helping anyway because they really did, there's just sort of something keeps you from asking for help. I don't know what it is. I don't know. I don't understand those things. But it's a lot of pride. The people take a lot of pride in the way they live. I think a lot of them, but I don't know. Just like him, he won't ask for help.

MK: In Elkins, they took the old Montgomery Ward store and turned it into a relief center there. They'd gathered in the office, a bunch of clothing and stuff you've ever seen, and people won't come in.

HD: No. Well, up at the high school, my son teaches up there. He said they had to move the stuff out today. No, it was Monday. I'm all mixed up on days, believe me. But they said – it was yesterday, they had to move the stuff out so they could have classes. But he said that there were just so much more than the people would come in and get. I don't know what it is. But they sent word out to anyone that wanted clothing to come and get it because they had to move it. I guess up at the gymnasium at Davis, they still have an awful lot of stuff up there that's going to have to sooner or later be moved out. St. George school's got a lot of stuff, and these places, and it just seems like people won't go and get it. Just like when they were handing out food here. I told my daughter, I said she ought to go down and get some for her and her family. She said, "Other people need it worse than I do." It was the way she felt about it. Of course, they didn't go hungry. You could bet on that. Not their sizes [laughter]. But she wouldn't come down and ask for anything even though they totally lost everything. The people have an awful lot of pride. When you go to help somebody, you have to be a little careful how you do it. You sort of just walk in and do it [laughter].

OH: Don't act like you're helping them.

HD: Right. Oh no, you don't want to say that word [laughter]. I just like it. I used to say about my son – my kids took their naps. That's old fashioned, but my kids did until they went to school. I had one of my sons, you couldn't say the word nap or sleep. You say, "You go and look at a book." He'd go and look at a book and go to sleep. But if you'd say nap or sleep, why,

they wouldn't do it [laughter]. So, that's why with the people, if you're going to help them, just don't tell them about it.

[laughter]

OH: I have one of my sons. He works for the gas company and he lives right down – did I tell you? On the lower end over there, he lost everything. He had garage, tools, everything he had down there, they're all gone. His house, so, he got to have to put new floors in his house, new walls in his house, and everything. He said he wouldn't get back until spring probably. Yes, that's something. Everything he had in there, gone. Yes. I don't know. Are you going out to sing tonight for –

MK: Yes, I might go.

OH: [laughter]

MK: I might go here and –

[end of transcript]