

Tucker County, West Virginia Flood Audio Recordings
David Humphrey Oral History
Date of Interview: March 27, 1986
Location: Parsons, West Virginia
Length of Interview: 01:05:26
Interviewer: MB – Michael Kline
Transcriber: NCC

Michael Kline: What's the date today?

David Humphrey: The third, the twenty-seventh of [19]86.

MK: March twenty-seventh. We're up here in – what do you call this (FEMA?) Ville or –

DH: No. This is Parsons Overlook. That's what they call it.

MK: Parsons Overlook. What is your full name?

DH: David Humphrey. David Hugh Humphrey. I'm sorry.

MK: David Hugh Humphrey. Where were you born?

DH: I was born in Alexandria, Virginia.

MK: How long have you lived here?

DH: I've lived in Parsons, well, basically 25 years.

MK: How did you find [inaudible]?

DH: Well, my dad was from here. This was his home, my mom and dad's home. Well, my mom's from Buckhead, but my dad was from Hamilton. They've been – they've lived here about all their life actually.

MK: Who was your daddy's people?

DH: Fitz Humphrey and Bessie Humphrey. They're from Hamilton. They lived in Hamilton for generations as far as I know.

MK: Can you name some of the generations back?

DH: Not really. Let's see. [inaudible] there as far as I can remember [inaudible] to CC camps because granddad always – he worked in the logging camps, well, back before they had cars.

MK: Your granddad's name is?

DH: Fitz Humphrey.

MK: Your dad.

DH: His name was Floyd C. Humphrey. But I guess they've lived there – or dad lived in Baltimore for a few years. And they told him if he didn't get out there, that the pollution stuff, that was going to kill him. So, they moved from there, back here, and he worked in the mines. That's right, worked in the mines until he got hurt in the mines. Then he had 13 operations on

his back in five years. So, he pretty well retired even then.

MK: Where was he working in the mines when he got hurt?

DH: Alpine Coal Company, out in Baird or out next to Baird. Let's see. [inaudible], he worked out there as a miner – or welder and mechanic for them, for as long as several years as far as I can remember. Grandpappy worked – like I said, he worked in the woods. They did a lot of logging and cleared out a lot of the country here for people to live, CC camps hauling logs out, whatever.

MK: Was it a big family, you kids?

DH: Well, there's – my mom, it was just me. But my dad was married before, and I've got three half-brothers and a half-sister. They're all married and living all over. Well, I've got a sister living down here up on the hill and a brother who lives out towards Elkins here a little ways. All right here in town though. Then my other two brothers, one lives in Charlestown, one lives in Baltimore.

MK: So, did you finish high school here?

DH: I quit in eleventh and twelfth grade, and I went in the Army, spent four years in the Army, come back out of the Army and been doing mechanic work and anything I can find right now.

MK: Did you get a career?

DH: No. I was in the war during the Vietnam era, but I never did make it there. I was in the States the whole time. I did mechanic work for them, Fort Belvoir, did some paint work on cars and stuff like that, jeeps and stuff, but mostly did mechanic work for the 92nd floating bridge, putting up bridges and stuff. But that's been twelve years ago or longer. Right now, I'm unemployed. I'm looking for work.

MK: What did you do mostly, since you came back from service?

DH: Mechanic work, that's what my dad – well he did it for years, mechanic and welder. I learned a lot of it from him. Then I learned through the service. I went through two different courses in the Army for it. I guess, I can – I know how to do it, part of it.

MK: You like mechanical work.

DH: Yeah. I like to make them run, cars or trucks. I've worked on some of the motorcycles, but not that good much.

MK: Good mechanics –

DH: Hard.

MK: – are in demand. I guess you're having a hard time right now.

DH: Well, I was working part time for (Sweetie?) Harper down here, off and on. He'd get a contract job, and I'd help him out on it. But his garage there kind of got washed away. So, he's in – back in the business where – beside Kidwell's. But they're trying to find a place, I guess, where they can build a new garage.

MK: His business got washed away?

DH: Yeah, grade-leveled it. We found air compressor probably 4 miles down the river here. We got it back, but it took him a few weeks here.

MK: That was in the big flood?

DH: Yeah, it washed clear away. It was bigger than that – or it was about the sizes as (counts?), I mean that long. It washed probably 4 miles or better down the river. We found it down here, but the tannery ponds, I guess it got caught in a brush and then when the water went down, set down. It was about 50 feet from the water – from the main body of water, a river then.

MK: What do you remember about that?

DH: The flood?

MK: Yeah.

DH: I remember we were sitting at the bottom of – quarter of the hill here, the bottom of the Red Hat over here at Red Light, at the moose, the old moose. I was talking to the owner, (Bobbi?) McWilliams, about the VFW. And I told her that the front door just washed off the VFW. She was telling me, "Yeah, it was a sound building. It'll maintain." I said, "All right." About that time, we heard a crash and turned around – looked back. We couldn't tell from where we were at, but you could tell it was coming from the direction of the VFW. We were looking down at front street there, and there went a big freezer, full freezer, at the intersection, floating through. I was telling Bobbi, "There goes your freezer out of the back of the VFW." She was telling me, "That that's not my freezer." I was telling her, "Well, there goes an empty keg that –" or it might have been a full keg, I don't know. But it went floating by right behind the freezer. I told her, "Don't tell me that isn't your keg too [laughter]." But it blew the great big – blew a great big hole out the back wall and blew it right on through, worsted all through. Everything got pretty well ruined, I'd say, tore the whole place down. Because what was left wasn't really worth having because it was a brick and block building. I guess they're in the progress of rebuilding that maybe now. But then we've been in the water there. We've been down at the hospital. I've been down trying to save my dog, and it was no way getting out there to him. I even tried to swim out and had things running into me and beat me around. So, I got up – back out of water, get back to shore, just had to watch him drown. There was no boat, nothing around available to – because all the boats that was out was saving people.

MK: Where was that?

DH: Right down here by Jim (Falls'?) store there where Frank (Ours?) the sign shop is, right behind Frank Ours' sign shop. Finally, we got up to town. I was up Shavers Fork that day and been up working on my first cousin's A-frame. Anyway, it rained us out. So, we went to the house. We just got in and was getting dry, go sit around and eat some supper there and watch some TV. Some people come up and tell me that they had to push water at Porterwood four-wheel-drive trucks. So, they pushed water up around the headlights coming to Porterwood. We let you know. We just laughed at him because we thought – I was telling him, "Oh, you're crazy." He's telling me, "No, I'm serious." So, I told him, "Well, if it's that high out there, you take me to town." My car was down there. I just put another motor in and stuff, so it wasn't legal for the road right then. And so, I was walking. Anyway, we come to town. We got to town about 8:30. In front of Kirsten's down here, the headlights of the truck were clear underwater, Kirsten's. He was going to take me around the block. I was telling him, "No, just back me up [laughter]." We stopped and backed out of it, and then the headlights came back on when they were out of the water. We went back up the street. Anyway, we ended up going down to my place for my dog. By the time I got down there, my trailer was just all but underwater. The car, the only thing I could see was the top of the rack, about 3 inches of the top of the rack on the car, out of the water, when we got there. So, we decided we'd go up and see if we couldn't get a boat from the Fire Department. And they had – all theirs was out. So, I know a couple friends of mine that had a canoe. But we couldn't locate them because they were out busy helping other people too. By the time we got back down to my place, the car was clear underwater, and the camper was just all but underwater. And the dog was still swimming around on his chain, as high as the chain would let him go up. He just got tired. After a while, he couldn't keep up the stroke with the water. Current was real bad. Finally, it just drowned.

MK: You say you tried to swim out?

DH: Yes. There was wood, and, well, there were four-wheelers floating by and three-wheelers floating by, all kinds. You name it, it was coming through there. We found a big propane tank here, the next day, and picnic tables and just all kinds of stuff, stuff from the shoe factory, shoes. I don't know what all. It's just anything and everything. Brush and everything else all tore up. But he was there. The next day, the dog was laying right there by the tree where he was tied to the tree the next morning.

MK: What was running through your mind when you were standing out there watching?

DH: Just trying to figure out the best way to try to save my dog. But there was no way for the water and the current. My friends, they didn't – there were a few of them. They didn't want me going out in there after him because they were afraid that I would end up dead along with him. So, we just had to sit and watch him die. Well, after he died, we wondered if we couldn't see him anymore, we just, more or less, rode it off and left. That's when we come back up to the (Moosehill?) there. We watched that – I can think of what his name is. They have the hard – or they had that furniture store right there by the red light on the right. He had that big truck set around back here all the time, where he hauled furniture and stuff in. We watched it float up and down to the backstreet there, let it float from up there [inaudible] two blocks, float from up the block, turn down below the half price store, and then float back up the street and just looked like

a pinball machine. Go over there and hit something. Then the water takes it back across the street. It hits something. It was one side. The next morning, when the water went down, it was an EMP lot sitting on its wheels. But it took it all around there that night. It even hit that lawyer, Cooper's office down here. Hit his awning and drain spout on the roof. It [inaudible] banged and did one story almost off the ground where it beat it up. But we went home – well, didn't go home, but I went up to the people's house I was staying with that night, up on Spruce Street. We've been watered there all even. We just got in and got dried off, got dry clothes. One of a friend of ours, Steve Sturms, he came in and asked us if we would – me and Dave – well, Dave and I – asked us if we would go and help look for Amy Moore and her dad. We think Alan Roberts was out in the Blazer waiting on Steve. "Okay," we told him, "Yeah, we'd been out all night, but we'll go back out with you." So, we went back down, and we went down Holly Meadows and looked for them. We looked for about six – probably 6, 7 hours there. About 4:30 a.m., 4:15 a.m., 4:30 a.m., I seen this trailer. Well, I couldn't tell what it was. It was just something white, and it was clear across the water. I don't know. I'd say from like the big T over the two paths where the monument would be, about that far distance. Anyway, my light was just about dead from using it all evening. So, Amy's dad there, he had a real good light, the light was up real bright. And I was asking him to shine the light over here on this white thing. It looked like a house. Then come to find out later it was a trailer. But it went down there and hit this grove of trees and busted all up. Part of it was there, and part of it wasn't. So, we decided we was going to go home and then come back in in a couple of hours and look for daylight. I was telling him, I said, "Well, we're dead men out here all light. So, it isn't much use to go home." We just get home, and I know – I told them, "I know me, if I go home, I'm going to go to bed. I'm going to be there for a while." So, I was, "Well, let's just look a little bit longer and see if we can't see someone or somebody." So, we decided we're going down the river. We're still shining the light on that house over there. We waited until we got down straight across from it. We were shining on it. We looked around. We couldn't see anybody. Them guys had been talking all along about still going home. So, we decided, all right, everybody decided. Well, we'll go home. We turned around and took a couple steps to leave. We did have the lights over on that trailer, probably five to 10 minutes, off and on and back and forth. I think Amy was asleep, maybe not. But I've never actually got to talk to her to ask her. But I think she was asleep at the time. So, I think she was in – they said she was almost in hypothermia and in shock. She got into a tree and climbed up in the tree, about 4 feet out of water, and was holding on to the tree. About 8 or 10 feet away from that trailer was what we were looking at. You couldn't see her in the tree, but you could see the trailer. Anyway, she yelled, "Hey." You could tell it was coming across from the water over that way. So, we still thought she was in the trailer or the house. Anyway, we yelled at her. We asked her – we couldn't tell whether it was a woman or man. We were asking them who they were, or how many are they over there. She yelled hey at us three times. That was it. She wouldn't talk to us anymore. So, in the meantime, me and Alan, we took off. The Blazer, it was up the road there, about a mile back up – in the bottom here, about 1.5 mile, something like that. Me and him were – well, he ran all the way up to it. I ran almost up to it. I ended up having to walk all up. Anyway, he went and got the Blazer and came and got me. We were going to go to town to get the Fire Department. In the meantime, while he was out getting the Blazer, there was another truck come out. He'd stopped them and told them about it and sent them to town to get to the law and the Fire Department and whoever else they could find, I guess. So, we took the Blazer back down as far as we could get down next to the water and shined the lights of the Blazer across to the – towards the house. I'm

back sort of there where the banks, so the headlights could come up real high, put it on high beam, shine it over there. Still couldn't see anybody. We knew somebody was over there. So, Don Goss, his boat had come down. Most of the emergency people there were tired and – from all the fighting and people they'd been saving all evening there anyway. Then that and the water being so high and mad out there, they were scared to get out on the boat. So, Danny Goss' dad, Don, he's probably 70-some years old. I told him, if he – it's his boat. If he wasn't scared to take it and go out there, I wasn't scared to go with him. We'd go out and see if – who's over there and see if we can save them or whatever. Okay. So, we got in the boat, started out in water. Well, it took about 8 or 10 of us to get it off the trailer. We got it in the water. Me and him started crossing. The only thing we had was (Force blooms?) flashlight. Nice flashlight but it's the only light we had that had lights on the boat or nothing. We start to cross, and David Sturms was yelling at us. I couldn't hear what they were saying from the water roaring and the motor roaring. So, I told him to shut the boat off. So, he did. They were telling us that we – the telephone lines or the power lines had got up around the motor on the boat, and we were dragging the poles down the river. We were taking them right down the river. The ones that were washed out or been knocked out, we were just pulling them down the river. We didn't – the boat just could even tell it in the water. But as soon as he shut the boat off, the boat went back up the river, about four or five boatloads. Then when it stopped, the cables fell off the boat. By that time, we were free flowing again. It took him a little bit to get the boat started. It didn't want to start right back up. In the meantime, we were drifting down the river. The water was probably running 55 or 60 miles an hour on the water. We drifted up within these two rooms from the grove of trees where she was at. But she was on the other side of it, way on out. I thought we were going to hit the trees broadside. I thought we were going to hit it about 55 or 60 miles an hour, broadside, when he got the boat started. We got it in gear and just drove right across. But there were house trailers and, like I said, you name it, cars and trucks and anything else that that happened to be in his way was coming down through there. But we got lucky and got over and saved her. She was in a tree, about 25 – 20, 25 feet from that house trailer. She told us later that was the house trailer, so that the – we found that out the next morning when the water went down. But she said she was in the tree when it came down there and hit the trees beside her and just blew apart. Part of it went down the river, and part of it stayed there. But she didn't know whether there was anybody in it or not. But it destroyed it. They were just like one room – two rooms. It looked like it was standing on its end because it was flipped up in the air, because of the trees. But I had to hold the rope while Danny's dad, he had to get around the tree while I had to keep the boat from fishtailing back and forth. I had to hold it probably 10, 15 minutes over there anyway. Well, I've been – out on water, never tried to rescue anybody. I didn't know what the heck we were even doing out there. We got out there. She was in a tree, say, here, and there was a tree out in front of her, twice the length of the boat away from her, up the river. But it was sort of offside. But anyway, I told him just hold the tree there, and we pulled in beside it. As we got in beside the tree, they had a 400-foot rope on us. The Fire Department did put in on the front of the boat. They were leading us out, and we started out. Okay. Well, we ran out of rope. So, I had to pull all this rope into the boat. Like I said, it was still tied to the front. So, I pulled about 20, 25 feet of the rope off the front of the boat, out, made a big loop and then went upside the tree. I threw my arm around it and tried to reach around and grab the rope on this side. Well, when I got the rope, pulled it back, about that time, the current shifted the boat around. It dragged me almost out of the boat. The only thing catching me was the heel of my shoe, was the only thing I had caught in boat. I was out of the boat. I was

hanging on the tree. He had to start to boat up again and pull the boat back up to where I could get my feet back down in the boat, which was only as high as this chair maybe. It's that high. The little square hole that's down in it, I stuck my feet down in it. Then there was no place for me to tie the rope off to on the boat. There were no hooks or nothing on it. So, I had to hold it. I had a yellow raincoat. Like I said, I had that looper here, so I just pulled the loop down over my arm. See that scar? That's where I had to – if I hadn't had the raincoat on, it would have been worse. But I had to hold the rope under here, hold my arm up, and then just let the rope lead out, let it go across my arm to flip the boat back far enough to where it would go into the forks of the tree where she was at. Then I had to keep the boat from going back and forth like this in the water, while he got up on the boat, had to stand up on the back of it and then help her out of the tree and get her down into the boat. I mean, while he got her into the boat there, safe, I asked him if the boat would start. He said, "Yes, it'll start." I said, "Well, start it, make sure here, before I turn loose of the rope." So, he started it and put it in gear. It pulled up. I said, "Okay. Well, when I tell you [inaudible] oh, it'll be all day getting her back over to the shore. All right." So, I turned loose of the rope and told him to go. We came back to the shoreline and got her out of the water. Well, I got out of the boat into the water there, got her out. Then I didn't realize I was hyper, I guess, for being out there, fighting all that water and everything. Tried to pick her up and got her in my arms. I didn't realize I was that tired. My arm started shaking. So, I had to hand her off to another guy that just came up there. I gave her to him, him and another guy, and they carried her from there. I went over to the ambulance. They put her in an ambulance and took her to the hospital. But then we had to get out and get the boat back out of the water and get it back on the trailer. I was down there for a little bit longer. I got home, probably 7:30 that morning. We've been out in it all day, well, all evening, from about 8:00 p.m. until 7:00 the next morning. But we've been there, five or six hours, in the water [inaudible] water up to my neck, out into this place, looking for – thought maybe she might be at a tree or – anyway, her dad told us that they was in their house watching TV. So, there had been nobody down to tell her. They knew the water was coming up, but they didn't think it was anywhere near flood stage. So, they said they're watching TV. He said they had to look over the front door, and water was coming through the front door, in the house. So, him and his wife, I guess, they grabbed whatever they was going to take. Amy, he jumped in his jeep and tried to come out from the bottom down there. It's like a dike since it's up so high. Anyway, with all that water running over the road, she couldn't tell where the road was even at. So, either he ran off the road, or it washed it off the road. But when it did, it flipped it over on its side. So, they got out and got up on top of the Jeep and was up on top of the Jeep, for I understand, for about almost an hour before anybody knew that they was out there. They called the Fire Department, or someone had. The Fire Department come down there and tried to get out to him and rescue him there. They ended up about – well, from the time we had three rivers that come into that. You had Shavers Fork and Dry Fork. Then you had Blackwater up here that come in the Dry Fork here at Hendricks, right above Hendricks. I guess Dry Fork was coming down through. Then it and Shavers Fork met. Then the other river too, all three of them combined to come through Holly Meadows there. They said it was about a 3- or 4-foot wave. The water was here, 3 or 4 feet high, come down and hit him. When it did it, rolled the Jeep over again, and throwed Bob and his wife, threw them towards the shore. He said Amy was on the Jeep then. But some of the guys from the Fire Department was there. They told me that she wasn't on the Jeep, or they couldn't see her. That might have been it too. She might have been behind them or something. They couldn't say for Bob and his wife being there. Anyway, Amy said she got washed.

Whenever she came back up out of the water, she was going down a river. She ran into barbed wire fences and things ran into her in the water. So, she ended up on a picnic table for a little ways. Then she ended up on a roof, either a roof or a porch floor or something. It took her almost right into that grove of trees. When she had seen this tree coming up to her, she got up on the porch floor and stood up and jumped up in the air and grabbed the limb. As she grabbed the limb, the porch roof, whatever, hit the trees at the base of the tree and just blew it apart. Went down in the river like toothpicks. She climbed the tree and been in the tree for hours. I told Steve, up until just a little bit before, that I didn't have too much hope of finding her. I mean, if we did find her, we figured she was going to be dead because she couldn't swim. She's, I guess – I'm just guessing. I'm not sure. She's probably 18, something like that. But she couldn't swim with a leg. But she washed her probably 3 miles down the river or so, before she got in the trees, from where she was worst off in the Jeep. But there were all sorts of things, you wouldn't believe it. I'd seen probably a 40-foot mobile home earlier. It was one they put in the back of a pickup truck with a fifth wheel, a camper. I'd seen it hit the town bridge down at the river bridge. It just wiped it right off the frame. It blew apart. It looked like it had a bomb in it. Boom [laughter]. But it went right on through, right on through underneath the bridge, the frame went, and the rest of it went through underneath too. It was gone

MK: Was Amy holding on pretty tight to the tree?

DH: Yeah, she was –

MK: [inaudible] getting her hands on –

DH: Well, yeah, he did, Danny's dad did, Don. But I couldn't help him. All I could do was hold the boat and keep the boat from moving around to keep from throwing him out of the boat or having to throw maybe both of them out the boat while he was getting her out. Then she was scared to death. She felt safer in the tree than she did in the boat, which I can understand that. The tree had been there for years and years, and there we were in a boat [laughter] with 50-mile an hour water running down through underneath of it. I never really thought much about we were out on the water. So, it had me stretched out there when I was holding onto the boat and when he pulled me out of the boat. I was looking back up the river. Then I got to thinking, "Well, heck, here we are." I'm paying attention to trying to hold on to this tree and keep the boat in one position, and he's over there paying attention, trying to get her out of the boat. There could have been anything that came down through and hit us. We didn't ever know that it was going to hit us until it hit us. Then I got to work trying to watch the water and watch him too. There were logs coming through and everything else. But we got lucky, got her out, and got the boat out without getting anybody else hurt or anything. But I guess some people weren't as fortunate that night.

MK: How did you maneuver in the river without a light with all that stuff?

DH: I don't think it'd be like that. Because it has taken out a lot of the businesses and the stuff has been here for years. These dikes they rebuilt up there, I don't think that will hold either. I believe when spring comes, it'll take it right out again. All that land has been there for years and years, more, as far as I can remember forever. Then it washed it out. They're going to man-

make it and put it back. I don't believe it will ever stay there. It might stay there forever, but I've never seen anything like that that night. As far as I know, most people out here have never seen it. Some of the older folks had seen the flood there in [19]55 or [19]54, wasn't it?

MK: [19]54.

DH: Yeah. They've seen that. But some of them I talked to said it wasn't nowhere near like this one. Back before my dad – he's been dead here (year better?) Anyway, he was telling me whenever they was kids, probably I guess in [19]54, they used to have a swinging bridge up here that went down over the hill, went across the river. His mom and dad whipped him a couple of times there for being out on this bridge. The water was up real high. Come flood stage, they've threatened them a couple times. They just whip them for getting off the bridge. So, they'd get off of it and mess around there a little bit. Mom and Dad weren't looking. They'd go back out and get on the bridge go out and watch everything float down the river on the bridge. They said they had been watching this big old red barn come down the river there for miles or not miles but about a mile down the river. Anyway, Mom made him come out and made him get off the bridge again and said he was the last one off and said, he just stepped off the bridge and heard a snap. When he turned back around and looked, that red barn had hit the bridge and took the bridge and all down river. If they had been on it, they'd went down the river right along with it. But it didn't take out [inaudible] that time. But it took it out this time. It took out, might as well say the whole bottom there at Hamilton. Everything was in the lowland. It took it out, took them down the river. I guess a lot of people was fortunate. For it to come at 3:00 or 4:00 a.m., there had been a lot of dead people in this town, not only here but everywhere. Because a lot of the older folks would have been dead. They'd been in their beds or asleep. I don't think they'd ever know what he had until it was too late. But I guess it was just lucky coming at the time it did come. We went down in tannery the next day – well, a couple of days after, looking for Harper's compressor. We found cars and trucks, some four-wheelers that Lambert's had up there and found a couple of their motorcycle, trailers, and just stuffs thrown all over, beat to pieces. Some of them were up. Some of the cars were completely buried, just parts of it showing out of the sand and mud and rock and whatever else, brush. I don't think there would ever be anything like it was Monday morning. It's starting to look up now, a lot better than it was.

MK: It takes a lot to put it back.

DH: Yes, still bad [laughter] any way you look at it.

MK: Just trying to put myself in your place a little bit and trying to understand whether I'd have been able to get in that boat like you did. I know I'd never been able to tell it because I'm not the style of man that you are. In my mind, you're a hero. There's no other way to describe it except that. I was just wondering, what went through your mind when Don Goss got the boat in the water?

DH: I never really got scared until I was out on the water. It didn't scare me at all until we actually shut the boat off, and I realized, when the boat didn't want to start, and I thought we were going to hit the trees. That scared me. But I'm a good swimmer. I thought, "Well, take his life jacket off and swim for shore." I was pretty sure I could make it to shore, but I wasn't sure

whether he could. Because, like I said, he was 70-some years old and getting up there in the [19]80s pretty good anyway. Actually shouldn't have even been out there on the water, at least should have had somebody else that was younger, I thought. But wasn't my boat to tell him, "Well, you can take your boat and get out of here [laughter]." But we worked out pretty good. We got her out there.

MK: He handled the boat well, did he?

DH: Oh, yeah, he's good. He knows how to run the boat real well. They use it. They fish with it, take it out, and take it up on the lake and stuff like that and go out and fish. But had been any smaller boat, I don't think we'd have maintained the water because it was ways beating the boat, things floating by, like I said, sticks and you name it. Anything you could think of that wasn't tied down, came down the river. They had stuff hit that Holly Meadows bridge down while we were down at the bottom looking for her. It just sounded like bombs going off, stuff hitting and busted up and going through. You could hardly see anyway except whatever you could see with your flashlight. Whatever got out of the view of the flashlight, you couldn't see it. But we went through the dike up here. I walked across the dike up there, and water hit you a little bit at the waist. I went out. I went over to this one house over there though. It's built like on a (little low?) in the bottom, and there was water completely around this house. But the garage floor was completely dry. He had his like a Gravelly tractor there. A couple of lawn mowers was just in a little building. Everything was just right in place, just right the way they had left it. Never hurt that house at all. Never got a bit of water in that house, but water completely surrounded it and wiped every house out right around it. But luckily, it didn't get hit. But the house was built up a little low, and right behind it, dropped off down over to the bank, I don't know, 8 or 10, 12 feet, whatever. But the water was up within two car lots, I'd say, in the house. But it hadn't got into it, didn't get into it, I don't guess, all night. But a lot of the other people down there were not fortunate, some of them washed their houses clear away. My ex-father-in-law watched his house clear away up Hendricks. His son, their house was built right above it. It even washed the ground that his house sat on, washed it all away, ground and everything. You couldn't even tell that there was even a house or anything even built there. I guess, [inaudible] and him, I guess they spent the night up in the woods, Norman and him, because they couldn't get out. He was trying to take things out of the house. Norman saved things that was in the house that he wanted to save. Then he was telling me that he was in water almost up to his chest then, in house, before she could get him out of the house and get him to stay out of the house, she did. But there wasn't a place for him to go except up on the hill. He went up on the hill area there. All the mountain streams was coming off of both sides of them. So, they couldn't go to the right, and they couldn't go to the left. So, I guess they went up there and stayed in their old father's shack or some kind of an old shack up on the hill, a little building maybe the government had up there or something. They spent the night up there in the rain and whatever else, storm. They lost their dog up there. It washed away. It tried to cross one of the creeks when they tried to cross and holding onto trees and stuff, tried to get across the water. They said the dog tried to swim across too. But the last time they'd seen it when it went down over the falls, down over the cliff, blown out of sight of them. I guess they've never seen it since, washed it away and killed it somewhere, down through there.

MK: A horse?

DH: Lost a horse, yeah. I don't know whether they ever did find the horse.

MK: [inaudible]

DH: St. George had cows up in the bridge. They had stuff in town here on the St. George bridge the next morning. The stuff that you put in your gas tank, dry gas, found 4, 5 jugs of that or plastic bottles of that down on the bridge. Trailer wheels looked like a spare wheel off of a house trailer, laying right in the middle the bridge. Logs and brush and rocks and everything else laying up there. Plus had a Ford truck right below the bridge, brand new Ford truck washed away from somewhere right there at the big white house, I think. It was laying down in there. Then Amy Moore's dad down there, I guess they lost three of their vehicles, lost her car, his wife's car, their Jeep, washed everything down the river. I don't think I'd want to see it again. But if it did have to come again, I hope it's in the daytime. That way you could see what's going on.

MK: I guess there wasn't a whole lot of warning.

DH: Well, it wasn't no warning for – actually, Shavers Fork area was like [inaudible] up there at the house, there's this creek right behind the house. It was high. But I'd seen it that high before. I mean, I didn't think much about it when it was high. But I'd never seen the water get up like it did down there. It just seemed like all the mountain streams must have come up. Then that hurricane or whatever, come off the coast, that didn't help things, moved it right in, more water than what the rivers could take at the time.

MK: I heard you mention a wave of water.

DH: Oh. So, you had right below Parsons here, you've got Shavers Fork come down this side. Then Black Fork and Dry Fork, like I said, intersected Hamilton. So, you've got two rivers coming into one there at Hendricks. From there, down, it was two rivers coming down one. They come down this side of the town. Then they had Shavers Fork come down this end by itself, plus all the little mountain streams and the cracks and whatever, all the way up the valley through there, where it runs into it. Then right below Parsons here, it all intersects in the three – there were three rivers, into one river. That's when it went through all – how they met is there were three rivers went to Holly Meadows down there and actually from there on down, to (Roseburg?), St. George, and all that, and three rivers going down one. I guess we really did a lot of destruction on down through. Randy Carr – we call him Truck – lives down next to Hannahsville there. They had a brand-new brick home. It was a pretty home, just destroyed. It's not even there. The only thing there now is just the foundation the next morning. They said there's bricks and part of the home, all the way down through the whole bottom there, behind their house or behind where the house was, the next day. Then all them campers and stuff that are in Hannahsville, it took them all out, washed them all down the river. There were probably fifty campers and maybe even more, down in there. Some of them were pretty nice campers. Heck, some of them were like mobile homes washed them away and eliminated them. Anything and everything got in its way, it took it out. Well, it took the old St. George bridge out.

MK: Did you do any praying that night?

DH: Yeah, I did. I'm not church going. I don't go to church. I mean, nothing against it. That's one of the finer places in the world, but I just don't do it myself. I don't go there. I don't believe you've got to believe in God – go there. It's just a building like any other building. But it's a special building, I guess. But yeah, I did a little praying when we were out there in the water. I'm a Pepsi drinker. Earlier than even we were up there in the bottom. We've been out there for hours. Well, I was about to die of thirst, sitting there, thinking to myself, "Boy, I just love to have a Pepsi." If I had my car or something up there, some kind of transportation, where I can whip back to town, I would've whipped back and gotten a Pepsi. Anyway, while I was in there thinking, "Boy, I'd like to have a Pepsi," I was flashing the light around. I just happened to look down. About 3 feet out in front of me, comes this 2-liter Pepsi floating by. I don't know where it came from. I pulled it up out of the water there. Fancy. All right. Took the lid off of it. I was checking the lid underneath it, see if it was – any dirt in it or anything. It was clean underneath, outside. It even had the fizz and all when I took it off. So, I drank. [inaudible] was there, looked over, I drank that 2-liter Pepsi out there in the middle of nowhere with water up to here, wishing for a Pepsi, a bottle floating by. I said, well, you couldn't ask for anything better than that, [laughter] right at the time.

MK: So, you got a couple of prayers answered.

DH: Yeah. It gave me a Pepsi. I couldn't believe it. So, [inaudible], just sitting there, thinking to myself, "Well, I'd really like to have a Pepsi," happened to look down, and it was floating right by, reached down, picked it up.

MK: That's great. Have you speculated at all about God's role in this flood, if God had any role or –

DH: Oh yeah. Well, I don't know what the reason why. Maybe the rivers were getting too dirty, so he cleaned them out a little bit, moved stuff that was there, out, and put more stuff in. But I know it moved rocks up Dry Fork there. Well, that one rock girl straight, that rock, half as big as this trailer, and I don't think it sits there no more. I used to be able to go down a good swimming hold, dive off there, and swim and whatever else. It took it out. It's not there anymore. I heard the one up at [inaudible] is still there. I haven't been up through there yet.

MK: There's one up there.

DH: Is it the great big one?

MK: Yes.

DH: Yeah, I heard it was still there. I guess it's probably beat pretty good too. We walked up to Richford Road. I can't think of what her name is, Mary – I know her first name, Mary. They have that little store going into Elkins there on the right, just as you right there, Highland Park. He had a cabin up there and a pavilion there, the pavilion. We walked up to it. The cabin's gone. What is kept below, it's gone too, along with his trailer, took it out, washed it out, and then you

get down on the old river road down there. Washed that old lady's house out too. It destroyed it.

MK: [inaudible]

DH: Yeah. The red house she had there, it took it down the river. But it left the pavilion standing up at Mary's house or the cabin, the pavilions there, but took the picnic tables out from under it, but didn't tear the pavilion up at all, just like it was before. But they had a great big pair of wooden steps, real heavy, oh, I don't know, half as long as this trailer, built down over the hill to the river, out on this big, flat rock. It was a nice place there. But it's just really dead like everything else. Never be the same [laughs].

MK: So, it really changed the looks of the countryside.

DH: Yeah. The rivers are all changed. Shavers Fork, I lived on Shavers Fork for 8 or 10 years when I was younger. The water up there now, some of the places where the water used to run on right side of the river coming down, now it's running on the left side of the river. Then the right side's almost dry from where it used to be the main part of the river. They took out (old Channel's?) house up there, just blew through his house, blew walls out and windows and whatever else out, destroyed it. There's another right below it. There were two little prefab cabins or whatever they built. I mean, they're nice cabins, but they don't look like they're built, nothing like the old homes were built. But they stayed, and the old home just eliminated it. Then right below it, there was another big house there, a two-story house. It was an old house. Moved it off the foundation and took it probably 500 yards down to the bottom or maybe a little bit more. Then it just looked like it was a great big hole out and dropped the first floor, just dropped it right down this hole. If you were going to go in the house, you'd have been almost walking into the second story window, going into this house, where it just washed out around it and dropped it back down in, sunk it. But it washed it off the foundation. It washed it, well, like I said, probably 500 to 600 yards or so down the river and sunk and destroyed it. This old fellow who lives right across the road here, Steve Miller, he had two trailers, washed them out, eliminated them, and destroyed them. It's all changed. I'm just waiting until the water warms up enough to where you can get in an inner tube, get your fishing pole, and just start way up the river and go all the way down the river on an inner tube or raft or whatever you want to go in. I'm going to go in inner air tube. I believe that'd be the best way to go, to figure out how the water is, and what's in the water. Where Tennessee is and everything else, some of the rivers, probably half of them won't even fit to be in. The places where you could swim, or the places I've been swimming biggest part of my life, probably won't be able to swim there. They're probably filled up. Other places will be real deep again to be swimming holes. Everything's just gonna be changed.

MK: You have to get reacquainted with the river.

DH: You have to go get reacquainted with it. It'd be just like a new river now, same area and all, but the water will all be different. It's all going to be laid out different.

MK: Some of your neighbors right here, do you know any of their experiences and what became of their homes? You mentioned Steve here.

DH: Well, Steve, the government, I guess they were supposed to take it off up there. Anyway, they were supposed to take the doggone thing off, and they didn't. He says [inaudible]. I don't know whether [inaudible] – was okay and stuff like that, but I never asked her too much about the flood because I didn't think she'd really want to talk about it. She's probably just glad it was over with. It's still a mess out there.

Male Speaker: What are your plans now? Any? You're looking for a job.

DH: I am looking for work. I need to work real bad. Well, if I don't get to work here, I'm going to lose the trailer. Because I ain't going to afford to be able to keep the payments here up on it. Then I don't know what I'm going to do. Because I'll be back out on the streets, be out sleeping in my car again, I guess.

MS: What is the arrangement with the payments on these?

DH: Well, right now, I've got to pay my electric and my gas and my water, cable for the TV, if you have it, telephone and stuff like that, if you have a telephone. But I had a little bit of money put back, but it's just about what [inaudible] go on now. They sent me a paper yesterday, wanted to know about buying a trailer, for me to send it back in, if I was interested. So, I sent it back in, just see what kind of paperwork they're going to send me back and see how much they'll want for the trailer whenever the time comes when I want to sell it or whatever. But they pay the land. They pay for the land. The trailer, it's more or less free rent for me, plus all the people here. They get all free. All you've got to do is pay your utilities on it. But then after so long a time, you've got the option to monitor for your own use.

MK: Would you like to do that?

DH: I'd like to buy it, but I don't know whether I'm going to be able to afford to buy it.

MK: Or just give it to you.

DH: If I was working – that's my big problem right now. I need to be back to work. I asked these people. I've been out to the unemployment office and all that. Some people called me from out of Romani and told me that for me to be down there at the courthouse, two Wednesdays ago. So, I showed up. They didn't show up. So, I called them up. She was telling me that they work for the Natural Resources or that the Natural Resources was the one that was going to be paying for their job was one of the river crews here. I was supposed to run parasol for them, 12.20 an hour. Anyway, but the Natural Resources had run out of money. They were trying to get a grant or a fund from the government. So, until they get that, they couldn't hire me. They contacted [inaudible], 4, 5 times, for me to go to work. Then once I get there, they tell me, "We're not hiring because we ain't get the money to pay." Okay. So, that kind of knocked me right out of that. So, now, I just – as a matter of fact, I was going to go to the unemployment office today and see if I couldn't find some work or see if they couldn't find something. But I've been to all kinds of places and opens around. They all tell you that they do their hiring through the unemployment office. So, you go to the unemployment office. They tell you, "See you over

there, but don't do no good." Just if you've got a job here now, you either hold on to it or you're without a job. That's just about the way it goes. But if I had the money and stuff to leave here and go somewhere and start over again, I would have left. I mean, I love Parsons. I've been here, like I said, 20-some years. Most of my friends are here. Family and relation and whatever else around that I've grown up with, most of them are here. But a lot of them left after the flood. A lot of them had to leave and, again, wherever they could go to find a place to stay.

MK: So, where would you go?

DH: I can't afford to go anywhere. That's why I'm still here, to be truthful with you. Money's just tight everywhere, I guess. But I know down south, there are jobs at Hilton Head down in South Carolina, whatever their jobs over down there. It seems like there'd be a lot of work here, but there's not. Then the shoe factory going out on strike over here. So, that's probably another 150, 250 people, however many people they got working over there, that's how many more now that's not working. So, there's not really no jobs here actually.

MK: Where are your sympathies in that story?

DH: The people's got a lot of grievances, but I think they've got to hold on to what they've got. At least they're working. I'm not. So, I can't really say too much about it. But for right now, they're not even working. So, I think they're just losing out. I think they're going to lose out all the way around on that. They might not. They might get something out of it. I hope so. If it goes out, I understand that they can't put another business in there for up to a year or a year and a day or something like that is what some people was talking, if they go out because of the strike. They won't be able to put another business in even in that building over there. There are no other businesses here but the charcoal plant. The private businesses, the stores and stuff, but actually that's nothing if you don't have nothing for people to make money at. They won't be able to buy nothing at the stores that are already here. This town's – it was pretty bad before the flood, and it's got a lot worse since the flood, about like a ghost town [laughter], only with people still here.

MK: But people are drifting away.

DH: Yeah. Well, they don't have any other option too. They've got to go somewhere. They've got to make some money to live on. I've been talking to my mom. See, since my dad died, she moved into that Buckhannon Manor, and I moved into the camper. Then I lived in a camper, off and on, for 5.5, 6 years until the flood. As a matter of fact, I was living in when a flood wiped out. But it's bad for everybody, just some more than others.

MK: How about your neighbors up here in the other trailers? Are their spirits pretty good, or are they beginning to see a lot of despair?

DH: Some of them are probably still pretty bummed out about the whole situation. But what is there to say about it? There's not much you could do about it. It happened. They said it's never happened before. I mean, it happened in fifty-three there, [19]54, but it wasn't nowhere near as bad as this. They said it got up into the first tree above the (Arab?) side where Sweetie Harper's shop was, got up in the back streets, but it never made it to other streets above there. It was bad.

It'd be a long time before everything gets straightened back around. Like the [inaudible], there's no grass down there, really nothing at all. All that's there is mud and dirt and rock, lots of rock. The nursery bottom here, I figured, it's gone. I figured they'll about put it back in. That's a rock garden. They bring the equipment in here and clean the rock off and refill back in with filler dirt to make anything out of it. Harpers over there, I don't think they're going to let him rebuild back because it's right beside the river. But his business has been there for as many years as I can remember. If they do let him build it back, they want him to build it 4 or 5, 6 feet, whatever, higher off the ground than what it was originally. [inaudible] up in this place like this. You can't get nothing like it. He gets the big trucks and whatever else up there; it'd have to be pretty healthy floor to keep something up there like that. It destroyed his building. It took it right down almost to the floor. He lost a lot of his tools and you name it. Well, he had people's cars set up front, didn't wash them away, but washed them down the street there and just ruined them. Ruined everything for everybody.

[end of transcript]