

Tucker County, West Virginia Flood Audio Recordings

Vittie and Thelma Lipscomb Oral History

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Length of Interview: 01:11:10

Interviewer: MK – Michael Kline

Transcriber: NCC

Michael Kline: Tell me your – sit back over here.

Vittie Lipscomb: Name?

MK: Tell me your full name, yes.

VL: My name is Vittie Lipscomb.

MK: Do you have a middle name?

VL: Well, just an initial. My wife is Thelma I. Lipscomb.

Thelma Lipscomb: Iona is my name.

MK: Tell me a little bit about your people back here that night.

VL: Well, there was a large family of us. There were ten of us altogether. There was a large family. They're all deceased now, except five of us. My father and mother and five of us kids are all deceased now. We were poor as could be [laughter] when I – you'd take back during the depression. That'd come up during the depression. We had new ground, and we used to raise stuff and take it to Thomas and Pierce and Ben Bush and Kempton and Huckster. Like green beans and sweet corn, cabbage and potatoes and stuff like that. When the mines were running good, those foreign people, they had to come out there and just grab the stuff. A lot of them, they would buy it on coupon, like Pierce. If their husband was in the mines working, they could run down to the office and draw out coupon or chip on that day and buy stuff off of the truck from – a lot of them bought stuff off of the truck like green beans. They'd can it and keep it. A lot of them just bought for the table use at the present time. Well, one place, I walked about four miles to get to school. Lived all the way back in the mountains. My father, he moved out and bought a place closer to school. Then that made it a little more convenient for us.

MK: What was the name of the place you lived all the way back?

VL: Pine Run. You can go to Pine Run up there.

MK: Four miles from the school?

VL: Well, I lived on the (Knotts?) property way back up in the mountains. The government owns practically everything through there now. But I had to walk down and then walk up to what was called the Hickory Grove School, which is nothing there, but just a couple of foundation corners anymore. Everything was torn down when growing up.

MK: Do you remember much about your school days?

VL: Oh, yes. See, one teacher taught all classes, and it was just sometimes a kind of a confusion [laughter], one teacher teaching all classes. But I went to school during World War I at Lead Mine. I remember the World War I soldiers coming back from World War I. Then my dad, he

bought this other place, and we lived up there. Then he bought a place in (Higher Run?)there where my school wasn't too far away, a couple of miles. But we walked right here in town. People right here, they have run their kids right up here to school in a car, not even a quarter of a mile.

TL: They weren't dressing warm enough.

MK: Where did you figure in that lineup of kids?

VL: I was the oldest one.

MK: The oldest of ten?

VL: I was the oldest one, yes.

MK: Do you remember their names? All their names?

VL: Oh, yes. Elmer runs a store over here. He was next to me then Velva and Lena and Odes and Ocie and Merle and Verla and Zelda. She died when she was four years old. Then this one died at birth.

MK: But your mother was a hardworking kind of a person?

VL: Well, they were both hardworking, but my father died in World War II. He was dead and buried a month before I ever found it out. I was in the Hürtgen Forest in Germany and got my Christmas mail came in. So, I got a letter from my wife and a letter from my mother telling me about it. Yes, I hit the Omaha beachhead, D-Day plus four. I got caught in that storm. If you remember on that invasion, there was a big storm came up. Well, I got caught in that. I had to sit there and that old LST was banging the waves around. You'd think part of the time that it was going to flip clear over. But I didn't get hurt. But I saw several of my other buddies get it. Oh, I got slapped around with shrapnel, but none of it cut me. We were flying around. You didn't know what time you were going to get it. You see flying in the trees and the old blue smoke just boil out of it forward and go in right to the side of it.

MK: Hard for me to imagine something like that.

VL: Yes.

MK: So, you fought there from D-Day right on through?

VL: Yes.

MK: Where did you finish up at?

VL: I finished up on the Elbe River. They wouldn't let us cross the Elbe River. Some of the infantry had crossed. But the Russians were right down in Berlin. Let's see, what were we? We

were about twenty-some miles, I think, from Berlin, there where I was at. The 83rd Division had thrown a bridge at a cross. One of the armored divisions, I forget which one it was, crossed the Elbe and we held ours there. They got theirs shot out. But when we got ready to come home, we were coming home by point system. I was sent over into Czechoslovakia there with the 8th Armored to come back with the 8th Armored Division. The points figured out how long you'd been in the service and how long you'd been overseas and whole lot of that stuff. We got ready to come back and we were up in France there ready to get aboard the ship. This *Marathon* boat strike come off. There we sat thirty days waiting for a boat to come home on [laughter]. So, I hit the New York Harbor on Armistice Day – that eleventh day of November, wasn't it?

TL: Yes.

VL: Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. From there, they sent me down to Fort Meade. We eat our steak dinner about 2:30 a.m. [laughter]. We got off the boat.

MK: So, what did you do once you got back home then?

VL: Well, I started a – there was a furniture company, Lowe [inaudible] at Kent. They had closed down, and they had new, overstocked furniture. They had closed down, and they had a law where I was supposed to report to the employment office. So, I did. They recommended I contact them for a job, that there was going to be a [inaudible], and it was going to be opening up again. One of them was a major, and the other one was – I believe the other was a colonel or something like that. I forget the one's rank anymore. But they did open up. But I went to work in another place, and I worked for a while. Then I worked for them, eleven and a half years, wasn't it?

TL: Something like that.

VL: Yes, eleven and a half years. Then they moved into the south, and along came Kingsley Furniture from La Porte, Indiana. They were originally in Chicago, but they put up a plant there. They gave me an offer. So, I moved out there, and I worked for them, about two and a half years. My renters moved out, and I had my home there in Ravenna. My wife says, "Let's go home." So, we moved back, and I applicated aluminum siding for a while, putting on aluminum siding all over Cleveland and Akron and Warren, all around. The company had a salesman, and they sold it from out of Bedford. Weather-tight was the name then. I think they changed to Norandex. We'd go there and pick up the job and take it out and put it on. So, a lot of confusion in that. Maybe we'd be in Maple Heights two days, and then maybe we'd go to be in Akron on the next job. The unions were always after us. You've got to get a permit to work here. You've got to get a permit to work here. Well, we belonged to the Carpenter's Union. We belonged to the Teamsters Union. They always had given us trouble. But you've got to get a permit to work here, and you've got to get a permit to work here. So, I kind of got tired of that job. The fellow I was working for, winter came, and he said he was going to Florida and spend a few months. I went to the employment office, and they said that they thought they had an opening for me over at Kent State University. So, I went over there, and I was dormitory maintenance there for twelve years up until I retired. They didn't want me to retire when I retired. They said, "You can work here until you're seventy." I said, "I'm already sixty-six." I said, "I'm going to be pushing

up daisies at seventy." [laughter] So, I retired, and we came down here and bought this place.

MK: What year was it you retired?

VL: Oh, nine years ago.

TL: [19]77.

VL: [19]77 or [19]76?

MK: So, you were at Kent State when the fireworks went off?

TL: Oh, yes.

VL: Oh, yes. Yes.

MK: Tell me about that.

VL: You see, they were burning down the ROTC barracks. They had an [inaudible] again for some reason. In the summertime, Kent State, they have –

TL: Workshops.

VL: – workshops from all over. Well, liquid crystal, for instance. They had them from Germany, from Brazil, from all around. They would come in for a workshop on this particular subject, okay? We would furnish the blankets and the pillows and stuff for this workshop. So, in North Barracks, we had it full of blankets and pillows. Not just one that I was telling you about. There were about three different union groups would come in. There was a pilot's association would come in, and there was a number of workshops just you could hardly get cleaned up. So, that was another one right in during the summer because they were booked heavy. In this North Barracks, they had their pillows and their blanket stored there. The campus police came to me and told me to move that out and get it out of there. He said he was afraid that it's going to burn it all up. So, I was there loading these up with another fellow too, when the shooting started just right out from me. It was too bad. A lot of them were asking for it, but a lot of them were just there for an education. This thing happened where they crossed over to the classrooms and back to their barracks. It happened in the middle of that. It caught some people who were not at fault. They were just not at fault. But there were others who were asking for it. They were throwing everything they could at the National Guards and cussing them – a bunch of them and just carrying on. A lot of them were asking for it. A lot of them were there for an education. That's all they wanted, was to get an education and get out of there. It was too bad. It happened in this particular place. We'd seen there'd most likely be trouble and my wife told my son to stay home. He stayed home that day.

TL: I hated to have him go to work that day too [laughter]. I didn't know I was going to have a husband home that night or not [laughter].

MK: Yes. Well, you've seen some rough stuff in your time, haven't you?

VL: Well, there were a lot of ups and downs.

MK: So, then you retire and come back here?

VL: Well, practically all my life since I came back from the service, I'd done a lot of work for myself. My wife would have supper ready as quick as I came in from my days' work. I would go out and do carpenter work and Ravenna is, oh, more than half Italian. Once they found out they could trust me, the whole business was on to me about they wanted me to do this and do that for them. Paint their house, roof their house, hang doors and ceiling tile and floors and, well, (building?) bathrooms. A lot of them, when they moved in there, they just had a stool setting in the basement. Was never enclosed. It was just a stool because the contractor at that time running all the houses he could run in, it seemed like he had ready sale for them. There were no bathrooms built in a lot of them. They just set a stool right in the basement. Well, a lot of those, I built bathrooms up. I'd have to build on the outside, but build it up and build it like a bathroom should be, you know? Those Italian people, once they find out they can trust you and you're not out to beat them, they really pass the word around [laughter]. So, I worked until dark, and after dark, a lot of times. I've had a lot –

TL: 10 p.m. sometimes.

VL: We raised our families, and the bill collector's never been at my door. I never had nothing possessed for not paying for it. When we bought something, we paid for it. As I say, I've had some of my ups and downs. One morning, I fell off of a two-storied house I was putting gutter on. Well, I doubt if you can see it at all, but there's a part of it. I'd just opened her up, slammed down through there, and put plates and screws in there and run the bones together. Three months' time, I was back to work. A colored fellow there ran his Cadillac in a ditch. Seven months later, he still wasn't back to work. His leg just wouldn't heal. But I always healed quick.

TL: Everybody couldn't understand why he didn't have his pay cut or why was he earning a wage every week, two weeks? He'd had saved up his time off and –

VL: Yes, I've never taken any sick time.

TL: – sick time, yes.

VL: There was a lot of colored people who worked there. What was it? Four days a month, I believe you got sick time. Quick as they'd got a day, they'd take it [laughter]. I never taken any sick time. When I broke my leg, well, here it was all built-up [laughter].

TL: He went back to work before that time was even up.

VL: Yes.

TL: The Lord just healed his leg, that's all. Then in July, he went back and had the plate taken

out and healed right up. We came right down here, and they took the cast off his leg.

VL: Oh, I told my wife, I said, "When we retire, I'm not going to just sit down." I said, "I'll have me a shop, and I'll tinker around with things." So, I had me a shop there. I had a band saw, two table saws, and I had a radio alarm saw. I had a joiner, and I had a table sander, plus a lot of hand sanders and tools and stuff. They all went down the river. I tried to clean some of them out. I cleaned out some of my drills. I drilled about three holes with one on each –

TL: Guns of smoke.

VL: – blow up. I drilled about a dozen or so, while the other needed blow up. You can hardly clean anything up unless you're professional at it, and you got the ways of doing it, like electric motors. Now, my electric hand saw, I'm still using it. But it complains a lot about it. It doesn't sound right [laughter].

MK: Looks like it's getting you through, though, on that job.

VL: But there were a lot of people who brought their stuff in here for me to repair.

TL: He'd have twenty-one chairs at a time out here in front that he'd fixed up over the winter. Set them out in the front there, and people would come along and look at them.

VL: I had a building where my building is at. It was 18-foot long and 12-foot wide. I had it jam full of frames and stuff that I would buy at sales. So, I'd have something to work on in the wintertime and get them fixed up. Down the river, she went. They busted up. A lot of them just fell apart. Where there was plywood, the plywood just let loose. Well, I'm trying to build up again and –

MK: Keeps you busy then?

VL: Yes.

MK: You remember that day pretty well, I guess when – had it been raining a long time?

VL: Well, this was a freak thing. It had been raining. But this came, the most of it, from up in the Dolly Sods area. It split there with a big portion of it going down into the Greenbrier River, catching Moorefield and Petersburg and Marlinton. Then it came this way and went into the Allegheny River also. So, it was a kind of a freak thing. If the Corps of Army Engineers would've had the rivers cleaned out, a lot of it wouldn't have backed up. It would've went on by. But a lot of it backed up. When it began to let loose, it came with a lot of force. Right here, I had 4-foot in my upstairs, and I had a big house. John remembers my house. I had 4-foot of water in my upstairs, 16-foot of water right out here. The first thing I knew, both of my cars were underwater. They came over and got us in a boat. We were up in the attic. It had come in the first floor, and I told my wife, I said, "I don't think we have to worry too much." I said, "It's going to cause us here to get new rugs and new carpet and stuff like that." First thing I know that it was up the steps, and we were up the stairs. Here it came upstairs, and we ended up in the

attic. I heard somebody hollering, and we had the flashlights. I came down, and I stuck out through the window. They were back over there. They came over and got us in a boat. We went out the upstairs window. That third trailer from up here was a classroom at the school. It hit the corner of my house. If it had been over a little bit, it just would've jammed right in where we were at. But it hit the corner of the house, and I felt it give. I noted it knocked it loose from the foundation when it had done that and had knocked my water connection's loose and my sewage and all of that. So, we finally began to get in the boat, and Thelma, she says, "I can't swim." [laughter] The fellow in the boat, says, "Come on. I can't either." [laughter] So, we went through there. This Cassidy house was already swinging around when we went through there. That was 12:30 a.m. that night. We got over along the wood area. That road over there was clear covered. We went down through there and came out down there. At about 3:00 a.m. that morning, the water began to recede. You could see it in the road over there in front of my brother's store where – the litter was laying there across the road, and it was dropping down. Water dropping away from the litter. We went up to the Church of God. We were in the Church of God over there. It's up on the bank. At about 5:30 a.m., I went walking around here, and I saw my house was gone. So, I went up the – when the FEMA people and the SBA came in up here, I was one of the first one in the first bunch to go through up there. They just continued trying to sweep me under the rug and was going to do this, and they were going to do that. They'd let me have a trailer, but I'd have to go up to Blackman Flats or I'd have to go up on Quality Hill. So, they just kept giving me that old story. Nobody came around to see me. My house, everything I had, was washed out. The Red Cross came because they gave my wife a clothing allowance and \$50, I believe it was, for groceries. They came down to check out to see whether I was handing them a line or not. They didn't tell me that's what they come for, but that's only business [laughter] to check it out to see whether somebody's handing them a line or not. I know what they come for. But the FEMA people never came around. So, I went uptown up here. I was up there about 10 a.m. I heard somebody say that I'd called FEMA. Then they just kept passing the buck. I heard somebody say that Moore was due at about 2:30 up there with the director over FEMA. I said, "I've got nothing to lose. Right, here's where I'm going to hang here. What was it? About 5:30 before he got there, wasn't it?"

TL: Yes.

VL: So, I said my little piece. Moore said –

MK: What did you tell him?

VL: – wanted the assistance. Well, I just forget just how I had it word for word. But I said, "I got a piece of property down there." I said, "It's over an acre of ground, gas on it, electric on it, water on it, sewage on it, all the conveniences right there." I said, "FEMA is trying to make a mountain out of a mole hill. They don't want to set a trailer there. They want to move me up in Blackman Flats or up in Quality Hill up there, or someplace and put me in on a little lot." I said, "My property is there, and there's where I want." I don't recall just exactly what words I used. But governor Moore said, "Get that man's name," to his assistant there. His assistant wrote me – well, he called my wife and said, "Moore wants a trailer in on your property before the first of the year." Then they began to talk to me. Up until then, they were literally sweeping me under. They didn't want to put a thing here. Well, here's where my property is. I was expecting around

two hundred quarts of strawberries down there, and I got [laughter] about that much mud all over. Mine won't get a strawberry. But here's where my property is. Your situation is real nice there for you to buy the trailer and all the convenience and everything [laughter]. They wrote me a nice letter. But in the meantime, this thing has changed hands, you see. It originally was a bunch of fellows from California. Then it went from into Philadelphia. Then they fired a bunch of them from the small business outfit just –

TL: Just the other day.

VL: – the other day. They should because they're a bunch of bums of – ever since the first day that they were up here dealing with them, and they just kept sweeping me around. So, I finally got the trailer. If they don't want too much for it, I'll probably buy it. I'll go over the top of it with rafters and build me on a room here and build me a porch out here. Something like we fixed the clinic up there, John. I'll fix me a place to live. So, I don't know what they want for it. I filled out their application, and they'll be letting me know before too long probably. Because I can't see them hauling all these things back to Kentucky in Atlanta, Georgia [laughter] for some months. Social security and retirement. They said, "You're making too much money for a grant. Yes, no grant. Yes. Well, that there's –

TL: Well, they asked for credit cards.

VL: Yes,

TL: But we don't have any.

VL: That's something my wife and I, every time they ever send us credit cards, we clip them to pieces and throw them in the fire.

TL: They couldn't believe that we didn't use credit cards.

VL: [laughter]

TL: We never did. We lived within our income.

VL: Well, most credit cards, when you get down to the base of it, people are absolutely crazy to use them because you end up paying an interest on them and so on. If you need money, you'd just well go to the bank [laughter] and borrow it there [laughter]. Know who you're dealing with because on credit cards, you pay interest on them. That's the usual thing. That's a pretty high interest; nineteen, twenty, twenty-two cents.

MK: They're bad.

VL: On a lot of the credit cards. So –

MK: Did you have a lot of fear about the flood afterward? Did you have dreams about it or did you have –

VL: Well –

MK: Did it linger in your mind?

VL: – I lost a lot of sleep because I lost everything I had, you see. I was wondering how I was going to get things put back together. My wife was wanting to go back to Ohio. I told her, I said, "We've got to get something on our lot here." I said, "We'll lose our pants if we don't." So, I just kept a – after the flood, we went up to the YMCA. We had a summer cottage up there that we stayed in. That was cold. There was water even running out from under the floor of it. It was damp. The heat was up in the ceiling. It'd only get about 4-foot down, and it'd meet the cold coming up [laughter]. So, it was quite cold up there. But this trailer has been fairly convenient for us. There was one morning, I froze up there at the sink a little. We had some cold mornings. It toed out without busting up the pipe.

TL: One month's gas bill was \$115, just for the one – I don't know what the next one will be, whether it'll be for the full month of February or not, but –

MK: Could you tell me your full name again?

TL: Thelma Iona Lipscomb. I'm from Ohio. Born and raised in Ravenna, Ohio.

MK: How'd you meet a fellow from Lead Mine?

TL: Well, he come up there and worked at the Arsenal. My girlfriend and I went out to – outside of town, they had a portable roller-skating rink. We went out there on our bicycles to watch the roller-skating. Vittie and his brother and two friends came out there and parked beside us, and we were just chit chat. I didn't even get his name. We didn't learn anybody's name. We were just talking there, and we left to – I had to go home and get ready to go to work that night. That was in July. Well, then in November, I came down from Cleveland, Ohio, home, and my girlfriend was having a shower. I walked across town, and he and his boyfriend were parked in the car and saw me. Well, this boyfriend knew my girlfriend and knew where she lived. Well, they went to get her. She called my home, and I told her where I was. So, then she came over to where I was, and I met him then. We found out the names and all that. I guess we made a date for that Saturday night, didn't we?

VL: I don't remember.

TL: Yes.

[laughter]

VL: Forty-some years ago.

MK: Heck, don't you remember anything about it.

[laughter]

TL: Well, we went on to the movie that night somewhere. I said, well, I had to go back to Cleveland on Sunday night. He said he'd take me up. So, all four of us went and took me up to Cleveland. He just kept coming back to Cleveland all that winter. We decided to get married then, and I quit my work. I came home, and he brought me down here over the 4th of July. I met his family, and then we were married in August of 1942. Then he went to the service then. Kathleen was born in forty-three, and he went in the next – well, that November after we were married, he went into the service in 1942. Kathleen was born while he was in the service. He came home for her birth. Then we bought the home there on Jones Street that we sold.

MK: How'd you feel about selling out there and coming down here?

TL: Well, I went to Tennessee to be with – I thought, "Well, I'd like to go to Tennessee to be with Byron." Because that would be out of the bad weather. But he couldn't take the heat. So, we came down here. Going across that bridge on the way home, I said, "Well, your mother's going to have to be taken care of eventually." I said, "You took care of my mother, then I could be willing to live up there." I make friends easily. I said, "We could come down here if we find a place." He got home and looked in The Advocate, and our home we bought here, was advertised. We wrote them a letter. She gave us the amount they wanted. Well, then she called us, I believe, and said that somebody else wanted it. Then she called back about 10:00 p.m. one night and said, "Well, ask him if he was still interested." He said, "Yes, at my price." She said, "Well, it's yours if you've got the money." He said, "Well, I'll have the money down there in two weeks." That's how we got it. The Lord led us all the way, buying the property and selling ours up there and moving down here. We moved in our van every two weeks. We'd come down with a load of stuff after we got the house. We moved into it, came down on Labor Day with a bed and a table and some chairs and the electric hot plate and a few dishes. We camped out and started rebuilding the house. Paneling it and –

MK: Pioneers.

TL: Well, yes, it was like coming to a camp [laughter].

VL: I reboarded it. The flooring in it was old.

TL: Paneled all the rooms ready to put up the ceiling tile in the kitchen, ceiling tile in the pump room. We had a bedroom upstairs we hadn't done anything with. We were just ready to finish up –

MK: S you were pretty happy here.

TL: Yes, we were enjoying it.

MK: Nine years you were here?

TL: Well, it was eight years. We were in our ninth year now. Last December, 17th, we moved

down here.

VL: I had one room, it's a big room right off, I had that thing full of furniture all the time.

TL: That was the living room that we fixed up that we –

VL: A lot of people would stop in and see.

TL: It didn't have heat in it other than it's a small gas stove if we wanted to – but we didn't live in it.

MK: So, what do you remember about last November 4th?

TL: Oh, it's nothing that I was afraid of. I still wonder why I stayed with him in the house. The Lord just impressed me to stay with him. It just didn't seem as it was going to go any higher.

MK: Well, start back earlier on and tell me the whole story.

TL: Well, about 5:00, the boys came over and wanted us to leave with them. He said, no, it wasn't going to be that bad. Well, all of a sudden, the dog, (Goldie?), began to bark. I said, "Something's the matter with Goldie. You better go see." Here she was pushed up on the wood, the water crept around her neck. He waded out waist deep in the water and loosened her and led her to the house. She'd come in through the back door and just shake the water all over everywhere. The water was coming in the back door then, and he shut the door. Then we were walking around there. We turned on the lights, and the cat was looking down at one corner, just looking at something. Here, the water was coming up through the crack of the floor. The cat was watching it [laughter] coming across the floor at him. Finally, I picked him up and sent him upstairs. Took Tinker upstairs. But he tried to coax Goldie to come off the (diving port?) to get upstairs, and he had to go get her and pull her to get her up there. We all stood up there at the head of the steps, watching the water come up step by step. But I could see that they were going to have to come after us in a boat because the water got up to the top of the step and the top of the door. It was too deep to try to get out of the house then. We just stretched out on the bed up there. The lights had gone out. I had a flashlight, and he had a flashlight. I guess both the dogs and cat were on the bed beside me. He'd taken off his shoes. I had my boots on, but I raised up and put my feet down, and the water was up to almost my knees. I said, "Hey, we've got to get upstairs." So, we ushered all the animals up to the attic. He threw up some bedding, and we were just ready to stretch out there on the floor to wait until morning until the fellows came with the boat to get us. Vittie yelled at me, "Which window opens up down here?" I said, "The one behind my swing machine." So, he pushed it over and raised the window, and I came down. I had to go back and get her. She wasn't coming with me. I had to go back and grab her and pull her to me. So, we came down. I got to the window, and I said, "I can't swim." He says, "Well, come on." He couldn't either. I tried to lift one foot, and I couldn't lift one way to get out. My boot was full of water. I finally got my foot out into the boat. I told Vittie he had to push my other foot out. I couldn't get it out the way. I was cramped. I rolled over a little bit, and he came out in the boat. Between the three flashlights we were showing around, they showed us where we were going. But then I went over to the Church of God. Then the girls were all

screaming and yelling when they saw us coming. So, we got over there at the Church of God and stayed there until – well, Elmer came over and said it was going down. So, he said, "Come on over to the house." So, most of us over there. So, then we went over to stay with Elmer the rest of the night.

MK: Who came in the boat?

TL: Darrell Heckler and his son, I guess. They start –

VL: No, that's not his son.

TL: Well, the boy that lives with him anyhow.

VL: No, Thelma.

TL: Oh, I thought it was. I don't know. It was dark.

VL: He lives with June Davis's daughter.

TL: I don't know. Anyhow, there –

VL: I know his name, but I can't think of it.

TL: I didn't know for sure who it was. I couldn't tell.

MK: What was it like being on the boat? Was it still raining then?

TL: I don't think it was raining then. I believe it had stopped raining, hadn't it?

VL: Well, there was a considerable bit of litter that was washing by. I was afraid something was going to hit us, like a big logging and upset us. But as we were going through here by these pines, this house right over here was swinging around. It was already swinging that house around. So, it felt good when I saw the brush over there again in the hill [laughter]. I knew I could get a hold of a limb or something if something big did hit us and the upset the – rowers.

TL: As rowers in the – it was a flat rowboat. They were paddling in that swift water with those brooms as oars. They lost them somehow. The boy went up, and they set in our attic and got a board – a couple of boards. I don't know where he got them up there. I thought they got bed slats [laughter], is what I thought they'd gotten. But he came flying back, and they took those boards as oars for that boat to get us.

MK: Good Lord.

TL: The water was just swirling around and around.

MK: Big stuff floating by?

TL: Yes.

VL: Oh, yes.

TL: I was looking out of the attic window with my flashlight when they yelled at me. I could see a boat just floating and circulating around and around as it came floating towards the house there. I thought we'd had to go out that window in the attic, but we went downstairs instead. But the Lord was really with us all the way. Because everyone says, "How could you get out in that boat?" I said, "I don't know. I just leaned on the Lord and said, 'Let's go.'"

[laughter]

I just praised the Lord when we hit the land over there behind the store.

MK: Leaned on the Lord and said, "Let's go."

TL: Yes.

MK: Well, now, what actually happened to your house? It wasn't in the morning where it had been the night before.

TL: No, it was sitting down here in the field.

VL: Washed it down on Alan (Sheehan's?) property. There was a willow there about that big, and it washed it against this willow, and this willow uprooted. It runs the house up on this willow, one end of it. It's kind of damaged and stayed there. But it tore the whole end out of it. It had a valley, and it busted the valley open. Then it had a utility room.

TL: The porch was broken off.

VL: It was broken off. We ran into this willow and just mashed it all up. So, it was all in a cramp condition over there. I tried to salvage some of the windows, and I did salvage some of them. But the majority of them were bound in there. You couldn't get them out. So, it was clear off of my property, and it set on the well of Alan Sheehan's property down there. Well, the FEMA people said they wouldn't set him a trailer with my house on the well. So, I just signed up with the state to tear down, and the state tore it down. I had a lot of stuff in there I'd like to have got out, but I had no place to put it. No place to keep it. So, they just down with a big bulldozer. It went down one side and just tore a little tore, and right over and down the other side. Went right around behind and just upset it and ran that bulldozer right up and down over the top of that, and just broke it all up into kindling wood in no time. Yes.

MK: Broke your heart along with it?

VL: Well, it –

TL: I was glad to see it go it because it was such an eyesore.

VL: It was all of my property, and there, it set up. It was all busted up. As I say, it was on his well down there, and they said they wouldn't set him a trailer as long as that was on his well. So, I didn't want to – but if it had been on my property, I would've salvaged a lot of stuff in it. I'd have just taken my time and tore it down. There was a lot of good two by eights and two by tens and stalk stuff like that that I could do with.

MK: How far did the water move it?

VL: Oh, they had –

TL: Over 200 feet.

VL: It's down where that other trailer is. It sets down there. It must have been about 500 feet or more, washed the plumbing off of my property.

MK: How do you think you would've fared if they hadn't got you out there in a boat? Could you have ridden it out?

VL: Well, we'd had to ride it out.

TL: Well, I think we could have because it didn't tip the house over. It just took it over and set it down.

VL: It didn't get up in the attic. So, we were in the attic and the water didn't get up that high. But it was four foot up in the upstairs. All of our beds were floating. Bed quilts, everything like that. I raised a big garden. I got over an acre here. I raised a big garden. I had two freezers and my wife had frozen a lot of stuff. The Friday before the flood, I'd went out to 135 Meat out at Oakland, and I bought \$70 worth of meat. I had an order to come in from southern states of –

TL: Peaches.

VL: – peaches, strawberries –

TL: And cherries.

VL: – and cherries. [laughter] We just got that in our freezers, and the first thing a freezer will do as quick as the water gets up is flip right over. It flips right over, the door flies open, and here goes that stuff everywhere. We lost the meat. [laughter] We lost all of our vegetables. She had a lot of stuff canned.

TL: I had about thirty-six to forty-two pints of green beans lost completely. Applesauce, about two bushels of applesauce that canned. I had dried a good two bushels of sliced apples because he likes them in the winter to eat. They were in old coffee cans and plastic – the cans you buy these pretzels in or whatever. I had them in the kitchen cupboard, and they lost all those. We'd

bought apples down in Georgia when we were down there.

VL: Yes, they had all kinds of bulletins out to don't use your canned stuff once it was flooded. They had pop – that pop up there, Dr. Acosta's office, it sat down there in the hall. They said there was actually mud in on top of that that went through. It was sealed, and it went through. You could see the mud right in it. There are several places like that. That mud as [laughter] I have shown you that level.

TL: The canned fruit was sealed up with those rubber lids, disks. There would be mud inside that can on top of the fruit and vegetables.

VL: It'd still be sealed. You just can't comprehend how it gets in there, like, that level I was just showing you. But it gets everywhere. I'd paneled my house down there, and it had – well, originally, they used a kind of muslin. They went over. They put this muslin on, and they tacked it on. Then they would paper over that, and this muslin would keep the paper from cracking. That was one of the older types of paper. Then once the muslin was on, well, then maybe paper two or three times over the other paper. Well, that's what had happened in one room. I think I went down there, and I needed some switch boxes. So, I just sort of tear them out. I was going to give them to somebody that needed them. I started to tear them out. I'd taken the plate off, and I just tore off the whole panel. I began to pull this paper apart, which was pasted on there, and there was a layer of mud under every layer of paper through there. There's a layer of mud settled in on that. It was just unbelievable. But that stuff got everywhere. The camera –

TL: I had cleaned off a record. My record player, cleaned it and washed it with soap. Dried it, and here was a gray film all over that record. My daughter said I should take a baby's hairbrush and go in the circle with the record and maybe clean it out. But I haven't done it yet.

VL: I've got a camera. I think it's made by the same company that John's got it. I bought it off at Sears Roebuck. It's a good camera. That thing's got a little film of mud every place in it. I had it apart, and I was looking at it and trying to clean it up. It just got a film of mud every place in it, and I had it in the case – in the thing. Mud just went everywhere.

MK: What did you think, Vittie, when you saw your house five hundred feet down the river?

VL: Well, this trailer, which was a classroom up here, there were two of them. But one of them still sets over here. The other one broke up. It went up again another willow tree there, hit my house, and I felt it give about that much. It hit my house when we were getting out in the boat. If it had been over about 10-foot further, it would've probably caught us. I felt my house give, and I was expecting it to be down the river. So, about 5:30 a.m., the next morning, just at the break of daylight, I came around through the brush, the water was clear up over the road there. I worked my way around, and I saw my house was gone. It was down in the bottom down there. All my buildings were gone. I had four buildings here.

TL: All we had were the clothes that we had on our backs [laughter].

VL: My garage went down and went right into Bill Manier's barn, went away in it there. They pushed that out with a bulldozer. Broke it all up. I had several things in there.

MK: How bad did you feel? Did you cry when you saw it –

VL: Well, I did.

MK: – or did you just [inaudible]? What?

VL: I did because I'd put so much work in the house and my age is up. I'm past seventy-four. My next birthday, I'll be seventy-five, and my ambition is just gone. Don't take much to tear me out anymore. Yes, I cried because everything we had was gone, except a little bit of money in the bank. That bank was even –

[laughter]

– flooded out.

[laughter]

MK: But you still had each other though.

VL: Oh, yes, and that was the main thing. Yes, that was the main thing.

TL: Well, we didn't want to go up to where they wanted to put these trailers because we'd had to give up our pets.

MK: I don't see you doing that.

TL: Yes.

MK: [laughter]

TL: That's what I said. No way. I'd stay up there at that cabin instead of going up there. I wouldn't part with – they're children to us.

VL: They're not, but they're just spoiled about it.

MK: This dog here – what do you call it?

TL: Tinker.

MK: – Tinker went out the window with you into the boat?

TL: Yes, I took her with me. She went over there and went in the boat, and she went in the church with me. She sleeps on the foot of the bed. She sleeps on the foot of the bed over there

where we were and down there at the camp. When we come in here, she didn't like the bed because it didn't have any foot on. When he got the foot of our bed fixed up and the side rails brought it in, set it up. She saw the foot of that bed, she came tearing down here to me, barking and turning around and around. She did all but cartwheels just to show that her bed was back [laughter]. Her bed had come back. She was going to have the foot on the bed, and she was so happy.

VL: I call her in charge of security. She knows everything that's going on around here. She'll get up and just watch the windows by the hour.

TL: She's got this window out here, this one here, and then the one on the bed. She can trail people around. I can tell by her bark whether she knows who's coming or not. These three wheelers, that's what she hears now. She hears the three-wheeler going somewhere.

MK: Do you want to say something?

[laughter]

TL: Bored stiff, aren't you?

VL: The other dog wouldn't come down there because we spoiled her.

MK: Well, now, Vittie, you said you didn't have any ambition left. But I pulled up here today and here you are building a new building outside. Now, let's get it straight –

TL: [laughter]

MK: – do you have ambition or don't you? Looks to me like you got a little bit left.

TL: Determination, let's put it that way. [laughter]

VL: Well, I've got to get me a place to tinker around and get some of my stuff gathered up.

MK: What do you call that? A pouting shanty out there? Or what do you call it?

VL: No.

TL: No [laughter].

VL: No, it'll be my workshop. There's a lot of people calling me to fix up pieces of furniture and stuff like that.

MK: Stuff that went through the flood?

VL: Some of it. There's the chair here that I was just showing you, that fellow is from Hartsville and never been in the flood. He's got ten of them. But he knows my condition here, and he only

brought me four of them. He's gone back to Hartsville. He said he'd be up there about fifteen days. He said he'd come back and pick these up and then he'd bring me some more. I fixed him about ten in the last year.

TL: [laughter] He bought you a new over there [laughter].

MK: You mentioned leaning on the Lord when you went out the window. But what do you think the Lord had in mind with this whole flood business? Do you think the Lord had a hand in that?

TL: I don't blame the Lord for it.

MK: No?

TL: It's a freak of nature. I think the Lord had his hands on us – everybody, because of the time of day it happened. If it had happened in the night, there would've been some drownings, without a doubt.

MK: Lots of them.

TL: Because there's –

VL: Yes, there's a number of houses washed completely and never even [inaudible].

TL: We had no warning in particular. All of a sudden, a car slowed down around here. The road was getting covered with water. Every car that would come along, it slowed down that much more. They couldn't see where they wanted to go because of the bend in the road down there. It came swirling up, round and around, just being beaten up with an eggbeater. Come around the garage, up that field onto the road and around. Around our garage out there, right towards our house. Getting deeper and deeper until folks just quit going along the road. They came along here in their trucks. Glen Arbogast over here came – oh, I don't know how many times wanting us to come out. Then he says, "Oh, no, it's not going to be very high."

VL: Well, never in the history – in 1888, they had a flood here and the water got up in the yard. In 1957, they had another flood, and it got up in the yard. This thing was 16-foot above all of that. Never in history was there ever such a flood here, 16-foot of water, just unbelievable. It just came quick. But as my wife said, it came of an evening before people had bedded down, and people knew what was coming. They watched it, so most of them moved out. There was nobody grounded around right in this area.

MK: How far is the river channel from here? How far are we from the river?

TL: Oh, when it's way up, you can see it from here, when it gets up high.

VL: You see, the river hugs that hill over there. It's quite a ways over there.

MK: Is that 300 yards?

VL: Oh, it's over 300 yards.

MK: So, it's quarter mile maybe.

VL: It's close, yes. But this was just unbelievable. Never in history. Well, they claim in two thousand years, we never had so much water. One article of these people who study this now, just –

TL: Archeologists.

VL: – there was an Indian grave over in the Petersburg area, and this got up and washed it out. They figured this grave was around two thousand years old. It was a graveyard there. Then they had marks on the (Syneki?), down at Syneki there, on the Syneki stones that somehow the archeologists could tell the water lines on it or some way. They claim this was the highest in two thousand years.

MK: Do you have other questions?

[end of transcript]