

Tucker County, West Virginia Flood Audio Recordings

Danny Hebb Oral History

Date of Interview: February 19, 1986

Location: Tucker County, West Virginia

Length of Interview: 00:33:34

Interviewer: MK – Michael Kline

Transcriber: NCC

Michael Kline: Full name?

Danny Hebb: Danny Hebb.

MK: Your middle initial?

DH: Yes, F, Frank.

MK: Frank. I met your dad one time down there.

DH: That's my uncle.

MK: I'm sorry.

DH: Yes.

MK: What's his name? First name?

MK: Russell.

MK: His wife?

DH: Shoot. Ora. I just call [laughter] her aunt. She used to cook out there at school when I was in grade school. We were in school. They wouldn't let us call them by their first name. There she was, my aunt, and I had to call her Mrs. Hebb. [laughter] [inaudible]

MK: Who's your dad?

DH: Charlie, Charlie Hebb.

MK: Your granddad?

DH: Elwood. He and Russell are brothers, Russ' older brother.

MK: I see. But this was your great granddad's place out here.

DH: Yes.

MK: What was his name?

DH: Burley. Burley, yes.

MK: He must have farmed this whole hillside, did he?

DH: I don't know. He worked in the mine. See, they was originally from Benbush. They was coal miners, and they moved down in here. My Uncle Russ, that's where he stayed up. But he

come down here and live and grew up a little bit. But he originally from [inaudible] and they mined coal up in there.

MK: You work in the mines now?

DH: No, I work in West Virginia Power.

MK: A power plant.

DH: Yes.

MK: Up in Mount Storm?

DH: Yes.

MK: Are you an electrician?

DH: Just TA electrician. It's just a temporary assign, a labor, but a TA. If we get outages and stuff going on, you get TA for them.

MK: How long have you worked there?

DH: Two years and about five or six months. I used to work construction for Armstrong before that.

MK: Well, at first, I guess, I heard about the experience you went through probably from Hank.

DH: Thompson?

MK: Yes.

DH: Yes.

MK: What do you remember best about that? Had it been raining all that week?

MK: Well, I was at work that day. I had to take a road trip. They take labors and send them, if they got errands, like errands to run or something to pick up in places. They send to take us out and send us on the road for road trips. I had to go to Oakland for a road trip and pick up the paper. When I went out, it'd been raining about all week. I reckon about five days in a row. When I went out, the creek was getting pretty high up here, but they weren't flooding the banks or anything. I was [inaudible] out there, maybe an hour, 45 minutes. So, I came back, and it just looked like the lake is out through there on both sides of the road. I knew then there's going to be some flooding. That was about, I'd say, I come through there, probably about 2:30 p.m. back through, coming back to the plant. So, when I came home from work, I didn't come here at home. I just went on down to the river. I was checking the river to see how fast it's coming up. I put a stick down, and it was coming up – just steady coming up on the stick when I was

watching it. I knew then it was going to flood. I was going to run to town. My brother and sister-in-law lived down the Pulp Mill Bottom in Parsons. I come up over the hill out here, and I've seen Bobby Spano. I asked him if he'd seen the mayor. He said he had. I asked him if he'd call the mayor and get him to evacuate them people down there. He said he would. So, I come on to town. When I come to town I called the emergency squad and tried to get them to evacuate people. They said they was out like in more places trying to get people out. They weren't really worried about the big rivers. Just the small streams they said was flooding. So, I went on over Pulp Mill Bottom. I told my sister-in-law and them about it. Her husband kind of laughed at me. She said when I left, he [laughter] kind of said, "Well, the water isn't getting up here." He just kind of laughed at me. So, when I left, I come on back at Hendricks. I've seen the water was coming up in the streets. Well, it was up where the Hick fairground was, the water was. I'd asked the deputy sheriff – that was Hank Thompson. Jim Blosser, he was a foreman and a chief. I reckon he was a chief foreman who was down there. I asked him if they'd got my uncle and aunt out of their house. They've lived on the lower street there, right next where Blackwater comes into Dry Fork area. They said they didn't. So, I told him I was going on down. They told me they'd get down with me, Jim and Hank did. So, I told them to walk on one side of the street, and I'd go on the other side. We'd try to check the rest of them houses up there and make sure there wasn't anybody else there. So, we walked up there, and we was checking them. They got down there. We could see there was already some people trying to get my uncle and aunt out of their house, and there wasn't nobody in other houses. So, I started to cross the road. I was wading water probably up to my chest when I crossed the road. We got across. I knew it was too deep for her to get out. Because she had – she's got arthritis and stuff real bad. She hadn't been very well. I knew we couldn't walk her out. That water's just blue cold. So, I asked him if he had a rope. We'd go out. I'd try to tie a rope to a pole and take it across and tie to another house where we can grab a whole rope and take ourselves across on it. I got a rope out. I went out and tried to go across it. Shoot, I hit the middle of the street, and the water just took me. I pulled myself back up with the rope. I told him, I said, "We couldn't get out." So, my father-in-law was a state policeman. So, I wanted to call the emergency squad and see if they'd pass me onto him and maybe we get a boat in to us. So, I tried calling the emergency squad. They wouldn't let me talk to him. They said that he was busy over there. I asked them if they'd get a boat into us. Tell the fire department to get a boat into us because there wasn't no way we could get out. The water was coming into the house then. It was just barely coming [inaudible] coming over the floor. So, we waited there a while on them, well, about as long as we could. The water come up in the living room. It was coming up pretty close to the phone. I thought, well, if I'm going to make another call, I better try it to see if the phone is still working. I picked up, and it was still working. So, I made another call. I told them that there wasn't no chance to even get a boat into us then. Because there's too much debris and stuff coming down the river. There was buildings and everything else, trees and stuff coming down through there. So, I asked them if they'd send a helicopter into us to get us out. Because it was eight of us in the house. They said that they couldn't pass me through my father-in-law or nothing because they was all busy on the phone lines, and everything was tore up. She said she'd call me back. I told her, I said, "Well, you'll not call me back on the phone." I said, "It's just a wonder it's working now." It went dead on us then. So, I knew then that we had to get upstairs, get out of the water. So, I took and helped my aunt upstairs. Then told the rest of them to come upstairs. When we went upstairs, we put her to bed. I've seen the water. There wasn't no chance for us getting out. So, I just asked them all, if they'd come into one room, we'd have a word of prayer. So, we all come

in one room. I asked them to get in a circle. We grabbed hands, and I prayed for them, prayed for all of us. It wasn't too soon, I said amen, boy, I heard kaboom and underneath it was – our house started shaking. I hear a building or something come through the side of the house right underneath where we're standing. So, we took her over and put her in another bed. My aunt, we put her in another bed in another room. Then we all went in over in the other room. Then about every twenty minutes or so, we'd go over in the one room where we was standing, where it had a window where we could look up to see the people who was trying to get us out of it. I had a flashlight where I keep flipping at them and let them know we're still in there. We went back. I just figured myself, man, the water was way up there. I could reach out the window, and you could – the water will hit your hands from reaching out the window, the upstairs window. So, I figured that we was going to be – I figured the river's just going to take us down. So, when I knew if them fellas wasn't right with the Lord, and they'd be killed at night, I just felt the Lord hold me responsible for. So, I went, and I asked to -- went and took the fellows off by their selves one-on-one and I asked him if they'd been saved. Hank told me he never. He kind of broke down. He told me he'd like to be. So, I led him in a word of prayer. I just went to each – to the other ones. Jim Blosser, the foreman, and he wanted me to pray for him. So, we took – me and him went together off and prayed. But the rest of them, they didn't want me to – they didn't want to say they wanted to be saved, but they asked me to pray for them. Maybe every ten minutes or so, one of them asked me to pray for them. So, it was going – the house was staying pretty good. You could hear stuff smashing into it and roaring. It just sound like a train coming through it, just a steady roar. You couldn't hear. There was two boys across the street in another big house that come down. They tried to bring a boat to us, one, to foreman. I told them to get in another house across street from us. They was pretty saved. It was a big old house. There was another house blocking the debris from them. It was just right across street. They couldn't holler. We couldn't holler and hear each other. So, we went in. I knew that the water was deep and stuff, but the house, it was staying pretty good. Then it started raining a lot harder. I reckon it's about 11:30, 12:00. The house started shaking a lot. There was trees. You could hear a lot of trees and stuff coming down, going through it. Something come in the other end where we was in that one room. It was behind us. It sounded like tree stuff coming through there. The house started shaking really bad then. The wind started rattling everything. I figured that that was time the house was going to go then. So, I just started praying so hard and everything. I just started getting scriptures back. It was in the Bible about faith. I just tried to block everything from my mind and just have faith in the Lord, and the old house quit shaking. It wasn't no sooner when I quit praying, the windows stopped shaking. The water kept raising, but the house stopped shaking. I reckon we sat there about 1:00 a.m. We had a Coleman lantern keeping us warm. Well, I was soaked. I was coming across street and something come down through and knocked me down. I went in and clear my head. I was all wet. So, he gave me a blanket and wrapped around me. The rest of us had blankets. Because we're just all pretty cold from being out in the water. So, we just laid there with that Coleman lantern. I'd go to the window, and they tried to bring a – I heard a loud noise, just like a roar. I knew it was something they was trying to bring in to get us out there then. It was the big loader. All them guys was hollering that they was going to get out. I thought maybe they'd get us out too. I've seen it was a loader. I told myself, they ain't going to get nothing down here with rubber tires. I said, it'll get down. But that guy wouldn't quit trying. Every time he'd try there, you'd see the loaders start to get down the stream. They just backed up and give up. They give up on the loader. But then I reckon they just kept praying for us. But the water receded then. It kind of quit raining. Then the water

started going down. The next morning, I was getting daylight then. The water – it just felt like somebody pulled the plug on a bathtub or something. The water went out so fast. It went down. Then they brought a canoe in and got us out with a canoe then. They brought some boys down there with a rope, and they took us out in the canoe. But it was something. [inaudible] again.

MK: Are you a preacher?

DH: No. I go to First Baptist Church in Parsons. We're Christian people,

MK: But you said that you felt the responsibility for the souls of those people was on you.

DH: Yes. I felt if they didn't know the Lord, if they haven't heard the word, it was my job to minister to them, to go and talk to them about. Because I knew it because I'm a Christian, that I knew the way to be saved. The Lord tells you to come on to me through my son, Jesus Christ, and accept Him, and you will be saved. That's what you've got to believe. I felt if I wouldn't have done that and they'd have died, and they wouldn't have known Christ, they went to hell. That had been on my head.

MK: How long have you been a Christian?

DH: Since I was 18 years old. I'm 24 now. So, it's been six years.

MK: What was your own salvation like or conversion?

DH: Well, I used to do body work, and I met another fellow. I used to work at a garage in Parsons at Lambrecht Chevrolet. This other fellow, he was a carpenter, but he had a garage he built. Me and him used to do work on the side. He was a Christian. He'd talk to me all the time about going to church. I went to the Methodist church, but I was far from being a Christian. I just went to church more or less to be there. But I didn't have the understanding. I didn't have the Lord in my heart then. But he talked to me, ministered to me a lot. They had a prayer chain going there. I didn't know about it. I just found out about it here just a few months ago. But he and these other fellows, they got together, and they was praying for me. Of course, I didn't know it then. But I was down one night working on a car for him. We got to talk about again – he'd come and talk about it. I'd talk about being a Christian. He was always trying to get me to come to the Baptist Church with him. So, I was down there one night. He was to tell me about getting saved. It had been bothering me for a while, about if I die, where would I go? That night, I was back there standing in the car, and I just got real hot. I started sweating. But I was just cool, but I just felt real hot. It was just like a cold sweat broke out. I started shaking so bad. I couldn't even hold any tools in my hands. I knew then the Lord was calling me. So, I told him. I said, "I'd like to go up to church," up to the Methodist church I was going to at the time. So, he told me, he said, "Go ahead." He knew what I was going through, but I didn't know that he knew so much about it. But when I left, he went in the house and called the guys that was having a prayer chain. He called them, and they got together and was praying again. I went out and got the preacher out and told him I'd like to be saved. He took me over and explained to me and prayed for me. I feel in my heart that I was saved that night. The Lord saved me.

MK: So, it was just you and the minister?

DH: Yes.

MK: In the church?

DH: Yes. I woke him up. He was in bed, I believe. I got him out of bed. It was about 10:30 p.m. It's kind of a funny feeling [laughter]. I'd never done that, just be going out and getting somebody out of bed and do it. But it's just –

MK: You were in a state of spiritual crisis.

DH: Yes, just a movement, you just can't explain.

MK: Have you felt that power growing inside of you?

DH: Yes.

MK: I mean, it just seems to me what you did over in that house that night was pretty amazing. Because I know the comfort that you brought to Hank, for example. I know that. He described his own conversion. He described how it made his body feel better. I mean, he just felt completely different. He felt transformed. There was a lot of some kind of good juices flowing through you that night.

DH: It's something. I was scared. I was scared of – I just got married, and I thought that night that I was going to die because of the way the house and stuff was. I didn't want to leave my wife. We were just getting married and things. I was worried about her. I was worried about the other people in the house. But I wasn't so much scared as of dying itself, with just dying, but I was scared of if other fellas would have died, where they was going? I was sure that if I would die then, I'd be with the Lord that night. But I was kind of scared of when we hit the water, how bad we was going to be tore up before we would die or something like that or have to watch somebody else to die. I was scared of that. I knew that the Lord was there. He put the flood there. I'm sure that he could calm it. So, it's up to Him whether we went or stayed. But it was up to me whether them fellas got heard the word or not. But I'm not a person that really go out and minister to people, just to go out and be ministering to them. But I'm not afraid to talk about Lord because I'm not ashamed of Him. I love him. But that night, when they started up the steps, and I was helping her up the steps, the Lord was just talking to me there, that I'm leaving this up to you. Just putting it on my heart like I was the only Christian in the place and as far as I knew I was. I asked my uncle if he had a Bible. I just want to read some scripture and stuff at night. He said, well, he thought he had one. But he looked for one, he couldn't find it. That was kind of disappointing to me. Because I was looking for something, but seemed like the Lord was putting it in my mind, out of his mouth to say, instead of me reading it out of the book. But a lot of scripture come back to me. I read my Bible a lot, but I don't – I can't remember scripture a lot, but it come to me that night and everything.

MK: Is that maybe a sign to you that you're going to be called to do more, more preaching, more

ministering?

DH: Well, I don't feel that I could be a preacher. But I wouldn't stop anything that the Lord had me to do. He's put me up there to work up the power plant. If he don't want me there – I took tests for another job here. It wasn't too long ago. But I just put it in Lord's hand. I just prayed about it and said, "If you want me here, put me here. If you don't, then I'll stay where I'm at." He's put me where I'm at. I got a letter from another job that said the job has been filled, but they appreciated my time and effort of coming down there and calling them. But the job I got is okay. I like it pretty well. It's something you can look forward to in the future. But if the Lord would call me to do something, I wouldn't stand back to wait for somebody else to do it.

MK: What did you see when you got back to the bank? Had a lot of people been praying? How did the community turn out there?

DH: Down here? Yes, my wife, she said – well, I was worried about her that night because I was afraid maybe she'd tried it to do something kind of stupid, try to get down there to us somehow or something. She'd come home and went to bed. She said she'd prayed. The Lord just put it on her heart that I was going to be okay. She said she just went to sleep. Just wasn't very long at all, and she was sleeping. She's asleep and good. The Lord was taking care of her the same time he was taking care of her. He was just easing her mind. When we got out, the people met us up there, and I felt more emotional me then. I held myself pretty good down there. Well, I felt calm and in my heart and the will to talk to those other men, the other people down there. But that morning, when we got out, it just felt like it just broke loose. You just felt like a lead bone hit my heart or something. I just let go then. But it just seemed like it scared me then, worse than it did when I was in there that night. But the people never stopped trying to get down to us that night. I found out later that there was people trying them boats and everything else to get down to us that night to get us out of there. But if that was the only way, maybe those two was the only two saved down there in that night, maybe that's the Lord saying, but that was the only time they could have been reached. If two souls are saved out of the flood, maybe it's worth it. But it's awful. But I think the people should open their eyes to the things that is going on around them, that the Lord is – I think, people going too much of an ease. I feel that the Lord is showing us he's still in command. He can put that rain here, he can dry it up, or he can cause an earthquake, whatever it is. I feel that time has grown short, but the Bible tells you that things will happen, these times. But the people should stand up and take a note and take a look at what is around them. I know a lot of people got a lot of things – people never got their loved ones or their selves killed or hurt in it, but they lost everything. Maybe they hold a big grudge for it. But they're still here. They're living. There's a lot of people that just like to be here, that people in these big cities and stuff are sleeping on the streets and what have you. But people around here, they're – maybe they don't have all that much money, but they're living pretty good. The Lord tells you to live day to day. Don't look for the things, riches for tomorrow, and things like that. Live for the day. "Live for Me," He tells you.

MK: How's it been for you since that night? Have you thought a lot about it?

DH: I think it's made me stronger as a Christian. Because in church, I'd stand up and give my testimony. I'd stand up and testify a little bit, but not like I will now. The Lord kind of opened



my eyes and opened my heart to it. You went through this. What can be the most that something can happen to you? If you stand up in church, it isn't going to be – nobody will send a flood on you there in church. If you've got something in your heart you want to say, stand up and say it. If you want to say something to people, say it. Do what you feel is right to do. Don't hold back and wait for somebody else to do it right. Take it on yourself to do it. I feel it just made me stronger.

MK: Have you got worried though or dreamed at all about the flood? Or do you fear water in any way?

DH: No. I always swim. I swim around here in the summertime. That was all for us to do as kids, go swimming, fishing, and things. I'm not afraid of water or anything, like I said. I haven't had no dreams or anything like that about it. I've worried a lot about the other people that's been in it that, the people that hadn't been reached – the people we haven't reached out – you can't reach out to them and talk to them and help them, like my aunt and uncle down there. Now, they bought another house. He's 76 years old, and they're fixing that house. It needs quite a bit of work done to it. I've been going down evenings and helping him. If it wouldn't been for me – he had another fellow down there helping him one day, and he was kind of a drunkard. He had my uncle to give him some money. Then he left and never come back. But I can get down and help him, and I don't mind doing it. I wouldn't take any money from him from doing it. I just love to help him. But the old people like that, they don't have nobody to help them and don't have nobody to talk to them how they're feeling about it. That worries me a little bit.

[end of transcript]