

Tucker County, West Virginia Flood Audio Recordings

Bob Klein Oral History

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Interviewer: MK – Michael Kline

Transcriber: NCC

Bob Klein: I was telling the kids –

Michael Kline: Some summaries or stories.

BK: Yes.

MK: What's your full name?

BK: Bob – it's Robert J. Klein. Bob Klein.

MK: Bob Klein. It's K-L-E-I-N?

BK: K-L-E-I-N.

MK: How long have you lived in Parsons?

BK: Since [19]73, August of [19]73.

MK: What brought you here then?

BK: Having worked long term in the ministry and switching into drug rehabilitation, in the private consultant work. Wanting to get out of Erie, Pennsylvania, big city life, wanting to do something different. Of course, my wife is from here, so I suggested we come back to West Virginia.

MK: Did she like that idea?

BK: I'm not so sure. I think I liked it more coming back than she. I think so. But she likes it here.

MK: How long have you been employed with Appalachian now?

BK: Since August of [19]78.

MK: Did you open this center here then?

BK: No. This center must have been open probably for three or four years before that. We were down on the Main Street. One of the coworkers, (Leonatz?), was, this was the oldest member, I think, in this area working. They had one other staff person. Then I came in, and after that, the staff person who was in charge left to go somewhere else in [19]78. It was vacant for maybe three or four months, something like that. I took it in August of [19]78.

MK: So, this is going on. This is seven and a half years almost for you.

BK: Yes.

MK: What kinds of problems have you dealt with in Tucker County? If you could generalize a little bit, what kinds of mental anguish do people here suffer from?

BK Okay. I would say most people that I have worked with would classify themselves as individuals who have problems with nerves and depression, feelings of sadness. Those would be the two primary ones. Now, I ran the whole gamut when I first started from children all the way through to the grave. It's been, let's see, since maybe four years ago that I shifted out of the children's program because we hired somebody. Then I'm dealing primarily only with adults now.

MK: So, people suffer from nerves and from depression?

BK: Yes.

MK: Can you translate that whole thing?

BK: Well, people suffer from a lot of anxiety in terms of the nervousness they feel on edge. They can't understand what's happening. We could switch it over and say some people really are having problems with separation anxiety. Some individuals are having problems on the job. They may be unhappy with their work. They may not like where they're working. Like, I had several minors who really didn't like what they were doing, but the options for employment were nothing else. They dreaded going down into the mines. I would reclassify that using diagnostic criteria differently. But to them, it was a matter of how they were just having a case of nerves, and so a sense of apprehension, fear, and dread. But aware that this was the only position or these are the only jobs that were open for them and going back into them, something like that.

MK: So, the causes of these things are what, a lack of employment opportunities?

BK: I think the opportunities for employment, for going anywhere, for advancement, they're not here. Well, not in their entirety, they're not here. People, I think, are working at jobs in which some of them are probably more capable than the position offers them. People are working, like in the mines. I think if there were other jobs, they wouldn't be working there. So, some call it stress. Some of the stress that they're into is related basically to the type of employment or the lack of employment that they might have.

MK: Is this stress produced or is it accompanied by a lot of alcoholism and drug abuse? How do people express it?

BK: I think a lot of the men express it with their abuse of alcohol. Although there are all kinds of reports going around now that there's more use of cocaine, probably. My guess is, historically, after alcohol, you'd have marijuana. I mean, I work with clients who knew that they were smoking all the time or most of the time, and some of them even selling it, they even grew it. But these would be people down at the lower economic levels would be into selling, maybe growing a little bit of marijuana and selling it. But most of them would, I think, express it through drinking, and most of it would be beer. I'm only going from my experience. And I certainly haven't worked with the majority of people in Tucker County. But my impression

would be that the men would express it in terms of alcohol. And you probably might have also a need to prove themselves macho. Macho in terms of probably some affairs, infidelity, things like that. I don't know what the statistics would be for Tucker County in terms of marriage and divorce, but I would say there's probably a high rate of divorce. Probably, they also show it, I think, in terms of physical abuse. Some of the women with whom I worked, and I think some of the women we are seeing, other staff people would be seeing fit that battered wife syndrome. They have been abused, and whether it's because this is what they've learned to expect, their role in society or what or sense of helplessness or feeling they're not able to get out of it or leave it. But I think those would be a few ways that probably the stress would be shown.

MK: So, it sounds like there's a fair amount of social isolation among people, anxiety, loneliness, poor self-esteem, all these things.

BK: Well, I don't know whether the individuals themselves are as much concerned about as some of us might be. I mean, there's a kind of like resignation or fatalism to the area in which people after a while learn to accept that life is difficult and life is rough. If they can't get what they want, they tend to adjust downward. Those who don't end up with a lot of acting out behavior, let's say, or they leave the communities and then may come back, or they never come back, or they may come back for retiring. But there's isolation in the sense that the family is the key to dealing with your own needs. You rely on your family. The family tends also to help you take care of everything. Like, I will get referrals from people who instead of the individual coming in, somebody will bring them in who will be a family member. Like, I have helped someone, and then they will bring somebody else with them. They'll take the time to explain to that person, it just happened today to me. That you can trust this person because they help me. So, it's like they try to deal with it within the family. When they can't do that, they might then reach out. I think the other way they would show it also probably in medical problems. I imagine that people, I don't know what the doctor's schedules would be in Tucker County in terms of how many times they see a given individual or what they would be treated for. But I would guess that a lot of individuals are getting medications of, say, anti-anxiety and or antidepressant medications from doctors in the community because they tend to look at something as having a physical root to it. If you're ill, if you have the nerves and you can find a physical thing to it, then it's acceptable. Where mental illness is still not too acceptable here, something like that.

MK: Can we jump to November 4th and tell me what you saw, your images that linger in your mind about that day?

BK: Well, I guess on the fourth, (Mary Allison?) and I were called to go over to her school to open up a relief center. That was about 06:00 p.m., and we didn't really know what was going on. I mean, I had left work at 5:00 p.m. She had left work at 5:00 p.m. We sat down to have dinner, and we were just kind of relaxing. We just assumed that when they called us that they were talking about water rising, that we were just talking about evacuating a few people along the river. I don't think we even really thought. I didn't even think much about I left my house unlocked. I left all the lights on. I just assumed I was taking her up there to open up the center and coming back home. Then all of a sudden, the firemen were moving around. We were the only two there. So, that wasn't the idea like, you could leave and go anywhere. So, it wasn't

until probably, as the evening wore on and people were coming into the center and the firemen were there, stranded on the side, and they had their communication equipment with them. That I began to realize that something really heavy was going on. It was kind of like a sense of being – not believing it. That up here in the mountains, this high up, that something like this could be taking place. Because we've had high waters here in town before. But I wasn't even beginning to believe that. But it was raining so hard, though, on the roof of the building of the school. That's all you heard was this rain coming down constantly. The thought I was having was if it only stopped raining. If it only stopped raining, you could see what was going on. There were only the two of us. As a result, we didn't know what we were doing. People were coming in, and we were opening up a kitchen, trying to get some food. We had no electricity. We had no heat. We found some candles. I had one flashlight in the car. I mean, we were not prepared. Certainly, the schools were not equipped for this. We had emergency lighting from batteries in the gymnasium where we stayed with the people. Then those went out by morning. The battery just burned out. But it wasn't probably until when I went out in the middle of the night and it stopped raining. I could still hear the roaring of the waters. I got the impression that the waters must have been very high. My mind didn't even think about Parsons. I mean, I accept that I'd heard the firemen talk about Holly Meadows, and there was a fire truck down there. But we weren't getting any communication about Parsons itself. So, I had no idea what was going on. Until finally, like in the morning, I heard that the bridge was out or it was rumored that the bridge was out. It wasn't the bridge, but it was the river creating new channel. But I think it was just a sense of disbelief. But the other thing about it was you were busy helping other people. So, I don't really know what I was thinking at the time, other than trying to figure out what the [inaudible] do. How we were going to see. We had no heat in the building. We had no place for them to sleep. We were pulling mats together. The firemen brought back, scrounged around and got a few mats. We didn't have that many people there, because the impression that I was getting that night was that – my first impression was, it must not have been all that bad because we weren't getting a lot of people at the center. We only had up to maybe six, eight, ten, twelve, probably a few more. Some of them were miners who were coming off the mountain and they lived in Beverly and they couldn't get across. They tried to go down and the roads were blocked because of the high water. I keep losing my train of thought since the flood. That's one thing that has happened to me. I tend to go block, my mind blocks out, kind of like an after effect of it. But I was so involved over there on the other side for a couple days that I didn't even think about my center, to be honest with you. I never even thought that would be underwater. I had no idea of it. Even when I was hearing about the waters coming the following day, into Parsons and the town was being flooded. I don't know why. The last thought I had was at this office. I think it was a day and maybe two days after the flood, I crawled across the opening there in the highway where they had the other side of Black Fork Bridge. There was a tree limb there and an old water hose. I came through town. I had my car, and I crawled down over and got across and walked across to come across to see the community. It was hard to believe.

MK: What was it?

BK: First thing I saw coming down was the nursery bottom. I couldn't believe it. I mean, when I came out of (Hamrick?), the last thing I wanted to do, I guess, though my mind was to go into Hamrick and look, or to go into Hamilton. I mean, I was heading into Parsons. I wanted to see what was going on and check on things, the house and so on. When I came up to the bridge, it

was the weirdest feeling. I mean, I knew my house was safe because my house was on a hill and you would have risen 200 feet almost to get to my house. But there was a strange feeling of I was on this side of the bridge, I couldn't get across. This was Tuesday morning. I couldn't get across. It was a strange feeling that even though I knew my house was all right, I couldn't get to it. It was almost as if I'd lost it and I couldn't get across. That's it. Now I'm trying to recall. So, not being able to get across that first morning, I just went back. Because my wife and I were still the only two people up at that center, as far as I can remember, with some help from the firemen, trying to keep things going. I know what I was saying. What we've discovered afterwards was the people on that side of the river, (Hamilton Henricks?), were being taken in by relatives and families. That's why we didn't have a lot of people coming up to the school, which I think was different from this side. From the Parsons side, there were so many people who may not have been related to others or had no places to go. Ultimately, they were moved into the Parsons school. That was what I wanted to say. It was just a feeling of numbness because I saw the nursery bottom and it was gone. The beautiful nursery bottom and all the trees and it looked like a gravel pit. I couldn't believe it. First thing I thought, "Well, my God, all these jobs lost. What are people going to do?" Then the following day, I got across. That was it. The following day I got across, crawled down over, and went through town. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. It looked like pictures. You know what I mean? A couple months before, there was a big flood or something in Louisiana or Mississippi and you saw these houses. It looked worse than that. It was hard to believe that really had happened. I just walked around town and I didn't feel like walking. I mean, I didn't feel like snooping.

MK: You felt like an intruder.

BK: Yes. I felt like an intruder in my own town. It just felt like you shouldn't be looking. You saw all this devastation and you felt like you shouldn't be looking. You should be getting on with it or something. I got up to my house, and then I went down to the office and found that it had been in under like, about a foot, a foot and a half water and so on. Then I tried to open up. I tried to be available here, but all the phones were out. There was a feeling of almost like you were nonexistent. There was no phone service. I think the military when they did come in, had one phone, but everything was out. Then when I was on this side of the creek, there was a feeling that my wife was on the other. How was I going to get back? It was a weird feeling of separation. But again, for me, I went back over. Then I was so involved with trying to get that with her, trying to help her on the (Hamrick?) thing that I literally forgot about Parsons for maybe three, four days. Then when I did come back, I came back through Sugarlands, drove my car back down around and came here. Then I drive back over to the school and make two trips a day to see how things were going there because she was short staffed. I found out then that all these other things were going on over here. Also, I had two staff people affected by the flood, Gloria and (Lea?). Well, three [inaudible] up in Hamilton. But two of them were up at the school here. So, I knew that if there were any persons who needed to be seen or who needed to talk to anybody, there would be staff there. But there was nobody on the other side of the river at that time to work with people. So, I went back over there. I think we were over there for probably about a week before we could come home and sleep. But I have a feeling of almost numbness. I still do at times, or disbelief that this has occurred. But also, a sense of I have really good feelings about the people. I mean, I do remember now that practically, the next day after the flood, they were bringing equipment off the mountain, local contractors. There were

contractors on this side who were trying to get something straightened out in town. I thought that was great. But to me, that was just typical of the people here. They're just back to this kind of resignation fatalism. It's there it is. You don't wait for somebody to help. You go ahead and do it and help each other. A tremendous sense of these people are going to do it. They're going to put themselves back into it. Of course, then there was all the governmental stuff that came in. There was trying to spend time sorting out where everything was and who was doing what, when and how, and trying to get other people to get in contact with others. I also felt helpless, a sense of helplessness. It was like, in the typical role of the mental health person, okay. They weren't looking for you. I got a few contacts that somebody was having desperate feelings at that time, and you would have to talk to them. But the basic needs were the basic right at the bottom, shelter, food, clothing. After I left the (Hamrick?) to come down here, I really felt almost like a sense of worthlessness. Because up there I felt I was helping to meet some of these needs. So, I'd go up in the evening then after I finished here and work the shift in the evening at the center in terms of food distribution and things like that. Because I felt that's where it was. Letting people know where they could go and where they could be. But it was a sense like that my work was designed to do in terms of mental health, did not meet these basic needs that had been met at this time. Now, in retrospect, these are the needs that should be met and probably are the main needs that still need to be met now. I did not anticipate a rise or a sudden increase in response to mental health. I still don't. Part of it is because of the way people are. They deal with things themselves. Mental health in a rural area tends to be more crisis oriented, or you get heavier when it comes, it comes. It's not like you're sitting down generally and talking to a couple who want to resolve some marital difficulties or you're talking to just some minor school problem. It's usually the extreme. So, people tend to wait until they really feel an extreme situation before they come now. How people will be in the next month or two?

MK: But the flood itself was a terrible crisis.

BK: Yes. The flood was a terrible crisis, but still, it dealt with the basics of survival, of food and clothing and shelter. That's what they were looking for, and that's what they wanted, and that's what hopefully they were getting. Now, afterwards, however, I don't know whether they will respond to the traditional kind of setup, coming to mental health office or not. That might be partly what, ameliorated by the fact that we've got some people now who are out there. Outreach workers walking around, talking to people, helping them deal with these basic concerns, and just talking with them. That might have an effect. I have always felt that that would be more primary need, but I don't really know. I've never been through a disaster before. Honestly, I haven't. I mean, of this any kind of magnitude. But my guess from working with people here is that they deal with these things. They just deal with them and they go on. I think it's good that they do. I mean, the government could only do so much. What it does is usually for most people late, and there are still people looking for trailers and things like that. I remember talking to an elderly gentleman whose house was washed away down in St. George. He had found a place to stay down at the 4-H camp, the YMCA camp. It wasn't the best of places, but it was shelter. I think some of the federal people couldn't understand why he would be then wanting something else like a trailer right away because he had a place to stay. But they didn't seem to be able to grasp. I think there were city people, they didn't seem to grasp. But this fellow was living, and he had enough resiliency – even at his age, he was up in his [19]70s, I think, to be able to provide a place for himself. It was not adequate, but he had enough sense to

do that. Where maybe in a big city, if there had been a flood, there have been a lot of people standing in line looking for other people to do something. Now, there may have been that up here in Parsons. I don't know that. But I'm just saying that people have an ability to be resilient. They'll go for help, but if they don't get it, they'll find a way. Now, I want them to have help. See what I mean? I think they deserve a lot of help to rebuild. But what I'm saying is they would go on.

MK: You mentioned families a while ago. Family members have taken each other in. There's been a lot of doubling up, crowding up and crowded conditions in homes now going on for two months. Would you foresee that this would produce problems?

BK: Oh, I think it will. I mean, I think it's going to produce all kinds of stress. I know some families who are trying to get out, trying to move out faster. They don't want trailers, but they're waiting. They were going to wait till spring to get to start their houses and now they're working on them earlier. But I don't want to imply that there are any problems. I mean, that they're not going to be coming into the mental health to talk about the stress that we're having because we've got four families in this house. They won't do it. What they'll do is they'll deal with it themselves somehow rather. If they can talk to somebody in an informal way out there about it, and others are aware that that's what's going on, they'll deal with it, see. They'll work on it. I think there's a lot of stress, but I have to be careful. I don't mean to say that there isn't a lot of stress. I mean that we will not see it in the official category of mental health. People coming in, increased caseload now. Maybe after this builds up some more where you have two or three families and they can't get out, and where there might be some situations where children living in with other children, a couple families mixed in. There'll be some school problems and we maybe pick up on some of these. I would still say that historically, people do not – in this area – respond to traditional mental health.

MK: So, do you have less business now than you had before the flood?

BK: No. There was a law, of course, we didn't open our office probably for two or three weeks in terms of people coming here. Then even when we were here, it was dead because naturally, there was no communication. We were here when there were no telephone lines. We were trying to be somewhere so somebody could reach us if they wanted to, like the state or the sheriff or something like that. But it's back to where it was in terms of the caseload is picking up again. But I'm not picking up any cases that I would see as specific to the flood. I'm picking up cases that are called traditional. People who have not been affected by the flood in terms of losing employment or things like this. These are problems they had before, and maybe they've been heightened by something else. Now, I can't speak for any other staff person here, but my caseload is not. There have been a couple cases that have opened up. That may be related in the sense that the person has had a behavior that they've expressed before. But having been spared the flood, or maybe having had a relative affected by the flood, this is kind of like awakening, almost like a sense of guilt. That maybe this flood affected, say, my parents, and they were good folk. I have this behavior which is "bad." Therefore, something must be wrong. So, I've had a couple responses like that. Not that the persons want to change their behavior as much as they want to just talk about their feelings. But I haven't seen it, and I say what we'll see, I don't know that yet. I haven't seen anybody yet with severe depression in this facility as related to the flood.

Not that there aren't. My guess would be that see the medical doctor first, see the family, of course, deal with it. Go to the medical doctor, maybe even go to the hospital, probably in Elkins. Contact a doctor, get some medication. The doctor would certainly recommend that they come and talk, but they won't. They don't. Some of them might. So, I think it would be fascinating to check with medical professions to see if there's an increase in the levels of anti-anxiety and antidepressant medications, prescriptions being made in this area or like, say, in a person's area.

MK: Do you know if it's – [inaudible]

BK: I don't think they're having any major increase in so called traditional services, that is, people responding to facility. Now we're small. Well, we are well known in the community. My guess would be about the same. I haven't talked with (Larry Alkire?) is county director in Upshur County. He'd be a person you want to inquire over there. Harry – oh, gosh, I keep forgetting Harry's last name. Well, anyway, it's Harry. He's the Barbour County director, and you could call him and talk with him to see what he thinks. But we haven't seen that major response here. I think people are right now, still busy trying to figure out places to stay and getting that thing sorted out. I noticed there are a lot of houses down the road here that still aren't not moved into yet. People are still working on it. The county clerk, for instance, (Nina Buchana?), was talking to her and she said they were just beginning to work on her house which is down on, I think, maybe 4th Street, something like that. So, I think there's a numbness, probably with a lot of people. My guess is I run into people on the street and talk to them. They're not there. They're here, but they're not there. I mean, you talk to them. You don't necessarily talk to me. Where were you at the time, flood? I mean, I haven't been doing that. These are people I know. They know me, know who I am. I'll stop and talk to them on the street. There may be a little bit of a more affection giving, a little hug or something, wanting to be close or something like that. But we'll just talk. But I'll get the feeling that – I call it a numbness or not being there. They are there, but it's like, not fully. It's like the old spirit or the old mind has put itself slightly back away. Trying to still continue to compute or take stock of the situation and sort things out.

MK: Kind of shock, maybe.

BK: Yes, I think. Okay. You could call it a shock. Yes. Yes, you could call it a shock. I like to use the word numb because I don't know whether of course, you can be shocked into numbness. [laughter] But these are people that I know are going at it. You know what I mean? They're going at rebuilding. They're continuing. Maybe shock still, sense of disbelief, sadness. I hear a lot of that. Not hear, but as I walk around and talk with people. Sense of sadness that things have been lost and part of their history. Talking to an elderly lady, her photographs were all washed away. The sense of belonging, the sense of saying, "Well, I'm not going to move back here in this town. I'm going to move over to another town nearby. But I'm not going to come back to that house." It's too painful. Now, whether they do or not, I don't know that. I'm not talking about a large number of people. But I'm just saying a few people I've met. The sense of sadness, a sense of having lost and never having regained it and lost something that was important to them. Not the house, per se, you see, but the sense of the personal belongings, things that they had. It was part of the family history. But again, I don't see these people as, you know, if I see them on the street and talk to them, that's one thing. But I don't see them as

coming down to talk to me about feeling sad and feeling depressed. History would say they will deal with that within their family, whether they get in to see a medical doctor for medication or not. If it gets real heavy, they'll come, but it has to be really heavy. As I said to you earlier, I think I'd like to work sometime in a mental health office in a big city just for the fun of it, if you excuse the expression. Where people come and somebody wants to come and talk about how they can grow and like a center for human development. Here, it's like you're at the tail end, and you get to the tail end of situations which are almost impossible. People who are really mentally ill, like schizophrenic, manic depressives, where you can't really do that much, but will demand a lot of your time and energy. Now, we haven't seen any increase in that level since the flood. But we see people usually at the tail end. Or like, if they're going for a divorce, they've usually already made their decisions. They probably have made so many decisions already that cannot be reversed one way or the other about anything and under the sun that it's almost like a hopeless or helpless situation. You're just trying to get them to figure out what they could figure out, as opposed to somebody who may be just contemplating a divorce and saying, "Well, I want to be able to work this through. I want to be able to get on with my life." I don't see that. Like a couple comes and wants to talk about maybe getting a divorce too fast and wanting maybe to think about going back at it. But then the problems are more immense than it would be if maybe the other side of fence, but.

MK: Sounds in a way to me as though what you're saying is that people are pretty darn resourceful.

BK: Yes. I'm glad they are. I mean, I'm not indispensable, thank heavens. I'm glad that I'm not. I'm glad that nobody would be thinking that they couldn't handle things without us or without any other organization. I think it's the same way the churches. There may be some response more to the churches, but people have dealt with these problems before. They accept them and they go on with it, and they're not going to wait. I think that's a good trait, is that sense of individualism in people. Maybe it works against them in the long run in certain areas, in terms of they don't really get together and cooperate for real good push for economic development and change in their community life. They put up with a lot of stuff that, coming from the big city, I don't think I would put up with if I were younger and all that stuff. But it might work against them that way but it does a beautiful job for them. The job situation has been horrible here for years. They go from job to job, but they're resourceful, you see. When you maybe are working with somebody who's going through that, they're bitching, but they're still working at it. There's still some sense of hope, but at the same time, it's kind of like a muted hope. The town will probably rebuild in the same spot, in the same buildings, and maybe a few will be changed.

MK: So, there isn't a sense of loss of community or dislocation or social upheaval in the town.

BK: Well, might be in terms of some of the –

MK: I guess things haven't really settled yet.

BK: No. They haven't settled. You really don't know.

MK: [inaudible] their family is missing it. People just didn't know where they were yet.

BK: Yes. Now, I think this community may be more fortunate in the sense that I've been reading in the Elkins Intermountain that the Barbour County, and I think it's Randolph County church groups, are still trying to get people to canvas areas to find out where people are and so on. But they did a lot of canvassing over here. So, in sense, people know where they are. But I remember standing on the bridge one day, maybe like two days after the flood, and the car coming down. They couldn't get across the bridge. Well, there wasn't any way to get across. They were really upset because they had been on the other side, which would have been over here the night of the flood. They had tried to convince a certain relative to move out, and relative would, and they left. They couldn't get back down over the Sugarlands Road, and there they were. There was no communication. I just happened to know who they were talking about. One of those weird things, I happened to know who they were talking about. I just happened to know, having talked with somebody, that that person was safe. But there was no way that – I don't know why I knew it in the sense it was just standing around there. So, I could say to them, "Well, that person's safe." I don't know where the person is, but I know that person is safe. "Well, how can I get to them? All you could say is, "Well, you're going to have to turn around. You're going to have to go all the way up, and you're going to have to risk going down Sugarlands." But there was no telephone. See? You couldn't call anybody. How long they were out, for months, for a long time. Oh, at least that in terms of the other side. Like Hamilton, they didn't get any telephone over there for good, maybe two, three weeks. Some of them still, I think at the end of a month, were without telephone. Of course, there were water problems and things like that. But I don't really know. I honestly don't really know how it would be to experience it myself. I mean, I talk with people who lost their homes. Later on, I went down into Hendricks and tried to deliver some heaters and talk to some people. Again, it was just a sense of being overwhelmed. I thought if I was overwhelmed by looking at what happened, I wondered, how about them? But the thing about it is they were talking. One little old girl who was a community official here, somebody had come walking up while I was talking with her and brought her a picture. They said, "Is this you?" It was a picture of her when she was young. She was as tickled as tickled can be to find that. Her family, of course, was a little more aware of what was going on. I think she was somewhat in a state of shock. Although she was functioning. She could appreciate the picture, but yet it was if, "Well, I really haven't lost it." Then it dawned on her. She had lost more and something like that. But I was amazed. I mean, I was feeling rotten and didn't know what to say or how to say "Well, how do you feel?" You're almost afraid to say, "How are you feeling?" Because you almost expected that they would be so overwhelmed. But the thing that I was picking up on is they were talking. It was a need to talk, the need to share. We just stood there and talked and. But I was kind of fortunate. I could leave. I could find my way out and go back up to the school, and then eventually go to my house. But these people had lost them. But I don't really know. I've talked, of course, with people. But my guess, though, is in talking with people that there's an awful lot of stress and there will be stress, but they're dealing with it. Now maybe we need these mental health people to do something different.

MK: Like?

BK: Well, I think partly maybe these outreach workers walking around, just being around with people. Working through this entire organization to get things organized and find out where

people are. Just the idea of people being aware that people know that you are you and that if you have a need, they'll come back and check on you. I think that's a very important thing that is new to people here. I mean, not that we haven't had human services and so on, but there hasn't been that kind of outreach to people. So, I think that's a great thing. What will come, I don't know. I talked with a couple businessmen about maybe a group. But they were sharing some experiences about what they had gone through, and they were saying, "Well, you think it would help to just sit down and just have a wrap session?" They said, "Yes. But this is like right about Christmas time." They said, "Well, we're just trying to get ourselves on our feet right now. Getting back in. So, maybe we should think about this in February or something like that." Not that they weren't having all these pressures, but it was like, maybe there'll be some kind of a time when then a lot of people suddenly realize they've been under all this pressure and we're almost near collapse. I don't know that. I think there will be some, but I don't think it is a major thing, again, because of the people. They haven't known economic wellbeing, et cetera that much. Even the businesspeople that I've talked to that lost. Some of them that were involved in the flood. One fellow, it had changed his whole outlook on life. Not whole outlook, it changed his outlook on life. It had really caused him to think about what was more important, what were the really serious issues for him as opposed to just going on with business. He's going to go back into business and have a story again, but he'll never be the same. I don't think anybody will be the same. I don't think I'm going to be the same, even though I'm not, again, personally affected in that way I was affected due to and thinking a lot of the stress that more of the stress that my wife was under than my own personal stress. Having to help her and be with her through those times, it's not going to be the same. So, I suppose it's not going to be the same for others, too. But in what ways, I don't know that.

MK: What has been the theological explanation for this whole disaster? Does the community hold God accountable?

BK: My guess is because of the nature of most of religion in this part. But most of them would probably hold God responsible, but not in the sense of blaming him. Like, "You're an awful God for doing this." But it's like the recognition that you're a frail and feeble individual and life is transitory and that's all the way it's going to be. But we don't understand what's going to happen to us now. But when these things happen, we won't have the answers now, but someday, someday in the glorious future, all this will be made up and we'll have our answer. So, I think religion tends to probably help provide a sense of consolation, I don't know, to people who feel that this helps them to accept it. It's just part of life. I think that there will be those who will blame God if that's just theology. But there are some, I think, that even though they go to church and maybe hear their preachers say, "Well, someday we'll understand," I think they also recognize the reality of nature. They've lived close to nature and they know it can be harsh. I don't think they necessarily, a lot of them don't necessarily feel there's a connection between disaster and God. From the point of view of God bringing it on. They might have prayed high to heaven, and as they rose from the first floor to the second floor to the attic when the flood was coming, keep praying. When they got to the top of the roof and the flood didn't hit them, felt the prayer was answered. But realistically speaking, I don't think they would then say that the person whose house was washed away was therefore being punished and they were being selected. I'm sure there are a few of them, but I don't think there are many people who are that naive or that self-righteous that way. I think that most people accept this as just, it's a hard life

and that's just the way it is. Well, maybe God is responsible because this is God's world. But, you know, it's just one of those things we have to accept. Besides, religion in these parts of the country is more of a socializing influence. I think people go to church in this area more for the social event than for the so called "theological or religious." I've talked with a few ministers who said that there was an increase in attendance and worship and at the prayer meetings and so on when people could start moving around again. My guess is that religion provides that sense of solidarity, that sense of you are related to other people and somebody cares and everybody can talk. So, just like the relief centers provided that atmosphere in eating and so on. I think religion has always done that for this part of the world, still do it. I've heard some preachers on TV, of course, attributing this to God and punishment. It's evident that the world is coming near to the end. But the people aren't acting like they're getting ready for the end. [laughter] Looks like they're getting busy building their houses up again and just going on with it. Now, I don't know about the people that might have some real serious questions in their heads about – haven't resolved that yet – about God and pain and suffering. They would feel that maybe that their faith is lost, their religion is lost. I'm sure there'd be some people like that. But my guess is most people in this area would either lay it to God, but that it's God's world. They might even be willing to give it the flip of the coin, which is the devil. The devil has done this to them to test them. They're not going to let the devil get too big of a hole on their leg. You know what I mean? So, in a sense, the religion works for them that way, too. The opposite side of blaming the devil, and then it's a big power contest. So, the devil is testing you. It's not God who has done this to you. God is testing you. So, I mean, the devil's testing you, and you got to be faithful to God to show God that you can stand up under these things. I think that some people would be responding that way to it. My own personal philosophy is it's just, that's the way it is. You live in an imperfect world. You're an imperfect person, and there will be these things. I don't attribute them to anything but the imperfect world. So, it doesn't affect my religious belief in God in a negative way. I think you have to accept this. I think God works in the limited world with limited people. That's all there is to it. I think there are a lot of people who buy that too. But most of them probably just will buy the idea that it's just the way it is. It's the world, and it'll be all explained in the future, and it seems to satisfy. But again, I think that's because religion serves that socializing function where you get together and you sing and you talk and you meet other people. I don't know if they ever listen too much to the sermons. [laughter] I don't know if I told you that story. I remember talking to a girl – not related to the flood. I talked to a girl about the fact that one Sunday morning, I was real lazy and I turned on the television. There was a local preacher on and he was telling the Story about Abraham. He mentioned that Abraham's wife Sarah was a really good wife. Because when he came home from work out in the fields, he could stick his feet up, and she'd bring him his shoes and his paper – he was modernizing it and so on – and a cool, soft, cool drink of milk or whatever. That this is the way a woman was. She really worshipped, and this is the role of a woman. So, she stopped by the house that night. I said, "Come on now. You really believe that stuff," because this is a professional lady. Her remark to me was, "Well, we kind of like pick and choose." [laughter] I think that's what most people do anyway. Pick and choose. Pick and choose. But again, I really feel the people are doing a tremendous thing in terms of the way they're responding. I wish there was some way I, as a mental health professional, could be there to encourage them to keep going in the naturalness of this kind of stuff and that you can work it through. That's not the nature of our work, I guess, in mental health, except you just do it incidentally. People are not going to wait to be pulled in here as clients, go through our system

and the process and so on. But I don't know.

MK: What about other government agencies? What about FEMA? Are you picking up any –

BK: Nobody plans for a disaster, of course. In this community, this is the second disaster was – in my book – was a communication disaster. Everybody was trying to do something without anybody knowing what anybody else was doing. The federal people came in, the state people came in, and there was really no coordination. I know there were attempts at it, but you didn't know where to go. I, as a professional, not knowing where to find people and where to go, I wondered how frustrated the average person might be or the person who had experienced losing something, loss in the flood. I think there was a lot of confusion. I think there was a lot of ill will that created tension. I would think that governmental people ought to recognize that as just part of their job that people are going to see things one way. Maybe they saw things from a different perspective, and that perspective was needed. But I don't think government has ever geared to work fast, as quickly as you'd want to do it. I've heard a lot of dissatisfaction with FEMA. I've heard some people speak highly of them. The people who have found their trailers speak very highly of them. The people who have gotten relocated and all that jazz, same way with Red Cross, are highly complementary. The people are still waiting or not. There are some people who feel they could have, probably rightly so, gotten a better deal out of somebody, whether it's FEMA or probably FEMA, because they were handling all this financial stuff. Your home wasn't completely destroyed, but it really was. So, it's not listed as a house to be torn down, and yet you're just left with nothing. You're going to get \$900 or \$1,200 to repair it. \$900 isn't enough to a two-days' work with a carpenter. So, I think there's a lot of that. A lot of satisfaction with the Salvation Army. My feeling is that a lot of good response there. I mean, they were there right away. You didn't even know they were there. They had opened up their little truck with their food and so on, giving out. I think probably maybe the day after the flood, they were in town, and they were also on the other side of the town doing that. Of course, the Red Cross, of course, they can't come in until it's an official disaster. Once it was declared, they came in. I think they offered the people a lot. But again, everything was centralized on this side. See, the Red Cross was over here, FEMA was over here. People on the other areas and even down St. George that were stranded wouldn't have been able to get to these services. There were no communication lines. It was such a disaster that some of this confusion and disorganization, etcetera, I think has to be downright attributed to the fact that you couldn't even have a communication system going. Human Services quickly got on the other side of the river and opened up a second center over at (Hamrick?) School and met with a lot of people. They did, I think, a tremendous job that way. The firemen did a tremendous job in saving people's lives and continuing to do things. The only complaints that I've heard have been related to the confusion between the people in the community who didn't appear to be knowing what they were doing, and maybe they didn't. But some competition or competitiveness between them and touchiness. But I think touchiness is a very natural thing to come by in something like this. Not that people are wearing their feelings on their sleeves, but for a while there, I felt like if you touched anybody, they'd probably go up and smoke. I mean, everybody was burned out. I think the professionals, more than anything else, get this sense. I suppose FEMA and the Red cross were feeling that, too. I don't know that, but I got the feeling that when I was talking with the professionals, they weren't listening to me. I don't think it was because they didn't want to listen. It was just like they were information overload. They would start talking, and you

wondered who they were talking to. You know what I mean? I mean, in the sense that they were just talking. You would ask them a question. They weren't answering your question. They got sidetracked. But it wasn't that they didn't want to answer your question as much as sometimes just information overload. They were just over the hill on that kind of stuff. Now, what will happen, I don't know what's happening to these people who really were involved, like the Red Cross and the Salvation Army. Well, Red Cross, Salvation Army, and the firemen, as to how they're getting back on. What I see from where I lived, the firemen are meeting every Monday night and rebuilding the fire station, things like that. But I don't know about the other professional people. I assume they've gotten some balance now, but I think the community has to come together again. This is like a more naturally being a town as opposed to Hendricks and Hamilton. But I think that this community probably has a task of coming back together again. I think there's been a lot of unfortunate, unintended your will created too. Hopefully, that's on the burner.

MK: Has the community come back?

BK: I don't know. Again, I don't know how they'll do it, but I think that there's been, I don't really know. I just feel that people are far apart in terms of the county commission, in terms of the community here, in terms of what they're expecting of the other outside people, like the federal people. Maybe we're just coming together, all fall together reasonably so in the future. Maybe there should be some community meetings, but nobody wants any more meetings right now. Maybe just bull sessions and so on. Maybe they need a scapegoat too. Maybe we should parade FEMA or the Red Cross or somebody.

MK: [inaudible]

BK: Yes. Get all together and do that. Maybe that's what we need to have. [laughter] It might help because Lord, we all have to live together. There are a lot of things I know have been said between people. That in the heat of frustration and so on, that probably some wish they'd never said it. But having been spoken, it's been written as it were. I think a lot of that, some of that will come about naturally, maybe, but I don't know how it really will occur. What's to come in the next couple of months? I don't know. I really don't. I say we have these two outreach people, and they've hired some more people to come in. I really feel that a counselor in schools would be a great thing to have, but we don't have one. I don't know whether our agency's going to be aiming toward trying to help that way. But I think outreach is the answer here. We have enough to do. We, in terms of our staff here, to do the main line. Working with people with severe mental problems, so on.

[end of transcript]