

Tucker County, West Virginia Flood Audio Recordings
Icy Sampson Oral History
Date of Interview: March 7, 1986
Location: Tucker County, West Virginia
Length of Interview: 00:41:53
Interviewer: MK – Michael Kline
Transcriber: NCC

Victoria Shahan Sampson: It's March 7th.

Michael Kline: Friday. A lot of snow outside. What is your full name?

VSS: Icy. Victoria Shahan Sampson. I have a little granddaughter whose name is Victoria.

MK: Where were you born?

VSS: In Tucker County on Pifer Mountain. You know where Pifer Mountain is. I only lived up there until I was six weeks old and then we moved to Saint George and have lived there ever since.

MK: You know I interviewed some Shahans over in Elkins. Do you know who they are? They were from Cassity.

VSS: No. I wouldn't know any.

MK: They were very well-educated people too. Their father was a great believer in books and learning. I was wondering if they were some kin to you somewhere.

VSS: Well, they could be. Probably, but not very close I don't think.

MK: You don't have any close kin in Elkins?

VSS: No. I don't think so. No. Nothing that I know of.

MK: Who was your mother and dad?

VSS: Well, my father was Cyrus Walter Shahan and my mother was Aleta Catherine Phillips Shahan.

MK: Okay. Phillips. There's some Phillips is up at Sugar Land.

VSS: Yes. They're her relatives.

MK: They're real old Sugar Lands family, aren't they?

VSS: Oh, yes.

MK: Was that where she was raised?

VSS: In the Sugar Land, yes. In that area and then on up in Mackeyville – on Sugar Land into the Mackeyville area.

MK: Who was your mother's people? It will come to you –

VSS: Wait a minute. I know who the mother was but I can't think who the father was. She was a foster child of Jackson Poling, and her mother was Teresa Teretha Phillips Poling.

MK: So, you moved to Saint George when you were just a little somebody, right? Six months old?

VSS: Yes. Six weeks.

MK: Six weeks old?

VSS: We moved in March.

MK: Was it a big family of children?

VSS: No. At that time, I had two sisters and myself. There were three of us. My father was a schoolteacher and he had gotten the job of rural mail carrier. It started in January. I don't remember the exact date. Then he had to go down there and carry the mail around people up on Clover. We stayed on Pifer Mountain until I was six weeks old, and then we all moved to Saint George.

MK: What year was that?

VSS: Well, that's telling my age, isn't it? Oh no, that's okay. That was in 1915.

MK: Fifteen?

VSS: Yes. He carried the mail then until he retired and then there were quite a few other children too.

MK: Then you had brothers born after that?

VSS: Yes, and sister. A brother and a sister and the rest were boys.

MK: Did you go to school in Saint George?

VSS: Oh, yes.

MK: What was that like?

VSS: Oh, it was great. All nine of us attended the Saint George Academy in Saint George.

MK: That's right. It was an academy was it not?

VSS: Well, we did not call it Academy then, but it's called an Academy now. It was an Academy, but at that time we just called it Saint George School and we all attended there. Then

my son, Skipper, did his eight grade there and went to Parsons to high school. My brother Allen's children, they attended Saint George School and they also went to Parsons. My brother David – his children attended school at Saint George Grade School, and then they graduated from Parsons High School.

MK: What did you like about it so much?

VSS: In the school?

MK: Yes.

VSS: Oh, I don't know. It was always a two-room school and then later they built a new part and it had become a four-room school. Well, I guess it was seeing the teachers and the children and being with them. We always had to walk to school but –

MK: Did you go to your dad then?

VSS: Oh, no. He had quit teaching when he got the mail – a little mail round when I was born.

MK: But you like going to school with all the kids in the community there?

VSS: Yes. I think it must have been that. Well, I just thought it was just nice. It was two large rooms downstairs and one large auditorium upstairs. It was really nice.

MK: Did you have plays in the auditorium?

VSS: Oh, yes. I remember those things.

MK: Christmas plays?

VSS: Christmas plays and, I don't know, maybe other meetings too perhaps?

MK: Did they have debating society?

VSS: Yes, they did.

MK: Tell me about that.

VSS: I don't know it. I don't really know anything about that. But I know my dad was a great debater and very good at it too. I don't know much. I don't know what they did do. I don't know enough about that to go into that.

MK: Was it a big community event? Did everybody come to the debate?

VSS: Yes. People from out in the country would come walk in because, yes, it would be a big debate, a big occasion. They would have socials – pie socials and people would take a little box

of something to eat, a pie or sandwiches or something. Yes.

MK: Spelling Bees, did they have?

VSS: No.

MK: Was it a big thing back then?

VSS: No. I don't remember. No. We didn't have spelling bees.

MK: What about dances and –

VSS: No. We didn't have them.

MK: Or music? Did anybody want to play music?

VSS: No. Well, when they have the programs, the children in school would sing. But no, I don't recall anything. Maybe someone else would.

MK: Did your mother sing to you?

VSS: Oh, yes. My father did too.

MK: What did they sing? Do you remember? Real old songs or –

VSS: Yes. Well, I think they were religious songs.

MK: They didn't sing any of the old ballads or –

VSS: No.

MK: Mostly religious songs?

VSS: Yes. No. I don't know any. I don't recall the names of any of the songs.

MK: So, you had a pretty contented life there on the river, huh?

VSS: Yes, we did.

MK: Did you ever see the water very high when you were a child? When you were growing up did the river ever get up?

VSS: Oh yes, it got up. It would get up to flood stage and it would get up to my father's house where we lived. But it never did anything. It never got in the house, never did any damage at all. It was just a small flood. That was up where my father lived for years and years. It never amounted to anything – just a small water. Then down where I lived, on the riverbank – I

called it on the riverbank – it would get up too. Sometimes it would get into the basement. There'd be 6 inches and as much as a foot. At one time, it got full. That was that big flood in nineteen –

MK: [19]54?

VSS: Yes. But it had never gotten up on my floors, never up on my porches. It just filled up the basement that time. The other times it just got up like maybe a foot. Then when the river would go back down, it would just drain right down where it had come in and there was nothing. It didn't bother anything at all. But I did learn that I couldn't keep my washing machine and freezer and things like that in the basement because they had to be moved out when the river would get in there. I had a coal furnace. I recall when the river would be up when it would be flood stage and there'd be maybe 6 inches of water in the basement, I would wade right down to that and fire the furnace. But we finally got rid of that coal furnace and had gas heating.

MK: You like that better?

VSS: Oh, yes.

MK: Cleaner?

VSS: Yes.

MK: You raised your son there where you –

VSS: Yes.

MK: – lived?

VSS: Yes.

MK: So, you must have lived in that house for how long?

VSS: I think [19]47, 1947.

MK: Thirty-nine years? Thirty-eight years?

VSS: I think it was [19]47. Yes, [19]47.

MK: Was that right after you married you moved?

VSS: No. I lived in Baltimore when I was married. Then my husband died and my son and I came to my father's. He lived in Saint George. We stayed with him until we got this house and we moved in it.

MK: I see.

VSS: We lived there until it washed away. Or I lived there until it washed away.

MK: What do you remember about last November 4th?

VSS: Oh, I tell you, I have good memories before the fourth came. Well, one thing I had gotten new carpeting and once they had to put down, it had a flaw in it. When (Cups?) really discovered the flaw, they said they would replace it. Well, the first time I got the carpet was in October. They got carpeting to replace it, and they brought that over and took up the old one. We were ready to put it down when we opened it up, this new carpet also had a flaw in it. So, they called (Cups?) and (Cups?), they just roll it back up and bring it back. That's what they did. Then they got another piece and November 5th, two of their workers came over to put down this new carpet. It didn't have a flaw or anything. It just went so well. The rain just poured the whole day. I kept watching the river and I couldn't see any change in then. But anyhow, they put down all the new carpet and loaded up the old and left about 3:00 p.m. I sat there and enjoyed my new carpet all for myself. I just was so proud and so good to have that new carpet. Now I had it for a year – the other one, but it had the flaw in it. But now I have this new one that's all nice and new. It's the same thing, only it didn't have any flaw in it. Well, before dark, I looked out and I could see the fence post down along the field. Each one was sticking out. That was my guideline of how I could tell that the river was all right. I thought, "Well, those fence posts are still sticking out. The river's not going to cause any trouble." So, whatever. I was eating something and was watching television. I was sitting there in my favorite chair just enjoying eating and watching television. I heard a knock on my door and it was my little old nephew, Jack Shahan. He says, "Come on, Auntie Icy. We got to get out of here." I said, "Why?" He said, "Why, the river's right there." I could look out and I could see it right in the road. I said, "Well, if I have to go, if it's coming, I'll come with you." So, I told him we had a canoe under the Norway spruce tree there in the yard. I said, "You get that canoe and put it up on the porch." I said, "Move my car up by my house." He did that and a boy was with him. I asked Joe if he'd go upstairs and turn the fire out in the bathroom. So, Joe did that and then David and Joe moved the boat and they moved the car up. By that time, I said, "I'm ready to go." We looked down in the basement and there was no water in my basement at that time – not a drop. I guess it had risen so fast that it hadn't had time to seep in there. But anyhow, I just reached in the wardrobe and got a coat – the oldest one I had – and picked up my purse and left. I went out the front door, locked both my doors and turned down all the lights, walked down my front steps, out the walk on the green grass and got into his truck. There was no road and no water in my yard. I'm not real sure what time that was, but it had gotten dark. He backed out and went down to my driveway and up on the street and he could hardly tell where the highway was. The boy that was with him kept watching and telling him to go here and go this way and go that way. We drove around up through there and got out all right. We went on up to Saint George and I stopped at my brother's, Allen, and told him what was happening. My brother, he couldn't believe it. I said, "Will you just get in your car and go down there and look?" Well, he did that. Then Jack and Joe and I went on up to David's house. So, that was going to be my stopping place. Then Ellowene and I sat there and talked a while and I called people on the telephone. I called Betty, the girl that lives across the river, and told her where I was. I asked her, I said, "Are you going to have to get out?" She said she didn't know. She didn't think it was going to bother them over there. We couldn't tell what I was going to do.

Then it was Monday Night Football game and Ellowene and I were watching that. Now it doesn't start until 9:00 p.m., does it?

MK: Yes, at night.

VSS: Well, anyhow, I must have been up at Ellowene's by 9:00 p.m. because we were watching that game. Then about that time, the electric went off and we couldn't have any water, or anything to heat water for coffee, or any heat or anything. It was kind of warm in the house when we weren't freezing or anything. We didn't have any lights. We did have candles. I don't know, just right away after that, Ellowene insisted that I go to bed. So, she got me out a nice, beautiful nightgown and I put that on and I went to bed. I went to sleep. Next thing I know, she was trying to get me up and saying that Jack said we had to move again because the water was almost up to that house. Sure, you know where the clinic is? That yellow house, that's where she lives. That's where we were. The water backed up in there. The regular river wasn't running down through there, but it had backed up the ditch and was over in the yard. So, we got ready and we went up to Marguerite's, up at the (Halcyon's?). (Freda Parsons?), Jack went over to get Freda and he helped a lot of people, just an awful lot of people get out. But then we went up to (Halcyon's?) and then other people started coming. That was the only place for them to go. There was something like twenty or so people up there, spent the night there. Well, I spent the night up there. Jack kept going all night. He would come in and he wouldn't tell me anything much because they thought it would worry me. But I knew when I'd hear him say something about a house, if it was that bad, it was bad down where I live too. The next morning, I insisted that he take me down the street so I could see what was going on. So, he did that. We went down the back way down by Elmer (Lifson?) store. We couldn't get any farther down than Limestone Road. That's where the Minears live up on the hill. We stopped at Minear's and I went in there. At that time, Bill Minear and his wife were there and Allen and Mary were there. Bill was sitting at the window looking down over the fields and he says, "Down there's your house in the trees." So, I looked down and saw my house, but it had gotten caught in the trees. If it had not caught in those trees, it would have washed completely away. Also, my car – couldn't see the car from up there, but my car was in front of the house down in the river. Now that was on Tuesday. At that time, Jack took me back up to Marguerite's and she had opened some soup that she had made during the summer. They had a stove that they burned wood in and she kept a pot on that. When she'd put the soup in the kettle, it would heat, people would eat it. Then she'd open another can and put them in. Anyhow, I ate some of the soup and had some coffee and then, I don't know, somehow or other, we went back down the street again. That's when I saw my brothers. Allen, of course, his house had washed down and he was at his house. Robert and Donald were there with him. That was on Tuesday. Then that Tuesday night, I went up to Aleta Snyder's, my niece in Parsons. I spent that Tuesday night with her. On Wednesday, my brother, Donald Shahan, took me to (Hagerstown?), whereas I was down there for two months. During that time, I become ill and was in the hospital for seventeen days. I couldn't have been treated any better in the hospital or at their house. I was there for Christmas vacation and all that when their children came home. I really enjoyed it but it wasn't very pleasant to be away. I really never got to see my house. They didn't want me, so I never got to go back to it at all. But before Donald and I left on Wednesday, he drove down the road so I can look and see where it was. The first thing I heard was that chime, just chiming away. I don't know how that thing could have clung there all that time. Anyhow, it did. Then I saw the sheet that was off of

the twin bed. It was a fitted sheet. I could tell by the flowers that are on. It was up in that Elm tree just as though someone had hung it up there to dry it.

MK: Had it been upstairs?

VSS: Yes. In my house. I had three bedrooms. I had the twin bed on this side and the other four poster one on this side and mine was in the middle and they were all destroyed. My brother-in-law and my sister Juanita came. Jim got the chimes and said, "I'll take it home and clean it up and keep it because someone else will take that. I'll just take that and save it for her." Juanita gathered up all the things she could find, which was not very much. This afghan – she got that someplace. She washed that eight times after she took it back to her house in Virginia. Then she made another trip back and she and her daughter looked the place over real well. But my rings, all my jewelry, everything – I had some of it downstairs and some of it upstairs – we never found any of it from upstairs. But I remembered where I'd left it downstairs and everybody that was there never found it. I had a nephew, Philip Shahan – he wanted to look it over and see what was going on and see if he could find anything of any value. I told him which sink drawer to pull out – the left one. I said, "The left top one, pull it out and then just stick your little fingers down through the mud and feel down through there and you'll get to those rings." He did that and he got my diamond wedding band and my engagement ring and this ring and a golden chain. That drawer was full of mud right up to the top but I got that much. But my diamond earrings washed away, my emerald ring. I had amethyst birthstone ring that washed away and had a pen that came from Portugal that one of my granddaughters had brought. When Donald and I left, my brother Robert stayed there for a while to be with Allen and to help him. So, he got some men and they got my car out of the river and then they got the insurance company. They moved along up the road but there wasn't much they could do.

MK: How far did the water move your house?

VSS: I don't know.

MK: Some little distance?

VSS: No. Not too far. Not off my land.

MK: But it moved it off its own foundation?

VSS: Yes. Completely off of its foundation. It moved it off of its foundation and moved it right through an outside fireplace, knocked it down and right through where the garage was. It was between this spruce pine tree and an Elm tree and was caught there. It hadn't moved too far. Then the river was on down there. The car was down in the river. It was completely submerged. But of course, the top begins sticking out. What else?

MK: What did you think on Tuesday when you went down there and down across the community? What did you think?

VSS: Well, I really don't know. But I did say – and I said it many times –what a dirty dig Cheat

River did us. You know, to tell you the truth, I don't know what I thought. I just don't know. When we left and David started taking me back up to (Halcyon's?), I would see people I knew and they'd want to talk. They'd run up to the truck and say, "Do you need anything? Do you want anything?" I'd left all my medicine down there. There was a couple of people that worked at the clinic and I'd say, "If you see Susan, tell her I left all my medicine down at the house." Well, evidently they did see her because she came up to (Halcyon's?) and brought medicine. I was sitting at Marguerite's table eating soup and she came in and talked to me there and she brought my medicine. Yes. I don't know.

MK: You must have been in shock, were you?

VSS: Yes. I would say so.

MK: It sounds as though you got very depressed then when you went to Hagerstown.

VSS: Well, no. Not too much.

MK: You got sick?

VSS: Well, I was kind of sick before I went. Yes. I wasn't too bad. But now they were so good. I went down there on Wednesday and on Thursday, I didn't have anything with what I had on. I had that old coat and I even forgot to take it. When I went down to Minear's, I took it off and laid it across a chair and went off and left it hanging there – laying on the chair. Well, anyhow, it wasn't very cold. I had a sweater, that's why. I had my sister-in-law's sweater and I had my niece's sweatshirt. But well, I wore that sweater and Donald and I went shopping. I got some underclothes, two or three things, and a suitcase. I don't know why I need the suitcase. Well, of course I need the suitcase to put my things in. We got the suitcase and then I just went around and picked up what I wanted and stuck them in there and then went up and paid for them. Then Donald's wife also was able to find quite a few little things I can wear. I guess I was kind of depressed.

MK: It's almost four months now, isn't it?

VSS: Yes.

MK: How do you feel now? Do you feel hopeful or do you feel –

VSS: Yes. I feel hopeful.

MK: You do?

VSS: Yes.

MK: Tell me about that.

VSS: Well, the first time I went to Parsons and went down across the bridge into Pennsylvania

Ave., I was terribly depressed. That's the first time I'd seen it and I just thought it was absolutely horrible – then Pennsylvania Ave. and on down the Tannery Row and over in Parsons and all the shops and stores and everything. At that time, there was no AMP, there wasn't any drugstore, there wasn't much of anything. I rode around and looked at it and then I went on down to Saint George and the same thing down there. There wasn't anything down there. I went to Minear's, I went up to Ellowene and she wasn't at home. So, I came back down to Minear's. I couldn't go to Allen's because they were staying at Minear's. Allen was working in the Parsons Post Office. So, I saw his wife at the Minear's and I saw Jake Minear. I talked with them for a while and then I left and came back up here. But I was extremely depressed over Parsons and Saint George. Since that time, I've been down there a few times. Then, since Allen has his trailer, I've been down there and visited them in the trailer. But I'm afraid Saint George will never be the same again. Well, I'm sure it won't be the same, but I don't know whether people are going to pick up and build back or not. I really think eventually they will in Parsons, but I just don't know. I would like very much to build. I don't want a big, large house. I just want a little –

[end of transcript]