

SOUTH DAKOTA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Library Cataloguing Service Data

Name of informant Don Theye
Address Rt. 1, Box 280 A, Dark Canyon, Rapid City, South Dakota
Date of Interview July 10, 1972
Name of Researcher John Watterson
Others Present _____
Location of Interview Dark Canyon
Added Notes _____

Subject Headings under which you feel this interview should be filed:

Extent and impact of flood in Dark Canyon; Meaning of flood experience; Poem about flood.

Demographic Information on Informant

Age 41 Sex Male County Pennington
Socio-economic status _____
Occupation _____
Education _____
Religion _____
Date of Arrival of Family in South Dakota _____
Where? _____
From where? _____
Number of Moves in South Dakota _____ Reasons for move: _____

- Q. This is John Watterson, June 10, 1972, I'm here at, near the mouth of Dark Canyon beside Rapid Creek in the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter of Section 18, Township 1 North, Range 7 East. And I'm talking with Don Theye, who is a poet and writer and who lives at the end of Dark Canyon, I will read the location in later. Mr. Theye had composed a poem concerning the flood, which he will read, recite, later in the tape. But at this point I would like to ask Don to tell us some of his experiences in Dark Canyon on the night of the flood, June 9. Okay, Don.
- A. Well, on the night of the flood I was at my home which is at then end of the canyon, after the fourth crossing it's about another half mile, three quarters of a mile up. And I had...
- Q. That is what direction?
- A. That's going west.
- Q. West.
- A. West up the creek. I had in the house at the time, there was my wife, my 18 year old daughter, I had five young houseguests who were just graduated from O'Gorman High School in Sioux Falls, they'd been working with me on a campaign for a friend of mine, and they came the Wednesday before the flood, the day after the election. We decided to have just a week or so together, just relaxing, as we worked pretty hard on this campaign. The night of the flood, the afternoon started pretty good, in fact, it was so nice that we went out and bought eight inner tubes so we could go tubing down the creek. Well, that evening when the rain started it was kind of hard, but I've seen hard rain here in the hills before, and it didn't bother me particularly.

Along about 7:30, between 7:30 and 8:00, I started to go out, it was still raining, and I started to go out of the Canyon to my studio in town. When I got just maybe a quarter mile down from my place across from Dr. Theberge's house, who lives across the creek, some big boulders about the size of refrigerators came down. And it was still raining as I say and there are rivulets of water coming off the top of the mountain, and I decided right then and there it was time to go back to the cabin. But I still had no idea that a flood was coming up or anything. The first thing I thought of was a few years ago there was also a land slide above Dr. Theberge's place where almost house sized sections of the cliff fell in.

Q. Where is the doctor's place?

A. Well, he's just about a quarter of a mile before I get to my place. Maybe not quite that far. Well, we got back, and there was two girls in a car behind me and one was in the car with me, and the two girls behind me as we backed up put their car up on a little slope by Judge Marshall Young's summer cabin--and that's just before you get to my place--and then we got in the truck and went back to my place, and I noticed the water was coming up pretty fast, and I decided I'd better call the Pactola or somebody to see what the situation was, it was still raining. And I couldn't get through, the lines were busy, and I tried to call the Forestry Service, the lines were busy, and about then I got to thinking, well maybe there's something up. And I finally got through, I had a call from a friend of mine, the deputy sheriff, chief deputy sheriff, Joe Burden, and, well, first another sheriff called, or deputy, and said that Mrs. (Ewoldt) who

lived down the, down the canyon, just past Dr. Theberge's in a nice new A-frame said she tried to get out and her car was stranded, and wanted to know if I'd go down the Canyon and help her. I told him I couldn't because the situation, there was a slight mud slide starting and those boulders across the road, and, well, meanwhile while I was talking to the sheriff on the phone, when the, well, I talked to the deputy, then this friend of mine called, Joe Burden, and while I was talking with him I told Tom (Snyder), the boyd who was staying with me from O'Gorman to watch for a mark about two fot above where the water was, the water was already about four foot higher than usual. And I suppose this is around 8 o'clock, 8:30, and this mark was about two foot up, I says, "Let me know as soon as it reaches there." Meanwhile, I told my guests and my family to get out some shoes and warm clothes, have a flashlight handy and a few other things, and when I said the work "Now" all it meant was we're gonna get up and walk as calmly as possible out the door and we're gonna go up on the hiking trail just above my place. Well, I was talking with Joe on the phone, and it was only a minute before when I told Tom Snyder to watch for that water mark, and he came up to me and said, after that minute that, "It's already there." And I, I said, "Goodbye, Joe," and hung up and I went in to the people were sitting in the living room, and I said, "Now." They got up and they followed me out, and the whole back hill behind my place, first you have to know what it looks like, it's just a wide spot I have in the road behind the cabin, a dirt slope that goes up about 20 feet, and then there's grassy slopes that go up about another maybe 3. 400 feet to the cliffs above which

are maybe anywhere from a hundred to 300 foot high. And this was just a river coming down, and mud. We went up on the hiking trail, and on the way we stopped and got my friend Cecil Hill who's a retired postman, who lives right in the cabin just past mine, right before (it blocks) end of the road. His wife wasn't there, she was in Arizona. We went up the trail, we set there by a big rock, and we no sooner got by this big rock and all at once other rocks come falling down, I suppose the biggest was about two or three watermelons put together, and bouncing off the top of this rock and hitting the hiking trail below us. About ten minutes after we left our cabin, Tom and Cecil went right back down the trail again just to see where the water was, because it was so dark, and the trail was under water already, and this trail was, had to be a good 15 feet above the normal creek level. So we spent the night out there, listened to the rocks fall over us, to the water going by, and we felt these vibrations occasionally, which were really tremendous. We found out the next morning that these were in fact mudslides that occurred from the very top of the slopes all they way down in several places. Jut literally scarred the beautiful slopes that are green this time of year. One of the places where the mud slide was came across the higher part of the hiking trail. There's a big rock that pushed down there, and this was the rock, strangely enough, that I intended on heading for, but I decided not to. I don't know why, don't ask me why, but I didn't go. We picked about, about the safest place there was. Well, we stuck it out, you know these kids from Sioux Falls were really fantastic, 'cause they, well, everybody was, everybody was calm and collected. Oh, sure, we had our

little heebie-jeebie scares and everything but nobody panicked. One of the girls kept singing something like "Raindrops Keep Fallin on My Head" and "I Feel the Earth, Sky" and everything like this, you know. They were good, they were well composed, I was prous of all of them. About 10 o'clock or so...there were three things that happened that night that really shattered our composure. And the first one happend at 10 o'clock. This sound came from way up canyon. A faint whistling. It got louder and louder and almost ear-shattering and then faded away down canyon. We had no idea what it was. This occurred aqain an hour or so later. And by the third time it happened which is around 1:00 in the morning, a series of lightning flashes revealed what it was. It was a propane tank, and I'm sure the other two were before it, and the valve was busted off and this white gas was spewing from it and whistling and the pressure releasing. But the first propane tank, from what I surmise and piecing things together and what, what Chuck Bennett told me, who lived down wehre Victoria Creek comes into Rapid--he lived above Bill and Elaine Smallnecker who were the only people on up canyon who were killed...

Q. Is that beyond here?

A. No, that was before me. They're before me, they're just where the last crossing is, the fourth crossing before you get to my house, and from what Chuck said...he had asked them earlier to come on in. Up to his place, and I'm not sure of all the details right now, exactly how he said it, but he said he saw Bill go out of the house and there was so much debris by the gate he couldn't get it open, and he went back in the house and then almost instantaneously, the house partially exploded into flame. And of all I can

piece together, this occurred about the first, about the time, we heard that first sound, of the propane tank. I, I just could almost be certain that this propane tank probably hit their house. Traveling with such force as it was.

Q. Where would it have come from, Don?

A. Johnson Siding, maybe. McGee Siding. I don't know if Hisega had any destruction or not. So I think it probably came from one of those two places. Which would seem likely with the time it would take for gas to escape...

Q. Could you, for the record, estimate how far upstream Johnson's Siding is and McGee Siding?

A. Well, by way of water, you know, which would be the...it's probably be...five miles, between five and eight miles, I imagine, by water. Between five and eight miles. I know I've tubed it a lot of times from Hisega and we were even talking about, the night of the flood--you know, you can be awfully humorous during a, during a flood or something until you come down the next morning like I did and see the death and destruction it did cause--but the night of the flood, there again, a lot of small talks keep you from admitting you are afraid sometimes. We were thinking what a gas it would be to get those eight tubes we'd bought that afternoon and tube down to Rapid. And, well, anyway, several hours later we did go down when the water started to recede, we conceived, again by lightning flashes, it was receding. We had a telephone pole across the way as a marker.

Q. Did you look at your watch?

A. Yeah. Somewhere around 1:30, between 1:30 and 2:00 maybe. Someone said the

time, I didn't look at my watch. And we checked my place and my panel truck, a Travelall was in mud up to the middle part of the doors and just battered and beat and crushed in on top from rocks and boulders falling in the mudslide. And it was a good old truck, it gave it's life for my Duster, and it folded itself in front of it, or nature helped it, and the Duster only sustained a dent in the side, you know, really it's, and both of them still start, by the way, but nobody can get up here to get to them. But we checked our house, I turned off the propane tank which was still there. We decided not to stay right there 'cause you couldn't walk through the mud very much. And went back to Cecil's house, and his whole basement was wiped out. In the front part, and the back part of his house rested on the ground, so we spent the night there in a bedroom. It was dry in the bedroom and all of us wore various clothing of his and his wife's, and he had a little brandy, which with some coffee, make things go pretty good. 'Course there was no power, we had to heat, we had some old kerosene lamps and we all cuddled together and we all realized right then and there we were cold. From that rain, and we started shaking, and I think there were about six or seven of us on the bed, just huddled up, you know. Next morning when it got down I started out, and I was sort of dismayed and felt pretty bad about the destruction that had gone on down canyon. I could only go as far as Victoria Creek, 'cause there was nothing else left. The creek seemed to have regained its original bed before they built the railroad, I guess, and so I went up over, out of the old rock quarry and in town, and after I got in town I saw really how bad things were, and this, this really bothered

me. The thing shows how things can be a little overreacted, when I got in town I went to the courthouse, and there was a map there, there were several maps, and one of them had Dark Canyon with a red X on it. I asked somebody what that meant, and it meant that everybody was dead and the whole place was destroyed. And I had a few choice words that I used in situations like that and erased the mark. My house is still standing. It just has a slight little lean on one corner, not even _____, we live in it. Everything's washed away in front of it. We're gonna keep on living in it, I know that, because there's something about this canyon that I came here for, is to write, be alone, do a little meditating and meet nice people...

- Q. What about the, your manuscripts. You were saying that you lost the manuscripts.
- A. I lost some manuscripts on a, a book that I've been wanting to do for a long time, all hand-written. That's, I lost that along with my storage shed down in the lower level of the, a lot of personal property and things which doesn't mean a thing to me really, as long as I'm still here, my family and friends that were there. The manuscript is precious to me 'cause it is a labor of love, but I'm sure I can regain all of it. I'm sure I have it inside of me to do it. Very, very fortunately, all my other manuscripts and notes and guitar and (filing) stuff and things and books are downtown, where I have a studio. And this is, this is very goo. Well, that's about I can really relate on that, and if you like, I will read the poem.
- Q. All right, I certainly would.
- A. Now, I'd like to say something. Someone asked me, people kept asking me,

"Are you going to write a poem about the flood, or a song?" And I would say, "No, I don't want to, because I have enough to remember about that flood." But I just started messing with it one day, I think it was the day I met you, a few days ago. And it came out, and without sounding egotistical, I like it, I think it has a point, and the last verse itself would be the one to sum it all up, I think, that's why I did it. So, should I leave this here or what?

Q. Yeah, just put it down and go to it.

A. I call it Hoch Wasser. That's German for High Water. I suppose I could give it a dramatic title like the Big Flood of Rapid City and all this stuff, but not being much of a dramatist, I don't think I could.

Hoch Wasser

9 June 72, Mark that fateful day.

When drops of death did spew from a sky slate gray.

Without rhyme or reason, favor or discord,

In the young, green season hurled the hydrohorde

The day came on just fine with sun, birds and green.

The storm as yet aligned was as yet unseen.

As a billowing steed from the north it sped,

Hardly time to take heed of the deadly dread.

The light melted to dark as fate's frock unfurled,

All that lacked was the ark in this wild, wet world.

From the massive mountains rocks began to fall.

Mud and (temptuous) fountains formed the wild, wet wall.

In Rapid City, bliss.
More rain. Drip, whish, drop.
Then swept in sheeting hiss
With no way to stop.
The clouds refused to travel,
The wind was asleep.
Chaos was unraveled from the creek now deep.
Rapid Creek earned her name under that slate sky,
Nothing would be the same after she passed by.
First a twig, then a tree,
A flower, rock and bud.
Beauty became debris
Borne upon a flood.
"A flood? There's just no way,"
Did the people cry.
"Just wait and you will see,"
Came the creek's reply.
The hydrahorde was fed by the constant wet,
Then more warnings were said, no believers yet.
Dark Canyon, first to go, claimed lives one and two.
By dawn the world would know what a flood can do.
Canyon Lake filled too fast with that damn debris;
Old dirt dike couldn't last, our park turned to sea.
Homes crumpled as cardboard, now the end was near.

More food for hydrahorde fed on death and fear.
Screams and cries were the sound from the twisting mass;
Round and round, round and round, killing with each pass.
Hydrahorde rode through town, eating brick and board.
What it touched tumbled down as it surged and soared.
It but took a brief while, less than a whole hour,
When nature's whimsy smile favored Hydra's power.
Pearls, gold and shiny cars were just so much trash.
Once trim yards now but scars of the Hydra's rash.
Rubber toys floating, whining dogs swept past,
Wounded, lost and bloating, now Hydra could fast.
Tales of escape and luck would keep your ear bent
Of how man beat the muck, how some did repent.
Heroes were commonplace, ten times of the dead,
Every creed, every race, shunning fear and dread.
From the very onset, before break of day,
Crisis came and was met, help was on the way.
One fact must be spoken, no if's and no buts;
Even with hearts broken, people still have guts.
Help came from all over, not just our nation;
Builder, nurse, freak, rover, each manned their station.
This man helping that man, long-hair helping short.
All worked within the span, all in good rapport.
"We couldn't stop the rainfall," so a panel said,

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Heeding a warning call could have meant less dead.
Not one sould should be blamed for Ma Nature's whim,
And no man can be shamed for such is slim.
Some answers must we seek while we plan and grieve,
But I hear Nature speak, "Now do you believe?"

(END OF INTERVIEW)

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Date of Arrival of Family in South Dakota _____

Where? _____

From where? _____

Number of Moves in South Dakota _____ Reasons for moves: _____

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- A. Well, on the night of the flood I was at my home which is at then end of the canyon, after the fourth crossing it's about another half mile, three quarters of a mile up. And I had...
- Q. That is what direction?
- A. That's going west.
- Q. West.
- A. West up the creek. I had in the house at the time, there was my wife, my 18 year old daughter, I had five young houseguests who were just graduated from O'Gorman High School in Sioux Falls, they'd been working with me on a campaign for a friend of mine, and they came the Wednesday before the flood, the day after the election. We decided to have just a week or so together, just relaxing, as we worked pretty hard on this campaign. The night of the flood, the afternoon started pretty good, in fact, it was so nice that we went out and bought eight inner tubes so we could go tubing down the creek. Well, that evening when the rain started it was kind of hard, but I've seen hard rain here in the hills before, and it didn't bother me particularly.

Along about 7:30, between 7:30 and 8:00, I started to go out, it was still raining, and I started to go out of the Canyon to my studio in town. When I got just maybe a quarter mile down from my place across from Dr. Theberge's house, who lives across the creek, some big boulders about the size of refrigerators came down. And it was still raining as I say and there are rivulets of water coming off the top of the mountain, and I decided right then and there it was time to go back to the cabin. But I still had no idea that a flood was coming up or anything. The first thing I thought of was a few years ago there was also a land slide above Dr. Theberge's place where almost house sized sections of the cliff fell in.

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A. Well, he's just about a quarter of a mile before I get to my place. Maybe not quite that far. Well, we got back, and there was two girls in a car behind me and one was in the car with me, and the two girls behind me as we backed up put their car up on a little slope by Judge Marshall Young's summer cabin--and that's just before you get to my place--and then we got in the truck and went back to my place, and I noticed the water was coming up pretty fast, and I decided I'd better call the Pactola or somebody to see what the situation was, it was still raining. And I couldn't get through, the lines were busy, and I tried to call the Forestry Service, the lines were busy, and about then I got to thinking, well maybe there's something up. And I finally got through, I had a call from a friend of mine, the deputy sheriff, chief deputy sheriff, Joe Burden, and, well, first another sheriff called, or deputy, and said that Mrs. (Ewoldt) who

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Q. Could you, for the record, estimate how far upstream Johnson's Siding is and McGee Siding?

A. Well, by way of water, you know, which would be the...it's probably be...five miles, between five and eight miles, I imagine, by water. Between five and eight miles. I know I've tubed it a lot of times from Hisega and we were even talking about, the night of the flood--you know, you can be awfully humorous during a, during a flood or something until you come down the next morning like I did and see the death and destruction it did cause--but the night of the flood, there again, a lot of small talks keep you from admitting you are afraid sometimes. We were thinking what a gas it would be to get those eight tubes we'd bought that afternoon and tube down to Rapid. And, well, anyway, several hours later we did go down when the water started to recede, we conceived, again by lightning flashes, it was receding. We had a telephone pole across the way as a marker.

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Q. What about the, your manuscripts. You were saying that you lost the manuscripts.

A. I lost some manuscripts on a, a book that I've been wanting to do for a long time, all hand-written. That's, I lost that along with my storage shed down in the lower level of the, a lot of personal property and things which doesn't mean a thing to me really, as long as I'm still here, my family and friends that were there. The manuscript is precious to me 'cause it is a labor of love, but I'm sure I can regain all of it. I'm sure I have it inside of me to do it. Very, very fortunately, all my other manuscripts and notes and guitar and (filing) stuff and things and books are downtown, where I have a studio. And this is, this is very goo. Well, that's about I can really relate on that, and if you like, I will read the poem.

Q. All right, I certainly would.

A. Now, I'd like to say something. Someone asked me, people kept asking me,

"Are you going to write a poem about the flood, or a song?" And I would say, "No, I don't want to, because I have enough to remember about that flood." But I just started messing with it one day, I think it was the day I met you, a few days ago. And it came out, and without sounding egotistical, I like it, I think it has a point, and the last verse itself would be the one to sum it all up, I think, that's why I did it. So, should I leave this here or what?

Q. Yeah, just put it down and go to it.

A. I call it Hoch Wasser. That's German for High Water. I suppose I could give it a dramatic title like the Big Flood of Rapid City and all this stuff, but not being much of a dramatist, I don't think I could.

Hoch Wasser

9 June 72, Mark that fateful day.

When drops of death did spew from a sky slate gray.

Without rhyme or reason, favor or discord,

In the young, green season hurled the hydrohorde

The day came on just fine with sun, birds and green.

The storm as yet aligned was as yet unseen.

As a billowing steed from the north it sped,

Hardly time to take heed of the deadly dread.

The light melted to dark as fate's frock unfurled,

All that lacked was the ark in this wild, wet world.

From the massive mountains rocks began to fall.

Mud and (temptuous) fountains formed the wild, wet wall.

In Rapid City, bliss.
More rain. Drip, whish, drop.
Then swept in sheeting hiss
With no way to stop.
The clouds refused to travel,
The wind was asleep.
Chaos was unraveled from the creek now deep.
Rapid Creek earned her name under that slate sky,
Nothing would be the same after she passed by.
First a twig, then a tree,
A flower, rock and bud.
Beauty became debris
Borne upon a flood.
"A flood? There's just no way,"
Did the people cry.
"Just wait and you will see,"
Came the creek's reply.
The hydrahorde was fed by the constant wet,
Then more warnings were said, no believers yet.
Dark Canyon, first to go, claimed lives one and two.
By dawn the world would know what a flood can do.
Canyon Lake filled too fast with that damn debris;
Old dirt dike couldn't last, our park turned to sea.
Homes crumpled as cardboard, now the end was near.

More food for hydrahorde fed on death and fear.
Screams and cries were the sound from the twisting mass;
Round and round, round and round, killing with each pass.
Hydrahorde rode through town, eating brick and board.
What it touched tumbled down as it surged and soared.
It but took a brief while, less than a whole hour,
When nature's whimsy smile favored Hydra's power.
Pearls, gold and shiny cars were just so much trash.
Once trim yards now but scars of the Hydra's rash.
Rubber toys floating, whining dogs swept past,
Wounded, lost and bloating, now Hydra could fast.
Tales of escape and luck would keep your ear bent
Of how man beat the muck, how some did repent.
Heroes were commonplace, ten times of the dead,
Every creed, every race, shunning fear and dread.
From the very onset, before break of day,
Crisis came and was met, help was on the way.
One fact must be spoken, no if's and no buts;
Even with hearts broken, people still have guts.
Help came from all over, not just our nation;
Builder, nurse, freak, rover, each manned their station.
This man helping that man, long-hair helping short.
All worked within the span, all in good rapport.
"We couldn't stop the rainfall," so a panel said,

Heeding a warning call could have meant less dead.
Not one soul should be blamed for Ma Nature's whim,
And no man can be shamed for such - is s'tim.
Some answers must we seek while we plan and grieve,
But I hear Nature speak, "Now do you believe?"

(END OF INTERVIEW)

JW I'd like to add that Ralph Sampsill was the only survivor of his family and that he is 13 years old.

End of tape. (Side 1)

557

JW This is John Watterson, June 10, 1972, I'm here at, near the mouth of Dark Canyon beside RapidCreek in the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter of section 18, township 1 north, range 7 east. And I'm talking with Don Theye, who is a poet and writer and who lives at the end of Dark Canyon, I will read the location in later. Mr. Theye had composed a poem concerning the flood, which he will read, recite, later in the tape. But at this point I would like to ask Don to tell us some of his experiences in Dark Canyon on the night of the flood, June 9. Okay, Don.

DT Well, on the night of the flood I was at my home which is at the end of the canyon, after the fourth crossing it's about another half mile, three quarters of a mile up. *And that's...*

JW That is what direction?

DT That's going west.

JW West.

DT West up the creek. I had in the house at the time, there was my wife, my 18 year old daughter, I had five young houseguests who were just graduated from O'Goraman High School in Sioux Falls, they'd been working with me on a campaign ~~on~~ for a friend of mine, and they came the Wednesday before the flood, the day after the election. We decided to have just a week or so together, just relaxing, as we worked pretty hard on this campaign. The night of the flood, the afternoon started pretty good, in fact, it was so nice that we went out and bought 8 inner tubes so we could go tubing down the creek. Well, that evening when the rain started it was kind of hard, but I've seen hard rain here in the hills before, *out* it didn't bother me particularly. Along about 7:30, between 7:30 and 8, I started to go out, it was still raining, and I started to go out

DT of the Canyon to my studio in town. When I got just maybe a quarter mile down from my place across from Dr. ~~(Theburgess's)~~ ^{Theberge's} house, who lives across the creek, some big boulders about the size of refrigerators came down. And ^{it was} still raining as I say and there are rivulets of water coming off the top of the mountain, and I decided right then and there it was time to go back to the cabin. But I still had no idea that a flood was coming up or anything. The first thing I thought of was a few years ago there was also a land slide above Dr. ~~(Theburgess's)~~ ^{Theberge's} place where almost houses ~~sized~~ sized sections of the ~~roof~~ ^{cliff} fell in.

JW Where is the doctor's place?

DTq Well, he's just about a quarter of a mile before I get to my place. Maybe not quite that far. Well, we got back, and there was two girls in a car behind me and one was in the car with me, and the two girls behind me as we backed up put their car up on a little slope by Judge Marshall Young's summer cabin. ~~That's just before you get to my place.~~ ^{And} And ~~they~~ ^{was then we} ~~WERE~~ ~~got~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~truck~~ ~~s~~ (got in the truck) ~~s~~ and went back to my place, and I noticed the water was coming up pretty fast, ^{and} I decided I'd better call the Pactola or somebody to see what the situation was, it was still raining. And I couldn't get through, the lines were busy, and I tried to call the forestry service, the lines were busy, and about then I got to thinking, well maybe there's something up. And I finally got through, I ~~fx~~ had a call from a friend of mine, the deputy sheriff, chief deputy sheriff Joe Burden, and, well, first another sheriff called, or deputy, and said that Mrs. ~~(Hewell)~~ ^(Ewoldt) ~~that~~ who lived down the, down the canyon, just past Dr. ~~(Theburgess's)~~ ^{Theberge's} in a nice new A-frame said she tried to get out and her car was stranded, and wanted to know if ~~fx~~ I'd go down the Canyon and help her. I told him I couldn't because the situation, there was a slight mud slide starting and those boulders across the road, and, well, meanwhile while I was talking to the sherrif on the phone, when the, well, I talked to the deputy, then this friend of mine called, Joe Burden, and while I was ~~xxx~~ talking with him I told Tom ~~(Snyder)~~ the boy who was staying with me from O'Gorman to watch for a mark about two foot above where the water was, the water was already about four foot higher than usual. And I suppose this is around 8 o'clock, 8:30, and this mark was about two foot up, I says,

DT "Let me know as soon as it reaches there." Meanwhile, I told my guests and my family to get out some shoes and warm clothes, have a flashlight handy and a few other things, and when I said the word "Now" all it meant was we're gonna get up and walk as calmly as possible out the door and we're gonna go up on the hiking trail just above my place. Well, I was talking with ~~(Joe)~~ on the phone, and it was only a minute ~~before~~ when I told Tom Snyder to watch for that water mark, and he came up to me and said, after that minute that, "It's already there." And I, I said "goodbye Joe", and hung up and I went into ~~the~~ the people were sitting in the living room, and I said, "Now." They got up and they followed me out, and the whole back hill behind my place, first you have to know what it looks like, ~~xxxxx~~ it's just a wide spot I have in the ~~rock~~ *rock* behind the cabin, a dirt slope that goes up about 20 feet, and then there's grassy slopes that go up about another maybe 3, 400 feet to the ~~cliffs~~ cliffs above which are maybe anywhere from a hundred to 300 foot high. And this was just a river coming down, and mud. We went up on the hiking trail, and on the way we stopped and got my friend Cecil Hill who's a retired postman, who lives right in the cabin just past mine, right before *(it blocks)* end of the road. His wife wasn't there, she was in Arizona. We went up the trail, we set there by a big rock, and we no sooner got by this big rock and all at once other rocks come falling down, I suppose the biggest was about two or three watermelons ~~put~~ together, and bouncing off the top of this rock and hitting the hiking trail below us. About ten minutes after we left our cabin, Tom and Cecil went right back down the trail again just to see where the water was, because it was so dark, and the trail was under water all ready, and this trail was, had to be a good fifteen feet above the normal creek level. So we spent the night out there, listened to the rocks fall over us, to the water going by, and we felt these vibrations occasionally, which were really tremendous. We found out the next morning that these were in fact mudslides that occurred *from the* very top of the slopes all the way down in several places. Just literally scared the beautiful slopes that are green this time of year. One of the places where the mud slide was came across the higher part of the hiking trail, *There's* and a big rock *that* had pushed down there, and this was the rock, strangely enough, that I intended on heading for, but I decided not too. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ I don't know why, don't ask me why, but I didn't go. We picked

DT about, about the safest place there was. Well, we stuck it out, you know these kids from Sioux Falls were really fantastic, 'cause they, well, everybody was, everybody was calm and collected. Oh, sure, we had our little heebie-jeebie scares and everything but nobody panicked. One of the girls kept ~~saying~~ ^{singing} something ~~about~~ like "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head" and "I Feel the Earth, Sky" and everything like this, you know. They were good, they were well composed, I was proud of all of them. About 10 o'clock or so... There were three things that happened that night that really shattered our composure. And the first one happened at 10 o'clock. This sound came from way up canyon. A faint whistling. It got louder and louder and almost ear-shattering and then faded away down ~~day~~ canyon. We had no idea what it was. This occurred again an hour or so later. And by the third time it happened which is around one in the morning, a series of lightning flashes revealed what it was. It was a propane tank, and I'm sure the other two were before it, and the valve was busted off and this white gas was spewing from it and whistling ~~and~~ the pressure of ~~it~~ releasing. But the first propane tank, from what I surmise and piecing things together and what, what Chuck Bennet told me, who lived down where Victoria Creek comes into Rapid, ~~he lived about~~ above Bill and Elaine Smallnecker who were the only two people on up canyon who were killed...

JW Is that beyond here?

DT No, that was before me. They're before me, they're just where the last crossing is, the ~~fourth~~ ^{fourth} Ford crossing before you get to my house, and from what Chuck said ..he had asked them earlier to come on in. Up to his place, and I'm not sure of all the details ^{right} now, exactly how he said it, but he said he saw Bill go out of the house and there was so much debris by the gate he couldn't get it open, and he went back in the house and then almost instantaneously, the house partially exploded into flame. And of all I can piece together, this occurred about the first, about the time we heard that first sound, of the propane tank. I, I just could almost be certain that this propane tank probably hit their house. Traveling with such force as it was.

JW Where would it have come from, Don?

DT Johnson Siding, maybe. McGee Siding. I don't know if Hisega had any destruction or not. So I think it probably came from one of those two places. Which would seem likely with the time it would take for gas to escape...

JW Could you, for the record, estimate how far upstream Johnson's Siding is and McGee Siding?

XW
DT Well, by way of water, ^{your know,} which would be the, ..it'd probably be...five miles, between five and eight miles, I imagine, by water. Between five and eight miles. I know I've tubed it a lot of times from Hisega and we were even talking about, the night of the flood, you know . you can be awfully humorous during a, during a flood or something until you come down the next morning like I did and see the death and destruction it did cause, but the night of the flood, there again, a lot of small talks keep you from admitting you are afraid sometimes. We were thinking what a gas it would be to get those 8 tubes we'd bought that afternoon and tube down to Rapid. And , well, anyway, several hours later we did go down when the water started to recede, we ~~receded~~ again by lightning flashes, it was receding. We had a telephone pole across the way as a marker;

JW XW Did you look at your watch?

DT Yeah. Somewhere around one:thirty, between one:thirty and two maybe. Someone said the time, I didn't look at my watch. And we checked my place and my panel truck, ^rTravelall was in mud up to the middle part of the doors and just battered and beat and crushed in on top from rocks and boulders falling in the mudslide. And it was a good old truck, it gave it's life for my Duster, and it folded itself in front of it, or nature helped it, and the Duster only sustained a dent in the side a you know, really it's, and both of them still start, by the way, but nobody can get up here to get to them. But we checked our house, I turned off the propane tank which was still there. We decided not to stay right there cause you couldn't walk through the mud very much. And went back to Cecil's house, and his whole basement was wiped out. ~~And~~ In the front part, and the back part of his house rested on the ground, so we spent the night there in a bedroom. It was dry in the bedroom and all of us wore various clothing of his and his ^wwife's, and he had a little brandy, which with some coffee, ~~we~~ made things go pretty good. ^rCourse there was no power, we had to heat, ^{we} they had some old kerosene lamps and we all cuddled together n and we all realized right then and there we were cold. From that rian, and we started shking, and I think there were about six or seven of us on the bed, just

DT huddled up, you know,. Next morning when it got dawn I started out, and I was sort of dismayed and felt pretty bad about the destruction that had gone on down canyon. I could only go as far as Victoria Creek, 'cause there was nothing else left. The creek seemed to have regained its ~~xxxix~~ original bed before they built the railroad, I guess, and so I went up over, out of the old rock quarry and in town, and after I got in town I saw really how bad things were, and this, this really bothered me. ~~xx~~ *The thing* shows how things can be a little overreacted, when I got in town I went to the courthouse, and there was a map there, there were several maps, and one of them had Dark Canyon with a red X on it. I asked somebody what that meant, and it meant that everybody was dead and the whole place was destroyed. And I had a few choice words that I used in situations like that and erased the mark. My house is still standing. It just has a slight little lean on one corner, not even _____, we live in it. Everything's washed away in front of it. We're gonna keep on living in it, I know that, because there's something about this canyon that I came here for, is to write, be alone, do a little meditating and meet nice people..

JW What about the ~~the~~ *some* manuscripts. You were saying that you lost the manuscripts.

DT I lost ~~the~~ *some* manuscripts on a _____, a book that I've been wanting to do for a long time, all hand-written. That's, I lost that along with my storage shed down in the lower level *of the* a lot of personal property and things which doesn't mean a thing to me really, as long as I'm still here, my family and friends that were there. The manuscript is precious to me 'cause it is a labor of love, but I'm sure I can regain all of it. I'm sure I have it inside of me to do it. Very, very fortunately, all my other manuscripts *and* notes and guitar and *(filing)* stuff and things and books are downtown, where ~~xi~~ I have a studio. And this is, this is very good. Well, that's about I can really ~~really xxxxxxxx~~ relate on that, and if you like, I will read the poem.

JW All right. I certainly would.

DT Now, I'd like to say something. Someone asked me, people kept asking me, "are you going to write a poem about the flood, or a song?" And I would say, "No, I don't want to, because I have enough to remember about that flood." But I just started messing with

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Jw Yeah, just put it down ~~and~~ go to it.

[DT I call it ~~(Hope Vassa)~~ ^{Hoch Wasser}. That's German for High Water. I suppose I could give it a dramatic title like the Big Flood of Rapid City and all this stuff, but not being much of a dramatist, I don't think I could.

~~(Hope Vassa)~~ Hoch Wasser

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The storm as yet ^{aligned} was as yet unseen.

As a billowing steed from the north it sped,

Hardly time to take heed of the deadly dread.

The light melted to darkness as fate's ^(frock) unfurled,

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More rain. Drip, wish, drop.

Then swept in sheeting ^(hiss).

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The wind was asleep.

Chaos was unraveled from the creek now deep.

Rapd Creek earned her name under that slate sky,

Nothing would be the same after she passed by.

DT ~~xxxxxx~~

First a twig, then a tree,

A flower, rock and bud.

Beauty became debris

born ^u upon a flood.

"A flood? There's just no way"

Did the people cry.

"Just wait and yo^u will see",

Came the creek's reply.

The ~~(hydra hoard)~~ ^{horde} was fed by the constant wet,

Then more warnings were said, no believers yet.

Dark Canyon, first ~~xxxxx~~ to go, claimed ~~(liars)~~ ^{lies} one and two.

By dawn the world would ~~no~~ know what a flood can do.

Canyon Lake filled too fast with that damn debris;

Old dirt dike couldn't last, our park ~~xxxxx~~ turned to sea.

Homes Crumpled as cardboard, now the end was near.

More food for ~~(hydra hoard)~~ ^{horde} fed on death and fear.

Screams and ~~crys~~ ^{cries} were the sound from the twisting mass;

Round and round, round and round, killing with each pass.

(Hydra ~~hoard~~) ^{horde} rode through town, eating brick and board.

What it touched bumbled down as it surged and soared.

It but took a brief while, less than a whole hour,

~~But~~ ^{When} nature's whimsy smile favored Hydra's power.

Pearls, gold and shiny cars were just so much trash.

Once trim yards now but scars of the Hydra's rash.

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Wounded, lost and bloating, now Hydra could fast.

Tales of escape and luck, would keep your ear bent

Of how man beat the muck, how some did repent.

Heros were commonplace, ten times of the dead,

DT Every creed, every race, shunning fear and dread.

From the very onset, before break of day,

Crisis came and was met, help was on the way.

One fact must be spoken, no if's and no but's;

Even with hearts broken, people still have guts.

Help came from all over, not just our nation;

Builder, nurse, freak, rover, each man ^{red} their station.

This man helping ~~that~~ that man, long-haired ^{red} helping short.

All worked within the span, all in good rapport.

"We couldn't stop the rainfall," so a panel said,

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(END OF INTERVIEW)