

SOUTH DAKOTA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Library Cataloguing Service Data

Name of Informant Mrs. Jerry Flanagan
Address 1708 W. Rapid Street, Rapid City, South Dakota
Date of Interview June 26, 1972
Name of Researcher O. A. Rothlisberger
Others Present _____
Location of Interview 2017 2nd Avenue, Rapid City, South Dakota
Added Notes _____

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

Rapid City flood victim; She, husband and baby stayed in house all night; Floated on a mattress; All houses around them destroyed; They rescued by National Guard next morning.

Demographic Information on Informant

Age c. 20 Sex Female County Pennington

Socio-economic status Middle

Occupation _____

Education _____

Religion _____

Date of Arrival of Family in South Dakota _____

Where? _____

From Where? _____

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

- Q. I'm talking this morning to Mrs. Jerry Flanagan from Rapid City, South Dakota. Mrs. Flanagan, I believe in our earlier conversation here, you told me that you and your husband and daughter were living at 1708 W. Rapid Street, right, at the time of, at the time of the flood. And we identified that on the map, too, I guess, did we not, as being located within the southwest quarter of the southwest quarter of section 35, township 2 north, range 7 east. Now, you were home, that Friday afternoon, or evening when the flood occurred. What time did you receive warnings that flood conditions were probably. . . ?
- A. Well, they told us about 8 o'clock, they started saying that Rapid Creek was, was probably, the water was starting to come down. And then about 10:30 they said those people _____ Rapid Creek or Canyon Lake should evacuate.
- Q. I see. Now. . . .
- A. But they should use their own judgement.
- Q. Oh yes. Now, 1708, now that was on Rapid Creek.
- A. No.
- Q. That was off Rapid Creek.
- A. That's, it's about three blocks from Rapid Creek.
- Q. I see, I see, and is it below the dam, Canyon Lake Dam, then?
- A. Yes.
- Q. I see, now, you were home that evening, you and your husband and daughter?
- A. My daughter, yes.
- Q. Were all there, I see. And did the waters, you say, reached your place, your house. . . .
- A. Yes, into our house.

- Q. But was your house, was your house destroyed, or. . . ?
- A. Well, it wasn't taken off the foundation. It stayed there, but it's unfit, of course, for human beings.
- Q. Yes, I see. Well, then, when, at what time do you remember, approximately, did the water start coming up into your property?
- A. Well, about, about 11:15, my husband noticed that the water was coming up through the pipes. And so, then about 11:30 is when the water really gushed in the house.
- Q. Now, what, you were there in the house, where did you take refuge then? Did you get on the roof or anything?
- A. No, we wanted to go outside, but we couldn't get the doors open, so we had to stay in the house, and we floated on the mattress in our bedroom.
- Q. Is that right?
- A. 'Cause we couldn't get outside.
- Q. How, how deep did the water get in your house then?
- A. Oh, about up to. . . shoulder.
- Q. Is that right? It must have been a rather harrowing experience, I would think. And, of course, your daughter is about what, a year and a half?
- A. A year old.
- Q. A year old. Was there with you. You, your husband, and your daughter then managed to cling to this, this mattress. I see. Well, you were that all night then. Now, did you have any communications, I suppose you were listening to the radio.
- A. Oh, no, the radios were all off, and we didn't have a transistor. There were people around that, there were so many more people that their houses

had left and people were floating by and so they tried to get those people, you know, because we were, we were more safe than them, because the house at least was standing.

Q. Yes, I see, now from you place there, could you look out and see people's houses going by?

A. Yes, trailer houses, the house right in front of us blew up, our house was filled with gas, you know, and so here the, the _____ and everything, were just coming by burning and everything.

Q. Oh, yes. Uh-huh. The gas mains broke, I suppose, in your house.

A. Yes.

Q. And you say the house right next to you blew up, is it. . . ?

A. Right in front of us.

Q. Uh-huh. Was that a gas explosion, I. . . ?

A. I don't know.

Q. Yeah, well, I don't suppose you would, but. . . I can see that some of these houses just had been blown to pieces, but that was the action of the waters themselves, automobiles, did you lose your automobile?

A. Yes we did.

Q. Was it swept away, or. . . ?

A. Well, it didn't go very far. We were really lucky, 'cause we live where there's a whole bunch of great big trees. And so they said that's what kind of saved our house from going, 'cause there's these great big cottonwood trees all over.

Q. Were any of the people around you there, on their roofs, in trees. . . ?

A. Well, all, all the houses around us were gone.

Q. They were.

A. Yes. Ours was the only one that was, there was one big one farther down and it stayed. But it was a great big huge one, and ours was just a real little, tiny house. And most of the houses, you know, around us were really built really well, you know, ours just happened to stay.

Q. Uh-huh. I suppose there were casualties in. . . .

A. Yes, we found a body right out beside our window.

Q. Was it from someone in the area there or. . . ?

A. I don't know. But the people right behind us were killed. And the people, well, we lived right beside Omaha, and so, you know, Omaha, you know, is kind of _____.

Q. Yes. _____ much destruction there. Now you, you say that the National Guard was out with, what, with their helicopters. . . ?

A. With great big trucks.

Q. Uh-huh. They were out that, that night, what time was that?

A. No, I don't know when they were out at night, but we could see boats, and we could see _____ lights, you know, but there was so many people, you know, that were more bad off than us, 'cause the guy right beside us, his house left the foundation completely. And so they were trying to help him.

Q. They lost, they lost everything then. Well, you say it was about 11 o'clock or a little after that the water really came up rapidly.

A. Yes, about 11:30, we, our house, well, about 11:15 my husband woke me up and said, "There's water coming in through the pipes." And so he went in, looked in the bathroom and came back, and by that time the water was gushing through the back door. So we went up and we got Becky, we barely got into Becky's

room and the water was up to waist length. So we just had to run for the bedroom, you know, 'cause that was the only (window) in the house.

Q. That must have been that wall of water that they talk about that rushed through the city, is that after the dam had burst?

A. Yes, that's what they said.

Q. And then you were, you were rescued then the following morning.

A. About 6:30.

Q. Had the waters somewhat receded at that time?

A. Well, at our place it did, but right exactly right beside us it was still about six or seven feet.

Q. Uh-huh. How, how were you rescued then?

A. By the National Guard, they brought their great big truck up to our house.

Q. Oh, I see, I see. And they took you from there, where did they remove you to?

A. To the auditorium.

Q. To the auditorium. Mm-hm. And I suppose the auditorium was just. . . .

A. Packed.

Q. Packed with all of the, many of the victims that were there. And then after arriving at the auditorium, I suppose that the National Guard was there, was there some of the other agencies that were trying to find places for people to. . . .

A. Well, we were really lucky, because we just barely got in the auditorium, and a woman came up, and I'm pregnant, and she noticed that, and then our little daughter was so wet and cold, and we went to her house.

Q. I see, I see. Some, you did not know the person.

A. It was a private, well, I know their name but, it's written down somewhere.

- Q. Yes, I see, but you were not personally acquainted with them.
- A. No, no.
- Q. And they took you to, to their house.
- A. Yes, to their house.
- Q. And you stayed there until you were relocated here.
- A. Yes. Well, then we went to another friends house, and then Jerry's folks were gone, and so they came right to Rapid and then we came up here.
- Q. I see. Yes. Well, that, during, during that night, now, you were there floating around on that mattress, then, from about 11 o'clock until the morning when the Guard arrived with their truck, and then. . .were, were there a number of other people in your area that were still there, were rescued at that time?
- A. Well, we only saw one man and he was in his house, and he was floating on a table. So he was the only one really that we saw around there. Most of the people, just about all of the people right in front of us were killed, and the people, the house right next door to us went in the first five minutes, luckily, those two kids were gone. They didn't stay there that night.
- Q. They weren't there that night. Well, thank you, Mrs. Flanagan, I think you've given us an informative and interesting account of your experiences here in the great Rapid City flood of 1972. Thank you so much.

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- Q. I see. Now. . . .
- A. But they should use their own judgement.
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- A. No.
- Q. That was off Rapid Creek.
- A. That's, it's about three blocks from Rapid Creek.
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- A. Yes, into our house.

- Q. But was your house, was your house destroyed, or. . . ?
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- Q. Yes, I see. Well, then, when, at what time do you remember, approximately, did the water start coming up into your property?
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- Q. Is that right?
- A. 'Cause we couldn't get outside.
- Q. How, how deep did the water get in your house then?
- A. Oh, about up to. . . shoulder.
- Q. Is that right? It must have been a rather harrowing experience, I would think. And, of course, your daughter is about what, a year and a half?
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Q. Oh, yes. Uh-huh. The gas mains broke, I suppose, in your house.

A. Yes.

Q. And you say the house right next to you blew up, is it. . . ?

A. Right in front of us.

Q. Uh-huh. Was that a gas explosion, I. . . ?

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Q. Yeah, well, I don't suppose you would, but. . . I can see that some of these houses just had been blown to pieces, but that was the action of the waters themselves, automobiles, did you lose your automobile?

A. Yes we did.

Q. Was it swept away, or. . . ?

A. Well, it didn't go very far. We were really lucky, 'cause we live where there's a whole bunch of great big trees. And so they said that's what kind of saved our house from going, 'cause there's these great big cottonwood trees all over.

Q. Were any of the people around you there, on their roofs, in trees. . . ?

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Q. Was it from someone in the area there or. . . ?

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Q. Yes. _____ much destruction there. Now you, you say that the National Guard was out with, what, with their helicopters. . . ?

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Q. That must have been that wall of water that they talk about that rushed through the city, is that after the dam had burst?

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Q. And then you were, you were rescued then the following morning.

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Q. Had the waters somewhat receded at that time?

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Q. Uh-huh. How, how were you rescued then?

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Q. Oh, I see, I see. And they took you from there, where did they remove you to?

A. To the auditorium.

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A. Packed.

Q. Packed with all of the, many of the victims that were there. And then after arriving at the auditorium, I suppose that the National Guard was there, was there some of the other agencies that were trying to find places for people to. . . .

A. Well, we were really lucky, because we just barely got in the auditorium, and a woman came up, and I'm pregnant, and she noticed that, and then our little daughter was so wet and cold, and we went to her house.

Q. I see, I see. Some, you did not know the person.

A. It was a private, well, I know their name but, it's written down somewhere.

- Q. Yes, I see, but you were not personally acquainted with them.
- A. No, no.
- Q. And they took you to, to their house.
- A. Yes, to their house.
- Q. And you stayed there until you were relocated here.
- A. Yes. Well, then we went to another friends house, and then Jerry's folks were gone, and so they came right to Rapid and then we came up here.
- Q. I see. Yes. Well, that, during, during that night, now, you were there floating around on that mattress, then, from about 11 o'clock until the morning when the Guard arrived with their truck, and then. . .were, were there a number of other people in your area that were still there, were rescued at that time?
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JF Well, they told us about 8 o'clock, they started saying that Rapid Creek was, was probably, the water was starting to come down. And then about ~~xx~~ 10:30 they said those people Rapid Creek or Canyon Lake should evacuate.

OR I see. Now..

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JF No.

OR That was off Rapid Creek.

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JF Yes.

OR I see, now, you were home that evening, you and your husband and daughter?

JF My daughter, yes.

OR Were all there, I see. And did the waters, you say, reached your place, your house..

JF Yes, into our house.

OR But was your house, was your house destroyed, or..

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OR Is that right?

JF Cause we couldn't get outside.

OR How, how deep did the water get in your house then?

JF Oh, about up to..shoulder.

OR Is that right? It must have been a rather harrowing experience, I would think. And of course, your daughter is about what, a year and a half?

JF A year old.

OR A year old. Was there with you. You, your husband, and your daughter then managed to ~~float~~ ^{cling} to this, this mattress. I see. Well, you were there all night then. Now, did you have any communications, I suppose you were listening to the radio..

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JF Yes, we did.

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JF It was a private, well, I know their name but, it's written down somewhere.

OR Yes, I see, but you were not personally acquainted with them.

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