

SOUTH DAKOTA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Library Cataloguing Service Data

Name of informant Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Deisch
Address 4907 Baldwin, Rapid City, South Dakota
Date of Interview June 28, 1972
Name of Researcher John Watterson
Others Present Milton Deisch
Location of Interview _____
Added Notes _____

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

Demographic Information on Informant

Age 46,44 Sex Male, Female 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: _____

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Name of informant Milton Deisch
Address 717 Herman Street, Rapid City, South Dakota
Date of Interview June 28, 1972
Name of Researcher John Watterson
Others Present Mrs. Milton Deisch
Location of Interview 4907 Baldwin
Added Notes _____

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Demographic Information on Informant

Age 38 Sex Male County Pennington
Socio-economic status _____
Occupation _____
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Number of Moves in South Dakota _____ Reasons for move: _____

- Q. This is John Watterson, I'm with Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Deisch and Mr. Milton Deisch, Deisch, at--what's the address?--4907 Bladwin Street. And they're going to tell us their experiences the night of the flood. Mr. Milton Deisch lived at 1313 Campbell, in the trailer court there, which is in the southeast quarter of the southeast quarter of section 6, township 1 north, range 7 east. Shall we start with Ronald Deisch, shall we start with you?
- A. Why don't you start with Delores and let her tell her what they done earlier Friday, and then I'll come in after. . . .
- A₂ Okay.
- Q. All right, fine. Can you, we can just set it here _____, should be enough. . . .
- A₂ Well, this was to be the annual campout, troop campout for Girl Scout Troop 43. The girls had sold Girl Scout cookies and I think raised the money to do this. So we had chosen Roubaix Lake as the place to camp out. There were eleven little Girl Scouts and two extra little girls.
- Q. Where is Roubaix Lake?
- A₂ Oh, Ronnie, where's Roubaix?
- A. Well, it's off Highway 385 and it's about, oh, what, eleven miles from the junction of 40 and Rimrock Highway and 385.
- Q. I see, yeah.
- A₂ It's a nice, pleasant, about 45 minute drive from here. Another one of the mothers and myself had taken four girls with us and had left here at 10 o'clock that morning to go to Roubaix to assure enough campsites for the whole troop. And it was a beautiful day. The four girls we took with us went swimming. Was no rain, no sign of rain. And then the rest of the troop was to congregate and follow us about 3 o'clock that afternoon, which they did. And it was

3:30 by the time the whole group was there. Then we had a couple of small tents which Mrs. Pugh and I had set up; then we had some larger tents, and that's where Ronnie and Milt came in. They were going to come up about 5:00 and set up these large tents for us. Also, Bob Rodeen, another man, those three men were going to help us get the tent set up and ready for the night. They came, got the large tent, just about set up, in the meantime the girls were cooking their supper over a campfire, and it began to rain. So first of all we thought we'd just sweat it out, just wait, and sooner or later it would quit. And it was just like standing under an open faucet, wasn't it? I've never seen such rain, and it just didn't quit. Then I. . . .

A. I think it was, I think it was an hour, almost an hour that we. . . .

A₃ We set there and waited. . . .

A. For that thing to quit. And, of course, in an hour's time with that much rain we knew that, that we going to have to leave, because everything was wet, I mean the bottom of the tent. The sleeping bags inside, the clothes, so the only thing then we could do was pull up stakes and leave. And we had taken a boat with us because after we got the Girl Scouts set up we were going to go back to Sheridan for night fish. Now, luckily we had that boat because if we wouldn't have had it, I don't know what would have happened to the tents.

A₂ We'd have had to leave them.

A. But we had a big 9 by 13 tent and the other two were somewhat smaller, but there's just no way we could have ever taken those tents back. So finally, the, we got everything loaded, and all of us just wet down to the skin, you know, so we left Roubaix and headed back on 385 to, to the junction, Highway 40, to come down Rimrock back to Rapid City. Before we got to the junction

a car stopped us and said, "You'll never make it across the road. The water is up over the hubcaps or up to the top level of the tires." So we set there a while and we saw another car come through and he say, "Well," he says, "If you stick to the outside of the road, it isn't so bad, you can get through." So we left Bob Roddeen's four wheel drive pick-up go through first, and then we all followed. And we had that four wheel drive pick-up, my van, a station wagon, and five cars in the caravan, you might say. Well, then we got to the junction of 40 and 385 and started down towards Rapid and the water alongside of the road, I've never seen water run like that has, and down below in the lower areas, everything was filled with water. Well, we, we went down Rimrock, I suppose about, oh, 7, 8 miles and in several spots the water was just going across the road, something fierce.

A₂ A river.

A. And when you go across this, across the water that was crossing the road, it was almost hypnotize you and you'd want to almost take the car and follow that water in the direction it was going across the road, it was real funny. And you could feel the force of the water on the vehicle. Well, finally, then a patrolman came up Rimrock and said, "It's impossible to go down Rimrock any farther, the road has several feet of water in it, an there are some places that are starting to wash out." So then the only thing that we could do was turn the caravan around and come back up, and by this time, the water was a little heavier than it was as we came down. And we started, but luckily we alternated to come back to 385. By the time we got back to 385 the rain and the hail was so bad that we could hardly see the road ahead of us. And I don't think it was dark yet, was it?

A₂ No.

A. Because we got back to. . .we. . .in at 9 o'clock, about 9 o'clock, and I suppose that this was about 8 o'clock.

A₂ It had just really gotten good and dark by the time we got to Wheel Inn, don't you think?

A₃ Yeah.

A. Let's see, now, there wasn't anything on the highway now, from 385 to Wheel Inn as far as the heavy water. . . .

Q. Where is Wheel Inn?

A. Now Wheel Inn is, is just north of Sheridan Lake. . . .

A₃ About a mile.

A. About a mile.

A₂ You. . . .

A. On 385.

A₂ How far from Pactola? We _____ Pactola.

A. Well, I don't know, but it's easier. . . .

A₃ _____ went by Pactola, Pactola looked normal, you know, as far as the water. . . .

A₂ Yeah, Pactola _____.

A. And so we couldn't see anything, and by the time we got to Wheel Inn, it was absolutely (soaking), and the condensation inside the car and, you know, everything was just fogged up, something terrible, being we were all wet and the heavy moisture outside, and. . . .

A₂ Everything we had was _____.

A. So we pulled into Wheel Inn. And as we pulled in to Wheel Inn, one of the

ladies with her little girl, pulled out and said she was going back to Rapid.

A₂ (Unintelligible.)

A. Now we set there at Wheel Inn from 9 o'clock till what?

A₂ 2:30.

A. 2:30, and it rained, I suppose, for four hours just almost as hard as it could rain. And then at times it would let up a little bit and it would come back. And at, this was at 9 o'clock because we call, we called Rapid City to see if our daughter, who was working in the hospital had gotten home all right, and she was quite surprised because she said, "Oh, it just rained a little bit here but it quit now." This was at 9 o'clock. So we felt, we felt real relieved and, of course, this is what we thought all night long when we were sitting up there at Wheel Inn. That, gee, it's raining hard up here but it's not. . . . Then the thought went through my mind, "I wonder if I should call Rapid and notify somebody?" I really didn't know who, and let them know what's up above Rapid City because. . . . But then it went through my mind, "Oh, we had hard rains before, and this is gonna let up pretty soon." Well, it was several hours before it let up.

A₂ Well, till that time it had rained, it had rained steadily from what would you say, 5:00, 5:30 that afternoon?

A. What time, we got those tents set up a little after five. . . .

A₃ Yeah, 'cause we thought we'd leave there at 6:30, and we didn't get out of there by 6:30 and go. . . .

A. So I suppose from _____.

A₂ Well, _____ never let up.

A. From 5:30 till at least--what?--1 o'clock or 1:30.

A₂ Oh, yeah, it just never let up, it was just solid, just. . . .

Q. _____ what, that hard of a rain, what they talk about, four to seven inches, usually. . . .

A₂ Oh, it was (20) inches.

A. Now we, we had heard that in the first two hours we were there that it had rained four inches. Now, you can take it from there. Now, we were there in that heavy rain then from let's say 6 o'clock to 1:00, which is seven hours, at least seven hours, so. . . .

A₃ It never quit.

A₂ No, it didn't, it never quite.

A. It never quit.

Q. So you would estimate that maybe it was as much as six or nine to ten. . . ?

A. Yes, yes, and this might seem a little out of line, but there were places reported, I know in that Nemo area where they had from twelve to fourteen inches of rain in those few hours. So this could very well be, that there was from eight to nine inches in that time.

Q. How did you, did you come back the next morning?

A. Yeah. Then at 2:30, some, I suppose highway man, tapped on the window and said the road, 16, is open, but there's a lot of debris and still water going across the road in several places. So then we got our caravan altogether and we all took off. And. . . .

A₂ _____ we were minus one at that time and a little panicky about her, because you couldn't, she just said she was going and she just whipped out. Nobody could stop her.

Q. Did she arrive safely?

A₂ Yes, thank God, but we didn't know that until. . . .

A. It wasn't until Saturday afternoon that we knew. . . .

A₂ Saturday afternoon.

A. But we knew that she had gone home the way that we were gonna go home, then, at 2:30. And from the time we left Wheel Inn till we got home, see, we didn't see her car, we didn't know where she was, we checked her house and she wasn't at home, so the indication was. . . .

A₂ Gone.

A. _____ flood hit. But she had, there's what they call three forks just a few miles south of here. One road goes to Highway 16, one goes up to Hill City, and then, of course, the fork that we were on that goes to Sheridan. And, of course, she had turned up the fork that went to Hill City and that's why we didn't see the car. And all the way back on the road, especially where there was a heavy cut in the side of the hill when they built the road, there were boulders, just, oh, just fantastic size and trees that were ripped out, large trees that were ripped out, large trees ripped out by the roots, laying across the. . . and, of course, then at, at time you could hear this creek, 'course then it was almost like a river. Just fantastic roar and, of course, we couldn't see any thing because it was still dark and believe me, we stuck right to the road, we stuck pretty close together because it was, it was real frightening.

A₂ And the smell was so bad. Which I could understand, that soon after all this, the stench was awful.

A. Then I suppose it took us, what, an hour and a half to get home.

A₂ Oh, it must have been 4 o'clock when we pulled into town.

A. _____ 4 o'clock when we got home.

A₃ Well, it was light when we got to Rapid.

A₂ Not quite.

A. No, because we were down, the lights were still out, in parts of the city the lights were out, as I remember and it was pretty dark. In, in the parts of the city where there wasn't any light. Well, anyway, then Milt, when we came down 16, Milt had cut off to go to his trailer at E. St. Patrick. And we continued on down so we could get out here to West Rapid. And I don't know how many streets and different places that we tried to get home and we couldn't get home here. And, oh, I suppose it was two foot of water going down Main Street. So then we said, "We'll go down to Milt's and stay with him in his trailer until we can get home." Well, I don't know if, if I've ever had a big shock in my life, but I tell you, this was the biggest one, when I drove down on Campbell Street and saw this river of water going across the road and a huge trailer right smack dab across the road, I just couldn't believe it. And then I walked over part way and I could see the bowling alley over there had both sides ripped out _____ and the doors wide open and, of course, I could see part of the trailer court and there were trailers every which direction. And then I couldn't find him, then I didn't know where he was, and it was several hours later that we run into him.

A₂ Took us about two hours to find Milt and there was only two streets open, and we traveled those two streets for two hours and kept missing you. But that was a terrible, rude awakening. We thought, thank God, we got all these little girls home safe, but we didn't know what Rapid City looked like.

A. Yeah, we had no idea. No idea. We knew nothing about the flood until we got. . . .

- Q. So as you came down, well, I don't know what you would have seen on 16. . .
_____ 16. . . .
- A. Nothing. Nothing.
- A₂ Everything was just peachy keen.
- A. There was no. . . .
- A₃ There was, there was, remember that house. . . .
- A. Oh, at Rockerville.
- A₂ Oh, Rockerville, yes.
- A₃ That house that was in the road. . . .
- A. (Unintelligible.)
- A₂ And a trailer. . . .
- A₃ And a trailer.
- A₂ Double trailer house across the road.
- A. But driving into Rapid City, you know, coming down the hill from 16 driving into south Rapid, there was no indication there of a flood. Of course, they were a long ways from the flood area, but we had no idea what, what. . .and then it was chilly and cold and that stench was something terrible, and then the fog, and it was just like, almost like death itself when you drove into that (city). It was a real depressing feeling when you, and then, of course, all the streets filled with water. . . .
- A₂ And then to see. . . .
- A. . . .part of the lights out in the city. . . .
- A₂ Milton's house and everything gone was just about the last straw.
- Q. So then you came on home and. . . .
- A₂ Well, it took us three hours to get out to the west end of the city, didn't it?

Q. About what time to what time. . . ?

A₂ Well, it must have been like 4 o'clock when we drove down Rushmore Road and it was seven in the morning when we finally pulled into our driveway.

A. And then we had to, we had to go way out on Interstate, go way around and we finally find a route that we could get in here. But. . . .

A₂ When we saw that trailer house gone, I cried. The two little girls cried. We cried over Milt's trailer house until we finally realized, you know, if he hadn't been with us, he might have been gone too. Then we thought the trailer house going wasn't so bad. But, I don't think any of us could believe what we saw. As we crossed that bridge, all those cars piled up on Omaha Street.

A. Well, then after we saw a part of the flood area, we, we felt so relieved that all the kids and the mothers and us three guys got back without really, any problems at all. Other than sitting in wet clothes and waiting in the car.

A₂ We were very fortunate, actually, that we didn't start home sooner and get farther down Rimrock, don't you think?

A. Oh!

A₂ Because if we had continued to come down Rimrock we'd have ended up right there in Canyon Lake.

Q. Yes, you would have.

A. We'd have been in that flood (area), God only knows what. . . .

A₂ We never could have gotten out of that.

Q. _____ under normal circumstances or even semi-normal circumstances, you would arrived just about the time _____.

A₂ Yes, you're right.

A. Just about the time the flood was hitting out. . . .

A₂ Just about the time. And I was. . . .

A. All in all, it worked out real well.

A₂ Yeah, it did.

A. Just spending a few hours sitting in the rain.

A₂ Now they say those condominiums there just beyond the fish hatchery, there had to be twenty feet of water that hit them to flood the lower level and halfway up the top level, and we'd have come right there. If we'd have kept coming. . . .

A₃ Yeah _____ wasn't fifty feet from then, well, hundred feet.

A₂ Oh, yeah.

A₃ Off to the road. Just off to the road. In that dugout there.

Q. Did you, did you, what happened, did you lose the trailer completely or what about your belongings and. . . ?

A₃ Well, the only thing, well, I didn't find my trailer till--what was that?--the next Thursday.

A₂ Thursday.

Q. And where was it?

A₃ It was, well, the next road, which would be what, a half a mile down the creek, and it was pushed in between two (barns), then there was debris stacked on them and this way you couldn't see. And the only thing that was left was the frame. And it was kind of in an S-shape. And they pulled it out with a Cat. In other words, to wee who it belonged to and all that. And then we found an air conditioner, 'course it was broke open and everything was spoiled; air conditioner and a lamp and let's see. . . .

A₂ Deep freeze.

A. Deep freeze.

A₃ Oh, deep. . . .

A₂ Log, log had gone through the roof of that.

Q. Hit the trailer?

A. No.

A₃ No.

A₂ The trailer was gone.

A₃ Just the frame was there.

Q. Just the frame, where did you find these. . . ?

A₃ Well, they were down along the creek right there. Creek runs. . . .

A. Probably a quarter of a mile. . . .

A₃ _____ mile beyond that.

A. Stuff strewn from the trailer where it broke up all the way down the creek.

A₃ Then we found, oh, what else. . . ?

A₂ Not very darn much.

A₃ No, hardly anything.

A₂ There's a piece of his draperies hanging in the tree about fifteen feet above us, way down the creek.

A₃ Oh, then, a part of the vacuum was there. And I found my parka and two gun cases but the guns, I had left the gun cases open so moisture wouldn't, and the guns were washed out of the cases.

Q. What about your future plans now?

A₃ Well, my future plans, move to higher ground, I'm gonna buy a house.

A. You bought the house.

A₃ I bought the house.

Q. You bought a house at. . . ?

A₃ Well, it's on Harmon Street, it's up by K-Mart.

Q. I see. Did you, have you been, did you receive much assistance from the public?

A₃ Oh, wonderful assistance from, from _____ from the Salvation Army and that.
The clothing they were given and the food that was given and. . . .

A. And the food stamps you got.

A₃ And the food stamps.

Q. And what about, as far as loans and that sort of thing, have you. . . ?

A₃ Well, see, I had insurance on my trailer.

Q. Did you really?

A₃ So it was full insured, but from what I got from my insurance and personal, I probably lost about \$2000.

A. But, that was, it was good if I hadn't had that insurance, I don't know what I would have done.

Q. What about the other people, your neighbors, in the trailer court? Do you know anything about. . . I notice a lot of those people were registered over at the relief center. I know I kept seeing that address _____ Campbell.

A₃ They were, well, all the trailers in the Campbell and _____ moved, I mean. . . .

A. There were a hundred and forty, weren't there?

A₃ Yeah, a hundred and forty, the ones that didn't move, that stayed and hit a tree or something, they probably got some personal possessions, but very few. My next door neighbor his trailer stayed 'cause his washed up against a tree. And he got in the next day and the only thing he saved was his air conditioner which was high, and his deep freeze, because it floated. But he said like the bedding and, oh, the dishes, some of that he saved, that were high enough, anything that was four feet or, you know, four feet up they just lost everything.

Q. Were that any casualties in the park?

A₃ Gee, that. . . .

A. Three, wasn't it?

A₃ Well, _____ give the casualties. None I knew, but they're always listed as 1313 Campbell, see. And they wouldn't give the lot numbers. But there were some casualties.

A. Not as many as you think with the, with the way that that court was torn up. And of course practically all the trailers moved out and they said there were three from that trailer court, which I think is great.

Q. Any verdicts as far as the flood was concerned? Obviously nobody seems to have been able to predict a catastrophe like this, at least that's what everybody sees to. . . .

A₃ Well, there was one thing freak about this though. I had three rose bushes planted in front of my trailer, and they were bent over, and had debris on them, but they were still there and (the) leaves were on them, so I picked the debris off, and they were in bloom. And that water didn't take the blossoms off. And that next week I was down, picked a rose. (Laughter.) That next week! You know, just to show how, see, everything. . . .

Q. How fickle the water is. . . .

A₃ Well, everything, all the debris was above, see, how deep the water was and everything, below it's just clear running water and you know what it takes to. . . .

Q. Yeah, that is interesting. Very interesting. Well. . . .

A₂ I want to say that I think our mayor did a fantastic job. He had people out to warn the ones in the canyon, and, of course, so many people didn't heed the warning. But I really thought, for a very young man who hadn't been in office

a great length of time, I thought he, I just think he's done a fabulous job through this disaster.

A. Yes.

A₂ I know Ronnie agrees with me. And the second flood we had, when he declared martial law, I thought that was a good move, that was the right thing to do. Then when the fire truck came along and said, "Move," you didn't have any choice, you moved.

A. _____ made people really move.

A₂ They sure did.

A. Now, I don't know how we'd ever get flooded out here in this area. It would take, it would take an awfully lot of water to flood an area like this out here. But when they told us to move, it took us about three seconds to get out, and we moved.

A₂ We sure did.

A. But, see this is the thing that happened, I think, the night of the flood. Many people had been warned. Neighbors were telling neighbors. In fact, from one story that a guy told me, he went over to his neighbor three times and said, "Now, move out, because this is really getting bad." And this guy used several cuss words and said, "If you don't leave me alone, I'll call the cops." So the guy said, "All right." And he was one of them that didn't make it through the flood. So this happened to many, many people. They knew nothing was going to happen.

Q. Yeah. It's too bad, the, it's too bad the order wasn't reversed, the first, the smaller flood came, the people. . . .

(All talking at once.)

A. Right, right.

A₂ Yes, right.

A. Absolutely.

Q. Who can, you know, you can't. . . ?

A. Because most of the people here don't remember the bad flood they had, and I think it was 1907, when a lot of this was tore up, of the town was tore up. But then they didn't have Pactola, and, of course, Pactola, had Pactola not been there in this particular flood, I don't think there would have been anything of the town left.

Q. People relied a great deal, though, on Pactola.

A. Oh, you bet they do, because that takes care of a lot of water that doesn't come down to Rapid.

Q. But they probably figured that with Pactola there wouldn't be the liklihood of a large flood. . . .

A. Because it's only twenty miles, you see, it's only twenty miles. . . so that creek isn't going to pick up much water in twenty miles. But believe me, it did.

A₂ Well, we felt very fortunate, we women, that we were lucky enough to have those three men still there. Becuase had they left, we never, we women could never have gotten all of those children out of there. We couldn't have known what to do. And that's a terrible responsibility to have that many children that don't belong to you.

Q. Oh, my goodness.

A₂ But the kids, people do behave very well in a disaster, don't you think? Even the children. . . .

Q. In a crisis. . . .

- A₂ The little girls were all wet and I think most of them were hungry because no one got a chance to eat their supper. And nobody cried, nobody fought, nobody said anything. They were just as good as gold.
- A. One thing I want to add, too, when we made the phone call from Wheel Inn to call our daughter down here, she in turn notified all the parents that we were high and dry. And otherwise, _____ can imagine how parents would have been thinking. So, so they knew that we were high and dry, us up there, and then down here, we, you know how, we couldn't get _____, at least we were up on that, up on the hill.
- A₂ I thought about it the other day, actually, the parents got the word that the girls were all right before they were aware that there was anything wrong. Didn't they? Because it was about 9:00, 9:30, that I told, gave Debbie the list of names to call and see, by that time there was nothing happening here, so. . . .
- A. Well, they had started giving warnings at 7 o'clock on, on television. . . .
- A₂ Was it that early? Oh, I didn't know.
- Q. I'm gonna switch this off. . . .