

SOUTH DAKOTA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Library Cataloguing Service Data

Name of informant Mrs. Mildred Dieter
Address 1220 Sheridan Lake Road, Rapid City, South Dakota
Date of interview June 30, 1972
Name of Researcher Stephen R. Ward
Others Present none
Location of Interview 4832 W. Main, Rapid City, South Dakota
Added Notes Mildred Dieter lost her husband and one daughter in the flood.

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

Attempted escape from Sheridan Lake Road home; Saw family and two German students swept away; Survival by floating downstream and clinging to tree; Thoughts on aftermath.

Demographic Information on Informant

Age 38 Sex Female County Pennington
Socio-economic status Middle
Occupation Piano, Organ teacher; husband, School of Mines
Education B.M.E. (Music Education), Wartburg College, Iowa
Religion Lutheran
Date of Arrival of Family in South Dakota _____
Where? _____
From Where? _____
Number of Moves in South Dakota _____ Reasons for moves: _____

- Q. . . .we can take as much as we want. All right, I'm talking to Mrs. Mildred Dieter, D-I-E-T-E-R. Of, address again, former address 1220 Sheridan Lake Road, this is Steve Ward, June 30, 1972, subject, Black Hills flood. Spotting Mrs. Dieter's home and point of departure for at least a moment at the north-west quarter of the southwest. . . .southeast quarter, section 3, range 7 east, township 1 north, and in specific terms, the home was on the corner of Sheridan Lake and Woodland, right across the street or catty-corner across the street from another respondent, the Crozier family, which we interviewed a few days ago. So let's begin. We were talking just before we started about the German boys, and I've heard about the German boys as early as two weeks. . . .more than two weeks ago, from Milo Winter, who I took a tape with in Vermillion before (pause in taping). . . . So, I know you were a sponsor or were involved with this.
- A. They were staying with us, mm-hm.
- Q. . . .with these people. So, who, who did you have in your home?
- A. We had Martin Schudde1.
- Q. Spell that, please.
- A. S-C-H-U-D-D-E-L.
- Q. Okay.
- A. And he was thirteen, and Dieter Boden, aged fourteen from Wadgassen, Germany.
- Q. B-O-D-E-N?
- A. Yes.
- Q. With an umlaut über die "O". (Laughter.)
- A. I don't know.
- Q. Well, his first name would be. . . .
- A. Dieter, exactly spelled like ours.

Q. Okay, good. And now, when, when did these boys come?

A. They came on June 1st.

Q. Yeah. And they were with this German band.

A. Yes.

Q. From. . . ?

A. Wadgassen, Germany.

Q. Okay, and they'd been spread out and these had just happened to be the people that stayed in your home.

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. So then we were, kinda talking about your, reminiscing about how they played in the creek, you might explain that again, if you don't mind.

A. The German boys loved the inner tubing that our children enjoyed in Rapid Creek. And so we would get, got some large inner tubes for them also and the children usually would go up to the Storybook Island Glenden bridge and start right down from there and past our area and go back around to Sioux Park and come out near the Canyon Lake Bridge, behind Baken Park.

Q. This is what, the creek running about two feet, three feet.

A. The water would, some places, one foot, I think the depth at the greatest might have been three feet and I doubt that there would have been a three foot area unless under the Sheridan Lake Road Bridge. But usually it wasn't ever deep enough for swimming.

Q. So here these chaps had gotten caught up in the, the interest of riding down the creek and so on. So then, then they had a series of concerts and so on. . . .

A. Oh, they. . .there is quite a, a heavy schedule for them in the Black Hills area, about visiting in the Hills and then they gave concerts at Wall and Lead

and various places. And they really enjoyed Rapid City and always mentioned how they couldn't possibly show us this much beauty in Germany if we ever went there. And had a delightful time, of course, until this night.

- Q. Well, let's get to the night then, on June 9th. Why don't you tell us about what your family did, starting with going to the concert and then moving on from there.
- A. All right. We all left for the concert about 6:45, the students had to be there, and prior to the concert there was a very heavy downpour between seven and eight. After a lot of introductions, the concert began about 8:30, which was late, and in mid-concert the performance was stopped due to a, oh, policeman, or someone, highway patrolman or someone who came and said that there was flooding in Hisega area, a lot of water, that anyone needing to leave to get to Dark Canyon etc., they'd probably want to leave. And then the, at the intermission of the concert, the concert was cancelled due to the heavy waters that people needed to get home. So we went home.
- Q. Now, did, did they talk about Rapid Creek in the Rapid City area, or were they still just talking about Hisega, Dark Canyon. . .?
- A. I, I was using the telephone at the intermission so we didn't know what they had announced at the intermission except that we were concerned about Rapid Creek in our area of town, to see if there was any rise in the water, and I called the neighbors and the little neighbor girl whose parents were not home said, oh, she didn't know of anything. That there was no problem there, she hadn't heard anything. So when we finished the telephone calling, we realized the concert had been cancelled. So then we went directly home and they told us to watch about bridges and so on.

Q. Mm-hm. So then you arrived home at approximately what time?

A. Uh, I really don't know, I understand the concert was cancelled about 9:30,

so I imagine we got home probably a quarter to ten or so, we did try to cross on 32nd Street bridge thinking that ours probably wouldn't hold, but we went around Baken Park and come in from Jackson Boulevard and Sheridan Lake Road to our home.

Q. Did you have any sort of premonition of something was going to happen that

would be significant in terms of flooding?

A. The only thing we were concerned about was that we might have sewer back-up in the lower level or that the heavy rain may force water into our lower level window area. That's about the only concern we had, that we may have some water on the floor in the lower level.

Q. Okay. So, then you arrived home, you would guess around 10 o'clock.

A. I would say we home by ten.

Q. And now you mentioned about the parking of your car. You didn't actually park

the car in front of the house, right?

A. No, we didn't go to our driveway because of debris that usually collects on the drainage. . . whatever that. . . drainage area, so we parked on Judy. . . back on Judy Street so that our car wouldn't. . . we wouldn't have to drive it through the water.

Q. Just south, south and rather east of, of where you lived.

A. Yes.

Q. What. . . about fifty yards?

A. Well, we just parked south of Marsh's, which is the white house on the corner.

South of their driveway.

- Q. Okay. And this had been a kind of typical procedure for heavy rains. . . .
- A. We usually didn't park there on any other heavy rains, we just park in the driveway, but since they were expecting flooding, why, we thought we'd park back there so we could leave if we needed to.
- Q. So you were anticipating, perhaps, leaving.
- A. Yes.
- Q. Okay. Now, at around, then, around ten o'clock you all came into your, your home. . .now there were what, three children and your husband and yourself?
- A. And two German students.
- Q. And the two, and the German students came along. Okay. Now, what happened then?
- A. We actually walked along the whole sidewalk to the house after we left the car, this was along Woodland. And they were guarding the bridge, of course, and they didn't. . .wasn't any particular danger, we didn't have any water up on our grass yet as far as flooding.
- Q. Who was guarding?
- A. I think the police cars were there and National Guard.
- Q. Had the bridge gone?
- A. No. They were just watching, they weren't allowing anyone traveling over, they were turning back the cars. Now, as to what we did, we went in and had our children change clothes and help carry furniture from the low. . .lower level out, and we pretty well had all things up off the floor and into. . . .
- Q. When you speak of the lower level, do you have a basement?
- A. We have a tri-. . .it was a split level. . .tri-level split. So we had the lower family room, piano room, laundry room, and then up some stairs to the living-dining area and up above the family room was. . .were our bedrooms. So

we felt we had things pretty well up to the living room areas and up into the bedroom areas, and then we received a call that, from some friends that said that, "Did you hear the mayor said that people along Rapid Creek to leave immediately." So we thought, "Well, evidently the water is going to be getting quite high," so we. . .my husband had said, "Everyone take a sleeping bag and a pillow and go on out to the car, I want to pull the electrical fuse. . . sections out of the, from the fusebox." And our two oldest children had gone out first, saw that the car had started to move north on Judy toward Woodland and so a neighbor man had seen them out there and suggested that they get into his house and our son came back to our home to try to tell us, but he. . .we bypassed and we never did see him. I and our daughter Patricia and the two German boys had gone out behind Cummings' home around Marsh's over to Judy and also found the car gone, we were standing. . . .

Q. It was floating north.

A. It was floating north, I think the. . . .

Q. Toward the creek.

A. Yes, I think the, the water just came rushing this way and came down around this was. We were actually being, the force was going north and not from the creek but across, from Storybook Island the back way.

Q. So that the pressure was coming from the, from the west and a little bit from the south and sweeping in. . . .

A. Sweeping toward the north, yes.

Q. Sweeping toward the north, linking up with the creek that flows directly north.

A. Yes. Mm-hm. And so we were standing out there in the middle of the street wondering what to do, waiting for my husband. I wondering what happened to

our two older children, I hadn't realized they had already gone to the car. . . .

Q. Middle of Judy or Woodland? Or Sheridan Lake?

A. We were standing in the street on Judy in front of Marsh's home looking for our car.

Q. You didn't even. . . ?

A. We didn't see the car. It wasn't there any longer.

Q. Were there other cars going?

A. Not at this time, the cars and, and truck in Marsh's driveway were still there and the cars in Cochran's driveway were still there. Cochran's is across the street from Marsh's to the south of it. And we stepped out of our home in just rainwater and by the time we got out to the street, the time had come up to about my knee length, knee depth. And. . . .

Q. Just like. . .now.

A. Yes, well, I imagine the, the street is that much lower than our home, and that was probably the difference.

A. What are we estimating in time, now, are we at about 10:15. . .10:30. . . ?

A. Well, I imagine, it took, we might have been in our home 45 minutes moving things up without realizing the danger that was coming.

Q. So we're probably at 11 o'clock.

A. Nearly, at least, I have an idea. I never did look at my watch.

Q. Well, I. . .yes.

A. What happened then is my husband had come out with a flashlight and he said, "Well, try to get to Pibenga's," which is on the corner of Woodland and Judy, same type area of the block as what our house was on Woodland and Sheridan Lake Road.

Q. Mm-hm. Right back here.

A. Yes. And they had a high private fence, he said, "Try to hang on to the fence and get scooted around over to their home." Well, the current came up so fast that our daughter couldn't keep her legs down, it was getting too high for her to be able to walk and breathe, so we hung on the fence and got them on top of this high private fence, all of us were hanging on it; we were questioning where Sue and Michael were, Michael came floating from the south side of Marsh's home and couldn't get over to us, the force just carried him beyond and we thought he was gone. But it happened to put him in front of Pibenga's home where the, it was calm, he was able to catch himself on the tree and was able to walk right up to their front steps and went right in.

Q. Did you see him do that at all?

A. We didn't see him do that. We thought he was gone. The rest of us hung onto this high private fence trying to move around to get to the home also; it just seemed like all of a sudden houses were coming, cars were coming, fences were coming, refrigerators, we had a lot of debris hitting us, my husband and I tried to hang onto the two German children and my daughter and hang on ourselves and keep this debris from crushing. Soon this high privacy fence went and we had just the corner post to hang on to. . . .

Q. Someone mentioned to me, I'm sorry to break in to this, but, the German boys had put on their bathing suits, is that true?

A. Yes, they thought it would be fun just to wade out in the water rather than, you know, and they had left their shoes in the car actually, and walked to the house barefooted after the concert. So, after the water became so forceful, it. . .the debris just knocked our daughter from our grasp, so she went, and I

thought I was the next one to be washed away; the water was coming so high that even though we were on this high privacy fence it was rolling over our heads, and my husband said, "If we stay here we'll drown, we must catch wood or, or anything that comes along and ride the flood."

Q. What was the fence made of?

A. It was a redwood fence with sturdy posts that were kind of woven, you know, in and around it, it was a very high privacy fence.

Q. Over six feet high. . . ?

A. Oh, I would say it was taller than my husband, and he's 6' 1".

Q. Okay.

A. And we were standing, you know, trying to. . . as high on it as possible. What happened after I spoke with the German boy is that Dieter Boden was the last one left on the post and that my husband and I and Martin Schuddel were actually swept away at one sweep. I had grabbed onto a broken door and was washed down Woodland Street, I approached the deck of the Orland Paulson home and was caught under it for a moment, and that is in Jane Court.

Q. This little, oh, I see, this little court that sticks out here.

A. Yes.

Q. Again, would be in the same quarter, but moving directly west a little bit.

A. East.

Q. Excuse me, east and a little bit, just a little bit north of, following the creek line, actually.

A. And. . . .

Q. Under the deck. . . ?

A. Under the deck, they had a deck coming up out of their upper level and the water

was that high, because when I was washed under it, there was no place for me to get a breath and my head was touching the, you know, the beams of the deck.

Q. So what. . . ?

A. So, for fear that I , that that would be the end of me, I just kicked real hard and tried to get back into the current, hopefully that I wouldn't get caught, get my hair caught on nails, and I did get out into the current and was swept around into Jane Court, and then it was quite calm and peaceful. I replaced my broken door with some lumber that was just floating there, and was contemplating trying to walk up to someone's home and get out of the water.

Q. Could you touch. . .could you touch bottom at all?

A. Yes. The water was actually just a little above my waist at that point.

Q. Is that right?

A. In, in the Court area, where I was then.

Q. Whereas just a little bit north it had been in your. . .you had been under water.

A. Yes, I had been under water here, but then I got into the court I was actually able to stand up because there was no force or current and I, you know, I think it must be a little bit higher ground than at. . .on Judy Street there. Either that or I was washed in an area that wasn't quite as deep, you know. I was there for a while and really did some breathing excercises to calm down. And, and then little by little I felt the swell of the water start moving me out.

Q. Did you try to move toward Jane, out of this Court, had you tried to walk anywhere?

A. No, basically, I was just standing there relaxing. Just blowing and taking exercise, breathing excercises to relax and then thinking about which home is closest. And I didn't have too long a time to think about this because the

water, the current just started to bob me backwards. . . .

Q. Are you a good swimmer, by the way? Or are you a swimmer?

A. I, I don't call myself a good swimmer, I can swim, but I wear out easily. And I actually did not swim this night. But I knew how to handle my body in water, and having this lumber under my arms, I didn't need to swim, I just tried to guide myself. . . .

Q. You had one piece of lumber or two pieces?

A. I had replaced the door with a piece of lumber under each arm, so I had two pieces of lumber.

Q. Okay.

A. I was then forced into the real heavy current of. . .going down Rapid Creek because then there was just turmoil. . . .

Q. You just, you couldn't have been standing there what, five minutes?

A. Oh, no, I don't think that long.

Q. Two minutes.

A. Yeah, I think if it would have been five minutes I could have moved to a home and got up some stairs, I just. . . .

Q. It was just a breather.

A. Yeah, it was just really a time when I could just relax and get my breath, and. . . .

Q. Could you see anything?

A. Only when it would lightning, then I actually knew where I was.

Q. And you had some notion of where you were from the houses and. . . .

A. Yes.

Q. So you hadn't lost any kind of perspective as to what had happened?

A. No, I knew that I was in Jane Court area.

Q. Did you see anyone else?

A. No, I did not. Not at that point. Then after I was washed into this real heavy force and being carried downstream, then I remember it lightninged and I remember passing the water treatment plant. But I'm confused as to whether I passed on the west side of the water treatment plant or whether I came around the east side. It appeared to me that I was passing, going on the west side, but what I'm confused about is that I actually was washed up into a tree coming from the north into the south by the way I was situated because of this other house that crashed into trees here, it actually had appeared to come from the opposite direction than that I got there. And so I was confused as to whether I was washed around this way. . . .

Q. On the south end of the water treatment plant. . . ?

A. Around the south end and got the current, you know, like this and I got washed into debris, or just how I'm, it has been confusing. And still as I remember passing the water treatment plant, I was positive I was on the west side going like this, but I remember kind of having a slight turn, maybe there was just kind of a churning there and, but I actually, you know, kind of made a U-turn into this debris that I was washed up into. I was hoping to be washed into this debris that I had saw caught in between trees, 'cause I thought, "I got to get out of this turmoil." And fortunately I was washed into the debris, but I didn't know if it was such a good idea when it happened because just like that I had just as much debris right behind me, and that was my second fear that evening, of losing my life, thinking that I could not get out of the debris, that it would crush me. But I did manage to push up through it and got into

a tree, oh, I would say the limb diameter was no more than an inch and a half or two inches. And I. . . .

Q. You were on that limb?

A. Yes. And I thought if I would sit very close to the tree, you know, big part of the tree, that maybe the limb would hold me. And I got out of the water and sat in, on this limb.

Q. Now where would you estimate, right here where you'd rather put this mark?

A. Yes. I was just about directly behind the hospital.

Q. Okay, so for a point of reference, this, it's, it's the southeast quarter of the northeast quarter of section 3, directly west. . .or nearly directly west of the Bennett-Clarkson Hospital, probably on the creek, itself.

A. I was on the east bank. I had thought that I was in the Sioux Park area, but after seeing the debris of this house, the Runholt house which had crashed into the trees north of the water treatment plant, I was on that same side and a little bit more east than what the wreckage was. And then crossing the Canyon Lake Bridge the other day and seeing the wreckage, I realized I was on the east bank and not on the west.

Q. By the way, I have a picture of your car.

A. Do you?

Q. Sitting in the middle, I got in early enough for that.

A. Our car on a fountain?

Q. Yes, I didn't realize it was yours, but I took a picture of it anyway. All right. Now, all of this from beginning time you moved then down to finally when you anchored here on this tree, are we estimating in terms of no more than fifteen minutes in the water?

- A. I would say I wasn't in the water more than fifteen minutes. It went quite fast, especially once I left that Jane Court.
- Q. Yeah, I can see that.
- A. Well, let's say, from the time, we may have been hanging on to that fence a good fifteen minutes or more. I really don't know how long we tried to hang on to there. We were there, it appeared to me, a long time. But the trip down was quick.
- Q. Now, there's one point at the fence, could you touch ground?
- A. No.
- Q. On the fence. So you were. . .being really held on the fence by the force of the water. The same force that was holding you onto the fence was also taking you away.
- A. No. The, the force. . .the fence was a north-south fence that we were standing, and the water was coming from the south, so it was, we, it was not pushing us into the fence. We were having to hang onto the fence and try to get our bearings by ourselves. Because the fence, of course, had broken down from the south and then we just had that post.
- Q. Okay. All right. Now, how long were you in this tree?
- A. I would estimate about three hours. Because it was ten minutes after two when I was looking at my watch when I was in the boat, and I was rescued by Bill Groethe and a School of Mines student, I understand, was manning the boat when they came by.
- Q. Okay. What did you observe in the time you were in the tree?
- A. I observed that. . .that I was just shaking terribly enough I was afraid I would fall out of the tree; the debris that I, got me up into the tree had gone

long before. . .I barely got into the tree and then this debris was washed away. I heard screaming for help, I heard roar of water, I heard wreckage, I heard explosions. It really was not a pleasant sound to have to hear. When I saw this house coming, which I found later was our neighbor's down the street on Sheridan Lake Road, the Runholt's, I was just praying that the wreckage would stop before it hit the tree that I was in. I was concerned with the uprooting of the tree. And it did hold fast.

Q. Now what kind of a, how big of a tree, have you ever gone back to look at it?

A. No, it had been so muddy, I, I would like to go back and find the exact tree.

Q. Would you guess that, that. . . ?

A. Oh, the thickness around, about, I would say, what would that be, ten, twelve inches in diameter?

Q. Yeah, so it really wasn't a, a huge tree at all.

A. No, it wasn't a huge tree, I just grabbed like, you know, I was just shaking terribly and I was afraid I'd fall off.

Q. You probably don't know how high up you were in the tree.

A. All I know is that they could hardly get me down out of it with the boat. When it was time to get me down, Bill Groethe tried to reach as high as he could and I couldn't even reach his hand with my foot. I had to kind of let myself down and he had to pull on the limb of the branches to try to get so I could slide down to have him help me get down. The water level had really gone down in that time from when I get up there to the time they rescued me.

Q. Now, you, you said, what sort of feeling does one have? I mean, you're sort of an unwitting witness to things that, it's has almost a nightmarish quality, I'm sure. What sort of thoughts went through you mind?

- A. Actually, I don't feel that I ever was afraid or. . .and I feel that I was calm, I feel I never did take a gulp of the creek water, I feel that when we were hanging on the fence all of us were calm; when my son came floating by, we just kind of thought, well, goodbye, Michael, God be with you. And likewise when Patricia floated by, she never did cry or scream when she was brushed away, my son didn't when he came by us, the only conversation that I know is that the German boys were wondering if we would drown, and I said I was afraid we probably would. They were saying the Lord's Prayer in German, audibly, out loud. My husband's comments were, "God help us," and, you know, the statement I said, that if we hang on here, we'll be drowned, we need to get some wood and go. My thoughts were the pianos weren't worth it. After I got into the tree I said to myself, "My goodness, my life is being spared. Thank God." And I had concern for others, I really felt that the Lord was with me for some reason or other; we were ready to drown if we needed to, there was no feeling of panic, if this was the way our life would be taken, that's the way it was. Throughout that evening I really more or less mourned my family, who I thought all of were lost, and the boys, that was the most heart-sickening thing for me.
- Q. The two German boys.
- A. To think that, that we would have lost these boys for other people. The tremendous responsibility that we had. I should say then that I was quite content in the tree other than being cold and shivering and thinking that I would fall out. I became quite numb because of not being able to put pressure on my feet somewhere, I was just hanging there. When I was rescued and taken, they took me out of the boat behind the hospital, Bill Groethe said, "Take this lady to my home." But then Paul Anderson was there picking us up, so Paul Anderson said, "I'll take

her to my home." I got there about 2:30. . . .

Q. Can I backtrack just a second?

A. Yes.

Q. How were you rescued? You were hanging in a tree obviously, had you called for help?

A. Oh! There had been calls throughout the night that I was hearing but I felt that there was no point for me to call and lose strength until I realized there was someone out there to rescue. And so I basically just did blowing exercises and breathing exercises to get my system calm because I was shaking so and then when I realized there were flashlights flashing across the water, occasionally I would call, "Help." When I realized that there was a boat near, I called out and they usually hollered, "Hang on." And finally one did come near enough that I felt that they actually heard me and it wasn't all this other. And then I tried to direct them, they were looking for me in the water of course, and finally, actually funny, but I had to laugh when I said, "I'm up a tree." I chuckled to myself, and, and they they were shining and I directed them actually, you know, to your left or to your right and now directly out and so on so that they could find me. And then in the rescue, of course, I think I mentioned already how they got me down, that it was quite high.

Q. Yes.

A. And when they got me into the boat I told them that there were people in this wreckage just back several yards.

Q. These were the Runholts.

A. Yes, the Runholts, and so we went back over there and it was quite interesting, the boat couldn't. . .the wreckage, but. . . .

- Q. All right, this is side two of Mrs. Millie Dieter, and we're picking up, I think you had just mentioned about the, the _____ and, and being rescued and so on.
- A. And that we were going in to get the Runholts from the wreckage.
- Q. And going in to get the Runholt's, okay.
- A. And it was quite interesting, they asked me to sit in the front seat of the boat at this point. We had taken in quite a bit of water trying to rescue me because I'd been up so high and but the interesting thing, Bill Groethe said, "I'm going to have to throw you some life jackets," to the Runholts, and in throwing the life jacket the buckle of it just my head and just hit me against the dash, and I thought, "If I didn't drown, I'm going to be killed from the life jacket." And, but they got these people on and in the meantime Bill Groethe pulled back the head to see if he'd injured me and then he recognized me and said, "Why, Millie! What are you doing here, where's the rest of your family?" And I said, "I, I'm afraid they're drowned. They're all in the water." And this was my knowledge, that they were all gone and the German boys. So after picking up the Runholts, we were then let out of the boat behind the hospital, the Runholts and I were taken to Paul Anderson's car. And Paul, of course, recognized me. And in the car is when I realized that it was my neighbors that we had just picked up. I didn't know who they were until we had got 'em to the car.
- Q. Where had the Runholts live?
- A. They lived oh, halfway between Woodland and Janet on Sheridan Lake Road. And their house was the one that left the foundation, it's the only one right at that point that left the foundation.

Q. So only two or three houses down, isn't it?

A. Well, let's see, it would be one, two, three, four, the fifth house down.

Q. South of you.

A. Either fifth or sixth.

Q. And theirs had just come off. . . .

A. They were in bed, the boy. . .the father and his son were in bed, and I guess didn't realize the danger, and they were awakened by the moving of the house. And so they hurriedly dressed, and the water filled immediately, they hung onto the refrigerator which went to the ceiling, the boy was nearly crushed, they broke through the ceiling so that. . .to free the boy. . .and then they were in the attic for a while and then they broke through to the top of the house this way, as the water kept, and then they rode this wreckage. And I believe that it was their house as we were hanging on this fence that had, that we had seen coming and it crashed against Cochran's house and all of a sudden it seemed to disappear. We thought it was going to hit us and that would be the end of us hanging on this fence, but it suddenly seemed to disappear. But I beat it down to behind the hospital. And so then Paul Anderson took the Runholts and myself to their home and they got us to bed, and it was really difficult to relax to sleep, I just felt I was shaking all over that bed. But I had fallen asleep, thinking I was the only survivor, as I said, and then about four in the morning they brought me two of my children. And I thought, "My goodness, I have half my family back." My grief was cut in half. The next morning. . . .

Q. Now, which of the two. . . ?

A. Sue, 14, and Michael, age 12.

Q. What had happened to them?

- A. Well, Sue, of course, had gotten into Marsh's house and had never really been out in the current and Michael had been swept by and, of course, was able to walk into Pibenga's home.
- Q. Oh, yes, you covered that, I'm getting your family all repeated here.
- A. Yes. Michael had been put on the roof at Pibenga's and Sue was sitting on the couch, you know, and trying to. . .as high as possible in this home. And they were actually safe. They were brought to me about four in the morning and. . . Sue thought she was the only survivor; Michael thought he might be, but he had known that Sue was in Marsh's home and that she might be fine. And I guess some National Guard trucks or something came by and had picked up Michael. They were checking for Dieter's, actually; when Bill Groethe knew and Paul Anderson that we had all been in the water somewhere, then they were out actually looking for the rest of the family. And they were then starting to go after water level went down, checking the various homes to see if anyone needed to get out, if they had any extra people there than what belonged there and so on, and this is how they found Michael, then they went over and found Sue. Sue was reluctant to go. She felt safer at Marsh's but when she realized that Michael was safe, then she went with Michael. And when they were taken up Sheridan Lake Road to the Jackson Boulevard stoplight, it was at this point that a Highway Patrol had stopped and asked who they had. And when they heard they had two Dieter children, then he had said, the patrolman. . .we have found Mrs. Dieter. The children were concerned that it was Mrs. Dieter's body that had been found. But the patrolman then took the children, brought them over to Dr. Anderson's, to where I was. And later in the morning, or about 10 o'clock, why, they were requesting that all German. . .anyone having German

students to report their whereabouts and their situation during the flood. And, of course, I reported in to the conductor that I feared them drowned. And this was quite difficult for me to tell them, and it was quite hard for the conductor's wife to have to listen to. But it wasn't long after that I heard that some boys had been found at Baken Park, I felt it had to be our boys because we were the only ones right in that area who had German students.

Q. Oh, they said they were German boys.

A. Yes, that German boys who had been found at Baken Park and that they were supposedly fine. But I didn't know whether they were really our boys or not until everyone was to call in to this one central area to report any that were fine, one way or the other. And then Paul Anderson soon had a call back to say that Dieter Boden and Martin Schudde! had been rescued, they'd been clothed, they'd been taken to Trinity Lutheran Church and fed, then they, through their own trying to translate, had gotten them to understand to possibly call Salberg's. And, of course, they called the wrong Salberg, but it was the parents of the Salberg's, where Dieter Boden's father and grandfather stayed. And that's how they were. . . .

Q. Oh, their father and grandfather.

A. Dieter's father and grandfather were here also on this trip. And staying with Don Salberg's. And so this is how a lot of the people knew about our situation, because the German boys thought we had all drowned. And so this, of course, then also cut my grief again down to a fourth so to speak, from thinking I was the only survivor. So the thing that has made this really quite easy is that so many people have gone through and have experienced losing people that, you don't feel it quite, the impact, as hard as, as it might be if it happened

only to me. And not only that, my feeling is this way, that we live to die and, and we all do. . .will sometime, and the comfort one has is that you know that your husband and child had lived the type of life that would be pleasing and acceptable and. . .you just look on these memories.

Q. Yeah. In the aftermath of, of the Saturday and so on, how did you feel of the treatment generally of the flood victims and so on as you observed it?

Q. I was amazed when I got up at 7 o'clock that morning, on Saturday morning, and heard the radio reports. I was amazed at how much organization in rescue efforts in taking care of the people that had been rescued and the volunteer work and the efficiency with which everything went, I just. . .you know, by seven that morning I was just amazed and having a missing persons bureau and the cooperation with the radios and Civil Defense, it was. . .if was fantastic. They had a first aid station set up by noon for shots and so on at Meadowbrook School and having these things available to us. Actually it was tremendous. I just. . .somebody really knew what they were doing.

Q. Where do you plan to pick up from here?

A. Oh. . . .

Q. I know you mentioned the other day that your house was pretty well destroyed,

A. Yes, the walls all. . .inside our lower level were broken through and of course we have to re-do things in the upper level 'cause we had about two feet of water, in the middle level, I should say, because we had a tri-level split, I don't know what will happen with the house; I do know that I have an education, I could go back to teaching, I don't know that I would do it right away. I think basically find a place to live, keep my children going on the type schedule they're used to, perhaps go back and renew my teaching certificate. I could

always, of course, my profession had been teaching group and private piano and organ lessons and being church organist, and working with, voluntarily with a lot of the music, the Black Hills Chamber Music Society, you know, church work and so on. We plan to stay here, we feel this is our home, we've lived here since 1956, and I feel it best to stay here rather than transplant the children; I think things will go well for us, there's no feeling of not being able to manage. I just have lots of praise for the Red Cross, for the Mennonite Disaster Group which is presently helping me at my home, for all our friends who have taken things, my furniture and helped clean and helped dig out the mud, and the church for letting me store things there. I think all the cards and letters and all this help is the thing that helps one to be happy and to keep going and it's, one just can't let people know enough how their concern really helps an individual in a situation like this.

- Q. It's kind of a curious thing as well, you, your family and you experiences, their sort of one of those kinds of stories that kind of got into the news. Why do you think that was true, do you think it was because people were looking for the Dieter family and because you had these two German. . .but it does seem like you have, I mean not notoriety or publicity but, but it does seem like you have sort of become a kind of, a one person you can call, and you said that you'd been called by radio stations and so on, how can you account for that?
- A. Well, perhaps the fact that my husband was on the faculty of the School of Mines. . . .
- Q. Yeah. (Phone rings, pause in taping.)
- Q. We were talking, yeah, okay, go ahead.
- A. And, you know, people knowing him out to the School of Mines, we've always been

active in church work and so we would know people there. We've been active in Civic Concert, I was on the Rapid City PTA Council, and our Meadowbrook PTA, I imagine AAUW, you know, various groups like this, and this is perhaps the reason that people may know of us. Other than that, I don't, never thought of ourselves as being known people. You know, we just kind of live through the churchwork, we've always been choir members, you know.

Q. Well, it just seemed, you know, that out of the tragedy that you and, there were others too, but we sort of. . .there was some, the stories that were published and so on, may not, I'd even heard of your name before it came out here, and. . . .

A. I've worked with Dr. Lee, you know, on the music division of the Black Hills Fine Arts Center, he and. . .representing the University and Dr. (Whiten) representing Black Hills State College, and I. . .the representative of Black Hills Chamber Music Society were a three person committee on this music division and now with the Black Hills State College not being in it, why then, we've taken more officers from Black Hills Chamber Music Society along with Dr. Lee. So. . . but Marsha Dunn and kind of hidden in an article, Living Today column, had mentioned something which other people recognized as being me, she hadn't listed the names at all. It was Thursday, June 15, Journal where she mentions about my coming into the Journal and bringing my husband's obituary and memorial service information and mentioning about my quote saying, "Well, you have to have great faith to come through, you know, without. . ." and I thought that was quite nice of Marsha to do this. I did, I have always known Mayor Barnett, he was in Junior High when we moved here, and so we, we knew him and he knew us; the night of the memorial service as we approached the gymnasium at Rapid City

Stevens High, he'd come to greet me and offer his sympathies, and I sang in the choir at the memorial service, I thought that this was more comfortable than sitting in a congregation-type situation, because I'm not accustomed to that. And then as he came off the platform he just came by and he says, "Come on, Millie," he says, "I want Mrs. Nixon to meet you." So I met Mrs. Nixon. There with Governor and Mrs. Kneip and Ron Stevenson and his wife, and I think Stan Adelstein and then the mayor and his wife were the only ones in that particular room that met Mrs. Nixon privately, and then, of course, they let the reporters and so on in and had others line up then and go through reception line to meet her also.

Q. Now were these people that were. . .had lost loved ones, or, . . .?

A. You mean that met her?

Q. Yes.

A. They were people on the rostrum on the platform during memorial service and also Mrs. . .Major Medley's wife, I recall.

Q. Well, is there anything else you want to add or, anything that, I told you that this would be. . .free association time.

A. Yes. . .like I say, I just, it's just unbelievable how everyone has just responded to helping people in need, so to speak, and it's just really been great. I do have to also comment, I imagine, that my family had all come immediately, we did have a committal service for my husband on a Tuesday afternoon and memorial service on a Thursday afternoon committal service for my daughter on a Saturday afternoon, so that first week was quite busy preparing for services. And my family was a tremendous help to come, Texas, California, Iowa, wherever, and help get things cleaned up and get ready, because I really

wasn't available to do any type of work at the house or, or furniture or at the church or anything that first week, I was just busy, you know, getting other things taken care of. Really, basically, I think that my feelings have been expressed and I don't know if one says you have sorrow, I, I have commented occasionally that I think the fact that I'm going to have to go to work and that my husband is gone, if you can find blessings in disaster, it was probably a blessing that my little girl is gone, because it would be, make it harder for me to go back to work. Because she was very dependent on me, so one, you know, I felt quite often it would be more difficult for me to continue if. . . .

Q. How old was she?

A. She was eight. And it's easier for me now to go back, to pick up courses, go to college and so on, having the two older children and not the little one, however, I'm going to miss her terribly, you know.

Q. Why, sure. Well, I think that ought to about conclude it, we've done two sides, thank you.