

#492

SOUTH DAKOTA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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Name of Informant Milo Winter

Address Rapid City, South Dakota

Date of Interview June 17, 1972

Name of Researcher Stephen R. Ward

Others Present _____

Location of Interview Vermillion, South Dakota

Added Notes _____

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

Experiences of various people caught in the flood; Experiences on the day following
the flood; Locating German students who were on band tour; Helpin people find
possessions, etc.

Demographic Information on Informant

Age _____ 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 moves: _____

- Q. This is June 17, 1972 in Vermillion, South Dakota. I'm talking to Milo Winter of Rapid City, South Dakota. This is Steve Ward, and we're pinpointing location on the Rapid City west quadrangle Geological Survey map and the section is northeast quarter of the southwest quarter of the southeast quarter of Section 32, Township 2 north, Range 7 east. And I'm talking now to Milo about where he was in...in the flood. We've located his home in the newer section of Rapid City which is not really on the map. Okay, where were you on a week ago Friday on...on the ninth?
- A. We had a concert that night at the high school and it was interrupted early, the band from Wadjassen, Germany who was visiting _____.
- Q. How do you spell Wadjassen?
- A. W-A-D-J-A-S-S-E-N. Wad...Wad-assen--English pronunciation. And their concert was interrupted by the warnings of the high waters coming down. They advised everyone to exercise caution on going home--this was the Civil Defense people.
- Q. About what time was this?
- A. About nine, I'd say...9:15.
- Q. You had started for the concert before it really rained, or...or...
- A. Well, it had rained earlier in the evening, it had...it was raining so, and it rained really hard from about 6:30 'til about eight or 8:15. And so we...most of the people that came down from Rimrock Canyon west of Rapid City said that there was high water and probably going up some more and they were sort of concerned from the first rain. Then it stopped raining and policemen came and interrupted the concert and gave us the information that we should exercise caution in going home and probably better go home.

Q. Where was the concert being held?

A. At Stevens High School, west Rapid City and that's also...my home was also in that district. So anyway, we all went home and they did broadcast warnings that there was high water and exercise...let's see, how did they put it on the television...statements were to be prepared to evacuate areas near the creek, this sort of thing. And then about 12, this terrific...it started to rain again at ten, it rained tremendously hard, lightning, stayed right there for two hours. And at midnight it was still raining and the TV was...because of lightning I turned it off and went to bed. And I didn't know anything about the flood until eight o'clock the next morning.

Q. Is that right?

A. When the neighbor...well, you just get up like usual and spotted somebody and they'd say, "Did you hear it?" And I still didn't believe it until I went over the bridge and looked, and then I still didn't believe it.

Q. What were you looking down on, then?

A. I was looking down on what used to be Canyon Lake.

Q. Oh, I see, yeah. And what...what did you see at that time, when you were... this was eight o'clock the next morning.

A. Mud flats filled with rubble as far as you could see, almost. I had to come over by the...the West Junior High where it flattens out, there's a yellow house sitting out in the middle of the baseball field that had no business being there. Incredible. And wrecked cars and this sort of thing. And there was really very little activity. Then my...my first thought was the band had been quartered with American families for ten days while they visited the Rap-

id City Band Festival. And I had been working quite closely with the German band director since I speak German and he spoke very little English. And so I thought I'd make myself useful by visiting with him and seeing what I could do to help him; I knew he would be concerned, because, although there was a band manager, still the director has final responsibility--least I feel that way as a band director when I have students. And so we were on the phone most of the morning and sometimes we couldn't get through because the phone lines were so busy. We would just drive around and try to locate...see if someone else had heard from so and so. At two o'clock we finally found the last person that was involved with the band, and all were alive.

Q. How many...how many were actually in the band?

A. There was seventy-two students and I think they had about an entourage of about another twenty-five or thirty people. Parents and friends and chaperons and managers and this sort of thing.

Q. Mmm-hmm. Did any of these people have relatively harrowing experiences or did most of them get...

A. Oh, yeah. Two of them were in a house that belonged to one of our friends and they were...the water caught them between the front door and the car as they were leaving. The house...the electric clock had stopped at 11:15. That was after..I think it was probably after that, however, probably closer to midnight. And the lady survived and her two oldest children--of her own, but her husband and her nine-year-old were lost, and the two German students that were with them wound up on the opposite side of the creek about a mile and a half downstream at Baken Park. They'd bumped up against a bus that was stalled

there of a group of students heading for a church camp somewhere that had gotten stalled in the high water in a sort of a sheltered area, apparently, where the current wasn't quite so swift. They bumped up against the bus and were pulled inside the bus.

Q. For heaven's sakes.

A. As I say, they were caught when they stepped out of the front door--Mrs. Dieter is her name...

Q. Where would that be located? Do you know?

A. Yeah, that was in...

Q. That in the other map?

A. No, it's on this one. It would be right in this area. It shows _____.

Q. South of Jackson Boulevard.

A. Sheridan Lake, yeah.

Q. Near Meadowbrook golf course.

A. No, I'm sorry. No, I'm sorry. It's right up in here.

Q. Oh. On up. Okay, go ahead.

A. Right about there. Let me see if that's the address. Yeah. That would be it. It just took out that curb.

Q. All right. This would be in...see, if I got my spot...yeah...this would be in the northwest quarter of the northwest quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 10, Range 7 east, Township 1 north, and that whole area, then, was the one that was probably the hardest hit, wasn't it?

A. Oh, it doesn't make much difference, there...

Q. It really doesn't.

- A. See, above...above Canyon Lake this is all out, too, there were some beautiful homes up in here. That's all...in fact, there's only one house left up there that I know of, that's standing. Up above...above the dam. The dam thing didn't have much to do with the flood at all. Just all it did is slow it down and _____ when it came through real fast. Anyway, these people were on their way...when they stepped out of their home, their car was about ten feet from their front door. The water was up to the curb. And the next thing Mrs. Dieter knew, she apparently went right through the garage. The doors were closed, but through the east wall and out...through the west wall to the east wall.
- Q. She was swept?
- A. Oh, yeah. She spent the night...she caught onto a tree finally. Her two older children were...wound up in someone else's house--inside. Nobody knows how. And the Germans wound up right down here. This would be...let's see...
- Q. That'd be on down the creek.
- A. Baken Park, right down here. So that was quite a trip. One was unconscious, but he wasn't hurt.
- Q. Do you remember their names?
- A. No. I could find them for you.
- Q. Well, that's...that's all right.
- A. One was Peter Kneer, K-N-E-E-R, I think, 'cause we had a heck of a time finding him. Anyway, then another young...young girl, and I can't tell you where she was. She was farther downstream in east Rapid and--I'm not at all acquainted there--spent the night on a roof and half the roof broke off and the people that were on the other end were lost. And...she had a horrible experience. A

lady was caught in the tree nearby and couldn't either get out of the tree or wouldn't let go, and she was battered by things and she screamed for an hour and a half or so, and in the morning she was still there--but, of course, dead. And so we wound up taking care of this German girl, also. So they came real close.

- Q. Do you get the impression in...that the flood itself hit all kinds of people regardless of economic...
- A. Oh, right. Jackson Boulevard is...I helped a millionaire try to carry some of his objects of art out of his basement in the morning--I happened to be acquainted with his son. And, of course, there were a lot of almost-slum areas on...along the east side.
- Q. On the other side.
- A. Yeah.
- Q. But out here you got the...
- A. These were all very expensive, yeah.
- Q. ...middle class and upper...
- A. The Braeburn Addition down in here will be down here, now.
- Q. West of Canyon Lake, south...
- A. ...right down in here. These were very nice homes in the thirty to fifty thousand dollar range. There are none left. Except one that I know of.
- Q. Did you spend most of the next day going through with the other people looking for particular..the German students, or...
- A. No, we thought...on Saturday at two o'clock we found the last one and then I just drove down and tried to make myself useful. This is when I...I just hap-

pened to see this man. He has one of the few houses standing on Jackson Boulevard that was worth messing with, and he had some of his family working there so I just stopped there for two hours, helped shovel mud, this sort of thing. And then the next day we went to Dieter's and salvaged what we could from there.

Q. So as far as your position is concerned, you...you hardly even knew anything was going on...you didn't know that anything was going on.

A. No. The only...the television said...did...about eleven o'clock they started calling by the use of the little print signals coming across, said that scuba divers were needed, and that sounded bad, sounded like somebody'd been washed into Canyon Lake or something, but...we...nobody really knew...even the next morning, the news..I think the first newscast feared that thirty-six to forty people had been drowned.

Q. So the magnitude wasn't even realized until...

A. Well, you could...until you happened to walk down there and see it. Even at eight o'clock there were probably...it wasn't...it wasn't very crowded in the flood area and you could move around very easily. People didn't start to move around until probably in the late afternoon, really--'cause they were asked to stay away, and they did. But I was close by, so I went down and helped look.

Q. Are there any other impressions or any other things that occurred to you as all this was going on?

A. No, I think there's a lot of, oh...there'll be a lot of scapegoating-type thing going on, but I don't think anyone could possibly guess that anything of this magnitude could come down out of those hills, 'cause the rain was quite...quite localized--even up above this wasn't...ten miles above Rapid City the damage

was not nearly as serious. There aren't as many houses, but the water wasn't nearly as high. So it has to be a fairly localized cloudburst in this area that did the damage.

Q. But, of course, here...what were you, about two miles from Canyon Lake when your...what do you call this, the Braner Addition?

A. That's the Braeburn...

Q. Braeburn.

A. B-R-A-E-B-U-R-N. Yeah.

Q. Yeah. This area in through here. Admittedly, this map is probably not as...

A. Right, that was...that was devastated. And Dark Canyon had a road going up in it and there's some beautiful homes up in there. I got as far as where the road just stopped and all you can see is piles of rubble thirty, forty feet high and climbed the first one to see what was up...I thought it was just maybe... had sort of dammed up there, but as far as you can see, the canyon is just completely scoured. I don't know if there are any houses up there that survived at all. I...I would doubt it.

Q. What about the high school, you teach where, at...

A. Stevens.

Q. Stevens.

A. None of the schools were hit except Meadowbrook Grade School down there. On this...that would be...look...it's not even on here, see. It's located right in this area. That was a sort of the base of operations from the west side. A great many bodies were found in there 'cause the...the creek makes a sweep that way. You usually find the most debris on the outside.

Q. Well, good. Well, I thank you very much. Unless you have anything else...?

A. That's all.

Q. Okay.

(END OF INTERVIEW)