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SOUTH DAKOTA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
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Name of Informant THOMAS K. OLIVER AND MRS. (NANCY) OLIVER
Address Box 707 Keystone Route - Rapid City
Date of Interview 26 Jul 73
Name of Researcher E. Hausle
Others Present Mary Hausle
Location of Interview Oliver's temporary home (HUD trailer) next to house he is
Added Notes: building on Keystone Route near Rapid City

SUBJECT HEADINGS UNDER WHICH YOU FEEL THIS INTERVIEW SHOULD BE FILED:

Temporary living quarters in borrowed trailer, living in HUD trailer; decision to buy lot and build; help from private and governmental agencies; efficiency and inefficiency of government agencies; the generosity of many people.

SEE FIRST INTERVIEW DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON INFORMANT
#525
Age _____ Sex _____ County _____
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. Rapid City, South Dakota, July 26, 1973, Earl Hausle interviewing Mr. and Mrs. Tom Oliver.
Where did you folks live after the flood?
- A. Oh, we spent the summer in a, what was it, Nancy, 19 foot...
- A2. No, 17 feet.
- A. Seventeen foot camping trailer that, uh, that, uh, my son's wife's parents were kind enough to let us use for the summer. It was parked on the Fizel's lawn.
- Q. And you lived in that until you got, uh, a HUD trailer?
- A. That was sort of our headquarters until we got the HUD trailer and now, uh, I should say that people were so generous we must have had, uh, eight different people call us and say they were going to be gone for the summer and won't you come live in our house while we're on vacation for the next four weeks or six weeks or something. And, uh, we, well, we found it more convenient to keep that camping trailer as our headquarters so to speak because it was handy to this lot where I was trying to get a well drilled and a septic tank put in, uh, so that I could get the HUD trailer up here. We did, uh, we did, uh, uh, sleep around in different people's beds during that, uh, period of time but the camping trailer remained more or less our, our base of operations. It just seemed easier that way than to completely move into somebody's house for four weeks and then move out and move on.
- Q. What was the date that you finally got the HUD trailer?
- A. Twenty-fifth of August, 1972.
- Q. And you, when did you purchase this lot where we are now?
- A. It was ten days after the flood or approximately the 19th of June.
- Q. Well, your house was completely destroyed by the flood, right?
- A. Right. Completely gone.
- Q. And so you, you felt already at that time that regardless of Urban Renewal plans or whatever else would be considered in which nobody knew any answer to it that then that you were going to relocate, is that right?
- A. I could pretty well tell that if anybody in the world was, was going to be barred from

building in their old lot it was going to be me. And, uh, even if the city had issued me a new building permit on that lot I think I pretty well figured out that, uh, I would sell that lot and build up here instead.

- A2. It wasn't so much that the lot was destroyed by the creek being reroute. Where it re-route it stuck, too.
- A. It really didn't take much imagination to reach that decision. It seemed to be the only decision at the time.
- Q. You, you didn't have the feeling then that some people I've talked to have that they would have, would stay where they presently are or were if they could?
- A. There just wasn't, wasn't anything left there to stay in. It would have been a complete rebuilding job and, uh, Nancy said the creek had actually dug out quite a bit of our back yard. The new creek bed, well, today part of the creek bed flows where our yard used to be. That, uh, that didn't seem attractive at all.
- Q. What are some of the problems that you have encountered during this time that has _____ since the flood?
- A. Oh, I guess everything takes a little longer than you think it's going to but, uh...ten, that sure would do it to call a problem.
- A2. An impatient wife, that's a problem. Right?
- A. Yeah, it all depends on your definition of problem that, the old farmer whose cows were sick and fence broken down and everything else and somebody said, gee, it's too bad you have so many problems." And he said he doesn't count it a problem if he can handle it himself. I don't know. Everything goes a little slower than you, than you think it should I guess.
- A2. I don't think that you, as a person, are used to dealing with the multiple agencies with whom you've had to deal. And sometimes although they've been awfully good they have, you have gotten rather impatient with them. Just because our lives have never revolved around that sort of thing.
- Q. Did you ever feel that there have been any tremendously larger and extremely difficult

problems that you haven't been able to solve then?

A. No, I guess the, I guess the most acute phase of this construction project really took place last fall. The, uh, house package was rather late getting here as compared to what I hoped for. I had hoped to see it, oh, at least a month earlier. It, uh, it came somewhere around the middle of October. And, uh, this man had a, had a space but the problem of either getting, getting the walls up and the roof on, uh, before the winter weather set in or else, uh, there I was sort of faced with the specter of timber spread all over the lot with snow on it and getting wet and warping out of shape so as to, so as to really give me a problem. And, uh, oh, we sort of felt, uh, sort of felt, uh, pushed by the circumstances there last fall to work pretty hard on Saturdays, Sundays and every splitting spare moment to get the walls up and the roof on. We did get it up but got the roof on just after Christmas. Heaved a sigh of relief. And, uh, my sons and I took off for Salt Lake City on a skiing trip. Figured we earned it at that point. Except for the, having the basement poured you've done practically all the work yourself then(direct).

Q. What kind of, uh, disaster help, uh, did you receive after the flood?

A. Gee, I guess the standard help. We, uh, we received food stamps. We received allowances from the Red Cross. We, uh, received assistance from the Swe, what do they call it, Rapid City Disaster Relief Foundation--all three phases of that. Uh, the Episcopal Church to which I belong got up a disaster relief fund. We got some help from there. Uh, then, of course, we got our small business loan which, uh, the big thing that makes possible rig building a new house. Uh, as you see we got the HUD trailer to live in for a year then a piece of assistance. And I would say of all the government agencies that have been helpful one that was, uh, that, uh, really done a good job of taking care of people. They're not my favorite government agency but I got to hand it to it the Internal Revenue Service, people they sent here talked to us knew their business and did it well.

Q. And is your lot been acquired now by Urban Renewal?

A. Right. It has been acquired by Urban Renewal. I think it was one of the first _____

A2. It was number six they said. _____ it was number six. The _____

- A. Yeah. That was dated the first day that they were, that they were closing deals on lots. So the lot has been acquired on Urban Renewal and, uh, and we have gotten a relocation allowance also. I guess the price of the lot plus the relocation allowance just about took, it was just about the right amount to take care of the mortgage on the old house that we still owed.
- Q. Did you feel that you got a fair price for the lot?
- A. I think so, yes. I checked it out with the realstate agent that sold me the lot just to, because it seemed to be a reasonable imprudent step to take and he thought it was, uh, he thought it was just about right for that price.
- Q. What's your assessment of the total program that was carried out by both government and private agencies in terms of relief for flood victims?
- A. I guess I would say in, in principle I think to say that, uh, from my standpoint that there was, uh, that is constituted an excellent program. And I wouldn't go calling for new legislation to cure any else that might exist. I think, uh, well, one government agency notibly could stand to have some more confident people working for them to put it bluntly. Uh, I guess to start at the, start at the top the, uh, I don't know if this is the sort of thing you want on the interview, is it, Earl?
- Q. Go ahead.
- A. I'd like to add some credit to the Internal Revenue Service, and they say the people that they sent to talk to us knew their business and did it well. I went in one time and, uh, asked to get a copy of my, uh, oh, what would it be, 1971 tax return which I needed in order to get a small business loan. So the man behind the desk said fine, filled out some forms. We've ordered it for you. You're all set. The next day I came back and I said I, I now discover that for another purpose I needed the 1970 and the 1969 returns; can we order those? "Oh," he says, "I knew you were going to need those and I've ordered them already. It's all taken care of." That was typical of Internal Revenue Service. I'd like to comend Small Business Administration, uh, recognize. They had to hire some temporary help and so on but at least, it seemed they had their temporary help, uh, brief

to, to do a sensible thing. I remember asking one of the kids I was talking to while I was questioning said, well, I don't know the answer to that to be frank and it's a good question. I'll go find out from the supervisor. So he checks and comes back and gives me the right answer. Uh, unfortunately you can't say the same thing for the temporary help that HUD hired. Uh, if they didn't know the answer they invented one on the spot. Nobody bothered to check with anybody. You can say it's temporary but McDonald's Hamburger runs on temporary help and they do a good job. They have them all briefed and trained. They know what they're doing. This seemed to be shot through at HUD. You'd get any answer that came into their mind at the moment, extremely difficult to ever. I finally learned the only thing you do is ask for the head man, and when they say he's busy why you start working down from him and maybe that way you get somebody that knows something. Kids behind the desk would just invent some fairy story.

A2. Well, I think there's still, uh, at sixes and nines, the HUD people. They say that they, uh, juggle their counselors all around, uh, not too long ago. And we had one very nice little man that I have a 19-year-old step son I'm sure who is got far more marbles than, far more marbles than this young one did. And he drove up here, you can't miss that house behind the trailer and he said, "Do you think you will be finding a home pretty soon?" And I said, "Look out the window and _____ how dumb can you get?" But they, uh, they really are not, uh, not terribly fair or e, I don't think it's that. As Tom says I don't think that anybody has thought to say, "Oh, you meet tomorrow morning at 8 o'clock. These are the steps we follow."

A. Well, there's, there's something serious wrong in that whole organization manifested itself in a number of ways. For example, in the process of, of putting this trailer in and so on you could see that almost anybody that works for HUD is incompetent. The difference between the people that I hired to do work for me and the people that HUD hired to work for them, the difference between black and white, and the competent people won't put up with that bologna they get from HUD. My, uh, bulldozer backhoe man was saying, oh, yeah, he did a job for HUD once and some 18-year-old kid tried to tell him how to do it and

tried to fire him and he says he doesn't work for HUD anymore. Now, I don't know what the story is and maybe he doesn't have the cheapest rate per hour among bulldozer backhoe men. I know he'll get the job done for you probably for a lower price than almost anybody else 'cause he does one hell of a lot of work in an hour. He charges by the hour. He's efficient. He knows what he's doing. He never, he doesn't waste emotion with that backhoe. He's an artist with it. HUD sent, uh, well, you see, I, uh, I had my guy put in the septic tank and the drain field which, of course, is my responsibility, and it goes with the main house, too, as far as that goes. But I had to have it in order to put the HUD trailer here. And in the process he did a lot of backhoe work and ran some lines and so on. He ran the ditch from my basement over to my well pit to run my water line from the well pit to the new house then, for example. Now, HUD sent up a crew to run from the well pit to this, uh, trailer site which is part of their rules. They'll run 90 feet of water line I think. They sent was it three guys or four, four guys up to run that little ditch including one backhoe up there. My man all by himself would have done it faster 'cause he works more efficiently and he doesn't always have to stop and consult and ask, ask everybody else what do we do next. He knows what he's doing. And then, then somewhere in the middle of the job they got about three HUD inspectors in with these four workers and everything quit and the seven of them huddled for half an hour. And Nancy can tell you about the guys they sent up to put the skirting around the trailer. That seems like a new low, well, I don't know. I don't want to delabor the point but, you know, it, it's one indication when, when the contractors they have working with them inevitably are the poorest available. There's something wrong somewhere.

Q. Tell us about the skirting, Nancy.

A2. Well, it was ridiculous. Uh, the man did nothing but complain the whole time about any and everything. The Stanley Johnson people were putting the basic frames for the basement in and occasionally they were using electrical equipment. And from this common power post that Tom has.

A. Service pole.

A2. What, service pole?

A. Service pole.

A2. And, uh, I was in here fussin around and, uh, the fuses kept blowing in the house which does annoy me because I don't like to play around with electrical things anyway and, uh, changing fuses is not one of my past times. So after replacing two fuses I finally asked the man, uh, if he had a short in his electric drill. Oh, absolutely it could not be his electric drill. Uh, it must be the cord so he went through the cord. We put something else on both end of the cord when he plugged the cord in and something else on the other end instead of his electric drill and it worked. So it wasn't the cord. And he seemed to be getting annoyed that at least I knew that to do that much. So finally I said, "Let me bring your drill in here right into the house and we won't have any cord problems at all and we'll see if it works." "Oh, it has to work. It's a brand new drill from Sears." And he brought it in and it didn't work. And I said, "It could be your drill couldn't it." And he said, "Say, you're pretty smart." And thought I'd say, "Well, how dumb can you get." Oh. Lord. This is over a period of about two hours.

A. He was trying to blame Stanley Johnson's crew.

A2. Oh, yeah, he blames their cre, he blamed their crew. I finally got Tom's brand new 50 or 100 extension cord and gave him that, and he still was blowing fuses. So, I mean the whole thing was ridiculous. That, that any woman who runs a household knows when you blow it once you check very carefully before you use it but not that _____. We have company. Who's that?

A. I don't know. Guess we'll find out soon.

A2. But it was, all in all it was really, uh...

A. Excuse me, is our light on?

A2. Any, any number of, uh, things that _____ and I think this is the reason that it bothers both Tom and me. I woldn't say that we are impatient people. I would just say that we're used to doing things in a fairly efficient manner but that one was too much.

- Q. Nancy, what are some of the particular frustrations that, uh, of problems that a housewife has in this kind of a situation?
- A2. Learning to live in a trailer, realizing how spoiled you've been all your life living in nice houses; reaching for something that isn't there; knowing that you cannot dwell on what you've lost because if you do you'll end up in the booby hatch. Uh, being a good sport I guess. It, sometimes it gets a little, little tiresome. And now, uh, in the wintertime we were surprised the trailer was really quite comfortable, heating wise and this sort of thing. But when all the windows frost up you suddenly realize that you're in a cell, sort of like living in a permanent poleman car that, when the washing machine goes you rattle along with it and that sort of thing. Uh, no, it's just been learning to cope without all the things I have taken for granted for so many, many years. And I am now faced with the problem of replacing a great number of those things. And you live in your, uh, smug little way used to having all the, uh, accouterments to your house that are so delightful to have. And you have to start replacing them and it's an awful lot to start replacing. I'm finding that I can do without a number of things. I don't like to but I am. And trying to, to make life as pleasant for Tom most of the time. I'm quite sure I've made it hell for him a few times, too. But, uh, it has been difficult for both of us in that way. This is a terribly different way of living than I ever had under some pressured circumstances is the building of the house.
- Q. Tom, have you had some, uh, frustrations besides the time factors that, uh, have bothered you particularly?
- A2. _____.
- A. Oh, gee, I don't...I don't know how to answer that. You know, when you're doing something like building a house there are days when things don't go right and you drop something on your foot and, uh, and you get pretty annoyed and frustrated with the whole thing. It doesn't seem to be making progress but, uh, unfortunately there haven't been too many of those days. I don't, I don't think of any major problems or frustrations to say.
- Q. How did you decide on the particular kind of a house you selected? You selected a pre-cut

house of cedar rather than, you know, having a builder build one for you or something. How did you make those decisions?

- A. Well, we, uh, we originally thought in terms of CAP home I think and doing the finish work ourselves. Then we discovered that the CAP home we had been looking at wasn't big enough to meet the covenant for this particular lot. And about the same time we saw an add in the Rapid City paper for these solid cedar homes. I sent for the brochure. I liked the, I liked the looks of what we saw and drove over to Sheraton, Wyoming to see the, uh, model house that the distributor had there. We, uh, decided it looked real nice and, uh, signed up for one. Yeah, I think we shouldn't end this interview without saying something about the tremendous, uh, generosity of, oh, countless of our friends and acquaintances who have, uh, oh, just for one example, volunteered their help in constructing this house. Last fall during that critical phase between October and December when we were trying to get the walls up and the roof on it seemed like just about any Saturday you named somebody would volunteer and come over and be helping work on the house. This was really just one example. There have been so many instances of people going out of their way to be helpful and I couldn't possibly give everybody the credit they should have. It really has been, well, a tremendously heartwarming experience to find out how generous and helpful all sorts of people in Rapid City are.
- A2. People you never know who are generous and, and genuinely concerned for your personal welfare as well as your building of your house which happens to be the major project we've had for the last year. All-in-all people have truly been fabulous.

(END OF INTERVIEW)