

SOUTH DAKOTA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Library Cataloging Service Data

Name of informant Mr. and Mrs. Duane Plucker, (Joan)
Address 202 11 Street, Rapid City, South Dakota
Date of Interview July 11, 1972
Name of Researcher O. A. Rothlisberger
Others Present _____
Location of Interview 12 St. Andrew, Rapid City, South Dakota
Added Notes _____

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

Flood victims, lost their trailer in trailer court; He is a deputy sheriff and related his experiences; Interesting comments on body recovery and identification.

Demographic Information on Informant

Age c. 30 Sex Male, Female County Pennington
Socio-economic status Middle
Occupation She , municipal employee; He, Deputy sheriff, Pennington County
Education _____
Religion _____
Date of Arrival of Family in South Dakota _____
Where? _____
From where? _____
Number of Moves in South Dakota _____ Reasons for move: _____

- Q. O. A. Rothlisberger, Oral History Project, South Dakota Historical Society, interviewing victims of the Rapid City flood, July 11, 1972. Talking this afternoon to Mrs. Duane Plucker, and Mrs. Plucker, your residence at the time of the flood was 202 11th Street, Rapid City.
- A. Yes, that's correct.
- Q. That, you say, is the Brookside. . . ?
- A. Brookside Trailer Court.
- Q. I see. You were home that afternoon, that evening, June 9th, I guess it was. . . .
- A. Yes, mm-hm.
- Q. When, when did you first, when were you first warned or did you become aware that perhaps flood conditions were developing?
- A. Well, the sky looked so very different, I never saw the sky look like that before. It was like aqua underneath and heavy, heavy clouds hanging above, and we started listening to the radio then, and becoming aware that something was sure going to be happening.
- Q. Yes, okay. Do you remember about what time this was that you noticed this, these particular cloud formations and would you say you knew something was going to happen and started listening to the radio?
- A. Around, around 6 o'clock, because we were preparing for supper.
- Q. Now, your husband was home at that time?
- A. No, no. He hadn't come home for supper yet. I went outside and next door to the next trailer house west and asked them if they would want to park their car under one of the trees because it looked like it was going to be a hailstorm. And they hadn't really paid too much attention, but then we all started watching and oh, the clouds were just rumbling, rolling something fierce.

- Q. Yes. Now, present with you in the trailer at that time were your two small children, are they both daughters. . . ?
- A. Both daughters.
- Q. Mrs. Plucker has one of the children here in her lap and little girl is about three?
- A. Six.
- Q. Six! (Laughter.) And what's her name?
- A. Vicki.
- Q. Vicki. All right, and your younger daughter then, who is. . . .
- A. A year and a half.
- Q. A year and a half, the two children were with you and anyone else?
- A. My mother.
- Q. Your mother.
- A. And a niece.
- Q. And a niece. All right, then you continued to watch this, this storm, and you had the radio on, so you were receiving warning on this?
- A. We were listening to KOTA, receiving more news on the weather, keeping posted with the neighbor's reports on a different station.
- Q. Uh-huh. Now, your husband, what is his employ?
- A. My husband is a deputy sheriff, Pennington County.
- Q. He wasn't home, _____ he was on duty?
- A. No, he was on duty.
- Q. Well, when, when did the water, now that's right near the creek, right, Rapid Creek?
- A. Right.

Q. When did the water come up along the creek?

A. Well, we were gone before it actually came up to do damage to our trailer.

Q. How did you leave?

A. We evacuated in our own station wagon.

Q. Your own station wagon. And where did you go when you. . . ?

A. We went up to I-90 and LaCrosse.

Q. I-90 and La Crosse, now this was, it was high ground up there.

A. Right, the highest place we could find.

Q. Were there lots of other people up there on I-90 and LaCrosse?

A. Well, on the way up, there were a lot of cars and West Boulevard there was one _____ street there, but cars were parked the wrong way and stalled, and we had a difficult time to _____ park on the hill.

Q. And, was, were there any city officials or state officials, any rescue squads, or anything up there on top of the hill to take care of the people?

A. I have since found out that there was Rapid City police department stationed on that bridge but I didn't see a patrol car. I think he was on foot at the time.

Q. Now you had received, you had been warned by. . . .

A. By my husband.

Q. By your husband, he had called.

A. He had come down to the court _____.

Q. I see, I see. And then he had to go back on duty, I suppose. But he had information at that time that the situation might become critical, and. . . .

A. Very, very much. . . .

Q. Well, when did you, did you spend the night up there on I-90 and LaCrosse?

A. We spend the night in the car, yes.

- Q. You, you left the park before the water was up around the trailer, though, and when could you get back down to your trailer, then?
- A. Oh, I suppose we could have got down the next morning, my husband _____ point of time because he was right in the area most of the time.
- Q. Yes, he was there all night I suppose, quite busy.
- A. Around. When he, when he could, yes.
- Q. Yes, I see. But you didn't, did you go back on Saturday then to. . . ?
- A. I didn't, I didn't go, my husband went down on Saturday morning after it got daylight, to see what he could as far as where the trailer house had gone or our car, our other car.
- Q. You left one car there.
- A. _____ was broke down, he was doing repairs on it.
- Q. Was it swept away?
- A. About half a block.
- Q. And the trailer, was it swept away?
- A. The trailer was, was moved probably about three blocks.
- Q. I see.
- A. And lodged against a power line pole.
- Q. Was it destroyed, or. . . ?
- A. A lot of our belongings were destroyed, as far as damage to the trailer house, we could restore it partially, _____ contents were in very bad condition.
- Q. Mm-hm. Now, how many trailers would you estimate were in the park?
- A. Thirty.
- Q. Thirty?
- A. Approximately.

Q. And were most of them destroyed?

A. Yes.

Q. Swept, were there, were there any casualties?

A. Three that I know of for sure as far as trailer houses were, there's been no trace found of them.

Q. Is that right?

A. Right in the court where we live, bodies were found, we don't know that anyone lost their lives, are dead, but some people out of the trailer court, a thirteen old girl and two small boys lost their lives.

Q. You say that was in another court?

A. Just out of the court.

Q. Just out of the court.

A. On Eleventh Street.

Q. I see. What about the rest of the folks, neighbors there in Brookside Court, they all get out, or did some of them. . . .

A. Most of them got out about the same time that we did, one lady was in till about midnight, when her trailer house had lifted up and was floating. And some people rescued her. She was in a state of shock, she didn't know which way to turn.

Q. I suppose not. Now, when your husband came out and warned you, then, did you say something to the other neighbors, or did your husband call any other people down there in the park?

A. Yeah, the neighbors that were closest to us, they were in their, in their trailer house during the evening, so we'd been keeping in contact with each other and so we told them that we were leaving and kind of checked around to

see right in the vicinity if they were going to be leaving.

Q. I see. Now, Mr. Plucker is here now, so Mr. Plucker, what can you tell us about your experiences that night as, as a member of a law enforcement agency, sheriff's department, you were kept on duty throughout the night, I suppose.

A2 Yeah. We was on, the whole department worked, I'm not sure, but I believe something like three days and three nights straight through. But probably _____ just, well, I was down _____ headquarters at approximately 11 o'clock.

Q. Is this when, is this when you warned your wife?

A2 Right, yeah. I checked the creek, and at that time, the creek was just even with the banks.

Q. Mm-hm. It wasn't up into the court yet.

A2 No. Not at 11 o'clock. And somewhere about 11:30 is when this _____ form of tidal wave it looked like to me came through there. At that time, I know _____ had an officer on the West Boulevard Bridge. I believe he said at 11:30 there was four feet of water going over the bridge. Plus trucks, trailer houses, _____ was going over the bridge at that time.

Q. Now, were you and the other members of the sheriff's department, were you out on, were you on patrol, or. . . ?

A2 Yes, as much as we could. From, oh, I'd say 11:30 until, oh, approximately 3 o'clock in the morning, there wasn't too much a guy could do, you couldn't, there was no _____ to these areas, it was just, just couldn't get into them.

Q. Yeah, yeah, I see. The following day when the water receded, and that was on Saturday when the water started to go down. . . .

A2 Right.

Q. The were, what, what were your duties _____ assist _____ . . . ?

- A2 Primarily at about 4:30 in the morning _____ more or less just trying to help people and locate people, I think it was about 4 o'clock in the morning, you could look down the creek and it just, between 4:00 and 4:30, it was just a haze with fires, and I don't know, people I seen _____ just stunned. They couldn't believe, when daylight came they couldn't believe what it looked like, it was just mass destruction.
- Q. Then did you, did you have to assist in rescuing some of these people, getting them off of the roofs and trees, off the trees. . . ?
- A2 Yes, we, we got some _____ primarily, as soon as daylight came on Saturday morning, _____ took the job, 'cause I went on body detail.
- Q. Body detail? Searching for the dead.
- A2 Searching _____.
- Q. How long were you involved with that--throughout the day?
- A2 Yeah, I was on it all day Saturday, most of Sunday, _____ something else.
- Q. Now, now, what did you have to do, did you have to search _____ the demolished houses. . . ?
- A2 Right, it was just a complete search of the area _____ so many people were buried under debris and stuff. This is what we primarily tried to do, is locate them as fast as we could and identify them as fast as we could.
- Q. Mm-hm. Now, did you and (brother) was with you, did you locate the bodies and bring them out or then notify some other. . . ?
- A2 No we, primarily, when we found them, we hauled them to one of the three morgues here in Rapid City.
- Q. Yes, could you tell us something about those morgues, emergency morgues?
- A2 There's Behren's, Catron's, and Campbell's funeral homes. And in these funeral

homes for the first two days we had the Division of Criminal Investigation, Attorney General _____, and identifying teams from the Federal Bureau of Investigation along with the sheriff's office and everybody else. Primarily, we was trying to identify these people as fast as we could. It was a tedious task, and I think that after it's all over with, we done real well.

Q. Yeah, yeah. Now, Mr. Plucker, the press reported that emergency, (a morgue company) provided that refrigerator trucks were used. . . .

A2 Right.

Q. Where were these set up, along. . . ?

A2 We had two big refrigerator vans that were placed at Behren's Mortuary for storage and the reason for it was the first day the bodies was coming in faster than we could identify them. We had to do something, this is a way of keeping them so we could identify them.

Q. Mm-hm. Now, in some instances were, was, were they identified by their families looking for them _____ there?

A2 Family, _____, jewelry, surgery scars, fingerprints, _____.

Q. But in some instances the family just came in, looked through _____ the bodies.

A2 Right, but I think probably that starting Sunday, I believe it was, at that time we started taking relatives, friends to view the body.

Q. I see. And you were on then straight through for several days.

A2 Yes, yes. I believe it was three days and three nights. The whole department not only me, but the whole sheriff department, police department, everybody involved in this thing.

Q. Yes. There was another report that made it into the press, and that was that there was some looting, did, were you on any patrols that were put out for

security purposes?

A2 Yes, right. There was, there was quite a little looting.

Q. Is that right?

A2 A lot of people were out and I don't know quite how to explain it, but it did happen.

Q. Well, it seems to be a thing that happens with disasters very often. Mrs. Plucker, in the meantime, you were, you were up there on I-90 and LaCrosse, right?

A. Right.

Q. And stayed there in the automobile all night, now did you, were you able to get in contact with your husband?

A. No, he didn't know where we were.

Q. I see.

A. He found out about, about 5:00 Saturday morning. Where we were located.

A2 I, I left the _____ at 11:00 and tried to contact them by phone. I believe it was right after 12:00, and I didn't locate again until the following morning, I believe it was right around 5 o'clock.

Q. But you assumed that they, they had gone on up.

A2 Wasn't sure.

Q. You weren't sure, no, I suppose not. So in addition to your duties, you had that anxiety to contend with, too, I suppose, that's. . .then. . .where did you, you came out here to 12 St. Andrew from LaCrosse?

A. We went to, we tried to rent a motel room and they were all full at the Holiday Inn, and for fear that things might develop more, we stayed in the _____ in the Howard Johnson Motel on Saturday. And we had to find clothing and shoes

for the children because they were still in their pajamas. And no slippers.

Q. Now what did you do for clothing then? Did you go to these emergency clothing centers?

A. Well, I didn't know how to get on the south side of the creek, but the girls' babysitter lives in the north part of town and not too far from where we were, so we went down to her house to see, and her mother-in-law and brother-in-law were there. She had also lost her house, and we got clothing and some shoes for the kids as best we could.

Q. I see. Well, when were you able to get back together again? Of course, you were working around the clock. . . .

A2 Oh, I, I think, let's see, I believe it was Tuesday.

Q. Tuesday, mm-hm. Okay. Did you get a couple of days off after. . . ?

A2 Not for a while.

Q. Not, I suppose not.

A2 No, no.

Q. Yes, well, anything else that you can tell us, either of you, Mrs. Plucker or Mr. Plucker, about your experiences there?

A2 Well, I don't believe that any community can plan a program (for this kind) _____, I don't believe it's feasible. We was real fortunate out here at the time this thing took place that the National Guard was here. But unless you go through something like this when you lose communications, you lose roads, I just don't see how, any way you can plan.

Q. Now, were you in contact with the Pennington County Sheriff's office throughout this period? (Through your radios)?

A2 Our communication system fouled up but we had an emergency call plan that we,

could use.

Q. I see.

A2 But we did have communications all through the ordeal. And this whole thing, I don't know, a lot of people had been warned, but I believe they felt that it wasn't going to be as bad _____. A lot of them were lost, I think _____ fortunate _____.

Q. Yeah. Okay, well thank you, Mrs. Plucker do you have anything to add?

A. No, but it sure did draw the community together. Everyone just helped everyone.

Q. Yes, I've heard so many people say that. Well, thank you very much then for this informative and interesting tape on the Rapid City Flood, 1972. Thank you very much.