

SOUTH DAKOTA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
Library Cataloguing Service Data

Name of Informant Dorrance Ducek
Address 3802 Riverdell - Rapid City, SD
Date of Interview 27 Jun 72
Name of Researcher J. Watterson
Others Present ----
Location of Interview 919 West Main Street - Rapid City

Added Notes: _____

Subject Headings under which you feel this interview should be filed: _____
Rapid City flood; escape from house to house of neighbor; separation and reunion with family.

Demographic Information on Informant

Age 43 Sex M 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. June 26, 1972, and I'm talking with Dorrance Ducek at the Ducek building. (Background noise) Mr. Ducek lived formerly and will live again at 1415 Quincy, I'm sorry, check that, 3802 Riverdell, which is in the southeast quadrant of the northwest quadrant of Section 9, Township 1 North, Range 7 East.
- A. The evening proceeded quite well 'til about 10:30 at night when my family and I noticed that the water was rising...rising quite rapidly on the front of our house, which was Riverdell and also 38th Street, which is to the east of our home. Most of us were in pajamas, so we quickly changed, got into our car and attempted to leave the driveway. We couldn't do so because of the stalled cars behind us and also the water that was rising, so we drove back in the driveway (I remember makin' a statement) we'd better get back in the house, consider getting on the roof to be safe. At the same time we were lea...going back to the driveway, a neighbor up Riverdell was coming down with his family by the name of Barney Madler. His two cars had stalled on 38th Street, and (he) said he'd better head for our house. I passed him from the standpoint that someone had yelled that they needed help with a Mr. Thompson in the middle of the street in the car who was a double amputee. At this time the water was approximately waist high. I went out to try to take him out of the car, take him to my house, and I couldn't because the water was...current was too swift. So it was difficult to get Mr. Thompson, who as I say had no legs, to my house, because he was no help at all, so I kind of floated with him down to a corner house owned by Fred (Morrell), which is on Franklin and 38th. I took him in the house, closed the door, and at that time the water was too high for me to leave. In the house were 12 other

people, or a total of 13. The older people, Mr., Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, were sitting in the front room, and in the house also another older person, Fred (Morrell) who owned the house, and young people, considerably young, probably ages 11 up to 21, 22. The water continued to rise but I didn't think there was any great danger, but I did have the kids up on the counters, sinks, refrigerator and wash machine, dryer and stuff, trying to figure out what I was going to do. At this time the lights were still on. At 11:15 or approximately 11:10, 11:15, the lights went out. Then the kids, some of them began to panic, and I figured possibly I should try to assist them from the standpoint of just calming their fears and talking to 'em as best I could, and everybody was scared to death, including me. I'm gonna guess approximately 11:30, 11:15, 11:30 Canyon Lake Dam apparently went out because the water rose very, very high on the house, and out went, picture window which faced 38th Street. When this went out, the house filled up with about, oh, approximately three and a half, four foot of water. Very shortly afterward the pressure of the water took the southwest corner of the house off, and when that left, Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, who were sitting in a large chair in the corner, disappeared right in front of my eyes.

Q. I might add that this house was in the southwest quarter of the northeast quarter of Section 9, Township 1 North, Range 7 East.

A. People who were in the house mentioned to me that there was an attic and that the entrance to it or opening for it was in the utility room which was directly behind me as I was standing in the front part of the kitchen. So I tried to ask, suggested to the children to get up to the attic, hoped they wouldn't be trapped, but approx...possibly they could get up to the roof,

maybe the chimney'd fall off or something would happen. So I had 'em holding hands and talking to me so I could hear 'em, everybody at one time, because you couldn't see a thing, and I was standing in front of them, and they were all behind me. The west wall of the house went at...as we were talking, and then I spent some time trying to push debris away that came in, so that it wouldn't hit anybody, which was re...coming in very, very fast. And I could still hear some, most of the people were still talking to me, behind me. Where the north wall finally went where the garage had been--and the garage had disappeared--when the north wall went out, it swept me into the...right out into Franklin Street, which is just in front of the house. As I went down the stream, clinging to nothing, just to myself, I was looking for, tryin' to look for landmarks to see where I was. The reason I was confused (was) that several of the houses I was looking for had disappeared. And it was dark. I figured I had better try and stay out of the mainstream, which was directly in front of me--Rapid Creek--so I worked my way around, I thought, Franklin Street, which turned and went towards Jackson Boulevard which was north. Somehow I slowed myself down by grabbing onto a tree that was lying down, the force of it almost pulled the arms out of my sockets. Then I drifted a little further on some debris, (in) which I was knocked off there, then I thought I noticed a house on the left of me, was owned by Joe Ellis, I thought it was the back part. So in a moment I happened to notice some telephone wires on the side of the house and I reached out and grabbed ahold of those. While I was hanging on to regain my strength, approximately two or three houses floated by on my right (and went down), which is quite an eerie feeling to see these large houses float. I thought I noticed a light

in the house, a candle or something, so I pounded my foot against the house as I was hanging on. Mr. Ellis looked out his west window--one of them--saw me, came to his back door which was facing the creek, opened it, I let go of the wires and floated to the door (in) which he grabbed a hold of me and pulled me in the house, at which time I practically collapsed in a chair.

Q. Would you comment on your, on your condition other than the fatigue at the time you were, you were saying that you were somewhat battered by debris.

A. Yes, I was constantly hit by things, but fortunately nothing as big as could have been; but I was black and blue for about a week from the debris hitting me. The water moves quite rapidly, and there's absolutely, really nothing you can really do to steady yourself unless you grab ahold of something, and then it's risky. People have asked me was I scared, you're damn right I was scared. Some people say, "Did you start to pray?" I said, "Well, I don't remember, because I was trying to figure how in the hell to get out of the damn thing." The thought did occur to me several times as I was going down there, would I get out, and what would happen to me thereafter. I sat in Ellis's house, oh, approximately a half hour to 45 minutes, at which time the water had subsided enough for me to leave his house which is approximately waist high. I went into the middle of Jackson Boulevard, which was then about knee high. I walked up to 38th Street and Jackson and looked with quite relieved to see that my house was still standing--still not knowing whether my family had made it to the roof or where they were. I went through the back door of the driveway said, heard voices on the patio side, went out that door, and there was my family being loaded into a boat which had been on the top of a fisherman's car from Edgemont, South Dakota, who was...(said he was a)

fireman up here on vacation. He had come down Jackson Boulevard and was stopped by a truck who had it's light shining on the top of my house where my family and the Madler family was sitting. The, I suppose the upstart was, I caught the second boat out over to Jackson Boulevard, from which we went to the Madler's friends house and spent the evening.

- Q. Would you, you were mentioning that very little damage was done, well, very, not little damage, but, to your own house, you're going to be able to move back into your own house?
- A. Yes, I think possibly one reason that, there's two, possibly two reasons, excuse me, why the house was still intact. One of which, it's an elder home and it was bolted down to the silt. The second reason was that my neighbor has a row of poplar trees which lined my, the side of my patio, and I think that, when the water came down it was broken my these six or seven trees enough so that it swirled and just went up the side of the house. According to the side of the water mark on the house, we had six foot of water on the west side. The house held up well enough, there's probably 12 to 15 inches of water in our house at one time and ended up with about four inches of mud. But all the personal contents are gone. But the house is good enough, and I think well-made enough, that we've cleaned it up considerably, and we're going to live in it.
- Q. You were mentioning your, your family and--on the night of the flood--and the fact that they wre able to get up to the roof, that kind of _____.
- Q. I asked my one daughter, who is 15, how they got up there, she just said, "Barney Madler, the neighbor, just said 'jump'," and she said, "I don't know how I did it, but I just jumped and grabbed ahold of the eavestrough and

pulled myself to the top of the house, (where as) I helped the other people." Now in my family there are four children, my wife and I. The boy was gone for the evening, so on the rooftop was my wife and three daughters, plus the neighbor's wife and three daughters and three dogs. So the house was, house-top was full at the time that...

Q. And the, the fate of the people who were in the second location, would you, uh...

A. Well, that was tragic. The three older people were drowned. Where the northwest wall went out, the Thompsons who I had taken into the home were swept away, right in front of your very eyes; there was absolutely nothing you could do, you couldn't reach out and touch, you couldn't do anything. The upstart of the whole evening was that most of them got on the roof of the (Morrell) house which I was in, jumped to the Sorenson house which was east of them; that house went, and they jumped then again to poplar trees that bordered that house and the neighbor's house next to them, whereupon quite a few people who were sitting on that house, pulled them out of the trees onto the place and of the 13 people, 6 drowned, which is the tragic part.

Q. You were saying also that had Canyon Lake not gone, dam not gone, that probably the flood would have been--in terms of your house and even the places to which you went--the flood would not have been nearly as serious.

A. Oh, yes, I'm convinced of this from the standpoint that the water was high in...(approximately) waist high, and in the (Morrell) house I was in it was probably two feet at the time. But when the dam broke, you could see the water rise right up to the window inside and out went the window, and it came right, right almost to the top of the window. It was just a sudden surge that...

that and the debris, I believe, that wiped out most of Franklin Street and possibly the rest of the area down below. It's true that a lot of water had come down the creek, into (Starners), into Breaburn Addition, and through Jackson Park. But that water would have probably gone out...if the spillway had been open or had access to it, a lot of it would have gone out. There would have been a lot of debris there. But the spillway was clogged, and there was so much debris there that it...I don't believe that...from what I can understand, the lake didn't erode, it just disappeared, the dam did. And it was that surge that came down through Riverdell and through Northbrook and Evergreen on down through Rapid City, see.

Q. Okay, I guess unless, do you have any other additions that you can think of that you'd like to...?

A. No, I just don't want to go through it again.

(END OF INTERVIEW)

#581

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
Library Cataloging Service Data

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Date of Interview: 27 Jun 72

Name of Researcher: J. Watterson

Others Present: ----

Location of Interview: 919 West Main Street - Rapid City

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Occupation

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Religion

Date of Arrival of Family in South Dakota

Where?

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Number of Moves in South Dakota

Reasons for Moves

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A. Yes, I was constantly hit by things, but fortunately nothing as big as could have been; but I was black and blue for about a week from the debris hitting me. The water moves quite rapidly, and there's absolutely, really nothing you can really do to steady yourself unless you grab ahold of something, and then it's risky. People have asked me was I scared, you're damn right I was scared. Some people say, "Did you start to pray?" I said, "Well, I don't remember, because I was trying to figure how in the hell to get out of the damn thing." The thought did occur to me several times as I was going down there, would I get out, and what would happen to me thereafter. I sat in Ellis's house, oh, approximately a half hour to 45 minutes, at which time the water had subsided enough for me to leave his house which is approximately waist high. I went into the middle of Jackson Boulevard, which was then about knee high. I walked up to 38th Street and Jackson and looked with quite relieved to see that my house was still standing--still not knowing whether my family had made it to the roof or where they were. I went through the back door of the driveway said, heard voices on the patio side, went out that door, and there was my family being loaded into a boat which had been on the top of a fisherman's car from Edgemont, South Dakota, who was...(said he was a)

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Q. I asked my one daughter, who is 15, how they got up there, she just said, "Barney Madler, the neighbor, just said 'jump'," and she said, "I don't know how I did it, but I just jumped and grabbed ahold of the eavestrough and

pulled myself to the top of the house, (where as) I helped the other people." Now in my family there are four children, my wife and I. The boy was gone for the evening, so on the rooftop was my wife and three daughters, plus the neighbor's wife and three daughters and three dogs. So the house was, house-top was full at the time that...

Q. And the, the fate of the people who were in the second location, would you, uh...

A. Well, that was tragic. The three older people were drowned. Where the north-west wall went out, the Thompsons who I had taken into the home were swept away, right in front of your very eyes; there was absolutely nothing you could do, you couldn't reach out and touch, you couldn't do anything. The upstart of the whole evening was that most of them got on the roof of the (Morrell) house which I was in, jumped to the Sorenson house which was east of them; that house went, and they jumped then again to poplar trees that nordered that house and the neighbor's house next to thim, whereupon quite a few people who were sitting on that house, pulled them out of the trees onto the place and of the 13 people, 6 drowned, which is the tragic part.

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- Q. Okay, I guess unless, do you have any other additions that you can think of that you'd like to...?
- A. No, I just don't want to go through it again.

(END OF INTERVIEW)

Ducek

JW June 26, 1972, and I'm talking with Dorrance Ducek at the Ducek building.

(background conversation)

JW Mr. Ducek lived formerly and will live again at 1415 Quincy, I'm sorry, check that, 3802 Riverdell, which is in the southeast quadrant of the northwest quadrant of section 9, township 1 north, range 7 east.

DD The evening proceeded quite well till about 10:30 at night when I, finally, I noticed that the water was rising quite rapidly in front of our house, which was Riverdel 1 and also 38th Street, which is to the east of our home. Most of us were in pajamas, so we quickly changed, got into our car and attempted to leave the driveway. We couldn't do so because of the stalled cars behind us and also the water that was rising, so we drove back in to the driveway (I remember makin' a statement) we'd better get back in the house, consider getting on the roof to be safe. At the same time we were lea... going back to the driveway, a neighbor up Riverdell was coming down with his family by the name of (Bonnie) Madler, his two cars had stalled on 38th Street, and (he) said, "You'd better head for our house." I passed him from the standpoint that someone had yelled that they needed help with Mr. Thompson in the middle of the street in the car who was a double amputee. At this time the water was approximately waist high. I went out to try to take him out of the car, take him to my house, and I couldn't because the water current was too swift. So it was difficult to get Mr. Thompson, who as I say had no legs, to our house, because at all, so I kind of floated with him down to a corner house owned by Fred Moore, which is on Franklin and 38th. I took him in the house, closed the door, and at that time the water was too high for me to leave. [In the house with twelve other people, a total of thirteenn. The older people, this Mr. and Mrs. Thompson were sitting in the front room, and in the house also another older person, Fred (Long) who owned, the house, and young people, considerably young, probably ages 11 up to 21, 22. The water continued to rise but I didn't think it was any great danger, but I did have the kids up on the counters, sinks, refrigerator and wash machine, dryer and stuff, Trying to figure out what I was going to do, at this time the lights were still on. At 11:15 or approximately 11:10, 11:15, the lights went out. Then the kids, some of them began to panic, and I figured possibly I should try to assist them from the standpoint just calming their

DD fears and talking to them ^{as} the best I could, and everybody was scared to death, including me. ^{I'm gonna} guess approximately 11:30, 11:15, 11:30 Canyon Lake Dam apparently ^W went out because ~~the~~ the water rose very, very high on the house, ^{and out} went, picture window which faced 38 th Street. When this went out, the house filled up with about oh, approximately 3 1/2, 4 foot of water. Very shortly afterward the pressure of the water took the south west ^c corner of the house off, and when that left, Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, who were sitting in a ^{large} lounge chair in the corner, disappeared right in front of my eyes.

JW I might add that this house was in the southwest ^W quarter of the northeast quarter of section 9, township 1 north, range 7 east.

DD People who were in the house mentioned to me that there was an attic and that the entrance to it or opening for it was in the utility ~~room~~ room which was directly behind me as I was standing in the front part of the kitchen. So I tried ^{to ask}, suggested to the children to get up to the attic, ~~hoping~~ ^{but apparently} hoped they wouldn't be trapped, ~~that~~ possibly they could get up to the roof, maybe the chimney'd fall off or something would happen. So I had them holding hands and talking to me so I could hear ^{them}, everybody at one time, because you couldn't see ~~athing~~ anything, and I was standing in front of them, ^{and} they were all behind me. ^{at..} the west wall of the house went ^{at..} as we were talking, and then I ~~xxxx~~ spent some time trying to push debris away that came in, so that it wouldn't hit anybody, ^{which was re..} ~~course it was~~ coming in very, very fast. And I ~~xxxx~~ could still hear some, most of the people were still talking to me, ^{behind me}. ^{re} When the north wall finally went where the garage had been, ^{and} the garage had disappeared. ^{re} When the north wall went out, it swept me ^{into the..} right out into Franklin Street, which is just ^{in front} above the house. ^{tryin' to look} As I went down the stream, clinging to nothing, ^{do} just myself, I was looking for, ^{kind of} looking for landmarks to see where I was. The ^(was) reason I was confused ^{at} that several of the houses I was looking for had disappeared. And it was dark. I figured I had better try ^{and} to stay out of the mainstream, which was directly in front of me, ^{re} Rapid Creek. ^{re} So I worked my way around, I thought, Franklin Street, which turned and went towards Jackson Boulevard which ^{or} was north. Somehow I slowed myself down by ~~dragging xxxxx~~ ^{the} grabbing onto a tree that was lying down, the force of it almost pulled ^{my} my arms out of their sockets. Then I drifted a little further on

~~XXXX~~

DD some debris⁽ⁱⁿ⁾, which I was knocked off there, then I thought I noticed a house on the left of me, was owned by Joe Ellis, I thought it was the back part. So in a moment I happened to notice some telephone wires on the side of the house^{and}, I reached out and grabbed ahold of ~~it~~^{it}, e While I was hanging on to regain my strength, approximately ~~two~~² or three houses floated by on my right, ~~and that was~~^{(and went down) which is} quite an eerie feeling to see these larger^s houses float. I thought I¹ noticed a light in the house, a candle or something, so I pounded my foot against the house as I was haning^g on. Mr. Ellis looked out his west window, ~~one of them~~^s saw me, came to his back door which was facing the creek, opened it, I let go of the wires and floated to the door ⁽ⁱⁿ⁾ which he grabbed ahold of me and pulled me in the house, at which time I practically collapsed in a chair.

JW Would you comment on your^s, on your condition other than ~~your~~^{the} fatigue at the time ~~that~~ you were, you were saying that you were somewhat battered by debris.

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DD *where my* family and the Madler family was ~~just~~ sitting. The, I suppose the upstart was, I cuahgt the second boat ~~out~~ over to Jackson Buolevard, from which we went to the Madler's friends house and spent the evening.

JW Would you, you were mentioning that very little damage was done, well, very, not little damage, but, to your own house, you're going to be able to move back into your own house?

DD Yes, I think possibly one reason that, there's two, possibly two reasons, excuse me, why the house was still intact. One of which, it's an alder home and it was bolted down to the silt. The second reason was that my neighbor has a row of poplar trees which lined *my*, the side of my patio, and I think that, when the water came down it was broken by ~~this~~ these six or seven trees, *s* enough so that it swirled and just went up the side of the house. According to the side of the water mark on the house, we had six foot of water on the west side. The house held up well enough, there's probably 12 to 15 inches of water in our house at one time and ended up with about four inches of mud. But all the personal contents are gone. But the house is good enough, and I think well-made enough, *that* we've cleaned it up considerably, and we're going to live in it.

JW You were mentioning ~~your~~ *your, your* family and ~~on~~, on the night of the flood, ~~and~~ the fact that they were able to ~~go~~ get up to the roof, *that kind of _____,*

DD I asked my one daughter, who is 15, how they got up there, she just said, *"Barney* ~~Bonny~~ Madler the neighbor just said 'jump,' and she said, "I don't know how I did it, but I just jumped, *s* and grabbed a hold of the eavestrough and pulled myself to the top of the house, *(whereas)* I helped the other people." Now in my family there are four children, my wife and I. The boy was gone for the evening, so on the rooftop was my wife and three daughters, plus the neighbor's wife and three daughters and three dogs. So ~~the~~ house was, housetop was full, *s* *At the time that..*

JW And the, the fate of the people who were in the second location, *would you, uh* ...

DD Well, that was tragic. The three older people were drowned. When the northwest wall went out, the Thompsons *"* who I *had* had taken into the home were ~~swept~~ swept away, right in front of your very eyes; *there* was absolutely nothing you could do, you couldn't reach out and touch, you couldn't do anything. The upstart of the whole evening was that most of them

DD ^{got on} ~~of~~ ^{roof of the (Morrison)} the house which I was in, jumped to the Sorenson house which was east of them; that house went, and they jumped then again to poplar trees that bordered that house and the neighbor's house next to them, ^{whereupon} quite a few people who were sitting on that house, pulled them out of the trees onto the place and of the 13 ^{people}, six drowned, which is the tragic part.

JW You were saying also that had Canyon Lake not gone, ^{i.e.} Dam not gone, that probably the flood would have been ⁼ in terms of your house and even the places to which you went, ⁼ the flood would not have been nearly as serious.

DD Oh, yes, I'm convinced of this from the standpoint that the water was high in. ^(approximately)
^s waist high, ^{and} in the ~~YM~~ ^{all} (Morrison) house I was in it was probably 2 feet at the time. But when the dam broke, you could see the water rise right up ^{to} the window inside and out went the window, and it came right, right almost to the top of the window. ^{It was} just a sudden surge that.. ^{that and} the debris, I believe, ^{that} it wiped out most of Franklin Street and possibly ^{rest of the} the area down below. It's true ^{that} a lot of water had come down the creek, into ^(starker), into Breaburn Addition, ^{i.e.} And through Jackson Park. But that water would have probably gone ^{or if} the spillway had been open or had access to it, alot of it would have gone out. There would have been a lot of debris there. But the spillway was clogged, and ^{there} so much debris there that ^{it..} I don't believe ^{that..} from what I can understand, the lake didn't erode, it just disappeared, ^{i.e.} The dam did. ^{and it} There was that surge that came down through Riverdell and through Northbrook and Evergreen on down ^{through} to Rapid City, ^{see.}

JW Okay, I guess unless, do you have any other additions that you can think of that you'd like to..?

DD No, I just don't want to go through it again.

(END OF INTERVIEW)