



The South Dakota Oral History Center Collecting Oral Histories in the Northern Plains Since 1966

Deed of Gift and Release: Individual Interview

I, Donna Hemstock [name of interviewee/photo subject], herein do permanently donate and convey to the South Dakota Oral History Center, on behalf of the Department of Native Studies at The University of South Dakota, and its agents or employees, to use my oral history interview/s taken on 16 July 1972 [date] by STEPHEN WARD [name of interviewer/photographer], for the use in, including but not limited to, research, academia, and historical/cultural preservation, of both hard copy and electronic forms. In making this gift, I understand that I am conveying all right, title, and interest in copyright to the South Dakota Oral History Center. I also grant to the South Dakota Oral History Center the right to use my name and likeness in any promotional materials for publications or projects.

I, Donna Hemstock, hereby release the State of South Dakota, the South Dakota Board of Regents, the University of South Dakota, the South Dakota Oral History Center, the Department of Native Studies, their employees, agents, successors, assignees, licensees, together and individually, from and against any and all claims, liabilities, demands, actions, causes of action, costs, expenses whatsoever, at law or in equity, known or unknown, anticipated or unanticipated, which I now have, or may hereafter have by reason of or a rising out of my agreement to allow for the use of my oral history/photograph as herein provided. I further acknowledge that I understand that this release shall include a release of any liability that could be alleged or which could arise as a result of the disclosure of any information by the recipient of the information to be provided in my oral history/photograph or unto law enforcement if the same relate to or could be deemed to contain information of criminal activity, whether or not the same has previously been prosecuted or will be investigated for prosecution in the future.

I am 18 years of age or older and I am competent to contract in my own name. I have read this release before signing below, and fully understand the contents, meaning and impact of this release. I understand that I am free to address any specific questions regarding this release prior to signing, and I agree that my failure to do so will be interpreted as a free and knowledgeable acceptance of the terms of this release.

I have read the release, understand it, and intend it to be a binding instrument.

Donna Hemstock 12/8/12 Ely M Meann 8 Dec 2012
Signature of the Interviewee/Photo Subject Date Signature of Authorized Agent Date

Summary of Restrictions:

_____ [See Deed of Gift: Restrictions



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Don Heustock Dec 7, 2012 Ely M Meun 8 Dec 2012
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SOUTH DAKOTA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Library Cataloguing Service Data

Name of Informant Donald and Donna Hemstock
 Address 219 Boston, Rapid City, South Dakota
 Date of Interview July 6, 1972
 Name of Researcher Stephen R. Ward
 Others Present Mother and father -in-law (Purington)
 Location of Interview Home
 Added Notes _____

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

Description of flood waters around Boston Street, 100 yards south of Rapid Creek;
Refuge center for area residents; Police activities during the night of the flood;
Rescue attempts of people along Rapid Creek.

Demographic Information on Informant

Age 36 Sex Male County Pennington

Socio-economic status Middle

Occupation Policeman

Education _____

Religion _____

Date of Arrival of Family in South Dakota _____

Where? _____

From Where? _____

Number of Moves in South Dakota _____ Reasons for moves: _____

SW All right, with (cookie) as a background, this is Donald Hemstock, 219 Boston, Rapid City, this is July 6, 1972, Stephen Ward talking with Mr. Hemstock, Rapid City police ~~xxx~~ ~~SW~~ force, right?

DH Right.

SW And we are on the, we still have the Pruington's around and, so let's start out by, you said you came on duty at, at what time?

DH Well, I started shift at 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

SW On Friday.

DH Right.

SW Okay. And I trust, what, what do you do normally?

DH Well, I'm the patrol sergeant, and on Friday, normally there's two sergeants, on Friday the other sergeant was ~~xxx~~ off. So I actually was in charge of the , the shift that day. And ..what I want to say is, is to (put) people out and know where they're at.

SW You don't patrol yourself.

DH I do, but I have no set area to patrol, I have to cover the whole town, and mostly check my, check my men to make sure they're all right, and..

SW Now, how many do you have under you?

DH ~~xxxxxx~~ On full strength, we have eight. On my shift. And then we have, in the afternoon we have extra shifts, which, in this case, there was probably 2, 6 more, so 14.

SW Why, why do you have..

DH Well, we have 2 on a permanent afternoon shift, which everytime we rotate around the afternoons we pick them up. And then we have a 7 to 3 shift, 7 in the evening till 3 in the morning. And this consists of 4 people which I'm in charge of ~~myself~~ until 10 o'clock, normally go home and the other shift comes on. It's a lap over shift, so..

SW Mm-hm. Is Lieutenant Henny or Hennies, is he your..

DH he's my commander,, .

SW Okay, all right. Okay, so when did things began to happen as far as your particular shift or your experience?

DH Well, I normally go to do, I brief this oncoming shift which is 7 o'clock, normally I

DH have dinner prior to that, but, or supper I guess you'd call it, and I had gotten late so I waited until after that to brief this oncoming shift, I went to supper shortly after seven, got back to the station around 7:30 or a little after, and this is the first that I had heard that there were storm warnings out; the Commander had sent everybody home for their rain gear, and thier, they changed into blue jeans instead of dress pants, and hip boots or waders or anything that they might be able to come up with. And this was getting close to 8 o'clock, and it was raining, but not too hard, and theyhad reports of high water in the hills. I said I had a couple fo comments to make: when Wayne said he called in the station, I was helping the desk man, he called me and I talked to him, didn't even know it. Did you know you were talking to me?

WP No.

SW When you were griping about Canyon Lake, and.. (laughter)

WP about Canyon Lake two hours earlier when
the first warnings came on.

??

SW This is one of the ironies we can put in to all this you see, father-in-law calling his son-in-law and, okay.

WP sounded like him.

SW Well, at any ~~nate~~, besides irate citizens calling in and..

DH Well, we had an awful lot of phone traffic, and we had two desk men, one of which was a patrolman ~~xxxx~~ which we were, we tried to make him aware of the desk duties, so we were teaching this one what the desk problems were. The phone traffic was getting heavy, so I went to the station myself to answer the phone, and then the other shift started coming in, some of them were called in, some just volunteered and just came in. Before, I would say before 9 o'clock, we had, oh, I'd say 3/4 of the police department with therest coming, and this was , they were there and working. And by thetime we had enough desk men in to take the desk, this other patrolman and I went out in the car. I suppose we got out shortly after 9 or 9:30. And we went out in the various areas, I was trying to keep track of my ment, plus we had all the other shifts at that time, plus reserve forces

DH and things were getting complicated due to the fact of lack of equipment and communication.

SW A REACT man, Jim Dudley, when I talked to him, said that there was ~~xxx~~ a problem of communications that night. There was atmospheric problems and there were other problems. Could you comment on what the problem was?

DH Well, normally, this time of the year we receive what they call skip, and it's, well, it's just that, it's FM station skipping, we receive Lake Charles and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, it's the state troopers. And this squelch, or not squelch, but skip comes in louder sometimes on our own station, so we had all of our own units on the air.

SW Now, what do you mean by skip, I mean..

DH FM is, as I understand, I'm not a radio man by any means, but what, the explanation has been given to me is FM is almost a line of. The radio beams go out and that's it, I mean, after it gets past the curvature of the earth, you no longer receive it. when it skips, it bounces off of cloud banks or something to this effect and comes back down. So anything else, the conditions have to be just right, but at the, ~~xxxxxxx~~ if they're broadcasting our frequency, you pick it up. And we get, like I say, we get Lake Charles and Baton Rouge, Louisiana louder sometimes than our own station.

SW And was this happening that night?

DH This was happening quite readily. Found out later that patrol commander had called to the governor, the governor told him to use his name and call this organization in Louisiana and told them to change channels. Which they did, and very good cooperation from them. In fact, they called back the next day and wanted to know if it was better. And then called back later, a couple weeks later to see if they could come back on. But then actually about all I did the rest of the evening was, I checked with some men that had found a body, this was early in the evening, I would say 10:30, 11:00, they found a body on the west side of town, and I went out, and normal procedure is the sergeant goes to, to all deaths that, that occur, and I went out there and thinking it was a normal procedure which we found out later, it just wasn't. I mean, like he said, even the guy that was there, he said waiting for the coroner to come, which is normal, and finally decided that the coroner was going to have trouble getting out there, and they loaded

DH the body up on a private vehicle and took it to the morgue.

SW Where was this located?

DH It seems like it was on Fourth Avenue or Fifth Avenue, out in that area, just north of Jackson Boulevard. Possibly even Sixth Avenue, there's a low spot right in here. And it was the first fatality that we had found from the, from the flood. Another bit of irony, two of the fellows working out on that side were out there, they didn't have keys to their car which ~~were~~ was parked in a parking lot which is actually a hole behind the police department. I was supposed to move their cars out of there, and I never got down there in time, the cars were under water before I got to it. I worked the west of the 2-day shift with their keys in my ~~pocket~~ pocket. Cars floating. But about the time that I was heading back to the station to..

SW Could you give me the approximate time that you went out on this first fatality that you got?

DH Well, it must have been somewhere around 11 o'clock or maybe a little bit later, not much, at the latest, midnight, it'd be probably just before midnight, somewhere in there.

SW What was the water like out on West Main at that time?

DH Well, we went out Omaha Street. West Main, well, not West Main, but right in the gap, right where West Main and St. Joe come together in there..

SW I'm getting familiar with the local area, yeah.

DH Yeah. But, that area was flooded, it always holds a lot of water, so that area was flooded, so we went out Omaha Street, the bridges in town were doing good, the water wasn't over any of them.

DH2 It was over Don, because the water came through at 11 o'clock or around 11, so it was, it was earlier..

DH Well, possibly it was.

DH2

DH Well, I don't know what time it was. It was, it was just prior to the wall of water coming down, it was..

DH2 That's when I called ..

DH Yeah. But it had occurred actually before that, but couldn't get out Jackson Boulevard,

DH Jackson Boulevard was plugged where the creek was across and they were, they were on the west side of where the creek crossed Jackson Boulevard. And I had worked around, come in from the back side of them and then went back the same way. And just as we had gotten close to the police department, the call came in about the wall going out in the Mountain View Rest home, I think. And this is another thing that I was thinking about when they were telling their story, was , Lieutenant Hennies, I don't know if you talked to him or not.

SW No, but he's one of..

DH He, his police car, he was trying to get out Omaha Street, and he had commandeered a bus, now, they mentioned this bus, which here, and this bus was pushing the police car, because the police car stalled out. And the bus pushed him into a taxicab and the last transmission we heard from him on the radio was the fact that his car had been hit by a house and he was leaving, leaving the car. And his car was just up here on Omaha Street, he jumped onto a fire truck, and the fire truck was the one that my wife and the Prington's saw coming down in front of the wall of water. Now, he said that the rear wheels of the fire truck stayed on the ground pretty well, the front wheels were floating. He said the only way controlling it was every once in a while the front wheels would touch and they'd steer it, and then they'd float again. This is the way they come down through there. trying to get to the Mountain View Rest Home, we went out the Interstate and came back in and tried to work around a little bit to Canyon Lake Drive, and this was as close as we could get. A military five ton truck went under water, the taillights went under water right at , near Jackson, or Canyon Lake Drive, the creek, and they headed back out, so we didn't even try it, and we never did get to the Rest home. And then by that time, the water had come up so far that we couldn't get back down Interstate 90 which is West Boulevard, to get back in the downtown area, we had to stay on the far side of the creek. Then I believe it was about 3 o'clock in the morning finally could get across to, across the bridge, and course I was concerned about everybody here and hadn't heard anything, where they were or anything, and Omaha Street, and Omaha Street was still so much water that we couldn't drive up it, so we went to (Lemon) Street, went up to Rapid Street, then came back

DH down to (Lemon). And finally came in here, and then from here we went over to this area right over here, and we were watching them let this boat down on rope, and they picked somebody out of a tree and was them. Other than that, it , it changed from a rescue type operation to picking up the dead, because the water came up and went down, and you had only a short while to try and rescue any of them, and from then on it was, just picking up bodies.

SW Did, didn't you feel a certain sense of frustration going along in the northern part not able to get down into here at all?

DH Right. There was a lot of at the a lot of help, there was people in trees up in here with the boats, they were having calls for help here and there, and I couldn't get to them, I couldn't, well, like I said ~~xxxxx~~ tonight, I never, I never helped anybody in the flood. The only thing I did was a shined the light on this one person over here, and watched the boat to him.

SW Well, did , when you were on the the next day then, on Saturday, you said that there was a matter of just going around picking people up. Did, was there any particular place that you sort of looked, or was just the matter of answering reports of, of people calling in? Did you set up any systematic search police, or..?

DH Well, not the police department, the National Guard had a systematic search going on. I stayed in the patrol car and I wasn't really too aware of what the other units, you know, the Civil Defense, National Guard and this thing had set up, radio traffic I was listening to. The National Guard did start a systematic house to house search of the ~~xxxxx~~ entire flood area. And I believe most of the fatalities were found by these people, although we had a lot of reports of just citizens , but of course the phones were practically out, they couldn't, anyone finding a body in that way couldn't call in, they had to wait until they could contact somebody.

SW What was your experience ~~xxxx~~ with the REACT organization, was , were they much help, or..?

DH They have always ~~xxxx~~ given us real good help, we don't have their channel, they're on a different channel than what the police cars are. But their people do a fantastic job ..

WP REACT guys?

DH They lost four. And they had quite a few that were missing for quite some time, but they have our police frequency, and their members are out, most of them have four-wheel drive vehicles of some sort, and their members are out, and they can call, they have a van that they can call into to their headquarters there, and they can call us from our frequency and give us anything, and any kind of disaster that we have, be it blizzard or high water or, we've had a couple of drownings, kids have gone into the creek and we've searched for them all night, and REACT's always been right there.

SW What was the, what was the story on the fellow ^{at the nursing home} the policeman there. Wasn't there one involved in a...?

DH This is a new policeman, actually ^{he's been in} law enforcement, he's a twenty year Air Force in military police ^{all his, all his} career there, which is twenty years, he's the only ~~guy~~ new guy on the force, and he had worked on the west side that night, well, the traffic coming into the gap area was so heavy and cars stalling out, that we put him at the intersection of Mountain View and Jackson Boulevard to keep traffic from coming in there and traffic heading down there ^{turning coming} back. And he was directing traffic there, well, it's only what, a half a block from the nursing home. He, he had what, ^{one} vehicle there I think that filled up some time or another, and, or some type of a large truck anyway, and I don't know the full story yet of how, how many people (helped) him, but he basically was the one that got the people out of there. And he told me ~~that~~ he had help, now how much help I don't know. I've heard say that he single-handedly took them all out, and he says he didn't. He had help. But one or two people or five people, I don't know. And a lot of the people that ^{survived} even, I haven't ^{heard} their stories yet, a lot of..

SW What is his name?

DH Sam Roach.

SW R-o-a-c..?

DH Mm-hm.

SW Okay. Well, is there anything else that's worthwhile passing on?

DH No, that's about it. I was just trying to think how to tie my story ^{into} into what Wayne said, this one boat that they were working out here was a fellow from my shift, in fact

DH what he had was two boats tied together and he said this really worked well because ~~of~~ it was wide enough and stable enough, and they'd gone to, while they were looking for rope, they'd gone to a merchant down there had opened up his storeroom & take as many, it's that western, horse store, and he said take as many lariats as you need, so we cleaned him out, and they took these ropes and tied them together, and then worked the boats from that, they, couple men on shore letting the boat out and couple men in the boat. They pulled quite a few people out ~~xxx~~ of the trees just out in here.

SW They didn't have motors, did they?

DH No, they didn't, in fact they didn't even had oars on those I don't think.

WP They wouldn't have them.

DH They , they keep the debris away from controlled them , this one fellow, he was on the tree here, they, they let the boat down on the rope, they let him into the water way up, way up there, they must have had I'd say 300 feet of rope tied together, and they got him into the water and down down where they missed the tree, so then they pulled it back up and started again, and this time they got right into the trees where the person was, and I couldn't even see if it was a man or a woman.

WP one started up, only got about, oh, 20 feet from shore, something motor motor right off debris coming down the boat, back end of the boat, ripped off about that much had that motor anchored, They flipped her off and they went down creek, so they had better luck without the motors .

SW Did you realize your father-in-law was over on the other side? Or were you on this side?

DH No, I, I had been down ~~xx~~ to the bridge, down where he lives, and I talked to him early in the night, but from there, I didn't know where he went. And I couldn't get close enough to his place down there ..

WP early wasn't it?

DH Well, this was even earlier than that.

WP Water ,water hadn't even started to raise, was it yet?

DH Well, the ~~waxxx~~ west side was having a few problems with water, but..

WP I believe, I believe rain.

DH But the water hadn't gotten to the other side of town even yet, in fact the car that was on the east side of town was making traffic stop, this is, he had nothing to do, really, where the west side cars were keeping busy with traffic and, mostly traffic problems, because people go out and sight-see and they run their cars in the water and they stall and then they plug up the arteries that ^{carry} the traffic and you just can't move if you have got a car that stays dry.

WP You know, the biggest main factor water flood damage diverting this ~~wa~~ water is anybody bridge that's got ~~xxxx~~ tiers in it, you know, in a wooded, mountain area where you have logs and things, you're bound to have trouble in, because bridges should actually be built without any (tiers) in them, clear stand, that's what they should have, so when all of this stuff comes down they could bypass the bridge, but the way it is now, put these piers in these bridges and first thing you know, all these logs and stuff come out of the hills or these timbers and things that accumulated for fifty years, come down and jam the bridges, first thing divert the water into areas, that's what, that's what our trouble was.

SW, yeah.

WP apartment houses down there where we live, that debris packed up never got a bit of water into it. And them houses right down below, they was washed away, and

DH2, cause she was laying on the couch down there in the basement sleeping and this water came up and woke her up. Water came up, so she, she went up and she got out and she was gonna get in the car and she went in the water to get in the car, and she happened to think those windows was open and that would let the water in the basement, so she basement waded in water to close the windows, went back out and got in the car and tried to leave.

PP She did?

DH2 Yes.

PP Oh, basement more water in it, such a short time

SW Well, can you think of anything else? your family ^{think of} anything else? I don't know how we're gonna catalogue this tape. (Laughter)

WP I think Don has pretty well finished up anyway. The only thing I can say, I think it was pretty hard to see his family . he was pretty well pooped out.

SW You must have been shocked to see that your , this area .

DH Well,yeah, course I, I never worried too much about this house in the last flood, because it got all this, it dropes off real sharp down here and then the far sideis, is wide over there, there's a lot of area over there. Then the Mother Butler Center over here got completely covered with water, I mean, I ~~XXXXXX~~ could see the water mark on that, and then I got a little concerned, I couldn't get across here, so that's all the good it did me, I mean I could, I'd go down to the Mother Butler Center, but I couldn't get across. And I, I was real relieved to see that it was dry like it was and all the people in it.

WP Did you read that in the paper about that priest down there that hanging from a chandelier and had his nose agains the ceiling,and that was the only place eh could breathe?

SW Well, I'm interviewing him next week...

(END OF INTERVIEW)