

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY HISTORY PROJECT

Library Cataloging Service Data

Dexter Koehne

3867 Riverdell, Rapid City, South Dakota

June 27, 1972

O. A. Rothlisberger

Two Wheeler Dealer Bike Shop

Rapid City flood - Mr. Kochne, wife, 2 children, 3 dogs spent night on roof of neighbor's house. Their own house totally destroyed. Informative and interesting interview.

27

Male

County Pennington

Male

Bicycle dealer

- Q. (I'm) talking this afternoon to Mr. Dexter Kohne of Rapid City, South Dakota. I believe in our preliminary conversation, Mr. Kohne, you told me that your address, the address of your home, your property at the time of the flood was 3867 Riverdell?
- A. That's correct.
- Q. And we attempted to establish that on our geological survey map here, as being within the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter of Section 9, Township 1 North, Range 7 East. Now, Mr. Kohne, you were at home at the time of the flood, you and your family, is that correct?
- A. Well, to start the evening out, I was at the bicycle shop...
- Q. I see. And your bicycle shop, uh...
- A. ...which we operate.
- Q. We are in Mr. Kohne's bicycle shop, by the way, now, that's the Two Wheeler Dealer Shop down in, that's 817?
- A. Yes, 817 Main.
- Q. (All right) in Rapid City. (Phone ringing) All right, just before the phone rang you were telling us that at the beginning of the evening you were, you were down here at the bicycle shop, I guess, right?
- A. Yes, I was working here and one of the people that works for me lived about a block from my house, and he came in and, and said that there was talk of a flood in our area...
- Q. Uh-huh.
- A. ...and that he was going to go out to his house and pick up a few of his, possessions, so I called home and, uh...
- Q. About what time was that?

- A. This was about 8 o'clock.
- Q. And it'd been raining heavily for some time.
- A. Yes.
- Q. Okay, you called home then about 8 o'clock.
- A. About 8 o'clock, and my wife wasn't home, she'd been grocery shopping, she arrived home about 8:30 and called me and said that the creek was very high, it was about two foot from the banks.
- Q. I see. Now, did you, did you contact anyone at home? You have two children, I believe.
- A. Yes.
- Q. Is it, two boys, right? What are their ages?
- A. Eight and ten.
- Q. Were they home then?
- A. They were, they were with my wife grocery shopping, and they arrived home with her at about 8:30, I would imagine. It was about 9 o'clock, she called and said that the, the creek was now about a foot from its banks and that it looked like it was coming up fairly rapidly, but still we weren't too alarmed because in 1962 the same sort of a thing occurred.
- Q. Mm-hm.
- A. The house that we lived in previously belonged to my wife's parents, and she was raised in that house, so he had gone through this before in '62; the creek came up almost to the top, and there were, there was flooding further down, but it didn't affect where our house was.
- Q. I see.
- A. So again, we weren't extremely alarmed, but it had come up quite rapidly.

- Q. Now, had there been any, had there been any warnings at, at this time from the, I don't know what it would be Civil Defense from the municipal government or...
- A. No warnings as such, I don't, I don't think. Darren, did you hear anything on the radio that absolutely everyone should evacuate before we actually did?
- A2. No, not (the first time).
- A. We were listening to the radio, and they were giving reports of, of bridge washouts and so on and so forth, but as far as evacuation notices, we didn't receive any as such.
- Q. Uh-huh.
- A. Until later.
- Q. You, you went on, went on home then.
- A. Yes, she began..became quite alarmed about 9 o'clock and, and said that I should probably come home, so I had one person working with me here that lived in South Canyon, so I started to take him home, and we found that his house wasn't accessible either because of the water on West Chicago. So I left him off at friend's and proceeded to go home. I got home and there were people standing on 38th Street where the bridge was, very excited, you know, and the water was coming through very fast, and it was kind of a fun thing. And all of a sudden the debris started coming down the spillway, paddleboats from Canyon Lake were coming by in back of our house very, very fast, and they'd hit the bridge and just disintegrate, you know.
- Q. Oh, yes.
- A. About this time we, we started becoming a little nervous; but still we thought that, well, it happened in '62, it's going to happen again, you know, we're..

we'll be all right. So we started collecting a few things just in case we would decide to leave; about 10:30 we heard on the radio that everyone south of Jackson should evacuate. This was the first...

Q. This was about 10:30.

A. Maybe a little before 10:30...

Q. Okay, okay.

A. ...but roughly in that area. This was the first evacuation notice that we received.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. And we decided that we'd better get out. So we picked up..well, we took about two minutes, I suppose, to barricade the doors, you know.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. We didn't want any more water to get in...

Q. Yeah.

A. ...than was absolutely necessary, so we put towels in the..in between the two doors, and got in...

Q. You, your wife and the two boys.

A. Right.

Q. And, by the way, Mr. Kohne, one of your sons is here with us.

A. Yes, Darren, my oldest boy is here.

Q. Darren. And he, he's...

A. He's ten.

Q. Ten, yeah, I see. Okay, and you loaded your automobile then, you and your family...

A. As we started out the front door, Darren said that the water was up to the

patio. Now this took about two or three minutes...

Q. Mm-hm.

A. ...from the time it was at the top of the creek levee to, uh, to our back door. And our yard was on kind of a slope, so it was coming up quite rapidly. And as we were going out the front door, Darren said, "The water's on the patio." Well, by the time we got out the front door to the car, the water was about six inches deep in the driveway.

Q. I see.

A. Then we got a little alarmed, because it was coming up so fast.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. I got in the car, started it, and began to back down the driveway, and before we got to the street, apparently that's when Canyon Lake Dam first went...

Q. Mm-hm.

A. ...because a wall of water sufficient enough to carry the car away hit us.

Q. Yeah, I see.

A. I imagine it was three and a half to four foot tall...

Q. Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

A. ...and it picked the car up and turned it around sideways, and the water immediately began coming in under the dashboard, and filling up on the inside. By this time we were very afraid, you know...

Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. ...because the water was just all over. Cars were floating by us--lighter cars--we were in a small car but it seemed to hold fairly well, I had the brake on and we would just kind of bounce along. We ended up about two doors east of our house against a tree. This took about a minute for us to get there,

I suppose. And then, and then it seemed like the water really started coming fast. It engulfed the whole car, the water was going over the windshield, and we couldn't see out, and we couldn't get out, from the looks of it. Uh, some people staying in our neighbor's house saw that we were in the car and made an attempt to get out to us, but the current was such that he just couldn't walk in it. And his car, he was standing beside his car in his driveway, and as he was walking out to us, or trying to, his car took off...

Q. Mm-hm.

A. ...and so he just turned around and went back in the house, there was nothing he could do.

Q. Now, the water outside of your automobile was a couple of feet in depth (was it) _____?

A. Well, it was about four to, I would say four feet deep.

Q. Yeah, four feet deep.

A. It was up to the windows and going over the windshield, in fact.

Q. Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

A. And at this time we were, you know, we just thought that we were dead.

Q. Mmm.

A. Darren asked if we were going to die, and we, of course, said that we didn't know, and he wanted to know if we were gonna suffer, and questions like that were a little hard to answer at the time, you know, we were just panicking. And finally I realized that we had to get outa the car. So I rolled my window down and the water immediately filled up on the inside.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. About that time we heard a big bang; we didn't know what it was at the time,

but people that were watching us told us that a Volkswagon came floating down and crashed into my wife's side of the car--the passenger's side--and it caved the, her door post in and shattered the windshield.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. But it didn't break the windshield out, so we were lucky in that respect. I got out of the car and held on to it, and the water was over my waist.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. I suppose it was four and a half deep by this time, and Mary Ann, my wife, got both of the kids out of the back seat and out into my arms, and then she got out, and just as she was getting out, the water took our car and it just went, so we were...our timing was perfect as far as getting out of the car. We started to walk back to our neighbor's house which was about 30 yards and the water was coming very forcefully, I don't know how we were able to stand up in it, I think the weight of the kids in my arms held me down so I could walk. And my wife was behind us and she couldn't get her footing, she a couple of times slipped and was washed back and grabbed ahold of her footing again and caught up, and she finally..I told her to grab hold of my belt. So she had a hold of my belt and we walked against the, the current for I suppose 30 or 40 yards back to the house that our neighbors were in. 'Course they'd all gone upstairs by this time, they thought that we...they..we were gone. And we beat on the door and, and immediately they came down and let us in, the water was about three foot deep on their patio, it was elevated a little. When they opened the door, a'course, the water rushed in and we got in. And then we immediately went upstairs where we were gonna regroup and try to figure out what to do next, uh...

Q. Now, there on the second floor then, your wife and yourself and your two children, and your neighbors, were there some children _____?

A. Our neighbors were on vacation. And their children and some friends of theirs were in the house at the time. So there were four of them and then four of us. As soon as we got up to the third level--their house had a basement and then a ground level and then a third level--as soon as we got upstairs, we heard the crashing of the windows as the basement level filled with water...

Q. Mm-hm.

A. ...and then the main level immediately filled after that. And the water started coming up the steps. We stayed in the house about 15 minutes, I suppose, we were panic stricken, we didn't know what to do, the noise was unbelievable, and...

Q. Now, this was at night, too, so it was dark.

A. Yes, this was between 10:30 and 11:00. I think the dam initially gave at 10:30.

Q. And the power was out now...

A. Yes.

Q. ...so it was pitch black.

A. Right. We had, we found some candles and lit the candles, and we noticed that the water, in the 15 minutes that we had been in the house, had come up about a foot and a half. And it was about three steps from getting into the top level, so it was probably eight foot deep out in the, in the front. So we figured we'd better get on the roof. So we kicked one of the bedroom windows out, and there was a, a patio sundeck-type thing that we could step out onto, and then from there we made it up onto the roof. And we didn't know how long we'd be there, so one of the gentlemen that was in the house got some canned

pop and things like this and blankets, and, and then even went to, went back in one more time to get a box spring, a thin-type box spring off a bunkbed and a, and a mattress, so we had a mattress to sit on on the roof as well as a small box spring to hold over our head to keep the rain off, because it was raining unbelievably.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. When we got on the roof--I suppose a little after 11:00, 11:30 possibly--we could see that the flood was gonna be a flood.

Q. I would certainly think so.

A. The houses were starting to move on their foundations, and the house that we were on even was moving, you know...

Q. Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

A. ...shaking, it wasn't actually moving but it was just kind of vibrating. Well, we sat there for four hours total, but from 11:30 to 1:00, it wasn't really super-bad, I mean it was bad, but the structures around us were still holding.

Q. Yeah.

A. About 1 o'clock, possibly 12:30, it seemed to intensify to a large extent, because that's when the houses started literally breaking up...

Q. Mm-hm.

A. ...they just almost exploded, and they would just come floating by right down the street.

Q. Yes, now, were, were, were there any fires in that, in that area? I understand that gas mains burst somewhere and there were fires. There were no fires?

A. There were no fires. No.

Q. Just exploded from the water, the force of the water.

- A. Yes, it, when a house, when a house would go, it would kind of make a squeak and a groan, and even above the sound of the water we could hear this.
- Q. Mm-hm.
- A. And then it would just bang, and it was gone, it would just take off. And we couldn't see, of course, until the sky would light up with lightning, which was quite often.
- Q. Mm-hm, yeah.
- A. So we sat there and we watched the houses to our left--which was upstream, there were a total of ten houses probably in the area immediately to our west and between us and the park--and we just watched those houses one by one float away. And we began getting a little more nervous as each house went...
- Q. Yeah!
- A. ...because it seemed they were giving us some protection when they were there, they were forcing the water out and around us. And as they would give, our house would start to shake a little more--the house that we were on. And eventually, there was just one house remaining between the house that we were sitting on and the, and the water itself, and that was the house that we lived in.
- Q. That was your house.
- A. That was our house. And about 1 o'clock, our bedroom, which was kind of an L-shape off the back, tore away and was swept off, and the rest of our house looked to be in pretty good shape, from what we could see. So we sat on the roof and we could watch the water level on this..the house across the street had a white garage door, so we could see the water level and count the number of squares in this door so we could tell if it was still rising or going down.

We had a flashlight and we would, we were in constant contact with other people that were in the area.

Q. I see. Through lights?

A. Through, through the light, yes.

Q. Yeah.

A. Our neighbor immediately across the street was in his living room, the water got up about three feet on his garage door, and his house was elevated considerably from ours. So he was in his living room (even), giving us signals with his light to let us know that he was all right. And his neighbor to the immediate west was also giving us signals 'til about 1 o'clock and then all of a sudden his light stopped coming, and we didn't know what had happened. Later we found out that they went up into the attic. But about 2:30 or 3 o'clock we noticed that the water had started to recede so we thought it would be all right to go back in the house, 'cause it was just bone-chilling cold up there.

Q. Yes, oh, yes.

A. The rain was coming down unmercifully and it was blowing, and we wanted to get back in. So we went back inside, and got dry clothes on. Then we just sat around and listened to the noise and waited until daybreak; about 5:30--5 o'clock, I guess--we looked out and just couldn't believe what we saw. The debris was piled up in some places 20 foot high on trees, you know, that had.. it had been forced up the side of the trees.

Q. Now at this time, was the water still sweeping houses and automobiles past you, or had it receded...

A. No, that had already been done. The water was, in fact, receded enough that

we could walk out on the street.

Q. I see.

A. As far as the water in the back, it was still going pretty fast. 'Course the course of the creek had been completely, completely changed. The creek as such used to be about 15 yards, maybe 20 yards wide directly in back of our house.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. And when we went out the next morning, we noticed that the creek was, oh, a good block wide, and our back yard had been just cut away by the, by the water coming through there.

Q. Well, you were on that roof, then--you, your wife, your two boys, and these young people, you say...

A. Yes, two other younger couples in their twenties.

Q. All right, you were on this about four hours then, and did you, did you do anything to sort of bolster one another's spirits while you were, while you were up there, or did...

A. Well, we...

Q. ...you reassure one another...

A. We prayed a lot.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. We..everyone of us, to the man, really did a lot of soul searching it seemed and we tried to encourage each other, you know, saying that our house is going to hold so we don't have anything to worry about, things like this.

Q. Now did your, did your house..you say the bedroom was torn off, did it remain on its foundation?

A. Yes, it did. It, uh...

Q. Largely destroyed, I suppose.

A. It was totally destroyed, yes. From the roof it looked like it was in pretty good shape except for our bedroom being gone, but when we got over there the next morning, there were two, my two boy's bedrooms were on the west end of the house which was the end that the water hit first, and in one of the bedrooms was about a five ton dump truck from the park that had been swept down and just right through the wall, it was just sitting in his bedroom with logs and all kinds of other debris with it. The other bedroom on that end of the house, the wall was completely gone, and it was jammed to the ceiling with trees and logs and whatever else was in the water. And the rest of the house was just totally destroyed, the water filled up inside so much because of the walls on that end being out that it filled up to about an eight foot water mark in the, in the other parts of the house, and there was so much weight that the walls would, they had to give from the bottom to let the water escape. So that the house was a total, just, you know, a total loss.

Q. Now, it was about daybreak then or when, when it was late in the morning you were able to venture out on, on, onto the street.

A. Yes.

Q. All right, and seeing all of this devastation, were there any casualties there in your neighborhood?

A. Yes, a couple named Thompson who lived three houses from ours, he was a, an invalid, and they were an elderly couple, and they were both lost, and another...

Q. Were they, were they in their, were they in their house, was their house destroyed, or did they try to leave _____...

- A. I'm not, I'm not really sure, I heard that they had gotten out but, but they were, they were lost, so I assume they stayed in their house, their house was, ended up almost in my backyard, what was left of it. There were, there were two houses right in my backyard, the remainders of two houses.
- Q. Mm-hm. You said there was another couple lost, too, in the, in the (neighborhood)?
- A. Yes, this was about..our street made a horseshoe and the side that we lived on was against the creek, and then it went on the other direction, and there were, there was a family over on the other side of four people that were all lost.
- Q. Now before we started the tape here, Mr. Kohne, I think you mentioned that you had, had three dogs...
- A. Yes.
- Q. ...you have two of them here with you. And they are, what, what breed are they, chihuahuas, or...?
- A. One is a chihuahua, the other is a chihuahua and terrier mix.
- Q. Uh-huh. And you had three...
- A. We had three.
- Q. And, how did you, how did you save these dogs, were they in the car, you had them in the car with you...
- A. Mm-hm.
- Q. ...with the boys, and you had to carry them out, too.
- A. Well, each of the boys carried a dog...
- Q. I see, I see.
- A. ...and then my wife carried a dog.
- Q. I see, and then you carried the boys.

- A. The dog that we lost was, was afraid to ride in a car, every time we got in the car she immediately went under the seat, and this is the problem, as soon as we got into the car she got under the seat and the water came in and we thought that she was drowned right away, but Darren, my oldest boy, pulled her out, and she was still coughing, so we took her inside, and, of course, we didn't give her the attention that we should have, you know, but she...
- Q. Hardly could under the circumstances.
- A. Yeah, right. She was wet and she, she died of pneumonia a couple days later.
- Q. I see. But I wondered just how, how you had gotten them..yes, well, were there any, were there any rescue units of police, fire department, National Guard, any of those out in the morning then when...the following, following morning that you were able to come down off the roof, go out into, out on the street?
- A. Well, my first..the thing I wanted to do first was call my, my sister and my parents. They were at the Air Base--my parents were visiting here from Arizona--and we'd been in contact with them the previous night, and we told them, we were on the phone with them immediately before we left, we told them that we were on our way out.
- Q. Mm-hm.
- A. So, of course, when we didn't show up they began..became very worried, so my first project was to call them. So I walked about a block and a half out of the devastated area to a house and she let me use the phone.
- Q. Mm-hm.
- A. But between there and our house, I didn't see any rescue workers as such, yet.
- Q. Mm-hm.

A. There were a lot of people out, helping, you know.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. People in jeeps were transporting people out of the area...

Q. Yeah.

A. ...but it wasn't very long after that that the National Guard did, did arrive and we're very thankful for their presence, that's for sure.

Q. Yes. Then what did, where, where did you go then that morning, that would be Saturday morning, now wouldn't it. When were you able to, when were you able to leave your house there and be relocated where..wherever it was you were relocated. Friends bring you down here to your...?

A. No, about noon my brother-in-law and my father made it through the area and got out close enough that they could walk over to our house. And in that five hour period we'd just been kind of walking around over there in a daze, you know...

Q. Yeah.

A. ...and just completely amazed, we didn't know what to do, where to go. And they took us out to the base where we were fed and given clean clothes. And then we turned around and came back in to see if we could start salvaging anything.

Q. I see. Well, now emergency assistance then was provided out at the base, at Ellsworth, right, you say you were given...?

A. Well, we were fed and clothed by my sister.

Q. Oh, I see, I see.

A. And her family. We didn't take advantage of any of the disaster facilities because we did have people in here that, that could help us so...

- Q. Right, mm-hm. And you did not have to utilize any of these emergency or disaster assistance agencies to obtain an immediate temporary resettlement.
- A. No, we moved in with my sister that, that day, started sleeping there. We did go to the Red Cross a few days later and got some, some help on the clothing...
- Q. Mm-hm.
- A. ...and things such as this.
- Q. And then you stayed at your sister's for a time, and you're living here in your, your shop now.
- A. Yes, we moved in here yesterday and we, we found a home to rent that will be available the first of July, so we'll only be here for the rest of this week.
- Q. Okay. Yes, it must, it must be, it must be very difficult for some people to find housing at all, with all of the destruction, (there wouldn't be) sufficient housing available now; of course, HUD is, is assisting with mobile homes...
- A. They're bringing trailers in, we were signed up for a trailer and they told us that if we could find a rental unit here in town they would pay the rent, so this is what we did.
- Q. Okay, well, we have probably a couple of feet left on the tape here Mr. Kohne, is there anything else. You've given us a very informative, valuable tape here, insights, reactions to, to this. It must have certainly been a long night out there on the roof; is there anything else that you might tell us now, (to include in this) tape?
- A. Well, no, the only thing that is in my mind and has been more than anything else is that, the fact that myself as well as several thousand other people or

a couple thousand other people have got homes or had homes that we owed money on...

Q. Mm-hm.

A. ...and now they're gone, you know, and we still owe the money. And this is gonna be probably one of the major problems. I, I certainly can't afford to keep making a house payment if I'm going to have to buy another house...

Q. I can appreciate that.

A. ...and so this is probably the main area of concern right now. I hope that our, our government will come through with some sort of disaster relief, I know that as soon as anything happens in Pakistan or, or any other area of the world we're the first ones there to help, I hope that they can do the same for their own people.

Q. Yes, yes. Well, so do I. Well, thank you, Mr. Kohne, for what will be a very valuable tape. Thank you very much.

(END OF INTERVIEW)

TAPE CHECKOUT SHEET

SOUTH DAKOTA

AIRP

585

TAPE NUMBER

USER	ADDRESS	CHECKED OUT	CHECKED IN
Bot-Janssen	#11 M=Cook Lake	4/29/77	4/29/77
Bot-Janssen	" "	5/12/77	5/12/77
Bot-Janssen	" "	5/12/77	5/12/77
Bot-Janssen	" "	5/13/77	5/13/77

OR ^(I'm) Talking this afternoon to Mr. Dexter Koehne of Rapid City, South Dakota. I believe in our preliminary conversation, Mr. Koehne, you told me that your address, the address of your home, your property at the time of the flood was 3867 Riverdell?

DK That's correct.

OR And we attempted to establish that on our geological survey map here, ~~and it'd be~~ ^{as being} within the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter of section 9, township 1 north, range 7 east. Now, Mr. Koehne, you were at home at the time of the flood, you and your family, is that correct?

ok: I see. And your bicycle shop, uh...

DK Well, to start the evening out, I was at the bicycle shop which we operate.

OR We are in Mr. Koehne's bicycle shop, by the way, now, that's the Two Wheeler Dealer shop down in, that's 817?

DK Yes. 817 ^{Main}.

OR ^{(All night) in Rapid City} That's... (phone ringing) All right, just before the phone rang you were telling us at the beginning of the evening ^{you were,} you were down here at the bicycle shop, ^{I guess, right?}

DK Yes, I was working here and one of the people that works for me lived about a block from my house, and he came in ^{and,} and said that there was talk of a flood in our area, ^{or: uh-huh.} and that he was going to go out to his house and pick up a few of his possessions, so I called home... ^{and, uh.}

OR About what time was that?

DK This was about 8 o'clock.

OR And it'd been raining heavily for some time.

DK Yes.

OR Okay, you called home then about 8 o'clock/

DK About 8 o'clock, and my wife wasn't home, she'd been grocery shopping, she arrived home about 8:30 and called me and said that the creek was very high, it was about 2 foot from the banks.

OR I see. Now, did you, did you contact anyone at home? You have two children, I believe.

DK Yes.

OR ^{Is it?} ^{night?} Two boys, what are their ages? ^{i.e.}

DK Eight and ten.

OR Were they home? ^{them}

DK They were, they were with my wife grocery shopping, and they arrived home with her at about 8:30, I would imagine. It was about 9 o'clock, she called and said that the ^{the} creek was now about a foot from its banks and that it looked like it was coming up fairly rapidly, but still we weren't too alarmed ^{OR: Mum-hum.} because in 1962 the same sort of a thing occurred. ^{OR: I see.} The house that we lived in previously belonged to my wife's parents, and she was raised in that house, so she had gone through this before in '62; the creek came up almost to the top, and there ^{were, there} was flooding further down, but it didn't affect where our house was. So again, we weren't extremely alarmed, but it had come up quite rapidly.

OR Now, had there been any, had there been any warnings ^{at,} at this time from the, ^{I don't know what it would} be Civil Defense from the municipal government or ..

DK No warnings as such, ^{I don't,} I don't think. ^{Damn,} ^{did you hear} anything on the radio that absolutely everyone should evacuate before we actually ^{did?} ^{OR: No, not (the first time).} we were listening to the radio, and they were giving reports ^{of,} of bridge washouts and so on and so forth, but as far as evacuation notices, we didn't receive any as such. ^{OR: Uh-huh.} Until later.

OR You, you went on ^{went on} home ^{then.} then.

DK Yes, she ^{began...} became quite alarmed about 9 o'clock ^{and,} and said that I should probably come home, so I had one person working with me here that lived in South Canyon, so I started to take him home, and we found that his house wasn't accessible either because of the water on West Chicago. So I left him off at friends and proceeded to go home. I got home and there were ^{and} people standing on 38th street where the bridge was, very excited, you know, the water was coming through very fast, and it was kind of a fun thing. And all of a sudden ^{the} debris started coming down the spillway, paddleboats from Canyon Lake were coming by in back of our house very, very fast, and they ^{hit} hit the bridge and just disintegrated, you know. ^{OR: Oh, yes.} About this time we, we started becoming a little nervous; but still we thought that ~~what~~, well, it happened in '62, it's going to happen again, you know, ^{we'll} we'll be all right. So ^{we} we started collecting a few things just in case we would decide to leave; about 10:30 ³⁰ ~~thirty~~ we heard on the radio that everyone south of Jackson should evacuate. This was the first..

OR This was about 10:30.

DK Maybe a little before 10:30, ^{OR: Okay, okay.} but roughly in that area. This was the first evacuation

OR: Mm-hmm

DK notice that we received. And we decided that we'd better get out. So we picked up, well, we took about two minutes, I suppose, to barricade the doors, you know, we didn't want any more water to get in; that was absolutely necessary, so we put towels ^{OR: Mm-hmm} ~~and~~ ^{OR: Yeah.} in ^{OR: in the.} between the two doors, and ~~we~~ ^{got in.}

OR You, your wife and the two boys.

DK Right..

OR And, by the way, Mr. Keehne, one of your sons is here with us.

DK Yes, Darren, my oldest boy is here.

OR Darren. And he, he's..

DK He's ten.

OR Ten, ^{Yeah} ~~xx~~ I see. Okay, and you ^{loaded} your automobile then, you and your family..

DK As we started out the front door, Darren said that the water was up to the patio. Now this ^{OR: Mm-hmm} took about two or three minutes ^{to, uh,} from the time it was at the top of the creek level to our back door. And our yard was on kind of a slope, so it was coming up quite rapidly. And as we were going out the front door, Darren ~~sa~~ said, "the water's on the patio." Well, by the time we got out the front door to the car, the water was about six inches deep in the driveway. ^{OR: I see} Then we got a little alarmed, because it was coming up so fast. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ ^{OR: Mm-hmm} ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ ^I ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ ^I got in the car, started it, and began ^a to back down the driveway, and before we got to the street, apparently that's when Canyon Lake Dam first went ^{OR: Mm-hmm} because a wall of water sufficient enough to carry the car hit us. ^{array} I imagine it was 3 1/2 to 4 foot tall. ^{OR: Yeah, I see.}

^{OR: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.} .. and it picked the car up and turned it around sideways, and the water immediately began coming in under the dashboard, and filling up on the inside. By this time we were very afraid, you know, ^{OR: Yeah, yeah.} because the water was just all over. ~~XX~~ Cars were floating by us, lighter cars, we were in a small car but it seemed to hold fairly well, I had the brake on and we would just kind of bounce along. We ended up about two doors east of our house against a tree. This took about a minute ^{uh,} for us to get there, I suppose. And then, and then it seemed like the water really started coming fast. It engulfed the whole car, the water was going over the windshield, and we couldn't see out, and we couldn't get out, from the looks of it. ^{uh,} Some people staying in our neighbors house saw that we were in the car and made an attempt to get out to us, but the current was such that he just couldn't walk.

DK in it. And his car, he was standing beside his car in his driveway, and as he was walking out to ~~see~~ us, or trying to, his car took off, ^{or: Mm-hm.} and so he just turned around and went back in the house, there was nothing he could do.

OR ^{Now, the water outside of your i.c.} Automobile was a couple of feet in depth ^{(was it)?} ^{OR: Yeah, four feet deep.}

DK Well, it was about four to, I would say four feet deep. I was up to the windows and going over the windshield, in fact. ^{OR: Mm-hm, mm-hm.} And at this time we were, you know, we just thought that we were dead. ^{OR: Mm-m.} Darren asked if we were going to die, and ^{we} of course, said that we didn't know, and he wanted to know if we were ^{gonna} going to suffer, and questions like that were a little hard to answer at the time, you know, we were just panicking, and finally I realized that we had to get out ^{of} the car. So I rolled my window down and the water immediately filled up on the inside. ^{OR: Mm-hm.} About that time we heard a big bang; we didn't know what it was at the time, but people that were watching us told us that a Volkswagen came floating down and crashed into my wife's side of the car, ^{the} ~~on~~ passenger's side, ^{the} and it caved her door post in and shattered the windshield. ^{OR: Mm-hm.} But it didn't break the windshield out, so we were lucky in that respect. ^{OR: Mm-hm.} I got out of the car and held on to it, and the water was over my waist. ^{OR: Mm-hm.} I suppose it was 4 1/2 deep by this time, and Mary Ann, my wife, got both of the kids out of the back seat and out into my arms, and then she got out, and just as she was getting out, the water took our car and it just went, so we were, our timing was perfect as far as getting out of the car. We started to walk back to our neighbor's house which was about 30 yards and the water was coming very forcefully, I don't know how we were able to stand up in it, I think the weight of the kids in my arms held me down so I could walk. ^{And} My wife was behind us and she couldn't get her footing, she a couple of times slipped and was washed back and grabbed ahold of her footing again and caught up, and she finally, I told her to grab hold of my belt. So she had a hold of my belt and we walked against ^{the} the current for I suppose 30 or 40 yards back to the house that our neighbors were in. Course they'd all gone upstairs by this time, they thought that we, ^{they... we} were gone. And we beat on the door and, ^{and} immediately ^{they} came down and let us in, the water was about three foot deep on the ^{the} patio, it was elevated a little. When they opened the door, ^{of} course, the water rushed in and we got in. And then we immediately went upstairs ^{IV} where we were, ^{gonna} regroup and try to figure out what to do next, ^{uh...}

OR Now, there on the second floor then, your wife and yourself ^{and} ~~there with~~ your two children, and your neighbors ^{were there} ~~had~~ some children? _____?

DK Our neighbors were on vacation. And their ~~re~~ children and some friends of theirs ^{and} were in the house at the time. So there were four of them and then four of us. As soon as we got up to the third level, ~~==~~ their house had a basement and then a ground level and then a third level. ^{i.e.} ~~==~~ As soon as we got upstairs, we heard the crashing of the windows as the basement level filled with water, ^{or: Mm-hmm.} and then the main level immediately filled after that. ^{and} The water ^{i.e.} started coming up the steps. We stayed in the house about fifteen minutes, I suppose, we were panic stricken, we didn't know what to do, the noise was unbelievable, and..

OR ^{Now,} ~~And~~ this was at night, too, so it was dark.

DK Yes, this was between 10:30 and 11. I think ~~that~~ the dam initially gave at 10:30.

OR And ~~the~~ power was out now, ~~so~~.

DK Yes.

OR ^{So} ~~It~~ was ^{pitch} black. ^{i.e.}

DK Right. We had, we found some candles and lit the candles, and we noticed that the water, in the fifteen minutes that we had been in the house, had come up about a foot and a half. And it was about three steps from getting into the top level, so it was probably 8 foot deep out ^{in the} in the front. So we figured we'd better get on the roof. So we kicked one of the bedroom windows out, and there was a , a patio sundeck-type thing that we could step out on to, and then from there we made it up onto the roof. And we didn't know how long we'd be there, so one of the gentlemen that was in the house got some canned pop and things like this and blankets, and , and then even went to, went back in one more time to get a box spring, ^{a thin-type} I think ~~a~~ box spring, ^{and a} off a bunkbed, and a mattress, so we had a mattress to sit on on the roof as well as a small box spring to hold over our heads ^{to} and keep the rain off, because it was raining unbelievable. ^{or: Mm-hmm.} When we got ^{on} the roof, ~~==~~ I suppose a little after 11, 11:30 possibly, ~~==~~ we could see that the flood was gonna be a flood.

OR I would, ^{certainly} ~~I would~~ think so.

DK The houses were starting to move on their foundations, and the house that we were on even was moving, you know, ^{or: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.} shaking, it wasn't actually moving but it was just kind of vibrating. Well, we sat there for four hours total, but from 11:30 to 1, it wasn't really

DK super-bad, I mean it was bad, but the structures around us were still holding. About 1 o'clock, possibly 12:30, it seemed to intensify to a large extent, because that's when the houses started literally breaking up, ^{OK: Mm-hmm} just almost exploded, and they ^{OK: Yeah} ~~were~~ ^{would} just come floating by right down the street.

OR Yes, now, ^{were, were,} were there any fires in that, in that area? I understand ^{that} gas mains burst somewhere and there were fires. There were no fires?

DK There were no fires. No.

OR Just ~~it~~ exploded from the water, the force of the water.

DK Yes, it, when ~~the~~ ^a house, when a house would go, it would kind of make a squeak and a green, and even above the sound of the water we could hear this. ^{OK: Mm-hmm} And then it would just bang, and it was gone, it would just take off. And we couldn't see, of course, until the sky would light up with lightning, which was quite often. ^{OK: Mm-hmm, yeah} So we sat there and we watched the houses to our left, ~~which~~ [?] which was upstream, ~~there~~ [?] there were a total of ten houses probably in the area immediately to our west and between us and the park. ~~And~~ ^{i.e.} we just watched those houses one by one float away. And we began getting a little more nervous as each house went, ^{OK: Yeah!} because it seemed they were giving us some protection when they were there, they were forcing the water ^{and} out around us. And as they would give, our house would start to shake a little more. ~~The~~ ^{and the,} house that we were on. And eventually, there was just one house remaining between the house that we were sitting on, ^{and the,} and the water itself, and that was the house that we lived in.

OR That was your house.

DK That was our house. And about 1 o'clock, our bedroom, which was kind of on an L-shape off the back, tore away and was swept off, and the rest of our house looked to be in pretty good shape, from what we could see. So we sat on the roof, and we could watch the water level on ^{this} the house across the street had a white garage door, so we could see the water level and count the number of squares in this door so we could tell if it was still rising or going down. We had a flashlight and we would, we were in constant contact with other people that were in the area.

OR ^{Is it?} Through ~~the~~ ^{lights?} lights?

DK Through, through the light, yes, ^{OK: Mm-hmm} our neighbor immediately across the street was in his

DK living room, the water got up about 3 feet on his garage door, and his house was ~~xxxx~~ elevated considerably from ours. So he was in his living room ^(even), giving us signals with his light to let us know that he was all right, and his neighbor to the immediate west was also giving us signals till about 1 o'clock and then all of a sudden his light stopped coming, and we didn't know what had happened. Later we found out that they went up into the attic. But about 2:30 or three o'clock we noticed that the water had started to recede so we thought it would be all right to go back in the house, ^{'cause it was} just bone-chilling cold up there. ^{ok: Yes, oh yes.} the rain was coming down unmercifully and it was blowing, and we wanted to get back in. So we went back inside, and got dry clothes on. Then we just sat around and listened to the noise and waited until daybreak; about 5:30, ~~5~~ 5 o'clock, I guess, we looked out and just couldn't believe what we saw. The debris was piled up in some places 20 foot high on trees, you know, ^{that had..} it had been forced up the sides ~~xx~~ of the trees.

OR ^{New} At this time, was the water still sweeping houses and automobiles past you, or had it receded..

DK No, that had already been done, the water was, in fact, receded enough that we could walk out ^{on} into the street. ^{ok: I see.} As far as the water in the back, it was still going pretty fast. Course the course of the creek had been completely, completely changed. The creek as such used to be about 15 yards, maybe 20 ~~xxxx~~ yards wide directly in back of our house, ^{ok: Am-hm} and when we ~~xxxx~~ went out the next morning, we noticed that the creek was, oh, a good block wide, and our back ~~xxxx~~ yard had been just cut away ^{by the,} by the water ~~xxxx~~ coming through there.

OR ~~I see.~~ Well, you were on that roof, then, you, your wife, your two boys, and these young people, you say..

DK Yes, two other younger couples in their twenties.

OR All right, you were on this about four hours ^{them} and did you, did you do anything to sort of bolster one another's spirits while you were, while you were up there, or did...? ⁸

DK Well, we ~~xxx~~ ...

OR ^{..you} Reassured ^{ok: Am-hm} one another.. ^{i.e.}

DK We prayed a lot. We, everyone of us, ^{to the man,} really did a lot of soul searching it seemed, and we tried to encourage each other, you know, saying that our house is going to hold so

DK we don't have anything to worry about, things like this.

OR Now did your, did your house, you say the bedroom was torn off, did it remain on its foundation?

DK Yes, it did. *It, uh...*

OR Largely destroyed, I suppose.

DK It was totally destroyed, yes. From the roof ~~xx~~ it looked like it was in pretty good shape except for our bedroom being gone, but when we got over there the next morning, there were two, my two boy's bedrooms were on the west end of the house which was the end that the water hit first, and in one of the bedrooms was about a five ton dump truck from the park that had been ~~xxx~~ swept down and just right through the wall, it was just sitting in his bedroom with logs and all kinds of other debris. ~~xxThe other~~ with it. the other bedroom on that end of the house, the wall was completely gone, and it was jammed to the ceiling with trees and logs and whatever else was in the water. And the rest of the house was just totally destroyed, the water filled up inside so much because of the walls on that end being out that it filled up to about an eight foot water mark in the , in the other parts of the house, and there was so much weight that the walls would, they had to give from ^{the} bottom to let the water escape. So that the house was a total, ^{just, you know, a} total loss.

OR Now, it was about daybreak then or ^{when, when it was} late in the morning you were able to venture out ^{or, or,} onto the street.

DK Yes.

OR All right, and seeing all of this devastation, were there any casualties there in your neighborhood?

DK Yes, a couple named Thompson who lived ^{three} 3 houses from ours, he was ^{a,} an invalid, and they were an elderly couple, and they were both lost, and another..

OR ^{Were they,} Were they in their, were they in their house, was the ^{it} house destroyed, or did they try to leave, ..

DK I'm not, I'm not really sure, I heard that they had gotten out, ^{but,} but they were, they were lost, so I assumed ^s they stayed in the ⁱⁿ house, the ^{it} house was, ended up almost in my backyard, what was left of it. There were, there were two houses right in my backyard, the remainder

DK of two houses.

OR *Mm-hmm. You said* there was another couple lost, too, in the, in the ~~the~~ *(neighborhood)*...?

DK Yes, this was about, our street made a horseshoe and the side that we lived on was against the creek, and then it went on the other direction, and there ^{*were, there*} was a family over on the other side ^{*of*} that, four people that were all lost.

OR ^{*Now*} Before we started the tape here, Mr. Koehne, I think you mentioned that you had, had ^{*i.e.*} three dogs, ^{*OK: Yes. How*} have two of them here ^{*with you.*}

DK ~~Yes,~~

OR And they are, what, what breed are they, chihuahuas, or..?

DK One is a chihuahua, the other is a ^{*and*} chihuahua terrier mix.

OR Uh-huh. And you had three..

DK We had three.

OR And, how did you, how did you save these dogs, were they in the car, you had them in the car with you, ^{*OK: Mm-hmm.*} with the boys, and you had to carry them out, too.

DK Well, each of the boys ^{*OK: I see, I see.*} carried a dog, and then my wife carried a dog.

OR I see, and then you carried the boys.

DK The dog that we lost was, was afraid to ride in a car, every time we got in the car she immediately went under the seat, and this is the problem, as soon as we got into the car she ^{*got*} went under the seat and the water came in and we thought that she was drowned right away, but Darren, ^{*i.e.*} My oldest boy, pulled her out, and she was still coughing, so we took her inside, and of course we didn't give her the attention that we should have, you know, but ^{*she*}...

OR *Hardly could under the circumstances.*

DK Yeah, right. She was wet and she, she died of pneumonia a couple days later.

OR I see. But I wondered just how, ~~just~~ how you had gotten them.. yes, well, were there any, were there any rescue units ^{*f*} of police, fire department, National Guard, any of those out in the morning then when, the following, following morning that you were able to come down off the roof, ~~some~~ ^{*out*} go out into, on the street?

DK Well, my first, the thing I wanted to do first was call my, my sister and my parents. They were at the air base, ^{*→*} ~~my~~ ^{*→*} parents were visiting here from Arizona ~~And~~ ^{*i.e.*} we'd been in

DK contact with them the previous night, and we told them, we were on the phone with them immediately before we left, we told them that we were on our way out. So, of course when we didn't show up they began ^{to get} ~~to get~~ very worried, ^{become} ~~to get~~ So my first project was to call them, so I walked about a block and a half out of the devastated area to a house and she let me use the phone. ^{OR: Mm-hm.} But between there and our house, I didn't see any rescue workers as such, yet. There were a lot of people out, helping, you know. ^{OR: Mm-hm.} People in jeeps were transporting people out of the area, ^{OR: Yes.} "but it wasn't very long after that that the National Guard did, did arrive and we're very thankful for their presence, that's for sure.

OR Yes. Then what did ^{where,} where did you go then that morning, ^{that} it would be Saturday ^{OR: Mm-hm.} mning, ^{OR: Mm-hm.} Now, ^{wouldn't it.} when were you able to, when were you able to leave your house there and be relocated ^{where..} wherever it was you were relocated. Friends bring you down here to your...?

DK No, about noon my brother-in-law and my father made it through the area and got out close enough that they could walk over to our house. And in that five hour period we'd just been kind of walking around over there in a daze, you know, ^{OR: Yes.} just completely amazed, we didn't know what to do, we're to go. And they took us out to the base where we were fed and given clean clothes. And then we turned around and came back in to see if we could start salvaging anything.

OR I see. Well, now, emergency assistance then was provided out at the base, ^{at} Ellsworth, right, you say you were given...?

DK Well, we were fed and clothed by my sister.

OR Oh, I see, I see.

DK And her family. We didn't take advantage of any of the disaster facilities because we did have people in here that, that could help us, ^{so...}

OR ^{Right, mm-hm.} And you didn't have to utilize any of these ~~xxxx~~ emergency or disaster assistance agencies to obtain an immediate temporary resettlement.

DK No, we moved in with my sister that, that day, started sleeping there. We did go to Red Cross a few days later and got ^{some,} some help on the clothing, ^{OR: Mm-hm.} and things such as this. ^{oh}

OR And then you stayed at your sister's for a time, and you're living here in your shop now. ^{you,}

DK Yes, we moved in here yesterday and we, we found a home to rent that will be available the first of July, so we'll only be here for the rest of this week.

OR Okay. Yes, it must, it must be ^{it must be} very difficult for some people to find housing at all, with all of the destruction, ^(there wouldn't be) sufficient housing available now; of course HUD is, is assisting with mobile homes...

DK They're bringing trailers in, we were signed up for a trailer and they told us that if we could find a rental unit here in town they would pay the rent, so this is what we did.

OR Okay, well, we have probably a couple of feet left on the tape here Mr. Koehne, is there anything else, you've given us a very informative, valuable tape here, ^{insights}, reactions to, to this. It must have certainly been a long night out there on the roof; is there anything else that you might tell us now, ^(to include in this) ~~(to include in this)~~ tape?

DK Well, no, the only thing that is in my mind and has been more than anything else is that, ^{or: Mm-hmm} the fact that myself as well as several thousand other people or a couple thousand other people have got homes or had homes that we owed money on, ^{or: Mm-hmm} and now they're gone, you know, and we still owe the money. And this is ^{gonna} ~~going to~~ be probably one of the major problems.

I, I certainly can't afford to keep making a house payment if I'm going to have to buy another house, ^{or: I can appreciate that.} ^{and} so this is probably the main area of concern right now. I hope that ^{our} our government will come through with some sort of disaster relief, I know that as soon as anything happens in Pakistan ^{or} or any other area of the world we're the first ones there to help, I hope that they can do the same for their own people.

OR Yes, yes. ^{Well, so do I.} ~~That's~~. Well, thank you, Mr. Koehne, for what will be a very valuable tape. Thank you very much.

(END OF INTERVIEW)

SOUTH DAKOTA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Library Cataloguing Service Data

Name of informant Dexter Koehne

Address 3867 Riverdell, Rapid City, South Dakota

Date of Interview June 27, 1972

Name of Researcher O. A. Rothlisberger

Others Present _____

Location of Interview Two Wheeler Dealer Bike Shop

Added Notes _____

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

Rapid City flood - Mr. Koehne, wife, 2 children, 3 dogs spent night on roof of neighbor's house. Their own house totally destroyed. Informative and interesting interview.

Demographic Information on Informant

Age 27 Sex Male County Pennington

Socio-economic status Male

Occupation Bicycle dealer

Education _____

Religion _____

Date of Arrival of Family in South Dakota _____

Where? _____

From where? _____

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

- Q. (I'm) talking this afternoon to Mr. Dexter Kohne of Rapid City, South Dakota. I believe in our preliminary conversation, Mr. Kohne, you told me that your address, the address of your home, your property at the time of the flood was 3867 Riverdell?
- A. That's correct.
- Q. And we attempted to establish that on our geological survey map here, as being within the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter of Section 9, Township 1 North, Range 7 East. Now, Mr. Kohne, you were at home at the time of the flood, you and your family, is that correct?
- A. Well, to start the evening out, I was at the bicycle shop...
- Q. I see. And your bicycle shop, uh...
- A. ...which we operate.
- Q. We are in Mr. Kohne's bicycle shop, by the way, now, that's the Two Wheeler Dealer Shop down in, that's 817?
- A. Yes, 817 Main.
- Q. (All right) in Rapid City. (Phone ringing) All right, just before the phone rang you were telling us that at the beginning of the evening you were, you were down here at the bicycle shop, I guess, right?
- A. Yes, I was working here and one of the people that works for me lived about a block from my house, and he came in and, and said that there was talk of a flood in our area...
- Q. Uh-huh.
- A. ...and that he was going to go out to his house and pick up a few of his, possessions, so I called home and, uh...
- Q. About what time was that?

- A. This was about 8 o'clock.
- Q. And it'd been raining heavily for some time.
- A. Yes.
- Q. Okay, you called home then about 8 o'clock.
- A. About 8 o'clock, and my wife wasn't home, she'd been grocery shopping, she arrived home about 8:30 and called me and said that the creek was very high, it was about two foot from the banks.
- Q. I see. Now, did you, did you contact anyone at home? You have two children, I believe.
- A. Yes.
- Q. Is it, two boys, right? What are their ages?
- A. Eight and ten.
- Q. Were they home then?
- A. They were, they were with my wife grocery shopping, and they arrived home with her at about 8:30, I would imagine. It was about 9 o'clock, she called and said that the, the creek was now about a foot from its banks and that it looked like it was coming up fairly rapidly, but still we weren't too alarmed because in 1962 the same sort of a thing occurred.
- Q. Mm-hm.
- A. The house that we lived in previously belonged to my wife's parents, and she was raised in that house, so he had gone through this before in '62; the creek came up almost to the top, and there were, there was flooding further down, but it didn't affect where our house was.
- Q. I see.
- A. So again, we weren't extremely alarmed, but it had come up quite rapidly.

- Q. Now, had there been any, had there been any warnings at, at this time from the, I don't know what it would be Civil Defense from the municipal government or...
- A. No warnings as such, I don't, I don't think. Darren, did you hear anything on the radio that absolutely everyone should evacuate before we actually did?
- A2. No, not (the first time).
- A. We were listening to the radio, and they were giving reports of, of bridge washouts and so on and so forth, but as far as evacuation notices, we didn't receive any as such.
- Q. Uh-huh.
- A. Until later.
- Q. You, you went on, went on home then.
- A. Yes, she began..became quite alarmed about 9 o'clock and, and said that I should probably come home, so I had one person working with me here that lived in South Canyon, so I started to take him home, and we found that his house wasn't accessible either because of the water on West Chicago. So I left him off at friend's and proceeded to go home. I got home and there were people standing on 38th Street where the bridge was, very excited, you know, and the water was coming through very fast, and it was kind of a fun thing. And all of a sudden the debris started coming down the spillway, paddleboats from Canyon Lake were coming by in back of our house very, very fast, and they'd hit the bridge and just disintegrate, you know.
- Q. Oh, yes.
- A. About this time we, we started becoming a little nervous; but still we thought that, well, it happened in '62, it's going to happen again, you know, we're..

we'll be all right. So we started collecting a few things just in case we would decide to leave; about 10:30 we heard on the radio that everyone south of Jackson should evacuate. This was the first...

Q. This was about 10:30.

A. Maybe a little before 10:30...

Q. Okay, okay.

A. ...but roughly in that area. This was the first evacuation notice that we received.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. And we decided that we'd better get out. So we picked up..well, we took about two minutes, I suppose, to barricade the doors, you know.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. We didn't want any more water to get in...

Q. Yeah.

A. ...than was absolutely necessary, so we put towels in the..in between the two doors, and got in...

Q. You, your wife and the two boys.

A. Right.

Q. And, by the way, Mr. Kohne, one of your sons is here with us.

A. Yes, Darren, my oldest boy is here.

Q. Darren. And he, he's...

A. He's ten.

Q. Ten, yeah, I see. Okay, and you loaded your automobile then, you and your family...

A. As we started out the front door, Darren said that the water was up to the

patio. Now this took about two or three minutes...

Q. Mm-hm.

A. ...from the time it was at the top of the creek leve to, uh, to our back door. And our yard was on kind of a slope, so it was coming up quite rapidly. And as we were going out the front door, Darren said, "The water's on the patio." Well, by the time we got out the front door to the car, the water was about six inches deep in the driveway.

Q. I see.

A. Then we got a little alarmed, because it was coming up so fast.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. I got in the car, started it, and began to back down the driveway, and before we got to the street, apparently that's when Canyon Lake Dam first went...

Q. Mm-hm.

A. ...because a wall of water sufficient enough to carry the car away hit us.

Q. Yeah, I see.

A. I imagine it was three and a half to four foot tall...

Q. Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

A. ...and it picked the car up and turned it around sideways, and the water immediately began coming in under the dashboard, and filling up on the inside. By this time we were very afraid, you know...

Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. ...because the water was just all over. Cars were floating by us--lighter cars--we were in a small car but it seemed to hold fairly well, I had the brake on and we would just kind of bounce along. We ended up about two doors east of our house against a tree. This took about a minute for us to get there,

I suppose. And then, and then it seemed like the water really started coming fast. It engulfed the whole car, the water was going over the windshield, and we couldn't see out, and we couldn't get out, from the looks of it. Uh, some people staying in our neighbor's house saw that we were in the car and made an attempt to get out to us, but the current was such that he just couldn't walk in it. And his car, he was standing beside his car in his driveway, and as he was walking out to us, or trying to, his car took off...

Q. Mm-hm.

A. ...and so he just turned around and went back in the house, there was nothing he could do.

Q. Now, the water outside of your automobile was a couple of feet in depth (was it) _____?

A. Well, it was about four to, I would say four feet deep.

Q. Yeah, four feet deep.

A. It was up to the windows and going over the windshield, in fact.

Q. Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

A. And at this time we were, you know, we just thought that we were dead.

Q. Mmm.

A. Darren asked if we were going to die, and we, of course, said that we didn't know, and he wanted to know if we were gonna suffer, and questions like that were a little hard to answer at the time, you know, we were just panicking. And finally I realized that we had to get outa the car. So I rolled my window down and the water immediately filled up on the inside.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. About that time we heard a big bang; we didn't know what it was at the time,

but people that were watching us told us that a Volkswagon came floating down and crashed into my wife's side of the car--the passenger's side--and it caved the, her door post in and shattered the windshield.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. But it didn't break the windshield out, so we were lucky in that respect. I got out of the car and held on to it, and the water was over my waist.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. I suppose it was four and a half deep by this time, and Mary Ann, my wife, got both of the kids out of the back seat and out into my arms, and then she got out, and just as she was getting out, the water took our car and it just went, so we were...our timing was perfect as far as getting out of the car. We started to walk back to our neighbor's house which was about 30 yards and the water was coming very forcefully, I don't know how we were able to stand up in it, I think the weight of the kids in my arms held me down so I could walk. And my wife was behind us and she couldn't get her footing, she a couple of times slipped and was washed back and grabbed ahold of her footing again and caught up, and she finally..I told her to grab hold of my belt. So she had a hold of my belt and we walked against the, the current for I suppose 30 or 40 yards back to the house that our neighbors were in. 'Course they'd all gone upstairs by this time, they thought that we...they..we were gone. And we beat on the door and, and immediately they came down and let us in, the water was about three foot deep on their patio, it was elevated a little. When they opened the door, a'course, the water rushed in and we got in. And then we immediately went upstairs where we were gonna regroup and try to figure out what to do next, uh...

Q. Now, there on the second floor then, your wife and yourself and your two children, and your neighbors, were there some children _____?

A. Our neighbors were on vacation. And their children and some friends of theirs were in the house at the time. So there were four of them and then four of us. As soon as we got up to the third level--their house had a basement and then a ground level and then a third level--as soon as we got upstairs, we heard the crashing of the windows as the basement level filled with water...

Q. Mm-hm.

A. ...and then the main level immediately filled after that. And the water started coming up the steps. We stayed in the house about 15 minutes, I suppose, we were panic stricken, we didn't know what to do, the noise was unbelievable, and...

Q. Now, this was at night, too, so it was dark.

A. Yes, this was between 10:30 and 11:00. I think the dam initially gave at 10:30.

Q. And the power was out now...

A. Yes.

Q. ...so it was pitch black.

A. Right. We had, we found some candles and lit the candles, and we noticed that the water, in the 15 minutes that we had been in the house, had come up about a foot and a half. And it was about three steps from getting into the top level, so it was probably eight foot deep out in the, in the front. So we figured we'd better get on the roof. So we kicked one of the bedroom windows out, and there was a, a patio sundeck-type thing that we could step out onto, and then from there we made it up onto the roof. And we didn't know how long we'd be there, so one of the gentlemen that was in the house got some canned

pop and things like this and blankets, and, and then even went to, went back in one more time to get a box spring, a thin-type box spring off a bunkbed and a, and a mattress, so we had a mattress to sit on on the roof as well as a small box spring to hold over our head to keep the rain off, because it was raining unbelievably.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. When we got on the roof--I suppose a little after 11:00, 11:30 possibly--we could see that the flood was gonna be a flood.

Q. I would certainly think so.

A. The houses were starting to move on their foundations, and the house that we were on even was moving, you know...

Q. Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

A. ...shaking, it wasn't actually moving but it was just kind of vibrating. Well, we sat there for four hours total, but from 11:30 to 1:00, it wasn't really super-bad, I mean it was bad, but the structures around us were still holding.

Q. Yeah.

A. About 1 o'clock, possibly 12:30, it seemed to intensify to a large extent, because that's when the houses started literally breaking up...

Q. Mm-hm.

A. ...they just almost exploded, and they would just come floating by right down the street.

Q. Yes, now, were, were, were there any fires in that, in that area? I understand that gas mains burst somewhere and there were fires. There were no fires?

A. There were no fires. No.

Q. Just exploded from the water, the force of the water.

- A. Yes, it, when a house, when a house would go, it would kind of make a squeak and a groan, and even above the sould of the water we could hear this.
- Q. Mm-hm.
- A. And then it would just bang, and it was gone, it would just take off. And we couldn't see, of course, until the sky would light up with lightning, which was quite often.
- Q. Mm-hm, yeah.
- A. So we sat there and we watched the houses to our left--which was upstream, there were a total of ten houses probably in the area immediately to our west and between us and the park--and we just wathced those houses one by one float away. And we began getting a little more nervous as each house went...
- Q. Yeah!
- A. ...because it seemed they were giving us some protection when they were there, they were forcing the water out and around us. And as they would give, our house would start to shake a little more--the house that we were on. And eventually, there was just one house remaining between the house that we were sitting on and the, and the water itself, and that was the house that we lived in.
- Q. That was your house.
- A. That was our house. And about 1 o'clock, our bedroom, which was kind of an L-shape off the back, tore away and was swept off, and the rest of our house looked to be in pretty good shape, from what we could see. So we sat on the roof and we could watch the water level on this..the house across the street had a white garage door, so we could see the water level and count the number of squares in this door so we could tell if it was still rising or going down.

We had a flashlight and we would, we were in constant contact with other people that were in the area.

Q. I see. Through lights?

A. Through, through the light, yes.

Q. Yeah.

A. Our neighbor immediately across the street was in his living room, the water got up about three feet on his garage door, and his house was elevated considerably from ours. So he was in his living room (even), giving us signals with his light to let us know that he was all right. And his neighbor to the immediate west was also giving us signals 'til about 1 o'clock and then all of a sudden his light stopped coming, and we didn't know what had happened. Later we found out that they went up into the attic. But about 2:30 or 3 o'clock we noticed that the water had started to recede so we thought it would be all right to go back in the house, 'cause it was just bone-chilling cold up there.

Q. Yes, oh, yes.

A. The rain was coming down unmercifully and it was blowing, and we wanted to get back in. So we went back inside, and got dry clothes on. Then we just sat around and listened to the noise and waited until daybreak; about 5:30--5 o'clock, I guess--we looked out and just couldn't believe what we saw. The debris was piled up in some places 20 foot high on trees, you know, that had.. it had been forced up the side of the trees.

Q. Now at this time, was the water still sweeping houses and automobiles past you, or had it receded...

A. No, that had already been done. The water was, in fact, receded enough that

we could walk out on the street.

Q. I see.

A. As far as the water in the back, it was still going pretty fast. 'Course the course of the creek had been completely, completely changed. The creek as such used to be about 15 yards, maybe 20 yards wide directly in back of our house.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. And when we went out the next morning, we noticed that the creek was, oh, a good block wide, and our back yard had been just cut away by the, by the water coming through there.

Q. Well, you were on that roof, then--you, your wife, your two boys, and these young people, you say...

A. Yes, two other younger couples in their twenties.

Q. All right, you were on this about four hours then, and did you, did you do anything to sort of bolster one another's spirits while you were, while you were up there, or did...

A. Well, we...

Q. ...you reassure one another...

A. We prayed a lot.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. We..everyone of us, to the man, really did a lot of soul searching it seemed and we tried to encourage each other, you know, saying that our house is going to hold so we don't have anything to worry about, things like this.

Q. Now did your, did your house..you say the bedroom was torn off, did it remain on its foundation?

A. Yes, it did. It, uh...

Q. Largely destroyed, I suppose.

A. It was totally destroyed, yes. From the roof it looked like it was in pretty good shape except for our bedroom being gone, but when we got over there the next morning, there were two, my two boy's bedrooms were on the west end of the house which was the end that the water hit first, and in one of the bedrooms was about a five ton dump truck from the park that had been swept down and just right through the wall, it was just sitting in his bedroom with logs and all kinds of other debris with it. The other bedroom on that end of the house, the wall was completely gone, and it was jammed to the ceiling with trees and logs and whatever else was in the water. And the rest of the house was just totally destroyed, the water filled up inside so much because of the walls on that end being out that it filled up to about an eight foot water mark in the, in the other parts of the house, and there was so much weight that the walls would, they had to give from the bottom to let the water escape. So that the house was a total, just, you know, a total loss.

Q. Now, it was about daybreak then or when, when it was late in the morning you were able to venture out on, on, onto the street.

A. Yes.

Q. All right, and seeing all of this devastation, were there any casualties there in your neighborhood?

A. Yes, a couple named Thompson who lived three houses from ours, he was a, an invalid, and they were an elderly couple, and they were both lost, and another...

Q. Were they, were they in their, were they in their house, was their house destroyed, or did they try to leave _____...

- A. I'm not, I'm not really sure, I heard that they had gotten out but, but they were, they were lost, so I assume they stayed in their house, their house was, ended up almost in my backyard, what was left of it. There were, there were two houses right in my backyard, the remainders of two houses.
- Q. Mm-hm. You said there was another couple lost, too, in the, in the (neighborhood)?
- A. Yes, this was about..our street made a horseshoe and the side that we lived on was against the creek, and then it went on the other direction, and there were, there was a family over on the other side of four people that were all lost.
- Q. Now before we started the tape here, Mr. Kohne, I think you mentioned that you had, had three dogs...
- A. Yes.
- Q. ...you have two of them here with you. And they are, what, what breed are they, chihuahuas, or...?
- A. One is a chihuahua, the other is a chihuahua and terrier mix.
- Q. Uh-huh. And you had three...
- A. We had three.
- Q. And, how did you, how did you save these dogs, were they in the car, you had them in the car with you...
- A. Mm-hm.
- Q. ...with the boys, and you had to carry them out, too.
- A. Well, each of the boys carried a dog...
- Q. I see, I see.
- A. ...and then my wife carried a dog.
- Q. I see, and then you carried the boys.

- A. The dog that we lost was, was afraid to ride in a car, every time we got in the car she immediately went under the seat, and this is the problem, as soon as we got into the car she got under the seat and the water came in and we thought that she was drowned right away, but Darren, my oldest boy, pulled her out, and she was still coughing, so we took her inside, and, of course, we didn't give her the attention that we should have, you know, but she...
- Q. Hardly could under the circumstances.
- A. Yeah, right. She was wet and she, she died of pneumonia a couple days later.
- Q. I see. But I wondered just how, how you had gotten them..yes, well, were there any, were there any rescue units of police, fire department, National Guard, any of those out in the morning then when...the following, following morning that you were able to come down off the roof, go out into, out on the street?
- A. Well, my first..the thing I wanted to do first was call my, my sister and my parents. They were at the Air Base--my parents were visiting here from Arizona--and we'd been in contact with them the previous night, and we told them, we were on the phone with them immediately before we left, we told them that we were on our way out.
- Q. Mm-hm.
- A. So, of course, when we didn't show up they began..became very worried, so my first project was to call them. So I walked about a block and a half out of the devastated area to a house and she let me use the phone.
- Q. Mm-hm.
- A. But between there and our house, I didn't see any rescue workers as such, yet.
- Q. Mm-hm.

A. There were a lot of people out, helping, you know.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. People in jeeps were transporting people out of the area...

Q. Yeah.

A. ...but it wasn't very long after that that the National Guard did, did arrive and we're very thankful for their presence, that's for sure.

Q. Yes. Then what did, where, where did you go then that morning, that would be Saturday morning, now wouldn't it. When were you able to, when were you able to leave your house there and be relocated where..wherever it was you were relocated. Friends bring you down here to your...?

A. No, about noon my brother-in-law and my father made it through the area and got out close enough that they could walk over to our house. And in that five hour period we'd just been kind of walking around over there in a daze, you know...

Q. Yeah.

A. ...and just completely amazed, we didn't know what to do, where to go. And they took us out to the base where we were fed and given clean clothes. And then we turned around and came back in to see if we could start salvaging anything.

Q. I see. Well, now emergency assistance then was provided out at the base, at Ellsworth, right, you say you were given...?

A. Well, we were fed and clothed by my sister.

Q. Oh, I see, I see.

A. And her family. We didn't take advantage of any of the disaster facilities because we did have people in here that, that could help us so...

- Q. Right, mm-hm. And you did not have to utilize any of these emergency or disaster assistance agencies to obtain an immediate temporary resettlement.
- A. No, we moved in with my sister that, that day, started sleeping there. We did go to the Red Cross a few days later and got some, some help on the clothing...
- Q. Mm-hm.
- A. ...and things such as this.
- Q. And then you stayed at your sister's for a time, and you're living here in your, your shop now.
- A. Yes, we moved in here yesterday and we, we found a home to rent that will be available the first of July, so we'll only be here for the rest of this week.
- Q. Okay. Yes, it must, it must be, it must be very difficult for some people to find housing at all, with all of the destruction, (there wouldn't be) sufficient housing available now; of course, HUD is, is assisting with mobile homes...
- A. They're bringing trailers in, we were signed up for a trailer and they told us that if we could find a rental unit here in town they would pay the rent, so this is what we did.
- Q. Okay, well, we have probably a couple of feet left on the tape here Mr. Kohne, is there anything else. You've given us a very informative, valuable tape here, insights, reactions to, to this. It must have certainly been a long night out there on the roof; is there anything else that you might tell us now, (to include in this) tape?
- A. Well, no, the only thing that is in my mind and has been more than anything else is that, the fact that myself as well as several thousand other people or

a couple thousand other people have got homes or had homes that we owed money on...

Q. Mm-hm.

A. ...and now they're gone, you know, and we still owe the money. And this is gonna be probably one of the major problems. I, I certainly can't afford to keep making a house payment if I'm going to have to buy another house...

Q. I can appreciate that.

A. ...and so this is probably the main area of concern right now. I hope that our, our government will come through with some sort of disaster relief, I know that as soon as anything happens in Pakistan or, or any other area of the world we're the first ones there to help, I hope that they can do the same for their own people.

Q. Yes, yes. Well, so do I. Well, thank you, Mr. Kohne, for what will be a very valuable tape. Thank you very much.

(END OF INTERVIEW)