

The Teton Dam Disaster Collection

Daryl Wayne Grigg – Life during the Teton Flood

By Daryl Wayne Grigg

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Box 6 Folder 28

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AA: Mr. Grigg, will you please spell your name for me?

DG: Daryl Grigg.

AA: What is your birth date and where were you born?

DG: May 6, 1954. I was born in Santa Maria, California.

AA: Do you have a family?

DG: Yes, I'm married and have one son.

AA: Did you have a family before the flood?

DG: I lived with my mother then, I wasn't married.

AA: I see. Where did you and your mother live?

DG: This same house.

AA: So the address that you live at was the address before the flood?

DG: Right.

AA: What do you do for a living?

DG: I'm a farmer now.

AA: How long have you lived in this area?

DG: About twelve years.

AA: What is your current address?

DG: 247 North, 3rd East, St. Anthony.

AA: Daryl, would you mind explaining your feelings about the construction of the Teton Dam, did you support it or oppose it? Or did you really have any feelings at all about it?

DG: I was for it. I was frightened about it and all that, but I'm opposed to it now.

AA: Did you or any of your friends, or your mother, have any premonition of the Teton Disaster? Did you have any strong or unusual feelings that something bad was going to happen?

DG: No, not that I know of. Nobody said anything.

AA: You didn't have any yourself?

DG: No, just a normal day.

AA: Where were you when the dam broke?

DG: About two miles below the dam. I was fishing out in the middle of the river on an island.

AA: You were on the Teton River about two miles downstream from the dam?

DG: Yes.

AA: You say that you were fishing, you and who else?

DG: David Benson.

AA: What I'd like you to do is to tell what happened to you that day, and you go into as much detail as you'd like to. Just tell your story.

DG: I left the house here about 9:30 or 10:00 to go to Teton. I picked up David Benson. He called me the night before and we decided to go fishing that Saturday. I had to get him out of bed, he was still in bed. So we finally made it on the river about 11:00. Then we started fishing where the pickup was parked at the end of the road. We've been fishing at this one place a whole bunch of times, it was pretty good fishing. So we drove to the end of the road and started fishing from there, there was a big eddy there then. We didn't get any there and just walked up the river. We had just barely got to the island, and this airplane started flying around. It was coming down through the canyon. We didn't know who it was. We thought that it was someone we knew. He was just waving at us and we were waving back. Then they left.

So we started fishing again and the water rose about six feet. We were standing there caught in the water. David said, "We'll have to swim out of here." I turned around and looked up the river and there was about a thirty foot wall of water coming at us. I turned and yelled at David, telling him to jump in the river. That is what I did. We started out swimming, but that didn't work. Then, that was the last time I have seen David. There were thousands of logs so I grabbed onto one of them. I didn't have to swim after that. I just remembered looking around. It was unbelievable, everything was tearing everything else up. I couldn't hardly hear anything because of the noise. Then I saw a couple of houses get wiped out. I also heard a bunch of cattle. I got down the river about a mile or two and the logs got really tight and crushed me. I figured that I had a collapsed lung. Then I went down the river probably another quarter or half mile and got pinned to a tree. It was in my way and there was a bunch of debris, too.

Somehow I got out of that and climbed the tree. I can't remember much from then until I started yelling. It was about 5:00, I started yelling and some people came. It was Craig Hawes and I can't remember who else, came out in a boat and rescued me.

AA: What time was it that Craig Hawes came out in the boat?

DG: They came out at about 5:00 or 5:30.

AA: In the afternoon?

DG: Yes.

AA: So how long did you say you had been in that tree?

DG: About four or four and a half hours.

AA: And you don't know very much what happened while you were in the tree, is that correct?

DG: That's right, I think I went out of it for a while.

AA: Do you remember climbing into the tree?

DG: Yes.

AA: Was it a big tree?

DG: Oh, not too big, I could get my arms around it. I think just barely. Pretty good sized cottonwood tree.

AA: Where did you get in that tree so you could stay in the tree and be either semi-conscious or conscious?

DG: There was a fork up on top of the tree about 20 feet up, so I got in there so I could sit or lay down. I was having a heck of a time breathing then. I had a punctured lung and five broken ribs.

AA: Where was the water when you started climbing in to that tree?

DG: Probably ten to fifteen feet up.

AA: What side of the canyon was the tree on?

DG: The tree was right at Teton City. It was in the Teton dumps, where the tree was at.

AA: I see. You rode that wave down the canyon and down the river down to Teton then?

DG: Yes. It was about three miles.

AA: Okay. Can you describe how you felt as you went down the canyon that log?

DG: I just figured it was all over with. First I started cussing, then I decided that wasn't doing any good, so I started praying.

AA: Were you frightened?

DG: Yes, I was scared. I tried not to panic because I knew if I panicked it would be all over, so I just took whatever came. It was really rough not to go into the water about 20 feet or so, every time I went down, I didn't plan on ever coming back up.

AA: What happened to your companion?

DG: He drowned. They found him two days later after the flood. He was about a quarter of a mile from where they found me.

AA: Downstream from where they found you?

DG: No, just about north, so we were about the same distance.

AA: You say you saw two houses wiped out on your way down the canyon. Do you know whose houses they were?

DG: One was Keith Tucker's, it's still standing, but I'd seen it get hit.

AA: Do you know of a Ross Reynolds from St. Anthony?

DG: Not very good, I know his son pretty good.

AA: Was his name Brad?

DG: Brad, yes.

AA: Did you know that they were on the river fishing that day, Mrs. Reynolds and her boy, it may have been Brad?

DG: Yes, Brad was there.

AA: And his wife and two friends from St. Anthony. Did you know that they were up there that day?

DG: No.

AA: You didn't see them?

DG: No. We were down further than they were, I think.

AA: So you didn't know where they lived in the canyon?

DG: I knew where they lived, I wasn't at their place.

AA: I see. You didn't see their place then?

DG: No, we were down below that.

AA: Okay. Did you have any idea when you looked up and saw that water coming towards you, what had happened, why that water was in the canyon?

DG: No. Well, me and my foreman, I worked at a sawmill before the flood, and me and my foreman was talking about the Teton River a week before that, and he was saying something about they was going to open up more water into the Teton River, let more out of the dam, and I just thought they messed up pretty bad. I thought that was what they'd done, that they'd just messed up.

AA: You didn't think that the dam had broken though?

DG: No, I didn't hear that the dam broke until we were in Idaho Falls Hospital and I couldn't believe it when they told me that the dam had broken. I thought, "How'd I make it?" It was kind of strange.

AA: Do you have any idea where you were in relation to the water that broke through, or were you in the water after it broke through after the first wave? Do you have any idea of where you were?

DG: My guess is I was in what came through first.

AA: The water was pretty well tearing up the canyon?

DG: Where I was at it just started coming into the valley. I remember I was right in front of the wave, I could see it grow, the trees coming up, that I'd go right through them and there would be nothing left. Sometimes it really scared me. Some of the logs I was on, they'd get caught on a tree, sit there and stop for a couple of minutes, nearly five minutes, just sit in one place. And you see water tearing up everything all over. The water would raise and then we'd go down the river again. I was climbing over the logs quite a bit, trying to get to the shore.

- That tree that I was in, it was only twenty or thirty feet from the bank. If I wouldn't have been hurt, after all the logs went by, I could have swam out.
- AA: So you really didn't know very much about what was going on after you were hurt?
- DG: No.
- AA: You do remember that Craig Hawes came out and rescued you from the tree?
- DG: Yes. I started yelling, I guess I gained consciousness or something, I don't know. I think I was in shock really bad and I think I went out of it for a while. I woke up, it was getting really late, so I started yelling. I couldn't see anything, I was scared. Luckily, there was a bunch of people over on the hill there that were on that and they could hear me. So they brought a boat out.
- AA: And they took you directly to the hospital, I guess?
- DG: No, they took me by helicopter, and that helicopter flew me to St. Anthony, and they said they couldn't do nothing to me at St. Anthony so they put me in another helicopter and flew me to Idaho Falls.
- AA: Were you conscious while all of this was going on?
- DG: Yes, I was just laying there.
- AA: How long were you in the hospital, Daryl?
- DG: Ten days.
- AA: Where did you go after the hospital released you?
- DG: Came home and took it easy for a couple of months until I could go back to work.
- AA: Is your lung repaired now? Do you have the use of one lung or two lungs?
- DG: Two lungs I guess. Haven't had any problems with it since then.
- AA: How did you feel about the fact that the dam had broken when you learned in the hospital that it had broken?
- DG: How did I feel about it? I don't know. It shocked me because I didn't think it would ever break. Never even crossed my mind that it would break. Just shocked me.
- AA: When did you learn your friend was dead?

- DG: They found him on Monday, didn't they? It was probably Monday night or Tuesday. Mother didn't tell me. This other friend, well, there were four of us who'd always ran around together. There was David, Lyle Gardner, Kevin Johnson, and me. We ran around together all the time. And then Kevin, he came down there, he's the one that told me about David.
- AA: Who were your friends again?
- DG: There was Kevin Johnson and Lyle Gardner.
- AA: And Kevin was the one that told you?
- DG: Yes.
- AA: You say now that you don't want the dam rebuilt?
- DG: No.
- AA: Why?
- DG: 'Cause I don't think it would ever hold. I just couldn't ever go fishing near the Teton River. There is good fishing in it still, but if they rebuilt it I'll never go fish in it again.
- AA: Do you go down there now?
- DG: Yes.
- AA: Does it bother you to go down there?
- DG: A little bit, not as much as it did last year. Went down there last summer after the flood, kind of gave me a creepy feeling. It is not that bad now. Guess time picks up. Still, if they ever build it, I'll never go fishing there again.
- AA: I'm just curious, Daryl, you made a statement that was humorous and yet I want to know how you feel about it really. You said that first you cussed, then you decided that wasn't doing any good, so you started to pray. Do you feel like your prayer helped you?
- DG: I don't know for sure. I was cussing at the reclamation guys, I just thought that they had opened up too much water.
- AA: I see.

- DG: I prayed ever since I was a little kid, and it really hadn't ever done anything, you know. This wasn't just praying, it was deep down praying. I don't know if it helped or not, but I know it didn't hurt.
- AA: How did your friends treat you after you were so that you could visit with them, get around a little bit?
- DG: They kind of showed me off a little bit, you know.
- AA: Did that bother you?
- DG: Sort of. We'd go some place and somebody would be talking about the flood, you know, and they'd say, "Hey, this guy here rode down the flood," you know. I'd have to talk about it.
- AA: Were you ever interviewed by anyone who was writing a book or an article?
- DG: Yeah, I've been interviewed for a whole bunch of articles. This one guy was going to write a book but I never heard anything since.
- AA: Does it bother you to be interviewed about your experience?
- DG: No, not really. I have a hard time finding things to say.
- AA: To express the feelings that you had that day?
- DG: Yes.
- AA: Do you have any nightmares?
- DG: Yeah, last summer I couldn't hardly sleep at all, I'd wake up in the middle of the night, it wasn't just nightmares about the flood, it was all kinds of strange things.
- AA: That you hadn't had before?
- DG: Yeah. Getting shot and all, just weird things. A lot of it about David. Lot of it was about the flood.
- AA: Have these started to leave now?
- DG: Yeah. Once in a while when I get depressed I'll start thinking about it. It's not too bad now. Not too often.
- AA: Do you have any ill feelings toward the Bureau of Reclamation for the way the dam was designed and built?

DG: I heard they took some shortcuts on it. I was talking to somebody, can't remember who, said that all dams are supposed to have detectors in them, can tell when they're starting to leak. I guess the Teton didn't have that. And then, there was quite a few things that they didn't do. And that kind of makes me mad. Soon as they knew it was leaking, I heard that the day before they knew it was leaking, I don't know why in the hell they even let anyone go on the river. I don't think that would put everyone to panic, but, you know, "Don't go fishing on the river."

AA: Do you think that airplane that flew over while you were fishing in the river was trying to warn you that there was a leak in the dam and you ought to leave the canyon?

DG: Yeah, I'm pretty sure. I talked to a lady in the hospital, somehow or other the guy flying his plane, he said that's what he was doing. He wasn't anybody from reclamation, he was just a private flyer. That's another thing that makes me mad is that they did know that it was leaking, why didn't they bring a helicopter down the river, you know, to pick up people that was fishing? They screwed up bad, as I think.

AA: Before we end the interview, Daryl, I just want to clear up one more point. About how many miles did you ride that wave of water down the river? Can you estimate that for me?

DG: I'd say two to three miles.

AA: Did it seem like you were moving along at a pretty good clip?

DG: Yeah, I wasn't in the water that long, it wasn't more than 45 minutes, I don't think.

AA: That you were in the water?

DG: Yeah, seemed like forever but it wasn't.

AA: I want to thank you for the time you've made available and for the interview. Is there anything that we've left out that you'd like to add, that you can think of?

DG: No, nothing that I can think of.

AA: Thank you, Mr. Grigg.