Lora Hadlock Holman – Life During the Teton Flood

By Lora Hadlock Holman

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Box 6 Folder 36

Oral Interview conducted by Mary Ann Beck

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Brigham Young University – Idaho
B: Mrs. Holman, where were you born?

H: I was born in Vernal, Utah in 1916.

B: How long have you lived in Rexburg?

H: We’ve lived in Rexburg about 27 years, prior to that we lived in Sugar City.

B: Would you spell you name please?


B: How old are you?

H: I am sixty-one years old.

B: Do you have a family?

H: Yes, my husband and I have six children.

B: How many were living with you in your home at the time of the flood?

H: Just the one daughter that’s twenty years old. Our youngest son was away to school.

B: What was your address at the time of the flood?

H: 322 West 4th South here in Rexburg.

B: What is your present address?

H: We’re back in our home at 322 West 4th South.

B: What do you do for a living?

H: I’m a registered nurse and I am still active.

B: How long have you lived in this area?

H: My folks moved to this area about forty-four years ago.

B: Did you own your own home?

H: Yes, we owned our home.

B: Did you support or oppose the construction of the Teton Dam?
H: Well, I was in favor of the construction of the Teton Dam. I thought it would be a great asset to our farming community and for the recreation and we did have that spring runoff every spring and it seemed like it was a waste of water and energy. If we could conserve it, it would be a good idea.

B: Did you or any member of your family have a premonition of the Teton disaster?

H: Well, yes, I could say that I did. We were out of town when the dam broke. We had gone to Salt Lake Friday and the dam broke on Saturday and it seemed that as I was getting ready to go to Salt Lake for some reason I could think of all the things that I should take with me. I don’t know why I felt like that I may have some trouble. It seemed like it would be a fire that would be the disaster or a car accident. I never dreamed of a flood. But I did feel like that something would happen before we got home.

B: What was your first reaction when you heard the dam had failed?

H: Well, like I say, we were in Salt Lake at my daughter’s and my son just happened to go out to his car and turn on the ignition to move his car and he heard the news over the radio and as soon as we heard that the Teton Dam had broken we knew that we would be affected, and greatly affected because of the tremendous amount of water that the dam did hold and the terrain of the land. Yes, we knew that we would be in the line of the flood.

B: In vacating the area where you lived, tell what happened to you and your family?

H: Well, we didn’t get here to vacate before the flood but immediately after hearing about the failure of the dam we started for home which was about 1:00 and we heard the news all the way home. The closer we got the worse it sounded. But we only wished that we had been here to help vacate and to help others vacate. Of course, we knew that there wasn’t much time for anyone to do anything but we can think of a lot of things that we would have done if we had been here.

B: Did you have any unusual experiences connected with the flood?

H: Not especially, no. The only experiences were just hang in there everyone and endure to the end till we got it cleaned up.

B: Where did you and your family stay during the first two or three days after the flood?

H: As we came from Salt Lake we were stopped in Idaho Falls and weren’t allowed to go beyond that point so we decided to go around by Ririe. Here we secured food and bedding and supplies in case that we weren’t able to find a place to sleep we could sleep in our pickup. We got within about two blocks of our home and as we stopped on the hill a canoe had washed up to the edge of the waters and my husband got in the canoe and rowed to our home in the rowboat and got the keys to the Health Center where I was employed there at Ricks College. We went to the Health Center. My son and my
daughter and I stayed at the Health Center that night. There we had a refrigerator and a hotplate to do our cooking. My husband came back and stayed in the home that night; he rode back in the rowboat and stayed in the upstairs. He was afraid of looting. For two nights we stayed in the Health Center and he stayed in the home.

B: How long after the flood were you able to return to your property and home?

H: Well, where we were just on the edge of the flood, we were able to return and stay after two days. And we stayed in our home after the first two days.

B: How did you get there and what was your first reaction when you viewed the destruction of your home?

H: Well, as I say, when we came from Salt Lake and came up over the Rexburg hill by way of Ririe, I shall never forget that sight as I looked out over the valley from the top of College Hill. There was water was far as we could see, one huge lake as far as we could see on the north and to the west. It was really a depressing sight to see all that water and all the destruction. My first reaction was, well, I was stunned and I knew that all the homes in Sugar City, we could see that they were destroyed. But the first thing I thought is we’ve got to get started.

B: What was the damage you suffered as a result of the flood? What was the most cherished item you lost in the flood?

H: Our home, the way it was situated, the flood hit us from the north and the east. Our basement windows were on the north and the east and we had left them ajar for circulation. As we go downstairs we don’t have a door, we just have a gate to the stairway. So as the flood came in these windows which were easily opened and it wouldn’t have taken much to break them out, there was nothing to hold the water form coming up on the main floor and it churned the basement extensively. There was hardly a thing that was recognizable in the basement. There was 31 inches on the main floor. My cherished things that I can think of that I lost were my genealogy and my pictures. I’ve always been a person to be very sentimental and I’ve had a lot of things from time to time that I have saved as mementos. The one thing I was glad for is our upstairs and my cedar chest was upstairs. We had a lot of bedding upstairs and a lot of my keepsakes. But my genealogy I had spread out in boxes neatly under my bed and was going to arrange them in my Book of Remembrance during the summer. But they were completely destroyed and my treasured pictures. I think that was the loss that I could say of the dam waters destruction.

B: How did you go about cleaning up your property and home?

H: As we left Salt Lake my daughter and son-in-law said, “We will come immediately.” But we told them not to come until they had heard from us. Of course, all the communications in Rexburg were down. There was no way of communicating with them, so we couldn’t call them back. But by the next morning we were able to get out
and go to Rigby and get a call into them. They were all ready to come. Neighbors had brought about a hundred gallons of water. They dipped into their food supply and had filled my son-in-law’s camper, and they were on their way early Sunday morning. My son came from Ponds with a pump from the fire truck at the Ranger Station. A son came from Twin Falls. Our children were all with us and we began working Sunday morning. I shall never forget the seat pouring from their faces as they rushed around. Most of our work was through our families. My husband’s family came from Salt Lake and Orem and my sister and her husband came from Idaho Falls. They stood by our side for about two weeks. We did get some good help from the church members that came in to assist us but we felt that there was many that needed help form the church more than we did, but they were willing to help us and they came in by busloads.

B: What were some of the problems with which you were confronted that gave you the most frustration?

H: Well, I hate to say it but it was the government. They didn’t seem to be well organized. They repeated what they did instead of having it organized so that we’d know what we were doing. We would just get things settled with one group of men when the next ones would come and repeat the same thing until we felt like the frustration was worse than the flood itself.

B: Did you receive any help in cleaning up your property? If so, describe it.

H: Yes, as I have said, our family and the church members were very diligent to help us and our neighbors were very good. A neighbor’s son form Preston secured four conventional washing machines that they brought to our neighborhood and so we had a washing machine to rinse the mud as soon as we were able to get water.

B: Have you had any unusual experiences during the cleanup operation?

H: Well, one of the unusual things that first morning, Sunday morning, when we came back to the house to start cleaning, my son notice on the front a little plaque and it was plastered right face down on the cement porch. He picked it up and rubbed it off so that he could see what it was. It had floated own from Johnson’s City Drug and it said, “Hang in there.” I took it and polished it and put it on the mantel and it will always have a special place on our mantel.

B: Did you personally suffer any vandalism or other forms of lawlessness?

H: No, I can’t say that we did. I think we should really be thankful that the security officers and police forces were well organized in keeping looters out of the area and in patrolling the areas that vandalism wasn’t done. I thought they could be commended for their work in this area.

B: Did you receive any assistance form the LDS or other church groups immediately after the flood?
H: Yes, we did. My husband being Assistant High Priest Group Leader had this in charge and we live close to the church house, just the second house west of the Third Ward Church. The buses as they came into town came to the Third Ward Church where they were assigned and distributed to different areas. We did have several LDS workers help us.

B: How many weeks did the volunteers come in like that?

H: Well, I think they were coming in for almost a month into our area. We used them the first week but I think it was about a month and they would’ve come longer if we had needed them but be this time the people in the area had got things organized so that they didn’t need the outside help or didn’t feel like they should have them any longer.

B: Did you receive any assistance form the Red Cross or from any other private or independent organization?

H: Yes, about three weeks afterwards, the Church was so far ahead of the Red Cross, about three weeks after they brought us cleaning materials and they brought us linens and pots and pans and were willing to help us in any way. They even brought sandwiches and food if we needed it. But like I say, by this time we were pretty well organized and going on our own.

B: What government agency did you deal with during the recovery operation?

H: Well, HUD was the main government agency that we came in contact with. They helped us with our housing and made sure that we were comfortable and didn’t need a trailer and they tried to help us get things back into place. But we weren’t very satisfied with the work they did. Everything that they did we had to do over again so we were disappointed with the work that they did on the basement and replacing the furnace, outlets and things like that. We were really disappointed. Evidently they (HUD) just take any help that they can get from back east and they don’t have time to screen them and they wouldn’t accept local help.

B: Did you have any dealings with the county and state authorities and law enforcement officers during the flood?

H: Not anything personal, no. Just as on general, just overall. We didn’t have anything special.

B: Did they have roadblocks in Idaho Falls when you tried to come home?

H: Yes, at Idaho Falls. We tried to get to Rigby to my husband’s sister’s but Idaho Falls. We tried to get to Rigby to my husband’s sister’s but Idaho Falls was as far as we could get by four that afternoon when we got in Idaho Falls.
B: And where did you stay down there? You went through Ririe?

H: Yes, we came on, we came back through Ririe and over Heise Bridge, then up over the dry farms. We followed a Cream Top dairy truck up over the dry farms and into the college.

B: Do you feel that any assistants in recovery operations took advantage of you or the government, especially in getting a lot of money without really earning it?

H: Well, after talking to some of the people I feel that some people have taken advantage of them. Not too many, but I feel like that there are a few that have taken advantage of the government. They felt like this happened to us and we’re gonna get all we can out of it.

B: Without divulging names, do you know of anyone who filed false flood claims?

H: Not false flood claims but exaggerated losses.

B: Do you feel that the flood was divine punishment or a man-made disaster?

H: Well, I think, the way I feel, I feel that it was to be. I think the Lord brought this on and I feel like that it was a cleansing just like the time of Noah and the ark. I feel that it was a reason to make us more humble and appreciate the things that we have and forget the worldly things around us. It seems strange that He should punish a large group but inasmuch that He planned it the time of the day that it happened, it saved many lives and being on Saturday, I’m sure more people were home with their families or the families were more together, either out of town or together if it’d been a weekday or during the night. I feel like that this was meant to be, that we were destined for this regardless of how the dam was built. It’s a way of cleansing this area that we need to be awakened and it’s only a minor bit of what’s to come and I’m sure that the way the church has things planned that this just a review of how we should act in the time of disaster and to impress on us that we’ve got to be ready for disaster because it definitely is coming.

B: In other words, you think this was a dry run?

H: Yes, this is, this what I would call it. Just like a fire drill. You can’t say a mock drill because it was really actual but we have many tribulations yet to come this is just a minor. So we should heed the President of the Church and his apostles and be ready for this. They have warned us about our food supply and to get our lives in order. They have warned us and this is just to prove that it is coming and that we can do it if we will heed their warnings.

B: Do you feel that the dam should be rebuilt? If so, should it be rebuilt in the same place?
H: Well, yes, I feel that it should be rebuilt. Now there’s only one place to build it to conserve this Teton runoff. Whether they should build it further back up the canyon, I just don’t understand the terrain of the Teton country. But I don’t know whether it should be an earth filled or not. This is what I question; whether the earth filled construction was the part that was wrong? But I am in favor of having it rebuilt.

B: How has the Teton disaster changed your life?

H: In many ways. The compassion and love that each one had for each other. The tears that we had were tears of joy and that no further death or injuries was sustained and the compassion of love that we have for each other. Little did we realize how much we did think of each other until a time like this when we worried about each other and their and what was becoming of them and how they were getting along and what their needs and their demands and to help them.

B: Was Third Ward organized?

H: Very well. Third Ward was organized really well. I know the bishop called a meeting and he told us he wanted us to put in a full day and not overdo ourselves and to eat properly and the Lord would sustain us with health and strength. I remember one night as I was washing at 10:00 out on the patio running clothes through the cold water to rinse them, my husband came out and he told me that he was gonna report me to the bishop because I was working too long and we laughed about that. But we were, Third Ward was very well organized, I feel.

B: How did the BOR treat you?

H: Well, we were satisfied with what the BOR did for us. The only way we were disappointed is that we handed in just man hours for my husband and we felt like we were very conservative on the time that we handed in for him and they cut down a third on his hours. We didn’t hand in anybody else’s hours so we felt like that they really cut us down on our man hours for my husband that worked eighteen hours a day and he only put in eight hours and $5.00 an hour and they cut him down to $3.00 an hour and he was the only one that claimed any time. We felt like that we weren’t treated very well on it, on our labor.

B: But were you satisfied with your claim?

H: We were satisfied. We felt like we missed a lot of things that we didn’t submit but again we felt like that if we could get back to where we were on June the 5th, 1976, we would be happy and we feel like that they were fair with us.

B: Did you write any stories or poems about the flood?

H: Yes, I submitted an article to That Day in June of my feelings.
B: Is that a book?

H: Yes, it’s a book that was compiled by some ladies and the Ricks College Press edited it.

B: Would you like to tell us about the article?

H: My article was much the same as I’ve told you, that we were in Salt Lake and my feelings of when I first heard of the dam. My daughter was giving me a permanent at the time and I just pulled the curlers out and wrapped it in a towel and started for home. I’ll never forget how concerned I was about the Afro hairdo that I had for a couple of days after I got home. My husband was kinda disgusted with me because I wanted to get it wrapped up. I felt like that if I could just get my hair in curlers and a scarf around it that I could go at it. So without any electricity and I didn’t have any water, I remember going to the fridge that first morning and getting the melted ice cubes to roll my hair up and I could hardly see in the bathroom to put my hair up and the mud was so slick I was afraid to move for fear I’d fall down so that’s on of the things I remember. Then I remember the love for each other, our neighbors as they were working in the rain that first week. It rained that first week, even snowed that first Sunday. We had secured food form my sister in Idaho Falls. She’d brought vegetables and fruit. I had fixed a dinner and we were thankful we had the fireplace that we were able to light that as soon as there was no danger of the gas lines being broken. And we invited all our neighbors over an as I said in my book it was like cooking for the thresher in the olden days when we cooked in large amounts and we had creamed string beans and hot chocolate and toast. A sister-in-law had brought some cake. One of them mentioned that we’d been neighbors for 25 years but we’d never had the opportunity to eat together. This was truly a great experience. One of the little girls said, “I never did like green beans before but they taste might good today.”

B: Did you hear President Kimball when he was in Rexburg?

H: Yes. It was marvelous to have the Prophet come in the time of disaster and need.

B: How soon did the electricity come back and did you have telephone service after the flood?

H: I don’t recall. It must have been almost five days before the electricity came back on but we didn’t have telephone service for about four weeks. It came on sooner than it did to us. For some reason our wiring was out. But the electricity was on in about five days.

B: What do you think about the Appreciation Day that’s coming up this weekend?

H: I think it’s marvelous and I hope that people come back to this area and see how we have rebuilt and that they will feel like coming to our homes that they helped to sweat and slave to help us and were so concerned. I remember one morning; I think it was the Thursday after the flood, as I stood in front of my fireplace watching out of my window
about 6:30 in the morning, the cars coming in just bumper to bumper also buses. After
the tenth Cache Valley school bus came in I couldn’t help but start crying. I just thought
the love and compassion they have for us. And then just behind them I noticed Idaho
Falls Street Department sprinkling system. There were two of their big trucks and then
behind them, directly behind them City of Pocatello. I just couldn’t believe it had come
with their sprinklers to settle the dust in our area. It was just marvelous.

I would like to add too the college, they should be commended on their services
that they gave the flood victims and everyone involved. The Red Cross was there the day
after the flood and they were giving out their free coffee and they had clothes that they
were distributing to people that needed it. But Ricks College from the very beginning of
the flood, that very first warning, they were serving people, many hundreds into the
thousands each meal, and they had given them housing in the dormitories and tried to
make them as comfortable as they could. There was first aid that was available to them,
nurses and doctors worked around the clock to help them with illnesses. And they set up
in the Kirkham Auditorium a lovely store sort of like the Deseret Industry where people
could go and get clothes. Things were even sized and grouped and you could go in there
and pick out what you needed and you didn’t have to check with anyone. You just
walked in and tried on the clothes, put them in a bag, and walked out with thankfulness in
your heart.

Then there was the bishop’s storehouse. How wonderful! I know that about the
fourth day, of course the flood hit my main floor where it had destroyed everything below
countertop, so my flour and my sugar was all gone and I thought, “If I had some flour and
some sugar I think I could make some pancakes that might be filling.” So my husband
and I went up to the bishop’s storehouse and there we met many of our friends, rich and
poor alike, it wasn’t just the poor that they were helping. But we asked for a small sack
of flour, five pounds of flour, and five pounds of sugar probably, and it was such a
wonderful feeling. They just said, “Oh, here are some really good prunes. Why don’t
you take these prunes? They will give you a lot of strength. And this cheese is just
lovely. I’m going to put some cheese in your basket.” And it was just “Here, take this,
take this.” And it was just such a good feeling to know that you had been preparing for
this day. Your fast offerings and your tithing and you’re just giving of yourself. It was
coming back to you and you just thought, “Oh, I just want to keep giving to prepare for
this type of disaster.” So we finally run out of clothes and we went to the Relief Society
distribution center where we were issued a clean pair of garments and a clean pair of
stockings so that we could go to Sunday School when the Prophet was here and go to that
meeting with clean clothes. There we met everyone and they weren’t selfish. The people
that were there they didn’t want to take more than their allotment.

It wasn’t being allotted just to the church members either. There were many
people that weren’t church members. There was no discrimination; everyone was
welcome. At the Deseret Industry group which I guess they called this department they
had in Kirkham Ballroom we got boots so that we could weather the mud and shirts and
trousers that we either had to wrap around tighter or put elastics in to make them fit us
and coats and jackets because it was cold. But it was such a good feeling everyone had
for each other. “Here take this; here take this. You need this worse than I do, take this.
Be sure and be warm enough and be sure you have enough to eat.” And it was a
wonderful organization. I just can’t say that our church isn’t well organized and there just can’t be enough said about Ricks College.

B: Then there is no doubt in your mind that this is the true and living church?

H: There’s no doubt in my mind. And my testimony had grown so much this last year as I’ve seen people just buckle in there and not be down just like we’ve got to work harder. And the love for each other is so much greater. I’m sure this all was for a purpose. Not that we were bad people but I think it was just a practice run of what has got to, what is to come yet and that we have got to take the warnings of the Church leaders to do what they tell us to do and to live lives and prepare ourselves for what we have to face.

B: Did you think this dam disaster was a good missionary tool?

H: Yes, I do. It was an example to there other people not only the church members, but I heard the men from back East that came here to work on the dam disaster say that it was marvelous the way that people had buckled in. But we are pioneers. This is our pioneer blood. We have been taught this all our lives. We were ready for it where people of our church they had no idea how to help each other. There maybe I’m judging the people of the world wrong but I know this is what we have been taught all our lives is togetherness and compassion and love and faithfulness and giving of our tithes and our fast offerings and preparing ourselves for these latter days which we know are near.

The National Guard should also be commended for their part. As far as I’m concerned they did an outstanding job. As we returned to Rexburg and were close to our home we could see 4th South, the main street leading out of Rexburg, and the National Guard trucks were coming in and the water was almost three feet deep by that time on the highway. But they, their trucks were coming in and their jeeps and the city street plows were going up and down the highways to free the main roads of the debris. The National Guard helicopters were busy even that night of bringing in personnel to set up assistance to the victims and to bring supplies in. The helicopters the next day were just like flies; they were lighting on the hill there by the college. As one would take off another would be landing and all the time bringing in supplies and for several weeks afterwards they were taking out electric light poles to different areas and wires. You’d see a pole dangling from a helicopter and then soon you’d see wires floating through air electric line and they along with Utah Power and Light really did an outstanding job in getting the electricity back into the area again. The Utah Power and Light worked for two weeks with their crews and they worked fast and diligently every day. I remember the second week as they left town. They had finished their job sufficient enough to leave the area, a majority of the Utah Power and Light trucks. And as they left town they honked. There was about a hundred trucks as they left town and they honked on their way out and I felt within my heart a job well done and a thankfulness in my heart. If I could’ve told them how I felt I just felt like saying, “Thank you, you’ve done a marvelous job.” Along with the National Guard that worked around the clock, everyone was really on the job. Our beautiful valley is almost back to normal again. There’s a lot of work still to be done but it’s a beautiful place to live and I wouldn’t trade this valley for any place in the world and the friends that are here and the people and the spirit they have.
B: Thank you, Mrs. Holman.