The Teton Dam Disaster Collection

Mary L. Fredricksen – Life during the Teton Flood

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August 23, 1977

Box 6 Folder 12

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Transcript copied by Sarah McCorristin       June 2005

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MF: On the tragic morning of June 5th, I was watering the lawn and planning the tasks I would accomplish that day when my grand-daughter came and informed me the Teton Dam had broken and the water was headed for Wilford, Sugar City, and Rexburg. She had left the oldest little girl and a baby son at home and brought a small daughter and son with her when she came into Rexburg to do her weekend shopping. She started back home when the officers on the road block turned her back and wouldn’t let her go on to the farm. So she came to my house hunting her husband, who had the oldest boy with him. They came in a few minutes and informed us that we had less than an hour to get to higher ground.

We were told to go to the Manwaring building on campus. So we gathered together two or three blankets, three of four jugs of water and some food items out of the refrigerator, including milk, bread, butter, and cookies.

I never thought to get all of my insurance policies, the deed to the property, my diamond ring, or any other important papers. They didn’t seem significant at the time. After spending part of the afternoon watching the flood come in and hoping it wouldn’t reach my home, I was numb from shock and worn out. My grandson got housing for us in one of the college dorms and we stayed there for the night.

They had no idea where their two children were, but we prayed that they were safe somewhere.

The next day being Sunday, June 6th, was my wedding anniversary. We would have been married fifty-five years, had my husband lived.

My grand-daughter’s parents and her sister came up from Salt Lake and brought food for a nice Sunday dinner. She found out that afternoon that the neighbors had picked up the two children and taken them to Chester. They were brought back by helicopter. The baby was delighted at seeing his mother again. And the mother was more than relieved at having the two children back.

I went over and stayed with the Scott Nickell family to make room for the others at the dorm. The family numbered ten now.

The next morning, June 7th, Sister Nickell took me up to the dorm to see how the family was getting along. When we got back Sister Nickell spent the rest of the day washing clothes for her neighbors. When Brother Nickell came home that night we drove over to my house to see how really bad things were. The floors were covered with slime and muck. There must have been thirty inches of muddy water pass through my home. Everything was in a mess.

The next day, June 8th, my daughter, Thelma, and her two girls came down from Egin and took me over to the house. We worked for hours trying to clear things out of the front room and my bedroom. Brother Perkes took me over to the Field House to see about temporary housing.

The next day, June 9th, my daughter and the girls came back again to work at the house. I had to go to the Field House for a while, but when I got back, I decided to go home with them. June 10th the girls and I went back down again and worked at the house all day. Brother Hill and his boys came and helped and we got out another truck load. Mrs. Mason came up from Idaho Falls and took my drapes and curtains and all of my clothes to be dry cleaned. By the 12th a bridge had washed out on 88 so we had to go a long way around to get into Rexburg. But we still brought back more things out of my house. On Sunday the 13th I couldn’t go to church at Egin because I didn’t have any
clothes that were fit to wear. That afternoon we listened to an address by President Spencer W. Kimball from the Field House on campus. He gave us hope to carry on.

On Monday, June 14th, my daughter washed all day, cleaning up my quilts, blanket sheets, mattress pads, quilt tops, etc. My grand-daughter, Joyce, called me from Salt Lake to see if I had survived the flood. My son Glen also called me from Nyssa, Oregon.

This washing and cleaning went on every day for over two weeks, until things were pretty well cleaned up. I slept on the davenport in the living room and my possessions, such as clothes, bedding, and personal effects occupied one whole corner and part of another wall in the same room. It was sure an inconvenience for the whole family. I was sick for two or three days and that didn’t help matters either.

Every few days I would have one of the girls bring me over to Rexburg to pick up my mail to see about housing. But there just wasn’t a place to be had. Friends called me every few days to keep up my spirits and encourage me. On the 5th of July my granddaughter Joyce and her parents came to see me. And the morning of July 10th my sister and her husband called from Texas and offered to come up and help me repaper and paint the house on the inside. We didn’t know then that this would never be accomplished.

July 18th my daughter, Thelma, had a picnic lunch out on her front lawn for a large crowd. While we were eating a grandson came that I hadn’t seen in over four years. He never knew about his grandfather’s death until that day. The morning of July 20th I called my sister and told her not to plan on painting because my house might be condemned. I guess I’ll know before too long.

Sunday, July 25th, I attended my first sacrament meeting in my own ward in Rexburg since the flood. On Sunday, August 1st I also attended Sunday school and fast and testimony meeting at Rexburg. Monday, August 2nd, I signed up for a HUD trailer. That afternoon my brother and my sister’s husband loaded up everything out of my daughter’s front room and brought it over to Rexburg.

After eight weeks of sleeping on a davenport and without any privacy, at last I’ll have a good bed tonight.

August 10th they put a red number on my house, so I guess it’s officially condemned.