

The Teton Dam Disaster Collection

Myrtle W. Ard – Life during the
Teton Flood

By Myrtle W. Ard

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Box 5 Folder 7

Oral Interview conducted by Alyn B. Andrus

Transcript copied by Sarah McCorristin —April 2005

Brigham Young University – Idaho

Alyn B. Andrus: Mrs. Ard would you please spell your full name for me?

Myrtle W. Ard: Myrtle Westover Ard.

AA: And what is your birth date?

MA: December 19, 1899.

AA: Where were you born?

MA: Rexburg, Idaho.

AA: Do you have a family?

MA: I have nine children, fifty grandchildren, and fifty-eight great-grandchildren.

AA: Isn't that wonderful.

MA: It's kind of hard to keep track of them.

AA: So your children are all living outside the home, away from home?

MA: Yes.

AA: Were you alone at the time of the flood?

MA: Yes.

AA: What is your address?

MA: 127 East 1st South, Rexburg, Idaho.

AA: That was the address that you lived at when the flood came?

MA: Yes.

AA: How long have you lived in Rexburg area, Mrs. Ard?

MA: I moved here December 1, 1969.

AA: Where did you move from?

MA: My home was in Driggs, Idaho for thirty years, and then I went to Layton, Utah, and took care of old ladies for a couple of years.

AA: When the flood came did you own your own home?

MA: Yes.

AA: Would you mind explaining your feelings about the construction of the Teton Dam, did you oppose it or support it?

MA: I supported it. We needed it definitely, but if it would have been built right, we definitely needed it, to bank up the supply of surplus water for times when we needed it.

AA: Did you live in Rexburg any time when the Teton River flooded over?

MA: No.

AA: This was the only flood that you have known anything about then?

MA: Well, I knew there was one a few years ago. We came down to Rexburg and my daughter and her husband took us around to see how it was south of town, but we've never had any problems ourselves.

AA: I see. Now Mrs. Ard, did you have a premonition of the Teton Disaster?

MA: Definitely not. I was sitting here on the couch crocheting and they said there's a crack in the dam at 11:30 in the morning the 6th of June or 5th...

AA: The 5th.

MA: 5th and I put my crocheting up in the plastic bag on the couch and I didn't know what to do. And then my granddaughter came and got me to go up on the hill. And we got in Terri's cars and went up to Nadean's, my daughter, home.

AA: What was your granddaughters name?

MA: Terri Ard Orr.

AA: Terri Ard Orr?

MA: Yes. Don and Naidas oldest girl.

AA: You went to your daughter's place?

MA: Yes, Naden Wilding.

AA: And she lives here on the hill in Rexburg?

MA: Yes.

AA: Is that where you spent that Saturday?

MA: No, my oldest daughter, Wanda Jeppsen came and got me and Mrs. Peterson and took us up to the Manwaring Center. I spent Saturday at the Manwaring Center. Scott Nickell took me to their home Saturday night.

AA: Now at the Manwaring Center, how did you spend the day?

MA: Just sitting around, visiting and listening.

AA: Did you see the flood water coming?

MA: Yes, we could see when they got to Rexburg. If they would have told us that we have, of course they didn't know, if we would have known we had till two o'clock, I could have taken a lot of things upstairs, but when you are shocked you don't know what to do.

AA: When you heard over the radio that there was a crack in the dam, what did you think?

MA: I thought it will be going soon.

AA: So there was no doubt in your mind that we would have water in Rexburg?

MA: No, I knew that it was bound to hit.

AA: I see, did you have any idea how deep the water might get here?

MA: Oh no.

AA: Did you think that it might get to your house?

MA: Well, you never know. The warning was to get out and turn the power off. You just don't know, but it did get about two feet deep.

AA: How long after you heard that the dam was breaking did your granddaughter come along and....

MA: I don't think it was over thirty minutes before she came after me.

AA: So you didn't have a chance to save anything in your house?

MA: No.

AA: So when you left the house you left in just as it was as you were living in it?

MA: Just as it was when I was living in it. That's why I say if we would have known there's a lot of things that we could have moved upstairs. But I saved most all of my furniture and clothing.

AA: When you saw the flood coming, describe what it looked like?

MA: Well, it was just a big sheet of water; we could see it as it came to... Then there was explosions all along.... And the smoke as far as you could see, where it was coming towards town.

AA: Did the coming of the flood frighten you?

MA: Well, it was kind of sickening. It just made you wonder what it might do if we would have had a home of anything left.

AA: When you saw the flood coming to Rexburg, did you now then that it was going to flood your house?

MA: No, we couldn't tell what it might do.

AA: How soon after the flood were you able to come back to the house?

MA: Well, I stayed with Scott Nickell that night. And that evening we walked down as far down to the street as we could go get through water, we walked down to Squires, and the water was up to... They had a boat out here on the water there by Brother Prows' home and we could come down the street.

AA: You were not able to see inside the house that night?

MA: Oh no. The mud was shoe top deep. You couldn't walk anywhere, you would just sink in and slip all around. I don't think I got in the house- I can't remember- I think we came as far as we could Saturday evening, but the mud was so deep you couldn't walk anywhere, and I came Monday morning. I stayed with brother Chapman, yes, we ere down here Sunday afternoon. Brother Chapman came down and he insisted I stay up there with them.

AA: So you didn't see inside your house until Monday morning?

MA: Yes, Brother Chapman was down here scooping the mud out. I got the key and got the door opened, and we worked from then on for about a month, well all summer in fact. I stayed with Brother and Sister Chapman Sunday night. Monday we worked in the house trying to get the mud out Tuesday night.

AA: When you saw inside your house, what did it look like?

MA: Mostly mud. The water had receded, but there was four or five inches of mud all over the carpet and everything, but all you could see was mud. The basement was full of water, straw and debris of all kinds.

AA: Did it look discouraging?

MA: I told Sister Chapman, you just wanted to sit down and bawl, that's what it made you feel like. You tried so hard to fix things up and then to see that, but he (Brother Chapman) was so good. He just worked all the time and Nadean, my daughter, came down and my daughter from Wellsville, Anona and Ray Hansen.

AA: And she helped too?

MA: They and their son, they stayed here for two weeks helping me and Wanda, my oldest daughter. They had eight geet go through their [home]. Donald he had an awful mess. He tried to save his home so they tried to help both of them.

AA: Now Donald is your boy?

MA: Yes.

AA: The store that you talk about would be his glass business?

MA: Yes, his glass store and paint store.

AA: So he wasn't able to give you too much help was help was he?

MA: Oh he couldn't, he was tied up at home.

AA: Describe the damage that you suffered in your home Mrs. Ard

MA: Well, we had to take the furniture out on the sidewalk out here on the driveway. I don't think we moved the buffet, the table, or the couch, they were so heavy, but we put the desk and everything else out. The TV was ruined, we took it out. I had a hideaway bed here, was sitting out across the ways in my living room, but it wasn't tipped over, my deep freeze was tipped over on the side, but Brother Chapman took it outside and we got it all cleaned out, and I saved almost all my fruit. I didn't save the meat or the vegetables, couldn't save that. But I saved almost all my jams. And, of course, the desk drawer we put the desk and the bottom drawers and the desk drawers and buffet and everything. All had to be changed. But is saved all my furniture except the TV, but this was all in pieces. But my daughter and her husband from Wellsville run up upholstery shop, and they took it down there and upholstered it for me, and fixed that up. I had to get a new bed too. Brother Grant was up to the storehouse when I went after that, they wasn't going to let me have it, but Brother Grant was there in the store and he said you bet your life that she can have it. So I got it back, a new bed from box spring and mattress.

AA: Do you have a basement under your house?

MA: Just a small basement, just a furnace and hot water tank and few cupboards down there.

AA: Were your furnace and hot water tank damaged beyond repair?

MA: Yes, we had to get new ones.

AA: Did you receive any help from the volunteers who came into Rexburg?

MA: Oh yes, Lynn Smith sent those groups with the Red Cross, Interfaith they came and helped. And there was some bishops from Ogden and Brigham and their families and there was quite a few people that came from Utah and around. These Interfaith people, I think she said were from Oklahoma. The Chester Hill family were awful good to help me.

AA: Did you have to get new carpeting?

MA: Oh yes. We just rolled this up. This had been down, this piece that was down here was here when I bought the home and it just come up in strips and that other one was practically new, but it was so heavy with mud that you was lucky to get it out the door. All my crocheted scatter rugs went out with the mud.

AA: Now I noticed that your walls are papered, did you have to repaper your walls?

MA: Yes, it was wet two feet up on the walls. That wall there, my son and his wife from Kearns, Utah, came on the 24 of July a year ago and helped me paper these two rooms.

AA: Did you have to break into the walls in order to get the mud out inside the walls?

MA: No, it was pretty good except back in my clothes closet. I had to tear all the plastering off and this wall here back of the buffet; there was about five feet high that I chipped out. The paper was loose, and when we pulled the paper the plaster came right off. So I took a hammer and a screwdriver and chiseled it out so it would be square. Then I tried to get a piece of sheetrock down here and they would tell me everyday none was in. So my nephew from Washington, Dale Mortinsen, came by and he was going to see that I had help. He went down to the lumber yard and there was a load of sheetrock that just pulled in, when he got there and he asked them how long it would be before they could deliver it, a sheet up here, only needed one sheet. They said that they possibly couldn't do it for two weeks. I had a construction guy look at it and he said that he wouldn't touch it under 200 dollars. Well I put \$50 in on my claim, I knew that I could fix it for 50 dollars myself. So Dale got me my sheetrock and brought it out and we cut it out in the sidewalk to fit around the window so what we needed it here and I had some tape and we taped it and I taped and nailed it in place myself, no help, you got to do it yourself. There wasn't a soul that could help me, so I did it myself. But the bathroom, it

seemed like the water when it could come up in the bathroom and kitchen up to the two feet, I painted and painted and it would just peel off like the water had dried so that it would peel off in big flakes no matter how many times, it would just do the same. So I went down to Donald's and he gave me a little can of something and I painted that on ether, you can't hardly washed off your fingers even and it held. I got some paint and painted it. But there was just something in the flood water, and it was the sae on the basement way, I tried to paint it with roller and the old paint would just stick to the roller. It just wouldn't stay till I got some more of that stuff and painted the whole wall with that so that I could paint it.

AA: Are you comfortable in your house now?

MA: Oh yes, I'm so thankful that I saved my home. It's not fancy but I'm not either. It's just a home.

AA: Has your home suffered any structural damage as a result of the flood?

MA: Well, it would leak in my basement. Course these people next door, they built theirs that much higher and that made mine lower so that a lot, I think, the water was running into the basement. So I had to reopen my claim to get the cracks fixed so the water wouldn't come in the basement. There was cracks fixed so the water wouldn't come in the basement. There was cracks all around the foundation. And I got that all fixed up and they put in rain pipes and window wells.

AA: How did you get along with the government in settling your claim?

MA: Well, if I would have known how it's done, I may have missed the first claim turned in. I went down to Donald's store, I don't remember what they offered me, they cut me way down like they offered me 3500 dollars to fix my home when I turned in my first claim. I couldn't begin to. But I put it in for \$6000, but I hadn't made the cost equal to what I've done through. I can see where I made the mistake afterwards. So I went down there with Terri, Donald's girl went with me and we went out to claims department and that claims department man he worked with the claims, he worked right with me and helped me fill it up to the \$6000. I lost that much definitely. I may have to get a new washer, I don't know, it's still running and my deep freeze still runs, but we weren't sure if it would or not. This here coming loose after those cracks showed up and we saw the water running right into the basement.

AA: Now you have solved that problem?

MA: Yes. I had to reopen my claim. They let me have 500 dollars for what it had cost, but it can't be done, but the claim said no. But this constructor out with this Bonneville Construction, he came up here and run an estimate of what needed done and what it would cost. He figured 1650 dollars was the cheapest he could do it for. They said they would give me \$900 and they finally raised it to one hundred dollars.

AA: So your claim has all been processed?

MA: Yes.

AA: And you have received the money?

MA: Yes, and spent it. It cost me \$500 besides what BOR would give me.

AA: And you've spent it. Did you deal with any other government agencies besides the Bureau of Reclamation?

MA: No.

AA: You didn't deal with Housing and Urban Development?

MA: Well, HUD promised to fix this wall, and he was supposed to give us the stove and fridge, but it ended up and we had to pay for it. But the bishop helped me out on that, enough to pay for the fridge and the stove.

AA: How was your health been since the flood Mrs. Ard?

MA: Well, I think it's affected it to a certain extent. I don't know, you just feel tired or something. This second claim that helped discourage a person, but I'm just so happy I saved my home. Otherwise, I would be living in a HUD trailer. I think they didn't handle the claims right. I think some got ten times more than they should have, and others get by on what they will give you.

AA: Do you feel that some people got far less than they needed?

MA: Or more than what they needed. Oh, I know I could have used a little more but then I was happy I got what I did.

AA: Do you feel that some people who assisted in cleaning up, like contractors and people who sold materials that were needed after the flood; do you feel that these people took advantage of the government and the people here, especially in getting a lot of money without really earning it?

MA: Oh, I'm not sure about that because I didn't have any hired help here. All I had was the ones that donated. I think some of the families that helped but the Hills are gone and I know them well enough they wouldn't have taken a cent, Brother Chapman wouldn't take anything. I tried to pay him. At times I know there was different ones, warned against that because they were taking people, but I never had any experience with it.

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

MA: Well, I think it is a man-made disaster. But I think it did a lot of good in a lot of ways. The business and everything is improved, everything is better off than it was before the flood. All the homes and everything is better off than they were before the flood. I think it made people closer to one another. I think it's just wonderful, our Rexburg has bounced back. It just didn't look possible. Donald had some of those pictures that was taken by the helicopters, and he showed them to us this summer. It just don't seem possible that the condition things were in then, but it came out as good as it has. Well I think it was for a purpose. I definitely do. But how fortunate we are there wasn't anymore lives lost than there was. Look at that flood they had in California from the rain. I think they said last night six foot of water. I tell you that could cause a lot of damage. Course that would be coming straight down and this come with a force and took everything in front of it. That's the thing.

AA: Do you feel that God perhaps intervened to save lives?

MA: OH, I'm sure He did. Otherwise, what would have happened if it would have been at night, instead of daytime. No, I think we were blessed in so many ways. Cause if it would have been at night, it would have just been sad that's all. Them little kids running around without any clothes on up at the Manwaring Center. Just a shirt and a diaper, nothing else to their name except what they had on. I think it was terrible, and then to see some of them and hoarded out of the church welfare and stuff that didn't need it, that's just sickened me. I think that's rotten.

AA: Did you see a lot of that?

MA: My neighbors over here, I'm not supposed to talk. It just burn me up, they didn't get anymore water upstairs and they really done their home inside and out, and built on and I don't think it's alright, but seeing come home with new stuff and their's laying out here in the mud, I don't know. Everybody has their own notion. I guess there's a lot of that done.

AA: Mrs. Ard, do you feel that the Teton Dam should be rebuilt?

MA: Well, yes. We need it, if it can be done right. I do think we need it, but people would be awful scared to have it flood again. Cause we don't want to go through another flood. I think it's caused a lot of the deaths and the heart conditions. I feel sorry for people for everything that they have worked for all their lives and their home and things they can't replace. I think that's sad. I didn't have much to loose, but I was just fortunate I was able to come out as I did. That's one time I 'm glad I didn't have much, because I didn't have much to loose.

AA: Besides what you have said, how do you think that Teton Disaster has changed your life and the life of the community?

MA: Well, I don't think it's hurt the life of the community any, as I can see. I think it's affected our lives to a certain extent. We worked so hard to clean that mud out and it was a worry. You felt pretty discouraged sometimes, you just felt like you weren't getting anywhere. It had cost so much to get back to livable again. I felt like before I could have got by and there's a lot of people could have got by with just what they had for as long as they had to lie, but with this coming, you just had to do something else about it.

AA: Well, Mrs. Ard I want to thank you for the time that you have given for the interview and as I explained to you before the interview started, copies will be sent to the Utah State University Library, Ricks College Library and to the Library of the Historical Society in Boise, and you will receive a copy for your own personal use. Thank you very much.

MA: You're welcome.