

The Teton Dam Disaster Collection

Ruth Barrus— Life during the Teton Flood

By Ruth Barrus

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Box 5 Folder 13

Oral Interview conducted by Ramon Widdison

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Brigham Young University – Idaho

Ramon Widdison: Ruth, would you please spell your name?

Ruth Barrus: Ruth Barrus. My husband is C. LaMar Barrus. I will be 65 the 15th of this month.

RW: Do you have a family? How many were living in your home at the time of the flood?

RB: We do have a family, but they are all married. All of them were not affected by the flood. We have a son in St. Paul, a daughter in Ohio, and our son, LaMar Jr., lives on the hill in Rexburg. They were not affected. However, we were bringing back, on the day of the flood, two of our grandsons to stay with us during this summer. They like to come out to grandpa's farm and work on the farm during the summer.

Our address at the time of the flood was 202 South Teton and it is our present address now. After removal of our home and cleaning up the ground and area, we have built a new home on this same site. Our address is still 202 South Teton, Sugar City, Idaho.

I retired this year from Ricks College. I've been a teacher for 42 years in music and humanities. I will continue to work over there. I'm on a special project, a grant from the Humanities Association to help the college with a project called "The Musical Heritage of the Upper Snake River Valley and Its Effect on Human Lives." I'll be working on this project for another year so I'll still be going over to the college this next year.

I've lived in this area for all my married life, 43 years. I was also here two years while I was going to Ricks College. My husband has lived in this area since he was nine years of age. It's home to both of us.

We do own our own home. We have a farm east and south of Sugar City that was devastated by the flood. We owned it also.

We both supported the construction of the Teton Dam for two reasons. First of all, we need water for irrigation. We're totally dependant upon irrigation for the maturing of our crops and the natural flow we can't depend on. We do not have a big enough resource to depend on so we favored the construction of the Teton Dam. The second reason is periodically in the spring runoff, we do have flash floods sometimes. They really haven't done severe damage to an area but they were fairly frequent and they do damage. One year the water nearly came into our home. It's something we didn't like to anticipate.

RW: Would you support the rebuilding of the dam?

RB: Certainly, if we're going to maintain a farm economy in this area, we have got to have better water resources. We need some kind of reservoir water to maintain irrigation. If things could work out so that could be safe, I would support it. It would have to be better than what it was in the past.

RW: Where were you and your family when the dam broke?

RB: We were just getting on a plane in Salt Lake City. We were returning from visiting our children in Minnesota and Ohio. We were in the Salt Lake Airport waiting to get on the plane to come to Idaho Falls and then home, when we got news of the breaking of the dam.

We got it in an interesting way. We were leaving the airport to board this plane when a boy, who had lived in Rexburg all his life, had married and left to work for Western Airlines, came up. His face was deathly white and he said, "Have you heard any news from Sugar City?" We said, "No. What's happened?" We could tell by his tone that something serious had happened. He said, "The Teton Dam has broken and Sugar City has been annihilated." We could hardly comprehend it and said, "No, it can't be!" He said, "Yes. It happened to my folks." It was a long time on the plane from Salt Lake City to Idaho Falls.

RW: Were you able to have anybody meet you at Idaho Falls due to circumstances?

RB: Our sister-in-law, Janet Barrus, and her husband were going to meet us at the airport. We left all our cars home. When she heard the news, she had a lot of things to do. She had a son, two brothers-in-law and many people out in the fields and it was at noon. She had to get these people out of the fields, help some grandchildren get ready, notify everyone and get out of there in a minimum of time. She had the kindness to call up another sister-in-law in Idaho Falls and say, "The dam has broken. I can't meet Ruth and LaMar at the plane. Will you go to meet them?" I think that's remarkable that she would think to do that under the terribly frightening conditions that she was involved in.

RW: Did you have any trouble getting back into Rexburg or Sugar City?

RB: Yes, that was quite a problem. We couldn't get into it that night. We got into Idaho Falls about two o'clock and immediately went to a brother-in-law, Keith Barrus, in Idaho Falls. We were told, "Absolutely no one can go into the area." We monitored the radio and TV. We changed stations to get any kind of news about what was happening and what had happened. We didn't know whether any of our people had escaped. There were three or four families in Idaho Falls that didn't know what had happened either and all we could hear was that Sugar City had been annihilated. It was frightening for many hours.

It was interesting. We were monitoring radio and TV constantly over KID-3, TV-3, and suddenly through a Salt Lake channel came a picture of LaMar's nephew, Brent, who had leased the farm. He's a young man working the farm. He was talking to the camera crew and told them that his family was safe. We had that reassurance and were really grateful. We didn't know where they were or what they were doing. We had a feeling that they were probably up on the hill in Rexburg at our son's home. When we got there we found that was correct.

RW: How soon after the flood were you able to return back here to your property?

RB: We left Idaho Falls in a borrowed pickup Sunday morning as early as we could get away. We were in line of cars many lines long. Only because we had a Sugar City drivers license were we allowed to come in. We got into Rexburg and went right up to our son's home and all the family was there except our son who was on vacation in California. The other four families were all there.

We were told that no one could go into Sugar City, but my husband took the pickup and went up on the hill by way of the Sugar City Cemetery as far as he could go. He walked in after that. He got back several hours later and I asked him, "How does it look?" he said, "Not very good. A wall of the house is gone and the front has all caved in." He tried to describe the devastation in a quiet manner. I couldn't comprehend it.

They did make a precarious road about three or four o'clock in the afternoon. We came in and it was a sea of mud. The water was everywhere and we couldn't get into our home at all because of the debris from other houses. There were about 20 houses, east of us, washed right off their foundations. They were washed right into our direction. Three of them had crashed into our home. You can imagine how the debris was piled all around our house. It was difficult to even get in, even with all the wall knocked out you had a very difficult time getting in.

RW: When you got into your home, was there any valuable possessions that you were able to save? I

RB: It looked like we could save anything when we got there because most of our things, especially our good things, were completely washed away. The south wall which was part of the bedroom and front room was completely gone. It was ripped right out, four thicknesses of wall. The front of it was caved in. There was only one little support in the middle that was holding the full upper part of the house. There was an upstairs weight on top of that.

The waters had gone right through our home and took all our front room furniture, our baby grand piano, books, stereo, our couches, our bed, everything that was in the bedroom, everything that was in our front room, all our silver, our good china, our crystal, tablecloths and tapestries. We never did see any of it. In the kitchen the refrigerator had fallen against the kitchen door and closed it and supported it enough that it filled up with mud and debris like a churn. We were able to shovel for days and get some of our things out of there.

We saved some of our everyday china, our kettles, our everyday silver. That which was high in the cupboards we were able to save; the same with our utility and family room. I can't think of anything we could save back in the utility and family room. Our furnace room was gone.

This was impossible to believe, but the deep-freeze had tipped over in the mud. That mud was three and four feet deep and from the waterline on the wall the water was up to about six feet. That drained off and it was mud when we went in at three o'clock. My husband pried open the deepfreeze door. We had filled that deepfreeze with new meat before we went east.

Miraculously the seal hadn't broken on the deepfreeze and the meat was frozen solid and clean; frost even on the elements. A gentleman from the Fish and Game came and he said it looked perfect to him. We loaded it in the pickup and took it over to Rexburg and got some of our friends, up on the hill, to put it in their deepfreeze. We did save our meat.

We were concerned about our genealogy. We had it in a big pasteboard file box in our family room. It was in the closet near the floor. That was one of the things I hoped I could save because I had histories of our people and many hundreds of pictures. They were precious to us. When we went in that afternoon there was nothing but chucks of mud. We took the box and carried it carefully so it wouldn't fall to pieces into the pickup. We went back that night to Idaho Falls because we didn't know of any place to stay. We were welcomed back to our brother-in-laws. I spent all Sunday night washing every page and picture that was in the file box. I filled a double garage and three rooms in her house with these washings. I put paper on the floor so it wouldn't hurt their carpet. The writing is legible and the pictures came out pretty well.

We had formed a Maru Corporation with our farmland and our holdings with our children. As we are getting older, we wanted them to enjoy the property that we had. We had a big Maru Corporation book that had all our deeds and our records. It was quite a big loose, heavy leather loose-leaf with a cover over it. It was fairly protected. We dug through three feet of mud to see if we could find it mired in the mud. We dug for days to try to find it, but we couldn't find it, but we couldn't find it. About ten days later, we got a call at our brother-in-laws, Kieth, in Idaho Falls. Apparently a man who lived in Idaho Falls had gone into the Hibbard area to help clean up. He'd been shoveling someone's mud out in the Hibbard area and he shoveled into this kind of loose-leaf. He dug it out, looked it and thought he recognized my husband's name, LaMar Barrus. He was a young man who had lived and was born and raised here in Sugar City. He got word to us that he thought this was our book and if we wanted to pick it up we could. That was important to us. We dried it out. It was still covered with mud, but it was dried out. I spent a day taking a knife and scraping the mud off. I didn't dare well it again. The papers are legible and the records and deeds are all there. I feel that was an absolute miracle.

RW: I think it's wonderful the way the people in the area, when they found things, tried to return them to the rightful owner.

RB: Yes. This same man found a box of genealogy that belonged to our neighbor. Our neighbor was pleased to get that back. That was many miles away from here and it was found. We're grateful for it.

RW: Did you have any help in cleaning up your property from any outside groups or neighbors?

RB: We knew from the very start that our home was absolutely hopeless as far as cleaning it up. We tried to salvage what we could. I remember taking out of our closet clothes that were soaked with mud. I put them in the pickup because I didn't know what to do. I'd take them over to Rexburg and hose them off to see if they were worth saving. There were suits, coats and dresses. As I was putting them into our borrowed pickup, Boyd and Margaret Thomas drove by and said, "We will take that to Idaho Falls." They took it and put it in theirs and took it down to get it cleaned and brought it back. We had others who did the same thing. Mrs. Steed took a lot of our tablecloths and dish towels. We had a niece that took another group of things.

We had a big dairy barn over here that had filled completely with mud and debris. There were quite a bit of valuable tools in the mud. We knew we couldn't save the dairy barn but we had a group from the LDS Church, about six of them, shovel a room or two out there. We got all the tools out there were there.

As far as cleaning and shoveling mud in our home, it was useless to ask. We couldn't do it. We appreciated all the help we received. On the farm there wasn't that much to be done. It was months before the waters receded because the Teton River runs right through our farm. It was badly flooded and still is in bad shape. We had a group that Alvin Smith brought and they helped fence some of the vital areas. We had maybe 400 head of cattle and were able to salvage about 60. At least this fence we were able to contain those 60.

RW: You mentioned the LDS church came in and helped. Did any of the government agencies come in to help out?

RB: Later on in the summer. I should mention there was a Mennonite group. They came several times to help put up fence. The Army Engineers were about the first and then on the farm. They hauled 150 loads a day of debris and junk. All summer long. They used huge bulldozers and big trucks. They carried out of Sugar City 150 loads a day.

RW: That's hard to comprehend.

RB: Yes. It's a small town. That is the extent of the debris and fill. They're still hauling it out. That was a totally remarkable cleanup.

We had a lot of government groups help us in many ways. The Corps of Engineers did a lot of cleanup. The city here worked round the clock. These wonderful city officials worked in organizing a system. The National Guard was here. The police sealed this place up every night. They had a curfew and it was a dead place for many weeks.

There was vandalism. People would come in. Even though they sealed the main roads off there are little dry farm roads that people could come in and could take things. I know our bishop had a box of tools. He's a good carpenter. He teaches carpentry at the college. He said that box contained about \$500 worth of tools and he had put it out of his house. The next day he went back and it was gone. He felt badly. He found a chainsaw, put it by a tree, and several hours we went back and someone had taken it. I think the vandalism was minimal considering the opportunity for vandalism. There are those who came in from the outside with full intent of just taking. Those who got the machinery didn't take much because none of the machinery is good anyway. I hope they spent a lot of money getting it fixed.

RW: You seem to appreciate this curfew and tight security that they had around?

RB: Yes. The first week was a shock even though we were cheerful. We all felt our loss deeply because when you lose everything you've worked a lifetime to accumulate it's a shock. When you see it in such a filthy manner, all destroyed, it breaks your heart. I never noted any real grieving. In spite of everything, everybody was smiling, joking and working.

If we wouldn't have had that tight security we'd have had a lot of people coming in out of curiosity to see what had happened. We needed to be alone and we were. We were all in the same boat so no one could feel any more sorry for himself than he did for anybody else. The curious were kept out. The Red Cross was kind to us. Everything was so contaminated in our area they were afraid some kind of outbreak of disease in our area because it was a filthy mess. Manure and chemicals were all mixed together like big horrible soup. We were walking in it and working in it. They took every kind of precaution that could be taken. They were constantly bringing us sterile water to drink, pop, and sandwiches. They didn't want us to be preparing or doing anything with food. I think it's marvelous how they sustained us so cheerfully.

The LDS Church was working right hand-in-hand with them, but in welfare to sustain us during that critical period so we could work. No one was sitting around. Everybody, no matter how hopeless it looked, was trying to salvage and clean. This is the thing that kept us from having many mental problems because we were physically working every minute of the time we were here. The little children, the 90-year-old men. Mr. Durtschi out here, he could hardly walk. He's in his 90's, and yet he was working right along with everybody else. Work is a good healer.

RW: Do you think when the church authorities came up and talked to everybody at the college, their admonition for everyone to dig in helped the mental situation?

RB: I'm sure it helped. I'm sure this process was going on before the Prophet got here. We knew exactly what he was going to tell us. Not one word came as a surprise to us. To feel his strength and his expectations and pride in us, generated a feeling of great love and pride in the fact that we were working. His admonition to continue to do that was

what we expected to hear. We weren't surprised. We'd already been doing it but we felt strengthened by his counsel and his faith. It was a great experience having him here.

RW: Did you feel that the city and county both worked together in helping you out in this?

RB: Yes, they're still working. They're doing everything that they can to look forward to our needs and prepare the way and when those needs arise they'll be ready to go. We're getting rid of sidewalks now. There's a lot of cleanup going to the final cleaning process to get our yards in shape.

We're anticipating roads. They worked hard to get rid of all the red tape so we could get our water system in. That was a big job and on record time they got a complete new water system in. While we were cleaning out, they were laying water systems. They didn't wait at all. They spent early this summer cleaning out our sewer system. I feel like their vision and their looking ahead to our needs was quickly done. I feel that all of those things have to be initiated on a city level. Our city board here needs great credit because they're generating the program that will take care of our needs on the grass roots base.

RW: It's nice when you feel that you're not alone in it. Everyone's working to help you out the same as you're helping everyone else out.

RB: Yes. I'm sure there are those who may disagree with me, but I feel there's been almost total unity and total cooperation. I feel there's been a strong feeling of empathy, understanding and a real deep desire on part of all agencies whether they be Federal, State or City.

RW: Without divulging names, do you know of anyone that has tried to benefit themselves by turning in fraudulent claims?

RB: I don't know of a person that's tried to do that. In fact, it's almost the reverse. I know people that worried deeply about what it was costing the government for what their claims were. They were worried about asking for too much. There was careful checking and going through and rechecking to make sure that we put down the correct costs. We were very conservative in our estimates because when it comes right down to it, months and months later, the purchase of these things are costing more than we put in our claims. This is the case more than those who have tried to overestimate. I've never seen a people try as hard to be honest and worry about it so much.

I'm sure people are coming in and looking at our fine new homes and then remember the old ones and they're saying, "They made a lot by this venture." If you were to investigate those people, they got a fair payment for their work and for their home. They themselves are paying on it. I know we paid at least \$20,000 more on this home to have it than we got from the government on our own. We were advised by our prophet, President Kimball, to build better and more beautiful and I think people are trying to do that. If you see a home that's more elaborate than what was there previously, you know

that person is paying more for that home than what the government has given them. A lot of people have the wrong impression. They look at these homes and think, "They surely got a lot from the government if that's what they got in return." I think the government's tried to be fair. We feel good about it as far as our home and possessions here. The farm we haven't settled yet.

We don't feel happy about our settlement on our machinery. Machinery is so expensive and you have to have it to farm economically today. You can't hire help. The amounts they paid, even though our machinery was old, to replace it, was almost impossible. We felt that the payment on the machinery was lower than it should have been. We could have made appeals and a big fuss about it but it didn't seem the right time. We tried to explain to them that it was impossible to replace anything with that amount. Other than that, we feel the government has been fair with us and we certainly do appreciate being able to recover as rapidly, through their help, as we have been able to.

RW: In evaluating would you evaluate that the flood had been a major disaster to you, a major help, or could you evaluate it that way?

RB: That's difficult to assess because you have so many levels of feeling on that. We are happy with what we had. We had a nice home. We had nice things in it. We had everything fixed up. We spent a lifetime doing it. We were happy with it and it wouldn't be difficult to return to that. I was talking to a lady the other day and I could sympathize with her. You can buy all new things and put it back. We're a conservative people and to spend vast amounts of money rapidly as we've had to getting resettled is not a happy experience. You'd think that getting money and throwing it around would be fun. But when you've got a conservative disposition, it's hard to spend that much in a few weeks and enjoy it. Before you had to work hard to get one piece at a time. You planned maybe for a year and then maybe you could afford it. It really meant something when you put it in your home. When you all at once put it back together again, after you've gone through the traumatic experience of total loss, the hard physical labor, and trying to get things back into shape, it loses some of its charm.

That doesn't mean that we don't appreciate what we have at all. I feel, maybe in a few years from now, we'll see a very beautiful community here. If we can keep humble, keep our faith, live as our prophet and our Savior would have us live we'll look on this as an experience that has been important in our lives. Maybe it will be an example that may have some effect totally. If it helps people to be better and to help bring people to an understanding of things that are true and right, then it'll be worth it on that account. I'd sure hate to go through another one.

RW: Do you feel that people of the community are still working together as they were immediately after the flood?

RB: We're getting back into a feeling of togetherness. It's a funny thing. When people are totally involved in their own problems, not that they're not aware that other people have these same problems, it takes every ounce of strength, nerve and mental capacity to

cope with the problems each day. You don't go around visiting with your neighbors and say, "Can I help you?" It's all you can do to get through what you've got to do in a day. Under that kind of emotional pressure it is hard to realize. Even though we were all together, trailers a few feet apart, I've never felt more isolated in my whole life than while I lived in that HUD trailer. I'm not complaining. Everyone was so totally immersed in the critical demands of every day to try to move things along to get back resettled and to get in shape, we lost contact with each other. Now that we're back in our home and we've got things settled and our yard cleaned up, I'm beginning to feel the same neighborly feeling that we had before the flood. It wasn't that we weren't aware of each other's needs and cares, we were. We did not have one minute of time for anything but the critical demands of every day. It was quite an experience.

When I say unity as neighbors, we were disunited in a way by the flood. We were united with church and government. Now we're getting back again the unity of a neighborhood.

RW: The whole thing's been a real traumatic experience all the way through. Was there anything unusual about any of it?

RB: Nothing. I think there's something to be learned from this experience and the way people responded. It takes a certain amount of leisure time to enjoy life, to enjoy each other, to enjoy fine things, the good things. That leisure we were robbed totally of it during this flood. It was a survival, that's all it was. It exhausted you mentally and physically to keep this survival going. I know a lot of people who have suffered emotionally and are having a slow recovery. They keep on plodding along. They'll make it fine.

RW: Was there much of a planning stage?

RB: We did have a plan. That was so demanding. It took the strength of us all. We were giving our meals at the dorm. Although we lived in the dorm, we could cook, and we cooked most of our meals. We were given all of our physical needs. When you shovel and wash, you have to wear boots and mud filth all day long. It was an exhausting process.

We had to plan a new home. We had to plan what went in it. We had to work with all these government agencies which took hours. We were having to use our minds to look ahead. We were involved in the process of trying to exist. When you put those two things together, the demands are great and it's hard.

At times I felt frustrated that as long as we were going to build a home we might as well make it the kind of home we would enjoy and like. I wanted to put it together in a way that would make it lovely because the cost was no different if you chose wisely. When you're under an emotional stress, you try to clear it out of the way and envision a harmony and something lovely, I know people who are trying to do that today. Their homes are in the process of being made. They're trying to plan what goes in it. They're

deeply frustrated because they're still involved in the physical labor. We're trying to control the shock and to keep a clear head to figure out things. There's the dilemma.

RW: Did, at any time, you ever feel that the flood was a divine punishment or did you consider it a natural or a man-made disaster?

RB: I don't feel at any time it was a divine punishment. I think it's really stretching it to even suggest such a thing. I'm sure it was a man-made disaster. I feel there was divine intervention in it by the Lord. I feel there was divine intervention because of the timing of the whole thing and the resources that were brought to us immediately. I feel the Lord was touching the hearts of the people no matter what area. You could tell He was touching the hearts of the people so that they would respond quickly to our needs. They helped us greatly.

I feel the timing of the break was miraculous because a lot more lives could have been lost. If the whole total dam had broken loose, we would have been annihilated. There was a fourth of the dam left. There was no reason that fourth of the mud and dirt would stay in the path to hold back a little of the waters. That was divine intervention. If the total dam had crumbled away, we couldn't have escaped. It would have come so fast and so deep. That's where I feel the divine intervention is and we feel that the Lord is blessing us every time we move. He's expecting us to move on our own power and to do all we can.

I feel that we are richly blessed. I feel that the Lord was helping us and still is. It's kind of ironic. Our children are out in the world and they're in Minnesota and Ohio. They were raised on our farm here and they loved this area. They've had a kind of feeling that Sugar City is a kind of sanctuary, their place of refuge, was the first to get it.

I'm sure that we will have a more beautiful place, we'll be tested and we'll have learned some great values if we can stay humble. That's the important thing from now on.

RW: Many people I've talked to felt that through all their hardships and labors they have grown physically and spiritually because of it. They've been able to see the government and the church work hand-in-hand.

I sensed this deeply last Saturday at Appreciation Day when all these government people spoke. They spoke from the very bottom of their hearts. They expressed gratitude for the service rendered us. We feel that gratitude deeply. We expressed a feeling of "We've gotten something from you. The spirit we've noted here, the willingness to work and the gratitude that is expressed is unique in our experience." They gained something too.

I'm sure we will learn from this. We'll grow from it; we can be better because of it. I know my husband and I have had remarkably good health in spite of all the work physically and all the stress mentally. It's been a blessing given to us. We've learned that we can endure whatever is asked no matter what. We'll keep our faith and not give

in and continue to work no matter what comes. We can endure and come out stronger for it. We have learned that lesson. We wouldn't want to go through it again.

RW: Is there anything you can think of, that we haven't talked about today, that has made an impact on your life or that has really had special meaning to you?

RB: I feel that we've had a unique opportunity as Latter-Day Saints to try to exemplify what we preach. We all haven't done it as well as we should, but because of the nature of the tragedy and the challenge that resulted from it, we've been strong to send our missionaries and to state our beliefs at this stage. We've been saying words for a long time. If we have exemplified those words in our lives then they can be a great missionary tools to help strengthen the gospel and the receiving of it in lives of people.

We've had many hundreds of people come in that are not members of the church. They've been able to see us in action. Some of them haven't been pleased with the way we've acted. Some have been very pleased and felt a warmth here and an experience they never had before. If something good can come of that, I feel that's important. The gospel is a way of life. It is trying to bring happiness and fulfillment. It is a vision of eternal life that I think is important. If this tragedy will make people more aware of the great principles of the gospel, it will be important to have experienced it.

RW: Was your church house quite badly damaged during the flood?

RB: Yes, it should have been torn down. It was badly damaged. It's quite a large church and meets our needs well. If it'd been torn down and they had built a new one a smaller building would have been the result. The people here pleaded that they would keep it so we could keep the size and rebuild it from there. They've done it. We should be in it soon. We had some strikes by the people who laid the carpet. The people that made it have gone on strike. We haven't been able to get it so that's held us back. We hoped to be in it on June 5, but it looks like it'll be July before we get in. One thing that pleases me, we're going to have our organ back. The pipes were saved and they've cleaned them up.

RW: Where have you have been attending church?

RB: We've been going to Teton. We've been going up there about 1:30 for Priesthood meeting, Sunday School, and then Sacrament meeting. One following the other very rapidly. We would get home about five o'clock. Teton has been generous to share their church with us. We appreciate that.

RW: You've been to go right on with your church activities?

RB: Yes. It hasn't been quite the same. They haven't had much home teaching. We don't have the Deacons visit us for fast offerings. We have to pay up there.

The church is the most important thing to me. That's when we came together. We were each immersed in our daily labors and we were isolated. Our ward would meet with the bishop two or three times a week up in the high school gymnasium and go over our problems all summer long. Our church has been the means of keeping us united marvelously. If it hadn't been for that, I don't know what we'd done as far as maintaining a kind of unity with each other.

RW: I think it goes to show that no matter what happens in our lives the church is the stable center point to pull everyone together.

RB: Yes. I sensed this deeply. We couldn't have had the rapid recovery if it hadn't been for the church. We were there to receive advice every day all summer long through that traumatic period. This advice would come from the headquarters of the church. We were there to receive it and to go about our labors. That shows how this recovery's been so rapidly achieved because of the obedience of the people. They obeyed when it came as far as evacuation and that's why there were so many lives saved. All the way through, all through the summer, we were almost like little children being guided. We were there to receive advice and people followed it. It came from the city, the state or the church. I think that's the key to our recovery. We were obedient to the counsel given. We tried to do what was said for us to do. We trusted in them and did it.

RW: In looking at what happened in Sugar City and Rexburg in the last year and comparing that with the Big Thompson Flood, they don't have the cleanup near as far advanced and the people relocated.

RB: A lot of people don't understand the organization of the church and say, "You don't have the agency. You go ahead and do what anybody says that pulls a string and you do it." You do it not because you don't know any better. You're trained to think for yourselves and to work for yourselves. You know when someone gives you advice that is good. You don't do it because they said you must do it. You have faith in the wisdom of the person who told you.

We've been trained to obey and use our head. It wasn't hard for us, as a people, when the word came from either our government or our church to advise us to do certain things; it wasn't hard for us to do that. We did it as a group. Everybody united in doing it.

That's one of the remarkable forces behind this last year, obedience, faith, trust and doing it simply and dutifully. Doing what we were told to do right down the line.

RW: You weren't here at the time of the flood, but have any of your neighbors said how they got the work that the dam had broken and their initial reaction to leaving?

RB: That again is a kind of a miracle because not many people on a Saturday afternoon are listening to the radio. They are out working. It was a nice day to work. Even though policemen were riding everywhere and warning in a loud voice for them to get out, don't take anything with you, and even though the radio was working frantically to alert

people, there were always some who say, “I wonder if my neighbor knows?” Quickly, before they’d do anything for themselves, they would check to see if there were those who might not get the word. It didn’t take long, because of the nature of the catastrophe, for the word spread. When they talked to people, some would say, “Go turn on your radio.” They’d go turn on their radio and hear the news. They’d call from neighbor to neighbor. “Go turn on your radio.” That was one means of alerting them. Even after the radio message there were the policemen to reinforce that and to push things into motion.

The people obeyed and they were saved. They didn’t take anything with them; they didn’t have time. It shows their willingness to follow counsel. Mainly, they were told to go turn on their radio because they figured, “If I tell you, you won’t believe me. It is so dramatic when you hear it over the radio, you’ll know what happened.”

RW: They didn’t take the time to discuss it with their neighbors?

RB: No!

RW: They wanted to warn as many as they could?

RB: They’d say, “The dam’s broken. Go turn on your radio.” That seemed to be the standard call. The policemen were there to reinforce that. They did a remarkable job. Their vigil on all roads and their patience and concern was appreciated.

You can’t stop thanking people because afterwards, when you think you were completely isolated as far as communications were concerned, you see how hard those utility people worked to get us back and to connect us with our communications, telephones, and lights and utilities. They did it with a good heart.

RW: I think everybody in the surrounding communities worked together to lend a helping hand if they possibly could.

RB: Yes. I don’t want to give the feeling at all that we think we’re better than anybody else because we’re not. Sometimes I think the world is putting too much credit on us. We were human. We tried hard and obeyed. We had all the feelings of shock, frustration and agony that anyone would normally have in something like this. We had faith in our church leaders and our government leaders. Because people were so kind to us, I think we arose to that occasion. That doesn’t make us any better than anybody else.

A woman got up in our Sacrament meeting and Testimony meeting last Sunday from southern Utah and she was thanking us so profusely for the example and how much it’s helped her little community down in southern Utah. It made them feel that they had to re-evaluate their lives and their feelings towards each other. When I walked out of there I thought, “We’re not that good.” I don’t want them to get the feeling, because we’re human people and if we did rise to a height more than what is normal it was because we had a lot of help to do it.

The thing that is important now is if we can learn enough from this experience that we can do what's right in the future.

RW: One of the main things is continuing to do what's right?

RB: Yes.

RW: Thank you very much, Mrs. Barrus.