

The Teton Dam Disaster Collection

Paul Birch – Life during the Teton Flood

By Paul Birch

July 13, 1977

Box 5 Folder 18

Oral Interview conducted by Alyn B. Andrus

Transcript copied by Sarah McCorristin—April 2005

Brigham Young University – Idaho

Alyn B. Andrus: Mr. Birch, would you please spell your name for me?

Paul Birch: It's Paul Birch.

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

PB: I was born here in Wilford, May 2, 1931.

AA: Do you have a family?

PB: Yes. I have a wife and five children.

AA: How many girls and how many boys?

PB: We've got three boys and two girls.

AA: I see. How old is your oldest?

PB: He's thirteen.

AA: Okay. How many were living in your home at the time of the flood?

PB: All of us.

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

PB: It was Route 1, Box 83. We lived down close to the Teton River.

AA: But that isn't the same address that you have now?

PB: No, we've had to relocate since the flood and we moved two miles north. We purchased another ten acre piece, built on the same Teton highway, but two miles north, away from the river.

AA: So what is your current address?

PB: Route 1, Box 47, St. Anthony.

AA: What do you do for a living?

PB: I work for the Post Office. I'm a mail carrier.

AA: And how long have you lived in this area?

PB: All my life.

AA: Did you own your own home before the flood came, I mean, you weren't leasing or renting?

PB: No, we owned it.

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

PB: We was strongly in favor of the dam. In fact, I was one of the stronger supporters probably in the area. We even sent letters trying to get it constructed because we lived down by the river for years and we've been bothered by periodic flooding and all, mostly in the winter time. Ice would jam up the river and it would come over the banks and flood us out. In my life time, I can remember four quite serious floods that we've had. The dam's really needed for flood control. We certainly need the dam. I want to see it reconstructed again.

AA: Did you or any member of your family have a premonition of the Teton Disaster?

PB: Yes, my wife did.

AA: What is her name?

PB: Carol. When we was on our vacation trip, she had a premonition of it.

AA: All right now, Mrs. Birch, you're here, would you care to tell about that experience?

Mrs. B.: We were in Spanish Fork, Utah, a little bit outside of it. All at once we were traveling down the freeway and I had an uneasy feeling all about this trip. I really wasn't too enthusiastic about going. All at once, I kept feeling, we ought to go home, no real reason. Then all at once, I just saw before me a scene of desolation. I saw the land ripped apart as though there was no reason, but yet, there was all these torn places in it. It was just ruined, there was no reason really. It wasn't like rain or wind or anything. It was just really ruined. I just, I don't know, it just really upset me. I said, "Paul, we've just got to get back. There is something going to happen. We've got to get back right now. Turn around; we've got to go home." So, he talked me out of it. I don't know if we had gone home if things would have been better. I mean, we couldn't have made that much difference or been that much help being there. I just feel horribly, like we ought to go home.

AA: Did you have this experience after the first experience during your trip?

Mrs. B.: Well, actually when I left the store. I was working at the Mighty Mite in Rexburg, and when I left I said, "I'll never work in this store again." Paul said, "That's silly. You will, you'll come back in one week and work again." I said to the little boss, who was in charge, I said "I'll never be back here again." She said, "You will, you'll come back." When we left I just kept telling Paul, "We shouldn't go, we shouldn't go! I

want to stay here, I want to stay here!” Then as we got down to Utah and I saw this scene, I just knew something horrible was going to happen.

AA: What time of the day was it when you saw the desolation?

Mrs. B.: It was probably around noon.

PB: It was afternoon, about 1:00, 2:00/

Mrs. B.: It was daytime.

PB: It was daytime.

AA: And you were traveling in the car?

PB: We were traveling in the car.

Mrs. B.: With all the kids and we were just riding along and all at once I looked out and I could see that, just right out there, as plain as if I were back home and there it was.

AA: So what you saw was a land of desolation here in the Wilford area.

Mrs. B.: I saw our home place. I saw the land just destroyed. There was nothing, no land, no trees, nothing and I just thought it was the horriblemest thing I'd ever seen. I didn't want to see it anymore.

AA: Okay, so the vision was of your farm and home?

Mrs. B.: Of our area. Yes and there was nothing left. It was just very shocking. I couldn't imagine what could have happened. I mean, a rain would have left something. I couldn't imagine anything just having it disappear like that. Wiped off from the face of the earth. I couldn't really understand what could have happened.

PB: She didn't really know what it would be. She didn't know the dam would go, or anything. It could have been a tornado, what have you.

Mrs. B.: I said, “Something horrible is going to happen, we've got to get out of here. We've got to go home.” I didn't know why. I didn't really think about it much except that I had seen this horrible vision, this horrible scene. I thought, we've got to get back there and protect our house, something.

PB: It took a lot of talking on my part to talk her out of it.

Mrs. B.: He said, “Relax, the kids are here, your mother is safe, my mother is safe. Everything is fine. All your families are fine as far as we know. There is nothing we could do if we didn't. Just relax, don't worry about it.”

PB: I told her, "If the house is insured, I mean the house was insured and everything. If we lost it we can replace it, you know."

AA: Is this the first time that you've ever had a premonition about a disaster?

Mrs. B.: Well, there's never been another flood, but oh, once in a while I'll get a feeling or thought about something. Sometimes they happen.

AA: I see.

PB: Of deaths, she's had a few premonitions of deaths in the family and stuff.

AA: Did you enjoy your trip?

Mrs. B.: I was so uneasy all the time. I just kept saying to Paul, "We ought to not this, we ought to not that," but of course, when I get it off my mind I guess it's all right. Then when we read in the paper about the flood, I just knew we had to get home right now.

AA: You knew then, of course, what it was all about?

Mrs. B.: What had happened, yes.

AA: How long after you had your vision did you read in the paper that the dam had broken?

Mrs. B.: IT was about four days later.

PB: Well, we didn't know until June the 6th that the dam had broken.

Mrs. B: Five days. That was the first day that we left, so that was June 1st, wasn't it?

PB: We were in San Diego going through the zoo down there at the time the dam had broke. We was just tourists traveling around. We didn't watch any television or have any contact with special media of any kind.

Mrs. B: We missed all the news and everything.

PB: We didn't watch television that night because by the time we got back to the motel after doing all our sight seeing, we didn't want to watch TV or listen to the radio. We didn't know about anything until the next day. We went to breakfast and we came out of the café and I seen a newspaper on the stand that said, "Flood in Idaho." I thought, well maybe flood in the north, in the panhandle or someplace. Then I got looking farther and it's the Teton Dam. Then I knew we was involved.

Mrs. B: Yes, but it was funny. It was the first trip that we had ever gone on that I wanted to buy papers everywhere we went. Everyplace that we stopped, I went to pick up a paper and read.

PB: Yeah, she had this feeling that we better get a paper. We must have bought a dozen papers.

Mrs. B: Everywhere we went we bought papers.

PB: We had hardly ever bought papers before.

Mrs. B: I never read papers, but I just kept feeling like we've got to know what's going on. We've got to be in touch.

AA: You say you were in San Diego when you found out?

PB: Well, no we didn't. We were traveling home, see, when we found out about the flood.

Mrs. B: Traveling through California. Fresno, wasn't it?

PB: It was in King City, is where we stopped for the night. We had our breakfast there. That's where we seen the newspaper. We were traveling home. We was to be gone seven days on our trip, altogether. We left the first and we was to be back by the seventh, cause she had to be to work on the eighth. I had a little more time, but she had to be back to her job.

AA: When the children found out about the disaster, what was their reaction?

PB: Oh, it was kind of like ours, a little bit of disbelief at first.

Mrs. B: What floods, you know; we thought there would be mud in the basement, clean it up. All this.

PB: You didn't really know what to expect. Our past history of flooding has been low level, oh three, four feet deep water. Just dirty up the place and do some damage to the walls and stuff. This was entirely different.

Mrs. B: When we reads the paper, I immediately went to a phone and I called my sister. Hers was the only telephone number I could think of other than my mother that I knew of off hand. There was no phone book. I got through to her by claiming it was an emergency call. She told us, "Don't expect a thing, just come back and there's nothing there. It's all gone, and our mother is missing." I couldn't believe it, I said, "Say that again," and I made Paul listen that time. Then I said, "Did she say what I think she said?" He said, "Yes." We couldn't believe it. Then we tried to call his brother in Idaho Falls and we couldn't get him, we couldn't get anyone else. We traveled on through

Nevada, homeward and we couldn't get anyone else. We tried everywhere we stopped. We couldn't get anyone.

PB: Well, at the time we found out about it, it was the 6th of June, and all of the lines to this area were tied up completely.

Mrs. B.: Or were destroyed.

PB: Or destroyed, you couldn't get through to Rexburg or St. Anthony at all. You could only get Idaho Falls rarely. We just happened to be lucky to get one rare phone call through. She tried to call her sister back within ten minutes after that, couldn't get through.

Mrs. B: No one. We wanted verification or something.

PB: We really only had one contact on our trip about the flood, other than what we had been told and read in the newspaper. We really knew nothing about it except from what her sister had told us.

Mrs. B: She had said that mother was missing and that her house was destroyed and our house probably was too. She didn't know, she hadn't seen it.

AA: So when did you get back into the area?

PB: We traveled the rest of the 6th.

Mrs. B: We came from Reno.

PB: And the seventh. I guess we got in Idaho Falls, the night of the seventh.

Mrs. B: We would have been on time for me to go to work, if there had been a store.

PB: Yeah. But we stayed in Idaho Falls that night because you couldn't rally get up this way.

Mrs. B: They had the roads closed.

PB: In fact the flooding was still carrying down into the Blackfoot area when we was coming. We had to go up around the dry farms and that to even get home.

AA: You mean in order to get to Wilford?

PB: Yes.

Mrs. B: No, to Idaho Falls, we didn't go to Wilford that night.

PB: We stayed in Idaho Falls the first night.

Mrs. B: Yes, with my sister.

PB: But even to get to Idaho Falls from Pocatello, we had to detour up around the foothills because all the lower areas were flooded. We couldn't even get along the highway from Pocatello to Idaho Falls. We went way out of our way.

Mrs. B: Had police everywhere, though, and signs.

AA: So it was an official detour that you took.

PB: Yeah.

AA: I see. Then when did you finally get to Wilford?

Mrs. B: The next day, didn't we?

PB: Yes, we come up the following day, and we had to go up to Ririe and Swan Valley and up through Tetonia, up around Ashton, came through the back door to get here.

AA: Did you have any problem with the road blocks?

PB: No.

Mrs. B: There weren't any, those ways, they were out.

PB: Not that way, there wasn't any problem with them. There was road blocks coming up to the flood area but apparently we never hit them at all because we went around them. We went the long way around.

AA: Let's see, the next day would have been the eighth?

Mrs. B: Yes.

PB: Yes, I guess it would be the eighth then.

AA: So on the eighth of June, you viewed the destruction of your property is that correct? What did you think about when you stood there and saw what you didn't have anymore?

PB: Well, we come home and at first I couldn't even tell where anybody had lived. There was about eight or nine houses on this mile where we lived and there was nothing standing hardly even a tree. You couldn't even recognize the area at all. You had to stop and think, now, there's where Uncle Melvin's house was and that's where my mother's house used to be. We was down the road just a little farther, that's where we was but

there was very few landmarks that you could pick out that just wasn't destroyed. You could see where the canal was, it was close to our place and just a few things.

Mrs. B: Yes, but the river was still running across our property, do you remember?

PB: Yes, but when we first got there, why the river was till flowing and our house, where it was, was sitting on the river bank as it was.

Mrs. B: Except all that was left was the foundation, the cement foundation.

PB: See, apparently the flood had receded from the major flow from the dam but there was still high waters from the heavy runoff and being as the river was out of course it was spread over quite a wide area. The river must have been, a half a mile wide at that time. Our house, where it was, it was sitting right on the river bank and the water was still flowing across the highway.

Mrs. B: That's where the road was.

PB: Even a corner of our property was still under water. In fact, about half of our property was under water and the other half was out at the time we seen it.

Mrs. B: That's where the road was.

PB: Even a corner of our property was still under water. In fact, about half of our property was under water and the other half was out at the time we seen it.

Mrs. B: And it stayed that way for how long?

OB: Well, it stayed that way for several days.

Mrs. B: I know then, we couldn't even get anywhere. That was where the road ended, right there.

Mrs. B: I know then, we couldn't even get anywhere. That was where the road ended, right there.

AA: You didn't have anything to clean up then, did you?

PB: No, there was some debris and stuff.

Mrs. B: As far as the house goes it gone, there was not trace.

PB: Now, in our house there was a tree laying across the foundation, you know. A little bit of debris of such, but mainly everything was swept away, even every fence post. In fact, on our whole place, I think I found one or two posts that was still in the ground, the flood had ripped everything out.

AA: How many acres did you farm?

PB: Well, we lived on a little cattle farm.

AA: Do you still own that fourteen acres?

PB: Yes, we still own it.

AA: Did the flood ruin it?

PB: Well, not really, it has a lot of silt on it, but it's reasonable. The reason is we had a little cattle set up, and the place is primarily in hay and pasture and the soil held quite well because the hay and pasture held it there. Now some of the adjacent farms, where they had potatoes and grain and the soil was looser, it took as much as a foot of top soil off. But our soil held quite well, and really the only real washing we had was in the garden spot, we let him use it because we both worked and didn't have time to work the garden too much, so he was raising a garden there and he just got through tilling it and he was up there tilling when the dam broke. It must have lowered the garden a foot and a half of top soil.

AA: That's the top soil?

PB: Washed the top soil away, yes. There's a kind of a hole, kind of a bowl where garden was.

AA: Why did you decide to move the location of your house after the flood?

PB: I think, we've been flooded too much.

Mrs. B: Also, because we went and applied for a loan from SBA and they said, "You can't put your house there, we won't loan you money to build in a flood area." So then we was eligible for a HUD trailer and they said, "You can't put a HUD trailer there," and we didn't know what to do because there we had property, we had a well and a sewer and we couldn't use them, they were no good to us at all and we couldn't get a HUD trailer because we had no place to put it. We were really in quite a quandary.

PB: See, at the time, like I say, our house was on the river bank and they didn't really want us to put a house back there because it was unsafe, until things were found out and a little more settled.

Mrs. B: We started on a house first thing, we felt like this would help to stabilize our family. Instead of living out with other people in other places. So we went ahead and got started on our house plans right away. It worked out that we could buy this land. The man we bought it from, we had tried originally to buy this land from him before, he wouldn't sell it. Then all at once it just worked out that he would part with this land, and,

of course, good frontage and that it was really quite strange that he would be willing to sell it. There was no problem, we couldn't work out.

AA: All right, I'd like to know where you and your family stayed during the first few weeks after the flood before you moved into your HUD trailer?

Mrs. B: We didn't ever get a HUD trailer.

PB: No, we didn't ever get a HUD trailer.

AA: Oh, I see. You mentioned that HUD wouldn't give you a trailer, I guess, because you lived next to the river.

PB: Yes, they didn't want us to have this.

Mrs. B: We didn't qualify there.

PB: We could have a trailer, but I couldn't see five kids in a HUD trailer.

Mrs. B: We couldn't have two HUD trailers because they are too small to be left alone. I said, "Well, Paul, I might as well move to Rexburg so I can work because you'll just be in one trailer and I'll be in the other one." So we couldn't really see that. We'd have to have two trailers. It just wouldn't have worked out for our family at all. So we decided we didn't want to do that.

PB: Well, after we first got back, the first three nights, I think we stayed with her sister in Idaho Falls. We kept going back at night.

Mrs. B: Her husband was in the National Guard and he was working this area, up in Rexburg helping clean up. He was telling us how the water had gone through there and how it had destroyed the Mighty Mite, so there wasn't really a job there but I could have worked at the other one on the other side of the town.

PB: Mostly clean up.

Mrs. B: Yeah, mostly mucking out.

AA: Well, then after you stayed with your relatives in Idaho Falls, then where did you stay?

PB: Well, we come out here and my relatives had found us a home in Parker. It was really an old one, but it was a roof over our head. We hated it, but we stayed there for three weeks before we found a decent home to rent in St. Anthony. HUD rented us a house. We spent the next six months in the rented house until we got this one rebuilt.

AA: What would you say the most cherished items were that you lost in the flood?

PB: Possibly our pictures of our family. We lost everything, you know. We lost everything, you know. We lost all our important papers.

Mrs. B: Temple papers, birth certificates, everything, they're all gone.

PB: I guess we just don't have records of our past; we'll just have to live for the future.

AA: Do you have any genealogical records?

Mrs. B: That's what I mean, we had some of those, we had our temple work and that.

PB: Our genealogical records are recorded.

Mrs. B: We could get copies.

PB: They won't be too hard to recover.

Mrs. B: We just haven't done it because his brothers, Blain, in Rexburg, does a lot of this work and one day we'll get with him and get a copy of it, as of now we haven't.

AA: Would you describe then in a little more detail, now the government aid that you received after the flood? Now you mentioned the SBA and HUD and how the SBA would not give you a loan as long as you built on the flood plain. HUD wouldn't give you a trailer as long as you built there. Now what I want you to do is to go ahead and describe any other dealings you may have had with government agencies, such as these.

PB: Well, I thought they were all cooperative as far as that goes. They was trying to help people. I think all of their intentions were good. In fact, I certainly admire the senators and the congressmen, the way they reacted to the whole situation.

Mrs. B: We were abler to go ahead to get a SBA loan later, as we put in on this piece instead of back on our other acreage. While we were building this house, HUD was able to rent during the time we stayed there. They checked on you periodically to see if there was anything else they could do. They brought you a little living kit. They brought you sheets.

PB: Well, this was HUD.

Mrs. B: Yeah, this was HUD.

PB: HUD was real good in the way they helped people.

Mrs. B: They came around and checked us.

PB: We don't have any complaints whatsoever about the way the government handled the situation.

AA: Have you had any dealings with FHA?

PB: We built our other home through Farmer's Home Administration. But somehow, due to technicalities, if you already had a Farmer's Home Loan, you couldn't rebuild your house under another Farmer's Home Loan. So we had to go SBA loan to get a rebuilding project going. This is just a technicality. We found them a little hard to understand. We could live with it.

Mrs. B: A lot of red tape in everything they did, but once it got all straightened out it was all right, I guess. We received a lot of aid from Red Cross. They gave us a lot of initial things that you could use, like clothing and things that you needed for your house.

AA: Why don't you talk about that for just a minute, since you've mentioned it?

PB: Of all of the relief agencies, we probably had the highest praise for the Red Cross.

Mrs. B: They were in the basement of the city building. We went to them and we said, "We have nothing." They said, "Do you have a place where you can put these things?" We said, "Yes." We didn't have anything for our kids, we went to the various church places that we could and they said they had clothes and I don't know if it was because our children were small or what, but we couldn't seem to find anything that they could wear. Of course, neighbors and that would try and help, but again we couldn't get very far. So we went Red Cross and they came forth with money, they had a certain amount for a child and we were able to buy a few things to help them. We were able to get some things for a house, dishes and things that you could use and towels. Things like this really helped because you didn't know what to do or where to go and you didn't have much money available to spend on items like that, that you already purchased before that you really couldn't afford to purchase again.

PB: Now they was good in helping replace little material things you needed. The Church was good in helping replace the initial food you needed. They had quite a supply of food I think it was the stake that got together and everybody that had storage supplies had got them to the stake center. All of the people that was affected out here, nobody went hungry because there was plenty of food available and they even had fresh milk and everything that you needed for the necessities of life. They were free for the taking for the disaster victims and I thought that was quite commendable.

AA: By the Church, you mean the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

PB: Yeah, the Mormon Church.

Mrs. B: We had a number of people; of course, they were associates and friends that we have known, probably through the years. They offered to let us come live in their homes

and that. Some of them already had families staying with them. With five children we hated to burden more people with them, in fact, we kind of wanted to make it on our own. We didn't want to become a dependant person or someone looking for handouts and all this so we tried to do as much as we could on our own because we didn't really want to become dependant. We did have people offer a lot.

PB: This is a time where if you were independent minded, you were in a position where for the first time in your life, you had to accept some aid.

Mrs. B: You really didn't want to.

PB: When you lose everything, and it was really difficult for a lot of people. They had to swallow a lot of pride, and accept food and the Church, or Red Cross help, or what have you. I thought it was all right to accept because it was a different situation. It wasn't a normal thing.

Mrs. B: We had several meals at the National Guard Armory. It was probably put on by the government or was that a local county?

PB: Well, I guess it was the Guard and the government assistance of some type.

Mrs. B: All of the relief operations, I thought, was really good. They meant well, there might have been a few blunders in some areas but they meant well.

AA: How soon after the flood were you able to start building your new home.

PB: Well, it took some time. They had a disaster center set up for all the victims and you could go to the various agencies and find out what you could do. We went to Farmer's Home and they told us we weren't eligible right then for a Farmer's Home Loan.

Mrs. B: No, but we still had to make our house payments, which was almost strange too.

PB: Then they told us maybe we better got to SBA, so we did. Within a week, we had already signed up for a rebuilding loan. We knew that we'd need a pretty good size home because we had a fair sized home that we lost. So we had to take one of their nearly maximum loans to rebuild a home to fit our family's needs. We started the loan process within a week. This deal, it all takes time, took a month or so for the papers to be processed. We wasn't sure of anything for several weeks, of what we were going to do. But we played it by ear and just took it as it come. Except we knew we had to get back in the home, so we got right with it. Now, some people had quite a time making a decision what they were going to do. With us it wasn't really a problem, we knew we had to get back in a home. We've lived in the country all of our life and we wanted to get back out into the country.

Mrs B: I wanted to build in Wilford.

PB: She wanted to build in Wilford, but at the time we didn't dare rebuild where we was, and there wasn't any land available and so we were looking all over.

Mrs. B: We looked down in Parker.

PB: North of St. Anthony and different places.

Mrs. B: Everywhere you could think of, anybody had a little bit of land we'd ask them about it.

PB: We couldn't seem to find anything for quite a while, then I don't know, I guess everything just worked out.

Mrs. B: I suggested that maybe Vern Singleton would sell this.

PB: Yeah, our neighbor, we happened to see him and he said, "Well, go talk to Vern, he might sell you that." We had asked him about it before we even built our other place down here. We liked this spot, have done all of our married life, but it wasn't available when we built our first house, but in this situation I guess somebody must have been directing it because, his circumstances were such that he needed a little money. It worked out that we needed a place to live and he was willing to sell his ten acres so we could rebuild and the location has just been ideal. I work in town and it's on the highway, and it's right in Wilford, just where we want to be.

AA: So how long did it take you to build your home, when were you in it?

PB: Well, the actual construction started in August some time. we moved in two days before Christmas, the 23rd of December. At the time I had a hard time getting off work and we have to move at nights, course we didn't have a lot to move, because we lost everything. We had a little Red Cross clothing and we bought two or three pieces of furniture cause the rented house we wasn't fully furnished. We had a couch and a washer and dryer and just a few things to move. But we moved at night. We said we wanted to be our new home for Christmas, and we just barely made it.

AA: So you have furnished your home since you have moved into it?

PB: It's an attractive home, very comfortable, are you satisfied with it?

PB: Very much so.

AA: In dealing with the Bureau of Reclamation, do you feel that you were treated fairly?

PB: I would think so. I don't know why I would feel otherwise. I think they tried to help people to replace what they had.

Mrs. B: They are still trying to help people.

PB: They are still trying. If a person was honest and tried to get what they had to replace, they worked with you and worked it out.

Mrs. B: You could talk to them and you could tell them how you felt and you could tell that what you lost, put a value on it and they would usually give you a good price for it. They wouldn't try to cheat you out of what you had or anything.

PB: Now at the time one of the earlier, not the earliest, but one of the earlier to get a claim in, and of course prices have changed since we put our claim in. and if we hadn't got right with it, to rebuild our home, the money wouldn't have been enough to rebuild what we did; but we kinda beat inflation jump and got our home built. It worked out well for us. I guess maybe other people that got their claims in earlier and waited to build their home, inflation ate up part of their money to where they didn't have enough to rebuild their home.

Mrs. B: We had an advantage because we had just built a new home and we had just had a contractor build us a new home. We had known what it was like and we had known the man did us a good job, so we went right back to the man and said, "How much would you appraise our house for today?" And he gave us a good price. So when we went to the claim, we told them we about figured that we had to have to replace that exact house. Then we went back to this man. We got started right away and he just took it right on. He wanted to help people out and he was just a good builder, good contractor.

AA: He built both of your homes?

PB: Yes, the same man. He's a good honest builder and we knew that we could trust him.

Mrs. B: He's LDS, he's in the stake presidency down in Rigby, just a right fine man.

PB: I think he bent over backwards to help us. I don't know if it was sympathy or what but he did really go out of his way to be good and help us to get rebuilt.

AA: Now, I'm curious, did you put a claim in for the damage to your land at the same time you claimed damage to your home?

PB: Yes, and we settled with them on our land damage. Now others in the area have claimed more than we settle for, but I felt like where we had hay and grass, we wasn't really damaged as heavily as some of them. Some of the farm up above us gravel covered and had a lot of sand on. We wasn't damaged that way, so we took the settlement and it was adequate to restore our ground. Of course, we had to take our land damage money, and but the new land with so it left us in kind of quandary cause we are in a situation where we got the land down there and that we used to live on. It isn't cleaned yet, but eventually we will get it someday. But we had to use our land damage money to buy the relocation property.

Mrs. B: We had some help from my brother. He is an acting judge now, he has been an attorney and he was down engineering type work, civil engineering, and he has done surveying, these kinds of things and he did come out and help us with several items like the claim. He talked to the guys a little bit and I don't know if he helped that much, but he talked to them and they knew that he was a fairly honest person and they could trust him. They looked over our claim and they said it was a small claim and it was reasonable and so they went ahead with it. Of course, we wanted it finished before Christmas, we wanted to buy Christmas and we wanted the kids to feel secure.

PB: But as far as any complaints to the Bureau we really had none. I think they treated us fairly.

Mrs. B: They were reasonable people. You go to them and talk to them. They were fathers, they were husbands, they were people you could talk to about things.

PB: There were verifiers that wasn't from this area that didn't really know things of this area, that might had some problems, you know, placing the right kind of values, but other than that I think that they did a pretty good job.

AA: Did you have any dealing with the law enforcement officers? County and State authorities and if you did, would you describe whether you felt they were effective in discharge their responsibilities?

PB: I think so. Most of the dealings that we had was just coming out on the highway to see our property that was damaged. They had it blocked off from an average person coming out.

Mrs. B: Curiosity seeker.

PB: Curiosity seekers because there was some looting of the remains. There wasn't anything worth looting, that we could see.

Mrs. B: They would say, "What are you expecting, things to grow back?" And Paul would say, "Yes, I'm expecting things to grow back."

PB: Yes, I did tell them I kept going out there to see if my house was growing over night. I think they did a good job, they had quite a few volunteers, it wasn't just police force.

Mrs. B: They had a wide area to cover.

PB: They had local people. They have a search and rescue team over here and they were all involved.

Mrs. B: A lot of CB'ers and things.

PB: Course, I'm quite well known. We didn't have any problems getting through, being a mailman everybody knows me and so we got through any time we would come without any problems at all.

AA: Did you feel that any who assisted in the recovery operations took advantage of you or other people of the government in terms of getting a lot of money without really earning it?

PB: As far as my own personal involvement, I don't know of that. I've heard rumors that some of these cleanup fellows they were over paid, some of them really! And they savaged a little bit of stuff on the side while they was cleaning up, but other than that I don't really know of anything real bad.

AA: Do you know of any one who filed fraudulent flood claims, without divulging their names?

PB: Well, I think there's some exaggerators. We know several. I wouldn't want to be the kind of guy that would rat on anybody, but we know people that in my own thinking actually had less or no more than we had, and their claims in some instances were nearly double ours. Now this whole flood claim thing I think it was a matter of character and personal integrity. Now if a person was honest and had character and integrity, they would file an honest claim. If they had tendencies to be otherwise, they were otherwise. That's the whole crux of it.

Mrs. B: I think this flood was a good testing point because there was so many times you could have easily given into stress or pressure, or claims of falsehood, to crookedness. You could have in so many ways, so many times.

PB: That's all it is. The opportunity was here to be yourself to be honest or the opportunity was here where you lost everything. Everything was completely swept away and all of the evidence. The opportunity was there; they could exaggerate and say "Boy, I has so much more than I had."

Mrs. B: I'll bet the majority didn't.

PB: I don't think the average person exaggerated that much. I know the temptation was there, and there are few people that are weak and they were temped and they exaggerated.

Mrs. B: It was their chance finally to have something, and nobody could do anything about it.

PB: Well, this area was a bunch of poor farmers, not really poor quality farmers, but they wasn't wealthy. It wasn't a wealthy area. But some of these people seems to come out with quite a bit of substance, and some of it was probably justified and some not.

Mrs. B: We've had a few experiences with family that aren't all that good, but I guess you always have trying experiences in families.

AA: Since we are talking along these lines, why don't we continue to talk about how the Teton Dam Disaster has changed your life. Of course, I'm not talking about relocating, we know that that part of your life has changed, I'm talking about other ways that your life may have been changed by the disaster?

PB: Well, I think it's a change to everybody that was involved in the thing.

Mrs. B: It made you think a little bit more importance about family ties, relationships, they count more than material possessions.

PB: You learn that material things aren't all that stable and aren't all that necessary. You can get by without some of the things that you lost. I guess while you had them, they were really important, but if they are all swept away suddenly, they are just not really all that important. I think a person's character and the way you deal with your fellow man and all that is much more important than material things.

Mrs. B: You fell all at once for a little child, it's more important for him to be comforted, for him to know that he can have a new toy or a nice soft bed or something again. That's much more important than anything else that you would want.

PB: Well, another thing, our very lives are important to you, because if this disaster would have happened, say a week earlier, it could have been taken most of the lives of the area.

AA: What do you say that Paul?

PB: Well, because if it would have happened at night, there would not have been time to warn most of Wilford. It's too close to the dam. At that time there was some very near misses of being drowned in it by quite a few people. Especially up in the upper area of Wilford, and even in some of the lower areas. Some people just barely got out by their skin of their teeth you might say and if this would have happened at night, people don't react as quick as night. If you were in bed, it takes time to wake everybody up. Maybe there wouldn't have been anybody up there to say that the dam was going yet. It would have taken more time to alert people, and there could have been so many lives lost, so I think it all must have been a blessing that it happened when it did.

AA: Did you want to say something Mrs. Birch?

Mrs. B: There's still a lot of bitterness, there's a lot of hurt feelings, there's a lot of people that feel like they are being cheated. I really wonder if they searched deep down inside themselves if they would really feel that way or if they just look at the material dollar and think "Well, I'm not getting out as good as so and so." I have a friend who is going to claim right now, and I said to her what you need to do is gather your little ones

around you and hold them close and think about what they need and what you can do for them.

PB: Instead of worshipping the dollar so much.

Mrs. B: Instead of worrying about your big beautiful house you just lost, with all of it's beautiful things in it, thinking you can always get a house; and you always can.

PB: Really people now days worship the dollar too much. I think this whole disaster was as if the Lord had planned it or something, the way it happened and it's been a real test to the people. It tested their character, and tested their ability to recover and.

Mrs. B: To cope with problems.

PB: To cope with the situation. It's also tested the people that weren't even involved in the flood. We know of people that have taken their entire food supply and taken it to the stake center and actually given it away to people in need. Now that's being a good person in my mind. It brought out the goodness in people and it brought a lot of the bad in people. Some people that weren't involved in the flood are quite envious of the new homes and such that are being built out here, and some people like I say, have been just a little bit greedy. They fudged a little bit on their claims. So that's the bad in people. It's brought both the good and the bad out in people and I think the whole thing was a test of everybody.

Mrs. B: We ran into a lot of people that would say "Would you come live in our home for a while, we would like to help you out." We had one lady who offered us to come and eat with her and be in her home and she had seventeen people there and she was taking on another seven without even thinking about it. I thought, my word, it would be such a strain on everybody.

PB: And we had a friend over there too, that had a two bedroom home and he invited us with our five kids to come and live with them. Now to me, that's being a good person, to invite a family with five kids to come and stay with you for an indefinite period. It worked out that we didn't have to stay with people. We found this old house, it was hardly bearable to be able to live in, but we survived three weeks before we could find a decent place to live.

AA: You indicated that the Lord may have caused the disaster, do you think that he cause the dam to burst?

PB: Well, the circumstances He probably allowed to happen.

Mrs. B: He probably just let the men make their own failings, helped them a little bit after they were in trouble.

PB: Man has capabilities of making errors and He knew that they would. I think the reason the dam went out is they filled it too darn fast. It was made out of primarily farm soil and any farmer knows that if you build something out of fresh dirt, even a ditch bank, and fill it too fast, it won't hold until it settles. If they could have filled it slower, and allowed settling and moisture to creep in and settle down, I don't think the thing would have went out. We had a real heavy snow pack up there and that water had to come somewhere and they didn't have a release, that tunnel was blocked off. Nowhere for the water to go except to back up higher and higher, even if got up to the spillway that was three hundred feet high and so it was inevitable that there was a lot of pressure on that dam when the water was that deep. With that fresh fill, I don't know whether the contractor was partially to blame either, because I heard that some of the dirt wasn't compacted as tightly as it could have been too. All these things are speculation, but you do know through that the dam shouldn't have been filled quite the fast, had an effect on it.

Mrs. B: Yes, but what an excellent chance for everyone to show their true selves. I mean, you could help your neighbor if you were not affected in the flood. You could hinder your neighbor if you were not affected in the flood. You could do things. You were in a good position; everybody was, at that time. You could have been done for people or you could have done bad, which ever they choose.

PB: Well, it's still affecting people to this day. Now some people have got more claims on others. They're building a little better homes than others. They're building a little better homes than others. It's causing enviousness right here in the ward. I hate to see it, but we know it's going on. That's backbiting what have you. I guess it's just characteristic of people though.

AA: What are you are suggesting is, that this has been a testing time.

PB: Really so. It's a major test of the people.

Mrs. B: I kept working during all this flood and I know if I hadn't of I couldn't have coped just with my thought all the days. I kept jobs, I worked at Orr's for a while, now I'm working all the time and I thought, this is a relief, you know, this is a relief because I was away from it.

PB: It's a test to people in stress, you know, because if you're say washed out of your home you're naturally not going to be as contended as you was in your original home and you're under stress and has been a real trying time for people.

Mrs. B: Plus you have people, like now, if you were making payments on something they would call you up, would ask you if you intended to pay this payment or what you intended to do. This put a lot of stress on you, because here you were trying to buy the necessities which you had to replace at this time. Seems to me there was an awful lot of demand for money, all at once. It was an awful lot of everything else.

PB: But, like I say, it's a test of the true character of the people and I think most of them come out quite well. There's a few that have weaknesses. I think if they had these weaknesses and were greedy and what have you, they'll be judged eventually for it and so if you felt like you was honest as you could be and none of us are perfect and maybe we wasn't perfectly honest. We tried to be as much as we could be. You know deep, you felt good about your claim. So if anybody felt that way, I don't think you was really dishonest. Now some of this stuff would make you feel a little half-guilty, like the price of the home, now, we built our other home for about 20,000 and the one we build cost us nearly 50,000. At the time we put the claim in, we thought, gosh, that's an awful price to pay for a home and so you felt guilty about asking for a home. But we talked to builders and such that said that's how much they cost now, but at the time and you almost felt guilty asking for too much, because of the prices, and it's even worse today than it was when we built.

Mrs. B: I know what was bad for while was the kids saying, "Will I ever have this truck back, will I ever have this car back?" Here we were trying to make ends meet, trying to buy the groceries, trying to just get half way assembled as a family and the kids were remembering things. When you convince yourself what you had wasn't that important. My one little boy who is eight years old, he said "I want to go back to my other house, cause I liked my bedroom better," and things like that. They just kinda make you feel emotional for awhile; you know that it was impossible.

PB: I think it takes a little time for a house to be a home, like they say it takes a heap of living to make a house a home and we have been here for six months now finally feeling at home here now, but it's a real trial for people to be booted out of their homes.

Mrs. B: So many have said to me as I see them at work, "Oh, you got a new home, don't you just love it?" at first I actually didn't like this home. All these people saying, "If I had a new home, I'd be so happy." I would think "Yes, if you had a new home and everybody just picked you up all at once and said, 'Here, live in this house,' I wonder if you would like it that well cause it was almost too sudden. If you built a new home you sit back and dream about it and plan about it for years or something but just to grab you all at once and say 'all right this house is no more now you are moving.'"

PB: These home building decisions were sudden, you didn't have that much time to make them, but we feel like we was really guided well. Our home seems to be well designed and constructed and everything and it all worked out well for us.

Mrs. B: It worked out so well and everything could have been gone so wrong at any point. I felt like we had direction, a guidance there because we couldn't have succeeded if we had not have.

PB: For some people they seemed to make almost wrong decisions. Some of them couldn't wait for a house to be constructed. They jumped into trailers what have you, double wides. They're not all that satisfied with them. If they would have taken just a

little more time and planned things out just a little bit, but I guess under stress people do what they do.

AA: I wanted to ask you if you have any livestock.

PB: Yes, we had a small beef herd. It was a small herd, we had 10 head, but they were nice sized animals.

Mrs. B: Beautiful Herefords, just beautiful.

AA: Did you recover any at all?

PB: No, we were down in the main stream. I don't think they had a chance.

Mrs. B: They said something like thirty foot wall of water went through there. There was no chance for anyone. We had pigeons, they were just nesting, they were homing, two puppies, five kittens.

PB: We had a nice corral set us and as far as we were concerned we was set up perfectly for life.

Mrs. B: We had everything. We had fixed our yard, everything was just the way we wanted it.

PB: We were contended.

Mrs. B: Raspberries and strawberries were just in their third year, they had just done really well.

PB: We felt like we had the perfect setup. All we lacked, we didn't have a garage at that time, but other than that we had everything else we'd want.

PB: I wanted to ask you about the children and their pets, now you indicated that they had some pets. What were they?

Mrs. B: Yes. We had an old white cat, we had her since the kids were little babies and she had just had kittens. We had five little kittens and the old mother. I know when I was driving down the road going back and forth to work, wherever I was I'd look for that cat and I'd think I'd see her sometimes and once I stopped and actually chased a cat across a field, only to find out it wasn't my cat and realized that probably she drowned. I don't know now how she could have made it otherwise, but I know the kids still are taking about their pigeons they had. They had some pigeons nesting in the shed and puppies.

PB: Well, I'd imagine that the pigeons survived but we don't know where they went.

AA: Did the children miss their pets?

Mrs. B: Yes.

PB: Primarily they had four little ducks that we had bought. They had them about two or three weeks before the flood. I think we miss the baby ducks more than anything. They just really liked them. Now, we had a couple of dogs but they weren't really too fond of the dogs, they were kind of mongrels they never really though that much of them. So I don't think they really missed them. I don't think any of their pets or livestock survived. Maybe the pigeons did, but they went far away to where we don't know where they're at.

Mrs. B: Snow White.

AA: Is Snow White the cat?

PB: Yes, we miss the old Snow White; she was quite old for a cat so she lived her nine lives I guess.

Mrs. B: She was such a faithful pet, she was always there. She followed you, you would go for a walk in the field and she would go with you.

PB: She was a cat that would follow this one by especially like a dog. Everywhere he went she was right behind him.

AA: Before we end the interview I wanted to ask you, do you feel that the dam should be rebuilt?

PB: Oh definitely. I wouldn't be afraid to even live where we lived again. Because I think the lessons have been learned now. I know the dam could be reconstructed there with proper engineering, with the proper safeguards taken, I'm sure that it could be. And we need it for flood control. I've experienced four serious floods in my lifetime from the Teton River and just a lot of trouble caused us. Every spring we would have to go out and check on the river. Every winter was also a worry.