The Teton Dam Disaster Collection

Mr. and Mrs. Harold Bischoff – Life during the Teton Flood

By Mr. and Mrs. Harold Bischoff

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Box 5 Folder 19

Oral Interview conducted by Alyn B. Andrus

Transcript copied by Sarah McCorristin and David Garmon—April 2005

Brigham Young University – Idaho
AA: Mr. Bischoff, will you please spell your name for me?
HB: Harold Bischoff.
AA: Would you spell your name for me, Mrs. Bischoff?
SB: Sharon.
AA: Mr. Bischoff, what is your birth date, and where were you born?
HB: I was born in Idaho Falls, on July 21, 1935.
AA: Do you have a family?
HB: Yes. There’s my wife and five children, three boys and two girls.
AA: How many were living in your home at the time of the flood?
HB: We were all living there.
AA: What was your address at the time of the flood?
HB: Route #1, St. Anthony, Idaho.
AA: Is that near the Wilford area?
HB: Route #1 takes most all of Wilford and part of Twin Groves.
AA: You were very near the Teton Canyon, weren’t you?
HB: Right in the mouth of it, where the water came out.
AA: What do you do for a living?
HB: We’ve got a dairy farm.
AA: And how long have you lived in this area?
HB: About thirty-eight years.
AA: Have you lived here all your life, Mrs. Bischoff?
SB: No, just since I married Harold.
AA: Did you own your own home and farm before the flood?
HB: Yes.

AA: You weren’t renting?

HB: No, we were in the process of buying it.

AA: Mr. Bischoff, would you mind explaining your feelings about the construction of the Teton Dam? Did you support it or oppose it?

HB: I felt like it was something we really needed. I figured that they could always build a safe dam. They need a dam on this Teton. Wilford’s been flooded out several times. We’ve been over there to help people, several years, to clean up their hay, move hay and what not after the flood. I still think that they need a dam on the Teton River someplace.

AA: Were you ever flooded out by the river?

HB: No. Even with the ice jam, we never had any water get on our place at all.

AA: But you got involved with others, helping them sandbag and move hay?

HB: Not sandbag, we’d mostly just help them move their hay.

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

HB: I didn’t. My wife always said she was afraid that it was going to break. She always had the feeling that it would.

AA: Would you care to make a statement about that, Mrs. Bischoff?

SB: I don’t remember just when it was that all the controversy was going on, should they build or shouldn’t they, and the environmentalists getting involved, but I read that book, *The Johnston Flood*. It was about the flood in 1898 and all these little towns down in that valley being wiped out. I thought that if the Teton Dam went, there would go Wilford, Sugar City, and Rexburg. I could just see it compared with that area of the country when they had their flood. When we heard the dam was breaking, they told us “The dam is breaking and they’re turning some water out,” Harold believed that they were turning water out and I just thought, “Well, this is the day!” I believe it broke.

AA: When you got the word there was no question in your mind that the dam had broken?

SB: No, I wasn’t surprised. It was almost finished and I thought, “Maybe it’s going to be okay.” I’d almost got over this uneasy feeling, when we heard. I thought, “This is it.”
AA: Mr. Bischoff, would you tell where you and your family were the day the dam broke and just go into as much detail as you want to. You can tell about what happened to you that day after you got the news that the dam had broken.

HB: Three boys and I were vaccinating, branding and dehorning little calves, and the wife was in town. She came home and our neighbor, LaVerl Singleton, came over and said, “They’re having trouble at the dam and they’re going to turn some water out.” That’s what he heard on the radio. My wife came out to where we were and told us what he said. She brought the radio and it was still playing just music on the station that we had it on. We had it on the St. Anthony station. We had one little calf yet to dehorn. We hurried and cut it and dehorned it.

We had a sprinkler pump in the slough, what they call the Hog Hollow. That’s where we get the water from for the sprinkler for part of our place. I thought, “Well, if they’re going to turn a lot of water out of there, it might get that wet.” It never got that wet before and we had it there for twenty years. We hurried and finished our little calf and I got in the pickup. I thought that I’d just hook on to the pump and drag it up on higher ground. I got just in front of the house and looked east. The canyon was just straight up and down with water, just level full, but it was like it was just straight up and down in front of it. The water was hitting these big cottonwood trees, and the canyon was clear full of those big trees. They were going down as soon as the water hit them and break them. They were gone that quick. I knew I couldn’t go that way to get our pump. So I turned around, I was going to go south from my house. I stopped back of the house. I told his wife, I wonder if the light company knows that that much water is coming and she said, “It must, the power just went off.” It was just twenty after twelve then. The water would have been about a half mile from our place from where we could see it. I thought that maybe I could go north, go around and get into it. As high as that water was I thought for sure that the pump would get wet. The boys and I went a quarter of a mile and I stopped on the crossroad. Layne Reynolds came up. I slowed down for him to go on past. Then we had to go east less than a quarter of a mile down to where they call Big Hollow. By the time I got there, Layne was backing out of Hog Hollow. I thought his car was on fire, it was smoking that bad underneath. We stopped and got out. I said, “It looks like your car is on fire.” He said, “No, I just locked my brakes up.” You can’t see down in the Hog Hollow until you get right on the edge of it. Then it falls right down low. By the time I got there, the water was probably fifteen feet up over the road down in Hog Hollow. And there he was. He said that he was going ninety miles an hour when I slowed down for him to go by me. How he ever stopped from going into the water, I don’t think he even knows to this day. But he stopped and came back and we looked at the water and passed remarks. I still didn’t know the dam had broke. They just said they were turning out a lot of water. I said, “Why did they have to turn so much water out?” He said, “I don’t know. My family is on the river fishing today. I know they’re gone.” He didn’t think they’d ever get out of there. We stood there and talked for not even a half a minute. We had a little house over our pump and it raised up and started floating away. We could see it floating away so I got in my pickup and we left.
I came back to the house. When I got back to the house, the water was out of the canyon and coming towards our house. And I sent one of the kids in to tell Sharon to get the girls and get out of here because we were going to get hit. We had had our milk cows out on a green pasture for a week right in front of our house. They happened to be laying right in front of our house. I took the two oldest boys and we tried to get them to the north where we figured it would be on higher ground. But we couldn’t get them out. We couldn’t even drive the cows out of the field. There’s a place we take them out every night and morning to go across the road to milk them. They would just not come out of the field, even across the road. We tried using a dog and everything else. My pasture was divided, the north side we had for our young stuff, so we took the fences down and run the milk cows in with them. We figured we could go further north on the other road, cut the fence, get them out and take them north to higher ground that way. By that time there was another car here to help us. The guy stopped, I don’t know who he was, trying to help us get the cows. By the time we got them into the other pasture, the water was around our house. We had a big awning up on the north side with steel posts on it and while we were trying to get the cows, we could hear metal popping and snapping. I looked around once when I heard one post snap and the big awning fell down by the side of the house.

We were watching the water; it wasn’t going to get any higher for awhile because we’re up pretty high here. Our neighbor to the south of us lives on a high canal bank and the water came rushing up the edge of it. I figured that once it got to the bank it wouldn’t go over the top of it. We just turned around and looked back and the water was completely over that canal bank. Our neighbors big hay shed and everything were gone. We saw Rex Hughes’ place his granary was floating around back of his house. Then his house was gone. The kids saw his big grain combine going down the field, they said it looked like someone was driving it. It was floating down in the water.

By the time we got our cows through that first fence and to the other one, the guy that was helping us had to wade in water to get to his car. The car was just a little ways away from our dividing line where we had our pasture. We ran our cows up north where the young ones were. Normally they would be over in the slough, Hog Hollow, but everything was right here at the house. We got about half of them out on the road to the north. Then we finally decided the water wasn’t or shouldn’t come any higher. We decided we’d leave and get out because some other guys came up and kept talking to our kids telling them to get in the car and that they were taking them out. Sharon, the two girls and Lynn went north for a mile. Then we went north to where they were and told them that we was all right. It didn’t look like the water was going to come any higher, so she took the other two boys and I told her I’d come back, because we had about half the cows out on the road. So we decided I’d come back. If it didn’t get any higher, to get them off the road and into the pasture. I stayed up there a half an hour and then I came back and water was back up in the cross-cut canal, about three-quarters of a mile north of our place and it was running out into the fields there. I came back and there was no fences left anywhere. We had maybe ten acres of ground that wasn’t under water then. So I left the cows there for a while, came back as close as I could get to our house.
Our house and all our buildings were still here. We could look at the water and see the place where it was leaving the canyons, it was flooding everything. There was some big tall trees there. The water was probably thirty feet high at least, looking through the trees. It was that high and everything was under water. I stayed here for a little while, I went back to see if I could find the wife and kids and tell them that the water wasn’t coming any higher.

When I got back over there, people could see the water west and they thought it was coming over that far north. They sent everyone to Aston. I was going to get her and I thought, “She’ll soon come back.” I came back. By 1:30 I had all the cows back in the pasture off the road. I came back over to the buildings trying to see if I could assess what damage there was. We were lucky our milking barn didn’t have any water in. Our hay barn had about five feet of water in one end of it. You couldn’t get into the hay barn, water was still running through. We couldn’t get to our house. By about 3:30, I went to Ashton trying to find the wife. I got up there and they had a roadblock. I asked them where the people were they sent from St. Anthony up there. He said they all went back to St. Anthony. So I turned around and came back home. I thought she was back in St. Anthony and that she would soon be out home. We had a generator, so I hooked it up to the tractor and had it raised so I could milk. Then I started fixing some fences so I could keep my cows in. One end of the hay barn had one door off, one that was all caved in and it was full of debris inside of it. I had to move a lot of debris and trash out of the way to get our cows in and around to the barn. By about 4:30, the water was down enough so that I could get over to our house and get into it. You could walk down the road about an eighth of a mile if you had an overshoe or boots on, it had gone down that much by then. About 5:00 I came back and Grant Stewart had come back from Wilford. He had been up to Ashton and knew where Sharon was. They were looking at the damage. He and Ben Peterson helped us. We set out to take the milk cows away from our young stuff. I got them in on the end of the barn in the holding pens to milk. It was about 7:00, I was just about through milking and the wife and kids finally came back to assess the damage that had happened that day. As we look at it now, we realize how foolish it was to stay here. The water that came from the east out of Hog Hollow just about surrounded us to where we wouldn’t have been able to have got out. We figured we were high enough that the water would never get up this high.

AA: Before we started the interview, you were telling me about some developments that could have put you down in Hog Hollow when the flood came. Would you care to talk about those?

HB: We’d ordered some sprinkler pipe, two lines, and it seemed like they couldn’t get to us. We bought it from Roy Beddes and he and he brought it to me on Friday night. It was about 7:00 when the unloaded it. We put it over to the west of a rocky knoll. He didn’t bring the risers and heads out that night. They said they didn’t have them and that they would bring them out in the morning. If he’d have brought them that night, we’d have went back after supper and put our heads in. He brought them out the next morning and he had all different sizes nozzles in some of the heads, so we sorted through them to get the sizes we wanted. Then we sat here and talked for about an hour. If he hadn’t
brought them out and stopped us that morning for that hour, we’d have had our calves
done and then we were going right over because our grain was getting dry. We would
have went right over and picked that pipe up. We were going to take it down in the low
part of Hog Hollow. The water over there was close probably thirty to forty feet high.
That’s where we would have been. If we would have been out in the fields, chances are
no body would see us to warn us. You couldn’t have seen the water until it came up to
Hog Hollow and it came up Hog Hollow with awful speed. When we were over there
with Layne Reynolds it was moving so fast with kind of a backlash on it. We would have
been in the lowest part and I’m sure there would have been no way we could ever get out.
I think that if you saw it, you couldn’t outrun it, we’d had to have gone quite a ways to
get out of it. So those things happen. Under different circumstances, we sure could have
been in a different place that day.

AA: I’d like to ask you some questions now about the flood, and before we have Mrs.
Bischoff tell her story. First of all, you mentioned Layne Reynolds, he was the one who
was going about 90 miles an hour when he went down into Hog Hollow and saw the
water and locked his brakes?

HB: Yes. They live right up in the canyon on the edge of the Teton River. Their house
was the first house hit by the water.

AA: That’s what I wanted to ask you, if they lived there.

HB: Yes, they lived about a mile east of us, right down on the river.

AA: Did you say that he said that his folks were fishing on the river that day?

HB: They were floating on the river in a boat, fishing.

AA: Isn’t his mother’s name Norma Reynolds?

HB: Yes. She had quite a story in the paper about how they got of there.

AA: I wanted you to explain for those who listen to this interview, and who read it, why
you were not devastated by the flood. By that I mean, why your home, barns, and
machinery were not washed away like all the other homes and barns in the Wilford area,
when you live so near the mouth of the canyon as you do.

HB: We live up on quite a high hill on the rim of the canyon, and my folk’s old house is
about 100 yards north of mine. That was just about the high water line. Around our
house, we had about seven foot of water at my house. In that distance of maybe 100
yards, there was maybe two foot of water around the other house. But it just seemed like
the water was in steps. We had the other house rented to some people, she had some
clothes out on the clothesline. There was two lines and one side was awful muddy, and
the other side didn’t even have any mud on them. A lot of people commented on them
clothes that afternoon. By the time the water went down you couldn’t even get north of
here, these was rows of cars of people stopping and walking in to see. To the south of us you could walk onto a canal bank, it was what was left—the bridge was there, all the canal banks was washed clear out. That one bridge there, you could get on it, and could see the water still running further south. We were just kind of high enough, and on the edge of the high water.

AA: It sounds to me as though the water, even though it was seven feet here where your house is, that it didn’t come through your farm with such force that I would wash it away then, did it? Was it water that rose gradually until it surrounded your house more than water that came rushing through?

HB: No, the water came rushing through here. It was coming through the pasture. I’d hate to even try and outrun it, as fast as it was coming, about directly towards you. And just to the west of our house, we’ve got two big canals here and coming up it hit the one canal, coming straight north. It was just like someone had a big line of people and he was running and kind of popped the end of it or swung around. That’s just the way that water looked coming up between these canals to a point west of our house. Part of our ground was completely washed to the bedrock to the south of us. We had about twenty acres of ground in there that had anywhere from two feet to as high as four feet of sand and rock deposited on it. Our house was just far enough north not to be washed away. We got the force, but it wasn’t near the force that was just south of here. If we had been even an eighth of a mile further south, there would have been nothing left here, because water came through with all the force that much further from our house.

AA: The pasture that your cows were in, is that even higher ground than where your house is?

HB: It’s about the same height.

AA: Did you get the cows out just before the high water came?

HB: Yes. By the time we got them in the pasture and finally got them through this fence and the other pasture, the water was clear up to that line of the fence where it divides the pasture. Because the one guy, I know he had to walk into water. His car was parked right there by the gates, and he had to walk through the water and get to his car. I’d say it was even up to the bottom of his car by then.

AA: Did you lose any cows?

HB: No we were able to save all our cows. We kept them going north to the pasture. We had one piece where no water got onto and we kept them over there.

AA: Did they seem nervous?

HB: Well, they had to be because you couldn’t get them out of the field across the road. We take them across the road night and morning to milk. And then we run them back
into the pasture after we get through milking them. And we could not get them to come out. You couldn’t get them out of the field, no matter what we did, you couldn’t get them to go out into the road. They just wouldn’t go. They knew something was coming, they could see the water, and they kind of kept wanting to go back towards the water and see what it was. We had to keep around them to keep them from going back towards the water.

AA: What were your feelings when you looked east and saw the water coming?

HB: I don’t know, I couldn’t believe it! All I’d heard then was they were letting some water out, and you couldn’t believe that they would let that much water out. But it still never dawned on me that the dam had broken. I just didn’t think the dam had broke. They hardly had it finished yet.

I always thought if the dam ever broke, it would be more at the top, and it would be a little gradual let out. But that canyon was just level full from the top, from side to side. But it never got any higher, it never did leave the canyon. It never got any higher in the area that I seen it, because it was just a wall of water straight up and down. And then as it come down, and the corner of our place, where Hog Hollow drops into the Teton River, there’s a ledge of rocks there and the river makes almost a complete ninety degree turn. But the canyon there widens out to three or four times. It was three times as wide as it was just up a little ways. And then I saw that water, I thought, “Well, if the canyon widens out, the water will level out, it won’t come up here.” But when it hit that straight ledge of rocks, why then it just boiled up. I was thinking those trees must be probably forty feet high or maybe fifty feet high. You can stand there and look through the trees, to the top of the water in back of them, and it was at least two-thirds as high as the trees. Unless you saw it, you can hardly believe how high the water was.

There were granaries coming down. You would see it one minute, kind of hit that area, then everything was gone. We saw one house, it must have been Reynolds’ and a big granary, but it just hit there, it was there and all of a sudden with that churning, boiling water, why it was gone.

AA: Were you frightened?

HB: I don’t remember, I think I was just in a daze. It was something that you couldn’t believe was happening, that much water.

AA: Were you ever really concerned about your family? Now, I don’t mean to suggest that you weren’t, I want to know if you felt that they would be safe here near the house?

HB: No, because I came back and told the wife to get the two girls and get out of here.

AA: So when you came back and told her to get out of here, you were afraid that the house would…..
HB: Yes, because I could see the water coming through the pasture, coming down straight towards us then. So we knew then we were going to get hit with the water. I still didn’t think it was going to get that high because we were up quite high. I think part of the reason we got so much water was we’ve got what they call the cross-cut canal. I guess it just hit that and pushed it right straight up into our houses. Then probably an hour after the high water, it kind of got the canal washed out and then that’s when the water kind of went back a little bit around the buildings. But it took until I think it was at least 3:30, almost 4:00 before I could get over to the house.

I came into our house, it was still here, but it had tore three sides of it off the foundation and tore the plates clear off the bolts where it was bolted down. Downstairs, all the walls were completely knocked out. When it raised the house up, it just boiled underneath the house, washing things right out of our basement.

AA: Did you see any animals being washed away by the floodwaters?

HB: No, there really weren’t any animals above us. Our place would probably be about the first one that would have any livestock on it. I didn’t see any animals floating away. Afterwards, we saw an awful lot of fish scattered around the yards. Clear up here to the houses there was, it was just sucker after sucker. I think we saw one trout. We must have seen hundreds of suckers, but only one trout. But we found some beaver too, and some geese. That’s about all the animals we found.

AA: Mrs. Bischoff, you have a slightly different story to tell because you were separated from your husband for some time during that day. Would you like to tell your story about the flood?

SB: Well, that morning, Roy Beddes came out and delayed things a little, while we visited with them. And then I decided I would go to town and get the shopping done first, and take care of things in the house in the afternoon. I took the girls and went to town. We got back about noon, and I thought that I’d hurry and make a meatloaf and put that and some potatoes in the oven, and dinner could cook while I go out to the barn and wash the car. I was just in the process of making the meatloaf when LaVerl Singleton came over, and I looked out the window and thought, “Gee, it looks like he’s in a hurry.” It was just the way he drove and even the way he walked. I commented on it when he came to the door. He said, “Not really.” But he asked us whether we’d been listening to the radio. I said, “No,” and asked why. He said, “The dam’s breaking and they’re turning some water out. Have you got any kids over in the slough?” They love to go fishing where the slough dumps into the river. I counted my blessings a thousand times that they weren’t fishing that morning, because we just didn’t have enough time to get over there. I told him no, that they were out helping Harold. So I ran out to tell him and he went and got into his pickup to continue warning the neighborhood. After I told Harold, I came back in. I turned on the radio when I came back in, but we never did hear that the dam had broken.
The sheriff’s office wanted volunteers to help evacuate Wilford. We were concerned about people who lived close to the river. But we had talked about what if the dam ever broke, and we thought up here on the hill, we’ll be okay. And I was concerned about who I would be putting up in my basement that night. Then when Harold came in the power was off at twenty minutes after twelve. I was watching out the window on the south side of the living room, and I could see over behind Hughes’ place. To start with, I thought it was a bunch of sheep being moved before the water could get to them. And then I thought, “Well, that’s not the road, it’s past Rex Hughes’ house.” It was over behind, but it just looked like a bunch of dirty sheep with the dust flying above them. It dawned on me that that was the river. And when Harold came in, I said that—and I hadn’t even looked the other way toward Verla Reynolds’ where he saw the canyon full, I was watching over there, and pretty quick one of the kids said, “That must be Bobby’s granary.” They were talking about Bobby Reynolds. And then pretty quick they said, “There went Rex’s granary.” That is when Harold left to go get in the pickup, and try to go the other way to get that pump out. The next time I looked out the window, Rex’s house was gone. It was getting pretty scary then. And still the water was staying over that way. It hadn’t started to cross the pasture yet. When I saw it rolling across the pasture towards the house, I still wondered how close this was going to get. I still didn’t really think it would get here! Then when I decided it was, it was just across the road from the house when we left. I was just so close to empty on the gas gauge of the car, (everybody ran around on fumes that day, I think) because I was planning to fill the gas tank when I washed the car, which didn’t get done. But I took the car, I had the two little girls, and Lynn. He’s the youngest of the three boys. Harold took the older boys in the pickup. He stopped by the gate to get the cows out of the pasture. I stopped behind him and pretty quick he was pointing up, and the power lines were swinging and the telephone lines, so we pulled up around him and got out of there. It wasn’t too long before the lines fell. Then I drove up in front of Dyle Peterson’s house to wait. Several people we knew had come up the hill from the lower parts of Wilford. They were saying, “Hurry, head for Ashton!” I told them that Harold and the boys were still back there trying to get the cows out. And Joseph Meservy, who’s our home teacher, he said, “Well, I’ll go back and help him.”

We went on up a mile to Twin Groves and waited up there. We could see the water going over the canals behind our barns out here. It’s really hard to remember what happened when it all happened so fast. But later we saw Norma Reynolds. She told us she had been floating on the river. Her face was positively gray, and she was shook. When we were talking about the fact that her home was gone, and she said, “Yours is too, you might as well accept it.” This was after Harold had been up, because he told me he had seen the awning hanging down by the side of the house. And she said, “Yours is too.” Seeing that water going over the canals behind the barns with such force, I accepted the fact that I wasn’t going to have a home to come to that night. And when Harold came back, he said that the water was going down, so he was going to come back and see how it was. He left David and Darwin there too. We were waiting for him to come back. Neal Hughes and LaVerl Singleton came and said, “Head for Ashton, its coming fast.” And so we took off, and got up to the Chester Store. Everyone in Wilford was there, I think, just about. People were looking for their families. Some families hadn’t found
their kids. Dyle Peterson was looking for his wife and one boy and asking everyone if they’d seen them. It was really kind of scary to think that possibly these people were in all that water. We waited there for quite a while, and I wondered if Harold would come up if the water was coming that fast because Neal and LaVerl had said they would go back and get Harold. We waited for quite a while. Lynn was really scared. He had been with Harold in the pickup when they saw the slough so full. He just kept saying “Head for Ashton, don’t wait,” he was so scared. So we decided to go ahead and go to Ashton. The reason I stopped at the Chester Store was to try to get some gas, and, of course, the power was off and they couldn’t pump gas. And so I thought, “Well, we’ll just keep going to Ashton, and if we run out, we run out.” And we made it into Ashton. I think I had two dollars and a couple of quarters in my purse and we bought gas. And then later, we saw Grant Stewart and he took us to the grocery store, and we bought some bread and a few things to make sandwiches. We sat on the lawn at the Ashton High School, and thought, “Well, that would be where Harold would see us for sure if he came into town.” He didn’t come, so Grand Stewart told us that they had got them a motel room. We went over to the motel where they were. These people hadn’t really been renting rooms; they were going out of business, trying to sell it. But they just cleaned some rooms up in case people needed them. We rested there for the early part of the afternoon. We decided we’d listen to the car radio quite a bit to see what was going on. And when they said the stake center was trying to get people back together and had a list of missing people, and kept announcing, “So-and-so call your family.” We thought, well this would be a good place to go, to the stake center.

We started out of town. The state policeman stopped us and told us, “No way. They’ve got all they can handle right now; you just stay here for now.” They wouldn’t let us out of town. Then it got later, and we were talking to Grant and his son-in-law, Dale Swensen, who was the one who had rented our other house over here, and he said, “Well, we’ll go see what we can find out.” So they left and came back down. We waited and waited, and when they came back up there, they told us that our house was still here, but it was terribly muddy and in a terrible mess and that Harold was milking and needing the boys to help. And so by then we could get out of town, and come home, but we had to come in from the north, this other road was washed out.

We came home but we had to park by the garage by the other house, because there were so many sightseers parked in the way, and debris in the road, just big sticks and everything. We walked over here to see what kind of mess we had left. People were out here looking at it. One lady asked us if we had a place to stay, and I said, “I don’t know what we’re going to do.” And she said, “Come and stay with us.” I didn’t know who she was. And I said, “They’ve got a list of people over at the stake center.” And her husband said, “Our names are on the list, come and stay with us.” And she introduced herself and said, “What year did Harold graduate from high school?” And I told her, and she was in his class in high school. It was Floyd and Donne Huntsman. And they adopted us for about twelve days. So we went and stayed with them and had a warm bed a good supper, but not much sleep even though we were in bed. It was a full day.

AA: Where do Mr. and Mrs. Huntsman live?
SB: In St. Anthony.

AA: When you looked and saw the water coming towards the house before you left with the children, what were your feelings?

SB: Well, a lot of people asked me, “Didn’t it scare you to death when you saw that wall of water coming?” But it wasn’t really a wall of water; it was just a low ripple. It gradually got deeper, and I talked to people who say they’ll never forget sitting over on this corner, looking back toward our house and seeing that deep water and I didn’t look back. Maybe it’s a good thing I didn’t. One thing I did do was to take time to kneel down with the girls for a quick prayer. I prayed, “Help me be calm.” I think that’s the only thing that kept me sane enough to drive. I didn’t see the deep water, I saw that ripple, but it was just to the fence, across the road from the house. Like Harold said, just within that few minutes, it was seven feet deep around the house. I didn’t look back to see it, maybe it’s a good thing, or I would have been too panicky to even drive.

AA: Did you ever hear the radio announcer sound excited about the flood?

SB: No. We were listening to KIGO. I have wished a dozen times, after I heard what Don Ellis said on KRXX, about “There it goes.” I wish we had listened to the other station, but on KIGO, they didn’t sound too excited.

AA: KIGO would be the St. Anthony station?

SB: Yes.

AA: And KRXX would be the Rexburg station?

SB: Yes.

AA: And, of course, Don Ellis was the announcer for KRXX?

SB: Yes. It seems like they started telling what was happening, and after they started trying to locate everyone, they had their centers set up in the stake center, with the Young Adults keeping track of everybody. So sometimes they’d get a little excited about things, and trying to help locate people. I might mention, on the way back from Ashton, we had called in, and if there was any way Harold could get a phone, I had left a number for him to call the motel where we were staying in Ashton. So he’d know where we were anyway, and we’d know if he was okay. On the way back from Ashton, I heard our family’s name, and my dad’s name, not my mother. And I thought, ‘What if mother got out but daddy didn’t.’ They live in Rexburg. So I had to stop at the stake center and tell them that our family was okay, but I wondered about them. And it was several days before they knew whether we had been hit or what.
AA: How old are the children who went out with you? At the beginning, when you left the house?

SB: Lynn was ten years, Janet was eight, Katherine was six. And then David and Darwin were with Harold; David was fourteen at the time and Darwin was thirteen.

AA: How did the children react to the flood? Did they seem excited? Did they seem distressed?

SB: Lynn was really really scared. He had seen the slough full, the Hog Hollow. And he didn’t want to stop for anything, he didn’t want to wait for dad and David and Darwin, just keep going, keep going….even after we got David and Darwin with us, even when we were clear up to Chester, he wanted to keep going. The other kids didn’t say an awful lot. Later in the afternoon, the kids were concerned when Harold didn’t come. Of course, he was probably just outside of Ashton talking to the state police and we were around the corner at the high school. I think there was a lot of praying going on that day. We had another little prayer, and a little while later one of the older boys said, “I’ve got a real good feeling that dad’s okay.” Pretty soon another one of them said, “I feel the same way.” And they weren’t really worried about him. I think we all had pretty well made up our minds we weren’t going to have a home to come home to after talking to Norma.

HB: The older boys were worried; when we were trying to get these cows out, they kept hollering, “Let’s go, let’s go, let’s leave and let’s go.” They could see that water coming. They could see down here south of us, to Hughes’ place, they could see the machinery, the big grain combine floating. They said it looked like somebody was driving it out of the field. West of our house, they could see our propane gas tank floating and spinning in the water. The great big orange tank from the dam, they could see it floating; it stayed over in the field. It was several thousand gallon tank, big orange one. They seen it floating. I’m sure they were worried, ‘cause they kept hollering to leave, let’s leave when we was trying to get our cows out. The power line was falling down. David moved the pickup so it wouldn’t get on it. They were, I’m sure they were concerned. They were worried about the power line and kept saying, “Let’s go, let’s go.”

AA: Let me ask you some questions now about what the extent of the damage was to your home and farm that late afternoon or evening. In fact, you milked the cows. What was the extent of the damage to your place, Mr. Bischoff?

HB: All our crops were completely ruined, we didn’t harvest anything last year. Our pasture, we had about ten acres left. Any place that the water got in, even on this pasture where the edge of it was only a foot deep, it had so much sediment in it that the grass just wouldn’t grow last year. You could water it and it just would not come back. Our house, they finally condemned it and told us to start over. Since then, our other house has been condemned too. Water was on it maybe only two feet, but the foundation was settling to where it was cracking. They have condemned that.

AA: Would this be the house that you were renting?
HB: Yes, that we were renting. Our ground had, I’d say at least four foot of sand and rock on it, and it would go down to practically nothing, and other parts, a foot or so was washed off. To save our farm we had to go in and take this sand that didn’t have any rocks in it. We had to scrape it and haul it over to pieces of ground that was washed to build it back up. Some places were washed, all the topsoil clear down to the rock. We covered them back up. Across the slough over in Hog Hollow we got about 50 acres of farming ground over there. It had anywheres up to as high as two foot of sand and debris on it. We had great big tress from up the canyon. Soil Conservation spent close to thirty days here hauling the trees and debris off the place after the flood. We pretty well got our farming ground by off the place after the flood. We pretty well got our farming ground by scraping the sand and putting it on the places that were washed away. But considering the way it looked last year, I feel like we’ve got a pretty good crop this year. It’s not nearly as good as we usually raise, but it’s a lot better than what you’d usually raise after the flood. So we’ve pretty well salvaged most of our farm back now. We’ve got about 40 acres down at Hog Hollow and about ten acres on the corner here down by Rex Hughes’ that was washed clear, no topsoil left on it at all. They figured Hog Hollow had so much sediment in it that it’s going to take a long time. It’s so boggy that you can’t hardly walk out in it yet. They figure them 40 acres are pretty well destroyed to be any use for a long time.

AA: What did you do then last summer for feed for your animals?

HB: We had to buy all our feed. We didn’t have any pasture. We had seventy head of milk cows we had to bring in, put them on dry lot. We got loans to buy feed, hoping that the Bureau, they’re supposed to pay for that feed, reimburse us for it. As yet, we haven’t settled our claim.

AA: You haven’t submitted any claim with the Bureau yet?

HB: Yes, we’ve submitted, they’ve had our claim for about four months. It’s getting to the last stage. We do know they’ve cut us quite a bit. We had to buy close to five hundred ton of hay more than what we normally buy. We normally buy some, but we had to buy about five hundred ton more to take care of our pastures and our hay that we lost. They’ve cut us considerably—the verifier did, but the Bureau has now come back quite a little bit on it. We were down there the other day and they said that they were going to cut us $2500 on our hay. We asked him where he thinks that $2500 was going to come from. It has to come out of somebody’s pocket, that we had to spend it just to replace hay that normally we wouldn’t have had to buy. So that’s one of the arguments we have with the Bureau. But that’s the way it’s working out now.

AA: How was the Soil Conservation Service? Were they easy to get along with after the flood?

HB: I got along with them pretty good. We had a lot of trees out in our pastures and ditches, and couldn’t irrigate. We went to them and they came out with bulldozers and
pushed the trees out of our ditches so we could get water down, trying to save our pasture. But it just wouldn’t grow. You could water one day and it wouldn’t green up with the sediment on it. There were some places with two foot of sand on it. We had to scrape that off and replant that. But I thought the Soil Conservation did a pretty good job cleaning the debris up.

AA: Are they the ones that did most of the clean-up work on your place, on your farm?

HB: They were in charge and, of course, they hired contractors to come in and clean it up. They came and make big piles to start with. It was too wet to get out on it. They just tried to get it so that we could get water back onto our ground, trying to save some pasture. And then they came back in later and hauled it off.

AA: Are there any other government agencies that you dealt with during post-flood operations?

HB: These canals, they had to come in and rebuild them. The banks were completely gone. They had the Bureau oversee that, and you had to be here constantly. If you left or weren’t out there for a day or two they just kept trying to go out in your field, and push the dirt up, and take what little topsoil there was left. You just had to watch them constantly. They’d be out pushing dirt out of your field, taking dirt that they weren’t supposed to take. I missed a couple of days and then when I went out to see them, I had a hole out there that you could have put a truck in and never seen it. They just dug what soil there was and pushed it up. We had one field that had a lot of rock that had washed out of the canal which had been lined with rocks. We had rock pickers come in and clean out the rocks for us. We dumped the rocks all in the big hole, and still didn’t have it filled up. And then we hauled sand out from where it was deep and finished filling it up. But you just had to be there and watch every time. Every time when they come and build roads you have to kind of watch them. They wouldn’t put your culvert in, or you’d have to go back and argue with them to put your culverts in so you could get water again sometime. It was just a hassle all the way through, just trying to watch them to see that they would do it right, not to keep taking your soil. You didn’t have much of it left in places any way. The ASCS helped us on leveling the ground and moving the dirt. We were on 80%-20% with them. Of course, we had to have Boyd Yancey come out and check it over and see whether they thought they could salvage enough of it to be worth their time or their money to go with you. He looked at it and said if we could haul the sand off of the field and put it on the other field that was washed bad, then they figured they could go with us, so that’s the way we went.

AA: How much of the work in moving soil or sand from one place to another place did you do personally?

HB: I didn’t do any of that. We contracted it out to some Tuppers out in Salmon. They came in with carryalls. They must have been here 45 days. Towards the end they brought trucks in, big bellydumps, to haul longer hauls. Two cats and two carryalls worked here most of the time. We didn’t do any of the actual sand. We didn’t have any
equipment to move that kind of stuff. After the Soil Conservation got through cleaning, we went in and hauled a lot of debris by hand that they didn’t get. There was a lot of our sprinkler pipe that was laid out. A lot of it stayed there, it was just scattered all over in pieces and we had to go back and hand-pick off the ground what you could find.

AA: If the Bureau honors your claim, do you feel that you would be compensated for the loss of your farmland?

HB: If I could put it back just like it was before the flood, and forget about everything, that’s the way I’d have it, ‘cause I don’t think you’d ever be back to what it was before. There’s no way it can. You lost, say about 40 acres out of your farm. That’s pretty hard to say that you could be back. And part of your ground with just sand; we had good fertility in our soil. Now, we’ve got this sand, and it’s going to take several years to restore. It was just washed sand was all it was. I guess we’ll have to be happy if we can get that much back. If it hadn’t been what they consider a man-made disaster, we’d have been doing all of it ourselves. So I guess we should be happy in that way, that they are putting us back pretty close on our farm. It’ll be pretty close to what we had before.

AA: How many acres do you have on your farm?

HB: We have 240 acres.

AA: That includes the parts that are not reclaimable?

HB: That was what we had in our place before the flood, 240 acres of farm.

AA: Let’s talk about the house. Mrs. Bischoff, how did you feel after you came back to the house and saw what the flood had done to the house?

SB: Well, when you think you’ve lost everything and find out there’s something left, it’s a pretty on-to-of-the-world feeling ‘til you start digging in all the muck. There was a lot of days when we wished it had completely washed away. We wouldn’t have had all that work to do. But we were thankful for some of the little precious treasures, still being here, some of the baby pictures and things like that. Of course, there were lots in the basement ruined too, and a lot of stuff upstairs was ruined as well, but it had its ups and downs.

AA: You mentioned that some of your cherished items were still here when you came back and were not damaged by the flood. Did you have cherished items that were damaged by the flood?

SB: Yes, we sure did.

AA: What were some of them?
SB: There’s no way we can replace our high school yearbooks. I had a great big thick book from Germany, that was probably over 100 years old, probably my grandfather’s father or grandfather bought it; it was practically tissue-paper-thin pages and this old, fancy curly-Q writing that I couldn’t read, but still was a treasure. And there were a whole bunch of pictures from grade school and some of the pictures of David and Darwin when they were two or three years old that were in photo albums in the basement. Souvenirs from our wedding, all the congratulation cards, and well, they were worthless but of sentimental value. Cuckoo clocks from Germany, things that his parents had, furniture that we got after Harold’s parents died, some of these things in the basement. Some of their pictures, that didn’t have any names written on them or anything. We didn’t know who they were, but maybe some of relatives would have identified them someday.

AA: Is this table, it looks like a table perhaps grandma or grandpa owned. Is it?

SB: This table and these chairs are what his parents had; they were in our upstairs, and we have since had them refinished. The chairs had to be re-glued, and we had them refinished.

AA: The home in which we are sitting, this is a new home?

SB: Yes.

AA: A home that has been built since the flood?

SB: It was the middle of February when we were able to move back in.

AA: Where did you live from the time you moved out of Floyd and Deonne Huntsman’s home, where you stayed with them the first few weeks after the flood, where did you live after you moved from their home until you were able to move into your new home?

SB: The Swensens who had rented the other home, had just been in about a week. They moved out so that we could be here with our chores. We camped there with sleeping bags until about the first of August. So that’s about six weeks from the middle of June till the first of August. And then the HUD trailer was here, and everything hooked up so that we could move into it, just here in our backyard. We’d have been there about six months and a week until this house was ready.

AA: So you dealt with HUD?

SB: Yes.

AA: How did you get along with HUD?

SB: Most of the time pretty good. Everybody thought they were terribly slow getting the trailers hooked up. We wondered when we were going to have a couch to sit on.
HB: They just took so long. They’d have some guys come in and dig a trench for your waterline, and another one would come by and start skirting it. Some guys come and put the two by fours around it, somebody would come back and put insulation in, then they’d come and put the tin on.

SB: Some of them didn’t have too much respect for your privacy, they’d just walk in, like, “This is ours, we’ll do what we want.” Most of them were pretty good.

HB: After we got moved in, we never had what I felt was any trouble with them, they seemed pretty good.

SB: I was about to give it back to them, it caught on fire at 4:00 in the morning.

AA: Your trailer?

SB: It was filling up with smoke at 4:30 am, and the smoke alarm never did go off. I was afraid we were all going to be asphyxiated or burned in our sleep or something, but we survived.

AA: When did you move into your new home?

SB: February 9.

AA: Do you enjoy your new home?

SB: Yes. There have been nights when I wished I had the old one back. I like this one better. It’s arranged a little better. We’ve improved on the things we didn’t like in the other one. But there are times I get homesick for the old one.

AA: Why didn’t you save some of these cherished items that you were talking about a few minutes ago? Did you have time that you could have saved them if you had thought about them, or was it because you didn’t have any time that you didn’t save them?

SB: We didn’t have any time, and I don’t know what I would have grabbed first if we had had time. I just really don’t know.

HB: I know it wasn’t ten minutes, it was less than that, really from the time we seen the wall of water until the water was here. I’d say we were more concerned then of getting our immediate family out, and our stock, because that’s our livelihood, our milk cows. If we hadn’t had them out, I’m sure we would have lost quite a few of them, because of the debris that was in the corner fence. The debris was about three foot deep, nothing but trees and sticks. We spent about three or four hours trying to get a road through it later on, when we finally could get some electric fences up to let our young stuff have whatever grass was left. We had to push the debris out to even get to the gate.
AA: If the water was seven feet deep around the house, I suppose you lost most of your furniture and your appliances?

HB: Monday, I seen Don Vander Linder. He’s the H-L Electric Dealer over in town and I asked him if there was any chance that he could save our fridge and stove and washer and dryer and stuff. And he said, he’d come right out and get them. Ours was the first ones he came and got, and he went through them all. And the fridge he never could get to work. The stove, it would work but the oven insulation was all wet, and they said that it probably wouldn’t be any good. The washer and dryer, he worked on the dryer and brought it back out, plugged it in and it exploded practically. So he said then that he wasn’t going to work on it anymore, that he just couldn’t save the motors, they were wet. But everything we had downstairs, I had a lot of things I inherited from my folks, we had a couch, a bedroom set, the water came in and just churned underneath in the basement, and all the walls, partitions and the chimney we had in there. It had regular chimney blocks, and it broke two chimney blocks right in half, took half of them out and left the other two sitting with the chimney. Just raised the house up, churned it in there. We had one of these straw hassocks, and it was on the foundation, and the house had come back and sit right on top of it. But there were a lot of things that were washed completely out of the basement. The pictures, they were just caked with mud. The time you got it all dug out and found them, they were completely ruined.

AA: When you came back to your home and saw the mess, I suppose you tried to clean it up.

SB and HB: Yes.

AA: Did you receive any help from church groups or other groups in cleaning up your home?

SB: Don Vander Linder came out, it was the Monday after the flood. It just seemed so hopeless, we were shoveling mud off the carpet in the living room, trying to save it. And it was such heavy mud. A half a mop bucket, it was just about all I could drag to the door and dump out. He showed up around 5 or 6 o’clock, he came and said, “We are going to have a bunch of people here to help you first thing in the morning. We’ve got buses leaving at the stake center to bring people out, and this is the first place we’re stopping.” Of course, there weren’t too many in Wilford that hurt that were still here. The next morning he came out in his pickup, and three volunteers had showed up, and he had all three of them working here. We had just butchered and had our freezer full to the top, in the basement, a chest type freezer, and it tipped over. And those boys, throwing all that smelly meat out, after sitting there for four days in the heat.

HB: Floyd Huntsman, he came out Sunday. I pumped the house we had rented out. That’s where our pressure tank was for our water for our barns and stuff, and we had to try to get the water back out there. And he come out Sunday afternoon and started on our house, to pump water out. He had got another pump out and couldn’t get it to pump, so when I got through over there, I brought it over here, and he pumped the water out of our
basement here Sunday afternoon. It was late when he got done, I had to quit about 4:00 to go start the chores, to start milking and he kept pumping water out.

SB: His wife and kids helped; they dragged blankets and sheets, brought them out of the basement, and we would wring those out. Their whole family was out here helping us for two or three days.

HB: Our hay barn had up to one bale on the north end and up to three bales on the south end was wet, and it took a couple days for it to start heating awful bad. Floyd and two other kids who came out to help him, Tuesday. They started hauling some of the good hay out. We were trying to get some fences up around this other pasture to keep the young stuff in. They’d got out Sunday night, and the neighbors had to run them back in for us while we were in town, after we had left. They hauled that day, and the next day there were two or three other people from town came out and helped him move the hay out of the hayshed. Floyd stayed here and helped us that whole week. And Don brought some other people out two different days to help get mud out of the house.

SB: They helped move appliances out and move the furniture out of the bedrooms, shoveled mud, and tried to save what we could. Then later on some of Harold’s relatives came up from Utah. It took them two hours to get through Rexburg. We were a little unhappy about that.

HB: They wouldn’t let any traffic come clear through out of Rexburg.

SB: They’d ask for volunteers in church on Sunday night, to come up different days of the week, and they came.

HB: It was almost a month after the flood.

SB: Yes, it was quite a while after.

HB: It was a month after. They’d been in Rexburg a time or two, and they decided they had relatives further up, they’d come on up and help us. They came up and spent one whole day. My brother came up the Saturday after, the week after the flood, and he helped me put some more electric fence up.

SB: Two of his boys came with him.

HB: I had two aunts and two uncles who came up later on and helped us. My one aunt’s son-in-law came up too. There was five of them that day, came up and helped us get some stuff out of the basement. Like the couch, it was so wet, we couldn’t even lift it up. It was so full of mud and water still saturated. What we had to do to get it out was to break it up, to even get it out of the basement.

AA: Did you receive any assistance from the Church, the LDS Church?
SB: We picked up food and clothes over at the stake center. The first few days when they called up and said that there would be food there. At noon we went over but there wasn’t very much there yet. Later they really had a store over there: they had the clothes all organized by sizes, and departments where there was children’s clothes, boys’ or men’s, or women’s or maternity, or whatever, and we got some more clothes for the boys. They lost nearly everything they had in the basement. The only clothes they had left were the ones they were wearing when the flood hit. So many things washed out of the basement, and we never did find them. So we picked up quite a few clothes over there, some food.

HB: When you went over to the City Building, to sign up for the disaster, for anything to help clean up, then the Red Cross gave some money for some of the clothes the boys had lost, and shoes for the whole family. Some food, and of course you had to take some food stamps.

AA: Did it bother you to take food stamps?

SB: The first time I spent them I felt really funny, but then after a while I thought, everyone knows we were in the flood. I was going to use them to help out while we were staying with the Huntsman’s. To help them get food for both them and us, because they were doing so much for us. I still have one five-dollar one left that I didn’t spend after we got back on our own place.

AA: Did it bother you to take the clothing that the LDS Church made available?

SB: Not really it was used clothes. I had my old maternity duds where they were in the top of the closet, all nice and dry, that I donated too, so it helped even out. And who knows, we might have a chance to help somebody.

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

HB: I definitely do, on this clean up, Soil Conservation. I think it cost twice or three times as much as it should have cost to clean the debris up. They had wages which were clear out of reason. The first guys who came to move the pile of trees in our field so we could get some water going, they had two boys. The oldest was less than sixteen because he had been working down in Rexburg, and they found out he was under sixteen, so they fired him down there. He come up as a laborer with his dad, on the cat. Him and his younger brother, and I don’t think he (the other one) was over twelve or thirteen. The two boys were getting $8 a piece per hour, and I never seen them do a thing out here in the field at all. Our kids had little baby ducks in the canal, and I caught them one day up there. They had caught the mother duck and were trying to get the little ones. And I’d never seen those boys do anything. They fired them right here when they were on our place. The Soil Conservation fired them. Their dad wanted to know where I wanted another pile of brush pushed to, he was kind of putting it on some rock piles so it would be out of our way. We didn’t know whether we were going to have to burn it or what.
They didn’t act very happy, and I asked what was the matter, and they said, they just got fired. I asked them how much they made in an hour, and they said $8 per hour.

SB: For chasing ducks and throwing rocks at them and chasing calves.

HB: Chasing calves that we still had out on the field. They had a dog with them and he’d be chasing the calves. I’d never seen them do anything. The Soil Conservation had a lady who was overseeing, and she said they were supposed to carry a saw with them to help saw some of the trees and stuff so they could pile them better, and they didn’t even carry a saw with them. And then when it came time to clean up, the trucks that they had, they were paying outrageous wages. They never hauled enough. A lot of them went out of our place half or even a third of the way loaded. After we got the ground scraped and leveled out, our two boys took the truck, and they had to hand-pick sticks and stuff that was left on the ground so that we could plow it or work the ground. They just drove along, and one of them would throw it up, we had sideboards on our farm truck, and of course they’d get a few on and want to go dump, just to goof around and play around kind of. They had a pretty good load on it. They went and dumped it by some other stuff that they had piled there, and when the men came back later on to clean up again, that part of the load that the kids had dumped off, they had a ten-wheel truck come in, and he didn’t even haul what our kids had there on that truck. He took two times to haul that out. That’s all he would put on it. I think their cleanup was really taking advantage. They just didn’t haul enough. They’d take too many trips. Sometimes I’d see them drive away with just a part of a tree on it.

AA: Do you feel that there are people who filed fraudulent flood claims?

HB: I’m sure there’s some that have. I’ve heard of some that filed such claims, not from the people who got the claim. But it come from other people who they had told how much their claim was, and I can’t see where they had that much. I heard some of the claims they were putting in, and thought at the time that they couldn’t have had that much. But when we started figuring ours up, it made us think twice. But then some of them, I’m sure some people put in for stuff, machinery and what not that wasn’t usable, and they’d put it on the settlement claim. Anytime you get this big of a thing going, there’s going to be some who’ll try and beat the government. I’m sure that some of them did. I’m sure there’s some that put in an honest claim and were cut pretty heavy too.

AA: Mr. Bischoff, it’s been over a year since the flood, and you’ve indicated that you’ve not received any claim money from the government yet. Would you mind telling me how you’ve been able to finance your farm operations during that period of time?

HB: We’ve got loans, FHA, we’ve borrowed for a house. For the feed last year we had to go through FHA for a loan. We’ve had to go to the bank for loans to take care of replacement of our sprinklers this year. We bought sprinklers to replace. They said they would put them in, and when they got them working, we’d have to pay for them. We went to the bank to get loans for them. We have our milk cows, I didn’t lose any of
them. They have kind of paid their way, the milk cows. We had some savings saved up before the flood. So far we’ve been able to get by.

AA: You have a whole passel of loans to pay off?

HB: When the money comes, it’ll go to pay those loans off. Of course on our ground to reclaim it, ASCS went on eighty and twenty on it, we got a loan to pay the other twenty percent on it.

AA: Did you have any difficulty in getting those loans?

HB: No, we didn’t have any trouble. It took a while to get one for the house, the first one we went down and got. It took a while to get everything cleared. And when we wanted to get our feed, it took a long time. It was sitting over here in the lawyers office, the title search had already been done on the loan for the house. It was sitting there for almost a month. The guy was needing his money that we bought the hay from, and we was calling up trying to find out where the loan was, ‘cause they said it should be through in no time ‘cause we had already had one for the house. Here he was wanting his money for the hay we got for the winter, we were trying to find out where the money was at and it was sitting over in the lawyers office for about thirty days. When we found out where it was, it went right through. But the bank, we had to get a loan there for sprinkler pipes, they’ve been real good to us, no trouble at all. We had heard that some people were having trouble with the loans for they’re houses, but we didn’t have any trouble.

AA: Did you suffer any vandalism during post flood operations?

HB: Not that we know of we didn’t. We was pretty well out. We was here everyday, cops sitting on the corner every night. There were roadblocks. The cops sitting on the corner so that people couldn’t get in too much after dark. We wouldn’t leave ‘til about 9 o’clock at night, ‘cause we were using the tractor and generator to cool the milk with, and we’d wait for the milk to cool to turn the tractor off. So it was dark, and by then they’d pretty well stopped everyone from coming in.

AA: Was it the corner just north of your place where they put the roadblock?

HB: Right.

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

HB: I feel it was a man-made disaster. They didn’t have the dam built right. Somewhere along the line I think there was a mistake there, their design or the kind of dirt they used. They used the dirt, the same dirt for the canals down here. They put head gates in last fall and the water in, and the next day the head gates had washed out. I think a lot of it was the dirt. But then I’ve heard them say that digging the south side out, that the scrapers can’t even scrape the dirt out, it was packed so hard. It seems like whenever
it gets wet, on the canals, there are spots on the canals that stay damp clear through all summer. They didn’t have any pressure on them so they’ve held.

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

HB: I’m sure he did. Any other time, if it happened at night, we would have lost three boys downstairs. There would have been no way we could have got them out. The time it happened, the time of the week and everything, if it happened any other time, I’m sure there would have been a lot more people killed, especially if it ever happened at night. There wouldn’t have been so many people that weren’t at home.

SB: If our boys would have been over there fishing, and Rex Hughes has a boy the same age as Darwin, and Kathleen (Mrs. Hughes) said Mitchell was always hunting or fishing, and he stayed home that morning, miracle of miracles, for some reason he stayed home.

HB: Just like Toy Beddes. If he’d have brought the sprinkler heads the day before like he should have done, no telling, I know we’d have been where the water was so deep.

SB: There had to have been divine intervention, or Layne Reynolds would have drove right into the water, going ninety mile an hour. And he was backing up by the time Harold got there. There had to be.

AA: Do you feel that the dam should be rebuilt?

HB: I think they need one on the Teton River somewhere. And I think it should be rebuilt if it could be rebuilt and designed right.

AA: Do you feel they can design a dam that will hold?

HB: I’m sure they could if they wanted to.

AA: How do you feel about that, Mrs. Bischoff?

SB: I said a long time ago, if they rebuild that, I’m going to put some big lights up in that pasture out there, and I’ll stay awake nights watching for water. I’ll sleep in the daytime and they can watch for water. Once is enough. I think something is needed for flood control. I don’t think it would have to be that big, they don’t have to back up water for seventeen miles, it could be done up further and not hold so much and not be so destructive if it should go again. But I don’t think I’d ever sleep nights if they ever rebuild it. I have a hard time now.

AA: Do you have nightmares?

SB: Not really. I just lie awake thinking about all the terrible things that have happened.
AA: One final question. Mr. Bischoff, how has the Teton Disaster changed your life and the life of the community in which you live besides all of the things that you have talked about tonight?

SB: I can think of one good thing. We have a lot of neighbors who don’t belong to the same church we belong to, and I have got acquainted with people I didn’t know before, not just the immediate neighborhood, but throughout Wilford. I’ve got acquainted with people I didn’t know before, and they’re really nice people. But we didn’t run in the same circles, so I didn’t meet them before. And we’ve met good people, we didn’t know the Huntsman’s before. I think that’s one of the really nice things that has come out of this, the nice people we’ve met.

HB: I think people have had to learn that they’ve got to make decisions that they’ve never made before. You had to make the decision last summer whether you were going to stay a farmer, whether you were going to quit or to come back. And I think everybody in the area had to make these decisions all in a little matter of time that before took you probably a lifetime, these decisions to make. I think people have found out that there are people that will help and kind of band more together than they were before.

SB: There has also been more emotional problems and people at loose ends who don’t know what to do. People who were almost ready to retire and had nothing to come back to, active all their lives and not sitting in an apartment in town twiddling their thumbs and not knowing where to go. Problems with kids.

HB: We’ve got neighbors right now, their ground was completely ruined and they can’t find anymore around here, and they just don’t know what to do.

SB: There was nothing south of our house after the flood but a lot of sand, the roads just almost disappeared, and they did disappear past the bridge.

HB: Much of the ground that was ruined is south and some that is straight west of us that is completely ruined.

AA: Is there anything else you’d like to add before we close the interview, anything that you forgot to mention that you’d like to mention now?

SB and HB: I can’t think of anything right now.

AA: Thank you for the interview.