

TETON ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ricks College

Idaho State Historical Society
History Department, Utah State University

TETON DAM DISASTER

Jay Risenmay

Interviewed by

Christina C. Sorensen

June 29, 1977

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY & RICKS COLLEGE

HISTORY DEPARTMENTS

COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT THROUGH LOCAL HISTORY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE AGREEMENT

You have been interviewed in connection with a joint oral history program of the History Department, Utah State University, Ricks College, and the Idaho State Historical Society. The purpose of this oral history program is to gather and preserve information for historical and scholarly use.

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In view of the historical and scholarly value of this information, I, Jay L. Risenmay, do hereby assign full (please print full name) and all rights of this material to the Merrill Library at Utah State University, to the Library at Ricks College, and to the Idaho State Historical Society at Boise, Idaho, for scholarly purposes according to each of the institutions governing policies.

Jay L. Risenmay
Interviewee's Signature
29 June 1977
Date

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Jay Risenmay, I, Christina Sorensen
(name, please print) (interviewer, print)

knowingly and voluntarily permit the Milton R. Merrill Library at Utah State University, the David O. McKay Library at Ricks College, and the Idaho State Historical Society at Boise, Idaho, the full rights and use of this information.

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ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Jay Risenmay

INTERVIEWER: Christina C. Sorensen

DATE: June 29, 1977

TETON DAM DISASTER

S: Mr. Risenmay, would you please spell your name?

R: Jay Risenmay.

S: Thank you. Mr. Risenmay, how old are you?

R: Forty-five.

S: And how long have you lived in Rexburg?

R: Twelve years.

S: What is your current address here in Rexburg?

R: 155 Elm.

S: And what do you do for a living?

R: I'm a counselor at Ricks College.

S: Now would you begin by telling us something about the early weeks following the flood, and some of the problems and situations which you dealt with during that time?

R: Immediately after the flood, the state sent in some people to deal with the emotional problems. I just worked in cleaning out mud and that sort of thing, and then became aware after about four or five days that the county commissioners had designated me to work with mental health. Only nobody had told me about it. And so, I sort of worked in a dual role of coordinating mental health from the church's point-of-view and through the county. The county commissioners pretty well left it up to the direction of the three stake presidents in the area to handle the area of mental health and to coordinate it. So that was my role. About two weeks later I received a formal assignment from

church leaders but previous to that it was just sort of loose. It's interesting. At first it seemed like there was so much confusion because no one knew just what to do. We didn't know what to expect, as far as how the people would react. There was still difficulty in communicating. I had no experience with a disaster, I had no idea what to expect, and hadn't thought of my role as doing anything other than just helping cleanup mud; that sort of thing. I remember that first two weeks as seeming to be a lot of confusion and yet, as people who had worked in previous disasters came in, even during the first week, they were amazed at how organized the approach seemed to be to handle the flood. It was kind of exciting to hear them talk about it, but I thought, if we were organized, I wondered how confused the others had been. One of the things they said, is usually they would get there after about three weeks, and the people would all be just sitting and waiting and nothing had been done. It would take them two or three weeks to get things kind of beginning to roll. They said that we were rolling at the end of the first week, better than many places had been. And that was largely because things were handled through the church and there was already an existing organization. But I've often thought, my brother said, "You see a war movie and it all sounds so clear and crystal but when you're in the war it seems like it's a bunch of confusion." That's how the flood seemed to me, that we just didn't know what to expect, we didn't know what was needed or that sort of thing. I was appreciative of some suggestions that were given by these people but we didn't have a lot of severe emotional problems. There were a lot of people who were upset, but they just seemed to need to talk to individuals. There were not that many serious emotional disturbances. One of the surprising things to me was, that, even those who had had a previous history of difficulty functioned better the first about three or four weeks, then they had been

functioning for a long time. There were so many things for them to do, and so many big problems. One woman, in particular, who had been severely disturbed for a long time, for about six weeks, functioned rather well. Then after the pressure wore off, she fell to pieces. There was a crisis or two immediately. There was a person in the St. Anthony area who was seriously disturbed, and just before the flood it had been recommended that she go to the state hospital and she'd resisted, and she committed suicide because she felt that she was to blame for the flood. So there were some of those cases, but initially it was more just the shock, but there was not a lot of deep emotional kinds of things. So that was kind of a surprising sort of thing. I think another thing that was related to mental health was the fact that people got involved immediately doing things, cleaning things up, washing things out, although a lot of these things had to be thrown away later and sometimes people said, "Wasn't that a waste of effort?" But my feeling was, as we look back on it, that's what kept people going. Even though I wasn't directly involved in the flood the shock was very great. My son-in-law's business and his parent's were flooded and we went down the very next day to talk with them. His name is Bruce Sutherland and his father is Brent Sutherland and they ran Rexburg Floral Shop. And I remember the day after the flood on Sunday, going into their home. My feeling has always been if you just finally pitch in and get things done, then it looks better at the end of the day. As we dug in and worked hours and hours, the more we worked the worse it became, and the more we realized how bad it was. And it seemed like it took several days to really comprehend how extensive and how bad the damage really was. I remember coming home that evening and feeling, instead of a kind of relief that we had started getting underway, a feeling like it was just a hopeless task, and I didn't know how they could ever get it done, awful glad I could leave it, and then during the first week, each time I would

go into a home or into a basement to clean out mud, re-experiencing that shock and how bad it really was. Because you just couldn't be aware of it unless you were right there.

But it was these things that people were doing that kept them going. I remember one woman, in particular, spent a day and a half washing jewelry and shoes, things that were later all thrown away. But I think that's what kept her going. Otherwise, I think it would have been too overwhelming for her. There was a lot of those kind of things.

Another thing that had a real impact on the emotional health of the people were the volunteers. That's been mentioned a lot of times, but that was probably the greatest emotional helper that there was. There were lots of accounts of people who were just down and discouraged and depressed, who as somebody would show up and help them during the day and bring in kinds of a breath of fresh air, really gave them a lift. I remember one woman who said, "I'm going to move." She'd worked for a week or two trying to do things and then she just said, "I'm through, I've given up." Four people (volunteers) came and helped her and at the end of that day she was ready to pitch in and keep going. And that was repeated lots of times. Another thing that was a very helpful thing, in terms of mental health of the people, was the organization of the various wards and most of the directions were given through the L.D.S. Church because they were organized and they included everybody who lived in their area whether they were members of the church or whether they were active or not. The people who functioned best were those where the wards met daily. Some of them ate one meal together. One of the families that was staying in our home, their ward would get together at noon for a meal. The bishop would give instructions, because every morning the leaders were having a general meeting with the civil defense people and

the church leaders, and the county commissioners who took over. They would coordinate and then these instructions would be dispensed out to the people in various meetings. This particular group would meet in a school. As they first went in, everybody would be glum and silent and then somebody would start cracking jokes and before the noon hour was over they were all cheerful again, and it kind of buoyed up their spirits. I remember one person who had stayed at home, a very strong person, a very capable person, but older. He just became extremely depressed. It wasn't a long-term depression, he was just kind of overwhelmed, and came in and talked with me and seemed to get relief, just from talking. It was a different kind of counseling. It just seemed that they needed to talk to somebody and just get it, their feelings, out. Then I talked to him about a week later, he'd been staying with his wife alone. They decided to go out to these noon meetings and he said that was the turning point. Just getting out and talking with other people really gave him a lift. We could see the difference in the people where they met regularly compared with those who only met occasionally. The Hibbard Ward, for example, had all three meals together during the day because they had people in their ward who weren't flooded. That togetherness and these outside volunteers were really what took care of the mental health thing.

People did not go in looking for therapists. You had to go out where they were. In the beginning we would get a referral and by the time we'd find the person it was over. I remember one woman in Sugar City, said she's just falling apart, and it took us about four hours to locate her in the dorm. By the time we went to talk to her she said, "Oh, I've forgotten what that was that had me so upset. Well, last night they came in and smashed my house down. You'd be depressed too." But she had bounced back the next day. A lot of it wasn't a long-term kind of thing. I think, at first, large predictions were that there would be a lot of long-term serious emotional disturbances. We referred,

in trying to predict what would happen here, to a previous disaster back east where two years later, ninety percent of the people were suffering serious emotional problems. But we didn't have that happen here. There's a different kind of thing. I'll mention that later, what happened as we went along. But initially and during the first three or four months, people handled a lot of stress and a lot of upset stomachs but handled it quite well.

S: One thing I just want to ask. Did the church social services send in any people or did that just sort of function out of those local wards?

R: They had people here and they were meeting with us all the time. We all kind of met together. There was the organization. Nobody knew quite how to handle it. State people, health and welfare did a good job of getting together, as did the L.D.S. Social Services, State Department of Health and Welfare, and the Mental Health Center people from Idaho Falls. Numerous agencies met together initially, and outlined plans and tried to predict what would be needed. As I think back now, I remember being in a big meeting and we were trying to list what would be ahead, and nobody knew. We were just trying to guess. They brought some disaster experts in from Los Angeles. Four or five times they gave us good direction in saying here's what happened in other disasters. So we anticipated that and our pattern went through the same as they were in other disasters. Initially, there's what they call a heroic phase where everybody just works hard and they don't fall to pieces. Then there's kind of a burned out phase, where they are physically tired, they are emotionally tired, and then the long drawn out problems that come later. We followed those patterns but I don't think we had as many seriously disturbed people as they had anticipated. We went through those various phases and you could see it. There were some interesting sidelights. People who were not in the flood had guilt feelings, and had to deal with their feelings and often the

kind of things we would do, I talked at a lot of Relief Societies and tried to talk to people about their feelings, both those who were in the flood and those who were not. Because there were lots of mixed feelings and people had to deal with what they were feeling. That was the main thing, to get it out and say, "Hey, its all right to feel guilty, or its all right to feel sad and depressed and to cry." I mean, that's normal and that's natural.

S: Something just occurred to me, do you think that the people in this area who strike me at times as being people of few words and keep maybe their feelings inside, pretty much, do you think that this in anyway affected their responses? Did they have difficulty in dealing with these feelings and letting them out? Is this a misconception on my part, maybe?

R: I don't think that it came out directly that way. Let me just tell you another little thing we did that we became aware of, and it relates to this. Maybe I can answer your question first.

If people who are very quiet could become actively involved, that seemed to take care of it, even if they just went to these noon meetings. If they were helping others, that seemed to take care of the problem. So it wasn't a case of whether they were outgoing, and verbal, or whether they were quiet. It seemed to be, well, we think it seemed to be how comfortable they were with themselves.

Let me tell you this little study that we did that was pretty fascinating to me. It was probably a couple of months after the flood. We interviewed nine bishops and we went to them, we were trying to see if the level of church activity or the degree of conversion had anything to do with how people handled the flood. We did a little quick study. We went to nine bishops and before we told them what it was, we said, "What would you say is evidence of an active person." They would each tell us what it was.

Then we would say, using your criteria for evidence, name three people who in your ward, who you would classify as fully active, three who are partially active, and three who are almost totally inactive. They just wrote down names. We said, "From your own standpoint, what would you say was an appropriate reaction to the flood?" They were all quite similar. They would talk about thinking more of others than themselves and being willing to take assignments, and maintaining a cheerful attitude and really pitching in and doing those sorts of things. Then we said, "Okay, using your own criteria how would you rate each of these nine people." They had already specified the people first, and then they went through and we did an hour interview with each bishop, so we got a lot of details. It was exciting to me. It meant that we had a sample of about eighty-one people. None of the people who were classified as active had reacted inappropriately. And only one had changed very much in terms of having difficulties. All the people who had serious difficulties were either partially active, or totally inactive. Those that were totally inactive had the most serious difficulties emotionally, and reacted the most inappropriately. Now, not all the inactive people reacted inappropriately. Many of them reacted appropriately. But they were the ones that had the difficulties. As these things were described, it was almost like they put all. . . , Well, material things meant a great deal to them. With the great loss of material things (and one of the bishops we interviewed was up at Wilford where they just lost everything) it seemed like when that was gone, their whole world was gone and there was nothing to hang onto. There were many of the people who just, the men especially, just simply deserted, they just left, left it up to their wives, or they just went out of the area. But none of the active people did that. Now, what made me think of this? On your previous question, we were trying to see if the level of activity would change if this would

convert some people. Overall, it didn't. Those that were active, stayed active, those that were inactive, stayed inactive. For a little while there was a slight change up or down, depending if their circumstances interfered, but basically, they stayed pretty much the same way they were before the flood. We learned, just like miracles don't convert people, neither do disasters. But people tended to stay pretty much the way there were. Some people who were inactive and yet who would go to church occasionally, but were afraid of being called on, or participating in church, the flood gave them the chance to come out. They just worked and worked, and gave hours and hours of service for no charge, I mean, donated equipment. Then after the flood was over, they went back to their inactive ways. It was like, they wanted to help and they were good people, but just the going to church and participating seemed to be too scary for them. This gave them the chance to really shine and do a lot of things. But that was an interesting study to us and kind of a faith promoting thing, and as far as the church point-of-view, we just felt like the main way to prepare for disasters and that's what we were trying to look at, is, "Is there something we need to do to prepare for disasters?" The main thing we found was if you're strong and have something you can count on, and this was true to some degree of people who were of other faiths, also, but we didn't check as completely on that, if you've got that solid foundation, then you can handle crisis. That just seemed to be the way that it was. And there were so many stories of how these people--we tried to see if there was any relation between the degree of loss and their reaction, but there didn't seem to be. Some of these people in the study lost everything, some that the bishop had indicated didn't lose anything, but they were right there, giving things, helping people, that sort of thing. There were really a lot of individual examples of just total dedication and strength and selfishness, and that sort of thing. That was kind of an interesting little sidelight.

S: How would you evaluate the help of the various organizations some of whom we've mentioned, such as the church, but state groups, or any others, the Red Cross, various other religious groups?

R: The Red Cross was sure seen as a helpful thing. I think a lot of people really got converted to Red Cross because they were here immediately and they were effective. They seemed to know what to do and gave out a lot of help. I felt good about the reaction of the state people. My own personal feeling is that I'm not very much of a bureaucrat, and I felt they functioned well and got through the red tape and that sort of thing. I felt like it was really the church that enabled a lot of things to get done, however. Now, I don't know how long it was, three or four weeks, Interfaith began to get functioning and got a lot of things going. The L.D.S. Church didn't join in and come under another group, but I did meet with them throughout the year in a kind of correlation role between them and the church. We were doing a lot of the same kind of things they were doing and we coordinated and worked quite well together. The Interfaith got things down at the bishop's storehouse and a couple of the ministers here were authorized to sign so that they could do that sort of thing. Here was a good correlated kind of work. I was impressed with a lot of things in the church. In the church we learned that we needed to do some things a little different. We relied on our bishops too heavily, nearly burning them out. I've never seen such tired, exhausted people. We just kept going back to the bishops, and stake presidents and sort of forgot there was anybody else for a while. Some of the wards began to use the others, but we needed to use our Elders and our other people a little better. That's one thing we learned in the church. There were some good lessons that were learned and people from the social services in Salt Lake monitored those and interviewed carefully to try to see what we

could learn for future disasters. I was impressed, overall, how well different agencies worked together. It seemed confusing and kind of hit and miss when we were right in the middle of it and yet, when you step back and look, apparently in comparison with a lot of other things, there was a pretty good organization. Everyone pitched in and got things done. There was a real blending together. One of the things that I experienced, and I think a lot of other people did, that there are a lot of barriers up here in the valley. But the flood sure broke down whatever they were and many different people mingled. It sort of became a valley thing instead of a local ward, or a local church, or a local group of people. It was the whole valley. There was really a cross mingling and that was good.

S: Did you notice any differences, noticeable differences, between various age groups, say as the impact on children and young people as opposed to the elderly, middle-aged?

R: In our early meetings we were alerted to look for problems with the young and the very old. We really watched those people. During the early two or three months the elderly people just came through remarkably well. We just didn't get the problems that we had anticipated. Later on, during the winter, then the fatigue, the dust, and the inconvenience began to affect the elderly people more. But overall, they came through remarkably well. There was very little difficulty with the children. We watched them, we monitored the schools, we expected there would be difficulty. It seemed that the children pretty well accepted anything as long as their folks did. It seemed to me that the biggest challenge, and the challenges came after about three or four months, the real ongoing ones, were the middle-aged people, and there were a lot of difficulties with their marriages. In my own contact with people, the problems that showed up were mostly

problems that had been there before the flood. I only know of one case that was pretty well the result of the flood. This was a young married woman who sort of just suppressed all her feelings and just went out and worked hard for three weeks. She didn't really let her feelings out. You had to accept your feelings and deal with that shock every day, the sense of loss, and let it come out and she didn't. She was very brave and then she kind of went to pieces. We had to work with her quite a while. She finally got patched together but she's the only one that I was aware of that didn't have a previous history of difficulties. It seemed like, for example, in the marriages, if there had been a conflict, the couples seemed to have had patterns and they were living their own lives, but now they had to talk together, they had to make plans together, they had to live in a little trailer. There was a lot of additional stress. I remember one family that had a whole home and now they were all living in a small apartment with one bathroom and so the problems that had been there were emphasized. There have been a lot of family problems, a lot of marital problems and those seemed to increase as we went on through to winter.

S: Would you consider stress in these kinds of marital and family problems, ongoing problems? What other sorts of problems have you seen as ongoing ones?

R: Most of them resulted from just ongoing stress and just physical wearing down. I was in Salt Lake in a panel where we considered four different disasters and the others were more brief. There were more deaths in some of them. There was the Thompson Flood over in Colorado, but that was a different kind of thing. Here there weren't so many deaths, but it went on and on and on and people began to get tired physically. There were so many more decisions that had to be made and no basis for making them. This was a new thing, so the government didn't have clear guidelines. No one knew

what to count on and that added to the stress. I saw it showing up and I'm still seeing it. I saw a woman just this week who has been depressed now for about four months. It seemed like it started at the time her home was demolished. She handled the flood well. She worked hard for three months after the flood and, in fact, I've never seen her except when she wasn't being energetic. But now there's some sort of sense of loss and a deep depression. So those things are still going on and it just seemed to wear them down physically and emotionally. If you were trying to rebuild, it was hard to get builders; it was hard to get materials; it was hard to decide if you should demolish your home; If you were on the verge, you'd think maybe not and all of that just combined together. Then as people began to go back to their regular jobs and would come home and work evenings they became very tired and some families worked every night. Then we began to see some little difficulties with children because they were getting neglected. The parents were tired and impatient. That kind of stress went on. That seemed to be the main kind of thing from the flood and I imagine we'll feel a little of it for quite a while. Not very much, but I think it will still carry on for another year or two. It seemed to me that we sort of turned past the peak about in February. That's when it seemed that people began to kind of quit talking about it. Things seemed to have been worked through and then as they began to get out again in the spring things went quite well, except for these few people who had been hurt. I think the older people suffered a lot of physical difficulties and a lot of discomfort but I was really proud of them.

One of the exciting things that I was able to do in the early stages, maybe a month after the flood, was to give money to people who really needed it. The Idaho Statesman, the newspaper in Boise, gave \$60,000 to flood victims. Somebody had divided it up and decided who should get it and my

job was just to find them and give them checks and these were all elderly people or those who needed it very much. They were substantial checks, anywhere from four hundred to a thousand dollars. That was really fun. To go and find these people and say, "Hey, I've got something for you." They were a little suspicious by then, wondering if it was another government person and I'd just hand them a check for \$600.00 and tell them who it was from and that they could thank the Statesman. A lot of them were elderly and widows and I was amazed how well they were handling and adjusting.

I remember one woman who was in her eighties. Her family were there from California, her son and all of them to help. They were all downcast and despondent and discouraged. Here she was just a scurrying around and cleaning, getting things going and that happened quite often. The elderly were quite remarkable, I thought. I think, overall, there was a lot of stress and especially if they had poor health I think a lot of it related to the flood that way.

S: Mr. Risemay, do you want to discuss a little bit more, perhaps some of the values that you saw in the daily interactions of the people?

R: Yes. It seemed that during those first days of the flood, there was so much emotion attached to what happened every day that people just had to deal with their feelings and one of the best ways was to just talk with someone. The counseling that I did at that time, it was different than usual, because mostly you just needed to listen. It seemed that people who were quite depressed and upset would come in and they would just pour out their feelings. Then they would feel quite a bit of relief and be able to function a lot better. Very little had to be said. I guess that was because most of these people were pretty well able to cope with their lives, but they had to deal with those feelings. What we tried to provide whenever possible and instruct

the church leaders and civic leaders to provide were as many opportunities as possible to just talk things over with people. People talked about the flood over and over and over. During those early social gatherings, whenever they began to have them, invariably the topic would get to the flood and everybody would begin to relive and share their experiences. It seemed like there just had to be quite a bit of that. It seemed like when that occurred people felt better. When they felt that others felt the same way they did, then they could feel better. Many people felt guilty about crying, for example, and yet it became kind of a cliché to say, "Have you had your cry yet?" I remember asking President Keith Petersen, "Have you had your cry yet?" He said, "Oh, yes, I had that on Sunday, the first day down in my business." You just had to face the feelings that were there and let them get out and then they would be back again the next day and you'd just talk them over and over. It was sort of a case of saying, this is all right. This is what's to be expected. This is normal. As people did that, they seemed to improve better. All of the chances to get together, whether it was to eat lunch, whatever it was, were helpful.

One of the things that we did early, it soon became apparent that the traditional therapy of sitting in your office and listening to people was of no value. By the time you found people that had difficulties, they were kind of transient in nature and had gone on. That was a waste of time. So the church leaders asked us to organize a recreational program and we put a lot of effort into that assignment. We got the church ball programs going just almost as soon as we could find a ball diamond that was dry and a place to go. So now the kids could do things. They brought in some entertainment and brought in the Johnny Whitaker Show. They donated and came in and performed for the flood victims, and that kind of thing. Any kind of outlets

were good. One thing that I was aware of and participated in, the LDS wards that were not flooded hosted all of the other wards and each week they had a big stew supper. They would involve maybe three or four hundred people or more than that. They had big metal containers made and they would cook these huge volumes of stew and then they would each invite another ward. They had stew and homemade bread and watermelon. Then they'd send homemade bread home with them. Those things helped a lot and did a lot of good. It helped the flood victims to just sit and talk. It did a lot to break down barriers and to help people feel really good. Those kind of things were extremely valuable in terms of interaction.

S: You mentioned that this brought the various communities in the valley together. Did you, in the work that you did, notice any differences in the mental health problems, or in the reactions of the various communities, say any community that did not respond as well, as certain other communities?

R: Yes, the Roberts area really stayed down a long time. They didn't get near the help that the other areas did. I felt it was partly because they didn't get the church leadership that the Rexburg area had. But also partly the nature of the people. They just didn't want to pitch in as fast. Now, that wasn't everybody, because there were some good leaders out there and they were doing things, but partly because of that, they didn't bounce back nearly as fast and they didn't get nearly as much attention. Some people in the Wilford area felt that they didn't get quite as much help as they could have gotten, as some of the other areas seemed to get. I don't know what happened in Menan. They seemed to be neglected, as far as we know. We didn't hear very much about them and didn't spend much time with them. I've wondered what happened there, but I really didn't get a feel for that area. I think

the thing that happened here in the Rexburg area and Sugar City area was that there was great organization and there were lots of volunteers and that really helped. It was that personal help that made such a difference.

S: How would you evaluate the situation, now, a year later in the sense of what is happening now and what sort of problems do you foresee for the next year or two?

R: I think people will pull together remarkably well. It seems like the basic difficulties in the flood have pretty well gone. It seems like the wearing down and the depression have gone. There are a few individuals who are still carrying very deep scars. I mentioned the woman who is depressed. I have worked within the last two weeks with two people who are depressed and have been depressed for a long time over a period of several months. One, now, has come out of that and has pretty well broken it and we're just trying to start with the other one. I imagine there are other people around like that. That there is still some sense of personal loss and they feel overwhelmed. But generally speaking, things have perked up well and the mental health of people seems good. It seems to be something that's pretty well been put behind them and people don't talk about it anymore. One thing that I almost forgot to mention that was kind of interesting is after the flood, all the kids would play Teton Dam. In our neighborhood, we're up on the hill, they would run water for a long ways, about three-quarters of a block from the hose and then they would dam it up. They would get all ready and they would break it and run it down into a vacant lot which was next to us. They washed quite a deep gully in there. This went on for about three weeks playing Teton Dam. The mental health workers said, that's healthy. At first they thought maybe this indicated there were real big problems, but I didn't ever see any problems and it finally quit. But

kids everywhere were playing Teton Dam. They would say, here goes the dam and it would wash things all down the side. You'd see that all over town and in the outlying communities. Everybody was playing Teton Dam.

S: That sort of thing lasted a few weeks and then it just kind of faded out?

R: Yes, maybe two or three months, most of the rest of the summer, and then just gradually faded away. I really think that was kind of a healthy outlet for kids.

S: One thing that I just wondered about, have you had any reaction recently, just now that the year is over, from some of the outside agencies or people from, say that you've met from other areas, as to how well the community has recovered? Are they surprised, pleased?

R: I've talked with just a few, not a large number, but they have been amazed at the change that has occurred. I talked to some people who were volunteers here from Utah. They said, "We can't believe it. We can't believe that it would look that good when they were here." We didn't think that it could ever bounce back." Then I've talked to some local people who had kind of not paid much attention to it that lived here. They said on the anniversary of the flood they drove through town and really started looking at it and they said, "Can you imagine that just a year ago it looked like everything was ripped out." I was with a group that we had got slides that had been produced of the dam and we showed those and I had forgotten myself how much change there really was and how bad the damage was. It's been remarkable in that sense. The community's changed and is moving faster and bigger and it never will be quite the same again. There have been a lot of benefits that have come.

S: Mr. Risenmay, how did your job situation change over this last year? You're employed by the college, did you continue that job while you were also doing

these other things and what exactly are you doing now as far as your different responsibilities go?

R: During the summer, I'm the one person who works year round at the counseling center. Most of the summer was just spent in flood related things. Hardly anything else all day. I was kind of wearing three hats. I had a church assignment that also involved me, then with Interfaith, plus I was kind of working with the community. We did whatever had to be done and it mostly related to the flood. Then as school approached, we did some school related things, but there were still lots of meetings and during the winter, most of my contact, I still met regularly with the Interfaith group and we did do a few flood related things. But most of my contact was with flood victims in my private counseling. I had more counseling than I usually did.

I'm not sure whether that was because there was that much more counseling or not. There may have been, but because of the contacts I'd made during the flood I had more referrals and so more people came in. That's where I kept in touch with it. Many of the people were flood related counseling victims--there were federal funds available to pay for the counseling of these people--so that's kind of where the remainder of my contact was. It was more in terms of my own private practice there. We just recently quit meeting with Interfaith about a month and a half ago. At first we met twice a week and then once a week all winter and then gradually trailed off this spring to a kind of coordination.

S: Could you give some evaluation of how the flood and the impact of this last year has changed your life, your attitudes, your personality in any way?

R: That's hard to say. It's hard to see how those things have changed. Probably two or three things. We were in Utah at my daughter's in Provo when we heard about the flood. My son-in-law called and said the water

was just coming into town and asked if they could use our home for people to live in. Down there we were looking for furniture and immediately we lost all interest in that and came home. We arrived that evening just before dark. We were able to get into Rexburg. I remember the impact then, that was the major impact, the darkness of the town, the water out there, though much of it had receded, the mobs of people up on the hill where we lived. On both sides of the street there were just cars and when we got to our house there were twelve people there. They were a little shocked to see us because they didn't think we'd be back and they had saved out all the water they could. We had pans and buckets and every container in our house full of water all around the house. That turned out to be quite useful. It was kind of an exciting thing. There was that initial impact of coming back. On the way back, wondering what happened, we listened to the news reports which were inaccurate. Reports of a hundred and fifty people being dead and of course we knew then there'd be many people we knew. Not really knowing, but being reassured that our own family was all right, because they had called us just before the lines went out. We tried to call them back but we couldn't get through. That apprehension and desire to get back made us decide to drive to Rexburg. Then, on Sunday morning, after all the water had receded, I drove through town and I couldn't believe what I saw and I had to go get my family and said, "You've got to see this to believe it." It was like big hooks had gone through and just pulled out every store. Every single store was cleaned out, all the logs and that sort of thing. Even though people told you about it, you had to see it to believe it. That was an impact. Getting into homes was an impact. Each time I would leave and then come back there was that impact again.

There were those initial feelings. I think out of the whole thing there has come a feeling, not a vulnerable feeling, but a realization. We felt pretty smug here. We talked about earthquakes but nobody'd ever really experienced one of those and that was something way off. We did get a realization that at any moment you can be wiped out. Not a fear of that but an appreciation to just be alive. A realization that things can be changed overnight. I guess a repeating of that feeling came when there were some severe winds. I can't remember when that was, whether it was during the winter or not, but you began to get that same kind of feeling that at any time things could go and it felt more real now.

Another thing that I noticed was that there was more interest in disasters around the world and seeing them from a more personal point-of-view than before. I think there was more of a sensitivity and an appreciation. As far as a counselor feels, an effect that I noticed usually when I worked with people, it hadn't been too difficult to leave their problems when I left the office. I seldom carried them home and even though I cared deeply about the people, these people were our friends and not through anything they had done, were suffering so much. It really touched me and I found my emotions hard to control. Being very open, I think I became a more sensitive counselor. I also began to carry things home more and to feel what people were feeling more and that has sort of continued. I think I'm more effective in one sense, but paying a greater price for it. Because the feelings were there they were very intense. As you talked to these people and sensed the emotion that they had and was always there, there was a great impact.

One other specific thing. I thought of it the other day when a helicopter went over. Those first few days, about three days, the sky

was full of helicopters, the radio was on, and they'd lost track of a lot of people and they were trying to find them. So the helicopters were going over, with this sound all the time, that chopping sound. Then on the radio it would say, "so and so has been found, so and so has been found." They would give the announcements and always in between them they would continue, "so and so has been found, so and so is missing, so and so has been found, so and so is missing." We just kept our radio on all the time, listening for people and just kind of had it on in the background. It was an eerie feeling. Those choppers in the sky and that radio repeating that, they'd go ahead with some announcements and then they'd to back to their lists. The other day, maybe it was a year after the flood, the government officials were here and there were two or three helicopters going over and as they went over I thought of before and the same old feelings came back, what was going on and that particular kind of feeling.

S: Mr. Risemay, I can't think of any other specific questions I'd like to ask. Was there anything else you'd like to say or any feelings that you'd like to express right now?

R: No, other than this is just something that has had a big impact and will continue to have an impact. People began to date things. That was before the flood or after the flood. Another thing that just comes to my mind, people began to get very forgetful after the flood, and we joked about it, and some people worried about it but we finally had to get that out of them. But we became so forgetful and even two or three months after you couldn't remember dates. Everything seemed scrambled and confused. It got humorous because you'd say, "Well, let's see now, was that before the flood or was that after the flood?" It just seemed all big and hazy and fuzzy around that particular time. That was another impact. I think it

was the fact of all the emotional kind of things that were happening. You just couldn't keep things straight. You'd forget a lot of basic things that ordinarily you could remember. It even got quite humorous and people began to joke about it.

S: That's something that Marv Eld mentioned, people filling out their forms often times they wouldn't be able to remember their children's names, their own birthdates.

R: Things that you had remembered without difficulty. It really got to be kind of a funny thing.

S: Well, thank you very much.