

TETON ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ricks College
Idaho State Historical Society
History Department, Utah State University

TETON DAM DISASTER

Nola Browning Thomas Vance

Interviewed by

Mary Ann Beck

July 6, 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.

A tape recording of your interview has been made by the interviewer. A verbatim typescript of the tape will be made and a final typed and edited transcripts, together with the tape will be made and a final will then be filed in the Milton R. Merrill Library Special Collections, David O. McKay Library at Ricks College, and the Idaho State Historical Society in Boise. This material will be made available according to each of the depositories' policies for research be scholars and by others for scholarly purposes. When the final transcript is completed, a personal copy will be sent to you.

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In view of the historical and scholarly value of this information, I, Nola Browning Thomas Vance, 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.

Nola T. Vance
Interviewee's Signature

June 6, 1977
Date

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In view of the historical and scholarly value of this information contained in the interview with Nola Crowning Thomas Vance, I, MARY ANN BECK (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.

Mary Ann Beck
Interviewer's Signature

6/6/77
Date

ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Nola Browning Thomas Vance

INTERVIEWER: Mary Ann Beck

DATE: July 6, 1977

TETON DAM DISASTER

B: Mrs. Vance, would you please spell your name?

V: Nola Browning Thomas Vance.

B: Where were you born?

V: In Lorenzo, Jefferson County, Idaho.

B: How long have you lived in Rexburg?

V: About fifteen years.

B: How old are you?

V: Forty-three years old.

B: Do you have a family?

V: Yes.

B: How many were living in your home at the time of the flood?

V: Eight.

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

V: Route 1, Sugar City, Idaho.

B: What is your present address?

V: Route 1, Sugar City, Idaho.

B: What do you do for a living?

V: I'm a housewife and mother.

B: How long have you lived in this area?

V: Five years.

B: Did you own your own home?

V: Yes.

B: And farm?

V: Yes.

B: Did you support or oppose the construction of the Teton Dam?

V: It was settled whether it was going to be built before we moved here. Every time we had guests we enthusiastically took them up to see the dam. I suppose in a way you would say that we supported it.

B: Did you or any member of your family have a premonition of the Teton disaster?

V: None whatsoever, as far as I know.

B: Where were you and your family when the Teton Dam broke?

V: We were in this area, but we were not all at home. A few were and the rest of us were scattered.

B: What was your first reaction when you heard that the dam had failed?

V: Complete and total disregard for the message and unbelief.

B: Did you try to save any household or personal items?

V: Yes.

B: Did you have any unusual or miraculous experiences connected with the flood?

V: Yes, I think we did. Our story is called, "Telephone Wire and a Prayer," by Nola Thomas Vance. Many times I have pondered what I would save from the house in case of an emergency. The prospects of having to do so never entered my mind that beautiful spring morning of June 5, 1976. I left our sixty acre farm about 11:00 a.m. to drive two of the children to a 4-H cattle judging show a mile south of Rexburg. Fourteen-year-old Niva had left for my brother's in Richfield, Utah, the day before. My husband, Neil, was at work and that left Nina, twelve, home with seven-year-old Norman and five-year-old Nanette. We were just beginning to learn the qualities of a blue ribbon hereferd bull and they had two go arounds, when nine-year-old Noreen got my attention with, "Moma, that girl over there said the Teton Dam broke." I looked in the direction Noreen pointed to see who made the comment and otherwise pass it

off as a kid's joke. A few minutes later, I went to find Nathan, age eleven, who was filling his paper plate with free sandwiches, salad, cookies, and punch served inside a blue metal building. No sooner had I entered the structure than a man pushed by me back and in a rather excited voice announced, "The Teton Dam broke. Everyone will have to leave." Stunned, people stood motionless. His voice grew more agitated. "This is all over, drop what you are doing. Get your children and leave." At the sound of "now" I ran for Noreen and hurried her toward our white station wagon where Nathan had gone with his plate of food. First thing I did was turn the car around and flip the switch to the local radio station, KRXX. Owner and manager, Don Ellis, was at the dam site and he confirmed over and over the seriousness of what was taking place.

I took the truck route through Rexburg without a hitch until we arrived at the bridge over the South Fork of the Teton River on the north edge of town. The river hadn't risen an inch, but the bridge was jammed in all four lanes with policemen and motorists. Most of the cars heading north were being turned back. Noreen started to cry, "Mom, hurry! The kids at home don't know about it. They'll all be drowned, and my Raggedy." Impatient, Nathan shouted, "Shut up, that won't do any good." "Yes," I answered, "Be quiet. We may only have a few minutes when we get home to grab what's really important so think what that is."

When I told the officer I had children at home alone, he let me drive over the bridge. We proceeded in haste along a back road, pausing long enough to ask the Dean Grover family, who were packed in a camper, where they were headed. Dean said in a rather dazed voice that he didn't know. Dust sprun from our wheels the next mile north as we listened to the alarming message on the radio.

A surge of relief swept over me when I pulled into our driveway and saw my husband's green U.S. steel pickup. He and the children at home had carried sacks of clothing, sleeping bags, cooler and picnic basket with food, to our small silver and white campger. I ran in the back door, through the kitchen and to the four bookshelves in the living room, customarily loaded with a dozen bulging Books of Remembrance, which contain genealogy, folders, pictures with stories of Christmas, birthdays, blessings, baptisms, and sealings. All those had been carried upstairs along with a box of baby books, income tax records, drawers from a china closet, buffet, and the bureau and a huge file from the family room that was thought to contain genealogy information and pictures. We also carried upstairs a violin, flute, brass and crystal lamps, stuffed animals, some piano music, grandfather clock, my mother's Bernina sewing machine in a portable case, steam iron and a recently purchased vacuum cleaner.

My calm husband, Neil, called for help outside. He instructed the children and I to go get the little wagon and haul bales of hay from the stack and place in front of the big and little doors of the shop, where was stored barrels of wheat, sugar, flour, beans, and rice, along with extra furniture, and appliances, ladders, tools, paint and paneling for remodeling jobs just completed.

All spring the children and I had labored with bum lambs. Twelve of the darling pets had survived and they followed us around like puppies every time the door was opened. They were contentedly grazing the ditch bank next to the raspberries in our enormous garden which Nathan and I hoed that morning. Neil decided to load all the lambs in the horse trailer and brace it for the water, hoping if we only got a few feet, that it would float. One lamb refused to be trapped and while trying to grab him, my eyes caught sight of a mother Banty hen and five chicks she hatched out in the granary. Our two Guernsey milk

cows, Honey and Sally, were contentedly chewing their cuds in the upper corral. They were both to calve within a month. In fact, the children ran out early every morning, wanting to be first with the news. The stock animals were all down in the lower pasture, each with a new black angus spring calf. One heifer called Stitches had two calves she mothered. After we pulled the main electrical switch in the house, an officer came to the back door which started our gold cocker, Taffy, and her two pups barking. With his announcement that it was time to leave, Neil told him that we were almost on our way.

Our nine-year-old girl grabbed the Holy Scriptures from the family room and Neil struggled with the TV, finally getting it on the kitchen table. Our small hobby farm, as my husband smilingly called it, was one scene of domestic tranquility that Saturday afternoon about 1:20 p.m. when we pulled away. My husband lead in our blue and white Chevrolet pickup-camper. Right behind, I followed in the station wagon with the children, except Nathan who rode with his dad.

Over the South Fork of the Teton River, past the Sugar City Cemetery and up Mill Hollow Road above Madison Memorial Hospital, we drove, pulling into a hayfield as one might drive into an empty space at a drive-in movie. All traffic was orderly as if the scene had been rehearsed a dozen times. My husband told me he had called his dad and ailing mother in Montana before we left the house to say that they would be hearing bad news about our area soon, but we were leaving and would be all right and they were not to worry about us.

The hillside was crowded with cars, trucks, pickups and campers. We saw many people we knew. While everyone was excitedly waiting for the drama to unfold, one man asked around if anyone knew how to drive a school bus and soon two cars loaded with men left to get the newly purchased buses belonging to District 321. Within minutes, the buses were all parked in a vacant lot on

the hill. Our three younger children climbed on top of the camper for a better view. We had always thought we lived quite close to protection, but from our vantage point, we could see that with any amount of water our farm wouldn't stand a chance.

"There it is." My husband pointed and we all strained our eyes to see. It was far away entering the valley from the west. Gray-brown in color, with a brown mist above. As it rolled forth about fifteen miles per hour, it widened, covering everything in its path, it looked like. From where we were watching, our white and green stucco house was lined up with the Sugar City water tower. Looking through binoculars, my husband called the names of our neighbors as the muddy torrent hit their places. With a feeling of horror and helplessness, we strained our eyes to see our farm and all that we had worked to build up. Knowing that we had done all we could in the time allotted and feeling an utter dependence on a force greater than our own; Neil, an Elder on the Mormon church, did the only thing left to do. "Everyone on the ground for prayer," he ordered. The children jumped from their perches and knelt beside Neil and I in the alfalfa field by the front bumper of our pickup.

"Dear Heavenly Father. (Neil's voice faltered and we were all sobbing uncontrollably.) We are at Thy mercy. We acknowledge our many sins and shortcomings before Thee and ask for Thy forgiveness. We have been thoughtless, short-tempered, and said and done many things not pleasing in Thy sight. But at this time of need, we ask a special blessing upon our house that it will stay on its foundation. Please bless our house, Heavenly Father, that we will have a place to live. We will try to do better in the future than we have done in the past. Thank Thee for all that Thou hast given unto us and for Thy many blessings throughout our lives. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen!"

No doubt there were others besides our Heavenly Father who saw us kneeling in the field and knew we were praying. Maybe they were doing likewise, we never knew.

As we arose from our knees, blew our noses and wiped our eyes, the flood engulfed our house. Even without binoculars, the children and I could see our three horses, two white Welch Arabians and one gray Shetland, in a frantic situation. "One of the horses has been knocked down," Neil choked. "What's happened?" we chorused? "Hit by something shiny, maybe a roof." The other two had jumped the fences and were headed west with dust at their heels. The little Shetland was keeping pace with the one remaining Welch Arabian. Before we could follow the course our horses took, an unbelievable sight caught our attention. Our neighbors houses were bobbing along in the current like corks. First one house, then another following behind, and then trailer houses looked like toys in a tub and the huge barn that the children used to talk about during the two and a half mile bus ride to school, added to the memorable sight. When the water hit the U.S. Steel Fertilizer Plant where my husband works, it looked like a clown had let loose a handful of helium balloons as the ammonia tanks flew in the air and floated away.

We forgot about the horses and our farm being absorbed as we were watching the water roll forth until it covered the entire valley from Ricks College on the hill to the sand hills on the north.

There were at least three flood-related fires and black smoke marked the areas. The flood headed southwest toward the Snake River and the Big Butte, where college students enthusiastically light the "R" each year.

Hand in hand we walked with the children several blocks down to the waters edge at the Fourth Ward church. What a spectacle. A few people were boating down the streets, mostly policemen and rescuers, I suspect. Walking in another direction, we saw a white building in the middle of Rick's College football field. But the college buildings were all high enough to be dry. People we met began telling about houses being in the parks and on the roads and everyone we met asked if our house was still standing. All during the siege we had

been able to see the roof of our house and the lone pine tree out front. Some of the people we'd parked by on the hill attended the same ward that we did. Word began spreading that we should meet at Brother Budd Reese's, a member of our bishopric, whose house was high enough to be dry.

When we arrived, Bishop Merle Jeppeson was checking the ward list for an accounting of each member and assigning each family who was flooded a place to stay for the night. We had our camper, tent, and some food, so we drove as close as we could get to our farm, about two miles away; put up the tent, ate tuna, V-8 juice, and some banana bread I baked early that morning. There was no water to wash dishes so we rolled out the sleeping bags and spent a terribly long sleepless night listening to the bellowing of surviving cows for their calves.

I thought daybreak would never come. The ground had become almost intolerably hard from tossing and turning. Neil and many of our neighbors got across what was left of the bridge over the South Fork of the river by the Sugar City cemetery and walked to their farms. Neil was fortunate to have caught a helicopter ride and flown over our farm three hours after the flood hit on Saturday.

Within an hour after the flood the area looked like a war zone. Helicopters and airplanes of every description filled the sky until dark.

Ricks College became our life station. We ate meals and received messages at the Manwaring Center. My husband's brother, Sherrill Vance, had been listed as one of the missing persons having been in Idaho Falls on Saturday and not able to get to his home in St. Anthony. Finally, he did get a message through by way of a CB radio and on Monday took four of our children to his home in St. Anthony. Our oldest boy, Nathan, age eleven, and I hiked to our house between four and five p.m. on Sunday afternoon. Neil had prepared me for

the broken windows and no animals. But the debris, washed away roads and railroad tracks was hard to visualize. I outran Nathan the last block and a half. The strangest and most glorious sight we found was the round, black telephone cable about a inch and a half in diameter wrapped four feet up around our house, shop, coal shed, lilac bush, and metal granary. The barn, loafing and lamb pens, sheds, pig pens, corrals, loading chute, haystacks, fences, and all the animals except two hens and one cat were gone. We have many visitors and our children tell people, "Heavenly Father answered our prayers and protected our house." I say, "Yes, he did. I want each of you to always remember that."

B: How soon after the flood were you able to return to your property?

V: On Sunday morning, early daybreak, my husband, Neil, hiked in with several of the neighbors over the bridge of the river by the Sugar City cemetery and walked the rest of the way to our farm. Then on Sunday afternoon, our eleven-year-old boy and I drove to within a mile from our home, left the car and then we walked and ran the rest of the way.

B: What was your first reaction when you viewed the destruction of your property?

V: My very first reaction was one of humble gratitude. I was so thankful to see the house standing strong and on its foundation in spite of the broken windows, ruined furniture and all the poles, bales of hay, straw, mud and much everywhere.

B: Where did you and your family stay during the first two or three days after the flood?

V: We had our camper and our tent and we pitched our tent on Don Blunk's lawn for two days and nights and slept there.

B: Did you continue to stay there during the cleanup?

V: No, as soon as the road was passible into our house, we brought our car and our camper home and we lived in our camper, slept in it, for the next six weeks.

After that, we moved into our shop we had cleaned out. We moved into that a bed that we got from Deseret Industries.

B: What did you think about and how did you feel as you watched the floodwaters rolling through the area?

V: It was a pretty helpless feeling. Mostly our thoughts were with our home and our farm and hoping and praying that our house would stay on its foundation so we would have a place to go after the flood. We weren't worried about people losing their lives, it didn't seem to be a panicky situation in that regard. People seemed to have heeded the message and gone up on the hill or other places, areas of safety.

B: What was the damage suffered as a result of the flood?

V: We suffered the loss of all our crops, tractor and other machinery, two stacks of hay, fifty head of stock cows and calves, two milk cows, one black angus bull, eight pigs, fifty chickens, twelve lambs, three dogs, cats, fences, corrals, clotheslines, lawn, trees, flowers, shrubs, furniture and personal items.

B: What was the most cherished item you lost in the flood?

V: Without a doubt, I think twenty-five tapes which contained recorded music and family programs including my father's and mother's voices, who are long since gone, my grandparents, aunts and uncles, and other loved ones also passed on and our children when they were small. The five hundred dollar tape recorder which played the tapes also was lost. We lost our piano and piano music, my grandfather's violin which was very old; my mother's blue diamond; my ruby ring with two diamonds. Those were the most valuable things.

B: How did you go about cleaning up your property?

V: When I first entered the house, I couldn't find any kind of a tool that I could reach to get the mud. The windows were broken so I just came in through

the window and up over the furniture that was in front of the window. I tried to get the back door opened, which I couldn't do, so I finally scopped it up with my hands and forced it open a small way and then I dumped the mud out with my hands and arms until I finally found a tray used to take food on. I used that until I'd ruined it. I found a real small scrub board and I worked for about an hour Sunday night. Then on Monday, there were five men; my husband, his brother, and his brother's two boys and a friend of theirs, who worked all day Monday in one room, our family room, just with pitchforks and shovels with boots on their feet and gloves on their hands, pitchforking the mud and getting the furniture out of that room. Tuesday, they worked just in the living room. By the end of the day they finally moved into one bedroom and took the windows out of that room and put the mattresses through the windows and the other furniture out of the bedroom. I had an aunt and uncle from Lorenzo come up and pitchfork all the children's toys that were still left in the family room and cleaned out the shelves and the closet. That took two afternoons.

The first Saturday, the volunteers came to our home. We had thirteen, including the church volunteer help from North Idaho Falls Stake. We had people from the Fourth and Tenth Ward represented, including the wife of one of the counselors in the Stake Presidency and a group of people that she had. Also, a group of people from Roger Brothers, where I was working, came to help and brought a big roast and cake and fed all of us that day. We had thirteen helpers that first Saturday. From then on, the volunteer workers through the L.D.S. church and our stake center, North Rexburg Stake, came almost everyday. We had up to five helpers until they quit coming the end of July.

B: How many volunteers did you have? Could you give a estimate?

- V: During the month of July alone we had fifty-five volunteers work on our place. I think there probably were a few less than that during the month of June, but right around ninety would be a close estimate of people who came to help us.
- B: What were some of the problems you were confronted with? What were the problems that gave you the most frustration during that time?
- V: Keeping the people busy, I believe was the biggest task that I faced. Not having any clean place to put things; not having any place to put things period. We didn't have water or electricity until the end of that first week. I remember how wonderful it was when we got water to wash the mud off. Our tub was full of muddy water. It was the only water we had for many days. We washed the dishes off in that tub just to get the worst of the mud off until it was almost clear to the top with muck.
- B: Did you have any unusual or uplifting experiences during the cleanup operation?
- V: We had many wonderful people who inspired us every day. We had stake president's wives, bishops, bishoprics, branch presidents, relief society presidencies, elders quorum presidencies, MIA class leaders and class members, and Sunday School teachers and Sunday School classes. But the one most uplifting experience during that time for me was one day we had three large men from Salt Lake, all over six feet. They worked hard manual work. At the end of that time I took them back to the stake center and I was telling them how much we appreciated having them come and help us that day. The other two started walking away and one stayed there a minute. When the other two had walked away, he said, "I just would like to give you a big hug to show you how much we all love you and support you." After that, for two days, I felt like the Savior himself had put his arms around me; so strong and powerful was that message of love.
- B: Did you personally suffer any vandalism or other forms of lawlessness?

- V: No, we had roadblocks. We had one that was at the end of our road and the police protection was fantastic. In fact, during that time they had curfews and we were inside of our camper before it was dark. There was no movement around. The roads were impassable and there was nobody going up, down or around. In a couple of cases, where my mother's blue diamond and my ruby ring with two diamonds, a watch with two diamonds and a genuine silver dollar, I wondered whether those items were actually lost in the mud or if they could have been taken sometime during the cleanup. I do not know and I do not accuse any person.
- B: What kind of government aid did you receive immediately after the flood?
- V: We did not ask for an apartment at Ricks College or a trailer. I believe it was about two weeks, when HUD came and began replacing and fixing up our home so we could have a roof over our heads. They replaced first the bearing petition in the basement. Then they replaced our hardwood floors with versa or particle board. They ordered windows which were put in late October or the first part of November and a new front door. We received about \$120 worth of food stamps which I took to Idaho Falls and purchased some staples such as flour, sugar, salt, jello, and cereals like that we had lost. We shopped once at the Bishop's Storehouse and got quite a few groceries there. From the church welfare program up at the college, we received some garments, stockings, hose, and a couple of shirts for our boys. We also got bedsprings and mattresses from the Bishop's Storehouse in Rexburg. We put these bedsprings and mattresses in our shop which had been cleaned out by then and we slept in the shop for six weeks to two months during which time we also had some company from Iowa.

My husband's relatives whose wife had never been in the West, stayed with us and we let them sleep in our bed in the shop. We went back to the camper for

a week while they were here. From the Deseret Industries in Idaho Falls, we received a hide-a-bed so we had a couch and a bed for the use in the house. We ate our meals at the college for two weeks and then, until the end of July, we ate meals at the North Stake Center, which is also our ward meeting house. I understand the food was transferred from the college down to the First Ward.

B: Did you receive any assistance from the Red Cross or from any other private or independent organizations?

V: The Red Cross paid to have our Pfaff sewing machine repaired in Idaho Falls. My husband got a pair of boots and some gas money so we could get back and forth to Rexburg for meals. One day when we were cleaning out our house, a station wagon with Red Cross people stopped by and left sandwiches, pop, and cleaning supplies.

B: Did HUD and the Red Cross deal with you fairly?

V: Yes, I feel that they did. The Red Cross offered to give us money so we could buy clothes for our six children and ourselves. We lost quite a few clothes in the flood, but most of the children's clothing was upstairs so we did not take any money.

B: What government agencies did you deal with during the recovery operation?

V: We dealt with HUD on the minimal repair program and also FHA for the loan that we took out.

B: Did you have any dealings with state and county authorities and law enforcement officers during the flood? Evaluate their effectiveness.

V: For the most part, I believe they did a superb job. We had only one situation. On Sunday we wanted to get down to our tent and the officers blocked the road off. A patrol officer wouldn't let us drive on the road pass the high school. We could see our encampment a mile east from where we stood but in the end, we had to find another route over the dry farms.

- B: Were there any household appliances and stoves in your yard and farm?
- V: Yes, there were household appliances, household effects and remains of one new home and trailer house that came from Sugar City. The contents of both homes were scattered throughout our farm and corrals.
- B: Who cleaned up your debris on your farm?
- V: The Soil Conservation Service took approximately forty truck loads of debris from the dam and from those two new homes, plus other homes around where we live.
- B: Do you feel that any who assisted in the recovery operation took advantage of you or the government, especially in getting a lot of money without really earning it?
- V: My husband thinks the money paid to equipment operators was fair, but some of the common laborers were definitely overpaid for the amount of work they accomplished. We had to have fifty-five acres scrapped late last fall. The ASCS paid eighty percent of that and the BOR paid twenty percent. This spring we had to have the land planted.
- B: Without divulging names, do you know of anyone who filed fraudulent flood claims?
- V: Only what we read in the paper. We read about two Spanish-American brothers who had filed claims. Other than that, we don't know of anyone.
- B: Do you feel the flood was a divine punishment or a man-made disaster?
- V: We feel that it was a man-made disaster.
- B: Why?
- V: We believe that it was caused basically by three things: (1) Poor workmanship, (2) over estimating the material used in the dam to hold back the water, and (3) filling the dam too rapidly.

- B: Do you feel the dam should be rebuilt? If so, should it be rebuilt in the same place?
- V: Yes, we feel like the dam should be rebuilt at about that location. There would have to be people that are more knowledgeable on the subject of geology and other factors related thereto to figure out the right place.
- B: How has the Teton disaster changed your life?
- V: I think the first thing are the values that we have gained since the flood. We still don't have a television set and this is thirteen months after the flood. We didn't spend that many hours viewing television before. Our family was only allowed certain viewing times anyway. I think that personally we have gained a greater respect for our lives and other lives and have seen that sticking together, as a family, and doing what's right is really the only thing that counts.
- B: Do you think this is a "dry-run" for something bigger in our lives?
- V: According to what we believe, if we believe in the scriptures and in prophecy, it may well be that we'll have many more calamities and hopefully be better prepared to face them.
- B: What did you think of the Appreciation Day for the volunteers we had in June?
- V: I think it was a marvelous gesture on the part of the leadership here in our community to have such an activity. Personally, I think there were very few of those who came to help us last year who came back to be appreciated. The local people had their morale built up by having this day also. It's my feeling that if help were requested by the bishops for people to come back there may be even more volunteers to come and help us than there were last year. I think that most of the volunteers who came last year and helped us felt like the thanks we gave them and the effort was more or less their pay. The words, or the love that was exchanged, brother for brother and sister for sister, that was their thanks.

B: Do you think it was a good missionary tool?

V: Yes, I think that it was. We've had some experiences mentioned in our ward where there have been contacts made and maybe some conversions, at least people asking about the church that didn't know anything about it. There has been a lot published in papers, articles and newspapers about what a tremendous thing the volunteers did to build our morale. I think that definitely it was a great missionary tool.

B: Did you write any poems or songs?

V: No songs, we didn't have a piano until last October. That was the first piece of furniture that we replaced after the flood. I felt that our home had been too long without the music that we were accustomed to. At Christmas time I did write a poem. I titled it, "News Headlines, 1976." Customarily every year at Christmas, I write a poem, letter or news of our family. I have done this for the past fifteen years and I make about 125 copies that we send all over the country to friends. This poem is called "Teton Dam Bursts, June 5, 1976."

The flood, flood, flood.

The mud, mud, mud.

Ugh.

Now hundreds of families
live in trailers by HUD.

The eight Neil Vance's
Feel thankful our house
was spared.

Never in this life have we
been so scared.

The desperate prayer we offered
in a hayfield high,
Was answered for our house and shop
As gray walls of water grew high.

A hundred of our animals struggled for
their life.

Three horses, eight stock cows,
two hens and one cat stood the
strife.

Our crops, fences, barn and shed were
lost.

Our lawn and garden too.

The condition of our newly remodeled home
Made us feel awfully blue.

Then you called, you wrote,
You came and helped us every day
But Sunday for two months you
worked in the muss.

August 5th our three youngest came home
to join the nest.

Could eight of us live in devastation
and surpass the test?

Our foundation was sound, the inspector said
And we decided to add utility and
garage with bedrooms above.
Which made Niva and Nina glad.

Putting each room together
completely takes my time.
Plus writing down our flood claim
Leaves me no time to write.

The childrens ages, fourteen, twelve, eleven,
nine, eight and six
Attend three flooded Rexburg schools
With a months late start,
To learn all the rules.

After school its practice time on
flute, piano and violin.
Each performs on family night,
which makes our daddy grin.

Music and games are every night fun;
Two TV's went in June
Flood lesson: Life's great treasure,
children grow up too soon.

We're thankful for each one of ours,
and for each one of you.
It's souls and families that mean most,
And the gospel true.

The love of Heavenly Father and Jesus
Christ shines bright.
With your prayers, your love and encouragement,
We have recovered from our plight.

B: Is there anything else you want to add?

V: About two weeks ago, I was to a family reunion in Idaho Falls and a relative of mine, a high school teacher by profession, engaged me in conversation. On learning where I lived, he inquired, "Were you hit by the flood?"

"Yes," was my immediate reply.

"Very badly?" he wanted to know?

"Yes," again I answered. "I have written it down for our posterity."

"Have you thought about sending it to the Reader's Digest for their first person award division?"

"Why no I haven't." I said, "In fact, I really wonder in this skeptical age of indifference towards God and religion, if the Reader's Digest's audience would be interested in the story we learned from the flood because it is very spiritual, special and personal to us. You see, we learned that God still is interested in his children. He still hears and answers our prayers."

"Why don't you try then?" was the encouraging remark from this relative.

I wrote to Reader's Digest on June 13, 1977, and said to the editor:

Dear Editor:

Here is my story of the day the Teton Dam broke in southeastern Idaho, June 5, 1977, the day I will always remember vividly.

There was also an amusing incident that happened within the first week after the flood. Three men in a pickup stopped in front of our house as we were hauling furniture out. The driver yelled, "I'm looking for my house." We thought that was kind of funny but he was very serious. He said, "Has that brown and yellow house always been there?" We said, "Yes, that's our neighbors, Dale Jensen's, house." He said, "Well, it doesn't look like its sitting straight on the foundation." We said, "It isn't, but it is the

house that was sitting straight on the foundation and now its all crooked. That is their house." He said, "I'm looking for my house and I haven't found it yet. I think it probably came this direction." We were as bewildered as he was and we said we just didn't have any idea where his house could be or where he could look for it.

The first question in the minds of our six children when we told them the condition of our house was not about any toy or possession, but, "Are we still going to be able to get our baby?" All six of our children are special and all have been sealed to us. At that time, our home had been cleared for an addition to our family and we didn't know how long before we would receive word. One of our worries was not having a phone. After four months the phone company reinstalled our service. Our baby waited until May 12, 1977, to be born, Nicholas Rnadall Vance, and he is a joy in all of our lives.

B: Thank you very much, Mrs. Vance.