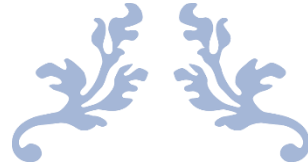


Crow River Flooding at Rockford, 1965
The Rockford Area Historical Society
Rockford, MN



MEMORIES: THE 1965 FLOODING OF THE CROW RIVER IN ROCKFORD

A Collection of Oral Histories



MARCH 1, 2020
THE ROCKFORD AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Rockfo4d, MN

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**The 1965 Flooding of the Crow River
At Rockford, MN**

In 2019, the Rockford Area Historical Society decided to collect information on the 1965 flooding of the Crow River at Rockford, and to specifically collect information regarding how this flooding may have affected the business community as a whole. We were surprised to find that most of this history had already been lost, specifically history on the affects of the flooding on the businesses. The project evolved to include general information on the flooding of 1965 in Rockford, MN.

Included are five oral histories of the 1965 flooding, with memories of how the flooding affected the Rockford community in general. We hope that you find these oral histories as enlightening and entertaining as we have.

Special thanks to our interviewers and those who helped support this project, Michelle Bartlett, Debbie DeBeer, Kathy Ehlers, James Eldien, Bonnie Maue and Kris Strobel

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Loren Harff Oral History Interview
Rockford Flood 1965 Oral History Project
July 31, 2019

Rockford 1965 Flood Oral History Project

Interview with Loren Harff

July 31, 2019

Bonnie Maue, Interviewer

Loren Harff: **LH**

Bonnie Maue: **BM**

Track 1

00:00

BM: This today is Wednesday July 31, 2019, and we're at the Rockford Stork House and we're recording an oral interview with Loren Harff, and we're going to start with some questions that we've prepared for him. And my name is Bonny Molly from the Rockford Area Historical Society. So I guess we'll start with your full name.

LH: Loren Harff.

BM: And your date of birth?

LH: 7-27-35.

BM: And your birthplace?

LH: Greenfield.

BM: So you were born in Greenfield?

LH: Yep—on the farm.

BM: On the farm? Did you have a midwife or—no idea?

LH: (Laughter). I couldn't tell you.

BM: Were all your siblings born on the farm?

LH: Yes.

BM: And so you grew up in Greenfield?

LH: Yes.

BM: I was going to say well, how long were you in Rockford, but you were just on the outskirts.

LH: On the outskirts, yep.

BM: Around April 1965, when the City of Rockford flooded, what were you doing?

LH: I think I was still on the farm; I'm still on the farm. And that day, when it flooded, I was in Minneapolis for some reason. And I came home and I was very surprised to see that the river came up that fast and couldn't hardly believe it, but it happened.

BM: Regarding your family, what were they doing at the time, do you know?

LH: Well just—my dad and mother were retired, so I'm sure they were just biding their time watching TV at home and things like that. Then brothers and sisters, they lived elsewhere.

BM: Did you get any warning about the flood or predictions or—

LH: Well, predictions, yes. The weather bureau came out and said the river would rise considerably and no one could believe it, but it did happen.

BM: Before the flood occurred that year, what do you remember?

LH: Well, there was a lot of snow. And then pretty much what really happened was there was a lot of snow—heavy snow—during the winter and then in July—excuse me—in March we got a huge snow storm. And it was very cold that winter with a lot of snow. And the ice was thick on the river and, when we got this heavy snow in March, there was so much water that it melted—it got up to about 60 or 70 degrees one day and it kind of all melted in one day, and that's when the river really flooded. I mean, it's a big watershed.

BM: How did you or other people in the town prepare for it, or did you?

LH: Well, the predictions were pretty bad, so they started sand-bagging and things like that, but the river went over the top with sand bags and nothing you could do to stop it, so, you know, it just happened.

BM: You were just telling me the story about down at the barbershop.

LH: Yes. I went to the barber to get a haircut and the barbershop is some distance from the river, and the weather bureau says, "You will have water up to your front door," at the barbershop. And the barber says out, "It's not possible." Well, it went beyond that. It went past the predictions that the weather bureau had said it would go.

BM: Who was the barber?

LH: Kenny Lemmage. He's now passed on, but I went to him for many, many years.

BM: During the actual flooding, what did you do?

LH: Well, I farmed and then I had a part-time job in Minneapolis which I would go to, not every day, occasionally. And I came home one day and, as my neighbor says, "Boy, Rockford is really getting it." So I went to Rockford and I couldn't believe where all the water was coming from. Good lord!

BM: Were you a part of doing the sandbagging the bridge?

LH: No. No, I didn't. I was too busy doing other things and they seemed to have enough volunteers around Rockford to get the job done. And no, I was not part of it.

BM: Do you know if they put a call out to everybody or—

LH: Oh, pretty much so, yeah. They put a call out to—everybody that could help went to fill sand bags and what-have-you. I remember them putting a couple pallets or loads of sand on the old bridge to—they figured it would lift up and float away. So they put sand on the bridge to hold it down, but whether that did any good, I don't know (laughter). I can't—

BM: But the bridge stayed.

LH: The bridge stayed. Yes. Yep.

BM: And, let's see, was your home affected and how?

LH: No. We're quite some distance from the Crow River and we were not affected at all.

BM: How about was your business affected?

LH: No, not at all. We're still far enough away from the Crow River that—and we're high enough, so it didn't affect us at all.

BM: But did it affect you when you needed to go to town to get supplies?

LH: Oh yes, oh yes. It was either if you went to town and the business was open, you could drive 20 miles around to get to town or you could—well, that was the only way to get there was drive around. There was no other way to get to town.

BM: How do you think it affected the businesses in town? Did it?

LH: Well, some of the business had to close because it was just too much water. They couldn't—most businesses downtown were really affected and they had to close up because there was just no—you couldn't get to them and that was it. You just couldn't do business.

BM: What about do you know if they still kept going with some of the businesses?

LH: Well, yeah, if you wanted to wade into their store and they had things that they put on sale after the flood that the things that were sitting in water in the flood, they would—they tried to sell, you know, salvage a little bit here and there, but it hit the businesses pretty hard.

BM: Did you see anybody there from a Red Cross or civil engineers or—

LH: I think the Red Cross was out there, but I didn't really see anybody. Well, I imagine they were up on higher ground and we were down closer to where the things were flooding.

BM: Someone—I heard that the post office was still open—the bank was still open. Do you remember that?

LH: The bank—I couldn't tell you about the bank because, if the bank was downtown, that was underwater—some of it. They had water on the main floor, but oh, I suppose if you waded—

put boots on and waded out there, why it would be—. But, like the restaurants, they all closed up because food is something else and any—I remember pop, they had to—that was underwater. They had to throw it all away because of contamination around the caps and the things like that.

BM: I assume, since you were in Greenfield, your post office was Loretto.

LH: Yes.

BM: So then that wouldn't have affected you with the Rockford Post Office.

LH: No. No, the post office I think was high enough. It was behind a barbershop at that time. And I think it was high enough that the water didn't quite reach that far.

BM: What were some of those changes in Rockford that you saw following the flood?

LH: Well, they put the dike up for one thing.

BM: Where is that along the river?

LH: Well, it skirts the river all through Rockford, the dike. And of course that'll leave the roads open. And now, if it ever floods again, they just close up where the roads are and everything should be okay. And [Highway] 55 was not affected because that's up quite high and the water didn't reach quite that far.

BM: And you're saying—how did you think that affected your family and your business?

LH: Well, it didn't really affect the family any because, like I say, we lived up on higher ground. And the business—it didn't affect that either because, at that time, we were farming and milking cows and things like that. And everything was, like I say, we were up high enough that it didn't affect us probably at all except probably going to town and getting a whatever, you know?

BM: You had to drive too.

LH: Oh, yeah. You had to go practically to Buffalo to come back again to—or else you'd go way around by Delano, and that was a problem because the Crow River in Delano was flooding. And it was hard to get to town. But, if you wanted to, you could make it.

BM: I did ask you about the Red Cross and Salvation Army. And you said you didn't see anybody when you went to town.

LH: No

BM: And how long do you think it took for the city to clean it all up?

LH: Oh, boy. It probably took at least six months to a year to clean up all the streets and the debris and everything that floated in. And especially the buildings with basements. That was quite bad. And to get that all dried out again, that was quite a problem.

BM: Do you think any of the businesses in town had to close because of the flooding and just quit?

LH: Oh, I wouldn't say they quit. They probably closed up for maybe a couple of weeks 'till the water went back down again. But they are back in business again.

BM: Over the years, what changes have you seen in Rockford because Rieder's meat market. And he said that they had freezers in the basement and all the meat had to be moved out to another meat market where they had freezers because everything was flooded. But that's just hearsay.

BM: How soon after the flood did they do the dike?

LH: Probably a year. As best as I can remember.

BM: And you remember the flood also going further down river.

LH: Oh yeah. That's when the Hanover Bridge washed out and a good friend of mine—I was not there, but a good friend of mine was there when it washed out. And he said the ice and the debris—the ice was so thick on the river at that time, and it melted. It got so warm all of a sudden that everything went to the river and the river was rising, and the bridge was made out of wood. It was all wood, not concrete like it is nowadays. And he said that the bridge—all the ice went up against the bridge and the bridge lifted up. And he says, all of a sudden it just tipped over and washed away. And then they said, well, let's go down river and see where the wood is going to. Well they went down to Burnings Mill down by St. Michael and there they saw the big poles and some of the wood washing down the river.

BM: It carried on, kept going.

LH: Yep.

BM: Well, I don't have any further questions that I can think of, but if there's anything else that you'd like to mention about Rockford and the area and what was going on at that time period or—

LH: Well, I know it was in—I can't remember the day for sure, but it was in March—or April—it was in April. And we had this big snowstorm in March. And that's when it got so warm, in April. And it melted so fast that it—it just—the river couldn't handle it all.

BM: Well, we thank you for your interview and we appreciate you taking the time to do this for us.

LH: Okay.

BM: Alright. Thank you so much.

End of Recording

Total Interview Time: 00: 17:15

Glen Hohenstein Oral History Interview

Rockford Flood 1965 Oral History Project

July 30, 2019

Rockford 1965 Flood Oral History Project

Interview with Glen Hohenstein

July 30, 2019

James Eldien, Interviewer

James Eldien: **JE**

Glen Hohenstein: **GH**

Track 1

00:00

JE: Good afternoon Glen. So we are in Glen Hohenstein's home located in Plymouth, Minnesota. This is James Eldien and I will be conducting the interview today which is Tuesday, July 30, a little after 2 p.m. Central Time. So with that being stated, so Glen, can you please state your full name?

GH: Yes. My full name is Glenard Charles Hohenstein, but I go as Glen.

JE: What is your date of birth?

GH: I was born June 4, 1933 and I'm 86 years of age.

JE: Where did your parents live at the time of your birth?

GH: My parents lived on our farm in Greenwood approximately two miles east of Rockford along County Road 50.

JE: What were your parents' names?

GH: Albert E. Hohenstein and Selma A. (Hauser) Hohenstein.

JE: What were your parents' occupations?

GH: My father was a farmer and my mother was a housewife.

JE: So I am assuming you had some siblings. So can you list them from first born to last?

GH: Yes. Norbert E. Hohenstein was the oldest, and Arlene L. Hohenstein was the next oldest, and Bonita A. Hohenstein was third, and I was fourth, and Joyce L. Hohenstein was the youngest.

JE: Where did you grow up?

GH: I grew up on the farm in Greenwood. And that was from 1933 to 1945. And then we moved to New Ulm, and we lived there from 1945 through 1948, and then moved to Milaca and lived there '48 through '51.

JE: So you moved back to Milaca the summer before your senior year in high school then.

GH: Yes.

JE: So where did you attend high school?

GH: I graduated from Milaca High School.

JE: So how did that work out with you actually moving back to Rockford but attending Milaca High School?

GH: Well, that was interesting. I attended high school in Rockford for two days, and I came home, and I told my parents that I wanted to go back to Milaca to graduate with my friends. So they called a friend in Milaca that had four sons and asked if there would be any chance if I could come and spend the senior year living with them so I could graduate in Milaca. The lady of the house said, “Well, there’s four boys here now. One more isn’t going to make a whole lot of difference.” And so that problem was solved, and I went back and I spent my senior year with my friends in Milaca.

JE: So following graduating from Milaca High School, did you return to Rockford?

GH: Yes.

JE: And did you work?

GH: Yes. I was employed by the Rockford Bakery. I was a route salesman delivering bakery goods to stores in the area—grocery stores. And the bakery was owned by my brother-in-law, Rudolph Wassermann and my sister Arlene Wassermann. And I worked at the bakery from 1951 until November of 1953.

JE: Okay, and what happened in November of 1953?

GH: Well, my father passed away in June of 1953 and so, in November of 1953, I volunteered to serve in the army and did so and served until September of 1955.

JE: Nice. So, following serving in 1955, what played out?

GH: Well, came back to Rockford and worked at the bakery for a year or so yet, and then I went to work in Minneapolis. I was in sales with Nash’s Coffee Company.

JE: So when did you meet your wife?

GH: I met my wife in 1959. I was playing baseball for the Rockford town team. And, after the home games, we went up to the Rockford House and had the back room to have some good old beer and some snacks and things. So this one Sunday, we were sitting in there doing that, and we were always the only ones in the room. And that one Sunday, three young ladies walked into the room and sat down. And they assumed they were going to get service. And I knew they wouldn’t. So I picked up a pitcher of beer and went over and sat down and started visiting with them. And one of them was my wife. And, later on, we met them at their apartment in Minneapolis, three of us. And the next—that was on Sunday evening—on Monday evening, we had our first dinner date. And from there on, it’s history. We were married in ’62.

JE: Wow. So can I ask you a question about Rockford House? What was that?

GH: Well, there was a bowling alley, bar and restaurant.

JE: All within town?

GH: Yes, up on the hill on the east end of town.

JE: Interesting. Wonderful. Okay, so you got married in 1962. So where and when did you move into your first home?

GH: We moved into our first home in Fridley in 1965 in February, exact in '65.

JE: So you just moved into your first new home in 1965 and Rockford experiences the substantial flooding. So which family member was impacted by the flood?

GH: Well, my mother, Selma Hohenstein, was living at the time on Main Street and with her older brother living with her. He had willed his home to my mother after his wife passed away with the stipulation that he could live out his life with her. And so they were there in the house together in '65 when the flood occurred.

JE: Alright. So how long did your mom's home have floodwater in it?

GH: I don't know exactly, but I know it was at least three weeks, and I think it possibly was even a little bit longer than that that there was water in the basement yet sufficient that they couldn't be there.

JE: So what do you recall about—so thinking about the exterior of the home, and seeing the floodwaters, tell me about what the floodwaters hit in terms of the exterior of the home.

GH: Well, I remember how muddy the house looked and how much dirt, you know, was on the siding. And also vividly remember the different lines on the siding as to where the water level was at a particular time. That was kind of interesting.

JE: So visually, you do have a picture here that the water did go all the way up—

GH: To the windowsills on the inside on the first level, the main level.

JE: Interesting. Okay. So what do you recall being destroyed outside the home?

GH: I don't really remember anything being destroyed outside. I know that the siding had to be very cleaned of a lot and repainted, but I don't recall anything other than maybe some shrubs really were affected by it.

JE: Alright. So tell me about the water level inside the house.

GH: Inside the house, the level came up to the windowsills on the main level was the high point.

JE: And so what were the rooms on the main level?

GH: Main level contained a kitchen, the dining room, the living room, two bedrooms a bathroom and a little entry.

JE: So what would you have defined at that time or, even per your mom and uncle, what was destroyed or considered unsalvageable inside the house.

GH: As I recall, some of the kitchen cupboards needed replacing, and, of course, the wallboard needed replacing. And, in the basement, I can remember that shelving was affected. And a workbench was affected that needed—you know, all that needed to be repaired. And that's—

JE: The basement probably held the water the longest, correct?

GH: Yes, very much so—yes.

JE: Ok. What items do you recall being saved from the home?

GH: Well furniture, the appliances, beds and bedding, clothing, dishes, pots and pans, and all the household items and pictures on the walls, and all those kinds of things.

JE: So were they able to move a lot of that stuff out of the way?

GH: Yes. A lot of that was moved up to the upper level in the home. It was a story-and-a-half-type home.

JE: So, thinking back to this experience specifically for your mom, how did she appear following the flood?

GH: Well, she was very concerned about the future for herself and, of course, her older brother. They were already 70 and 88 years of age, so she was very concerned about that. But she was always optimistic that the Lord would see that it would all turn out okay.

JE: Nice. So where did your mom and uncle live as you guys worked to restore the home?

GH: The old bakery, which was on Main Street, was vacant at the time. And so, my brother-in-law said that they could move in there, but there were no apartments yet. It was just a large vacant building. And so they moved in there. And, actually, my brother-in-law's family and my sister, they also moved in there and had some kind of a divider I guess between them. But they had to move out of their home for a while too. So they lived in there while all the work was going on. And there was no stove in there. I can remember my mother cooking meals in a two-burner kerosene stove that somebody still had from the farm days.

JE: So how long do you think the clean-up process actually took?

GH: Well, I'm of the opinion that it was most of the rest of the summer, you know, that we—it seemed like I was coming out from Fridley for quite some time to do what I could.

JE: What do you specifically remember personally feeling during the cleanup process?

GH: Well, I was really sorry that they had to go through that at their ages. Actually, my uncle at 88 really couldn't do anything. So that bothered me. And, of course, they seemed stressed and tired at times, but thankful that no one was having health issues related to that incident, that ordeal. So thankful.

JE: So how long did your mom and your uncle stay in this home?

GH: They stayed in there, moved back in for a while late in the fall, and stayed there into the winter. And she sold the house in December of 1965. So they weren't back in the house very long.

JE: So can we talk a little bit about where your mom went following selling that house?

GH: She and her brother tried living with a sister Bertha Schaar in their house. It was located right across the side street from the Cross Lutheran Church. And on the property that is now the bank property. And that didn't work too well, so then my brother-in-law decided that he would build an apartment in the bakery, and they could live in there in the front part of the bakery. So he did that. And they moved in there, and they lived there in the front part of the bakery for I think 8-10 years. And then, for whatever reason—I don't know—he decided to put another apartment in the back of the building. And so, they moved back there then. And then another sister who lost her husband joined them there. So then there were three of them there. And the front of the building was then leased I think to a dentist, if I'm not mistaken. I think that's what—. So that's where they lived. The uncle Ed passed away five years later. So then it was just the two sisters there.

JE: So following the flood in 1965 and the fact that you did not live in Rockford at that time, right? You're living in Fridley. So do you recall any improvements that the city made?

GH: Well, they built the dike on the west side of the river. And that was probably the major improvement or the major thing that happened. And removed some homes down in the area of the park, the lower end of town there by where the park is now. And that's all I can really remember. I don't remember any businesses leaving town or people leaving town because of the flood. And then, later on in 2011, two houses along Mechanic Street were removed to further improve the dike system. And that's about all I can remember. And, long term, I just don't see that the flood had any effect on Rockford.

JE: Okay—alright. So I guess this concludes my questions for today. So is there anything that you felt we missed or that you just want to share as we close out this interview?

GH: I enjoy going back to Rockford to visit friends and relatives. It's still kind of like home. And I belong to the Greenfield Historical Group and enjoy that. So staying connected with the community.

JE: Awesome. Alright. Well, thank you Glen.

GH: You're welcome.

End of Recording

Total Interview Time: 00:17:17

Mike Stoddard Oral History Interview

Rockford Flood 1965 Oral History Project

August 8, 2019

Rockford 1965 Flood Oral History Project

Interview with Mike Stoddard

August 8, 2019

Michelle Bartlett, Interviewer

MS: Mike Stoddard

MB: Michelle Bartlett

00:00

MB: Today is August 8, 2019, and we're here at the Stork House visiting with Mike Stoddard. My name is Michelle Bartlett. Mike, can you share your full name with us?

MS: Michael Paul Stoddard.

MB: And when were you born?

MS: March 15, 1950.

MB: So how old are you?

MS: 69.

MB: And where were you born?

MS: I was born in Minneapolis.

MB: Who were your parents?

MS: Paul A. Stoddard and Janice Elizabeth Stoddard.

MB: And can you tell me their occupations?

MS: My father was a truck driver and my mother ran the café and she worked at the Rockford House since about 1960.

MB: And was your dad a truck driver in Minneapolis and then the same when he moved out to Rockford, or—

MS: Yeah, he based out of Golden Valley and he went interstate. He usually went to North and South Dakota. He was usually done by Thursday noon—had his 40 hours in. He'd be on the road all week.

MB: And what year did you move to Rockford?

MS: 1960.

MB: And do you know why your parents made the move?

MS: Well, they wanted to raise their kids up out in the country rather than in the inner cities, I suppose.

MB: And how many kids were there?

MS: There was myself and four or five siblings.

MB: Who are they?

MS: Pat's next to me. Dave is deceased. Joe, Jeannie and Debbie.

MB: And do they all live in the area?

MS: Yeah, pretty close.

MB: You mentioned that your mom worked at the restaurant. Can you tell us a little bit about that? Where did she work?

MS: She was a waitress at the Rockford House. That was up on a hill up there by Billy's. It burned down I would say the later 70s, maybe mid-70s, but that was a highlight in town for a nightlife. They had bowling and dining and a bar, of course. And my mother was a waitress out there.

MB: And so that's where she was working in 1965?

MS: Yeah.

MB: And then, after that, how long did she work there? You said 'till it burned down?

MS: 'Till it burned down, yeah.

MB: And she did something else after that?

MS: She'd bought Johnny Mutterer's café right across the west end of the 55 bridge—used to be Jan's café. It was Johnny's before she bought it and it turned to Jan's.

MB: And how long did she run that café?

MS: Oh, I would say into the 80's—maybe 10-15 years—maybe longer.

MB: And where were you living in Rockford in 1965?

MS: We'd live on the northern-most end of Mechanic Street. That's the street that parallels the river. We were the northern-most house.

MB: Oh, so you were the last house?

MS: Um-hmm.

MB: And you lived there in '65. Was that the only house you lived in in Rockford?

MS: Yep, until—I graduated in '68. That was the second flood. And we built my second house up on top of the hill, way higher ground. That was in '68.

MB: Oh, okay. So can you tell me a little—so in 1965—excuse me—you were how old and what were you doing then?

MS: Fifteen as a sophomore in high school. I worked at the Holiday Station before school and after school.

MB: So you were a busy kid.

MS: Yeah.

MB: Where was the Holiday Station?

MS: Holiday was where Molly's Liquor Store is now.

MB: And, in 1965 then, can you maybe just share a little bit about what Rockford was like at that point in time—what it was like living in Rockford?

MS: Well, the population was 265 people. Everybody pretty much knew everybody. And everybody was pretty friendly. I suppose there were feuds between some, but everybody got pretty good. It was kind of a joyous occasion for me. This was a farming community. It was nothing to see tractors pulling equipment down main street with a load of hay behind it. Or farmers came daily to grind their feed at the feed mill. It was a farming community.

MB: And what do you remember about the winter of '64 - 65 before the floods hit.

MS: It was cold winters back then. When New Year's came, it would drop to 20 below and it stayed 20 below until at least the 15th—two weeks straight. And snow that year—I would say we had probably four feet of snow on the ground by first of March. Seems we were shoveling the driveway or shoveling somebody's driveway maybe every other day.

MB: And then do you remember concerns about flooding that spring?

MS: Well, there always was concerns. Nobody knew how to control it. We didn't have the dikes back then. You had to take it like it came. Maybe on some prior years you'd get a wet basement or something. But, when you see it come up to the top of the banks, it's a pretty good indicator it's going to go over the banks. So once you see it leaking onto the street and everything, you better get out of there.

MB: So what happened in terms of preparation during that time?

MS: Well, you didn't have much preparation. It came in about a day and a half. And I suppose my parents were looking for someplace to take us six kids. In the meantime, we were packing up stuff that we were going to need to move with—putting stuff we didn't need up in the second floor of the house, like the wash machine and the dryer and the kitchen table and things like that. Mom—she packed up all our school clothes and things we were going to need to keep surviving out of that house.

MB: So you had a pretty good indication that you were going to have to leave.

MS: Yeah, that river was [laughter] really moving along as a good indicator. It was the first time I got flooded—I was ever involved in a flood. And then like I said, I was 15 years old back in '65.

MB: Were your neighbors doing the same?

MS: Oh, sure. We had a lot of day's notice I would guess.

MB: What other kind of activities were going on?

MS: In relation to what? Business or high school or school or what?

MB: Sure.

MS: Sure—all of them.

MB: (Laughter). Sure all of them in terms of the town, you know, as they were watching the flood waters rise, what was the—

MS: Well, the high school, they let out—as volunteers—all the seniors down to juniors, whoever wanted to come out and help build dikes. They were prepping for the water. And so, 2-3 days prior to the actual flood and into the flood, we were sand-bagging the bridge, both sides of the street, paralleling the bridge going west. And trying to cut the waters from coming into the commerce into the business area. It would already have been into the houses on north end of town.

MB: So at that time when you were bagging, your house was already—

MS: Oh yeah—yeah.

MB: How was the community effort organized? How many people?

MS: Oh I don't know. I don't know what the staff—town staff was back then. I know Vernon Virgin—called him Red—was the mayor back then. And Iver Dale was the cop. I think to me it seemed kind of helter skelter. They'd come and tell us, "Well, we got to go here and sand-bag." So we go and build a dike and about noon they go, "Oh we've got to go over here and build one now. It's getting over by this house." And I don't remember who the director was. It was kind of firemen probably who was involved in a lot.

MB: How big a bagging crew was it?

MS: Well, it was senior volunteers, juniors and sophomores. And I had 23 in my graduating class. I think 9 were boys. So yeah, probably 20.

MB: And did it work?

MS: It did to a fashion. We'd send it down the east and west of the bridge, both sides of the street. And the idea was to keep water from going into the businesses and theoretically letting people still do business there. The café, the laundromat, the bank, the liquor—bar, two hardware stores. And I'm sure that sand bags didn't do an adequate job. But I'm sure that people stayed away because of the situation down there, because of the flooding and because of the sand-bagging.

MB: Were there any stories in regards to—any individual stories about people during that flood time?

MS: Individual stories?

MB: You had mentioned a couple of names at one point.

MS: Oh, we were sandbagging across the bridge in the west end of the bridge and there were some older kids. They were seniors. Elmer Kasheimer was maybe just out of school. They had long pipe poles. And the water was so high that big cakes of ice would come down the river, and they'd bang into the bridge and shake the bridge. The bridge was probably 80 - 90 years old. It was a single lane. So they had men standing on the edge of the bridge on the south side with pipe poles, and they'd lean on the pipe poles onto the big cakes of ice and push them underneath the bridge so that they didn't crash into the bridge. And I remember Elmer Kasheimer—I didn't see what happened, but either he missed the cake of ice or the cake of ice broke in half. And he went head-first into the water. And of course he went under—under the bridge and everybody went to the other side of the bridge. And it seemed like forever before he came up. But he did come up. And they fished him out right away, but he was out cold. They took him to the hospital. But he lived. He was fine.

MB: Where was the hospital back then?

MS: Buffalo.

MB: And then were there any other stories of rescues?

MS: Ah, I remember they sent the boat down—our neighbor on the north end was Freddy Gasper. He was an old single guy. Don't know if he ever had a wife or whatever happened to her if he did have one. But he lived by himself. He was elderly. He seemed like an old grandpa to me. I was 15. But I would guess he was in his mid-60s to 70. And he had just a one-level house with an attached garage. And he got caught in the flood. And he didn't have anybody to help him. He was sitting on the roof of his garage. And they took a boat down and rescued him off of the top. I don't remember who did the rescuing. It was all just volunteers at that time.

MB: Do you know how long you'd been there?

MS: I have no idea. I'd guess maybe only half a day or something. We worked and got out by the evening. And I came out the next day and sand-bagged some more, and pretty soon, the area was done. They have a picture of them on the garage somewhere. I've seen it.

MB: And picture in the paper do you think?

MS: No it was—it may be in the paper.

MB: You mention that you had to leave your home. So can you tell me a little bit about that? Your family had to leave.

MS: Well, it was a fire drill. We had to load up all our belongings. We just had a pickup truck and everything we needed. My folks would go find another house to live in. And we were

packing, and as soon as they'd come back, we'd throw everything in the truck and haul as many loads as we could get out before the water push us out.

MB: Where did you end up going?

MS: The first place we went was just across south of the railroad tracks on 50. There used to be a railroad station up there. And it was the first house on the left-hand side going south. I don't know who owned it. I think at that time the park had bought all the houses around Lake Rebecca. And they were buying them up and then they were vacant. And I think probably they offered them to flood people that didn't have anyplace to sleep or stay. And it may have been arranged by the city. I don't know. I wasn't privy to that information.

MB: And then you said you moved a couple times?

MS: Yes. We moved from there. We were there with two families. Lawrence Stuckle was also there with us. And he lived north of town about another three quarters of a mile on the opposite side of the river bank. And Lawrence and my father were good friends. So we ended up spending a couple weeks with them. And then we later ended up moved further south down to another farm. That was right down by the Sportsman's Club.

MB: Do you know why you moved?

MS: Probably because the house was pretty congested.

MB: And how long did you have to stay away?

MS: I would say month—six weeks at least. The house, of course, everything four feet in the walls was destroyed. Hardwood floors were all expanded and heaved up. Had to have carpenters come in and rebuild everything on the main floor.

MB: So you had—were you displaced throughout that process because of the rebuilding?

MS: Yeah, the house wasn't livable. Everything had to be cleaned up. And it smelled like river and dead carp and stuff like that. We had a cistern downstairs that we kept potatoes in and, of course, the potatoes all got rotten. And it was full of fish when we went back. They were not living.

MB: Did that surprise you?

MS: No, I took everything in stride—didn't surprise me.

MB: So it sounds like quite a mess.

MS: It was a mess, yeah. And we worked our butts off. We did everything back to normal and then we waited a couple more years and did it again.

MB: Were your neighbors in the same boat?

MS: Yeah. Everybody had to go back in and clean up the flood mess and start over again.

MB: What happened with the school?

MS: We all got out and—it must have been the first week in March. And we sand-bagged for about a week. And the sewer backed up into the school and flooded the floors and the gymnasium floor expanded—the little slats of ash and whatever it is in the floor—birch—they expanded and made three-four foot high mountains in the gymnasium floor. So I would guess probably the city or the county condemned the school or made them close it anyway because of that—because of the sewer backing up into it. And from first week of March, they cancelled school for the rest of the year. Everybody thought it was great.

MB: So did you all pass, then?

MS: Yeah, everybody passed. Everybody got good grades and nobody flunked [laughter]. It was a freebie.

MB: How long did it take them to get the school cleaned up?

MS: It started right away in September again. So I supposed they worked feverishly on it all summer.

MB: What about the businesses? Do you know the impact of the flood to the businesses?

MS: Well I'm sure that the ones down immediate in town, that's where all the business was. There wasn't anything on the west end of town at that time. Up here is was just the Rockford House and the gas station. And there was a trailer court up there that started about '65, '66.

MB: Was that flooded?

MS: No, that's way on the high end of town. But I'm sure all the businesses down here were hurt. People couldn't drive through and go to the feed mill. They couldn't get to the hardware stores. I'm sure the bar got hurt a little bit. This one—there was another bar that was higher ground than Ken's bar. He may have got Red Vest business. But the bank was down there and laundromat and they had to sandbag down the streets so people could walk behind the sandbags and get into the businesses. But I've—it's only natural to think that people would kind of wait going down into there to do any kind of business, they'd go to a higher city like Buffalo or go east or something. Delano was under the same situation. They got flooded major just like we did. Hanover same way, St. Michael.

MB: Do you know any of the businesses that weren't maybe retail, like things that couldn't move such as your post office, your bank, something that's—do you remember anything about what happened with those?

MS: I guess I do not. The post office was directly across the river from us here, probably one-two blocks down to the south on the west side. And I remember Iver Dale was in the building next to it. And I remember the water was stopping about there. I would guess that the post office prepped for water, might have had a little bit of wet feet. But I don't think they actually closed down. Everybody in town had to get their mail at the post office. We didn't have delivery men, postmen back then. You were assigned a post box, and you had to go there and use your little combination—get your mail out daily. Bakery was across the street from it to the west and a little

bit south. And they had probably 15 or 20 trucks. I think they kept running. They were pretty dry at that time. But everything from there going north was affected one way or the other.

MB: Do you know of any businesses that maybe were closed?

MS: Oh, I'm sure Schlieff's Garage down here. That was the first hardware store. I'm sure that their mechanic business—they used to have a garage there they did repair on cars and tractors and all kinds of stuff—I'm sure that they had wet feet. The two hardware stores, [Schlieff's?] and the one next to it, that they had damp basements for sure, real damp right up street level. And I don't remember the effect it had on them. I'm sure that they cleaned up after the flood. And they were there for a few years later. It seemed it didn't take them long. About the time I went in the army and came back out, both of them were done.

MB: And what year was that?

MS: After I graduated in high school.

MB: So you were 15, so it would be five years—

MS: '68.

MB: Okay. And then, you know, since you were a kid when it was all going on and then you had another flood in '68, were you here for that one as well?

MS: I was—yes. Same house. And that was the last time we lived there.

MB: Two floods were enough?

MS: Um-hmm—yep. The old man bought a lot up at top of the hill up there by the—I guess it would be the new elementary school at that time. And that school wasn't there, but that's where it was. And built a house up there.

MB: What happened to your old house and the other houses?

MS: My little brother Dave, he lived there for a few years and then they sold it to Wayne Leffler who I think evidently whoever paid to put the dike in, or the city bought them out I would guess. It was a floodplain—declared a floodplain or always had been one. And I'm sure that they paid him to run the dike right through there.

MB: And that would have been around what year?

MS: Probably about—I'm guessing '73-74.

MB: What was the mood of the neighbors having undergone a couple of floods?

MS: Well, the city went down and bought out everyone in floodplain down there, and they all moved out. I would guess they must have had a satisfactory sum for their house. And then they were dispersed wherever they wanted to go—I'm sure a lot of them went to higher ground. I know Rudy Wassermann here, he went up on top of the hill way up by the water tower. People were fed up after getting two floods in three years.

MB: So they weren't too upset—

MS: I don't think so.

MB: —at the offer.

MS: I don't think so.

MB: And then, like I said, having been a kid, or your developmental age of 15 at the time, what kind of impact did that experience have on you?

MS: I thought it was great. We got out of school. I was used to working hard and my buddies, myself, we all sand-bagged day and night—no resting or sleep. They'd bring us sandwiches—it must have been the Red Cross. They'd bring us some sandwiches for lunch or something. And it was like the state fair almost [laughter]. It was fun. Hustle and bustle. Moving everybody out and trying to save the town and keep everybody dry and we did our best. And I think it pretty well failed in '65. The '68 one I think we did a little bit better job. It was basically the same people that were doing it. But it was springtime. The snow was gone finally after all winter. It wasn't 20 below anymore, and just having fun.

MB: Do you think those events brought the community together or had the alternative impact?

MS: Well, I think some people left because of the fact that they lost their home. And, frankly, a lot of the people along here, I had never seen again after that time. There were quite a few—if you look at the city plot from 1965—I estimated probably 20 households got flooded out. There's probably more. And most of them people, I'd never seen after that.

MB: Was that after '65 or after '68?

MS: After '68. I went in the army. When I came back, all the houses were all gone and the dike was built. So I don't know where everybody went. I assume that they went elsewhere. The house directly north of the feed mill, he moved way up by me on Sand Prairie Road—a lot higher ground. And that's where he went. I know that. I forgot his name though. He didn't stay there very long though. I don't know if he died or what. That's the only one I know of.

MB: So based on your experience, did it feel like it had much of an impact on the town?

MS: Oh, I'm sure it did. Businesses did their best to get their feet back on the ground. I'm sure it hurt them—lack of business plus their losses. I'm sure it was a pretty good weight to swallow. I think I remember about that time the laundromat went. The bank moved to its present location. They tore down a real nice house there. They weren't going to get wet feet anymore. I know all these people down here to include the feed mill.

MB: When you said down here, you mean the north side?

MS: Yeah. It was—

MB: Feed mill—how far was the feed mill?

MS: It was directly on the west end of the bridge.

MB: Oh, okay.

MS: Right across the bridge on the north side. Right there in the corner. And I think big businesses took over Rockford. The local grocery couldn't compete with Cub or the new ones coming around. Everything here was impacted. The farmers—the big farmers took over and squeezed the little farmer out. They were only milking up to 50 cows, and of course that was the commerce. They'd come into town and go to the beer joint, get their groceries and go to the feed mill. Well, the big farmers are milking 5000 cows now. And that drives the price of milk down for our local farmers and there are no dairy farms around here anymore. And that was a big part of it, the dairy farms went.

MB: So combination maybe of the natural disaster along with the economic condition?

MS: Yeah, I was told in high school that Rockford was a bedroom community. It was explained to me that people stayed here overnight and they all drove elsewhere for their work. The people in the immediate town, they drove into Minneapolis or wherever. There wasn't a whole lot of jobs here except for my brother pumped gas at a gas station and my sisters worked at my mother's restaurant. We all bailed hay all summer long—helped the farmers. Of course, they paid us a dollar an hour. And I worked up at the gas station up on top of the hill. So you worked wherever you could, buck an hour or something like that.

MB: Any lasting thoughts?

MS: I had the time of my life living here in Rockford. Yeah, lived my whole childhood right here until I graduated. And probably there's not many old-timers left. I'm not saying I'm the oldest or last—there's still a lot of people around, you know. But I'm probably one of older ones that got flooded. I didn't know at the time, but I turned out to be the oldest one.

MB: Well, thank you so much.

MS: That's it?

MB: Unless you have anything else to share.

MS: No, I think you got it all.

MB: Okay.

MS: Did a good job.

MB: Thanks Mike.

[End of recording]

Total Interview Time: 29:43

Betsy Virgen Oral History Interview
Rockford Flood 1965 Oral History Project
July 19, 2019

Rockford 1965 Flood Oral History Project

Interview with Betsy Virgen

July 19, 2019

Kathy Ehlers, Interviewer

Kathy Ehlers: **KE**

Betsy Virgin: **BV**

Track 1

00:00

KE: Alright. This oral interview is conducted by Kathy Ehlers on 7-19-19 in person at Betsy Virgin's home. Betsy, can you tell me your full name?

BV: Elizabeth Margaret Virgin.

KE: And your date of birth?

BV: 11-5-31

KE: And birthplace?

BV: Buffalo, Minnesota.

KE: Where did you grow up?

BV: Lake Sarah which would be I suppose Rockford address.

KE: Around April 1965 when the City of Rockford flooded, what were you doing?

BV: Well, I always worked at the store selling furniture and appliances.

KE: Okay, and what was the store's name?

BV: Virgin Sales.

KE: And what was your family doing at that time?

BV: Probably going to school.

KE: Before the flood occurred that year, what do you remember?

BV: I don't know except I worked and worked.

KE: Do you know if there were any warnings or predictions of a flood that spring?

BV: I don't really remember.

KE: Do you remember any—how you and the other people in town prepared for the flood?

BV: That I don't know either, really, what we did.

KE: Do you remember any sandbagging?

BV: Well, the men did a lot of that, and they tried to save the old bridge which was on Main Street and Bridge Street. Because it was kind of going over that bridge at that time. The firemen did a lot.

KE: During the actual flooding, what did you do?

BV: Well, I suppose we were in the store all of the time running our store.

KE: I'm going skip around some of these questions, just so you know. With your business, was it affected? Did it flood or did it—was it closed?

BV: No, it only came up to Bridge Street and then it kind of—that was the high point. And then it kind of went down our way towards [Highway] 55, the grade. So, if it would have come over Bridge Street, Main Street, then it would have been kind of bad. And there also was by the—south of 55 by the Sioux Line, the railroad, there was a low spot in there that water could have come up from that point to our store. And then there was a lot of flooding on the other side of the railroad on the south side where the trailer court is now.

KE: Was your home affected at all?

BV: Well not really except that, about a week after the flood, then the water level was starting to come up and we had to sleep in the store for a week and watch the sump pump so it wouldn't quit working. And so we slept in the store, him and I.

KE: What did you do with your kids?

BV: Well, they were in the house. The house was right next door.

KE: Do you remember how the other businesses were affected in town?

BV: Well, I think they all helped as much as they could. Like, people came to us, and the Red Cross or Salvation Army paid for a lot of their flooring that they lost and wallpaper resold and paint and everything. They had to redo all their homes.

KE: What did other people have to do?

BV: I don't know. I'm sure they helped as much as they could. Everybody—we had relatives that lived in the flood area where the water came up to like the top of their cupboards. And, after that flooding all went away, you could smell it in the houses that the—you know, the flood smell.

KE: Did any of them have to be torn down?

BV: Had to what?

KE: The houses have to be torn down or demolished?

BV: No, I don't really think so. I remember that the flooding—like one house way on the north side—that somebody took a canoe through the house, went through one window and out

another. And then one man almost drowned. He was trying to save the bridge. He fell off the bridge, and the water was really rushing then. So they did save him. His name was Floyd Wagner.

KE: Was the water actually rushing over the bridge?

BV: Yeah.

KE: What were some of the changes in Rockford following the flood that you remember?

BV: Well, they put up the dike. I don't know which year though.

KE: What other ways did the Salvation Army provide any assistance that you remember to homes or businesses or—

BV: Well, just that they provided financially for them people, you know, paid them to get their places back in order again. And I suppose they helped them with other, you know, living expenses or something. I don't really know.

KE: Did people have to move out of their homes while the flood?

BV: Oh yeah.

KE: Do you know where they went?

BV: No.

KE: Okay. After the flood, did that affect anything in your business?

BV: Well, I don't remember that either, anything.

KE: Other than—

BV: Nothing special. I think it just kept running, you know?

KE: Did it affect anything with your family that you remember?

BV: Not that I know of.

KE: Do you remember how long it took the city to clean up after that?

BV: No, I don't remember.

KE: Do you know if any businesses happened to close after the flood or that it was too much to repair?

BV: I don't think that they did. I think everybody just cleaned up and kept on working.

KE: Did it take a long time to recover from the flood?

BV: I don't remember.

KE: Ok, I know it was in 1965. Over the years, you'd seen any other changes in Rockford because of flooding and the potential of the Crow River to flood?

BV: I don't know.

KE: Other than you said that they built a dike. Did they—I know today there's no homes along Mechanic Street still. Was that decision—

BV: Well, they probably took out a bunch of homes, but I don't remember if that was because they were damaged by the flood or not, but there was quite a few homes on the other end north of [Highway] 55.

KE: The old hotel?

BV: No, that's still there, the old hotel.

[Interruption]

KE: In some of the documents you gave me, there was a lot of statistics. Was it regularly—did Rockford regularly flood?

BV: It seemed like there was another time that it flooded, but I can't remember what year, you know? It wasn't as bad, but it was always in mind every time—every spring.

KE: Is there anything else you'd like to comment on?

BV: Well, I don't know too much of anything. Just that the Salvation Army helped the most, more than the Red Cross.

KE: Was there any people that came in for that?

BV: Well, every year Salvation Army came in and collected money—donations. I don't have any other notes that I remembered. I tried.

KE: No, that's fine.

End of Interview

Total Interview Time: 00:11:13

Rickard Wasserman Oral History Interview

Rockford 1965 Flood Oral History Project

July 24, 2019

Rockford 1965 Flood Oral History Project

Interview with Rickard Wasserman

July 24, 2019

Debbie Debeer, Interviewer

Debbie DeBeer: **DD**

Rickard Wasserman: **RW**

Track 1

00:00

DD: Alright, this is Debbie DeBeer and I'm interviewing Rickard Wasserman for the oral history on the flood of '65 in Rockford. So Rick, do you want to just give us a little bit of family background, your parents' names?

RW: My parents were Rudolph and Irene Wasserman, and my dad had been in the baking business, first with his dad. Then he wanted his own shop, so he had one down on Hennepin Avenue in Minneapolis, a little retail place, but he wanted something a little bigger, so he built Rockford Bakery out here in 1950 and got going with that and got into a fairly midsized wholesale retail operation. And that's where I came in. I was born in 1950 also and I've been here ever since.

DD: And you did say that he opened the bakery on your birthday?

RW: The same day, yep.

DD: That's a fun little fact. So you grew up in Rockford?

RW: Correct.

DD: And what do you remember of the flood of '65?

RW: Well, to begin with, we had a very snowy March. And the last three snowfalls near the end of March were very heavy, wet snow, which was, you know, enough to make everyone kind of wonder what was going to happen with the spring melt. Then, to add to that, in very late March and early April, we had a lot of rain. And, back in the early '50s and '60s, all across the state of Minnesota, I believe, but the Army Corps of Engineers would come around and tie a little red markers around trees and telephone poles and stuff, saying this is how high we think the water is going to be after consulting with the hydrologists and everyone else. I remember, as a kid, listening to some of the folks here in town saying, "Oh that's ridiculous—it'll never get that high." Well, by the time the river crested, those little markers were about six inches under water. So it got going. I mean, it's not a flash flood. This comes up fairly gradually and stuff. You're given time to move out of your house or different things like that. But, it was a lot of water, especially for the Northern part of town, Northeastern part, which is the lower part of town, so there were a lot of homes there that just were uninhabitable after the flood was over with.

DD: And how old were you during that?

RW: I would have been 14 during that time.

DD: And what do you remember about the actual flood?

RW: Oh I remember pretty much all of it because I grew up on a house on the river, more in the center of town, so it didn't really affect us right away. But we had people come in—you get sandbags and sand and we had people putting in—people from town. The school was closed for a couple weeks to have students who wanted to—you know they didn't all live in Rockford—but they would help sand bag and carry sand bags around. At the time, the bakery that dad first built was empty because the new building on the Hennepin county side had been put up. So we had people—the post office and the bank, the original bank building down just at the end of building were flooded out. So they had—one corner of the old bakery building was the post office, one quarter was the bank, one quarter was used for storage for some of the people that worked for dad. They lived at the low end of town, so they put their stuff in there.

Then it ended up—because the basement of the house we were living in flooded—had to shut off the electricity and heat—so we moved into the other quarter and spent about a week or ten days living in that place and stuff. And it was different. You know, it was one of those things. In my own personal—you know, because we didn't lose anything, we were able to move back into the house—we weren't affected as bad as some of the other people who lost—except what they could carry out of the house, they lost everything. And it was a mess. I mean there were some houses where the water line—when the water had gone down, you could see that the water was right below the second story window, so it was up.

DD: Oh my goodness.

RW: It was up.

DD: And you have two brothers?

RW: Three.

DD: Three brothers. Older?

RW: No, they're all younger.

DD: And were they helping with this?

RW: Well, the one that's two years younger than I am was. The other one is ten years younger and he was obviously too small, and the third youngest brother wasn't even born yet. So it was just the two of us.

DD: And then, you said how your home was affected and other people were affected, but did people move out of town then or?

RW: I think a couple of families did—I really don't know much of that stuff. But I do know that there were at least a half a dozen houses down in the lower end down there and things that—they had to be torn down. They had to go someplace and I'm guessing a lot of them just left. I know, I think, one family at least that just left town and went—I'm not even sure where they went—but they moved out 'cause there was nothing left for them.

DD: And were these people working in Rockford or?

RW: That I couldn't tell you. At that age I wasn't—you know—

DD: So what changes in the businesses happened after the flood if you can remember?

RW: Well, some of them just changed, like the one, the Schlieff Hardware and Garage—well they were still there—but that was a mobile station, and a guy bought another piece of land and moved the gas station out onto Highway 55. But, as far as the businesses, most of the ones that were there then are still here, they just put a dyke or a levy, whatever you want to call it. It was called at the time—they put it in a temporary levy, because all it is is dirt. And I think they put that in in 1969 or something like that, I

believe, because I was at college and, when I came home for summer break, or something even earlier, Easter break, all of sudden our backyard was gone and there was this big pile of grass covered dirt—the tree we used to swing on all over the river—they had to cut that down and all this kind of stuff. So it changed the landscape quite a bit. And that's mainly what has kept the town where it is now. We haven't had any kind of flood, and even if it had—the '65 flood would not have gone over the dyke we have now, so—.

But it filled the river bank shore to shore almost and we had to keep moving the sandbag blockades or whatever you call them—changing them every couple of days because it just—a lot of them ended up being underwater. So we had to keep filling and keep moving and things like that. But you just—you know it's just one of those things where you have to—unlike some of the floods we have now so far this year where it just all of a sudden comes down, this was slow enough that you could kind of manage it. You couldn't stop it, but you could manage it and it helped save a lot of buildings and a lot of people.

DD: Did they have the dam on the river they have—

RW: No, that was gone from before I was around I think. We used to play off of what was left of it. And, as we got older, we used to fish off of what was left of it, but no the dam was gone for quite some time.

DD: So that didn't block either.

RW: No, the dam in Hanover was still up and there were a couple of other places along the river that still had a dam—Hutchinson was one. But the one in Rockford had gone up some time ago.

DD: Alright, well you've covered most of these questions very quickly. How did the flooding affect your family afterwards? You just moved back into the house that you had?

RW: Moved back into the house and then Dad added on a like a rec room or family room toward the river actually on the back. And he built—the electricians and everybody—instead of leaving the fuse box in the basement, they moved it upstairs—it had a breaker system put in and stuff so that it wouldn't happen again. But, like I said, our yard—we never got much water in it. It was mostly because of the ground seepage that the basement filled up. And we had a neighbor lady who decided that she was going to fight it and so she put rubber balls in the floor drains of her basement, and then two-by-fours up to the ceiling rafters and kept it dry. And everyone was saying, it isn't going to stand the pressure—the basement is going to collapse—never did, she stayed nice and dry. So, I have to hand it to her, she was a little more gutsy than the rest of us (Laughter).

DD: And then the new building, the new bakery, that was high and dry?

RW: Oh yeah, Dad said, if he had had water up there, he said the rest of the town would have been long gone because it was considerably higher than just about anything else in town.

DD: And I know you were one of the ones that were actually here for the flooding, so if you can think of anything else for other businesses that—

RW: Well, it affected a few of them in that some of them—because a lot of the buildings were older—they had to redo some of that before they can even use the place and stuff. But it wasn't so much the businesses. They had their problems but, like I say, the biggest thing was how many houses were lost that had to be torn down after because they were just uninhabitable.

DD: So in your opinion, just your opinion, did the flood affect the economy of Rockford?

RW: It did to a certain extent, yeah, and stuff. I don't think too many business people just decided to get up and leave. They had an investment obviously in here and, if they couldn't repair, they would

replace when they had to and stuff. But I don't think anybody said, "I'm not going to live through this again." I'm sure everybody was thinking it, but they didn't say. And everyone just pretty much stuck around and everything.

One thing I was thinking of when you asked that is, during the duration of the flood, or at least for a couple of weeks, the fellowship hall at Cross Lutheran over here—the basement was opened for coffee and sandwiches to anybody working on the flooding, you know sandbagging and that kind of stuff for the better part of 12 hours. Maybe even a little more and stuff. You know, volunteers would bring food and stuff and make coffee—sandwiches was the main thing and everything—but so that was going on. So, if anybody was working and he didn't want to, you know, drive out of your way to get back to your house or something, you could stay there for a couple of meals and then go home at night. So that was kind of nice to have that thing there. But, other than that, it was it was just one of those things that, you know, people have to put up with these things and you live with it, and you get through it and, like I said, some of them the way it ended up I can see why they left but, as far as the businesses go, they pretty much hung around.

Although, a lot of them, if they did go someplace else, they moved slightly to the western edge of town into the shopping center and stuff like that, and stayed high and dry, but they kept going. We just did—you know life got back to normal by the middle of the summer or even little bit later. But I mean it was just one of those things you put up with. You got through it, and then you go on.

DD: Well the nice thing about a small community is everybody pulls together.

RW: Yeah. That's the thing. I mean, we had—you know the school let out for like I said two weeks. Well it was a total of four actually because, after they let it out for two weeks where the students could help sandbagging then, after that, we were going to go back and they had to close because of the sewage problems and everything. But yeah, we had students and we had businessmen, you know, some guys they would take—and if they worked—a lot of business here were small one-owner kind of things to put over your big factories—they would go to work for a few hours and then they go to sandbag or do things like that for a few hours, and then get some sleep and come back and do it over again the next day and everything.

So it was if it was a community effort—everybody pulls together.

DD: So the entire sandbagging that was about two weeks then or—?

RW: Oh it was at least that, maybe even a little more because, like I said, as the river got high, you know, we would put up a berm of sandbags and stuff and, you know, three four days later that might be topped, so we'd have to go back and put up another one. We finally, you know, it got to the point where we just you know—a lot of guys had with—this is far as we're going—we're not moving them again, or putting up another one. So it was held back fairly decent, but, you know, to the point of it actually got to the highest levels, but once it got down you had, you know, everybody was drying stuff out. A lot of people—the house could be saved but a lot of the furniture couldn't. Things like that. So they replaced it. What is now Lion's Park and that area down there. There were like—that was the area where the houses had to be torn down mostly and stuff, so.

DD: So they made it into a park. So that didn't have that.

RW: Yeah, that way they didn't, well, you know, I think what happens is you get these building codes and they changed that floodplain a little bit and so he couldn't, you know, doing it—you could build whatever you wanted as long as you didn't worry about insurance because nobody's going to insure, so they just cleaned it all out and eventually made it the city park.

DD: That was gonna be my next question. Do you think insurance covered most of the damage?

RW: Well at 14 years of age I wasn't thinking too much about insurance, but I think I think a lot of it—there was—a fair amount was in stuff, you know, yeah.

DD: Alright, well, I think we've covered most of it unless you can think of something else?

RW: No, not really, except the last two weeks when school was shut down the weather was pretty nice. So, when we weren't sandbagging, we played a lot of softball.

DD: (Laughter)

RW: But, other than that, you know I did, and I'm not trying to make light of it just, you know, as a kid you kind of think well, at least you're not in school. So, but I think that pretty much covers what I can recollect.

DD: Has there been—this is an aside question just for me—but the other floodings that's come through, nothing's been as bad as '65?

RW: No, there had been—I think it was 1957 or something like that, it got fairly—living on the riverbank, my dad had planted some little Colorado blue spruce trees on the bank and when it got—in that earlier flood, it got up to where it killed all of those because they were all under water. So that was—after that it was just lawn, but there was you know, we have never had anything like '65, you know, not out—not in this area. I mean, I know some of the other parts of state, but not here thankfully, and I hope we never do—well I should have you know, I know you never can tell, but I don't think it'll happen. I mean, with the dike in place now, it would have to get pretty high to get over that.

DD: Okay. Well, thank you so much.

RW: No problem. Kind of fun.

End of Track 1

0:17:16

Track 2

0:00:00

DD: So you had another story you wanted to tell us.

RW: Yes, the old Iron Bridge that had originally been built in Rockford. It was at one time the only bridge—they were afraid it was going to lift off because the water pressure lifted up off the foundation. So they were putting sandbags on and we had one guy who was helping and he happened to fall in on the upstream side of the river and luckily everybody got over to the other side informed enough of a grasping. He went underneath the bridge and came up on the other side and they pulled him out. So he didn't drown. That's the one thing—I wasn't there when it happened, but I heard about it and stuff and I knew

the guy a little bit. So that was one that was the most serious as far as I can tell incident that happened to a person during that flood zone. That was it.

End of Track 2

00:00:56

End of Recording

Total Interview Time: 00:18:12