DON BARNETT

Never Again

The Rapid City Flood of 1972 and a Vision for Change

Editor's Note: In December 1969, Donald V. Barnett returned to his hometown of Rapid City, South Dakota, after serving in Vietnam as a captain in the United States Army Medical Service Corps. Less than eighteen months later, he was sworn in as mayor of the community of nearly forty-four thousand, the youngest person ever elected to that position in the city's history and the youngest serving mayor in the country. Barnett would have just over one year to learn the ropes of city government before Rapid City was struck by the worst natural disaster in South Dakota history. The flood that began on the night of 9 June 1972 would kill 238 people and damage or destroy more than twenty-three hundred dwellings and businesses, leaving the twenty-nine-year-old mayor to spearhead the municipal recovery effort.

Barnett grew up with two sisters in the house their parents, Verne and Ruby Barnett, had purchased in 1947 in the area known as "The Gap," between downtown and Rapid City's west side. The family was active in Trinity Lutheran Church, and Barnett earned the rank of Eagle Scout shortly before graduating from Rapid City High School in 1960. In 1964, he received a B.A. in political science from South Dakota State University, followed by two years of graduate study in public administration at the University of Nebraska. In 1966, Barnett worked as campaign manager for Jack Allmon in his run against E. Y. Berry for South Dakota's Second District congressional seat.

That same year, Barnett accepted a direct commission as a second lieutenant in the United States Army Medical Service Corps. He trained at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and spent sixteen months with the 24th Evacuation Hospital at Long Binh Post north of Saigon. As medical detachment commander, he did not see combat but was responsible for the 280 men who provided care for the wounded; for discipline and order in the detachment; and for the vehicles in the hospital's transportation department. He also served as security

officer for the hospital at Long Binh and was awarded the Bronze Star for meritorious service.

The death of a close friend in combat spurred Barnett to enter politics upon his honorable discharge and return to South Dakota. His first opportunity was the race for a United States Congress seat, facing James G. Abourezk in the Democratic primary. He lost the close election but served as assistant executive director of the South Dakota Democratic Party during the summer and worked for Frank E. Denholm in his successful race for the First Congressional District seat. Barnett's eye was still on elective service, and the next opportunity was the mayoral race in Rapid City in the spring of 1971. He called himself a "long shot" in what became a six-person race but managed to carry 40 percent of the vote, which led to a face-off with John Barnes, the retired commander of Ellsworth Air Force Base.

One of the major planks of Barnett's mayoral campaign was to build a new civic center and sports arena without using a property tax bond to finance it. He promised to find a fair and less regressive method of taxation to present to voters by the spring of 1972. Barnett wanted to move Rapid City forward, and he was rewarded with a win, defeating Barnes by 168 votes. During his campaign, he met JoAnn Bauman Ferguson, and the couple married in February 1972. They settled with JoAnn's two daughters from her previous marriage into a home in the Robbinsdale area of southeastern Rapid City.

Although young and politically untested, Barnett had enormous energy and optimism, and he was a quick study. His initiatives were not met with instant success, but he and the city council found a path to cooperation, trust, and shared vision. This dynamic was profoundly important when the storms on the night of 9 June 1972 dumped up to fifteen inches of rain on the eastern Black Hills, overflowing creeks, breaking dams, and devastating Rapid City and portions of Pennington, Custer, Meade, and Lawrence counties.

Barnett's account of the flood and its aftermath, presented here, is part of a longer memoir covering his two terms in office (1971–1975). In writing his memoir, he relied on the copious notes he recorded at the time the events occurred, as well as on his own memories of events and conversations. As he recalled his career, Barnett said he kept in mind the words of Admiral James Stockdale, a Vietnam War prisoner of war, who stated, "The challenges of my education and my years of leadership training . . . were not designed for

my personal success. The challenge was to prepare me for failure." About his own life, Barnett wrote that his education and military training "did not teach me to manage success. These stepping stones of life taught me how to manage failure . . . and opportunity."

The Deluge, 9 June

On Friday, the ninth of June, I spent the morning at a conference sponsored by the Lutheran Social Services office in Rapid City on "Death and Dying," which featured a keynote address by pioneering grief expert Elizabeth Kübler Ross. In retrospect, her powerful message was eerily appropriate for the days ahead, but none of us in the audience had a hint of what lay in store. By afternoon, I was relaxing on the golf course with good friends. Rain was sprinkling down, but not enough to interrupt our game.

After golf, we met our families for a swim at the YMCA. By the time I showered and walked out of the locker room to meet JoAnn and our girls, D'Anna and Debra, it was almost 7:00 p.m. A clerk at the front desk spotted me and called out, "Mayor! A policeman is looking for you."

Just then, the policeman rushed out of the locker room and hurried over to me. "Sir," he said. "Lieutenant Hennies just radioed our shift and told us to prepare for high water along Rapid Creek. Chief Messer ordered the entire force to report for duty. We're calling in the night shift, and the weather service is issuing a high-water watch and warning over KOTA radio and TV. You need to call the police department dispatcher! He has several urgent messages for you."

I walked outside to where JoAnn and the girls were waiting in her car. It was raining heavily now. I leaned in and said, "I have a knot in my stomach that feels like a bowling ball. Please be careful driving home, and stay there. I don't know when I'll be home." JoAnn gave me a hug and held on a little longer than usual. It was the best moment of the whole damn night. I told the girls I loved them and ran to my car. Thus began the worst natural disaster in South Dakota's history: the flood of 9 June 1972 in which 238 people perished.

I picked up my messages at the police department and made the call to the National Weather Service from my office at city hall. The me-

teorologist said, "Our radar shows a bank of clouds on a line between Custer and Sturgis. The clouds cover the mountains and valleys that drain into Rapid Creek, Spring Creek, Keystone, Box Elder Creek near Black Hawk, and the drainage areas that flow into Sturgis. The water levels are higher than usual in those areas, too. Many clouds are also upstream or above Pactola Reservoir and all over the northern Black Hills. Very heavy rains are falling in the mountains behind Sturgis and the Black Hills National Cemetery at Tilford and ten or fifteen miles on all sides around Nemo."

I was making notes in my seven-subject binder. "What kind of warnings did you issue to the TV and radio stations?"

"We told people who reside in low-lying areas to be ready to evacuate those areas I listed for you. One more thing, Mr. Mayor. Military pilots at the air base and the airline pilots over here report the absence of winds over the Black Hills. The air is very still over western South Dakota, and the clouds are heavy and dense. Things are kinda spooky. If we don't find some wind to move those clouds, we're in deep trouble!"

My next call was to Leonard Swanson, my friend and the public works director for Rapid City. "Swanny! We're in for a long night. Can you meet me at city hall in a hurry?"

"Sure. It's raining something terrible here on the south side, but I'm on my way."

I called the fire chief, Ken Johnson, who was already at the central fire station on Main Street. He had received several calls about possible flooding in Dark Canyon above Canyon Lake. Volunteer fire departments countywide were assembling their forces. He said, "I sent one truck and four men out west to the upstream side of Canyon Lake and called in the second shift for reinforcements. Where are you?"

I told Ken I was at city hall scrounging up portable two-way radios for the public works department. I told him to reach me through the police frequency in the city car, which was equipped with a two-way radio so I could communicate with the police dispatcher, police cars, and the state highway patrol and their dispatcher. We agreed to talk again around midnight.

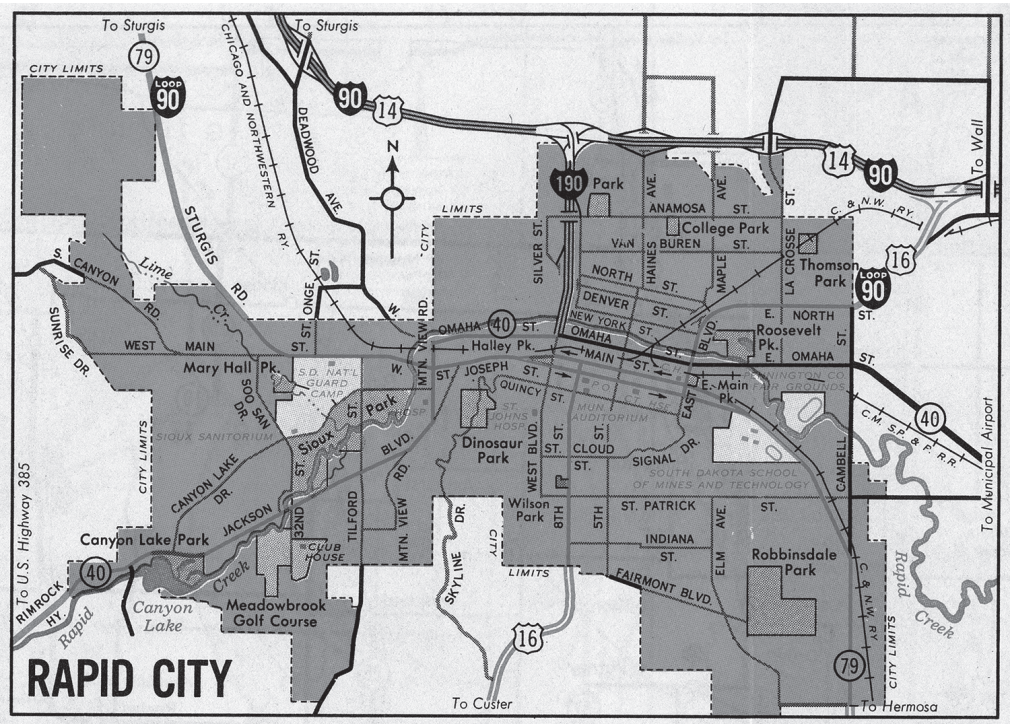
I called KOTA. The disk jockey said they had not yet received an updated warning from the weather bureau. It was about 7:15 p.m. When

Swanny arrived, we agreed to head out to Canyon Lake to check out the level of water in both the lake and Rapid Creek, which fed into it. We stopped for gas first, and while we were at the city shop, I lifted four seventy-five-pound sandbags into the trunk while Swanny searched for a portable radio in the office of George Seniuk, head of the street department. With it, I could also use the public works frequency during the night. Visibility was down to about fifty feet as we rolled westward on Jackson Boulevard. KOTA continued playing music with no hint of alarm.

When we arrived near Canyon Lake Park, Swanny pointed me toward the park caretaker's cottage. He said, "Harry and his wife have two small children!" He hurried into the cottage, was back in three minutes, and said the family would be leaving the park immediately in their own car. As I started to back out, Swanny shouted over the noise of the storm, "Stop! Harry didn't take me seriously." He rushed back in and firmly ordered everyone to leave their evening meal on the table and follow him to their car. Swanny handed Harry forty dollars and told him to use it as a deposit on a hotel room and to charge the rest to me or the city. We watched his car drive eastward through the rain. Some time that night, the cottage and all of the family's belongings were washed away without a trace.

I drove west toward the state fish hatchery. The rickety bridge on the upstream side of Canyon Lake was in place, but the lake was very high and already covered with floating debris. We returned to city hall and planned to meet again beneath the clock at the Baken Park Shopping Center at midnight. That meeting never happened, as the floodwaters continued to rise in that area of Rapid City known as "The Gap," flowing over West Main Street and Mountain View Road and eastward toward Halley Park, stopping all traffic. The Gap is a notch in the ridge separating the east and west sides of Rapid City.

As I drove away from city hall, several fire trucks sped east, west, and north. I turned on KOTA and heard the most recent warning from the weather bureau, a recorded message calmly telling people who lived near a creek on the east side of the Black Hills to prepare to abandon their homes and seek shelter at higher elevations. Chief Johnson's men spread the alert. The police department was in high gear; I heard the



As seen on this 1972 map, Rapid Creek winds from Canyon Lake at lower left through the neighborhoods and business district of Rapid City.

police dispatcher as he received his orders from Chief Ron Messer, who called in the third shift. The detectives reported for duty, and the men spread the warning in the general area between the base of M Hill (named for the School of Mines "M" outlined in white concrete) and East Boulevard. Other cars raced to homes near Jackson Boulevard in the Canyon Lake area.

I drove into the Robbinsdale area southeast of downtown to check the level of storm drainage on Meade Street, which the residents called "Meade River." Due to bad planning in the 1950s, many homes had been built in low areas along a natural drainage corridor. I drove to the east end of the street where the water poured into an open drainage ditch. A "dead end" barricade stopped traffic, but the storm water was not yet extremely high.

The police department dispatcher said Lieutenant Tom Hennies, the shift commander, could account for each man on his shift, some of whom were using their private cars, without radio contact, to spread the alarm in the neighborhoods near the creek. I returned to my office to make several calls, looking for more information about the magnitude of the storm. Coincidentally, the summer encampment of the South Dakota National Guard had opened that very day at Camp Rapid on the west side of the city. The commander, World War II veteran Duane ("Duke") Corning, was a two-star major general and had been active in the National Guard since his retirement from the United States Air Force. He was well connected to the Republican political establishment in South Dakota and overqualified by rank and experience to command the guard. I first met him in 1966 and liked him very much. These were engineering outfits, and they might be useful if the storm resulted in a localized disaster. When I called, the clerk at headquarters said, "The general is assembling his officers, and a few guardsmen are already involved with rescue operations in low areas near Nemo."

To try to get a firsthand report about conditions in Dark Canyon, where I had played and hiked as a youth, I called Charles Donnelly, an old friend who owned a fishing cabin in the canyon. He said the water level had never been higher, and many cars were lined up to use the narrow bridge at the mouth of Dark Canyon, leading to State Highway 40. "I think the water level is dropping," Charles said. "The worst may be over." I urged him to hang up and get out damn quick. He, his wife, and several sheriff's deputies were the last folks to cross the bridge and escape the flood in Dark Canyon.

Col. George Bennett had recently assumed command at Ellsworth Air Force Base. I left my request with the sergeant major at his office, urging my air force friends to send teams of volunteers into the city. He assured me that he would pass the message on. Colonel Bennett told me later that many airmen and officers, without command or directions from the military brass, had rushed into the city to help where they were needed after the first radio warnings about high water came over the airwaves.

Next, I called Sheriff Glen Best at the Pennington County Courthouse, where the dispatcher let me know that the sheriff and several

deputies were west of the city near Rapid Creek at Hisega and Johnson Siding, ten miles west of Canyon Lake.

Swanny called me on the public works frequency to say he was leading six men and Bill Noordermeer, the parks superintendent, over to the Canyon Lake spillway. "We have ropes and chains," he said. "We'll try to remove about a dozen paddleboats that are clogging the spillway."

Fire Chief Johnson called on my private line. "We're using men from all three shifts," he reported. "Every vehicle in the department is rolling now as my men spread the alarm. The greatest danger is on the upstream shoreline of Canyon Lake, where a few motel cabins could be swept into the water. I have four men out there now. One crew parked their pumper at the intersection of Highway 40 and the approach road to the bridge."

I called the weather bureau again. The ranking man said he was not authorized to expand the level of the warning his agency had issued earlier in the evening. By then it was almost 9:00 p.m. I hurried to my car and drove west toward Canyon Lake near the old bridge. I spotted a crew from Montana Dakota Utilities pulling on a huge wrench attached to a shut-off valve that would cut off natural gas to a small cabin court on the upper shoreline and a few homes in the area now called Chapel Valley. George Miller, a close friend and a leader on the city's statutory planning commission, was the crew supervisor. Any spark, electrical short, or lightning strike might cause an explosion if the gas mains ruptured in this area that had taken on alarmingly high water. I jumped out of the car to lend a hand to the crew. A minute later the rusty valve budged, and we finished the job. I saw the parked fire truck near the north end of the old, wobbling wooden bridge that Chief Johnson had mentioned to me earlier.

The men loaded their equipment as George and I watched the bolts of lightning over Canyon Lake. Suddenly he pointed to a small car bobbing up and down like a fishing cork in the rampaging Rapid Creek about fifty yards upstream from the bridge. George said, "I hope that car is empty." Moments later it disappeared under the bridge.

George's men stood next to us, and we silently watched the fury of the storm above the lake. A moment later we heard a loud crunch

as the bridge imploded and floated into Canyon Lake. The small car bobbed to the surface again and then slowly sank. George said, "Somebody could get killed in this damn thing!" That was the understatement of the night.

"I'm going to issue an all-points alarm, and fast," I said as I ran to the car. On the state police radio frequency I heard frantic pleas from a highway patrolman trying to save a family whose car had been swept into Box Elder Creek near the former dog-racing track at Black Hawk on State Highway 79. "Send me a boat and one hundred yards of rope," he shouted. "I can save those folks if I just had a damn boat." The dispatcher said he would try.

I switched back to the police frequency as I drove toward the Canyon Lake Night Club, using both hands to steer the car carefully through the torrents of rain. The police department dispatcher radioed me. "Mayor! A man who lives about two miles below Pactola Dam needs to speak with you right now! He said this is urgent. Lieutenant Hennies is out of his vehicle, and I can't find him." I parked and wrote down the information.

"I'll call him right now. Where's Chief Messer?" Ron Messer interrupted us and said he was near the night club. I asked him to meet me in the parking lot. I drove into the jammed lot and parked on a sidewalk near the pay-phone booth. A customer carried my message to Chris Doomis, the owner-manager and a neighbor of my parents, to close the club immediately.

Sheltered in the phone booth, I called the number and quickly had the man on the phone. He said, "Mayor, it's really bad up here. I've lived here thirty years and have never seen Rapid Creek so high and wild. It's damn near flooding my house right now. My wife and kids are climbing up the side of a big hill near the creek. Put out the warning, Don, now! By the time this water gets to town, you'll have a disaster on your hands."

"Okay, I got it. Climb up that hillside and wait this thing out up there." The line went dead, and I prayed this brave man would survive the flood.

Ron helped Chris usher the customers into the parking lot. He yelled, "It's bad, Don, all over town. We've lost contact with two, may-

be three, police cars. The dispatcher's frantic; he can't find Tom." It was about 9:30 p.m. and the rain continued like a monster monsoon in Vietnam.

I dialed KOTA, where Robb DeWall, the news director, answered the phone and was eager to cooperate. Thirty seconds later, his equipment was ready for me to record. I closed my eyes, prayed for calm, and said, "This is Mayor Barnett. I am declaring at this moment a state of emergency and ordering all residents of Rapid City who reside in the vicinity of Rapid Creek, and any other stream, or drainage corridor, large or small, in Rapid City to leave your homes immediately and climb or drive to safety at a much higher elevation. Please move as far away from Rapid Creek as possible. There is terrible flooding along Rapid Creek downstream from Pactola Dam and extending deep into Rapid Valley and beyond. This is a regional flooding disaster. Please cooperate with city policemen and firemen and seek shelter as far away from Rapid Creek as possible." I added the highway patrolman's urgent plea for a boat to help the people clinging to debris in the creek at Black Hawk. I never found out if anyone responded.

Robb checked the recording and said, "We'll broadcast this over KOTA all night and send copies to every radio station in Rapid City. Most of them go off the air when the sun goes down, but we'll call and ask them to go back on the air. To hell with federal regulations!" Tragically, KOTA experienced an electrical outage at both the TV and radio transmitters about twenty minutes after they began broadcasting the recording. Nobody in the city had any warning after the station went off the air at about 10:25.

Ron Messer and I formed a two-car convoy and drove up Canyon Lake Drive in an attempt to drive south on Evergreen Drive to check on the evacuation of people living on Jackson Boulevard. As we drove, I switched over to the state police radio. The dispatcher reported, "I sent two cars to Pactola Dam. Both cars and four men will remain there all night and radio me if there's any indication that the dam might fail." If Pactola Dam failed, a large part of Rapid City would be destroyed, and the death toll would be enormous.

Suddenly, I spotted nine men next to a white van waving me down. The chief stopped behind me. They were some of the airmen that Col-

onel Bennett had sent into the city. One shouted, "How can we help?"

I gathered the men in the headlights of my car, and we introduced ourselves. I wanted them to know that besides being mayor, I was a captain in the army with sixteen months in Vietnam on my tail. I said, "Chief Messer and I need your help tonight. Let's drive over to a fire department substation about a mile from here, pick up some equipment, and return here. We'll head toward the creek."

Electrical power was off at the station on Soo San Drive; the firemen were spreading the alarm and using every truck near the creek. We used Ron's flashlight and found a few life preservers, several coils of rope, and a battery-powered megaphone. The electricity was out in the Canyon Lake neighborhood, but we regrouped in the parking lot at Calvary Lutheran Church.

Our eleven-man team waded through water up to our knees on Second Avenue toward Jackson Boulevard, a four-lane state highway. We waited for a lightning bolt to view the condition of the homes on the south side. In what seemed like a microsecond, the extremely cold water reached up over our belts. The lightning flashed and the thunder roared. I wondered for years if that surge of water was the raging flow from Canyon Lake when the dam burst.

The homes on the south side of Jackson Boulevard were very close to Rapid Creek and overlooked the nine-hole golf course. People were standing outside in groups, holding their children on their shoulders and screaming for help. It was a desperate situation. The roaring water was filled with floating cars and debris and already stood four feet deep on the driveways. One of the airmen tied the end of our rope around his waist and volunteered to walk upstream about 150 feet, dive into the current, and swim over to the other side. He said, "If I make it, I'll tie this rope to a car, and those suffering people will hang onto the rope and cross over here. It's their only prayer."

Nobody had a better idea. It was dangerous, but he was ready to try. Chief Messer wrapped one end of the rope around a tree and tied a triple granny knot. We gripped the rope. The man played out the slack, walked upstream against the rampaging current, and screamed, "Here I go!" A moment later we watched his flailing arms fighting the current as his body tumbled downstream about fifteen feet from us. His

Canyon Lake rose to dangerous levels during the June 1972 downpour, as the debris in this photograph by Rapid City resident Keith T. Johnson shows.

task was impossible; we pulled him back to our position. Heroically, he tried three more times to swim across Jackson Boulevard. Each effort failed as water crashed into all of us at ever-higher levels. I called it off and held the megaphone over my head to keep it out of the water.

I waited a moment between the claps of thunder and yelled into the megaphone. "This is Mayor Barnett. We cannot bring a rope across Jackson! Climb up on your roof and hang on to your chimney!" I repeated my instructions several times and wondered whether they could hear me. In the lightning, we watched a few men boost their children first and then the women to the tops of their cars and then onto the roofs of their homes.

Our swimmer was terribly distraught and wanted to try again. Ron and three airmen calmed him down and held him firmly by his shoulders. Suddenly, a body floated past our position, and Ron was able to grab one of its legs. I helped to hold on with my free arm until an airman found a long wire, which they wrapped around the dead man's body and through his belt. They tethered the body with wire around the stop sign at Second Avenue and Jackson Boulevard. The water was above our waists now as we viewed the horrific circumstance of the suffering families on the south side of the street.

Ron Messer called us together and gave his instructions. "Wake up the folks on this side of Jackson and order them to abandon their

Keith Johnson photographed the damaged Canyon Lake spillway immediately after the flood. The break resulted in a surge of water downstream.

homes. The water might be six or eight feet deep over here within minutes. It'll knock these houses off their foundations." The men set out in teams of two with instructions to tell the residents that they must leave immediately, under the mayor's orders, and follow Evergreen Drive north toward Canyon Lake School.

Ron worked one side of Second Avenue, and I worked the other. People were following our directions, wading in bitterly cold water, dressed in only their pajamas. Fifteen minutes later about thirty folks huddled at the Calvary Lutheran Church parking lot. Shivering survivors continued to arrive as the airmen returned to the avenues and led more people to the church. Ron woke up the folks in four homes on Evergreen who invited the evacuees to come in and wait out the storm. They immediately gathered towels and bedding to dry and warm the survivors.

As the last soaking survivors entered the homes, three National Guard trucks approached from Canyon Lake Drive. Ron used his flashlight and directed the trucks into the church parking lot. After introductions, I repeated my instructions through the megaphone, adding, "When the water recedes, drive your trucks across Jackson Boulevard and carry the survivors on the south side to a place where they can dry out and warm up. They'll be blue from hypothermia. Try Camp Rapid or the Sioux San Indian Hospital. We can't rescue them now." The captain and his thirty-two men started their mission in the nearby neighborhoods. The airmen from Ellsworth stayed with Ron and me.

Our convoy drove to Canyon Lake Drive, headed east, and then turned toward the creek on Thirty-second Street. Floodwaters covered the bridge and the approach roads, forcing our return to Canyon Lake Drive. We convoyed toward Sioux Park Baseball Stadium and turned south toward Rapid Creek on Sheridan Lake Road. The left field fence was collapsing, and the ballfield was covered with several feet of water.

The police dispatcher reported that a man was stranded on a telephone pole near the Rapid Creek bridge and was in serious danger. Out of our cars, we met in the headlights and heard screaming above the raging creek, although the roar from the storm was deafening. I yelled over the noise, "We need a boat!" The men agreed, and Ron led our convoy to a boat shop out on West Main. We pounded on the

doors, and the owner let us in. He was quick to respond to our need.

He said, "Load my entire inventory of life jackets and the coils of rope from the shelves into the boat out front. Take everything. There are at least fifteen high-powered electric lanterns on the floor near the rope supply. Each lantern has a fresh battery." In the parking lot in front of his business, a boat with twin Evinrude engines was loaded on a trailer and ready to go. "We'll use this baby. Let's hit the road."

We arrived at the baseball field. The police dispatcher called to let me know that city hall had flooded, causing a power and phone outage. He had locked things up and was on Signal Heights near a city water reservoir. He said, "I'm using one of the detective cars for my dispatcher point. Power's out all over town. I don't have a phone. Our citizens can't contact the police department. All I've got is my portable citizens' band radio."

Chief Messer interrupted and gave his man directions for the balance of the night. His last command was "Keep very clear notes on where each of your cars is located at their last report."

The dispatcher said, "Lieutenant Hennies and a volunteer on the police reserve and his car are missing. He was near the meat-packing plant with a man from our police reserve. I just lost contact with Officer Sam Roach." Ron and I were terrified about the safety of both men.

After examining the situation in the debris-filled creek, I called off the rescue plan as too dangerous. The airmen walked to the water's edge and shined their electric lanterns into the raging storm. Parts of a large white house floated by and crashed into three cottonwood trees. The building shattered. One by one, the men returned to the boat, each one still willing to give the rescue a try.

We could barely see. I said, "It makes damned little sense to even try. This is suicidal." Ron agreed. The men tied down the boat and removed the life jackets, ropes, and lanterns and loaded everything into the van and my car. I sent the boat owner back to his shop with our thanks as Chief Messer left to search for a bridge to take him to check on conditions on the south side of Rapid Creek.

The dispatcher made an "all cars" emergency request: "A man just radioed the police department on his personal CB band and said the Mountain View Nursing Home near Jackson Boulevard is 70 percent

under water. Seventy-five to a hundred lives are in danger right now. All cars! Rush to that location. Officer Roach! You're the closest right now. Drop everything and rush to that nursing home. I'll send all the help I can find." We could not see one light near the Baken Park Shopping Center, Bennett-Clarkson Memorial Hospital, or the flooded nursing home. The Gap was entirely dark.

We stopped briefly at National Guard headquarters, where I spotted Col. Elroy Liemaster and told him about the nursing home. He barked at his men, "The mayor needs six trucks and all the men we can spare." Our convoy pulled out a few moments later and worked its way to West Saint Louis Street and then eastward to the bridge over Rapid Creek. I carried two electric lanterns and my megaphone as we hurried toward the bridge. Two members of the National Guard recognized me: Sergeant First Class Snozzle, Sergeant First Class Peterson, and I had been friends since 1966 when I served in the Headquarters Company of the 85th Engineering Battalion at Camp Rapid as a buck private before I left for army basic training. These noncommissioned officers (NCOs) were both senior leaders in the National Guard and native sons of Rapid City.

Their men were pulling flood victims out of the raging waters where the creek turned east below M Hill. Ten minutes before we arrived, the guardsmen had carried four survivors to the guard camp for safety and dry blankets. We watched in the lantern light as two men in a rowboat attempted to maneuver under a tree where a screaming woman hung on to a limb about four feet above the water. A dozen men slowly released the rope attached to the boat. Suddenly, there was a gigantic boom of thunder and a sharp bolt of lightning. The woman tumbled out of the tree and disappeared under water. Everyone heard the splash. The men in the boat were frantic; one of them attempted to dive into the water. Sergeant Snozzle yelled, "Pull the boat back! Don't let him jump in!"

The second man jumped on top of his partner, and they struggled while those on shore pulled the rowboat to safety. A moment later, both men stood on solid ground, neither of them wearing a life jacket. They were in tears, screaming in sorrow. Pete introduced me to the sobbing men who had tried to pull off a miracle. I helped adjust the

life jackets the airmen had just distributed and tried to comfort them, but my words were hot air. The woman did not survive. I told the men gathered around, "We'll leave eight lanterns and two dozen coils of rope with you. Your system is sound." Two airmen ran to my car and carried the gear to the guardsmen.

In between bolts of lightning and the thunder, Sergeant Peterson described watching the floodwaters rip homes in the mobile home park on the southeast corner of Mountain View and Omaha off their foundations. About a dozen floating propane tanks exploded and caught fire. Mobile homes swirled around, tipped over, and caught fire. "It was a damn nightmare," he said. He paused for a long moment. "We heard the folks in the mobile homes screaming."

The airmen and I returned to our vehicles, headed north of Deadwood Avenue to Interstate 90, and sped several miles to the La Crosse Street exit. We drove south and found several firemen near Roosevelt Park, where a large mobile home park on the north shoreline of Rapid Creek was inundated. Several fire trucks were parked in the street near the creek with red lights flashing. A neighbor arranged for temporary lights using a portable generator.

The fire department lieutenant in charge yelled, "We're losing these mobile homes by the dozens. We'll have a lot of casualties. My men are struggling to reach the folks stranded on the far south side of the court, closest to the creek and Omaha Street. We don't have a boat."

I asked the airmen to distribute life jackets to the firemen and handed mine to the lead fireman. "How can I help?"

As the men pulled off their yellow firefighting gear and strapped on the preservers, the lead man said, "We need rope." An airman and I rushed to my car and returned with twenty coils of parachute cord and a dozen packages of rope used for sailboats. Two airmen carried the last of the rope in their van to the fire trucks, and they brought me a new life jacket. The rain fell in sheets, limiting the visibility for the rescue workers.

I said, "These airmen from Ellsworth are with me all night. Use 'em any way you can." The firemen tied themselves in thirty-foot strings, worked in teams of five with the airmen, and snaked themselves between the mobile homes. They led dozens of occupants to safety. The

survivors shuddered in the cold water and trembled with fear. At times, a long string of ladders tied together with ropes, which people could hang on to more easily, was their best tool in the smashing water. The swirling water was filled with lumber, rooftops, debris, floating mobile homes, car bodies, propane tanks, and more. The firemen stacked six bodies near a fire truck. Somebody covered the bodies with a few soggy blankets.

Neighbors to the north led the survivors to the warmth of their homes. Folks lit barbeque grills beneath their porch roofs to heat water for coffee and tea. A few women heated large pots of water in which they soaked bath towels that they wrapped around the survivors, and then offered blankets. This process continued until dawn. I kept my mouth shut and worked under the supervision of the senior fireman, who had incredibly strong leadership skills.

The level of the floodwater remained extremely high and continued to batter more mobile homes. The bridge at East Omaha was clogged with the wreckage of homes and cars. The waters cascaded away from the bridge and roared into several far distant neighborhoods. To attempt to stop this diversion of waters out of the floodplain, I radioed George Seniuk at the street department for help. I asked him to send a bulldozer and a few trucks and two hundred feet of heavy chain to Roosevelt Park at dawn to try to unplug the bridge over Rapid Creek on East Omaha Street. George said he'd be there ASAP. I was reassured to learn that Swanny and his son were safe and wearing life jackets while they helped the police department on Omaha Street. His crew carried several dozen survivors up to Saint John's Hospital.

We rested for a few minutes, and I gathered the lead firemen and airmen and said, "I'll leave these firemen with you for as long as you need them. You're saving lives right now. This is your best work of the whole damn night." I gave them five more coils of rope and reminded them to use triple granny knots when they tied those ladders together. I said, "I'll send word to Colonel Bennett at the base and tell him that you are damn good soldiers and neighbors." We shook hands, and I was on my way.

Triage, 10 June

It was about 5:00 a.m. on Saturday, 10 June, and dawn was just breaking. My gut told me to look for an open bridge to take me to the south side of Rapid Creek. I took a chance and drove west on Interstate 90 to the 1-190 exit, hoping the elevated bridge over Rapid Creek north of Omaha Street was safe. Police Sergeant Leland Preble had blocked both approaches with his car and a few orange cones. He said, "Part of the elevated span and one narrow lane is still attached to the girders. It's a terrible risk, Mayor. The remaining asphalt is wider on the west lane than on the east side of the bridge."

I decided to give it a try and guided the Ford sedan as close as possible to the west side of the northbound lane. As the remaining asphalt on this lane widened, I increased my speed. In a second or two, my car was off the bridge and closer to Omaha Street. I jumped out of the car and looked west, but my visibility was limited. In my headlights, I saw large volumes of water, three or four feet high, pouring eastward on Omaha Street. Had I trapped myself between the high water ahead and the crumbling bridge behind me?

Sergeant Preble buzzed me on the police frequency. "Don't try to cross Omaha, Mr. Mayor! You'll be swept down to East Boulevard in about ninety seconds. By the way, that lane of asphalt you just used dropped into Rapid Creek."

I returned the microphone to its place on the dash of my car and whispered, "The mayor of Rapid City is a damned fool." I prayed JoAnn and the girls were safe at home. I drove slowly across Omaha Street. The heavy sedan fishtailed a few times, but the full tank of gas and those four large sandbags provided enough weight for my tires to find traction as I pushed through the waters to the south side of the four-lane street. Barrels, lumber, a Volkswagen car body, and other debris in the floodwater slammed into my vehicle. As I drove south to Main Street, I was praying that I would find Officer Sam Roach and survivors at the Mountain View Nursing Home.

The Gap was flooded and could not carry east- or west-bound traffic. Three feet of water blocked the street near Fitzgerald's Paint Store under Hangman's Hill. I made a U-turn and drove to Saint John's Hos-

Damaged bridges, such as the washed-out Sixth Street bridge shown here, made rescue and recovery efforts difficult during the flood and its aftermath.

pital. Volunteers, guardsmen, and firemen were delivering patients, but it was not a mass casualty circumstance, not a crisis.

A fireman parked his truck on Eleventh Street. I hurried over to him, and he told me that he had been helping Swanny and his son pick up survivors near Sixth and Seventh on the south side of Omaha Street. He said, "We carried the folks up here before they went into shock. They were blue! My men just carried nine folks inside."

I asked him to find Chief Johnson on his radio and waited in the cab of the fire truck until Ken answered. "Terrible news, Mr. Mayor. We might have lost three firemen out by Canyon Lake." I closed my eyes tight and shook my head. The four men Ken had sent out earlier had driven to the upper end of the lake, left their fire truck near Highway 44, and run across the bridge carrying their axes. For thirty minutes they tried to convince a few occupants of the cabins on the south

side of Canyon Lake to abandon their cabins and move away from the shoreline. Most refused. In the darkness, the high water, the lightning and thunder, the men climbed onto the roofs of several cabins and used their axes to break out windows to enable the occupants to escape. The cabins floated off their foundations and across Canyon Lake.

In the meantime, floodwaters roared over the earthen impoundment. One fireman removed his boots and heavy-duty coat, dove into the water, and swam to the north shoreline. He was found, totally exhausted but still alive, by several firemen a few hours later. Three of the men floated over the dam and into the raging waters of Rapid Creek and were declared missing.

It took me a few moments to regain my composure. In Vietnam, I had commanded 280 men, and every man returned home safely. Now, the city employed four hundred civil servants. It was the first and only time in my life when men in my charge perished while on duty.

I explained the flooding situation near West Main. Ken Johnson was not only the fire chief but also a major in the South Dakota National Guard, and he firmly managed his portion of the disaster and the recovery. He said calmly, "We have several old jeeps and power wagons with pumps at the south-side station and two or three old pumpers at the downtown station that I'll send to The Gap." I signed off to free up the network as Ken lined up his manpower and equipment.

I needed to bring help for my former neighbors behind the Black Hills Power & Light plant in The Gap. Six firemen arrived at the hospital with a dozen shivering survivors whom they had pulled out of the creek near Fifth and Omaha. We waited for the guardsmen to carry sixteen injured flood survivors into the hospital, and they joined the firemen gathered around me.

I introduced myself, and they listened carefully. "Please follow this lead fire truck and my blue Ford. We have heavy-duty work to do." They hurried to their trucks, and our short convoy drove toward the old power plant in The Gap. We parked on the north side of West Main and walked northward into the deep water. We could see water four or five feet deep along West Rapid Street to the north. I hoped Sergeants Peterson and Snozzle would be able to lead their men from the west through the water into this neighborhood under M Hill.

I said to the crew, "I lived down here in the 1940s and 1950s. Let's go." I broke the men into groups of a dozen each and sent one team to search the homes in the 1400 block of West Rapid Street as the men with me searched the homes to the west. I spotted the first home my parents purchased in 1947. It was downstream from its foundation and leaning against a cottonwood tree. We waded in the mud and water and found several bodies and six survivors inside several battered homes. The guardsmen carried the survivors to their trucks, transported them to Saint John's, and returned within a few minutes. The guardsmen stacked six bodies on the parking lot near the east entry to the power plant and covered them with a tarpaulin.

Two captains and sixteen more guardsmen arrived and parked their trucks near our vehicles. I met briefly with the team leaders and sent them closer to the raging water near the creek. I joined six firemen in

Omaha Street, where water remained up to four feet deep after the flood, saw severe damage, as in this neighborhood at Fifteenth and Omaha.

slogging through the muck to the home of Chester and Effie Dahlien who lived two lots east of my boyhood home on West Rapid Street. The water was four feet deep. I followed two of the firemen as they staggered up the steps and beat on the door. Nobody answered. I yelled, "This is Mayor Barnett. Can anybody hear me?"

A minute or two later, during a break in the thunder, I head a faint sound. "Donnie! Is that you?"

I answered, "Yes, hang on!" A fireman used his axe and broke out the window in the door, releasing hundreds of gallons of water. Seconds later the firemen knocked the door off the hinges, and a deluge poured through the doorway. Four firemen knocked out the window in the bedroom on the far south end of the home. More water gushed through the broken glass.

The guardsmen charged through the open door and slogged to the south bedroom. Using my lantern, they found the elderly couple on their sodden mattress, soaking wet and suffering from hypothermia. Chester was in deep shock, but Effie explained in a muddled voice, "We held onto the light fixture all night and floated on our mattress." Guardsmen carried them outside, where neighbors rushed to wrap warm, dry blankets around them. A few minutes later, a National Guard truck delivered them to Saint John's Hospital. Thanks to the heroic action of these brave men, Effie and Chester survived.

Chief Johnson's first pumpers arrived from the downtown central station and the south-side station in convoy. Each was operational a few minutes later once the firemen placed several hoses over the railroad tracks near Canal and Cross streets. Six large pumpers and portable pumps sucked muddy floodwater out of the lake between the paint store and the Baken Park Shopping Center and pumped it over the railroad track to the north, where it flowed in the direction of the flooding creek. For the next three hours, the firemen continued pumping as the level of the floodwaters in The Gap dropped. The larger pumper trucks moved westward to the intersection of West Main and Mountain View and repeated the process.

I flagged down a slow-moving National Guard truck and one jeep and asked those men to direct traffic through The Gap. Within thirty minutes traffic in two lanes slowly rolled east and west on West Main.

Firefighters' hoses lie across the twisted rails of the Chicago & North Western line after pumping removed some of the flood water.

Chief Johnson was a solid leader and gave firm directions without raising his voice. He reminded me of Major Irwin Jenkins, my commander in Vietnam; that comparison is the highest compliment I can give. Even with his heart breaking with fear for three of his men, he gallantly performed his duties. My memories of his leadership and that of Assistant Chief Dean Rickert can bring me to tears to this day.

Using a two-way radio borrowed from a guardsman, I radioed Camp Rapid to ask an officer to request that General Corning send ninety more men and several trucks to the area north of the old power plant in The Gap to search the homes below M Hill for survivors. Some three dozen guardsmen and a dozen firemen were already there, but they needed help. I also requested some cracker-box ambulances (a

three-quarter-ton panel truck capable of carrying six to eight patients) like the ones we used during my military training in Virginia and in Vietnam. With sad certainty, I said, "Body collection in this area of the disaster will keep several dozen men busy all day."

I drove slowly west with the traffic on Main and turned onto Jackson Boulevard. There was heavy damage west and north of Jackson near the large Safeway store and the strip mall and other area businesses. Heavy fog now replaced the rain. I saw, with a feeling of dread, a police car floating upside down in a ditch near the flooded Mountain View Nursing Home. The doors of the building were open, and white curtains drifted on the breeze through the broken windows. A bystander yelled at me, "That place is empty."

Thirty guardsmen drove south on Mountain View Street from near the bridge on the southwest corner of the Baken Park Shopping Center. The convoy included the five-ton wrecker from the National Guard headquarters and six more trucks filled with men. They had not been able to cross Rapid Creek for several hours but were here now and ready to help with a major in charge. I suggested they stop at the rehab hospital to see if there were any life-or-death emergencies and use their trucks to carry patients to Saint John's Hospital.

I talked with a few of the bystanders on the street. One told me, "A police officer, two volunteers, one nurse, and two attendants managed the evacuation of the nursing home. Somehow they led dozens of elderly folks through very deep water into that service station. Then the officer and some of the staff led or carried the residents down the street, through three or four feet of water, to the rehabilitation hospital." I still didn't know the fate of Officer Roach.

I continued west on Jackson, heading toward Meadowbrook Elementary School, and followed a police car pulling a sixteen-foot U-Haul trailer through the foot-deep water. The officer parked near the school. Dr. Larry Lytle, a councilman from Ward Two who served as council president and my deputy mayor, was leading a group of volunteers carrying several bodies. The policeman opened the trailer door, and they carried eight bodies inside. Nobody paid any attention to me as I stood behind the city car and puked. It wouldn't be the last time that terrible morning.

Larry lived on the south side of the golf course where they found these bodies after the floodwaters began to recede. I told him about the missing firemen. He absorbed that news with his eyes closed, and then we talked about the recovery. He said, "Somebody suggested we use the school for an inoculation center and start feeding folks here later this morning." Larry was a dentist and understood the dangers of a possible secondary epidemic from water-borne pathogenic bacteria. "We'll make another pass over the golf course and carry more bodies to this trailer."

I volunteered to find more trailers to transport the bodies to area funeral homes and asked the police officer to deliver his first full load to the Catron Funeral Home a few blocks east of us. When he did, he found the place heavily damaged, so he carried the bodies to the garage normally used for ambulance and hearse parking at the Behrens Mortuary. I used the megaphone to address the crowd who had gathered seeking news of loved ones. "Please cooperate with Dr. Lytle. The Pennington County Commissioners will manage this disaster. City government will restore normal city services." More volunteers arrived with more casualties.

Larry walked with me to my car and placed his arm on my shoulder. "It'll be totally grab-ass for a few weeks, Don. We're all playing this by ear."

I asked him to call the Pennington County Civil Defense Office at the courthouse and alert them about the need to start a massive inoculation process, and the sooner the better. Larry added, "The bodies are a health hazard, too. I'll find somebody to lead the search parties while I make that call from the school."

We shook hands, but before we parted, I said, "Swanny survived. I'll find him and meet him at the water treatment plant. Water! Larry! We have dozens of water main breaks all over the city. I hope our reservoirs don't run dry!"

His response was to grab my megaphone and shout to the bystanders. "Don't drink the tap water in your homes. Everyone must assume the city water is not fit to drink. Boil it before you drink it." He repeated his announcement several times.

Back in my car, I radioed Chief Messer to tell him about the U-Haul

Keith Johnson recorded this view of homeowners sorting through debris near their homes along Jackson Boulevard.

trailer being loaded with bodies near the Meadowbrook School. Ron interrupted, "I know all about it, Don. Four of our police cars are at the U-Haul agency on West Boulevard hooking up more trailers. Three detective cars will be there soon. We lost six cars last night. Tom Hennies somehow survived and will be back to work in a few minutes. He led several dozen survivors out of the high waters near Black Hills Packing and the I-190 bridge over Rapid Creek near Omaha Street. Damnedest story I ever heard."

"Okay, Ron. We'll figure something out for replacement cars later today."

Ron was ready to sign off. "The state sent crews and closed the I-90 bridge with barricades on the south and north side near Omaha Street."

I looked west through the fog on Jackson Boulevard. A wrecked house had crashed on top of the bridge over Rapid Creek during the highest peak of the flood in the Canyon Lake area, about a hundred yards east of where we had strapped the body to the stop sign. All traffic was blocked. I walked to the bridge; it was covered with mud, debris, and the wrecked home. Guardsmen were helping with the body search, and a sergeant recognized me. "General Corning is sending a few front-end loaders and several dump trucks. We'll tear down this house and clear this bridge PDQ."

He added, "My men just dragged a family of four out of the creek. They are in terrible shape and could die from exposure. We carried a few survivors from the homes on Jackson Boulevard up to the Sioux San Hospital. They found another body tied to a stop sign. We loaded

Wreckage from houses, such as this roof left on a stone wall, was lodged against bridges or scattered throughout the floodplain.

it into that small truck by the bridge." I did not tell him what I knew about that tragedy.

I thanked him and asked him to radio the commander. A moment later the sergeant handed me the microphone. I said, "General Corning, this is Mayor Barnett. I worked with a few dozen of your men during the night. They did heroic duty. I'm sure they saved dozens of lives."

"How can I help you, Mr. Mayor?"

"Sir!" I hadn't forgotten my military courtesy and training. "I haven't been there yet but I'm sure the city water treatment plant near the Baken Park Shopping Center is severely damaged. The water is pumped out of the creek for purification and into settling basins on the lowest level of the plant. Right now the intake system is full of debris and wreckage. We'll need two bulldozers and one crane, a few front-end loaders and dump trucks, and several operators."

The general said he'd send a convoy within thirty minutes and assign a senior engineer to manage the job. "That's why we're here. Anything else?"

"General," I said, "You're the most experienced public official in the state right now. I'll appreciate your help in ensuring that our locally elected folks in the Rapid City area work in harmony in this recovery operation. We're counting on you, Sir."

"You'll do fine, Mr. Mayor. The governor's in town and on his way to Baken Park."

"Thanks, General. I'll talk with you soon."

The National Guard convoy to clear the bridge arrived, and I drove east to the water plant. The fog was a terrible cloud of death over the city, but the water level near the flooded nursing home was lower, and the gravel road to the water plant was now visible. I noticed the fleet of water department vehicles, including several backhoes, and several pieces of trenching equipment parked on private property at a higher elevation along Jackson Boulevard. I gave thanks that this machinery was instantly available for the crews to begin water main repairs the same morning.

I followed fresh tire tracks on the mud-covered street to Bennett-Clarkson Memorial Hospital and met a major from the National Guard. He said, "I'm sending four trucks to haul portable generators

and lighting apparatus down here. The general ordered thirty men to load the gear at Camp Rapid."

"Go man, go!" He hurried toward his convoy. I yelled after him, "Hey, Sarge! Please check again with the chief nurse at the rehab hospital across the street. The staff are caring for about ninety survivors from that nursing home that flooded. They may need food or other supplies." The major and four men dashed across Mountain View to the rehab facility.

I remembered another issue and shouted, "Hey, Major! Ask General Corning to send two five-ton wreckers and maybe a crane and thirty to forty men with chains and gear to pull car bodies out from under the West Main Bridge by McDonald's. We have to open that bridge and be sure it is safe."

"Yes, sir. I'll clear that with Colonel Leimaster and Colonel Mechling. AMF!" To civilians, that means "Adios, My Friend." In military language, it has a more colorful meaning. We smiled, and it felt good, if only for a moment.

Somebody had parked a Winnebago motor home with a portable generator near the back door to the hospital. Floodwaters and debris filled the basement and ground floor of the structure. A man carried an extension cord from his generator through a foot of water and slogged into the hospital. Carrying my lantern, I followed him in and met the nursing supervisor. She said, "We don't have power. We'll use this line for electricity for a ventilator in pediatrics. When the road clears, we're expecting dozens of injured disaster survivors. However, we'll close this hospital as soon as possible!" I remained silent and took notes. "The emergency electrical generators are in the basement and under water. That's just the way it is. We'll discharge everybody we can safely send home and transfer the rest to Saint John's. We can't function without electricity."

I said, "Volunteers are finding many bodies. Do you have space here to store a few dozen bodies for a few days?"

"No, we don't! The funeral homes will need refrigeration trucks for that duty." Business was this woman's middle name. I had never met her before but liked and respected her instantly for her sound skills as an administrator.

National Guard personnel from Camp Rapid set up equipment instrumental in the rescue and relief work.

"Can I help with any of your short-term needs?"

"Yes. We're in serious need of a few gallons of milk and a few dozen loaves of bread. Pediatrics has several new babies and three more on the way. We might send a few mothers and babies home with one of our nurses, Yvonne Kuehn, who has several extra bedrooms. We'll send plenty of milk and bread home with her. I gotta go." She shook my hand and smiled, "You won't be twenty-nine in a few days, Mayor. You'll be eighty-nine."

I hopped out of her way, used my lantern in the fog, and struggled through and around piles of debris and mounds of mud to the water treatment plant. Don Wessel, the superintendent of the water department, was in charge and had arrived at the plant during the early hours of the flood. Everything was shut down; electrical power was off.

I greeted him and asked about his family. "My family is okay. Frieda's with her family in Indiana. Our house is totally gone. Nothing remains except the concrete foundation." The Wessels were close friends of ours and lived in a new subdivision near Rapid Creek within easy walking distance of the water plant.

He gave me an update. "Last evening our crew purified millions of gallons of potable water to build reserves in our reservoirs during the early hours of the storm. In our rush, the pumps on the intake system for water from Rapid Creek burned out. Everything is torn to bits down there. The settling basins are filled with tons of debris. We won't treat water for several days. Maybe a week or two. Swanny's on the way out here now."

His most critical need was several dozen divers to work underwater and clear the debris from the lowest level of the plant. I told him I'd make the water treatment plant the city's highest priority. However, I was shocked to hear how long the repairs might take. Don was calm but could not be optimistic. He said, "It all depends on delivery time for the new pumps and related repair parts, but here's the good news. The reservoirs are full. The bad news is that many water lines are ruptured near the creek with millions of gallons of water now pouring out of the lines all over town." I wrote it all down.

Swanny arrived, and Don brought him up to speed. The foresight of the plant operators in moving the fleet and machinery to higher ground meant that the equipment would be operational this morning. Allen Kleinsasser, a senior supervisor, joined the conversation as Swanny shared his news from Ernie Hanson, the assistant public works director and city engineer. Ernie had alerted everyone on the public works net about the need to isolate millions of gallons of water in our city reservoir systems to protect the reserves.

In his German accent, Allen said firmly, "We'll send men to every reservoir and shut off the outflow lines before the water drains into the distribution systems. All over town!"

Swanny said, "Ernie and six men from the engineering department are racing to the reservoirs to do exactly that."

Don told Allen to take the master set of keys and five men and drive immediately to the reservoirs at the highest elevations. "Report to me when the reservoirs are locked down," he said. "We're dead ducks if they run dry!"

Swanny had the power and the responsibility to supervise every public works department, including the water department. He made a

quick and brilliant decision. "Streets are one thing. Safe water is another. I'll reassign manpower and equipment from the street department to help your crews with water-main repairs."

I raised my hand. "The council and I will provide the money and support you'll need for this action and all emergency repairs. Never doubt our willingness to support these urgent actions. Secondly, General Corning and the entire South Dakota National Guard are in town, and the general is sending men and equipment to start clearing and cleaning out the intake pond behind this plant. They'll be here pretty damn quick, and we'll need a senior man to direct this work along with the senior officer the general sends. The general and his men understand that this is the city's highest priority. They'll dump the debris in Sioux Park on the far west side of the creek."

Swanny interrupted. "George Seniuk is sending one bulldozer from the street shop with two operators and two loaders and several men over here, too."

I repeated my promise to Don. "Your department will receive the highest priority in the city. We need safe water and need it fast. I'll find a few divers, send them here, or deliver them myself."

Don used his flashlight and led us to his conference room and the large maps on the wall. He marked the maps with red "X"s where his crews started water-main repairs two hours later. The lights were flickering on now, as Don said, "I'll send crews to help Allen and Ernie at the reservoirs as soon as the men arrive. If we can preserve that water by noon, we'll have potable water for a few days. I'll also ask my senior foreman for the repair crews to drive along the creek and locate the ruptured water mains that are pouring perfectly good water into the creek. We will shut off the damaged water mains at the closest valve system near the creek."

I asked Don for another map with the reservoirs marked that I could give to General Corning. I told him that the National Guard would send water tankers and water trailers to the reservoirs, fill them up, and set up potable water distribution points all over town. Don handed me the map five minutes later.

We walked outside. Swanny asked me to work with the county civil

defense board to issue an order for people not to drink tap water unless they boiled it first. He said, "They can ask the radio and TV stations to run this notice constantly until the crisis is over." I agreed.

The fog made travel almost impossible, but the roads carried more traffic. I drove north on Mountain View. The street was blocked with debris from inside the shops at the Baken Park Shopping Center, so I parked and walked to the West Main bridge over Rapid Creek. The bridge was in place but covered with three feet of mud and debris. A few cars and pickups crossed cautiously, splashing the bystanders with water and mud. Guardsmen parked a National Guard wrecker and a few trucks behind the bank and the grocery store and studied the wooden support system under the bridge, but about fifteen car bodies blocked their view. Within a half hour, these crews used chains and machinery to drag debris upstream and out from under the bridge and up to the shopping center parking lot. Two pumpers and crews from the fire department power-flushed the mud and debris off the bridge and into the roaring creek. I asked the senior firemen to power-flush under the bridge as well so the state engineers could inspect the wooden support system. I hoped this critical bridge could remain operational.

Governor Richard Kneip was standing nearby and waved. He was dressed in a grey, western-cut summer suit, grey shirt and tie, and wearing what appeared to be black cowboy boots. He was covered with mud and was soaking in muddy water, well above his knees.

We shook hands, and he said, "We'll help your city, Don, in every possible way. I'll meet the survivors and the victims and tell them state government is here to help. Herb Teske will manage my local office in Rapid City." Herb was a political professional, a senior officer in the National Guard, and a good friend of mine.

I told the governor about the three firemen. He folded his arms and stared at the mud on his suit and boots. "Yeah," he said. "General Corning just sent a man down here with that information and news that several guardsmen are missing and probably casualties, too. He'll provide a full report by noon." Later that day, the governor showed me the list of National Guard casualties: 2d Lt. Gary Engelstad of Milbank, PFC Freeman Franklin Phillips of Rapid City, and 1st Sgt. Myron H. Corbin from Webster perished while rescuing many survivors during the peak

A South Dakota National Guard wrecker from the 153d Engineer Battalion winches a wrecked automobile from flood debris.

of the disaster. One piece of good news that I picked up on the police radio chatter was that Sam Roach had survived his rescue efforts. The governor asked me to arrange for a highway patrolman to pick him up near East Boulevard about noon. Then he shook my hand and waded through the mud and debris into the damaged McDonald's to meet the owner.

A National Guard jeep approached the bridge from the west. The driver used his radio to contact General Corning's office. I told the general about the map to city reservoirs and our proposal to have the civil defense office work closely with him and the guardsmen to help deliver clean water in their tankers and trailers to thousands of folks at designated points throughout the city. The men could work around the clock if the county commissioners agreed. I said, "Potable water is my main worry! Don Wessel doesn't know when the water plant will be operational."

The general said, "This is also the county commission's plan. I sent Dick Trankle, who is a major in the guard and the state civil defense director, to the courthouse. I'll call him with this idea and tell him I have the master map. We'll be operational at the reservoirs with a few tankers and trailers by ten o'clock this morning and will double that number by noon. We have thousands of five-gallon water cans that we'll fill and use, too."

I returned to my car and watched a ten-man crew using dozens of shopping carts haul soggy groceries out of the Piggly Wiggly store and stack the rubbish on the parking lot. The east and west windows in the shops at Baken Park and the large grocery store in the shopping center were shattered.

My next stop was at the former Swander Baking Company (then called the Old Home Bakery) at Twelfth and Saint Joseph Street where several bakers stood outside. I introduced myself, and they found a supervisor for me to talk to.

I described what the nursing supervisor at the Bennett-Clarkson Memorial Hospital had listed as her greatest need. I asked, "Can you send a truck or two out there and deliver a few dozen loaves of bread and fifty gallons of milk? The city will pay for it." The supervisor snapped his fingers. Four bakers hurried inside to wrap the loaves and load the delivery trucks. "Can you please send twenty dozen loaves and all the milk you can spare up to Saint John's, too?" More bakers rushed to help the others.

When I explained the unavailability of city water, the supervisor said, "These men are the night shift. We didn't lose our natural gas service last night and used emergency generators for electrical power. We'll keep production at a high level today. We have tons of powdered milk and plenty of water in our storage tanks. We'll use it today."

I said, "Think about this. Every grocery store within six blocks of the creek is flooded. That means their baked goods are waterlogged. Somebody has to feed the survivors and the entire city. The store managers will call you for emergency restocking by noon."

He wrote several notes and said, "We'll use a double shift and operate this place at max capacity by noon today and from now until the Fourth of July."

I shook his hand and drove to the Pennington County Courthouse, hurried inside, and met Delores ("Deedee") Ghere, the councilwoman from Ward One in Robbinsdale who had regained her council seat in the recent election. She was a skilled and experienced public servant. We met behind a pillar where I gave her a hug and shared the news about the missing firemen. She sobbed in my arms and said, "I've known those men for years, Don. I can name every fireman. This is terrible." We were both in tears.

She brought me up to date on the actions of the civil defense board. She said Lloyd St. Pierre, chair of the Pennington County Commission, the other leaders of the commission, and Ron Stephenson, spokesman for the civil defense board, were doing a good job. The biggest challenge was dealing with the hundreds of folks who were bringing in the names of their missing family members and friends. Lloyd had placed her in charge.

The Bennett-Clarkson Memorial Hospital was forced to transfer patients or send them home. Keith Johnson photographed the post-flood debris field.

To bring some order to the process, DeeDee had her volunteers tape thirteen signs printed with two letters of the alphabet on each of the pillars in the courthouse rotunda and set up portable tables next to each column. Desperate people formed in thirteen lines to register the names of those they could not locate. Calling it "The Missing List," volunteers entered more than four thousand names during the first forty-eight hours.

Charles Swander, a strong council member from Ward Three, had arrived at the courthouse at two o'clock that morning. We shook hands, briefly discussed the lost firemen, and hurried downstairs to meet with the Pennington County Board of Commissioners, which also served as the county civil defense board. Harold Irish, director of the board, had been up in the Black Hills on Friday night and could not make his way into the city. In his absence, Commissioner Ron Stephenson was acting director. He interrupted their temporary agenda and asked for my report. I told the board everything I knew but did not mention the missing firemen. There was not time to notify the families, and we were still praying the men would be found safe and sound. I explained the dangers from polluted water and the imminent closure of the Bennett-Clarkson Memorial Hospital.

Ron said, "Please write a press release about the water risks on civil defense stationery, and we'll issue the order immediately." I typed the release, Ron signed it, and soon fifty copies were ready for the local and regional reporters who were all over the courthouse. Since KOTA was back on the air, Ron called the station and recorded the release. They were the first to broadcast the warning. As other reporters used the phone bank in the conference room, the warning spread throughout South Dakota.

Everybody was talking at once. Charley pulled me into a small office. "This is the damedest mess you ever saw. Nobody's to blame. We probably won't have a tentative body count until noon. Judge Marshall Young will manage the body count, the official list of the dead, and the expanding numbers of the folks who are reported missing."

I gave him more information about potable water and repairs to the water plant and asked him to call the other council members and inform them about the three missing firemen. Charley said, "Ron and

Health officials used the dispensary at Camp Rapid as a site for free inoculations to prevent disease outbreaks.

Lloyd appreciated Dr. Lytle's call about thousands of inoculations. They'll have a plan by noon." That marked the end of my responsibility for the inoculations. The civil defense board and regional doctors and nurses managed the program without city involvement and deserve all the credit. The region did not experience secondary epidemics.

Charley, the council, and I recognized that disaster management was a county responsibility. Charley said, "Communication is the key to this mess. I'll remain available in the courthouse to answer questions about what the city is doing to restore normal services. You keep me informed as the city liaison with county officials, and you focus on bringing the departments back on line as rapidly as possible."

We returned to the meeting, and I said, "If you need me, Charles will find me. Remember! He speaks for the city at your meetings from this moment forward."

On my way out, I ran into State Senator James Dunn from Lead. He was also senior vice president and director of community relations at

the Homestake Mining Company. He told me he had heard my radio warning the previous night, but I was stunned to hear him say that it had been broadcast only a few times before KOTA went off the air. Like the governor, Senator Dunn assured me that the state government would help Rapid City. He said he'd call every state senator that day. He then handed me an envelope and said, "Please take this, Mayor. Homestake will help, too."

I thanked him, waved to DeeDee, rushed out the back door, and just about knocked down a man from Custer who had fifteen hundred gallons of potable water on his truck and wanted to know where to take it. I sent him to the Old Home Bakery and said, "The bakery may be our single source of bread for several days." The stranger hurried to his truck.

It was almost 9:00 a.m. as the fog slowly cleared. Hundreds of survivors lined up around the parking lot at the courthouse to add names to the ever-growing list of missing. I ran into Wes Storm, the city recreation director and my golfing partner the previous afternoon. He told me that he'd called JoAnn that morning and could report the family was safe and sound. I was very grateful for the news.

While we stood there, Joy Medley, the wife of the Salvation Army commander, rushed up to hug me, and I felt tears on her cheek. Soon she got down to business. For her, that meant feeding the hungry. She said, "Mister Mayor, we need a place to feed the survivors. There will be thousands of homeless and hungry people from all over town."

I listened carefully, and Wes took notes while she described her needs. My mind was racing to think of a site, but Wes quickly responded, "The city auditorium!" I described it to Mrs. Medley. "It's on the south side of the business district, easy to find. It's old but quite large, has a large kitchen, and the water heaters work. The place has hundreds of chairs and dozens of tables. Wide doors are located on the alley side where your volunteers and staff can deliver groceries." Wes agreed to drive Mrs. Medley to the auditorium and handed me my binder as they walked away.

Mrs. Medley's tears were understandable. When we met, she already knew that her husband, Bill, had died in the recovery effort the night before. This fine man had kissed his wife and raced his pickup to the

raging Rapid Creek. He made several trips into the floodwaters, pulled several people out of the debris, and courageously tried to make one more trip. His pickup rolled and tumbled on this last try; Bill perished. He was one of the many heroes, known and unknown, who saved hundreds of folks that miserable night.

I drove to the auditorium with two priorities on my mind: to find three dozen divers and locate Richard Rippe, the city building inspector. I needed his professional guidance. KOTA was finally on the air, and I was surprised to hear Stu Steele, a county commissioner who worked for KOTA, report that the old city auditorium might be used by the Salvation Army to provide free meals for the disaster survivors. Stu told me later how he followed me to my car with several questions and had listened to my chatter with Wes and Mrs. Medley. Knowing I was terribly busy, he rushed inside, reported my actions to the civil defense board, called KOTA, and made his report. Stu had the best nose for news in the city and proved it repeatedly during the balance of my years in city government.

I parked near the auditorium and tried to clear my thoughts. JoAnn drove by, saw my car, and parked. We both got out and embraced for a long moment, and then she told me that her mother had driven down from Belle Fourche to pick up our girls. The highway patrol had guided her to the bridge on East Saint Patrick Street to reach our home in Robbinsdale and then to the interstate for her drive home. JoAnn was ready to work with Mrs. Medley to prepare meals for the survivors. She kissed me gently, said she loved me, and hurried through the open doors. I drove to our home for my first break since the storm struck.

Several of my neighbors were standing outside talking when I arrived. They expressed concern about me and the situation, of course. I was thinking hard about the need for divers at the water purification plant. When I mentioned Don Wessel's request, one of my neighbors, M.Sgt. Samuel Sears, a senior NCO at Ellsworth, offered to call one of the leaders he knew in the divers' club at the base.

"That's great," I said. "Run it by him and his commander. I'll clear this with Colonel Bennett. You're a lifesaver, Sam."

We all shook hands, and I walked inside. I washed my face, combed my hair, soaked the mud off my feet in the tub, and pulled on a pair

of white tube socks and the pair of jungle boots I had brought home from Vietnam. After three glasses of milk, four muffins, and three full minutes of absolute silence with my eyes closed, I was ready to return to my duties.

Roy Savage, my next-door neighbor, was waiting for me in the driveway. "Is there anything I can do to help, Don?"

"Yes, there is! Please call Pastor Voas and ask him to alert his congregation about the need for volunteers at the old city auditorium. If he could round up 150 people to help serve the midday meal today, that would be great." Ken Voas was our neighbor and friend, and the United Methodist Church where he served as senior minister was across the street from the city auditorium. I suggested that Ken could also call the ministerial association members and alert the other churches throughout the city about manpower needs at the old auditorium. Between the Salvation Army and the Red Cross, we needed hundreds of volunteers at emergency feeding shelters all over town during the next few weeks. I added, "Ask him to call Reverend Kent Millard at Canyon Lake Methodist Church and see if he will send 150 volunteers to Meadowbrook Elementary School ASAP. That's the feeding station for survivors on the west side of the city in the general Canyon Lake area."

Local Salvation Army board members and dozens of volunteers, mostly from the Methodist Church, served the first meals at the old auditorium at two o'clock that Saturday afternoon. National Salvation Army leaders and several special vehicles and crews for food-service management arrived at Ellsworth on air force planes from Saint Louis, Missouri, to manage the process by late afternoon. Dozens of churches helped. Mrs. Medley reported to the council that the Salvation Army fed twenty-seven thousand meals to the flood survivors during the first five days.

From a room in the courthouse, I called Colonel Bennett at Ellsworth. He had arrived as the new commander of the Missile Wing and the senior base commander just three weeks before the flood. First, I wanted him to know about the valor of the nine Ellsworth men who had worked with me all night. I said, "Each is a great soldier. They saved lives down by Roosevelt Park. My assistant Kay will send you

their names." I explained how the civil defense board was operating and that Charles Swander represented the city at the command center.

Colonel Bennett said, "How can the base help? I have men, airplanes, machinery, food, and just about anything you might need. My commander, General Fall over at Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, will pull every string in the air force to help Rapid City."

I thanked him and moved to the issue of the divers we needed from the Ellsworth Diving Club for the water treatment plant. I said, "We have about a dozen civilian divers who are searching for bodies in the creek, and the civil defense board cannot pull them off that duty right now. The city needs divers and needs them PDQ. We have water for a few days. In less than a week, we'll have a terrible health crisis if we don't produce safe and potable water."

He replied, "I have your earlier message from Sergeant Sears. Some of the divers left in air force vans for the water plant, and we're searching for the club's leaders and membership list. We'll send more divers in a short military convoy with additional airmen to help within ninety minutes." I affirmed his idea to contact the other air bases in surrounding states for divers and reminded him that we might need a plane to deliver a few large, heavy pumps and related apparatus for repairs to the water treatment plant. He agreed.

The colonel continued, "A general at the Pentagon called me about an hour ago. The feds are buying every mobile home they can find in the seven-state region, even a few dozen in Indiana, and ordering the dealers to start them rolling toward Rapid City for temporary housing for your flood victims. He ordered me to find a place at this base to park and store the homes until you have sites ready. I'll hire local firms to deliver the mobile homes to sites in Rapid City when you give me the word."

We ended our call, and then I checked in with Don Wessel at the water plant. He confirmed that a few divers from Ellsworth had already arrived with "tons of equipment." I told him about the forthcoming help from the divers' clubs at the various air force bases. Don said, "We'll have new pumps and repair parts in three or four days. They are working on air transportation right now to deliver everything ASAP. Also, I placed an emergency order with our supplier in Denver for sev-

eral semi-truck loads of very large water mains and related apparatus."

He was glad to hear that the air force had agreed to transport the pumps if he had any difficulties on the factory side of this problem. He sounded more optimistic now. "My crews have plenty of parts, fitting, and pipe for the work today through Sunday," he said. "We'll repair several water-main breaks by nightfall. I made a few calls; three towns in the Black Hills are sending their crews and supplies to help. I'll call General Corning at the National Guard office if I need more equipment or manpower. We've already blocked off the lines to several neighborhoods and prevented millions of gallons from leaking into the muddy waters of Rapid Creek."

The civil defense board established nine districts for water point distribution, and by noon on Saturday, the National Guard was set up to distribute potable water. The city's radio stations announced the locations and urged citizens to bring containers to carry home several gallons of water. The state highway department and city crews opened seven bridges over Rapid Creek by noon.

The civil defense board appointed Army Major Robert Disney, a career officer, to manage the body-search process. He brought order to the chaos, and search-and-rescue operations were quickly underway with divers using National Guard equipment in deep ponds filled with tons of debris. They completed hundreds of missions and discovered dozens of bodies, which were carried in National Guard vehicles to area funeral homes. Among the dead, volunteers found the body of one of our missing firemen.

Organized teams and skilled volunteer divers, working under the supervision of Ray Lucan, an experienced local diver, also searched for bodies during the next several days. By noon on the day after the flood, volunteers had recovered approximately eighty bodies found in the rubble along Rapid Creek. Hundreds of guardsmen and volunteers found dozens of injured flood victims during the first hours of light on Saturday. They were transported to Saint John's Hospital where a number of doctors and nurses cared for the survivors. Everyone had terrifying stories to tell.

The entire police force was on duty despite the fact that the police department offices in city hall at 22 Main were flooded. Chief Messer

reached out to Stanford Adelstein, who owned the old bank building at the corner of Seventh and Main. With his permission, the department relocated and was operational within twelve hours. Fire department Chief Ken Johnson and Assistant Chief Dean Reichert performed the sad duty of notifying the families of the firemen who had perished.

City council members were actively engaged in the relief effort. Jerry Shoener stayed on the job at the *Rapid City Journal*, managing the printing and distribution of the Sunday edition of the newspaper. Art LaCroix, a decorated World War II army officer and a retired major in the United States Army Reserve, managed volunteers between I-190 and East Boulevard and east to the fairgrounds. This wonderful man, so calm and brave with leadership skills tested in the heat of battle, did not sleep for two full days and nights as his crews and National Guardsmen delivered bodies to the funeral homes. Dr. Lytle remained in charge of the volunteers upstream from the Baken Park Shopping Center, encompassing a large area, while other councilmen and women worked as clerks and volunteers at the courthouse.

Charley Swander remained at the courthouse and helped the civil defense board develop a plan to search eight hundred damaged homes, including several hundred mobile homes, and determine if the rubble should be transported to a city landfill or if the damaged home should be boarded up for security. They devised a code to mark each home with spray paint for repair or destruction. I volunteered to send Richard Rippe, the city building inspector, to help, but we could not find him. When his friends told us Mike and his new wife lived near Dark Canyon, we feared the worst.

DeeDee managed her duties with scores of volunteers, yellow pads of paper, and ballpoint pens. The number of names on the missing list approached a thousand. About 11:00 a.m., Earl Sutton, the dean of instruction at the National College of Business approached DeeDee with an offer to help. He said, "Electrical power is restored at the college. I'll round up twenty or thirty key-punch technicians or operators, and we'll computerize the missing list in alphabetical order. Then, we'll print copies for you, the civil defense board, Judge Marshall Young, the *Journal*, and the radio and TV stations." She agreed wholeheartedly. By Saturday at midnight, the list was quantified, and county officials

This image by Keith Johnson shows some of the homes destroyed in the hard-hit Baken Park area.

began the long process of separating the living from the dead, which lasted through Labor Day.

I drove out west toward Canyon Lake Park. The homes downstream below the park along Rapid Creek had been one of the most beautiful developments in the nation. Folks caught rainbow trout out of Rapid Creek for three hundred days a year; it was a serene and beautiful setting for homes. Now, only a few totally destroyed homes were standing; the area was filled with debris and vacant lots. The full force of the water from Canyon Lake and the rampaging creek crashed into this subdivision and destroyed virtually everything in its path, including streets, driveways, and concrete foundations.

The police dispatcher radioed me to relay the message from Councilman Swander that I was needed at the courthouse for a press conference. Regional, national, and local reporters were arriving to report on this national disaster, which was already international news. The first reporter to reach me was Steve Hemmingsen from KELO-TV in Sioux

Falls. He and his cameramen were ready in the courthouse parking lot for an interview. Hemmingson was the best and most experienced television newsman in the state. We talked for twenty minutes, and his questions were tough and penetrating.

I couldn't answer his question about the death count but told him that about fifteen hundred volunteers were searching for survivors along a ten-mile stretch of Rapid Creek. That figure included about six hundred searchers in the area immediately north of our central business district. I referred him to the civil defense office and Judge Marshall Young, who was the official spokesman for the board, for better answers relating to the confirmed dead and the growing numbers of names on the missing list. I said, "The missing list is expanding by several names per minute. This disaster will be managed by officials at Pennington County."

"What are *you* doing, Mayor Barnett?" Steve asked. The cameras were rolling.

"My job and the job of four hundred city civil servants is to return our city departments to full operation as soon as possible." When he asked me about the condition of the city departments, I defined the status of the water treatment plant and the hasty relocation of the police department. I tried to be clear and direct in my responses to the local, regional, and national reporters and never ducked their questions. For clarifications and updated information, these reporters met with me daily. I often referred many reporters to the courthouse, where the county commissioners, including Ron Stephenson, had more accurate information.

Kay Rippentrop, my administrative assistant, had been working at city hall without phone, water, or electrical service. She found me in the courthouse and delivered a stack of telegrams as well as notes from dozens of folks who had stopped at city hall. "Coleen Schmidt is watching city hall while I meet with you. Everything's down." Kay gave me a handwritten sheet with critical information, and I scanned through it:

• Robert Rosenheim and Carroll Goodwin from Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in Denver will arrive on the afternoon flight. Staff leaders from the Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEP) are also on

the plane. Six regional managers from six federal agencies are on the same plane. Six more arrived on the last plane tonight.

• Bill Cannallas from OEP is a mobile home park specialist and picked up several city maps that I found upstairs. OEP wants to repair the damaged mobile home parks near the creek and then bring new mobile homes to Rapid City for the flood victims to use. The feds will provide several hundred homes for instant occupancy in six existing courts on both banks of Rapid Creek within a few days. Maybe three or four weeks.

• The Corps of Engineers set up shop at the Surbeck Center at the School of Mines. They dropped off five copies of this booklet about "Disaster Debris Management" for us. They hire private contractors to collect the debris and carry it to city landfills. Cities waive the tipping fees during presidentially declared disaster cleanup.

• President Richard Nixon responded to Governor Kneip's request and declared the four counties in South Dakota Presidential Disaster Zones about eight this morning via telegram.

Kay borrowed my binder, decoded my notes, and created an orderly list of urgent issues. She reported that the police were in the process of moving the police radio transmitters and equipment out of city hall and that several engineers were upstairs digging out engineering data for the water plant, city bridges, the sewer plant, and more. She returned to city hall.

It wasn't long before the advance teams for large contractors from Denver, Omaha, Minneapolis, Casper, and Billings arrived on private planes to scope out the work for the lucrative contracts issued by the Corps of Engineers. Convoys of equipment rolled into the city. The work continued for several weeks.

One of the biggest problems was the car bodies from the spring citywide clean-up that were now scattered over the fairgrounds. In addition, more than five thousand vehicles were destroyed in the flood, and they blocked the creek, clogged bridges, and were serious safety hazards for the search teams. As these cars were removed, wrecker services and contractors, paid by OEP and the Corps of Engineers, consolidated the autos at two locations: the site of the new Federal Post Office

on East Boulevard and the Pennington County Fairgrounds. Swanny told me that the contractors discovered bodies, too. "Several National Guardsmen watch each machine and find and retrieve the bodies," he said. "It's gruesome work out there."

Saturday turned hot, with temperatures in the nineties. We worried about our crews and the potential dangers from heat exhaustion. Within a few hours, large chunks of mud dropped off the contractors' trucks, dried rapidly on the streets and highways, and were crunched into dust. Dust clouds gathered above the floodplain. Starting Saturday night, George Seniuk assigned manpower to use the city's fleet of street sweepers and had one of his senior foremen direct the operators to critical areas where the dust storms were the most intense. However, George ran out of drivers at dawn on Sunday morning. The men rested a few hours and then worked sixteen hours per day under difficult and exhausting conditions until the middle of July. A volunteer at the city

Wrecker services and contractors removed ruined cars from flooded areas and consolidated them at two locations.

auditorium gave me two gallon jugs filled with water. I drank from and refilled the jugs hundreds of times during the next few weeks. Swanny and the department heads did the same thing.

At about 6:00 p.m. on Saturday I ran into Terry Woster, a friend from my years at South Dakota State and an Associated Press journalist from Pierre, and asked him about the body count. He answered, "Who knows? My boss just sent three reporters to the funeral home to count the bodies. The civil defense office doesn't have an accurate number, but it's growing pretty fast. We're working on a total number and will have it in about three hours. The *Journal* will have a list of the confirmed dead in the paper tomorrow morning." As a parting shot, he encouraged me. "Kick some butt, Barn!"

As the press focused more on my role in the recovery, I became increasingly uncomfortable about having my "mug" in the spotlight. Charley Swander said, "Forget it! Be yourself! We're in this damn thing together for the long haul. The people must have faith in their government. Bark out your answers loud and clear. Somebody's gotta be the strong spokesman for city government. That's YOU!" The council and I governed as a strong, positive, and cohesive team. Swander could summarize a critical situation better than any man I ever met. He cut to the nubbins of hundreds of discussions that fateful summer and served his city with brilliance.

I found JoAnn at the auditorium at eleven o'clock Saturday night. She was exhausted. One hundred fifty volunteers were cleaning the place again and sorting a mountain of inventory for the Sunday morning meal. The guardsmen parked six full water trailers in the alley and brought three fresh trailers per hour, towing the empty trailers back to the reservoirs. A few of the Salvation Army brass from Saint Louis introduced themselves, and I spent serious time thanking them for their magnificent service to our survivors while I downed pints of water.

I needed to visit with George Behrens, the county coroner, at his funeral home. JoAnn came along with me. Black Hills Power & Light had restored power to his funeral home at about five o'clock on Saturday afternoon. We found George and two men standing near the garage where he usually parked his vehicles and noticed several mortuary vehicles parked on the street. While JoAnn napped in the city car, I

stepped out and met the strangers. Both were morticians from eastern South Dakota and arrived in our city as part of the statewide embalming team.

George led me into the garage. I whispered, "My God!" The concrete floor was covered with bodies, side by side. I guessed that forty bodies lay on the cold concrete. Many were mangled and unrecognizable.

"Here's the problem, Mayor. I need help to identify these individuals. It's gruesome when the families arrive, and all I can suggest is for them to look at these cadavers in my garage. If they find the body of a family member or close friend, they just break down. It's the damnedest mess I've ever witnessed in my professional life. The death toll is far above 115."

I found a plastic bag near a trash can, puked into the sack, and dropped the sack into a garbage can in the alley. George said, "Don't worry about throwing up, Donnie. I've known you since you were in the Boy Scouts. Everybody pukes when they visit my garage."

George carried a handful of tags in his shirt pocket, each about six inches long. "Please give me the name of anybody you recognize, and I'll write the name on a tag and tie it around the big toe on the body." In tears, I took a deep breath, and one of the morticians patted me on my shoulder and handed me a large cup of lukewarm coffee. We started down the line.

The third body on the concrete floor was an old friend from Trinity Lutheran Church. A piece of paper was attached to his ripped shirt with a safety pin. Between sobs, I said, "George, this is Lowell Dieter. He teaches math at the School of Mines. His wife is Millie. They live on Judy Drive near Jackson Boulevard." George filled out the tag, and I closed my eyes. Lowell was a basso profoundo and had attended Wartburg College in Iowa with Millie. They both sang with me in the church choir in the 1950s.

"Ok, let's move on."

I identified nine more bodies and asked George whether JoAnn should come and take a look. "No. That's it for tonight. This madhouse will last several weeks. These two East River guys and I are going to bed. General Corning sent six National Guardsmen to watch over this place and use the garage at my home if more bodies arrive tonight.

About thirty, maybe forty, morticians are coming from Wyoming and South Dakota tomorrow. I ordered six refrigeration trucks from Denver. They'll also be in town by noon. As we identify more of these folks, we'll store the bodies more professionally and safely in those big trucks at each funeral home."

JoAnn and I arrived home ten minutes later and were almost too tired to speak. I dropped my clothes to take a shower and didn't notice the wet envelope from the Homestake Mine that dropped out of my wet pants pocket. Ten minutes later I had shaved, and we met in the hall. JoAnn picked up the soggy envelope. "What's this?"

The wet check was sticking to the back of the letter Senator Dunn had delivered—ten thousand dollars, payable to the Rapid City Disaster Fund. JoAnn took it and dried it with her hair dryer. She put it in our *Webster's Dictionary* and placed the dictionary under our bed. We'd never had that kind of money in our custody at home before. I clarified my notes in my binder and jotted down more reminders as a checklist for my work early Sunday. We held each other and fell asleep. The next morning, I was awake at six and worrying about a hundred details. JoAnn cooked us a big breakfast, and I decided to lay off the coffee for as long as possible.

Taming Chaos, 11 June

When I arrived at the courthouse on Sunday, about two hundred people were waiting in line in the parking lot to add more names to the exploding list of missing. Thirteen volunteers handled the duty. Runners carried the lists at thirty-minute intervals to the key-punch operators at the National College of Business who worked in shifts around the clock for the next twenty-five days to keep the computerized list updated. DeeDee supervised all of it.

Near the back door, a good friend who was also a lawyer representing a large local savings and loan association hailed me. He made an impassioned plea on behalf of his client for a financial bailout. The flood had partially or totally destroyed so many homes that many of the mortgages were now partially or totally worthless. He said, "Donald, we might go belly-up if the city doesn't sponsor a relief plan, and I mean quick!" He whaled at me for five full minutes.

Finally, I had heard enough. "Stop! This is pretty damn cheap. During the last twenty-four hours volunteers have logged more than three thousand names on the missing list. Right now, those families are suffering with a degree of pain and uncertainty that I cannot define. We can't find the bodies of two firemen; both are probably dead! More than 115 bodies are lying on cold concrete at the funeral homes, waiting for dozens of out-of-town morticians. The city will be out of safe drinking water within a few days, and you want me to stop working on this recovery and define a plan to bail out your client?"

He responded that it was a bad time for everybody, and we engaged in a staredown. I gave him a litany of the decisions the city and region were facing and then said, "Your problem right now is the last thing on my mind! I'll try to forget that this conversation ever happened." I left my good friend standing in the shadows.

DeeDee greeted me with a hug and a cup of coffee. It hadn't taken me long to fall off the coffee wagon. Charley and the civil defense board members were eating day-old chocolate doughnuts and drinking coffee. Lloyd St. Pierre said, "The body count just passed 150. Mr. Behrens and his staff have only identified about eighty."

I walked upstairs with Charley, and we both spotted Tom Lane from the Rapid City Chamber of Commerce. The three of us found a room for a little privacy. I handed the letter and the check from Homestake Mine to Tom. He was impressed. I said, "Tom, I need your help. I don't have time to handle this check and other donations that might come in. Please talk to your board and devise a plan to form a foundation or something to manage this money. We need somebody to write a business plan, and we need it within the next forty-eight hours. I want some heavyweights to manage this openly, honestly, and firmly, with full reporting to the *Journal* and the media about every dollar we collect and every dollar the new foundation distributes to the survivors."

Charley suggested that we should involve the city, the county, the schools, the churches, and the business community, as well. Tom accepted our challenge. "I'll have a plan within forty-eight hours." We shook hands.

Three days later, a group of volunteers under the direction of Everett P. ("Ep") Howe, created the Rapid City Area Disaster Foundation.

During the next seven months the foundation processed $1.4 million in direct financial aid to the disaster victims. I served as treasurer and Ep Howe as president. The board of directors was composed of leading citizens from business, labor unions, education, clergy, the legal profession, and the various minority communities. Ep and his wife, Grace, several board members, and many volunteers managed the foundation in the offices of the Elks Club near the current Elks Theater on Sixth Street. The office was open sixteen to eighteen hours per day. I attended morning board meetings and placed my trust in Mr. Howe and his board. Their work was harmonious and productive.

A few days later Mike Schirmer, the mayor of Sioux Falls, called me to report that service clubs in Sioux Falls and thousands of schoolchildren were going door to door and urging every household to donate to the Rapid City Disaster Fund. They had already collected over ninety-four thousand dollars for our disaster survivors. I invited Mike to present the funds personally to the council and the foundation's board of directors. There wasn't a dry eye at the table as Mike described the community-wide actions in his city to help the four-county disaster zone. This surge of funds enabled the foundation to make its first cash distributions in late June.

Representatives of national relief organizations were also quick to respond to Rapid City's needs. George Elsey, national president of the American Red Cross, had flown in on Saturday night and met with me on Sunday. He said, "Our local board of directors and many volunteers will start processing cash payments to the flood victims this morning." I was impressed with his speed and determination to deliver instant cash to the survivors and offered the city's cooperation. I told him about the assistance the Salvation Army was providing with free meals at the auditorium.

Mr. Elsey said, "We'll help with more than cash! We'll pay for temporary housing, motel room fees, meals, medical care, burial expenses, and much more. We will also help the American Indians in your community who are impacted by the flood and give that challenge our highest priority." As the financial plight of the survivors became painfully clear, Elsey expanded his staff in South Dakota. The Red Cross and Salvation Army (with Joy Medley in command) provided finan-

cial support for the victims throughout the summer and fall of 1972.

On the Fourth of July, the board of the Disaster Foundation received a $50,000 check for the disaster victims from Joan Kroc, the wife of McDonald's founder Ray Kroc and a former resident of Rapid City. Her donation came with one condition—anonymity. Ep Howe and I honored her request, but we arranged to have her portrait displayed during the dedication of the new city library later that fall.

The civil defense board arranged for the school district to provide twenty classrooms at the Central High School building on Columbus Street for a consolidated point of contact to enable flood survivors to find assistance with one-stop shopping from several government offices, social service agencies, and charities. The Red Cross and other agencies were open for business and overwhelmed with applicants in their classroom only two days after the flood.

Disaster victims were thrilled when the foundation began accepting applications a week later for "walking-around money." On 20 June, the first cash payments of about $150,000 were issued to well over twelve hundred applicants who met strict and explicit criteria. These grants continued through the end of December 1972, and the foundation was closed by January 1973. In addition, $500,000 was distributed to compensate disaster victims in other ways. The amounts were calculated as 3 percent of the real property lost by each flood victim. Funds were also distributed to assist with funeral and burial expenses. The board distributed these funds in close cooperation with the Church Disaster Response and other charities, including the Red Cross and the Salvation Army.

Rev. Larry Dahlstrom from the Calvary Lutheran Church and his ministerial associates from dozens of local churches started the Church Disaster Response. This board mobilized donations for a wide range of survivors and raised more than one hundred thousand dollars by the first of July. They strove to meet the needs of recipients who may have "slipped through the cracks" of the various assistance programs sponsored by federal, state, and local governmental agencies and charitable groups. The leaders of several denominations nationwide sent generous contributions to help with this mission. Hundreds of deserving citizens used these dollars to survive.

There was close cooperation between the boards of the Church Disaster Response and the Rapid City Area Disaster Foundation. The chairmen, Howe and Dahlstrom, helped me compose a letter as part of our nationwide appeal, which we mailed to the editors of hundreds of newspapers requesting folks from across America to donate to the Disaster Foundation. The board received donations from generous people in every city and county in South Dakota, every state in the nation, and seventeen foreign countries. The foundation's balance was $1 million by mid-summer. The board distributed another $550,000 by the end of August.

On Sunday afternoon, I returned to the banks of Rapid Creek near Sixth and Seventh Streets and worked with volunteers and Councilman LaCroix for several hours. Arthur would later succeed me in office and serve for several terms as Rapid City's first American Indian mayor. A gentle man, calm and compassionate, he managed hundreds of volunteers and directed the guardsmen to carry the corpses to waiting trucks. His keen leadership skills were obvious and appreciated, much as they were in 1944 when Gen. George Patton awarded him a battlefield commission during the worst hours of the Battle of the Bulge.

I then drove to the far west side of town to join volunteers searching for bodies in the Canyon Lake area. I was happy and grateful to see Amos Smolik standing on the barren foundation of his home beside Rapid Creek about one hundred yards below Canyon Lake Park amidst tons of rubble. Amos and his family were close friends of mine, and I offered him my sympathy. He told me about the serious damage they experienced in the two floods in 1962, which caused extensive structural damage to more than three hundred mobile homes and houses but no loss of life. He spoke of the Small Business Administration (SBA) loan of ten thousand dollars that he had received to repair his family's home ten years ago, with only six payments left outstanding. He added, "Now, I'm not sure what we'll do." At the moment, I did not have an answer.

While we stacked tons of debris, I wondered whether it was prudent policy for any federal, state, or local government to continue flood recovery programs and massive federal loans for rebuilding and repairing homes along the banks of Rapid Creek, where there was a

clear historical record of death and destruction from flooding. All levels of government needed a more radical vision of recovery that made economic sense and would save lives. Nothing was clear or obvious to me at the time, but preventing a disaster like this one, with so many lives lost, had to be a priority.

Chief Messer requested that I meet him at the new police headquarters. We drove to Frontier Ford on East Boulevard to order six replacement vehicles for the police department. The car lot was a gigantic mess, with dozens of cars piled up helter-skelter on all four sides of the structure. We found Larry Patnoe, the auto-leasing manager, a few minutes later. He said, "I heard about your problem with the damaged police cars and ordered six new ones, with complete apparatus, yesterday afternoon. I used my phone at home."

When we returned to police headquarters, I met John Phelps, chair of the Pennington County Democratic Party. He said that South Dakota Senator George McGovern and his wife, Eleanor, would be arriving soon with a mob of national reporters. The McGovern presidential campaign had not crossed my mind since Friday afternoon. Senator McGovern was climbing in the polls, had earned enough support to qualify for Secret Service protection, was leading in several states, and was flying into Rapid City on his way to Wisconsin. National Democrats suggested he might win the Wisconsin primary and roll forward to the Democratic nomination for president.

During the next few hours I gave the senator and his wife a tour of the city from Canyon Lake to the fairgrounds and showed them the vacant lot where my family lived from 1947 to 1956. He said, "Your city looks worse than some neighborhoods in Berlin when my crew and I flew a B-24 into the last remaining airport in Berlin. The plane was filled with food to feed the starving German children at the close of World War II." Rapid City needed the senator and his staff to manage our appeal for federal funds of all varieties to spark the recovery.

When I got back to the courthouse, Charley Swander asked me to join Lloyd St. Pierre and Ron Stephenson for a serious meeting. "This is very sensitive," he said as he closed the door to the private office where they were waiting. All of our elected officials were deeply concerned about how complex the state and local assistance programs were and

Rapid City Mayor Don Barnett, right, gave Senator George McGovern and his wife Eleanor a tour of the flood-damaged area.

felt they needed to hire a professional to help them manage the recovery from the county's perspective. Their choice was Dick Trankle.

Trankle was a native of Rapid City, a major in the National Guard, and was currently the civil defense director for South Dakota with an office in Pierre. He was working with General Corning's staff and the civil defense board in the courthouse. St. Pierre said, "Don, will you please meet privately with General Corning and ask him to release Major Trankle from his military duties with the guard? We'll immediately appoint him acting director of the Pennington County Civil Defense Board."

I agreed but asked, "Why not call the general from here?"

All three shook their heads. "It's too sensitive, Don. Please speak directly with Duke and ask him, as a personal favor to you, to pull this off." When I found the general, he was quick to respond. He released Major Trankle from his duties and provided a jeep for his use during his employment with Pennington County. The county commissioners appointed Trankle acting director of the Pennington County Civil Defense Office ninety minutes later.

Bob Rosenheim from the HUD regional office in Denver stopped at the courthouse, and we agreed to meet at my office early on Monday morning. Swanny provided a guided tour of the flood zone. The city council wanted an emergency meeting Sunday night; DeeDee Ghere and Charley Swander contacted all the council members.

On Sunday night, the council met in a small room with a large round table illuminated by one small lightbulb. This time Jerry Shoener, our most experienced city council member and a senior executive at the *Rapid City Journal*, was able to attend. His newspaper printed fifty thousand extra copies of the Sunday edition for distribution all over the Great Plains. Many became collectors' items for historians, libraries, and the general public. I left the door open, and councilman Earl Huntington offered a short prayer. Carroll Goodwin from HUD in Denver was there, as was Bill Cannallas from OEP. Swanny was there with his wisdom and engineering perspective.

Kay Rippentrop was her usual efficient, helpful self at the meeting. She distributed a list of the missing firemen and their dependents, as well as the name of the man from the police reserve who perished. I informed the council about the status of the water treatment plant and the urgent need to complete repairs. Swanny expressed concern about Don Wessel's health; dedicated to his duties at the water plant, he refused to go home and sleep. After summarizing the status of the city departments, I introduced Bill Cannallas to discuss the forthcoming delivery of a thousand mobile homes to Ellsworth. I said, "As soon as we complete repairs of the existing mobile home parks or build new parks at safe locations, Colonel Bennett will hire local contractors to move the homes to the pads."

Bill unrolled a large city map. "I need your authorization to repair these six mobile home parks circled in red." The council strained to see. Each park abutted Rapid Creek, and each was 80 to 100 percent destroyed by the flood. Bill said, "OEP will be ready in thirty-six hours to take bids from area and regional contractors to repair 500, maybe 550, partially damaged spaces near the creek and complete the work within a very few weeks. We'll also build several hundred new pads throughout the city."

A few of the council asked questions, while Swanny sat silently with

his eyes closed. I had been thinking long and hard about this situation, but I had not discussed it with him or anybody else. Swanny's insights had made a profound impact upon the city since 1947. We met daily during my four years of public service as mayor. Every discussion with Swanny was a learning experience. This visionary man was a great teacher, a loyal, professional city employee, and one of the closest friends I have ever enjoyed.

After a minute or two of silence, Swanny spoke the first words of eternal wisdom about the city's recovery. "No!" he exclaimed. "No! We cannot sentence the survivors to one more night on the suicidal floodplain." Kay wrote down Swanny's exact words. Her meeting minutes should be displayed in a museum.

Silence gripped the room. "Sentence" is a strong word. A judge might *sentence* a killer to die on the gallows. Swanny had our attention. "I've worked for the city since the 1940s. This is my fourth flood; one in 1952, two in 1962, and this disaster. That's an average of one flood every six years. The old-timers tell me the flood in 1907 was a much larger disaster than this one."

Swanny continued, "We must define a radical recovery plan. If not, future floods will kill more people from now until kingdom come. We can't move or relocate the entire city. This city is located where it is today because people in the 1870s and 1880s needed the hay meadows on both sides of Rapid Creek." He spoke very slowly. "Nobody slept in those meadows!"

"It would be absolute nonsense and premeditated suicide for future generations if this city government, after this terrible moment in time, repairs the mobile home parks near the creek and requires our survivors, as the stated public policy of this city government, to sleep again near the obvious and terrible dangers within this urban floodplain."

More silence. Tears flowed down Swanny's cheeks. This was the defining moment of the professional engineer's career. The pause lasted a long, long time.

Council President Larry Lytle agreed emphatically. "Swanny's right. There is no need to rush on this. I move the council instruct OEP to stop immediately all plans to repair the mobile home parks near the creek." Al Wilson seconded his motion. The motion passed unanimous-

ly. I nodded to Kay, and she inserted my positive vote into the temporary minutes of the meeting on this historic action.

Tom Hennies stepped into the room as Swanny buried his face in his hands, leaned forward with his elbows on his knees, and wept. I called Tom to my side and said, "Swanny's exhausted. Please drive him home." He handed me a note before they left the room together. I read his note to the council. "Six new police cars will be in service by Monday afternoon." I stuffed it in my binder.

A minute or two later Charley Swander broke the silence. He asked for an official council meeting at city hall on Monday night, with reporters present, to hash over a stack of issues the county needed all of us to address. He said, "We have so many urgent issues. We're all too tired to make rational decisions now."

I heard Carroll Goodwin from HUD whisper, "We'll move everybody!"

I glanced at my notes and said, "Before we adjourn, I need authority from the council to hire a local law firm to help the city lease lands, far distant from the Rapid Creek floodplain, on several vacant areas for the construction of temporary mobile home parks. We'll call these OEP parks. We'll need land for one thousand temporary homes for flood victims. We need to designate the sites with speed. OEP and the city staff will begin this work immediately. Officials from HUD will help with every component of these projects. The city will waive normal zoning procedures and declare these actions emergencies." The council granted me the necessary authority, and the meeting ended.

Some of the members lingered to chat. Dr. Lytle said, "There is no doubt about it. This disaster is one of the largest floods ever to hit Rapid City, but it's not the biggest." We listened carefully. "My father owned a business in New Underwood in 1907 and was in Rapid City during the first large flood in city history. He said a big, strong cowboy could not swim a strong horse across Rapid Creek in the deep water running through The Gap between Hangman's Hill and M Hill for two full weeks during the 1907 flood."

He continued, "This was before the construction of Deerfield Dam in the 1940s and Pactola Dam in the 1950s in the higher elevations where Rapid Creek starts as a tiny stream. Think of the gigantic vol-

umes of water that drained into Rapid Creek in 1907. I hope all of us keep this fact in mind during our recovery from this disaster."

This profound history lesson remained on our minds during the formation of our massive relocation plan during the terrible summer of 1972. Earl Hausle, the councilman from Ward Five and a skilled economist and historian at the School of Mines, reminded the council about Larry's history lesson many times during the following years. Earl and Larry made their point during dozens of public meetings as the theme for the 1972 recovery came closer to reality. Later that summer Earl completed several hundred hours of oral history research with tribal elders on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Indian reservations. He asked them, "Did your tribes camp and hunt for game where Rapid City is located today?"

"No, for two reasons," the leaders said. "At the base of those valleys, there were too many floods and too many bears."

Rapid Creek had overflowed its banks numerous times before 1972, an indication that the floodplain should be avoided as a building site.

Before we split up, Larry, Jerry Shoener, and Art LaCroix stopped at my chair to visit privately. Art said, "We found six more bodies in my zone during the last hour." Larry reported that his team had found five. Jerry offered to drive out to the water plant to talk to Don Wessel and beg him to rest.

"Thanks, Jerry. We can't replace that man. Swanny's out of gas tonight, but he'll be back to work in the morning. I'll ask him to assign Ernie Hansen to work full time with Don at the plant. I'll be asking all of you for guidance and a back-up plan if we fail to bring the plant into service before the reservoirs are empty." It was an alarming moment. I did not withhold information from the council; they were the essential decision makers at each step along the trail to survival. For these decisions, eleven heads were far better than one, and we were all bordering on exhuastion. I scribbled a note in large letters in my binder: "Bottled Water."

I stopped at Swanny's house before I went home. His wife Stella invited me inside and brought me a glass of ice water. "He's taking a shower and is dead tired. He only slept two or three hours last night."

A few minutes later Swanny entered the room wearing his robe. We shook hands, and there was an awkward silence. Finally, I said, "I am proud of you and even more proud of your wisdom and courage in making such a strong and clear point. I'm also proud of the council for endorsing your concept."

He looked me in the eyes. "I was too tired to argue. If they had rejected my suggestion, I was planning to resign on the spot."

I barked, "That's bullcrap! You'd never leave this city in the lurch like that. Think of it, Leonard. The council unanimously supported you. Now, we'll devise a plan for this recovery that matches your wisdom at the meeting tonight. Your concept is brilliant. Future generations will remember this. I'm gonna write a book about it someday."

We smiled and shook hands. I read true affection in his eyes. Words weren't needed. He walked me to the door, and I patted him on the shoulder. "See you in the morning at city hall." He nodded, and I drove home.

The First Full Week: A New Kind of Normal

On Monday morning from home, I called George Cunningham, the senior administrative and political assistant to Senator McGovern in Washington, D.C. I asked him to provide us with every accounting and reporting manual he could find at OEP. My intent and responsibility was to help our civil servants become familiar with these complex federal programs so we could maximize the federal reimbursement for flood-related city expenditures and accurately account for all of it, staying in compliance with the rules that came with President Nixon's disaster declaration. I said, "The federal bucks are floating around Rapid City like leaves off a grove of cottonwoods. My goal is to keep me, the council, and the staff out of the federal pokey." Cunningham agreed to send us fifteen copies of everything they could find that might help.

Back at city hall, we again had phone service and power. I found Bob Rosenheim and Carroll Goodwin waiting in my office with Swanny and Larry Finnerty, a key city engineer. Without fanfare, I told Bob, "Sir, I think you should round up all the feds and fly back to Denver at noon today." He was startled.

I explained that we weren't ready to handle the requirements of federal assistance programs in this crisis mode. "We don't have time to count the bodies, quantify our losses, and approximate our needs. The city can only provide limited potable water, and we're breaking in six new police cars today." I listed about a dozen short-term emergencies. I asked him to come back in a few days to meet with me and the council. "By then," I said, "we'll be ready and you'll be ready."

Finn gave me some dreaded news. "The National Guard found Dick Rippe's body near Canyon Lake. His wife was nearby." There was silence in my small office; Swanny used a tissue to brush the tears off his face. Bob Rosenheim stood and extended his hand. "I am sorry for your loss. It's almost like a war zone in Rapid City these days. I'm going back to Denver."

Carroll Goodwin passed out a thick federal publication, *NDP: A Federal Neighborhood Development Program*. He said, "Study this. One of these projects will fund the total cost for elevation surveys and related data to start the ball rolling. Your city has one of these applications

started already. We'll modify it for the first application for funds related to your flood. We'll be back soon."

After the meeting, Swanny and I went to the water plant to respond to Don Wessel's urgent request for more divers and ten more men to work with them. He said, "We can't repair or replace the intake system until we clear more debris out of the settling basins. This emergency is getting more serious by the hour." Colonel Bennett agreed to release his divers from their normal duty station. Ray Lucan assembled six local divers to work with these airmen and those from four other bases in six-hour shifts. With their life-saving assistance, the divers had the basins cleaned out by Wednesday morning.

My next stop was the Catron Funeral Home. My friend Ozzie Osheim offered good news about the three funeral homes in Rapid City: repairs were complete, and all were now functioning. In addition to the city's eleven morticians, forty professional associates, mostly from South Dakota, had arrived on Sunday to help.

I said, "The churches must be overwhelmed."

"Probably not, Don. We are scheduling a funeral every thirty minutes, and most of them will only be short graveside rites, about thirty minutes in duration. Local ministers will be working overtime to care for the grieving families. It is heartbreaking duty. Many of the churches will hold memorial services for victims later in June or July after this crisis slows down."

Back at my office, I started my research to find a few commercial bottled-water companies and arrange for supplies to be sent, via trucks in convoy, to Rapid City on very short notice. With JoAnn's help, we identified eight suppliers in Denver and the Twin Cities. Privately I telephoned each one and received affirmation that each would be willing and able to meet an order of five thousand cases of potable water per day for fourteen days.

I shared my research only with Charley Swander, and he wondered out loud whether we should order 150,000 cases of water outright to be on the safe side. We decided to wait for further data from the guys at the water plant, but Charley glared at me and said, "If we need the water, later might be too damn late!" I locked my notes in my desk and showed him where the envelope was hidden.

I met with city finance officer Wes Richmond, Larry Karns, George Wilson, and Merton Tice, the city attorney, to ask them to begin a search for every available dollar in the city treasury and prepare a list of how, and from which accounts, the city could use several million dollars for emergency expenditures related to this disaster and our recovery. Wes was startled. "What about state law and the city charter?"

I responded, "I just don't know. When the council meets tonight, I will ask them for extraordinary powers to use all available city funds to meet this emergency. We'll worry about legalities later, after we find and ID the bodies and make progress with potable water and replacement housing and the other massive problems that boggle my mind." I added, "Wes, you and your staff will cover my tail and keep strict records on every nickel we spend. I'll personally sign the checks for these emergency actions."

Florence Arnold from payroll joined the meeting. I asked her if the Burroughs check-writing machine was operational. She smiled and assured me that they would process paychecks on Thursday and issue them on Friday, just like clockwork. I hurried to her chair and hugged her. I told them about my strict rule as commander for 280 men in Vietnam. "If we paid the men on time and fed the men on time, the men showed up for work. You're helping this city meet this challenge with your brains, dedication, and honesty. Our people are grateful for your service."

The Rapid City superintendent of schools, Dr. Charles Lindley, and I had a short phone call. His concern was how the new mobile home parks might affect the elementary schools in the city. He said they needed time to arrange faculty and related administration issues to ease these students into new schools. He assigned Dr. Ray Reiff from his office to work with the city on the site selection process. We agreed and shared the hope that the new housing units would be occupied as soon as possible and before school started in September.

I met over the noon hour with Bill Cannallas from OEP and Special City Attorney Gene Lebrun to manage the terms of land-lease arrangements with several landowners. Ray Rieff from the school district, George Miller from the planning commission, and Fred Whiteface, the new director of the city planning department, joined the meeting and

used the city map on the conference room wall to examine potential safe sites throughout the city for temporary mobile home parks. The sites were designated by 20 June, and construction bids were underway soon thereafter. Local contractors were hard at work on 940 pads and finished the first sites in early July. All of it was paid for by OEP. The city financial reserves remained strong. Contractors completed the sites in early August, and displaced families moved in by August fifteenth, meeting the goal Dr. Lindley had set.

Monday afternoon, Don Wessel called us with an update. "The first shipment of repair parts for the plant arrived at noon on the Frontier jet from Denver. I called General Corning, and he arranged for his men to use army trucks and haul the apparatus to the plant. The pumps arrive tomorrow. We're making serious progress!"

Four water-main repair crews worked twelve-hour shifts around the clock. Don's plan was to start pouring concrete on Tuesday for part of these repairs, but he was concerned with the weight of the trucks and the condition of the narrow road leading to the plant. He asked Swanny to arrange for a few loads of gravel. He added, "We can't live with any delay. I'd hate to see the trucks sink axle-deep in the mud near the plant."

Work on the road started two hours later. George Seniuk and his city crews completed the job quickly, with the National Guard providing rollers and compactors. Once the road was stable, Wessel's crews completed the concrete work by late Tuesday night. Finally sounding optimistic, Don predicted, "We might have safe water by this weekend."

At the opening of our Monday night city council meeting, Wes Richmond distributed his report on available funds to the council and the reporters, and we opened with prayer. I summarized the loss of our gallant city employees, and Chief Johnson added, "Thus far, we have not found two brave firemen." Tears flowed freely.

The first item was Larry Lytle's motion from the emergency meeting the previous night to prohibit OEP from repairing the damaged mobile home parks within the floodplain. It passed again as official business of the council. I asked Coleen Schmidt to insert my "yes" vote to the motion. The second motion concerned hundreds of homes in the flooded areas of the city. The council had studied the report from the

civil defense board. Larry was ready again: "I move adoption of the following policy. If a home is deemed by the civil defense board to be more than 50 percent damaged, the city will not issue the homeowner a building permit for repairs." Al Wilson seconded the motion, and, surprisingly, there were no objections from the guests at the meeting. It passed unanimously. Again, I had my vote added to the total.

Our next item of business was my request for extraordinary powers in case they were needed. I said, "South Dakota has never had a crisis like this. I need this power. It might not be possible to gather a quorum of the council to approve expenditures for emergencies, which may relate to life-or-death issues."

Wes Richmond's report showed eight million dollars available for emergency measures. He said, "Mister Mayor, I don't think this will be necessary. If we manage our financial issues properly, the city will make normal expenditures out of the general fund and the enterprise funds. After we pay the bills, I will immediately file for reimbursement for all flood-related expenditures from the feds. The turnaround time will be short if the city files the forms correctly."

Nevertheless, Al Wilson moved to grant me the requested powers, and Earl seconded the motion. It passed unanimously. Coleen recorded my vote as yes. I retained this authority but did not use it and requested the council to revoke the authority several months later.

Councilman Swander handled twenty-two items related to actions by the civil defense board, and the council approved each one. The meeting ended at about 10:30 p.m. As we walked out of the courtroom, a policeman handed me a message from Chief Messer. I read it aloud for the council and the reporters. "The missing list remains above four thousand names."

Charley Swander and I were the last to leave, but we were stopped by the sight of Tom Lane waiting at my office door. His concern was not life-or-death, but it was real. He said, "Mayor, tourism has dropped off to darn near nothin'! The parking lot at Mountain Rushmore is empty. Occupancy at the motels is far below 10 percent. Visitor levels at the Reptile Gardens are way down. We have to do something!"

Governor Kneip had told me the same thing during a call from the capitol. The state was building a new advertising blast to start within

Reports of flood damage at locations in the Black Hills, such as this bridge on Elk Creek, threatened the area's tourism-based economy.

two days in markets in the seven key states that usually sent 80 percent of the annual visitors to the Black Hills. This interval between the flood and the saturation campaign was several days. The urgency was now.

I said, "This will have a terribly negative impact on city sales tax collections and taxes for the civic center."

Tom said, "I don't have the authority yet, but if a solution requires local money, the chamber will kick in our share." We decided to call the governor's office. Ted Muenster, his senior assistant, answered the call on the governor's private line, and I explained our concern.

The governor, Ted, and Rapid City's former mayor, Jack Allmon, were already far ahead of us. The state launched their radically expanded advertising campaign in twelve states only twenty-four hours later. Tourism increased rapidly and was back to 90 percent of normal by the first of July and exceeded 1971 levels for July through October.

Two other opportunities presented themselves for me to encourage tourism. The first came on Wednesday, 14 June, in an appearance with John Palmer of the NBC *Today Show* program, aired live at 7:00 a.m. eastern time. Palmer originally planned to give a brief report on the flood and then interview me for a few minutes. His first question was to ask my age—not surprising, since I was the youngest mayor in the country in 1972.

"I'm twenty-nine, Mr. Palmer. A rapidly aging twenty-nine."

That broke the ice. We talked about what had made the storm so disastrous and about the more than two thousand names on the missing persons list. I gave credit to the volunteers, the South Dakota National Guard, our civil defense leaders, policemen, and firemen who were working tirelessly to relieve this uncertainty. I also had the chance to talk about the new plans for strict flood-control policies.

Palmer asked, "What is your largest problem today?" This was my opening to reassure tourists that South Dakota was ready and open for visitors, despite the flood. I invited the *Today Show* viewers to visit this wonderful land of infinite variety and experience the inspiration of Mount Rushmore and the history of the Black Hills. Happily, the network instantly expanded their flood discussion with fifteen additional minutes of coverage. I answered hard news questions for five minutes and chattered about tourism for ten. I closed with this assurance: "South Dakota will offer a vacation your family will never forget."

The second opportunity came in a phone call to my office from Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago on 16 June. He offered his sympathy and support and even offered to send a fire truck if we needed one. We did not, but I asked for his help in encouraging Chicagoans, especially his city employees, to consider a trip to South Dakota for their summer vacation. He eagerly agreed, and we sent him boxes of tourism-related information to distribute.

When I finally got home after the Monday council meeting, I received a phone call from Chief Johnson. The body of a second fireman had been found, and he and Dean planned to meet with the man's family at noon the next day. On Tuesday morning, Ron Stephenson, the public spokesman for the civil defense board, and Richard Trankle, the acting civil defense director for Pennington County, announced their

plan to confirm the accuracy of the thousands of names, many of them tourists, on the missing persons list. KOTA managed the project. In his calming voice, Verne Sheppard, the most renowned radio broadcaster in western South Dakota, slowly read the list of names in a simulcast on KOTA and every radio station in the region. This simulcast became a model used in future disasters throughout the United States. Listeners were advised to call a special number at the courthouse if they had knowledge about the current status of any individual listed. The board used this process for several days. Hundreds of people called in to provide updated information, and the number of names on the list rapidly decreased. Thousands of those listed were tourists.

Charles Childs, a longtime resident of Rapid City and a World War II bomber pilot, and his group of volunteers tracked down hundreds of names to be absolutely certain a person was safe and sound before the name was removed from the list. Judge Marshall Young maintained the computerized master list of missing persons and updated it four times each day.

Thirteen days later, at 4:30 on the morning of 26 June, I heard a knock on my office window. It was Chuck Childs, who shared his good news while tears ran down his face. "Mr. Mayor, my volunteers have the missing list down to twenty-five names!" It was a somber and yet joyfully historic moment in the recovery.

The county commissioners met daily at the courthouse, and on Tuesday morning, 13 June, Charley Swander and I were in attendance when Lloyd St. Pierre announced that Robert Finch, senior assistant to President Nixon, would be flying into Ellsworth Air Force Base for a tour of the four-county area. He and Ron Stephenson were to show him around and then meet with us.

Ron told Charley and me privately about a phone call from the White House, this time to announce that First Lady Pat Nixon would arrive in Rapid City the following Sunday for a memorial service to honor the flood victims. He said, "She doesn't speak at events like this but represents the president. We gotta get cracking and put the program together." Charley suggested we use the gym at Stevens High School, the biggest auditorium in town, and involve the churches. I left them to make the plans and returned to work.

On Wednesday, after my interview on the *Today Show*, I went home, changed clothes, and rushed to the water plant. Don Wessel wasn't there; he was sleeping at his son's home. I was relieved that he was taking a nap. In the meantime, his crews followed his directions to a T. Allen Kleinsasser gave me the good news that water levels in the reservoirs remained high. "We'll be okay for a few more days," he said. "Mr. Wessel will have a timetable for completion of these repairs within a day or two."

One of the volunteer efforts early in our recovery required serious diplomacy. Members of the Mennonite Disaster Foundation, representing Mennonite colonies in several eastern states and the Dakotas, arrived to offer their services to the people in damaged neighborhoods. A problem developed, however, when local, regional, and national reporters swarmed around these workers and prepared feature stories about their service. The publicity was an unfortunate shock, and on Wednesday morning, their leader sought me out. He said, "We did not come to Rapid City to seek praise or publicity for our assistance. This attention violates the very foundation of our involvement with your disaster survivors. Our home communities will shun us, and our families will be held in absolute disrespect."

As tears streamed down his face, he said that they were prepared to stay for the summer to help and offered donations of equipment, tools, and cleaning material, but only if reporters agreed to stop covering their work. I respected his position and responded quickly. All of those in charge of the recovery agreed to ask journalists to cease their reporting about the magnificent work of the Mennonite families. The reporters cooperated.

Later that day, I received a call from Harold Buckingham, who lived in a beautiful home fifteen yards from the south side of Rapid Creek. His home was 90 percent destroyed, but it wasn't the family's pending relocation that worried him. He said, "Mayor Don, it's ninety-six degrees today, and there is something strange about the pile of flood debris in my backyard." My mind raced to a fearful conclusion: the third fireman? I told him that I would send a crew out immediately. Two hours later, Chief Johnson and his men found the third fireman's body.

Swanny and I met with Don Wessel at the water plant later that day.

Deep layers of wreckage posed immense clean-up challenges and sometimes concealed bodies of flood victims.

He was gray with fatigue and spoke softly. "We'll run a few batches of water through the plant tonight. I just met with Chief Johnson. The firemen will use a few dozen fire hydrants near the creek, waste a few thousand gallons of potable water, and flush down a few streets and several bridges to remove more mud, dust, and debris. The wasted water will flow into the creek. This will also force the potentially polluted water out of the water mains." Swanny agreed, and they discussed engineering and technical issues that were above my understanding. I left with Don's reassuring assessment: "We're just about home free. We might have safe water for city-wide consumption by tomorrow morning."

On Thursday morning, I headed back to the water plant. Don still hadn't bathed or shaved and was running on absolute empty. "It's on,"

he said. "You can tell folks to stop boiling their water. The water is safe, and we've been filling the reservoirs since four o'clock this morning." I said I was thrilled and would contact Dick Trankle at civil defense to make the announcement.

Don finally drove to his son's home and collapsed with exhaustion. The toll on his health was grave; he was able to return to work for just two to three hours a day. After his sick leave benefits with full pay ran out, I gave Wes Richmond instructions with support from the council to maintain Don's normal pay until he recovered. While this was technically a violation of state law, when we received the city audit for the year, there was no mention of any payroll irregularities for Rapid City's Water Department. I told the council, "Case closed!"

I did find myself in trouble with the safe water announcement. Before I could make the call to Dick, I heard from Commissioner Stu Steele, a reporter at KOTA Radio. He had heard the water plant was just about back in production and wanted to know when the city would have safe water. "It's safe right now, Stu. I'll call the brass at the CD office. Are you at the courthouse?"

"No, I'm at my desk at KOTA. I gotta rush."

KOTA earned their scoop again and made the announcement immediately. The business of radio news is highly competitive, and it was a serious mistake on my part to leak this vital information regarding public safety to a reporter. I was in my car when the police dispatcher radioed and asked me to call Dick immediately. "Please tell him I'll be at his office in four or five minutes." Dick was polite but gave me a stern lesson in civil defense procedures that I did not soon forget. I apologized to him and the civil defense board.

My next stop was a meeting with a great friend of mine, Floyd Fitzgerald, at the Sioux Park Stadium. He had been involved with every discussion about baseball and Sioux Park Stadium since 1947, when he opened his Dutch Boy Paint Store and home-painting business after serving in the Japanese Theater during World War II. I had known him since I was a boy.

The damage to the ballpark was extensive. Floyd and his supervisors needed expert advice on how to restore the grass to its pre-flood con-

dition. I arranged for Bill Noordermeer, the parks superintendent, to visit the field and advise Floyd and his volunteers. Thanks to Bill, the stadium grass was in perfect condition for the Fourth of July American Legion Tournament. Bill took the opportunity to remind me of the urgent need for funds for park restoration. He estimated the cost of park repairs near Rapid Creek at half a million dollars over the next two years. As with almost every conversation I had, I made copious notes and shared the information with the council.

By noon on Thursday, JoAnn's mom had returned with our daughters from their visit in Belle Fourche. We met them all for lunch at the south-side McDonald's. Enjoying our meal together and the girls' chatter about their visit, I relaxed for the first time in many days. JoAnn tapped me and whispered, "What does that lady want?"

I looked up to see a woman making a beeline for our table. A complete stranger, she took my hands and smiled and then gave me a big hug. "Mayor Barnett, for the past week this entire city has been saying our prayers for you." Her warmth brought tears to my eyes, and I was conscious of everyone in the restaurant watching. I dried my eyes and introduced her to my family, and soon dozens of customers joined us, shaking my hand and offering kind words to my family. My private regret was that the heroic men and women who had helped during the recovery were not with me.

When I returned to city hall, a small delegation of American Indian friends was waiting. These were men I had known since boyhood. They expressed concern that their city government might fail to distribute certain recovery programs and financial assistance fairly to the Indian citizens who had suffered so greatly in the disaster. I quickly appointed three of the men—James Emery, Sr., Ruben McCloskey, and Bob Rogers—to lead a special committee to assist in delivering positive programs to our native community. A few days later, I designated this committee of three to lead all contacts with HUD, OEP, the Indian Health Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The four of us held telephone conferences with the regional leaders of these agencies and designated the Black Hats, an elite group of Indian firefighters, to manage and direct financial assistance to American Indians within our city.

These men and the Black Hats opened an office at Central High School, joining the other charities, agencies, and federal departments operating there. Eva Nichols and Muriel Waukazoo managed the office, which was open sixteen to eighteen hours per day. By streamlining the delivery of services from one location, all of the relief organizations were able to provide generous assistance for American Indian disaster victims. This volunteer committee eliminated red tape and was helpful in advocating for their people.

That afternoon I called the managers of the bottled-water firms I had talked to earlier to thank them and let them know that we wouldn't need their services. Wes and I distributed the OEP accounting manuals from Washington to the departments and set times to meet with each leader. In the meantime, Bob Rosenheim called from Denver and asked if we could meet for breakfast on Friday. He said, "We have a plan." I agreed and promised to bring along Swanny and Larry Finnerty.

Thursday evening, our recovery plan got a big and unexpected boost from three professors on the faculty of the South Dakota School of Mines in Rapid City. They issued an academic paper with a press release to the *Rapid City Journal* that gained wide circulation in the newspapers and electronic media throughout the region. The article was signed by Dr. Perry H. Rahn, Dr. John C. Mickelson, and Dr. Jack Redden, professor emeritus. The headline read, "Civil Engineers Do Their Professional Duty." Their statement was powerful. They had presaged their remarks by stating, "As scientists, we believe we will be criminally negligent in the saving of lives by not speaking out." After explaining the science behind their study of major floods on Rapid Creek, which appeared to happen at fifty-year intervals, they wrote, "There is no guarantee that the 50-year flood could not occur tomorrow. *We suggest the city government not permit the building of dwellings on the Rapid Creek flood plain*" (author's emphasis).

With this academic backing, the council and I now had ammunition and much more confidence for making our first decisions about the recovery. The three professors remained active supporters and expert witnesses at dozens of public meetings where the goals of the 1972 recovery were defined, adjusted, and refined between June and August. I called on each of these nationally known experts to provide more sci-

entific, academic, and engineering counsel and support for our plans to evacuate the lowest reaches of the floodplain as the central theme for our vision of a full recovery and a safe future.

As promised, Robert Rosenheim and Carroll Goodwin were waiting for us in the restaurant at the Hotel Alex Johnson on Friday morning. I brought them up to date on our progress since their return to Denver on Monday. Bob tapped his suit pocket on the left side, just over his heart. He said, "I've got a letter here in my pocket. President Nixon appointed me by executive order to be his personal representative and chairman and director of the coordinated federal flood recovery programs for the South Dakota four-county disaster area." The task involved overseeing delivery of coordinated federal assistance from fifteen federal agencies. The single exception to Bob's authority was the regional commander of the United States Army Corps of Engineers in Omaha, Nebraska.

Carroll also had good news for us. He said, "HUD will instantly approve a three-hundred-thousand-dollar planning grant to enable your city to have sufficient funds to make your first decisions about this recovery." The money would be available seventy-two hours after I signed the application, which he offered to help Swanny complete within a few days. This was the program Carroll had defined for us in our first meeting on Monday morning—preparing topographic maps of the land along the banks of Rapid Creek from the state fish hatchery above Canyon Lake to the sewage treatment plant in Rapid Valley in order to define the floodplain clearly.

Sleep was wonderful on Friday night—eight full hours. I was up early with a shorter "to do" list and without new problems. Almost everybody in the city departments worked overtime with me on Saturday to keep on top of flood-related details, overtime pay, and more. I sent everyone home at 6:00 p.m. and faced a mountain of paperwork in the privacy of my office.

Soon, heavy rains began to fall, and then it poured. The clouds were dark, and there was little wind. The streetlights, triggered by light-sensitive devices, flashed on early. After Ron Messer and Ken Johnson arrived for our meeting, we reviewed the OEP manuals and discussed the process involved in applying for federal reimbursements

for the normal and overtime hours our public safety professionals had worked during and after the flood.

Thirty minutes later, my phone rang. I answered to hear William Duhamel, the son of the owner at KOTA, on the other end. I pressed the speaker button, and we all heard his message. He said the weather bureau had just called with an order for KOTA to broadcast a serious alarm and warning about the weather. Bill wanted us to know that forecasters were very concerned that conditions could mean another storm and flood.

I wanted to believe the call was a prank, but Bill assured me that the weather bureau was deadly serious. I dialed the number he had given me, and the meteorologist came on the line. He said, "Mayor, this is no joke. These clouds are identical to last week. Put out the warning. This is official. Ellsworth called and agreed. Their radar confirms what we're seeing at Rapid City Regional."

I was afraid of crying wolf and risking the trust people had placed in me, but I agreed to make the announcement and hung up. Ron and Ken were stunned but ready to respond with strength, calling in all their shifts and alerting the neighborhoods near Rapid Creek.

I ran the stoplights to reach the KOTA studio in two minutes, where I recorded the warning, relaying the weather bureau's storm and flood advisory for residents of Rapid City and Pennington County who lived close to the Rapid Creek drainage area. I defined six neighborhoods and ordered everyone in those areas to move to high ground immediately. To emphasize my grave concern, I added, "I am using my power and authority as your mayor to establish martial law in Rapid City. Move away from Rapid Creek and low drainage areas throughout the city immediately." The TV station ran my alert four times over the storm-warning emblem, waited a few seconds, and ran it again as the radio stations broadcast the warning continuously.

The police department was in full force when I arrived. An officer called for two fire trucks, three cars for backup, and one ambulance to speed to the east end of Meade Street in Robbinsdale. I drove west to check the level of the creek near Jackson Boulevard. At Stevens High School, several hundred citizens were safely parked in their cars in the

lot. The hill on Soo San Drive at the junior high school was clogged with traffic. Hundreds of cars lined the streets and filled the neighboring church parking lots.

Miraculously, the rain began to decrease, and I saw a break in the clouds and a patch of blue sky over Hangman's Hill and Dinosaur Park. I drove quickly to General Corning's office at Camp Rapid, where the major general was standing in the doorway to his office, motioning for me to join him.

"That was a great warning, Mr. Mayor," he said as he closed the door and looked me square in the eyes. "Don, I'm not sure that you as mayor can legally declare martial law." There was a pregnant pause. He smiled. "But I can. I'm a major general and commander of the citizen constabulary in South Dakota. If you require martial law to do your job, I'll declare martial law all over the Black Hills."

Colonel Mechling poked his head inside the office. "KOTA just sounded the all-clear. The weather bureau called off their alert."

I was embarrassed about my hasty decision to establish martial law and was ready to drive back to KOTA and apologize for my impetuous reaction. General Corning said, "No need, Mr. Mayor! You're damn near outta gas. Your youth and education—and your army service in Vietnam—led the city through this terrible week. You knew conditions were identical to last week. You did the right thing. The people respect firm commands and directions from their mayor. You're doing a good job!"

"Thanks, General. God sent some winds to blow those clouds around the Black Hills. It was our turn for a break."

I arrived at KOTA ten minutes later through heavy traffic and recorded a short message, thanking our citizens for responding so quickly and apologizing for any overreach on my part. I reminded listeners to attend the memorial service on Sunday afternoon at Stevens High School and said, "Let's be proud of Rapid City and welcome Mrs. Nixon to our city."

While I was at KOTA, I learned from Robb DeWall, the news director, that two young people had died after the storm warnings were issued. The boys, who were from out of town, had raced a van in panic

down Meade Street and were swept through the dead-end barricade at the east end of "Meade River." The county coroner counted these casualties as part of the 1972 disaster.

I headed home, but I didn't sleep well. We had made some big decisions during the past week, and now the details about how to make these progressive policies happen filled my days and nights. About 2:00 a.m., I got up and typed a basic outline for my remarks for the memorial service. Governor Kneip and I were to greet the First Lady as the honored guest and provide remarks. A combined choir representing many churches in the city would provide special music. JoAnn retyped my notes Sunday morning, and I was more confident that I was ready to speak.

Listening to the radio Sunday morning, I was gratified to hear the senior meteorologist at the weather bureau affirm my warning and say, "I'd give the same advice to Mayor Barnett that we gave him last night if the clouds on my radar are ever that dense and dangerous again. I'm glad we were wrong!"

As I welcomed Pat Nixon later that day, I expressed gratitude to the president and our appreciation for the professional work of the federal agencies. Included in my remarks was the following:

> No one can define the depth of grief and suffering in South Dakota. No one can define the monumental duties that we face as this recovery resumes on Monday morning. No one can define the width, depth, or staggering pain for the families who have lost so much and now search for peace, consolation, and contentment in the depth of their hearts. . . . However, no one can deny the strength of our survivors. No one can deny the determination of our city to grow and breathe and thrive. No one can deny the vision and determination of our people, the common men and women of this proud city, as we strive to restore our town with determination, pride, and our common concern for public safety, to its previous beauty and to our historic traditions of excellence, growth, and civic harmony.

I walked slowly to my chair and was shaking like a leaf. It always happened at the moment when I ended a major address.

The music was inspiring, as were the comments from Governor Kneip. After the program, Ron Stephenson announced that Mrs. Nix-

on would meet privately for a few minutes with local civil defense and state officials. Following guardsmen and Secret Service agents, JoAnn and I passed the choir, and I reached into the fourth row and gripped Millie Dieter's hand. She stepped down from the bleachers and walked with us into the dressing room. I had identified her husband's body at Behren's Mortuary. When she called to tell me how much it would mean to her to meet Mrs. Nixon, I promised to make the necessary arrangements. With permission from one of the agents, I approached the First Lady and thanked her for visiting Rapid City. I introduced JoAnn and Millie, saying quietly, "Millie's husband and daughter perished in the flood." We walked away as the two women retired to a corner of the dressing room, where they shared tears, hugs, and a cordial visit.

Never Again: Making the Vision a Reality

The next day, I was in Roosevelt Park as the bulldozers and crews were finishing their work to clear the creek bed of wreckage that clogged the free flow of water under the Omaha Street bridge. A dozen guardsmen helped with the search for bodies. In the midst of this heartbreaking, heavy work, a police officer found me to deliver a Western Union telegram.

Apprehensive, I opened the envelope and then relaxed. It was from an army friend from Vietnam, Capt. Jim Weadick. The regional "pinch-hitter" for the medical service corps, he had been assigned to fill in at half a dozen hospitals within 150 miles of my duty station at the 24th Evacuation Hospital when skilled leaders were required for special or emergency duties. Jim had performed heroically during the historic 1968 Tet Offensive before I arrived in Vietnam. He was also the most humorous person I had ever met. The telegram said simply, "God bless you, Barney." I instantly started crying. The pressure of the moment and the lack of sleep had caught up with me. Decades later, Jim is still one of my best friends, and I remain grateful for his kindness during the battle Rapid City was fighting.

Fred Whiteface, our city planning director, and Swanny were eager to start the policy formation for the flood recovery plan, which had a September first deadline. During the next week, we signed and sent off the application for a Neighborhood Development Program (NDP)

grant from the regional offices of HUD in Denver. Within a few days the grant for three hundred thousand dollars was federally approved. Once the topographic maps of the entire urban floodplain were prepared, the results defined the exact boundaries of the urban floodplain for "100-year" and "500-year" flood events. Taxpayers attended public meetings where each citizen was given ample opportunity to ask questions and make positive suggestions. The council needed and used the wisdom of the people.

The housing crisis was acute. Local developers rushed applications for platting and zoning approvals for new subdivisions in newly annexed areas far distant from Rapid Creek. These new developments were underway by early August. However, many homeowners could not qualify for a second home until the debt on their original home was managed, and that would require federal assistance.

We also needed to quantify the magnitude of the tax base that had been destroyed in the disaster, numbers important to both the council and the school board. City Tax Assessor Charles Cummings was a key advisor to these governmental bodies. He and his staff hiked the floodplain with maps, compiled lists by address of damaged homes and vacant lots, and prepared a first approximation of the properties that would never again generate property tax revenues. At the same time, Chuck monitored the sale of building permits and the projected date of occupancy of the new homes and commercial structures. During the following three years, private enterprise led the city to a restored and expanding tax base.

Wes Richmond prepared weekly financial reports to keep the council informed on the various city accounts. He was also key advisor to the council on issues relating to the economic ramifications of removing so much private property from the tax rolls. Wes admitted that he and Chuck Cummings were estimating when they projected that 15 percent of the city's tax base was gone. They were, however, hopeful that new residential and commercial construction would rapidly restore the tax base to pre-flood levels. The council used Wes's data at dozens of public meetings as our vision for recovery evolved into the formal application to HUD for federal funds to purchase 1,500 dwelling sites and approximately 140 businesses.

Inventorying flood-damaged property, like these homes where the water had yet to recede, was one of the first steps in relocating residents.

In early July, Richard Trankle delivered a $1.5 million check from OEP to Wes's office as partial reimbursement for the flood-related funds the city had thus far expended in disaster recovery. The county received $600,000. His prompt attention to detail and timely submission of forms accounted for the fast delivery of the funds.

I was focused on managing the department leaders and providing positive, constructive input to the decision-making process on dozens of recovery-related issues. I also spent a few hours each day near the creek visiting with the survivors to keep them informed on each possible avenue of recovery. As I was hiking along Rapid Creek near Sioux Park Stadium one day, I ran into a friend who was boarding up his home. It was about 60 percent damaged and unlivable at that time.

He said, "Please give me time to sell my damaged house before the city announces the recovery plan."

I told him what the city council members and I had been telling so many disaster victims. I encouraged him to be patient while we searched for the best recovery plan, including repurposing land for parks and recreational activities. "I'm not sure it's wise to encourage disaster victims to sell homes to a new generation of homeowners who will reside along the banks of Rapid Creek until the next disaster happens." My friend was willing to consider the wisdom of that approach.

I did not sense extreme rage or despair over this delay in defining our recovery plans. At our urging, the flood victims were patient and trusted the judgment of the civil defense board and city council until all recovery options were fully aired and discussed with massive citizen participation. The people supported this request, and we had a comprehensive plan in place fifty-seven days after the flood.

The nuts and bolts of recovery began to advance more rapidly. During June, Swanny had met with senior engineers within the State Highway Department to discuss the repair and replacement of major bridges located on state highways within the city. By 1 August, both units of government had a firm timetable for these massive investments by state government. Jerry Shoener resigned from the council several months later when Governor Kneip appointed him to the State Highway Commission. Jerry served the city well in this new position, keeping pressure on the commission to replace the bridges over East Boulevard and West Main.

In late June, City Attorney Merton Tice issued an order for the owners of flood-damaged private vehicles to retrieve them as soon as possible from the two locations where they had been placed. The city's secondary sources of potable water from galleries and well systems near Rapid Creek would be fully operational by early August.

The most encouraging factor during the first seventy-five days was the political harmony that existed between the city council, the county commissioners, and the school board. We met together many times and respected the duties of each unit of local government. Minor disagreements never exploded into raging controversies. This harmony remained in place as city policies evolved to evacuate the floodplain.

This cooperation included a positive relationship with various federal agencies, fueled by President Nixon's assistant, Robert Finch, who forcefully directed senior executives in fourteen federal agencies in Denver and the commander of the Army Corps of Engineers in Omaha to give the recovery in South Dakota their highest priority.

City council members and the county commissioners educated themselves about many positive avenues for the delivery of new housing products to meet the needs of the disaster survivors and low-income families. With council encouragement, the county commissioners constituted the Pennington County Public Housing Authority (PHA) and hired expert David Blair as director. Initial plans called for the creation of seven hundred affordable housing units throughout Rapid City and communities in rural Pennington County. Within a few weeks, the city planning commission approved platting and zoning applications by Blair and his commissioners. These projects provided 488 housing units for senior citizens, low-income families, and specialized housing for the physically and mentally impaired. This affordable housing concept became a model for disaster recovery on a nationwide basis. The PHA never utilized county property taxes and was financed with rental fees after federal funds were used for construction.

One option many older citizens recommended as a way to protect homes near Rapid Creek was the construction of a large dam at the mouth of Dark Canyon. These advocates claimed future floodwaters from Rapid Creek and the drainage areas near and above Wildcat Cave could be captured behind the multi-million-dollar structure. As part of the plan, the city would annex this area, and the Corps of Engineers would relocate a few dozen homes. The city would then permit flood victims below the dam to repair and rebuild their homes in their original locations along the scenic banks of Rapid Creek. The council and I doubted the dam would ever be built without a massive infusion of federal funds.

Colonel Richard Austin, a senior officer from the Corps of Engineers offices in Omaha, attended a citywide public meeting that attracted more than one thousand people. His opening remarks left no room for speculation about a possible flood-control dam above Canyon Lake. He said emphatically, "I can assure you of the following: The Corps

of Engineers has studied this concept for the past fifteen years. Such a structure is not economically feasible and will never be funded by the Army Corps of Engineers or the United States Congress. Now, I will be happy to hear your comments about the dam."

That settled that. Seventy-three people stated their names for the public record and strongly supported the concept of the dam. Colonel Austin refuted each statement with hard economic facts delivered in a courteous manner. Later, Swanny expressed what the council and I were thinking: "His comments are just what we needed. Now, we'll get down to brass tacks and complete our floodplain evacuation plan."

Without fanfare or publicity, Carroll Goodwin from HUD and Walter Linderman, a local banker and member of the city's statutory planning commission, using city blueprints of the residential and commercial developments, marked the tentative boundaries of the neighborhoods to be acquired and independently counted the private homes, businesses, and vacant lots near the creek. City engineers refined the maps in working sessions with the city's planning consultant, Floyd Tanaka and his THK planning firm from Denver, and members of the statutory planning commission.

South Dakota Congressman James Abourezk sent his staff to Rapid City to assist the flood victims with data about all possible forms of federal financial assistance. His key man was Peter Stavrianos, a brilliant and savvy political expert, who provided us with a shocking summary of the needs of the typical family who had lost their home in the flood. Peter's math was agonizing. Unless the feds provided massive relief, the working families in Rapid City could not manage the terrible economic realities of the disaster for a reasonable or timely recovery. This economic pain on top of the deaths, injuries, massive dislocation, and horror of the flood would destroy the civic optimism that had been so pronounced within our city prior to the storms on 9 June 1972. We appreciated the commitment of Abourezk and Stavrianos to pressure congressional leaders to adopt a radical plan to help our disaster victims and prevent a dark and discouraging future.

On 23 June 1972, the nation suffered a second terrible disaster. Hurricane Agnes caused disastrous flooding in New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia, Ohio, and Florida. Eighty people perished,

hundreds went missing, and 120,000 families were driven from their homes by high water. Local officials estimated the damage at over $1 billion in Pennsylvania and the same in the neighboring states. President Nixon promptly declared those states as federal disaster areas. National news coverage of this monster storm replaced reporting about South Dakota's disaster.

The quality and volume of federal assistance to help the Agnes victims quickly became a nasty political issue in the 1972 presidential election. Within a few days Governor Milton Shapp of Pennsylvania, a Democrat, voiced outrage at President Nixon over the quality and quantity of federal assistance. Others joined the melee. Governor Kneip and I did not pick a political fight with the feds about the delivery of funds to Rapid City. It was election season. I told Bob Rosenheim, "National Democrats are urging both of us to blast the president and OEP and turn this recovery into a political circus. Please pass the word to your supervisors in Washington. I will not join this protest!" Bob appreciated my candor and passed my reaction on to the White House.

Congressman Abourezk alerted me that leaders of Congress would soon introduce the 1972 Disaster Recovery Act defining federal assistance to disaster victims throughout the nation. This was wonderful news. With the availability of new, specific federal programs, the council would move forward quickly with short-term and long-term recovery plans. Jim spoke confidentially to me about what the bill might look like. He said, "It could be a generous and radical loan program to be administered by the Department of Commerce and the Small Business Administration. The feds might provide thirty-year, 1-percent loans to help homeowners and business owners replace or repair their structures." Such a plan would save the many banks and savings and loan associations in South Dakota and the Hurricane Agnes states from going belly up in the event that thousands of bankrupt customers couldn't pay the mortgages on their devastated homes. He said, "The feds are searching for programs to help the disaster victims and save the lending institutions, too."

Jim Abourezk was a South Dakota School of Mines graduate and a practicing civil engineer before he attended law school and entered

public service. He understood how important this financial support would be to the recovery, and he privately briefed the city council on the complex federal plan. It was essential for the council to understand and discuss how the availability of these loans might become the central pillar of our evolving recovery. In early July, the council and I enjoyed a productive conference call with Bob Rosenheim and Carroll Goodwin. It was not an official council meeting; none of the local or regional reporters were in city hall at the moment. Much of this discussion followed the theme that Pete Stavrianos had defined for Swanny and me a few days before.

Bob suggested—although there were no guarantees—that if the Small Business Administration (SBA) provided the loans, HUD might be able to help. The money could enable our city government to buy the homes and vacant lots in the urban floodplain and pay for the relocation of flood victims. With HUD assistance, the city would own the floodplain and permanently dedicate and zone several hundred acres for park and recreational development.

In the discussion that followed, some of the advantages of this plan were made clear: new homes built in safe areas would spark a construction boom in Rapid City and create a much stronger tax base over a three- to five-year period. Once a recreational avenue was established in the floodplain, the lands could never be used or rezoned for housing or commercial use unless the taxpayers voted on a specific rezoning question in a special election. Larry Lytle defined the political reality, saying, "Nobody wants fewer parks!"

Swanny's heartfelt words, delivered at the emergency council meeting on 11 June, were now the central theme of the recovery. Soon, the concept evolved and benefited from the wisdom of taxpayers. In addition to dozens of public meetings, the council held meetings in every ward. The plan improved as the council listened. This was democracy at its best.

As Charles Lindley and the school board searched for a site for a new Central High School, Swanny recommended a location north of the floodplain, south of North Street, and east of I-190. The athletic fields could safely be situated closer to Rapid Creek. Swanny's cave-

at was firmly in place when the location for the Rushmore Plaza Civic Center was finalized. Both facilities were located outside of the one-hundred-year floodplain. No one would be sleeping near Rapid Creek.

On 5 July the council created the new Urban Renewal Department. With unanimous council approval, I appointed Leonard Swanson to lead this department as director. Within the month, Swanny's staff prepared a first draft of the formal application for a federal grant to purchase the homes and businesses in the floodplain. The council designated the formal "Urban Renewal Area" as the general area on both sides of the floodplain and included several square blocks of commercial lands within the central business district. Part of the recovery package would enable the council to purchase several businesses within the degenerating bar zone on the north side of Main Street and modernize the retail heart of the city with office and bank buildings to create a more wholesome environment for business expansion. This thrilled my new allies in the Chamber of Commerce. Swanny led his new department with great skill and eventually employed thirty-five temporary city employees for the duration of the four- to six-year project.

In early July President Nixon announced his Disaster Recovery Bill for 1972. A bipartisan group of congressmen and senators from the Hurricane Agnes states introduced the legislation which, shockingly, included no assistance for the flood victims in South Dakota. Many Democrats suspected the president had zeroed out South Dakota because it was the home state of his Democratic opponent in the upcoming presidential election, Senator McGovern.

The political atmosphere in South Dakota turned toxic. Leaders of both parties issued charges and countercharges about the terrible unfairness of the president's bill. The entire South Dakota delegation to Congress lambasted President Nixon and claimed the White House had betrayed South Dakota.

Bob Rosenheim told me candidly, "I heard from a friend in the White House that the omission of South Dakota was a simple clerical error." He said the senior staff in the White House had not carefully proofread the bill, and President Nixon wanted this nagging embar-

rassment resolved quickly. I accepted Bob's word and on 16 July issued a press release urging political leaders to "refrain from making disaster recovery efforts in Rapid City political fodder for the 1972 election."

Many Democratic friends, Congressman Abourezk's staff, and Senator McGovern's campaign staff were outraged with me. I received support, however, from an editorial in the *Rapid City Journal* that called my words "wise and restrained." A few days later Jim Abourezk called from Washington to ask me to join him in testifying before the House Banking Committee. My job was to urge inclusion of South Dakota in the Disaster Relief Bill.

I called to assure Robert Finch at the White House that I intended to be positive about the federal assistance we had received thus far. His response was, "President Nixon won't let you down." Once the gavel came down, Congressman Wright Patman of Texas, who chaired the committee, called on Jim to testify. In front of microphones and TV cameras, he skillfully summarized the recovery in the Black Hills. My testimony lasted less than ten minutes and gave me a chance to praise the federal agencies that were so effective, especially Bob Rosenheim and his staff at HUD. Not one voice was raised in opposition to the amendment or the bill. Fifteen seconds later, the legislation was amended to include South Dakota. Thirty seconds later, by voice vote, the committee unanimously approved the measure, and we were included in the 1972 Disaster Recovery Act.

Congress passed and President Nixon signed the legislation a few days later. Finally! Optimism was in the air. The national media described Rapid City's plan to evacuate the floodplain and create a recreational avenue as a historic concept for flood recovery, one likely to be copied by cities that had violated other urban floodplains over the past two hundred years.

On 25 August, the city council approved for my signature the long and complex federal application for funding from HUD, which Swanny and I personally carried on the plane to Denver. We faced an intensive cross-examination about the plan from fifteen highly skilled HUD officials from all regions of the nation. Diagrams and maps from Floyd Tanaka and THK covered the conference room walls. Carroll Goodwin was at my side, and I was thankful for his brilliance, humor, and com-

Memorial Park, dedicated to the flood victims and designed by landscape architect Patrick Wyss, is one of the areas reserved as "green space" in the Rapid Creek floodplain. The pedestrian bridge is located where Seventh Street crossed the creek before the flood.

mon sense. A few days later Bob and Carroll carried the applications to Washington.

In September, Vice President Spiro Agnew visited Rapid City during a campaign tour and announced the approval of a $48-million grant for disaster recovery and $4 million more for the four counties and the South Dakota Department of Transportation. Secretary of HUD George Romney carried the documents to Rapid City a few days later, which the council authorized me to sign and accept.

Through a complex appraisal process, the city purchased the vacant lots and the damaged homes (or the concrete foundations) at post-flood values. The SBA loans included funds to pay off the balance of the flood victim's original mortgage as well as the cost of the victim's new home. The HUD program also provided a $15,000 relocation pay-

ment for each family. All mortgages on the lost or damaged homes and businesses were paid in full, restoring the local banks and savings and loan companies to solvency.

The total federal expenditure in the four-county disaster area during the first five years of the 1970s was approximately $170 million. In 2016 dollars, that sum is the equivalent of almost $750 million. The magnitude of the building boom in the weeks after the flood was encouraging. During the first eight months of 1972, the city issued 522 single-family building permits. This new construction quickly led to a partial restoration of the city's tax base, which by 1976 exceeded its pre-flood value.

The council's intensive efforts produced more exciting results by early fall. This was sparked by the start of construction on the new federal building, followed by the arrival of the first revenue-sharing funds from the federal government for construction of the new central fire station. In October the new city library at Sixth and Quincy was dedicated with grand festivities, thanks to the hard work of the library board and the Rapid City Library Foundation. William Porter, a board member, showed brilliance in designing the financial instrument for the project. Bill designed a similar mechanism for the Rushmore Plaza Civic Center that was unanimously affirmed by the South Dakota Supreme Court two years later.

More great news, unrelated to the flood, was the $500,000 pledge by the Arndt Dahl family to donate a new fine arts center to the city. The city selected the site of the old city auditorium and moved forward with plans to demolish the building after the Salvation Army no longer required the space for its massive food service operation. Some naysayers and property owners vehemently opposed this action but lost every legal challenge. The council had steel in their spines, high levels of character, and forged forward with this wonderful gift to the taxpayers.

At the annual Chamber of Commerce dinner held in October 1972 to recognize the public safety agencies that serve Rapid City, Sam Roach received the "Officer of the Year" Award. I was honored to acknowledge his heroism in rescuing dozens of Mountain View Nursing Home residents from the icy water on the night of the flood. Sam was thankful so many were saved, but he cried remembering the three

people who perished inside the flooded building. Two hundred fifty guests honored him with a standing ovation and shared tears as JoAnn pinned the medal on Sam's uniform.

On 17 December the city council and I recognized the families of the three firemen who had perished in June: George Carter, Henry W. Tank, and George A. Sumners. The scene in the old fire station on Main Street was emotional as fire department leaders presented plaques honoring these men and their bereaved families for their heroic sacrifice and devotion to safety in our city.

Later that month, the Chamber of Commerce sponsored a banquet and Christmas party to acknowledge the civil servants and their families who had performed so well in 1972. Seven hundred people enjoyed a grand time, eating, enjoying a few libations, and celebrating with friends and colleagues. On Christmas Eve, I enjoyed my annual round of visits to the city's fire stations to extend my best wishes to the crews. We devoured dozens of JoAnn's cookies, drank gallons of coffee, and talked about the heroes the city had lost on the terrible night of the flood. The city council was making good on its promise of a tangible symbol of their dedication with the plans now in place for the new central fire station.

Six months after the flood, each of these occasions gave us a chance to share our pride in the positive determination of disaster victims to survive, pick up the pieces, and move forward with new homes and new dreams into the last quarter of the twentieth century. We looked forward to 1973 with hope and optimism.

Following the crisis of the 1972 flood, Don Barnett went on to face other challenges during his remaining time as mayor. Foremost among these were confrontations with members of the American Indian Movement (AIM) following racially charged incidents in nearby Custer and Wounded Knee in early 1973. After leaving political office in 1975, Barnett embarked upon a career in business and consulting in South Dakota, Wyoming, and Colorado. JoAnn, his wife of thirty-eight years, passed away suddenly in 2010. Rapid City honored its former mayor in 2002 with the dedication of the Don Barnett Arena in the Rushmore Plaza Civic Center, the 150,000-square-foot multipurpose facility he helped bring to fruition.