

FLOODED

Reflections of Hurricane Floyd

Friends of Braswell Library

\$30.00

On September 15, 1999, Hurricane Floyd hit eastern North Carolina. The land we had previously known as the city of Rocky Mount and Nash and Edgecombe Counties became a series of islands surrounded by raging water. Once the waters receded, the vastness of the destruction became evident. Stories of heroism, love and caring were being shared but not recorded.

During this time our new library was under construction. The Friends of Braswell Memorial Library decided to commemorate the opening by collecting these stories, the telling of which became part of the healing process.

Maybe, in the reading and rereading of these recollections, we can discover what enables us to reach out to our neighbors in the face of great disaster but inhibits us from doing so in the course of normal, day-to-day living.

ALICE THORP—FOREWARD



North Carolina Humanities Council
Weaving Cultures and Communities

FRIENDS OF
BRASWELL
LIBRARY

FLOODED

Reflections of Hurricane Floyd



CHAPEL HILL
PRESS, INC.

Despite our cultural and technological advances, humanity still must cope with the kind of devastating natural disasters that disrupted life in Pompeii on August 24, 79 A.D., and life in eastern North Carolina on September 15, 1999. Martha F. Johnson notes in her concluding essay:

As the stories in this book reveal, we, like the victims of Pompeii, felt passionately about our families, our pets, and our community. Unlike the residents of Pompeii, however, we rebuilt our town after the Great Flood of 1999. If some natural disaster, historical event, or advance in transportation has overtaken us by the time you read this, we have merely moved to a more auspicious location and gone on with the business of living. But please do not forget the determination and passion with which we lived.

"As devastating as Hurricane Floyd was, many blessings have resulted from this catastrophe. God touched the hearts of an amazing number of people in order to reach out to the victims and survivors in countless ways. Lasting friendships and bonds between people of all races and stations in life have been created." —*Jessie Pash*

"My father always told me that there is humor in every situation if you look hard enough to find it. [...] two days after the flood we received a random wrong-number phone call in the middle of the night. A voice asked, 'Is Floyd there?' Our daughter answered, 'He was!'" —*Ida and Bill Stanley*

"Wayne and I were told to report to Riverside Apartments, where a large number of senior citizens reside. We found seniors wading through the waters to get to higher ground as they carried trash bags containing their belongings and medications. [...] Many were crying, worried, and upset. In the autumn of their lives, these senior citizens were losing all they had in the floodwaters." —*Captain Mike Doss, Rocky Mount Fire Department*

"Hurricane Floyd may have flooded the land but never the spirit. We survived, and the old saying, 'What doesn't destroy you makes you stronger,' was proven true." —*Robert D. Edwards*

"Volumes could be written about the efforts and sacrifices of our local volunteers, but I leave that to others. They came from Maine, New York, Pennsylvania, and from the Midwest—Ohio, Michigan, and Kentucky—from the mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina and from Virginia and West Virginia, from Alabama and Florida." —*Gary Heschl*



CHAPEL HILL
PRESS, INC.

ISBN 1-880849-98-4



53000

9 781880 849989



FLOODED

Reflections of Hurricane Floyd



NUMBERED LIMITED EDITION

_____ OF 1000





FLOODED

Reflections of Hurricane Floyd

COLLECTED AND EDITED BY
Friends of Braswell Memorial Library
Rocky Mount, North Carolina

EDITORS

Martha Fountain Johnson, Rosa Moore Leonard,
Katherine Neal Lucas, Alice Saunders Thorp,
Linda Gibson Williams, Ann Duke Williamson



CHapel Hill
PRESS, INC.



COVER PHOTO: Brian Fleming

All trademarks (™) and registered marks (®) used in this work
remain the property of their respective owners.

Copyright © 2004 Friends of Braswell Memorial Library

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used, reproduced
or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical,
including photograph, recording, or any information storage or
retrieval system, without the express written permission
of the copyright holder, except where permitted by law.

ISBN 1-880849-98-4
Library of Congress Catalog Number 2004113755

Printed in the United States of America
First Printing

Dedication

We, the Friends of Braswell Memorial Library, present *Flooded: Reflections of Hurricane Floyd* to the Braswell Memorial Library to become a permanent part of its local-history collection. This book provides only a few small snapshots of the many trials and triumphs experienced by those who lived through the Hurricane Floyd disaster. Our hope is that the character and courage that speak throughout these stories and pictures will continue to speak to and inspire future generations.

We dedicate this book to:

- the leaders and employees of the City of Rocky Mount and Nash and Edgecombe Counties for their hours of tireless effort and heroic deeds;
- all those affected by Hurricane Floyd;
- the agencies, churches, and other groups who contributed in so many ways; and
- the many volunteers, both within our community and from far away, who gave of themselves to help their neighbors.

Contents

Foreword—Alice Thorp	xi
Preface and Acknowledgements	xv
Introduction	xix
PART ONE: TRAPPED	I
A Ripple in the Water—DeEtt Davis	3
Trapped in Nashville—Doris Jackson McBride	9
A Walk from the Water—Elmo Boswell	13
The Great Flood of the Century—Shelby Sewell	15
Home from the Beach—Daryl Britt	19
Dark Night at Lafayette Circle—Anne Mosley	23
Disaster Brings Strength: An Interview with Barbara and J.E. Drake—Martha Johnson	29
Up a Tree: An Interview with Jack and Jean Bishop—Martha Johnson	35
Going to Meet the Storm: An Interview with Frank Adams—Alice Thorp	45
The Fish: An Interview with Adelaide Scott—Ann Williamson	51
An Attic Adventure: An Interview with Betty Jean Howerton— Rosa Leonard and Ann Williamson	53
Unforgettable: An Interview with Lisa Whitfield— Rosa Leonard and Ann Williamson	57
A Flood on My Birthday: An Interview with Lucille Powell—Jackie Pash	69

PART TWO: RESCUED	73
Squad-Two Assignments—Captain J.G. Pittman, Rocky Mount Fire Department	75
Rescue Efforts at Riverside Apartments—Captain Mike Doss	81
Hurricane Floyd Operations: Lafayette Circle Call— Captain Gerry B. Wood	85
Diary of Hurricane Floyd—Naomi Brown	89
A Time to Act—George Jeffries	95
 PART THREE: A COMMUNITY COMES TOGETHER	97
Where Do You Go?—Hal Peck	99
Floyd Memoir—Betty Ann Whisnant	103
Flood Affects Art: An Interview with Bobbi Gregory— Rosa Leonard and Ann Williamson	109
Letter from the <i>Hickory Daily News</i> —John S. Edwards	119
Memo to Rick Toomey from Nash General Hospital Maintenance Department—Robert Flowers	123
99% Teamwork: A report to Rick Toomey—Beth Gore	125
In Retrospect—Ida and Bill Stanley	127
Cookbooks Replaced—Linda Shearon	131
Letter from the Office of Sheriff Jimmy Grimes— Dennis O. Lyons	133
E-mail from a Volunteer: An Outsider's View—Kit Sluder	135
Remember When ...—George Jeffries	141
 PART FOUR: THE CITY RESPONDS	143
Start-up of the Sunset Plant—Jay W. Van Hoose	145
Important Decisions: An Interview with Claude Mayo, Wayne Deal, and Brian Brantley—Alice Thorp	151
A Challenge: An Interview with Marlene Payne—Alice Thorp	163
Struggle for Clear Water: An Interview with Jackie Evans—Marlene Payne	169
No Normal Day in the Water Department: An Interview with Kenny Parrish—Marlene Payne	173

Washout of Four Years' Work: An Interview with Candy Madrid—Marlene Payne	177
72 Hours: An Interview with Fire Chief Eddie Jones—Marlene Payne	189
Water Resources Department: An Interview with Jay Van Hoose—Marlene Payne	209
Retired and Tired: An Interview with Larry Camp— Marlene Payne	225
Firemen Wear Many Hats: An Interview with Kenneth Mullen—Marlene Payne	233
Generosity Surprises Police Chief: An Interview with Police Chief Bill Hogan—Marlene Payne	241
Safety Is Our Mission: An Interview with Janice Cox— Marlene Payne	249
The Telephone, FEMA, and I: An Interview with Ann Wall—Marlene Payne	255
Meeting the Needs of the City: An Interview with Fred Turnage, Steve Raper, Charles Penny, and Pete Varney—Marlene Payne	263
Disaster at the Arts Center: An Interview with Louise Janelle—Marlene Payne	275
"Let There Be Light": An Interview with Sheila Doiron—Marlene Payne	285
A Washout: An Interview with Jerry Jackson—Marlene Payne ..	289
Captain Mike Doss Remembers the Flood	299

PART FIVE: IMPACT AND RECOVERY	303
"Busy" Was the Operative Word: Nash County Health Department Staff Report	305
Floodwaters Come to the Home Place—Nancy Matthews	307
New Home, New Hope—Cathy Worsley	311
The Flood Reaches Paris—Patsy Chambless	315
Gnomes Come Clean—Charlene Lewis	319
Alerted by a Cat—Gwen Corinth	321

Grief and the Storm—Helen M. Toney	325
From Agriculture to Aquaculture—Robert D. Edwards	327
The Angel Is Forever—Phyllis L. Jacobs	329
A Farmer's Story—Joel Boseman	333
Destruction, Reconstruction, and Restoration— Nancy and Lewis Thorp	337
Even the Refrigerator Floated: An Interview with Victoria Joyner—Ann Williamson and Rosa Leonard	341
True Generosity and Friendship: An Interview with Dell Pope—Jackie Pash	343
What an Experience!: An Interview with Betty Battle—Rosa Leonard	347
From Carriage Trail to Shellcastle—Betty Penny	353
Trials and Tribulations: An Interview with Vivian Anderson and Suzanne Sifford—Rosa Leonard and Ann Williamson	359
The Flad!—Zackary Green	368
CONCLUSION	369
Back to the Future—Martha F. Johnson	371

Foreword

On September 15, 1999, Hurricane Floyd hit eastern North Carolina. Within a matter of hours, languid rivers that had meandered through cities and towns became raging currents of water, growing deeper and wider than could have ever been imagined. Small, shallow creeks became rivers. The floodwater consumed all in its path. Because Hurricane Dennis had dumped ten inches of rain just a week prior to Floyd's arrival, the ground was already saturated. As a result, trees, the holding-power of their roots compromised by the soggy earth, were hurled up and over by the fierce winds. The land we had previously known as the City of Rocky Mount and Nash and Edgecombe Counties became a series of islands surrounded by raging water. Communities were isolated from each other and from some necessary services. Churches and schools became safe havens for those escaping the floodwaters, as well as a source for obtaining food, water, cleaning supplies and dry clothes during the days that followed.

Even Nash General Hospital was surrounded by water, making access by car impossible. During the days before the waters receded, members of the hospital staff who had been on duty when the flood hit were unable to leave and fresh staff members were unable to get to the hospital to relieve them. Those staff members trapped in the hospital worked long hours, doing whatever they could to care for patients. Even the hospital administrators caught at the hospital pitched in, delivering meals, cleaning rooms, and assisting where needed to enable other staff members to take a quick break. Soon, military helicopters (and other, volunteer helicopters

and crews) began airlifts of medicine, clean laundry, and food. But more importantly, those requiring medical attention now had access to the hospital. In the two-county area, "pick-up" points were established where helicopters could land and pick up patients and fresh staff for transport to the hospital. Helicopters would be heard for days and nights to come.

Once the waters did recede, the vastness of the destruction became evident. Homes, businesses, public buildings, cultural centers, and recreational sites were destroyed. Rocky Mount's water and sewer plants were damaged. Whole neighborhoods had been under water. Some bridges were damaged beyond repair. The powerful and the powerless, the rich and the poor were hit equally hard. Hurricane Floyd's path of destruction cut across every ethnic background and every socio-economic group. The floodwaters covered areas never previously thought to be near water, much less subject to a raging flood. Locations where flood insurance had not been deemed necessary or available were affected.

My husband Jim and I live in Creek's Bend subdivision, located on Stony Creek in Rocky Mount. Thursday morning, we awakened to find water in the ground level of our house, and as the morning progressed, water continued to rise until it was in the main level. Several of our neighbors were experiencing the same situation as other neighbors rushed to help. By Sunday morning, the water had receded, leaving filthy mud and slime on everything and a stench in the air. Our children arrived from Charlotte and Chapel Hill. They were finally able to get to Rocky Mount to check on us and talked about the smell that started a few miles west of Rocky Mount and permeated the air throughout the flooded area. We owe so much to our children for so many reasons, but as I write this, I am reminded of their actions that particular Sunday morning. They showed up armed with rubber boots and gloves, cleaning supplies, water, ice, and food. Then they opened up the garage and basement doors and began the arduous task of clearing and tearing things out of the flooded parts of our home. Shock, grief... I am not sure what it is that renders one unable to take that first step sometimes. Whatever it is, it happens and serves to remind us that we are a part of a loving family whose members are willing to take that step for us.



And that's how life began again: family, friends, neighbors, even strangers showing up to salvage the bits and pieces of what we will always refer to as "life before Floyd." As the days turned into weeks, the scope of the devastation became even more apparent. The stress of starting over—coupled with possible relocation, heat, and the mold that now was growing on everything touched by the flood—eventually took its toll. Many people began suffering from respiratory infections and other, related illnesses. The exhaustion felt at the end of one day was still present at the beginning of the next. Paperwork for the insurance companies (if you were lucky enough to have some insurance), the Federal Emergency Management Agency, city and county codes, etc. seemed endless and overwhelming. Days turned into weeks. Businesses that had existed on the edge of financial viability before the flood did not reopen. Many people who had to relocate temporarily didn't return. In most cases, everyone pitched in to help, but as is human nature, there were always a few who did not. Such is the fabric of our lives. Thankfully, though, the will to go forward by either rebuilding our old lives or paving the way for a new direction led us to new friendships and forged bonds that weren't there in August 1999. As you read the personal accounts in this book, you will be reminded of these words: the flood dealt a severe blow to the very fabric of our lives; it changed forever how we look at our neighbors, neighborhoods, communities, and beyond; and it made us realize that these stories are a part of who we are and, as such, need to be preserved for our children and grandchildren.



It was also during this time that our new library was under construction. Friends of Braswell Memorial Library is a broad-based volunteer group originally organized to support and encourage the growth of our public library services in Nash and Edgecombe Counties and the City of Rocky Mount. At a meeting of the Friends of Braswell Memorial Library on October 25, 2000, we talked about ways in which we could commemorate the opening of the library. With our community still struggling to recover from the flood, stories of heroism, love, and caring were being shared but not recorded.

We decided that there could be no better way to commemorate our new library than to present it with a book for its local-history section

that had been written by the people and the communities it serves. These stories are a part of our history, the telling of which helps in our healing process. They show neighbor helping neighbor, strangers helping strangers, children helping the elderly, all crossing racial, religious, and socio-economic barriers. These stories needed to be preserved for future generations. Maybe, just maybe, in the reading and rereading of these recollections, we can discover what it is that enables us to reach out to our neighbors in the face of great disaster but inhibits us from doing so in the course of normal, day-to-day living. What lessons can be learned from this experience that can be applied to our daily lives together? Aren't we truly one family of people capable of extinguishing those invisible boundaries for the common good of our greater community without requiring a disaster as the driving force? —Alice Thorp, September 2004

Preface and Acknowledgments

Friends of Braswell Memorial Library requested and received a grant from the North Carolina Humanities Council. In 2000, we used this money to sponsor three oral-history workshops conducted by Karen Baldwin, an oral historian at East Carolina University. It was in these workshops that we learned how to interview and collect the stories from those who chose to tell their own stories about their experiences of the devastation visited on eastern North Carolina by Hurricane Floyd in 1999.

Once we had formed our committee and we had been trained to conduct interviews, we mailed, delivered, and posted more than one thousand flyers around the area. These flyers described our oral-history project and encouraged anyone with a story related to Hurricane Floyd to contact us. We aired numerous press releases about our project on local television and radio stations. We also distributed flyers and aired press releases in Spanish because we knew that many Hispanics had been affected, as well. Many people chose to write their stories in their own words. We hoped to attract all those who had a story, event, letter, or picture to share.

It took a year to collect the stories and three additional years to put them together and create this book. We wanted to make sure that our book covered the many faces of our population. We feel we have achieved this, with one exception: Despite our efforts to locate Hispanic families who were affected by the flood, we were unable to do so. Since we did not begin collecting the material until almost a year after the flood, it was felt that many of those affected had already left the area, and we regret this.

Just know that many, many hours of love and devotion have gone into this project. All who helped or had been asked to help have done so with great enthusiasm and dedication.

To the many volunteers, thank you for the countless hours you have devoted to this instead of doing something that, perhaps, you would rather have been doing.

Thank you, too, to the family members and friends who have supported us. We're sure you thought this project was going to last our lifetimes.

But most importantly, thank you to those in our community who took the time to share your stories and photographs with us. There were times when we have cried with you and times when we have laughed with you, but through it all, the strength and endurance you have demonstrated have been worth the telling!

As you will see, this book is truly a volunteer effort. We have attempted to list below all who actively participated in this project. But as we write this, we are also aware of so many memories of people whose names have faded but whose actions and/or words inspired us along the way. Your small gesture or comment provided the encouragement we needed to pursue this project to its completion. For all of your contributions we are truly grateful, as we are to:

- Dr. Harlan Graden and the North Carolina Humanities Council, who provided guidance and a grant for our three-day oral-history workshop and the funding to purchase necessary equipment;
- those who donated their time to attend the workshop;
- Karen Baldwin, Department of English, East Carolina University, who conducted the oral-history workshop and patiently guided us through the initial process of gathering the source materials;
- the Church of the Good Shepherd, which donated the facilities for conducting the workshop;
- our fellow Friends of Braswell Memorial Library, who spent many hours addressing envelopes, stuffing them with flyers about the project, and delivering flyers to businesses, churches, and schools throughout our area (thank you, too, for your ongoing support);

- Nash-Rocky Mount Schools and Multimedia Cablevision, which advertised our project on their local news channels;
- Martha Daniel, who set up our website;
- those who, with recorder in hand, traveled throughout our area collecting stories—Katherine Lucas, Ann Williamson, Rosa Leonard, Martha Fountain Johnson, Carol Harrington, Jackie Pash, and Alice Thorp;
- Marlene Payne, who earned our special thanks for prompting and collecting all the stories from Rocky Mount city employees;
- Alice Thorp and Linda Williams, who typed the manuscripts and oral histories into the computer;
- Cynthia Leonard and Linda Williams, who transcribed the tapes;
- all who contributed their pictures;
- Ann Williamson, Katherine Lucas, Rosa Leonard, and Martha Fountain Johnson, who gave so much of their time in editing the drafts of this book;
- Linda Williams, who organized the book on disks and readied the materials for the publisher;
- Ricky Davis, who designed the map; and
- the Chapel Hill Press—especially Edwina Woodbury, president and publisher; Misty Thebeau, publishing manager; Jeffrey Thomas, editor; and Kathleen Severa, book and cover designer—who all played essential roles in transforming our manuscript into this book.

Throughout this process, our desire to maintain the integrity and drama of the experiences related by the heroes and victims of the flood has prevailed. We had to edit selectively to keep the book within a reasonable size, but in doing so, we have tried to preserve the voice and tone of each recorded memory. If there are mistakes in the content of any story, the editors take responsibility.

The original sources for *Flooded: Reflections of Hurricane Floyd*—tapes, transcripts, and manuscripts—are permanently housed in the archive section of Braswell Memorial Library.



An aerial view of the reservoir.

CREDIT: CARL (POGIE) WORSLEY

Introduction

On September 5, 1999, Hurricane Dennis punched the North Carolina coast once, then doubled back, and came ashore as Tropical Storm Dennis, packing seventy mile-per-hour winds and torrential rain, leaving creeks and rivers swollen and the land saturated. Within eleven days, North Carolina was bracing for the arrival of yet another hurricane. On September 15th, Hurricane Floyd, a category-three storm with winds of 130 miles per hour near the eye, moved up the eastern coast of the U.S., causing catastrophic flooding in North Carolina and Virginia. What made Hurricane Floyd such a menace was its sheer size. Almost twice the size of the average Atlantic hurricane, Hurricane Floyd was approximately five hundred eighty miles across and packed tropical-storm-force winds of forty to seventy-three miles per hour or greater across its entire span.

As eastern North Carolina prepared for the worst, it was understandable that anxiety was high. About three o'clock in the morning of September 16th, Hurricane Floyd, now a category-two hurricane, made landfall near Cape Fear, North Carolina, and continued to move northward through the state, leaving as much as fifteen to twenty inches of rain in some areas. The Rocky Mount/Wilson Airport reported receiving 15.51 inches. A low-pressure front moving from the southwest pushed Hurricane Floyd through quickly but not quickly enough to spare those in its wake. The path of destruction was astonishing. Trees, standing in the water-soaked earth, were uprooted. Rivers and creeks that normally meandered slowly through eastern North Carolina were rapidly rising as much as six to eight inches per hour.



Fear that the dam at the reservoir, a man-made lake that supplies water to Rocky Mount, would not hold prompted the decision to release some of the water in an attempt to prevent the dam from giving way completely. An earthen dike that had previously contained the floodwaters of the Tar River now was under the rapidly rising river, and water was filling the streets, houses, apartments, businesses, parks, and cars, leaving people and pets trapped in homes, trees, on rooftops, or in their cars trying to escape, even as roads were being washed away. Livestock and farms were flooding, leaving both families and animals scrambling to find higher ground. Many people were awakened by strange sounds only to discover that their homes were flooding and that the water was already too deep to leave or would be soon if they did not leave immediately. Floodwater engulfed sewage plants and contaminated the water supplies of many communities. Major roads into and out of Rocky Mount were blocked for two days by the flooding waters of the Tar River and Stony Creek. Nearby, Interstate 95 was closed for three days. With roads underwater and water covering surfaces that had previously been miles away from water, rescue teams were unable to reach some areas of the two counties and Rocky Mount. The Tar River finally crested twenty-four feet above flood stage. At the flood's height, it was estimated that approximately 22% of Rocky Mount was under water. Before it was over, thirty-five deaths were attributed to Hurricane Floyd in North Carolina alone, fifty-six total in the United States, most of which were due to drowning in fresh-water flooding.



By noon on September 16th, the winds and clouds were beginning to dissipate. Homes and businesses that had been located so far from water that flood insurance was thought unnecessary or was not available were now destroyed. During the following weeks, damage estimates rose to \$6 billion. Thousands of people were either homeless or living in damaged homes. Businesses were destroyed. This proved to be the deadliest hurricane in our history.

TRAPPED



CREDIT: MARTHA DANIEL

A Ripple in the Water

DEETT DAVIS

During that night, as the river slowly crept into our backyard, my sister and I kept a vigil by our living-room window. We worried about the rising water that slowly surrounded our home. We finally went to our parents' bedroom at the back of our house to tell them about the water. My father dressed quickly and hurried outside to investigate.

He surveyed the area around our home and then drove from one end of our neighborhood to the other. He returned looking serious but told us not to panic. "Your mother and I have lived here for many years and have yet to have the waters reach this house. I doubt this time will be any different."

With his assurance, my sister and I returned to our vigil. If our father thought that everything would be fine, then everything would be fine. After all, he had experienced situations like this many times and knew what was best. Reassured, I finally went to bed.

At 4:00 A.M. I woke to my sister's hysterical screams. The water had reached the top step of our home. I followed her to the living room, where my family had gathered in a state of alarm.

My sister dialed 911 and frantically reported our situation. Slowly replacing the receiver, she told us no rescue could be attempted until sunrise, two hours away. Trapped, we anxiously awaited the sun, which would bring escape.

At last, we heard a lone knock on our front door. A young black man dressed in army fatigues instructed us to carry only small items of

importance and to hurry because the water was quickly rising and the current was very strong.

As I stepped from our partially flooded porch into the icy cold water, I looked around, and my heart plummeted. The water was up to my mouth. After a few steps, I glanced back and saw that in just that short time, the water had completely covered the front porch and entered the house. The force of the current was extremely strong, so I lost my footing many times before reaching the army truck.

As I stared at the small, camouflaged truck, my hope crumbled. How was this modest truck going to get us through this angry current to dry land, approximately four miles away?

When I struggled into the truck, I found it nearly filled with other victims. It occurred to me that we might not have enough room for everyone, and members of my family were still on their way. Thankfully, everyone did fit, although it was most uncomfortable. I could imagine how animals felt being shipped in overcrowded trucks.

We were on our way, but the truck came to a halt after about a mile. The back door opened, and to my dismay, more people climbed in. Parents held children in their arms, and smaller adults climbed onto shelves near the roof of the truck, where they sat in a curled position. I was one of the shelf people in a nightmare that was only beginning.

After the rescuers closed the back doors, I struggled to breathe. We were so tightly squeezed in that no one could move. I remember thinking that I might die from suffocation before reaching dry land.

With a hard jolt, the tinker-toy truck came to an abrupt halt. I heard the strangled sounds of the engine's attempts to restart. Teasing us with hope, it remained dead.

Eventually the driver gave up. Outside I heard splashing that moved to the back doors. Men murmured nervously, more water splashed, one of the truck-cab doors opened, and then all was silent. I was not the only person wondering what was going on. The back doors of the truck suddenly opened, startling everyone.

One of the soldiers told us that the rising water had washed out the engine and we were dead in the water—"dead" being the operative word.

For one horrifying moment, I thought the soldiers intended to close the doors again, leaving us in a death trap. To my relief, the doors remained open. Everyone inside the truck was still silent, lost in shock and disbelief.

Almost three miles from dry land, we were unable to move, and the water was rising rapidly. The soldiers decided to float to safety using a small boat that was attached to the roof of the truck and to return with help—a great plan if they'd had oars.

They climbed into the boat and pushed away from the truck. With no oars, the boat quickly became caught in the current and floated away in the wrong direction. In silence, I watched what seemed to be our only chance of survival float away and slowly disappear.

We were trapped inside a small truck in the middle of what was once a road but was now a river. The current had stolen our rescuers from us, and Hurricane Floyd was not over. I nearly vomited from fear. I remembered the soldiers saying that they needed to fit as many as they could into the truck because they didn't know if another rescue could be attempted. It seemed that no one else knew we were stranded. Even the people who had dispatched the soldiers did not know we had become stranded, and it



Raggedy Ann expresses the devastation of Floyd, but like the victims, is still smiling.

CREDIT: SUZANNE DOWNS

would be a long time before floating army rescuers could help themselves, much less be of any further help to us.

This new obstacle was my undoing. When people whispered that someone else would come to our rescue, I screamed that no one else knew we were out there. Our only hope had just floated away, and we were stranded. We were going to drown, pressed together like cattle in this God-forsaken truck, or worse, be toppled during the coming winds from the hurricane. I began sobbing hysterically, which started a chain reaction of hysteria throughout the truck. My parents attempted to calm me and the others, but for a while, their efforts were futile.

I struggled from my shelf, determined to free myself from this deathtrap, but my move toward freedom was blocked by my father, who kept me from leaving the truck. Slowly, I stopped struggling and regained my composure.

We waited for what seemed to be an eternity. Gradually the winds gained strength, and the noise outside the truck became deafening. Objects snatched up by the powerful winds were being hurled at us from all sides. Picnic tables, telephone poles, tree limbs, gas tanks, and other large debris floated toward us at alarming speed. The smell of gas was very strong. An older man was almost thrown from the truck for trying to light a cigarette. Gas tanks tossed about in the current threatened to collide with the truck. An impact might set off an explosion.

The storm finally passed, and our truck was still intact. We could see other victims of the flood on the tops of cars and could hear others calling for help from the attics of nearby houses. I had not realized that so many other people were stranded. Many were still in their homes, and others had climbed onto the tops of vehicles scattered around our army truck.

By this time, the water inside the truck was up to our waists, and no rescue was in sight. I no longer had any feeling in my limbs; and now and then, I would weep softly and pray for deliverance without truly believing it would come. Amazingly, my parents truly believed that the Lord would deliver us and that we would be rescued. I envied their faith. Their reassurances gave our fellow occupants hope, and with this hope, we survived one minute and then another.

Minutes slowly turned to hours. Every so often, I would cry softly. During one bout, I overheard a woman talking outside the truck. I heard her asking someone for help. She yelled that if we weren't helped soon, we'd die. She had called someone in Pinetops on a cell phone that she had managed to keep dry. Minutes after her call, several cars pulled up; and people gathered at a distance on dry land. It seemed as if we might be rescued, which was fortunate because the water was now up to my chest.

Getting to dry land took some doing. First, our brave heroes attempted to maneuver a tractor through to us, but cars hidden beneath the water almost overturned the tractor. To our relief, people with powerboats arrived from the town of Pinetops to assist, but the number of boats was few and the number to be rescued, many.

The rescue progressed slowly. People trapped in their homes were rescued first. After they were placed on dry land, we were next. By then, the water came to my shoulders. The last one to be rescued from the truck was my father. When I saw him step from the boat and realized everyone from the truck had been safely removed, I wept. Joy, relief, happiness, disbelief, and remorse pushed me to my knees where I remained until my father picked me up and carried me into a lady's home. She had transformed her home into a rescue station for the flood victims.

I had lived in a lovely area on the outskirts of a small town called Pinetops, North Carolina. During that memorable day in September 1999, my home was covered by the floodwaters that resulted from Hurricane Floyd. While describing the events of that extraordinary day, I have cried. The tears were not from the loss of material things. Those items can be replaced. I cried for the loss of my intangible "home."

That home is the place where I played backyard football, baseball, basketball, and kickball into the night with kids in the neighborhood. "Home" was the place where I developed from a child into an adult, the place where I had my first kiss, a place of familiar surroundings that gave me a true feeling of belonging. I cry for my lost home and mourn for a life I can never return to again.

I would like to thank everyone who has given time, money, shelter, food, and labor to help the flood victims. Their assistance was greatly needed.

Their kind words and smiles were much appreciated. I will never forget the compassion and caring of the people who have helped my family through this terrible ordeal. I doubted the Lord in that truck and forgot His promise and His great power. My parents never doubted Him and stayed faithful and believed that He would allow us to come through this tragedy. After witnessing the power of the Lord, my faith has not only been restored, but it has also become stronger. I shall never again doubt Him.

At the time of the flood, DeEtt Davis was living in her parents' home on the outskirts of Pinetops, a small town near Rocky Mount.



Trapped in Nashville

DORIS JACKSON McBRIDE



On September 16, 1999, a lion named Hurricane Floyd “roared in.” The news media warned the public not to stay in mobile homes and not to sleep in the upper level of their homes. Being obedient, my husband Mac and I curled up on the couches downstairs. The rain came, escorted by the wind. Water beat against the window. Trees began to twist from the force of the wind, but we had no fear, only a strange anticipation.

A giant oak fell. Water rushed down the chimney into the fireplace. The wind howled. More trees fell. We stood on the porch watching the muddy water rise. Around 4:00 A.M., I slept, but Mac did not.

When daylight came, the wind had ceased, the rain had stopped, and the water in the yard had receded. Except for a few downed trees, broken power lines, and a ditch right down the middle of the driveway, all was well.

We decided to drive around to see how Nashville and its people had fared. Once out of the neighborhood, we saw what a flood looked like. Tar River and Stony Creek had played havoc with Nashville and the surrounding areas. Fifteen feet of water blocked N.C. Highway 58 to Castalia. Behind the Nashville post office, we saw water up to the rooflines of homes. Cars were submerged or tossed onto the tops of other cars. Cars were parked on top of houses, and houses were stacked on top of cars. Trees were lying across houses and streets.

As I stood on Washington Street and looked to my right, I saw that the home of one of my best friends had been inundated with floodwater.

Only the roofline was visible. The only dry things he had were the clothes on his back. I cried.

We were interested in what was happening in other parts of the county. We tried to get out of Nashville using the old Red Oak Road toward Indian Trail, but it was blocked by water and a flooded bridge. No luck—later we learned that more than half of the homes in the Indian Trail subdivision were flooded. The residents, including my cousin, had lost everything they owned.

Then we tried to get out of Nashville using the road that runs by Richardson's Funeral Home. That road was flooded, and the bridge was out. Floodwater and downed trees blocked U.S. Highway 64 East.

We were trapped in Nashville. Soon Nashville looked like a war zone. The National Guard directed traffic, checked identification, and turned sightseers away from the flooded areas. Authorities cordoned off streets. Power lines and cable wires were down, telephones were out, and streets were caved in, leaving holes large enough to hold a car.

Emergency crews tried to rescue people caught in the swift currents before they washed away. Helicopter crews plucked victims off rooftops. People were rescued by means of boats, Jet Skis, and canoes. Some floated to safety on plastic-encased mattresses.

The media had warned of a flood. A flood warning to the people of Nashville and the surrounding areas meant two feet of water, not twenty. We were prepared for the wind but not for the water. We were not prepared for the deaths of friends, the loss of belongings, or the sad faces of those who had lost a lifetime.

Help came. Shelters were set up to accommodate the homeless. Centers were stocked with food, clothing, water, and cleaning supplies. Help came from cities and towns that had not flooded. Electric linemen came from Durham, Mt. Airy, and from as far away as Dalton, Georgia.

Church pews that once held worshipers sat on the curb awaiting the trip to the dump. Pianos and organs, refrigerators, stoves, televisions, kitchen sinks, and just about any other piece of furniture awaited removal from the curbside.

Plants and factories were flooded, leaving people not only homeless, but also jobless. No one knew when or if the plants would reopen. Folks lived from day to day.

The people in Nashville tried to re-establish themselves. Many opened their homes to the victims, but hundreds remained displaced. It was hard to hear little children saying, "Mama, I'm hungry," or "Mama I want to go home." Food was available, but only God knew when the children would get back home.

Thank God, some of us were spared. It is my belief that those who did not personally suffer were spared to help those who did.

The memory of Hurricane Floyd is indelibly etched in our minds. Being trapped in Nashville made us a more loving and closer-knit people. We shall not soon forget.

Doris Jackson McBride, a native of Nashville, North Carolina, retired after teaching for more than thirty years at the elementary level.



CREDIT: GARY BRITT

A Walk from the Water

ELMO BOSWELL

I had seen water creep into my backyard at Riverside twice during the fourteen years I had lived happily at 482 West Duke Circle; therefore, I was not overly concerned to see water creeping nearer and nearer as Hurricane Floyd raged. At 4:00 A.M., I waded out and moved my car up to Lee Street, waded back to enter my apartment, continued to put things as high as I could, and filled a tote bag. Finally, when water was about a foot into the apartment, my neighbor, Anna Privott, and I decided it was time to leave.

With our tote bags slung over our shoulders, we waded up to Lee Street with water just under our armpits. My ninety-nine-pound body wanted to bob out of the water. Barefooted, I kept us on the sidewalk by feeling for the grass on each side of the walkway, knowing that if we got into the street, the water would be over our shoulders. Even though the swift water was pretty forceful at times, I was not frightened.

We finally reached Lee Street, where we were picked up and carried to temporary shelter at the old R.M. Wilson gym. We spent the entire day there. Later that afternoon, we were carried to Parker Junior School, an official shelter, where we spent the night sleeping on the floor.

Fortunately, Louise Janelle knew where we were. She came for us late Friday afternoon and took us to the home of Anna's great-niece in Nashville. On Saturday, I went to my nephew's, where I remained about three weeks. We spent days in the soggy apartment saving the things that we could and refinishing furniture that had been given to me.



Aerial view of the reservoir.

CREDIT: CARL (POGIE) WORSLEY

The hardest thing for me was to learn to accept monetary contributions, which were so generously given. After moving into a new apartment in October, I started giving away my many flowers from Riverside. When they were all moved or given away, I was content that they had a home.

Even though I lost much materially, people were so kind, thoughtful, and generous with their money, food, clothes, and emotional support that I feel that I lost nothing.

It was an experience I wouldn't want to repeat. Now, nearly two years later, I am happily working in my new flower garden. As long as I can grow flowers, things aren't bad at all.

Elmo Boswell has helped make Rocky Mount beautiful with the wonderful flowers she grows with care and love. She was living at Riverside Apartments at the time of the flood.

The Great Flood of the Century

SHELBY SEWELL

Residents of Eastern North Carolina will not soon forget the great flood of the century. The area experienced tremendous rainfall following Hurricanes Dennis and Floyd—a total of twenty-seven inches. The rain caused all rivers and tributaries in the area to flood like never before in recorded history.

I had never dreamed that I'd live to experience such a disaster. It was terrible to helplessly watch the water rise around the house, cars, and garage on Thursday, September 16. Not realizing that water covered the whole area, we were shocked when the lake that we lived beside in Edgecombe County flooded. It had never flooded in the past.

The night of September 16 was like living in a war zone. We could see helicopters airlifting people out of their homes. They kept zooming in to check on us because when the water level reached the wiring in both of our cars, it shorted out and the emergency lights flashed for hours. The people in the helicopter thought we were signaling them to pick us up.

After a sleepless night, we were ready to be evacuated. Our neighbor, Charles Threat, who had checked on us often the day before, came in his boat and picked us up right off our porch. He took us and our dog, Missy, to a warehouse across the lake. Missy was to stay on the second level with all the neighborhood dogs and was not happy about that. Most of our neighbors who lived on the lake were being airlifted to the warehouse.

Nineteen soaking-wet people piled into the helicopter just like cattle,



An aerial view showing Stony Creek flooded from the west of Highway 95 to the east of Highway 301.

CREDIT: CARL (POGIE) WORSLEY

an experience I won't forget soon. I had always wanted to see Rocky Mount from the air but not exactly that way.

We were transferred to buses that took us to shelters set up in churches in Tarboro. They gave us dry clothing and fed us lunch. We were grateful for each person who so generously gave us help during this time of need.

We were finally able to reach our friends, the Blakes. Even though they were experiencing difficulties on their farm, including the loss of electricity, they came and retrieved us. We promised that we'd stay only three days.

As we promised, after three days we left, and the Ray Walker family and the Gaither Weeks family kept us for the next six days. These wonderful church friends will never know how much their hospitality meant to us during our time of homelessness.

We are blessed with friends, our three children (Joey, Jans, and Pam), and our other relatives, who were so concerned about us. All of our children and friends live out of town. They could see on the news the horrible things that were happening.

With telephones out, they were frantic to reach us.

Though we lost much, compared to many we lost very little. The water level had risen to the top step when we left the day after Floyd, so we didn't know for several days whether it was wet inside our house or not. A lot of sweat equity had gone into our home for a year. I remember how I complained the day I saw that the brick mason had added one more layer of concrete blocks to the foundation than I had wanted. If the foundation had

been the height I'd wanted, we would have had water inside our two-month-old house. Instead, we were happy to discover that the inside was dry.

After many days staying with friends, we were anxious to get back home. Missy was there to greet us. What a surprise! We didn't know how long she'd been there without food. Apparently, she had swum back home.

By Saturday, September 25, the power was turned on, but we didn't have a phone for over a month and were grateful for our cell phones. Since the heating system was out for several weeks, we had to install gas logs.

We also learned lessons about insurance. Fortunately, we had insurance on both of the cars that were lost. We learned, however, that the insured never gets the true value of a lost vehicle. Weeks before the hurricane, we had bought flood insurance to cover the structure of the house, but none of the things in the garage were covered, since it was not attached to the house, another insurance lesson. Much of the stored furniture and many of my in-progress projects were just thrown onto the burn pile or hauled to the county dump.

Rocky Mount Academy, where I teach kindergarten, was closed for five days, but many schools were closed for eight to ten days. Ironically, I went back to a flooded classroom where water stood on the floor due to a roof leak. The room had just been renovated—new roof, new ceiling, new carpet, new paint. I took my children to another building for a week until repairs could be made.

Through it all, we really did count our blessings because so many people were affected by this flood. Thousands of people in this area lost everything they had. It was a sight to see: closed businesses, devastated homes, thousands of totaled cars, hundreds of animals killed or lost. It was commonplace to see rubble and garbage piled head-high along the roads.

The majority of people had no flood insurance. Although our former house on Maple Creek in Rocky Mount had water up to the sub-floor, many of the houses on that street had water to their roofs. It was sickening to drive down that street and others in this area. It will literally take years for things to return to normal.

We have learned many lessons. We have always known that this earth is not our home, that we are just journeymen here. The flood really brought

home that fact. This whole ordeal has been an unbelievable experience, and we pray that we didn't miss the lessons God had for us during this time.

Shelby Sewell was a kindergarten teacher at Rocky Mount Academy at the time of the flood. She has been a longtime resident of Rocky Mount and is an active member of The First Baptist Church.

Home from the Beach

DARYL BRITT

On September 14, we battened down in preparation for Hurricane Floyd. Living on Sapony Creek, near the Rocky Mount Reservoir, we have learned to be prepared. When Hurricane Fran came through in 1998, forty to fifty trees blew down, and I had to cut my way out of the blocked drive. This time I drove my Ford van and my tractor down toward the water to get them away from the remaining trees. Bad decision! Floyd brought less wind but more rising water.

After the storm, I realized that the chain saw was in the van, and both the tractor and van were under four feet of water. I did manage to rescue some tools before wading back to the house. Once again, I was hemmed in by a couple of big trees across the drive.

My mother, Jo Britt, called around 7:00 P.M. from her apartment at Riverside to say that water was coming up close to her door. I thought, "She must be exaggerating. There couldn't be that much water at Riverside." Nonetheless, she seemed really afraid that if the water got into the apartment and connected with the electrical outlets, she might be electrocuted. Since she couldn't get to the main switch outside, I told her to take out all the fuses.

Mom was right to be scared. The water did come into the apartment—under the doors and through the furnace vents. Fortunately, Randy Hicks from Leggett came by boat to rescue his mother-in-law and picked up my



Darden Court at Riverside Apartments. The Rocky Mount firemen rescued many people here at a great risk to their own lives.

CREDIT: GARY BRITT

mother, too. They were taken first to Gay Street. Eventually a bus took them to the R.M. Wilson gym, which had been set up as a temporary shelter.

It took me an hour and a half to clear the drive enough to get out. Meanwhile, I received a call from the shelter saying that my mother was there and needed a ride home. (Home? Where was home now?)

Driving from Sandy Cross to R.M. Wilson proved tricky. Most roads were blocked by water, but I managed to zigzag through six to eight inches of water on West Tarboro Road to get to her. She was very glad to see me.

Mom needed oxygen twenty-four hours a day and was quickly using up the short supply in her tank. We called and tried to find some more but to no avail. We went back to Riverside, where I asked the fire department rescue team if I could get a boat ride to Mom's apartment to locate some oxygen. They flagged down a volunteer rescuer I'll call "Hero," who was using his own boat, and he took me.

I was amazed how unfamiliar things appeared without landmarks or visible roads. The multitude of apartment buildings all looked alike, and I couldn't tell whether I was on Darden Court or East Duke Circle. When she'd first moved in, Mom had planted a cherry tree from the home place

by her apartment, and after fifteen years, it was taller than the building. That was the only way I finally located her apartment.

Mom's car, which contained her spare oxygen tank, was always parked right beside the cherry tree, so I finally found it. I dived into the water, found the car, opened a door, got out two bottles of oxygen and swam to the apartment. The door was locked.

Hero asked, "How are we going to get in?"

"Give me that anchor," I replied, and I knocked out the glass and opened the door. The water inside was about five feet deep. After I got all the oxygen equipment loaded and was on the way out, I also grabbed the picture my great-grandmother had painted.

As we tried to figure the best way to return to land, we heard something and simultaneously said, "What was that?" A lady stood on her porch in five feet of water. As we headed her way, the trolling motor hit something that broke its mount. Then it really hit me. This was a serious, life-threatening situation.

When we finally got to the lady, Elsie Cone, she was very calm, holding her pocketbook and a bag of clothes. Though she was afraid she was too heavy for us, we promised that we'd get her into the boat. Hero got in the water and picked her up, and I helped pull her in. Back at the rescue area, a neighbor had called for someone to come pick up Mrs. Cone.

When I finally carried Mom to my home, it was the simplest relocation ever—one person holding a pair of dry shoes, one pocketbook, and one oxygen tank. That was it. Such relocations happened a thousand times, but only the people who experienced them understood.

After I got Mom settled, I took my pontoon boat back to 527 Darden Court and tried to salvage whatever I could. My friend, Mike Phillips, went with me to help, and we salvaged a few pieces of furniture. By the way, my friend Hero was still trolling for survivors at Riverside. I do not know to this day who Hero is. I would certainly like to hear from him if he reads this story.

Daryl Britt and his family were vacationing on Emerald Isle when they heard that Hurricane Floyd was heading for Rocky Mount. They immediately drove home.





Dark Night at Lafayette Circle

ANNE MOSLEY



During the wee hours of September 16, 1999, I woke frequently, listening for sounds of Hurricane Floyd, but I heard nothing except a rather hard, continuous rain. Each time I woke, I was very optimistic that we were going to get off easily this time in comparison to Hurricane Fran, because I heard no wind, no limbs or trees falling, as I had heard during the night of Fran's arrival.

However, when I woke around 4:00 A.M., my husband Michael asked me to step out onto our front porch to see how much water was running down the street. I thought it looked okay, but I am a good-bit nearsighted. Before he went to bed, he'd moved my Suburban and his pick-up truck onto the street where they would be less likely to have a tree fall on them. Now he'd become a little concerned about what he thought was more water than usual in the street. Just to be sure, I walked to the back of the house, which is lower than the front, and took a good look around. Everything appeared fine.

I went back to bed, but just a minute later, Michael insisted that we go back out on the front porch because Dr. Fish's dog was barking down at the end of Lafayette Circle, and Michael said it wasn't Duchess's normal bark. We could see water in the street, and it appeared to be moving quite fast in the direction of our yard and up Lafayette Circle away from the river.

Michael suggested we call our neighbors below us on the circle and alert them. Not understanding the seriousness of the situation, I hesitated



Lafayette Circle in West Haven. All houses in this circle were flooded.

CREDIT: JULIAN FENNER

because it was the middle of the night. He was unable to get through to anyone but the Pierces directly across the street. They seemed to think everything was okay, but within a few seconds, Carlton Pierce returned to the phone and told Michael that they were indeed flooding.

While Michael was on the phone with Carlton, Johnnie Harris (daughter-in-law of Tom and Alma Harris, who lived at the end of the Circle) was frantically ringing our back doorbell. Ironically, Johnnie's family had evacuated their home near Wilmington, North Carolina, the day before and were staying at Alma and Tom's house until the storm passed. When I opened the door, she was soaking wet, which I thought was from the rain. She was extremely excited and was telling me that the water was coming and that we needed to leave our house.

I tried to calm her by telling her that we were fine and had no water in our house and for her family to come and stay with us. In her frantic state, she failed to tell me that she, her mother- and father-in-law, her husband, and teen-aged son had just swum out the front door of her in-laws' house in water over their heads against a horrific current.

I left Johnnie at the door in order to dash around my house to look for any signs of water seeping under the doors and to check on Suzanna, our six-and-a-half-month-old baby who was sleeping in a porta-crib downstairs in our bedroom. Suzanna was sound asleep, and everything in the house appeared fine until I noticed a little water coming under the doors in our living room, dining room, and den, which are located on a level two steps down from the rest of the first floor.

I yelled to Michael and tried to find Johnnie, but she was nowhere in sight. Michael said that we should leave the house immediately. I thought he was overreacting, but I knew that we must prepare to leave in case it became necessary. I could imagine a few inches of water in the house, but the thought of almost nine feet never entered my mind.

I ran upstairs and woke up Nicholas, our fourteen-year-old son. I told him that there was water coming into the house, that we might have to leave, and that he should go downstairs, grab a few things, and bring them upstairs. His clock read 4:30 A.M. I ran back downstairs and yelled for Michael to get the Oriental rug off the living room floor and Nicholas's portrait off the wall and to take them upstairs while I gathered as many baby things together for Suzanna as I could. As I was grabbing baby formula, baby food, apple juice, etc., and was dashing back and forth from the kitchen to the bedroom to check on Suzanna, Nicholas came flying downstairs and snatched his golf clubs to take upstairs.

I felt the water rising quickly past my ankles up my legs and screamed to Nicholas to take Frisco, our little Jack Russell terrier, out to the Suburban. Nicholas later told me that he found her in the laundry room caught in a little current going round and round, unable to swim out.

I continued to throw baby things into tote bags while Michael and Nicholas grabbed as many small things as they could and rushed them upstairs. They saved family pictures, for which I am thankful.

By this point, all three of us were aware of the seriousness of the situation and knew that we must soon leave. Michael persistently commanded, "We gotta get out of here!" Since all of the lights were on and all of us were constantly checking on her, Suzanna was wide-awake. She was watching

all the commotion and the fast-rising water but not making a whimper or a sound of any kind. As I stood in water above my knees with my back to her, hurriedly filling the diaper bag, Michael rushed in and saw that her crib had floated from the wall to the center of the room. She was still dry because the water had not reached the mattress in her crib, but he shouted, "We're getting out of here *now!*"

He picked up Suzanna and tucked her under his raincoat as I picked up my jewelry box and handed it to Nicholas. I loaded my arms and shoulders with the numerous bags I had just packed, and we headed toward the door. On the way, I waded into the family room to pick up my pocketbook just as the power went out. It was the blackest darkness I had ever experienced. I could see absolutely nothing.

At that moment, I realized how strong the current was and how loud the rushing water was. I yelled to Nicholas who said that he was okay and right in front of me. I waded to the back door, walked out into waist-deep water, and headed up our driveway toward the lights of our Suburban.

By now the gale-force wind was blowing the rain sideways, and the rushing water that was quickly drowning Lafayette Circle was so loud that I had difficulty hearing anything else. I kept screaming for Michael and Nicholas and soon found them standing beside the Suburban. Michael yelled over the noise of the water that Suzanna was fine and that Jessica Pierce, our fourteen-year-old neighbor, was holding her inside the car.

I got in on the passenger side, found Johnnie Harris sitting in the driver's seat, and her son, "T," and the entire Pierce family along with little Suzanna in the back. Thank goodness for that sports-utility vehicle, a place to get out of the storm and a way to escape the flood. The digital clock read 4:45 A.M. What an incredible fifteen minutes we had just lived through!

Johnnie told me that the water at the lower end of Lafayette Circle had been over their heads, that she and her family had made their "swim-out" escape, and (most frightening of all) that Stephanie and Cliff Hayworth and their three small children were stranded on the second floor of their house hoping to be rescued through an upstairs window. Also Dr. and Mrs. Fish were stranded on the second floor of their house and that the current was so incredibly strong that swimming out at that point was

impossible. She had learned all of this via cell phone and assured me that 911 had been called repeatedly.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. In my mind, strong currents were located in the oceans and in the rapids of huge rivers—not in Lafayette Circle! My mind raced to find a way to rescue the Hayworths and the Fishes. I jumped out of the car to find Michael, knowing he would come up with a plan. When I found him, he was talking (or, I should say, yelling over the wind, rain, and river roar) to Gary Phillips, Stephanie's father, who had the Hayworths on his cell phone. A johnboat and one paddle had already been retrieved from the Pierces' backyard, and they were now searching the area for another paddle. Using one had proven unsuccessful. The fire department was on the way.

I jumped back in the car and called my parents to make sure they were okay and to let them know our situation. While I was talking to my mother, my father was listening on another phone and heard about the need for a second paddle. He remembered that he had one in his barn. He dropped the phone, rushed to the barn, found the paddle, and took off for Lafayette Circle!

In the meantime, the fire department arrived (without paddles) and asked us who needed to be rescued. I told them who lived in each house and that the Hayworths and the Fishes were the only ones we knew about who needed to be rescued. We did not know that Ida and Bill Stanley and Joe and Matt Smith were also stranded on the second floors of their homes. Even more horrific, Jean and Jack Bishop had been forced to swim out of their one-story house and climb a tree, and they were in their yard hanging from a wobbly limb barely above the quickly rising water!

Michael insisted that I take Suzanna (who still had not made a whimper) and everyone else and leave West Haven. He was afraid that trees would soon begin to fall. He assured me that he and Nicholas would not stay much longer but felt they might be of some help rescuing the Hayworths and the Fishes. I agreed reluctantly but felt very uncomfortable not only leaving my son and my husband standing there, but also leaving three children and four adults hanging out of their second-floor windows amid fast-rising waters, strong winds, and rain in total darkness.

Off we went to seek shelter. We were fortunate to find three rooms available at the Carleton House Motel, which became our home for the next ten days. An hour or so later, Michael appeared and told me that, thanks to a second paddle my father had brought from his barn, the Hayworths and the Fishes were being rescued by the men from the fire department in the little johnboat.

My father beat the flood across the Falls Road bridge on his drive to Lafayette Circle and back. He took Nicholas to stay at his house, and it was hours before Michael and I were able to determine that they had actually made it back across the bridge. We were separated from Nicholas for days because of the flooded bridges between the Carleton House and my parents' home.

The fire department did indeed rescue the Hayworths, the Fishes, and the Stanleys from the second floors of their homes and the Bishops from the wobbly limb of the tree. Matt and Joe Smith were discovered standing on the roof of their home the following afternoon by a spectator trolling by in a small boat. Duchess, Dr. Fish's dog, was also found the following afternoon on a nearby street. Apparently her doghouse had floated over her fenced-in pen, and she was able to swim to land. Of our neighbors, the Gatsises left their home shortly before the storm and flood hit, and the Zalnecks were out of the country for the entire catastrophe.

None of the Lafayette Circle neighbors, except the Gatsises, were able to obtain building permits after the flood. The rest of us have relocated and are now waiting for FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] closings or have already completed the FEMA buyout program. No matter where we reside today, the former residents of Lafayette Circle will always share a unique neighborhood bond.

Anne Mosley grew up in Rocky Mount and lived at 1754 Lafayette Circle for eleven years prior to September 1999. She is married to another Rocky Mount native, and they have one son and one daughter.



Disaster Brings Strength

AN INTERVIEW WITH BARBARA AND J.E. DRAKE | MARTHA JOHNSON

Barbara: The night before the flood, we knew that we were going to have some winds and probably some water. But we had been in that house forty-four years, and we'd never had a drop of water inside. We've had it in the yard many times but never in the house.



That night, when we went to bed, we were well aware that the water was rising because we'd been monitoring it. It was rising about an inch an hour, so when we went to bed, we put our clothes right beside the bed—just in case. I'd had on shorts, and Sambo had had on casual clothes. We got up several times during the night to check on the water, and everything seemed okay.



When I woke up about 4:40 A.M., it was still dark. I turned on the light and saw a little spot on the carpet in the hall. I thought, "Now what's that?" I went to check, and the carpet was wet. That's when I first realized there was water in the house.

I quickly woke up Sambo, and both of us threw on the clothes we'd worn the night before, dashed to the kitchen, and started grabbing things. I had a trunk full of photo albums—that was the first thing we thought of. We put that up on the kitchen table. I had a little hedgehog in a cage sitting on the floor in the den, so I ran, got him, and put him up high on a shelf.

The water was rising very quickly. In the thirty to thirty-five minutes after we woke, it rose fifteen inches. The lights in the house were still on. Of

course, we couldn't go pull the breaker while standing in water, so Sambo said, "We gotta get out of here before this water reaches the outlets." I grabbed my purse and Sambo stuffed his wallet in his back pocket. And that was it—that was all the time we had.

Sambo: The city had opened the gates at the reservoir because they were afraid the dam would break and all the water would come rushing down at one time. I understand why they had to do that, but they should have sent out sirens to the low-lying areas to warn people to get out. Two people on our block were trapped and didn't get out. One on the street behind us was trapped in his attic. Another man climbed up on his carport and was rescued later the next morning.

Barbara: When we went out our back door, we had to go down three steps. I'm five feet two inches tall; and at the bottom, the water came up high on my chest. The water was cold, and it was pitch black. I don't know how, but the tennis court lights across the street had been left on or had come on. Our house was right in front of them, so we could see a little bit.

The water was coming with a terrific force directly towards us—not from the direction of the river like you'd expect, but directly across the tennis courts. The river had overflowed its banks so widely that it was coming through the tennis courts and right by the side of the house. The current was so strong that a brick house two doors down was moved six inches off its foundation.

If Sambo hadn't been six feet three inches tall and pulled me along, I could never have made it. In the cold, strong current, things kept hitting our legs. We didn't know if they were snakes or tree limbs. We were in shock, cold, shaking, and wet.

Sambo had parked the truck at the swimming pool like everybody in the neighborhood did when we thought the water might be up. The pool's high on a hill, so we had to walk a long block to reach the truck. Everybody else's cars were parked down nearer the street and were already almost covered. Ours was higher up the hill, and it started the second time Sambo tried. Once the truck started, however, we had to go down the hill into deeper water to get out.

Sambo: When I drove down off the hill and onto Taylor Street, the

water came up to the headlights of the truck. I drove slowly so the van wouldn't throw water all over the motor. But by the time I got to Thomas Street, the truck was skipping and just about ready to flood out.

We turned right onto Thomas Street and went to where it joins Sunset Avenue, intending to go up Old Mill Road, but that was blocked off with water. Trying to get across the river to our son's house, I turned around and went back to Hammond Street. That was full of water, too, and we couldn't get across the bridge there. I then turned around and took Raleigh Road southwest out to U.S. Highway 301, which took me across the river by the overpass to Bethlehem Road and to my son's house. I'd called him on the cell phone and told him we were coming.

Barbara: Gosh, it was good to get to Steven's house and into a pair of warm, dry sweats.

Sambo: By morning, all the roads leading from Steven's house were flooded. We couldn't get back to our house to see how high the water was. Judging by how high the water was on the roads the next day, if we'd been a little later leaving the house, we wouldn't have made it to Steven's.

Barbara: It was six days before we were able to get back to our house. Sambo and our two sons—Tommy, who came over from Raleigh, and Steven—put in a canoe on Thomas Street and paddled down to the house. They went in and got the family pictures. They had on waders because the water was still deep. The next day, the water had subsided, and we all finally got back to the house. The water had risen two feet onto our roof.

Mud was everywhere. When we walked we would sink up to our knees. Fortunately, Tommy had thought to bring all sorts of things from Raleigh with him. He'd brought all the boots he could find—including high-top boots. In addition, he brought paper towels, plastic containers to put things in, a first-aid kit, and water. He bought all the things we'd need but that I would never have thought of. Our daughter, who teaches, was out of school that week, so she came. Our son from New Bern and his wife came.

They all started pulling stuff out. We probably could have saved more than we did, but we were just overwhelmed and in a state of shock at the time. On the other hand, we saved a lot of things that I wouldn't have thought possible.

The old furniture came through fine. We had to have a couple of old pieces redone. But anything with veneer on it was gone. Any modern furniture—the wingback chairs, sofas, mattresses—all that, of course, was gone.

The water had reached the floor of our attic; consequently, all the insulation was wet, which made the ceilings fall in. There was our furniture with horrible looking wet insulation on top of it. It was a mess.

The water had gotten to the room over the garage where I had my collections. Everything on the floor up there got wet—my books and all. Things up on shelves or the walls were okay. I only went in the house one time.

When we'd left, we'd thought that we'd be back that night or the next day and that everything would be a little muddy but all right. Of course, that was not true. The trunk full of photographs and family memorabilia that we'd put on the kitchen table had just floated.

Sambo: Everything in the house floated up to the ceilings.

Barbara: Things floated up, turned over, and then floated down. Like in the bedrooms.

Sambo: As you can see in those pictures, even this merry-go-round carousel horse floated.

Barbara: It floated off its brass stand and turned sideways. Of course there was damage to it, but it did come through. It's solid. In the bedroom—that's the only place I went—the mattresses and everything had floated up to the ceilings. When the bed, the mattress, the box springs, and the covers came down, all of it was tangled up. We couldn't even see the bed. There was just a conglomeration of stuff when we walked in.

I had put my little hedgehog high on a bookcase thinking he'd be safe. Of course, he was gone when we got back.

We saved a lot of pictures from the bookcases, though. People took pictures home, cleaned them, and laid them out to dry. We really did save a lot of pictures. The color just slid right off the older ones of our children, but they were made when color first came out.

I had a collection of children's books that I really loved, and they were long gone. I also had a collection of dolls, which included a Shirley Temple doll that was mine when I was a little girl. All the dolls were gone. I'd kept

them in the den bookcases downstairs instead of over the garage because it was too hot for them in the attic room.

Sambo: We only had \$10,000 flood insurance on the house and \$10,000 on the contents. We'd thought the river might someday rise high enough to come into the furnace and mess that up—the ductwork and maybe the floors or carpets—but we never carried a high amount. It was so expensive. After all, we'd lived there forty-four years, and nothing like that had ever happened.

Barbara: Before 1999, in all the flooding of the Tar River, water had never gotten higher than to the steps or to about three or four inches below the floor joists. And that had happened only one time before. Usually it came to the steps. We knew we weren't going back to the old house long before FEMA told us they were going to buy us out. We went ahead and bought this house within, I think, within three weeks and moved into it.

Sambo: On January 3, 2001, just about fifteen months after the flood, FEMA bought the old property.

Barbara: We were well pleased with the buyout. Except for a rental house on the corner, all the rest of the homes in our block were bought out.

Sambo: They are already bulldozing the houses.

Barbara: Our neighborhood had been very stable. Most of the people had been there more than forty years, just like us. Now, everyone's left and gone other places. If it hadn't been for the FEMA buyout, everything would have been a total loss for all of us.

We got a lot of help from local folks, as well. Church groups came from all over. A group came from Chapel Hill, but since we had lots of help, we sent them to people on our street who needed help. The Rocky Mount churches were the same way. The First Baptist [Church] helped the people next to us. I learned that people were more than willing to help.

Sambo: They knew the stuff had to come out of the houses to be dried out, and they helped bring stuff out. They had to go in there with wheelbarrows and load up. The walls, ceilings, and the insulation had to come down. It all had to be gotten out of the house so it would dry. We were told by the city that, before we could redo houses, the sheetrock had to come off so the studs could dry out. If you put the sheetrock back over

wet studs, it causes them to mildew and becomes a breeding round for *Stachybotrys* mold [a.k.a., “black mold”]. So, we cleaned our house out hoping we’d be able to live there again.

One stranger came up that first day and asked if he could help. He pushed a wheelbarrow all day long. People were wonderful.

Barbara: We felt like we had as much support from the entire community as we could have hoped for under the circumstances. We had as much help as we needed—because we had a lot of help from our own family.

If we’d been completely on our own that night and hadn’t had a child whose home we could go to and be welcome, we certainly would have suffered. It was hard enough just getting there. I never cried the whole time because we were so busy, but I don’t know what we would have done if there’d been just the two of us with no family or community support.

Sambo: But we’re beginning to build new relationships in our new neighborhood.

Barbara: We love our new neighborhood and feel comfortable in this house even after living somewhere else for forty-four years.

Sambo: This house is just as far from the Tar River as we could get.

Barbara: This house is on a hill.

Sambo: It’s out of the flood zone—the five-hundred-year flood zone.

Barbara: The things we miss the most are family pictures and my collections of children’s books I could never replace those, but they’re just things.

Sambo: If you live, there’s always the next day. I think, without a doubt, the flood brought Barbara and me and the children closer together.

Barbara: It brought our whole family closer together. At the same time, the flood taught us that, individually, we’re stronger than we thought we were and that it pays to have insurance.

In September 1999, Barbara and James (Sambo) Drake lived at 725 N. Taylor Street across from the Rocky Mount city pool and tennis courts in Riverside Park. They lived in the third house from the river. Barbara was sixty-six at the time. Sambo was seventy-one.



Up a Tree

AN INTERVIEW WITH JACK AND JEAN BISHOP | MARTHA JOHNSON



Jean: At the time of Hurricane Floyd in September 1999, Jack and I had lived at 1745 Lafayette Circle in West Haven for about fifteen years. I stayed up late that night because we have a son who has a charter-boat business in Beaufort, North Carolina, and I was worried to death about him. He had moved his boat to safer waters and was going to stay on it all night, so I was waiting up to hear that he was safe. I watched TV to see what was going on, but I fell asleep on the sofa.

When I woke up, I started back to our bedroom. Our house was U-shaped around three sides of a swimming pool. As I went through the living room and dining room, I flipped on the outside lights to check what was going on. When I did, I saw that the swimming pool was overflowing.

I went flying back to the bedroom, woke Jack up, and told him the pool was running over and that he needed to go out and see if the pump was working.

Jack: Well, I went out, as I recall, barefooted. When I got into the pump house, I realized that the water had covered the pumps and had probably already shorted them out. As I came back to tell my wife, I realized that the water was within an inch of coming into our home, which was built on a concrete slab. As I got back inside, Jean called from the bathroom and said that water had started coming into the bedroom. The bedroom must have been an inch or so lower than the rest of the house.



We began putting chairs on top of the dining-room table. I dashed to the game room, where I had some valuable guns from Ducks Unlimited, and put them up on top of the pool table, thinking that the water would never get that high. I also put some expensive cameras on top of a wooden desk that was probably five feet above floor level.

Jean: We also took the bottom drawers out of dressers and put them on the bed. We ran from room to room like crazy people, trying to put things up. We'd lived in the house fifteen years and had never had any flooding, so we couldn't imagine that the water would get very high.

Jack: Our home was some two to three hundred feet from the Tar River, and there was an earth berm or dike between us and the river. Flooding had never been an issue. On the other hand, our home was on almost an acre of heavily wooded land with very large pine trees, so our hurricane preparation anticipated wind and tree damage. I'd moved Jean's car, which was newer than mine, into a friend's warehouse but had left mine in the driveway in case we needed it. Mine was completely inundated by floodwaters.

Jean: We realized that we were getting in trouble and that the water was rising fast.

Jack: In the thirty minutes or so that we rushed around making various preparations, we had ankle-deep water in the house. I had a cell phone that was working, but our other phones were out. I called 911 and told them that I thought we were going to need some help, probably a boat. They said that they were sorry, but they didn't have any boats.

Jean: So we rushed to the back door to leave.

Jack: When we opened the back door, we could see through the thick, plastic storm door how high the water was outside.

Jean: It was almost waist deep. We had hurriedly thrown a few things into some bags, but when we tried to push the storm door open, we realized we couldn't. The force of the water outside was so powerful that we wouldn't be able to carry the bags. We looked across the street and saw the Stanleys, who were using flashlights to try to walk out. They were in waist-deep water. We didn't know until 7:00 or 7:30 A.M. the next morning that they'd turned around and gone back to their two-story home.

Jean: When we realized we couldn't get out the back door, we rushed to

the front door. I'm five feet four inches tall and in fairly good health. Prior to the flood, I'd had two knee replacements done at the same time, so I figured maneuvering in water that deep was going to be difficult for me.

Jack: I'm five feet nine inches tall, and my health had been good until the flood. By the time we got to the front doors, water was waist-deep inside as well as out. The pressure of the outside water had broken through the bottom panel of the back storm door, and water was just cascading in. Our front doors had been imported from Mexico and were made of steel and glass. Without opening the door, we could see the height of the water and its force. It was obvious that we wouldn't be able to open that door either.

Jean: Then we tried to get out through a guest-bedroom window.

Jack: Our storm windows were removable only from the outside, so we were trapped. I had put our bags on the guest bed while considering how to get out of the window, and by the time we turned around, the bed was floating.

Jean: Everything in the house was floating. The night before, we had brought in the yard furniture and put it in the hall, thinking that the wind was going to blow. When we came back through the hall from the guest bedroom, all of that furniture was just topsy-turvy, floating on water. Cupboards had turned over. The sofa and even the rug were floating. I said to Jack, "We are going to drown in this house." I never thought we were going to get out, but he said, "No, we're not. No, we're not!" As we made our way through the house, Jack kept saying, "Be careful," because we couldn't find a safe path—heavy, submerged objects were moving everywhere. We finally made it to the sliding glass door in our living room.

Jack: There's normally an inch-wide board that lies in the track to prevent someone from coming in. By this time, I'd say the water was probably within six inches of Jean's neck, so I had to go underwater to remove the security stick. Then I was able to slide the glass door open.

Jean went out first, carrying just her pocketbook. When she stepped out, there was a six-inch drop down to the ground, so the water was close to chin-high on her. I cautioned her to swing wide around where the pool might be. We definitely didn't want to drop into six or eight feet more of water.

As we skirted the pool, there were large four-by-four timbers floating

around, and I said, "Wonder where in the world they came from." It dawned on us later that those were the treated timbers that had edged a couple of small flowerbeds on either side of the house.

I have sleep apnea. So even though I'd left everything else, I had my little C-PAP air pump in my arms, thinking, "I gotta have this to sleep." As soon as we left the house, I realized that I couldn't carry it and keep hold of Jean, so I put it in the fork of a tree. Along the way, Jean got rid of her purse. We never did find them.

We finally made it to a rear gate. I tried the left door but couldn't open it. Then I tried the right-hand door and finally shoved it open. I was leading the way. Jean was close behind me, and we were talking the entire time. My idea at that moment was to try to cross the street and get to a two-story house; but when we reached the street, the strength of the current was so great that we realized there was no way we could get across. We were talking to each other over the noise the whole way.

Jean: Our feet were getting tangled in azaleas that were as tall as we were as we tried to swim over or move through them. We'd lost any sense of where walkways or other things were. I said, "I am not going across the street."

Jack said, "Well, you've got to. It's the only chance we've got."

I said, "No, it's not. I can't go across it!"

He asked, "What're you going to do?"

All this time, it was raining, the wind was blowing, and we were swimming the best we could. I said, "I'm going back and get in a tree." I got hold of a tree limb that was under water and pulled myself backwards until I got to the tree trunk. About then, I heard Jack say, "I can't make it! I can't make it!" He'd ventured further into the current than I had. I yelled, "Yes, you can! Reach down. Reach down and grab a limb!" So he did. He reached down, found the limb, and pulled himself back.

Jack pushed me higher in the tree. He said, "Get up and straddle that limb." And then he was right there beside me.

The cold wind was blowing. We could hear trees falling. It was terrible. We were so cold our teeth were chattering, and we stayed there three and a half to four hours. I had on just a pair of long, cotton pants, a T-shirt, and tennis shoes. Jack didn't have on shoes.

Jack: I had on shorts and a Polo-type shirt. While we were in the tree, we realized that the lights were still on in the house, so that was comforting. Then, probably twenty to thirty minutes later, all the lights went out. We were left in the pitch black. Later, when the water got up around nine feet or so, it set off the fire alarms. They sounded for a considerable length of time and then stopped. All that time, while we were clinging to the tree in the dark, we could hear trees coming down in the distance, limbs breaking. I don't know if we ever actually saw snakes, but we certainly imagined them.

Jean: There were lots of bugs.

Jack: Every kind of bug. An area twenty feet or so around our house had been cut weekly, but the rest of the yard had been left natural. At the time, there was probably ten years of pine straw and stuff on the ground. The deep mat of pine straw had just floated to the surface, and you felt like you could almost stand on it. Naturally you couldn't, but you could lay your arms out on it, and it would support you. It was full of bugs trying to escape and full of what we suspected were snakes but were probably limbs that had broken off and were floating around us.

Jean was sitting on a limb that was extremely small, and I was terribly afraid that it would not support her if she moved around too much. Sitting on a narrow limb for over four hours, your butt gets sore. She kept moving around to sit on a different spot, and I kept cautioning her, "Don't move out on that limb!" because I knew that, if she did, there was no way in the world that it would continue to support her. I think Jean was more afraid than I. I think she was more concerned that we would not survive. And . . .

Jean: I didn't think they were ever going to find us.

Jean: Then we started yelling, "Help!"

Jack: Well, that was around 6:30 A.M. or so.

Jean: We could see a flashlight going back and forth across the second floor in a neighbor's house behind us and knew that some people were over there. We wanted to let them know that we were in the tree.

Jack: I don't think they envisioned where we were. They just knew we were out there—on the roof of the house or somewhere. But they did holler back to say that the fire department was aware and was coming.

I've spent a lifetime in Scouting and a lifetime hunting. And I've fallen

out of boats in cold water and one thing and another, so I had experienced some of the same things. I wasn't afraid, except for Jean. Of course, she was extremely frightened and mentioned many times, "Jack, we're going to drown." But having daylight come around 7:00 or 7:30 A.M. and hearing the couple over there hollering to us gave us the nerve we needed to finish it out.

Our neighbors had three small children, so the firemen took the family with three children first, but they hollered back to us to say they were coming back. It was probably thirty minutes or more before they came, and that was like an eternity.

When they came back, there were three rescuers in the johnboat. I told them to take Jean first, but they couldn't get past me in the tree to reach her. They said, "We're gonna have to take you first," so I slid off the limb and grabbed the side of the boat. One of the firemen pulled me in. Then they went over to get Jean.

Jean: By the time we were rescued, the water was up to my shoulders where I was sitting in the tree. The guys in the boat told me to drop down into the water. They were holding me and said, "We're not going to let go of you." I had to drop off the limb and down into the water for them to be able to pull me into the boat.

A neighbor of ours told me a week later that he was still having nightmares of hearing me call for help. He said, "Jean, will you ever forgive me? There was nothing I could do. There wasn't a thing I could do." He and his son had crawled out onto their back roof. At the time, they thought we were probably on a roof, too. They didn't know that we were in a tree.

Jack: We were extremely cold and experiencing hypothermia when we finally got into the rescue vehicle. They wrapped us with blankets, which helped a great deal.

After taking us to a rescue vehicle, the boat went to get Dr. and Mrs. Fish, and then they went to get Mr. Stanley and his wife. Everyone on the circle had lived in two-story houses except us. The Smiths were probably rescued much later, maybe even a day later, I'm not sure. But, as I say, they were on the second floor, so they were safe.

Jean: We left the house at 3:30 in the morning, and they picked us up about 7:30 A.M.

Jack: I think the firemen had borrowed boats from anybody that had them. That was the situation all over town. The town was totally unprepared for this type of thing. They were prepared for high winds, as we had.

Jean: The firemen took us, the Fishes and Stanleys to the van and then to Edwards Junior High. It was the only shelter that wasn't full at the time, but it was not prepared for the flood. There was no coffee, blankets, or clothes to keep us warm. But there was the nicest young man there.

Jack: I'm not sure, but I think that he was connected to the educational system because he had the keys to the gymnasium.

Jean: He went down in the gym and brought back warm shirts for both us and some pants and socks for Jack.

Jean: Dr. Fish thought Jack was going into shock, so he called the hospital or the rescue squad and asked them to come for us.

Jack: Well, they never arrived. They couldn't get to the shelter. A police van was going to take us to the hospital; but when we got to the City Lake and Tar River, there was no passage across on Sunset Avenue. They stayed on the phone for what seemed like an hour or more trying to find a route to the hospital, but there wasn't one. They finally decided to take us to another emergency center. This time they chose the city hall. At the city hall, there were sandwiches, coffee, and blankets. That really helped after so many hours of exposure. The assistant city manager, Mr. Charles Penny, and his wife were there.

Jean: They could not have been nicer.

Jack: That's right.

Jean: I had called my brother on a cell phone from Edwards Junior High because I kept telling Jack, "Everyone's gonna think we're dead. Nobody knows that we got out of that house."

Jack: We knew that many of the neighbors thought that we had left town because I'd taken our main car and put it in a warehouse. We commonly went to our home in Bath, North Carolina, during storms to take care of our boats and property there, but this time we'd chosen to stay

home. I wasn't sure anyone even knew we were there at 7:00 or 7:30 when we started hollering.

Jean: At city hall, everyone was wonderful.

Jack: I own an interest in the Hampton Inn, so that was the logical place for us to go, but the bridge was out until the next day. So, after making some calls, we spent the first night with a cousin. We were able to get to the inn the following day.

Jean: Our phone at the motel rang constantly. People came to see us and brought clothes and other things.

Jack: There was no television for the first five or six days after the flood, so we had no earthly idea of the magnitude of the storm and the flood. I have seen pictures on television since then, but I don't want to watch them.

Jean: It was seven days before we could get back into our home to get the water out of it. Neighbors, people from the church, and people we'd never known came to help. The preacher from the Baptist church in Louisburg and a group of about six men came and helped haul furniture out and throw it away. They shoveled debris out.

I don't know what we would have done without our children. One son came with a crew of men and hauled furniture that we thought was salvageable out of the house by boat. Steve, our son who had the charter boat at Beaufort, was busy because he'd lost his own house, but we kept in close contact with him daily. But our three girls came, stayed, and worked with us when Jack was so sick. I don't know what we would have done without them.

Jack: Our circle and all the houses around it were built in a cul-de-sac that was actually lower than the river. There were pumps that, under normal conditions, kept any storm water drained out. Farm friends came and brought large pumps and hoses and pumped the area. The water was still in our circle seven to eight days after the flood had receded everywhere else.

The center of our house had a white cathedral ceiling. After the flood, the watermark on the ceiling was at thirteen feet. If the water had been three feet higher, it would have covered the entire house. If we had not gotten out when we did, we would have been trapped in a bubble of air only a foot or so from the top of the cathedral ceiling. We would have been

bobbing around in there with everything else that was loose and moving around in the house.

In looking back, I think the city did everything they could to help us. It seems like it took FEMA forever to buy us out, but I'm sympathetic with all they had to contend with. I think they did a good job.

I had counseling after the storm, and one of the counselors asked me one day if I was bitter. I told him, "No, I wasn't bitter except for perhaps one thing." I served on the city council in Rocky Mount years ago and served twenty-one years on the planning board as its chairman. I don't suppose there's anyone who has loved Rocky Mount any more than I have; but in thinking back, I believe that somehow the city should have been prepared for the opening of the dam upstream and should have alerted people who were in low-lying areas either by bullhorn or by knocking on doors before they opened it. They knew that opening the dam could result in people in low-lying areas losing their lives. I've never had that issue adequately addressed: exactly why the reservoir dam had to be opened and why we didn't have some warning. Jean was watching television that night—a warning could have been made on TV that the dam was going to be opened at a certain time and that those who lived in a low-lying area needed to evacuate. That wasn't done. I guess preparation for a flood just wasn't done.

Jean: A flood that bad was just inconceivable. Of course, we didn't have any flood insurance. The things we most regret losing were the family pictures. We did salvage a few. Just before the storm, the children had had a good time sitting on the living-room floor showing their children all of the old pictures and telling them stories about when they were little. Those are things that we'll never have again.

Jack: Almost daily we'll think of something that was lost. On every trip we'd ever taken, including our fiftieth-wedding-anniversary trip to Europe, I had taken rolls and rolls of film. Not only did I lose all of my camera equipment, but I also lost thousands of pictures that are irreplaceable. Oil paintings came out like brand new—didn't even have to get them restored—just washed them off and put them in new frames.

Jean: I kept saying, "Please look for my girls' wedding pictures," and they found them. Barringer's Studio had to restore them for us. The

remarkable thing was that the stuff like furniture that you thought would survive didn't. Anything laminated or veneered was lost. But things you thought would break didn't—like a teardrop-shaped, art nouveau vase. It's over a foot tall, thin glass, and fragile, but it survived the flood, even though it had been sitting on a glass table. Most of my cloisonné lamps were cleaned and rewired.

Jack: The Oriental rug came out extremely well. The English oak dining table came out better than anything, but we lost our dining-room chairs, our sideboard, and everything upholstered.

Jean: I cannot tell you all the furniture we lost, but the pieces that survived are going to be labeled so our grandchildren and great-grandchildren will know that they went through the flood with us.

Jack: But first we're going to get the tree moved. Jean has said that she doesn't care what it costs—but she says that about most things. She's going to put a plaque on that tree and have it moved to our home in Bath, North Carolina.

Jean: If you drive by our old house, you'll see I've got a ribbon on the tree. The strange thing is that a lot of the trees in our yard died after the flood, but that tree is just as alive, green, and pretty as it can be. I don't know if it can be moved or not. It's a big tree to move—an old tree. Of course, the city owns the property now, but I'm sure that they'll let me have that one dogwood tree.

Jack and Jean Bishop, lifelong residents of Rocky Mount, were in their seventies at the time of Hurricane Floyd.

Going to Meet the Storm

AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANK ADAMS | ALICE THORP

Tuesday, September 14, 1999, when Hurricane Floyd was on its way, Jim and Alice Thorp from Rocky Mount called us and invited us to come stay with them for safety's sake and to have some fun. Jim said the weather reports indicated that we might be badly hit by Floyd. He suggested that Jean and I, along with Sally (our canine of debatable heritage) and Gracie (the Thorps' cocker spaniel of middle years and high pedigree, but one with compassion and patience with younger canines), join them.

By Wednesday morning, the reports were more ominous, so we called Jim and took him up on his offer. Even Sally was perfectly willing to join us. We assembled our meager togs, dog bowl and food, and one canine, and away we went about midday. We arrived in Rocky Mount in light rain.

Soon after our arrival, Jim took Sally on a leash and led her down the cellar steps to the backyard, and took her on a tour of the yard and narrow creek that flows around the edge of the yard.

Jim had mentioned this little creek to me in the past. He said that on nice summer and fall days he and Alice sat on their porch and listened to the ripple of this mild stream flowing around the backyard. He said it was a wonderful sound. It was quite lovely and very relaxing that afternoon.

Thursday, I woke in my usual fog. As Satchel Paige used to say, "Gotta get the juices jangling." After a cup of coffee and a blast from my nebulizer for my emphysema, my wheels started turning. When I looked out of the window, even my two legally blind eyes could tell the rain was coming

down. If I could see it, believe me, it was *raining*. Jim was in the kitchen, and I asked, "Oh, my goodness, have you walked Sally in this rain?" He answered, "No." I said, "You didn't take her into the backyard?" He replied, "There is no yard. It's flooded."

The little creek suddenly awakened, and by midmorning it had filled the garage and basement, which would be the first floor of anybody else's house. Their house had been built on the side of a hill.

The ground-floor basement was flooded to the ceiling, which meant one station wagon was now history and letters from friends and family saved over the years were destroyed along with many other items. Luckily, the night before, Jim had the foresight to move our car to the parking lot of the Outback Restaurant and had put his truck on the upper level in front of the house.

As the water continued to rise, Jim, neighbors, and friends carried rugs and furniture up to the top floor. Then came lunch! Even though she used emergency provisions, Alice made a great lunch, but the little dog, Gracie, ate one or two sandwiches from the provisions, which meant we had to ration the rest. I had brought a bottle of wine with us.

I was sitting next to the floor-to-ceiling bay window that hung out over the backyard. Looking down, I noticed that the water was level with the bottom edge of the window. The water was now even with the floor of the second level. My initial reaction was, "Yo, Mama!" Then, "Holy bleep!" Then the wonderful, reassuring words of Rudyard Kipling came to mind: "If you can keep your head while all about you are losing theirs, ..." you don't fully understand the situation! I believe I heard Jim say, "As one shepherd said to the other when it started raining, 'Let's get the flock out of here.'" We did.

Rather than worrying about himself, his house, and his possessions, our dear friend, Jim, worried more about me. The possibility of no power would mean no nebulizer for me, so the good doctor called and got me a room at the hospital, where generators were in force.

By the time we left Jim's house, the water had reached around to the front of the house and was roaring by the front door a foot and a half to two feet deep. Walking was perilous. If anyone had fallen in that water,



An aerial view of Stony Creek flowing under Highway 95.

CREDIT: CARL (POGIE) WORSLEY

he probably would have been swept away in what then was a raging river. It was hard to remember that it had been a small creek two days before. Fickle Floyd was now Ferocious Floyd.

Jim dropped Jean and me off at the hospital. Jim, Alice, and the dogs proceeded to Jim's office, where they were stuck with no power. The four of them slept in the dark on the cement floor of Jim's conference room.

Meanwhile, at the hospital, many of the staff were forced to stay over because of the widespread flooding. They had been on active duty for hours and were filling-in for others who could not get there. Administrative staff was filling-in any place they were needed. One very well-spoken, attractive woman was in our room, saying, "I hope you've got everything you need. Let me check your wastebasket." I think she even made the bed. During our conversation, we discovered that her office downstairs was flooded and that she was the hospital chaplain. Everything in that hospital was shared, including an awful lot of friendship.

The next morning, Friday, the nurse on our floor came into our room with many apologies and said that we would have to leave. The hospital was receiving a lot of people injured in the flood, and beds were needed. She assured us that she would find us a room with power. She diligently

phoned all around Rocky Mount and reserved the one remaining motel room left at the Holiday Inn.

Earlier that morning, while Jean was getting a newspaper, she had made a friend. They got acquainted and related their situations to each other. The lady's husband had had a stroke many years ago and was bedridden. He was on the second floor while their house was in danger of flooding. They had called the rescue squad that brought them to the hospital for safekeeping. Like us, they were leaving the hospital for a motel.

When we reached the motel, Jean ran into the lady again. She mentioned that, besides her husband being a stroke victim, he also had an advanced case of diabetes and needed medication. She had no idea where to get the medicine, what pharmacies were open, or which ones could be reached by car.

Jean, the Good Samaritan, offered to drive her, but we did not know where to go. This was foreign territory for us, too.

The motel manager overheard their conversation and intervened: "Don't worry. I'll take care of it. I'll call around and find out what is open, and I'll either drive you myself or make sure you get there, get the medicine, and get back." That's an example of the prevailing attitude.

Into the lobby we went, Frank, Jean, Jim, Alice, and the dog, Sally. The lobby was full of people wandering about in various garbs—they'd left whatever they were doing in a hurry. Fortunately, at the counter they found our name on the list with no trouble. We had a room on the second floor. The clerk couldn't see over the counter, but we owned up to the fact that we had a dog with us. "Dog?" she asked. "Does your dog bark?" "Of course not," we replied. I think that under the emergency conditions, they were forced to take pets. Up to the second floor and down the hall we went. Lo and behold, we heard howling and barking at every door we passed. Kids were in the hall throwing a ball back and forth. There could have been ten people in one room, people and families making the best of it under tough conditions.

In our room, we heard and felt sloshing as we walked across a very wet carpet. Somehow the rain had gotten through the window, and the whole place was sopping wet. We did not complain, however; we just never took

off our shoes. Poor Sally was confused walking on a wet rug, so she jumped on the bed and spent most of her time there.

Friday night, Alice, Jim, Jean, and I (no canines) went to the Outback Restaurant for dinner. It opened to help in the emergency. There was no alcohol allowed, which was fine. Who needed it? We had a good meal. Our waitress mentioned that, the night before the hurricane, she and some friends had gone to a hurricane party and got home very, very late (probably in the early morning) to discover that their property was pretty thoroughly flooded. The saddest part was that they had a small kennel where they had dogs and other pets. All of the animals had drowned.

Saturday morning, Jean and I had breakfast in the motel restaurant. While Jean made a trip to the powder room, I overheard someone talking on the phone: "Nags Head, uh-huh, right; so you got through? Gee, that's good. You made it all the way back. Tell me what route."

At that point, I moved in a hurry. After he hung up, I told him that we needed to get back to Nags Head or at least to the general area and asked if I had overheard that someone had gotten through and if so, how?

He said that so-and-so had left the motel last night and had gotten to the Outer Banks in the morning and that he had taken such-and-such a route. I said, "Hold that thought. My wife will be here in a minute, and I'd appreciate it tremendously if you would tell her everything you've told me, so we can trace the route. We've got to get back."

Once Jean arrived, I introduced her to my new best friend. As he outlined how to get back to the Outer Banks, I was thinking, "This really isn't that easy—sounds a little complicated." It certainly didn't sound as simple as Amos and Andy's Alaska episode, in which they said, "To get to Alaska, you go out to Seattle, Washington, and take a right."

Of all things, we had to go west to go east. We were sent west but were told to avoid the Raleigh-Durham area because it was flooded. We had to go further west, then north all the way to Richmond before heading south again.

It was a nice, clear day when we left. We followed different routes and traveled many winding country roads. We got to Chesapeake with no

major hang-ups. That really wasn't too bad. I must give Jean credit. She observed directions, road signs, even called ahead to the police.

Walking Sally was no problem, since we could walk faster than the cars could drive. At one point, we were averaging two, three, or four miles an hour.

Our emergency provisions were as follows: half a medium-size bag of potato chips and a small, small bottle of wine. I mean small. It probably isn't necessary to say that the females shared the potato chips, and I did not share the wine.

As we were driving down the road, I was saying, "Well, Jean, it is just four o'clock. I'm sure we'll be at such-and-such a place by 5:00 P.M., which is a little early to eat, but why not?" 4:30 came, 5:00, 5:30 came, and 6:00 P.M. By the time we got there, the restaurant was closed.

No problem. There was a very nice pizza joint in the Marketplace at Southern Shores. We'd stop there. Instead of the usual three-and-a-half-hour trip, it had taken us eleven and a half hours in clear weather.

We had suffered some minor inconveniences and few moments of genuine trepidation, leaving the Thorps' house in two to three feet of water that was really moving. We came away from this experience with tremendous respect for those who suffered injuries and genuine losses of property, pets, and memories. There were tests of will, tests of courage, and tests of unified effort. I think that we saw people at their best. Through my daughter, we discovered that absolutely nothing had happened on the beach. If Jim calls us again to flee a storm, I think I will decline.

Frank and Jean Adams lived in Southern Shores on the Outer Banks of North Carolina at the time of the flood. They spent three days and nights during Hurricane Floyd in Rocky Mount, North Carolina.



The Fish

AN INTERVIEW WITH ADELAIDE SCOTT | ANN WILLIAMSON

My story may give a chuckle to some who had a rough time during the past couple of years and during the hurricane. The storm hit on Wednesday, and on Friday, I carried a friend out to see some of the sights. We went out to the U.S. Highway 301 area at Rivers Edge, where the Food Lion store was under water. We were looking north from the southbound side of the road. As we looked, we spotted an eighteen-to-twenty-foot-long fish swimming north in the southbound lane. I said to my friend, "Is somebody playing a joke?"

She said, "No, I am sure it came out of the Tar River." I couldn't believe it but went running back to the van to get my camera. When I came back, the fish had gotten off the highway into the high grass in the median. Two men were going down the embankment to try to get the fish. They got down there, and one of them finally picked it up. The fish was fighting. I was about to get his picture when the man threw the fish back into the water because he couldn't hold him.

I finally did get a picture of the fish in some water by the side of the highway. That fish could have gotten a ticket for swimming against the traffic.

Later, up on the bridge, I told the man that I had tried to get his picture, but he'd thrown the fish back too quickly. He said, "Tell this man about that fish." He'd been trying to convince the man that there was a fish swimming down the highway, but the man hadn't believed him. I was glad to verify his story.

Adelaide Scott lives in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, on Winstead Road in the Englewood subdivision.

An Attic Adventure

AN INTERVIEW WITH BETTY JEAN HOWERTON | ROSA LEONARD AND ANN WILLIAMSON

I woke about 7:00 A.M. My cousin, Carolyn, called me and said that it was raining. I told her that I was just laying in because I didn't have to go to work. Around 7:40 A.M., I heard a bumping noise under my house. I couldn't figure out what it was, so I got up and went to my front door. I looked out and saw that my whole yard was covered with water. I called my aunt, and she told me to check my backyard. Water always puddles and stands in my backyard when it rains a lot, but when I looked, the water was covering half of it. When I called my aunt back, she said not to worry because the water would probably go down. The water was all the way to my porch, and I couldn't see the highway. I tried to call my aunt again, but my phone went dead.

My stomach got very upset, but when I went to the bathroom and flushed the commode, water started rushing through the vent. I took quilts and comforters and tried to stop the water from coming in, but it didn't stop.

My fiancé was here with me but was still asleep. I woke him and told him that there was water in the yard.

He said, "There's always water in the yard."

"No, I'm talking about the front yard."

He got up and looked out the door. By this time, I had been to the back again, and the water was at my steps. I came back to the front and just started crying.

"I think we need to see if we can make room in the attic," he said.

I don't have a pull-down staircase to the attic. There's just a little hatch in my closet. We started by taking shoes and things off the shelf. I was crying. I climbed into the attic and watched the water from there. I looked for my cell phone but couldn't find it.

My fiancé decided that if we were going to have to stay up there for a while, he'd better get us some supplies while he still could. He is about six feet three inches tall, so about 10:00 A.M. that Thursday morning, he went back down into the bedroom and snatched the bed linens, grabbed some sodas, a pitcher of water, and a few candles and brought them into the attic. He said, "Well, somebody will probably get us later," but no one ever came. About that time, I heard the helicopters and people who were hollering.

Through the little vents in my attic, I could see the house next door. When the rain is real bad, neighbors around the corner always park their cars in the yard of the house next door because it always floods up their way. I could see just the tops of the cars.

We thought we heard someone knocking at the door later, but we couldn't get down because there was too much water and because it was hard to get in and out of the attic. By Thursday afternoon, I could see the boats evacuating people from the apartments behind us, so I came down, stood on the bed, and opened the window. The water hadn't reached the window yet, so I screamed and hollered, but the men in the boats couldn't hear over the noise of the motors. So we stayed up there all Thursday and Thursday night. Since we had candles and flashlights, every time we heard a helicopter or boat, we tried to flash a signal out the window.

We stayed awake just about all night because we couldn't sleep. I wasn't hungry or anything. Early Friday morning we could still hear the helicopters overhead and boats going around the corner. It sounded like three boats: two had motors and one didn't. We called and called, but they couldn't hear us. Helicopters kept going by, but they couldn't see the candles or the lights.

Later that Friday, it got very hot. Those hopping spiders with long legs were all over the attic. My heart was beating so fast that I thought I was going to have a heart attack. I was so nervous.

Friday evening was very warm, and it had stopped raining. The boats were still going around evacuating survivors. Between 6:00 and 7:00 P.M. Friday evening, we heard boats go around the corner to Harper Street. About 7:30 P.M., three boats came back, and the one that did not have a motor was the last boat. I was just screaming and hollering, and then someone heard me and said, "Where are you?" I told him where I was, and he told me to keep hollering so that he could find me. Finally, he realized where I was. He came into the yard and wanted to know where we were. I told him. He asked, "Is there any way out?" I told him that there was no way out unless I had a hammer. I asked him if it would be okay if we knocked the vent out. He said, "No," because there were electric wires out there. And if we had knocked it out, then we probably would have been electrocuted. We were about to do that because I was becoming hysterical by that time. I couldn't stop crying—all I could do was cry and pray. He told me to wait and asked if I was alone. I told him that my fiancé was with me. He wanted to know if my fiancé would come to the vent. My fiancé could not come to the vent. At six-three, he was too tall. Finally, the rescuer asked me if my door was unlocked. I told him I wasn't sure. I knew we had been backwards and forwards to the door. He said that they would check.

By this time, I had five and a half feet of water in my house. I could hear things turning over. I had a console TV that had floated from my living room all the way into the kitchen.

To get closer to the house, the boat came right across the hood of my car. There were no marks or anything on the car afterwards. It was my first brand-new car. When they finally got to the front door, it was open. They came in, and someone got me, put me on his back, and took me out to the boat. Then they came back and got my fiancé. He was tall enough to walk through the water, but he wasn't a swimmer, so he was very nervous and upset. He almost pulled the rescue man down. The rescue man and I tried to calm him down some, but he was just . . . we were both devastated. It was the most traumatic thing I have ever been through. I was in shock.

For the first month or more, we lived with friends of mine. Each morning when I would awaken, no matter what time it was, I would get up and go sit outside on the patio. I had no appetite. I cried and prayed a

lot. I just stayed to myself. My heart was still beating very fast. I have sinus problems, so my sinuses started acting up. I ended up with a severe sinus attack. I had emphysema, something I have never had before that I knew of. I just didn't know what to do.

I couldn't find most of my neighbors. I didn't know them very well, except the lady who lived next door. I didn't see her for two to three months after the flood. And I've only seen her maybe three times within the past couple of years since the flood.

But everyone I know was very comforting to me. All of my friends, people I know, my pastor, and my church were all very considerate. They called to check on me. I have family members who live as far away as Seattle. Once they got in touch, they were very comforting. Everyone sent help and their love and prayers. I think that at that time I needed the prayers more than anything because I didn't know what to do with myself. I lost eight pounds within a week or so.

People ask me what I miss most. I miss my pictures of my mother. I had a brother who hadn't been dead long. He had given me papers and his picture, which were in a rubber band and folder and were sitting on a little nightstand. While in the attic, I cried and prayed that they would be safe. His picture was the only thing that came out of the folder. That is still puzzling to me, because it was in with all the other things.

After the flood, when the FEMA people were here, I went down to try to get some assistance or to see about places to live. I met lots of people whom I didn't know, yet we shared our stories and cried and hugged each other. At this time people were really very close due to this catastrophe.

Betty Jean Howerton lived on Leggett Road at the time of Hurricane Floyd. She was working at the Tarboro Women's Center.



Unforgettable

AN INTERVIEW WITH LISA WHITFIELD | ROSA LEONARD AND ANN WILLIAMSON



When we first heard about the storm, we didn't really pay that much attention to it. We just did as usual. We listened to the news because we figured the storm would just blow over—we were hoping it would. That night, when the storm first started, it kept raining, and I remember getting a little nervous, and I kept thinking about the winds. The reporters kept talking about the winds. Maybe I did need to leave the house that I was staying in. At that time, I was staying on Carolina Avenue. A lot of glass was in the back of the house, so I felt like I should leave and go somewhere else. I went to the grocery store and got some canned goods, but I couldn't find any flashlights. I thought, "Well, maybe we won't need them."



I was undecided about where to go—my mom's or my sister's. At first I was going to go to my mom's house, which is over on Marigold Street, but my sister was scared, and she asked me if I would come and stay with her and her kids on First Avenue. I didn't know that she had a creek behind her apartment complex, so I decided to go over to her house.

Ultimately, we gathered over there. We put our food together—our canned goods, and she had some candles. That night, I remember we just sat around in the living room and listened to the rain and the wind. We couldn't have imagined that all that rain would make the water rise like it did. We were just sitting there saying, "Well, when the rain stops, maybe it'll be like Hurricane Fran, just the places that usually flood will flood." When we finally went to sleep, the electricity and television were still on.

About 8:00 A.M. the next morning, it stopped raining. Then the electricity went off. And we were glad that it was daytime. We were curious. Someone suggested that we go out and ride around to see what had happened. Then we saw some water coming from behind the complex in front of us, and I wondered if perhaps there was a ditch back there or something because I didn't remember anything else being there. Since we didn't have a radio or a television, we didn't know what was going on around us. As the water kept coming, we didn't think we needed to worry about it because we were sitting back on a hill a little bit, and we figured it was a ditch that had filled up. We had no idea that it was a creek. Surprisingly, we took a nap, and we woke up a little after lunchtime. The water from the creek was in our front yard, and the apartment complex in front of us was gone. It was under that water, all the cars and everything.

We panicked. We had a cordless phone—a cordless electric phone at the time, so it had stopped working when the power went off. The only thing we thought of was getting into my sister's car and trying to make it over to my mom's house. We were on the Nash County side, and she lived on the Edgecombe County side. We still didn't know what was going on around us. We went down the avenue. When we got to Taco Bell, we could see that everything was under water. Again we panicked. Swift Creek had flooded all the buildings behind Taco Bell—the whole street behind it. From where we were standing at Taco Bell and McDonald's, we could see that Tarrytown Mall was under water.

We got back into the car and rushed around the other way down Sunset. There we could see where the creek had washed away the road going out to U.S. Highway 64 by the hospital, so we couldn't go that way. Finally, we remembered the bridge on Nashville Road and thought we could go over that bridge. We didn't even think about the river covering the bridge. When we neared the overpass, we could see that other people had stopped. We looked over to our left, and U.S. Highway 301 had disappeared; it was under water, and of course, the bridge, too. All the buildings around U.S. Highway 301 and Nashville Road were under water, including the Art Center and the Playhouse. Food Lion at Harbor West and all those townhouses were under water. Before the flood, we crossed the river every



Joyce Fleming and daughter, Charmas, gaze at the destruction in the Carolina Avenue neighborhood.

CREDIT: NAOMI BROWN

day and never thought that it could ever get that high because it was always dry. Of course, everyone with a cell phone was panicking and calling 911.

While we were out, we went to a phone booth. I tried to call my mom. Her phone kept ringing, so we didn't know what had happened to her because we didn't know what was going on on that side of town. We couldn't get over there. We also called 911 to tell them about the creek that was behind my sister's house. It was not funny then, but it's funny now because we thought it was the Tar River. We still didn't know that it was from the creek. We were thinking that we were going to go under water. So we went back to the apartment, and one of our neighbors brought over a phone that we could stick in the wall so we could have the use of a phone. By that time, the creek had risen a bit more, and it was coming close to the front door. So we called 911 again. We were standing at the door watching the water when the fire department finally came around. They told us that it was the creek, not the river and that we needed to stay in the apartment.

We decided that we should try one more time to get to my mom's. We almost got to Nashville and planned to get on N.C. Highway 97, but

the highway was under water, too. We went back to the apartment. The water was still running, but we weren't thinking that it was unsafe, so we continued to drink the water and bathe in it. Our little babies got real sick, but we couldn't get to the hospital because the road had broken, and the water was really running. Finally, the National Guard brought in water and ice. The grownups got sick, too, but we were able to fight it off. The kids had started to lose weight—really, really fast, and they were getting very sick. We had to wait for them to fix that road so we could take the kids to get antibiotics. The kids were two, three, and four years old. They had to have antibiotics.

We just had no idea about the extent of the damage until the electricity came back on, and we could watch the news. That's when we found out that most of Tarboro and all of Princeville had been destroyed. My best friend lived in Princeville, and I couldn't find her. We finally got in touch with my mom. A tree had fallen near her house, and it had knocked down the telephone pole. Thank goodness, it didn't hit her house but fell right behind it. A house on the next street was destroyed by a tree. She had heard it when it hit. At least she was okay. Out-of-town family members were calling to see if we were okay.

But we were still trapped! On the Nash County side, we could not get anywhere until the water went down. We got more bad news when we found out the Tar River was going to crest and the flood was going to get worse. And that was about the time we found out that the Tar River was down the street from us and that the creek was behind us. The fire department men said that the creek was going to go down but the river was going to rise, so we had to stay in our house for four days. The electricity came back on, but the water was not safe. We were still using the water. We didn't have anything good to eat. We just ate it out of the can. The mosquitoes and flies were coming in off the water, and we actually had to fight the mosquitoes and the flies to eat. It was hot when that flood came, and we were all closed up in the house.

I thought, "Well, we're just going to have to do the best we can." That night, we were so scared because all we had was a little-bitty candle. We tried to be strong for the kids, but they could see that we were scared.

When they saw that water in the front yard, they panicked. So we told them to go upstairs and play. We just didn't know what to do. And when that river crested, it spilled a whole lot of water plus the average on the Nashville Road. When I saw that U.S. Highway 301 and U.S. Highway 64 were under water, I just felt like we were going to die. I felt that the river was going to do us the way it did Princeville. We were just sitting there waiting, and we were making plans: Okay, if the helicopters have to come get us, we're just going to have to act like we're in a movie and try to be strong and get out. But we were just so scared we were going to drown.

Not being able to go anywhere and not knowing if that river's going to kill or not was just the most helpless feeling that I have ever experienced. I don't want to ever feel like that again. We seemed to be in denial at the beginning. We pretty much knew it was going to be another bad storm like Fran, but we just were in denial, so we didn't get prepared. As to the extent of it all, we still wouldn't have been prepared emotionally for water and everything. Just being in that house with water all around, knowing that down the street there was water and around the corner there was water. All the major highways were under water. It was even hard for the National Guard to get in here; but when they did, we got ice and water. It was about four days before we could get over to the Edgecombe County side of town to see my mom.

During the same night that Hurricane Floyd hit, I didn't realize that my godmother, who had been sick, had gotten worse. She was in the hospital. I got a phone call the next day that she had died. We didn't know how her family was going to get here, and we didn't know when we would be able to have her funeral because of the flood. A lot of her friends lived on Leggett Road, and it was under water. We didn't know where they were. Her family lived out of state. They couldn't get here because I-95 was under water. Some of her other people didn't want to fly in because they couldn't get to Rocky Mount from the airport. The Tar River was covering a lot of the roads. It was just total chaos. I think we had the funeral that Wednesday after the water went down, so we had to deal with finding everybody to make sure everybody was okay. Not very many people could come to the funeral because of the fact that we didn't know where they

were. They didn't even know that she was dead, as there was no way they could know until afterwards. One of her friends was in Tarboro in the hospital. She called and asked how she was doing after we had buried her. That was really sad.

I still hadn't found my best friend. After a couple of weeks went by, I figured, "Well, she's still alive, and she will be able to go to work." She worked in Nashville, so I called her work number and it just so happened she answered the phone. I was okay with that but upset by her news. She lost everything. Her father had willed her his home, and she had maybe lived there a year or so. She had everything together, everything. She didn't have a mortgage or anything. She was lucky in that she had decided to spend the night with her mom in a part of Tarboro where they were okay. She lost everything—all her memories of her father except what her mom had. She lost everything except what they wore the night they left. She said she had a feeling that, because Princeville was already low, water might be a problem. They remembered that the low-lying areas had been flooded when Fran came. She felt like she should leave that night, but a lot of people didn't. They had to be evacuated later. She told me about some of the older people—some neighbors who didn't want to leave and had to be made to leave—and they lost everything.

A lady whom I know who lived in Tarboro was bedridden, and they had to evacuate her. They had to push her out of her home in her hospital bed. She had bought her home. After the flood, they finally got everything straightened out so she could go back to her home. I'll never forget the smell of that water. You could still smell it when you walked into her house. She was just thankful to be alive, so she said she would deal with it. The smell...it was kind of like that water, and those mosquitoes, those big black mosquitoes, and the flies we had to fight.

After the waters went down, when we rode around in Princeville, everything just smelled like that water. It was just an unusual smell. It's hard to describe it. At first, I was thinking that it smelled like an iron, but then it was like a rotten smell. We smelled it for a while.

In Rocky Mount, some two-story apartments went completely under. That was something to see—two-story apartments disappearing under

muddy water! They still have not completed rebuilding them. I also know people who lived near Sunset Park who lost their homes, and they just now are finding other places to live. I rode through there the other day, and those houses are falling to pieces, and they haven't done anything. There's nothing to do. They had to live with relatives. Some of them had homes bought and paid for but now are paying rent to live in other places. My best friend had to find a small apartment to rent until she could find another house. Some of them didn't want to take loans because they had already paid off their loans.

A preacher with whom my family grew up lost everything in Princeville, and he had to start over and rent an apartment. He had a home and a church that he had built himself. He lost everything. They didn't want to sell Princeville to the government, so a lot of people lost more than they could gain, and they just got fed-up from that.

The whole area behind Carolina Avenue was flooded—Tom Smith Park and Leggett Road, but the part of Carolina Avenue we used to stay on was more uphill over by the OIC. The water didn't get up that far, but everything around it went under. I thought to myself, "I wish I had stayed over there." Then I thought, "Maybe it was for the best, because at least I was with my sister. I'm the oldest, so she was kind of comforted that I was there."

When the floodwaters first started coming, our family thought we were dead. Some of my brothers knew that the creek was behind us and wondered if we knew it. They'd tried to come as far as they could down past there, and they had seen how things were with the Tar River. Then they decided to take U.S. Highway 64 Bypass as far as they could, since they had heard that it was not totally under water. When they stood on the overpass and couldn't see Tarrytown Mall or anything, they said, "Oh, God, they're probably dead—all those nephews, sisters, and nieces." So they went back home, and they couldn't get through on the telephone because, at that time, the cordless phone had stopped working.

We finally got in touch with everybody because the neighbors brought their phone over so we could plug it in the wall. Family members worried for hours because they were calling but couldn't get an answer. They knew that creek was back there, and then they saw that Tarrytown was under water.

We were really out there maybe—two—I'd say about three big blocks from Tarrytown Mall. For us to be able to ride down Sunset Avenue a little way and see that the street behind Sunset Avenue was under water from the creek was scary. We were so scared because, at the time, we were still thinking it was the river, until the firemen told us otherwise. They kept saying, "The river has crested." If it had been the river, we probably would have been taken out by boats or something because the creek was already in the yard. I can only imagine what would have happened if it had been the river.

The creek went all the way down and met with the river, and then the water just kept flowing. To see that water flowing like it was and to hear it at night was a real scary thing. Hearing the helicopters flying all over added to the tension. Seeing people try to swim into their apartments in an effort to salvage things was frightening. But it was just too late. The water came too fast. I said, "Well, I can see why they call it Swift Creek." We could hear it coming, but we had no idea, at first, that it was water. My sister had been living there for a couple of years. We could hear that water coming, and everybody was uneasy by then. We had no idea it was a creek. Maybe it was the fear of not knowing what was going on and seeing all that water that frightened us all day and night.

I probably didn't get any sleep for about four days because they were looking to me to be the strong one because I was the oldest. They slept, and I had to stay up and watch the water. You could walk out a little ways, but if you went any farther, you would have fallen into the creek. I had put this little stick where I could see where the water had come up. It finally stopped and didn't go any further, but that creek didn't go away either. It just lay around, and that's where the mosquitoes came from. To smell that smell all day and all night was just the saddest thing. There were some empty apartments at the front of the complex where some of the people who were flooded out went. Others went to neighbors' houses until they could find out what to do.

I thought something was strange when our kids went to school the morning after the hurricane was supposed to be coming in. At the time, it was just Hurricane Floyd. It started raining, and it just got harder and harder. We had to pick out kids up early that day. We figured it might just

rain a little and blow over, but it just didn't work out that way. I remember picking up my niece and my son. My little girl's father picked her up. I'm glad he picked her up because she didn't get to see what we saw because she was on the Edgecombe County side, and all she saw was the ditch that had filled up. She didn't get to see any of the other stuff. I found out that they were okay. He didn't have any idea about our problems. He thought I was on Carolina Avenue, so he wasn't worried.

I finally got a chance to call him and let him know where I was. He was getting worried. I said, "Well, I hate that I called you because now you're going to worry, but I had to make sure you had the kids." Everyone was okay.

The saddest experience was the children getting sick like they did. One of my nephews, even after he took his medicine, was still losing weight and had to go back to the doctor. After that, he started getting better, but it lingered. My two youngest nephews were sick for a long time. Maybe a month or so after the flood, the children still showed the effects of drinking that water. It was just sad to watch. We were too scared to drink any of the water. We thought, "We have to take a bath." When we were younger, my daddy always taught us to put a little bit of Clorox, about a capful, in the water. We started doing that. We had a lot of drinking water from the National Guard, and Harris Teeter was giving away water. Food Lion started giving away water, but the water was gone real quick. A lot of churches started advertising canned goods and things like that, and I tried to go because we lost whatever food we couldn't save in the freezer or refrigerator. We went and got some things, but I tried to go around more for some older people that I knew. They couldn't get around, and they needed lots of things, so I went around for them, too.

Ironically, I was supposed to start a job that week after the flood hit, but their office was flooded. Their main office was down near the beach, and that area got messed up, too. The car that I was going to use got messed up. The wind was so strong that it tore up the trunk of the car, and all that water drenched the entire car. This happened after we had moved it uphill so it wouldn't get flooded. When we found the water coming from behind those apartments, we said, "Maybe we'd better move that car up the hill." After that, the water started coming so fast that a lot of people just had to

leave their cars. They just got scared. They ran up the hills, scared. But still my car got messed up because the wind ripped the trunk off. It just rained and rained in the car. After that, the car was no good. But it wasn't worth much anyway, so we couldn't really replace it because I didn't get anything for it. And, at that particular time, I needed a car for the job because I was going to be working for a service where I had to transport patients back and forth. So I said, "Well, forget it." I was supposed to be up there at a particular time, and I didn't think about it.

We missed a month out of school. I was going to Edgecombe Community College. It was close to a month because we had one in Tarboro and one here, and a lot of students got flooded out. They couldn't come. It was just too stressful. So we didn't go to school, and the kids didn't go to school either. I know it was about three weeks, at least, that the kids were out of school. They were happy about it. They just didn't know the ramifications of everything. After the water started going down, we were kind of scared to go around and look at everything, but we did. And it was just unbelievable to see what the water did!

The helplessness that I felt, I hope I never feel again. And losing my godmother of twenty years the same night that the flood hit.... Then I had to be strong for my family to get through Hurricane Floyd. My best friend lost everything. I couldn't do anything to help her but be there for her emotionally. I would be there for everybody emotionally and forget about my own emotions. After a while, I just broke down for a little while and just had to sit. I just sat around for a long time thinking about what I had gone through with Hurricane Floyd. It takes a while to bounce back emotionally from something like that. I prepare myself better now for hurricane season. I just hope that I don't have to go through something like Hurricane Floyd again, but if I do, I'll be better prepared.

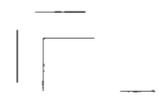
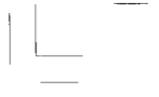
After the flood, I did meet some people that I wouldn't normally meet, and they had lost everything. They were still out there trying to help others. They have a church out on U.S. Highway 301. Servant's Heart is the name of the church. Their members are very nice, wonderful people, and even though a lot of them had lost everything they owned, they were still out trying to help other people. They were giving and weren't looking for

anything in return. I know one particular couple is just moving back into a house. They had lived over by Sunset Forest, and it took them this long to get somewhere else to live. They had to rent for a while, but they were still out there helping others.

It seemed like, you know, everybody was around looking at each other as people. There were no barriers anymore. That was so wonderful to see and shows how a community can come together.

I miss many things that are now gone: the Children's Museum, the Playhouse Theater, and Tarrytown Mall. I think the only way to prepare emotionally for such a terrible catastrophe is to expect the unexpected and try to remain strong.

Lisa Whitfield was living at 1210 Winston Walk in Rocky Mount at the time of the interview. She was a full-time student at Edgecombe Community College working for her associate degree in psychology. Lisa's two children were eight and five at the time of the flood.



A Flood on My Birthday

AN INTERVIEW WITH LUCILLE POWELL | JACKIE PASH

I had heard on television and the radio that there would be a hurricane, but I thought it was going to be just a regular storm like the ones we'd had before. Between 12:00 and 1:00 Wednesday night, my pastor from Morning Star Church called to ask me if he could come pick me up and take me to his house. I told him I would be all right. It was my birthday, so I will never forget that.

After he called, I got up to look around and discovered that the water was entering my house. I tried to call Pastor McCarter back, but it was too late. The phone had gone dead.

The water was almost up to my bed by then. It came in fast once it got started. When I looked out, I could see it rolling toward the house just like the ocean.

I began calling for help. At last, I heard my neighbor Minnie calling to find out where I was. I had to plow through the water like I was swimming to get to the door, and when I opened it, the water gushed in. The water was higher than I was tall because it was higher than my front door. I rushed back to my bedroom and closed the door to slow down the water.

As the water rose, I climbed on top of the television. The water kept getting deeper, so I stood on a table. The whole time I was waving a flashlight so people could see where I was through the windows.

Minnie Knight's son and some young girls and boys managed to get inside my house. When they opened the bedroom door, they almost had

to swim because the water just gushed in. Since the water was almost deeper than I was tall, they picked me up and carried me. I paddled my feet in the water to help, but I wasn't able to walk because the water would have been over my head. The water was rolling real strong, just like we were in the ocean. I probably would have drowned if they hadn't saved me when they did.

They took me across the street to a neighbor's house. Once there, we all decided that we should go to Parker School because the water was still rising in the neighborhood. When we got to the shelter, there were so many people there, but the workers found cots and mattresses for us to sleep on.

We stayed at Parker School for a week, at least. With so many people there, bathroom space was limited. Around 5:00 or 6:00 A.M., we would get up so we could get our clothes on before the rest of the people got up. Sometimes our meals were prepared at the school. Sometimes the Red Cross brought them to us. Other times various cafes brought food. Helen Gay cooked for us on Thursday.

I thank God for being a just God. He's merciful, and He saved me. Without Him, we wouldn't have made it. During the whole ordeal, I was frightened by the large amount of water. Everybody was frightened—just awe-struck, really—because nothing like that had ever happened before and because it was something so completely unexpected. I did a lot of praying. We all prayed.

People eventually brought us clothes because most of us didn't have anything. I stayed wet—well, not exactly wet, because my clothes dried on me. I had put some things in a bag in case the hurricane got bad, but the water was coming too fast, so they didn't have time to get the bag. I couldn't get my important papers, jewelry, or anything. I didn't even have my medicines. I was, however, able to get prescriptions filled by the pharmacist at the Boice-Willis Clinic. I didn't have a change of clothes until Friday because it rained all day Thursday, and people couldn't get out to help us until Friday.

The volunteers and people who helped were wonderful. God bless them. They were good about helping me. The Red Cross and the Salvation Army gave me furniture. My church, Morning Star, all the other churches,

and clubs helped. Jessie Jones stuck right with us, as did Helen Gay and some others. Reverend McCarter, Sister McCarter, and members from St. James came and gave a helping hand.

I finally moved out to Guardian Care. I stayed sick off and on. I believe the storm contributed to my being sick. Though I had a heart condition, high blood pressure, and low blood sugar, I'd always been active before Floyd hit. I did volunteer work on Monday and Thursdays at Boice-Willis Clinic. I welcomed people and directed them to the doctors' offices and to the elevator. After the flood, I was never as strong as I had been.

For many years Lucille Powell lived in the Armstrong Homes on Hunter Street. Lucille was a volunteer at Nash General Hospital and the West Lewis Clinic. She received citations from the mayor for her volunteer work all over Rocky Mount. She represented Edgecombe County in Raleigh as part of a North Carolina senior-citizens group.



Looking east from the intersection of Gay Street and Lee Street.

CREDIT: GARY BRITT

RESCUED



CREDIT: GARY BRITT

Squad-Two Assignments

CAPTAIN J.G. PITTMAN

SQUAD TWO PERSONNEL: Capt. J.G. Pittman, Fire Engineer W.W. Lewis, Firefighter L.T. Joyner, Firefighter C.A. Woodard, and Firefighter A. Huddleston

1230 South Hornbeam: Squad Two assisted with the rescue of victims from the cul-de-sac of South Hornbeam. Part of the rescue effort involved stretching a one-hundred-foot-long life-safety rope from a secure area to the farthest house in the danger area. We used this rope as an attachment point for harnesses and carabineers to secure firefighters from being swept away by strongly flowing currents. We rescued approximately twelve people from this area and evacuated six more families from the flood area before water entered their residences. In addition to rescuing the people, we also removed a travel trailer and an automobile from chest-high floodwater to a secure area.

Wellington Drive: Upon our arrival, water at chest level was flowing into a house. We found two elderly adults and their teenage granddaughter trapped in the structure. We lit the scene by using a generator and floodlights on Squad Two. We secured one main anchor in to the squad and a second safety line to a tree that was located on the premises. We then rigged the floating rescue basket with a lifeline and a safety line and proceeded to the structure where the victims were waiting at the front door. We placed and secured the elderly lady in the rescue basket to be pulled to safety and carried an elderly man and his granddaughter from the flooded



An aerial view of Highways 301, 95, and 64 converging south of Stony Creek.

CREDIT: CARL (POGIE) WORSLEY

area to Squad Two. We then performed a primary survey on the victims and waited approximately twenty minutes for police to transport them to a shelter.

Pamela Lane: Upon our arrival, we found victims trapped by rising floodwater in two structures. The water was approximately five feet and rising, so we rigged a floating rescue basket with a main haul line and a secondary safety line. We proceeded to the first structure to effect the rescue. The first victim was secured in the rescue basket, and the haul crew was instructed to pull the victim and rescuers to safety. We transferred one victim to Squad Two and proceeded to the second and last occupant in the structure. We accomplished this rescue in the same manner. By this time the water level had risen to six feet. We placed the second victim on Squad Two and performed primary surveys on both victims.

The attempt to rescue the victims from the second structure by using the floating rescue basket failed because of six to seven feet of water and very strong currents in front of the structure. We called for a boat to effect the rescue. When it arrived ten minutes later, we attached a main haul

line to the front of the boat. Because of the swift current, we had to place a change-of-direction pulley 150 feet upstream to allow for a pendulum effect to combat the swift currents. Three rescuers were sent to the structure, where two victims and one rescuer were loaded onto the boat. Two of the rescuers stayed behind to secure a third haul line and prepare the other victims for rescue. After the first victims were taken to safety, the boat returned to retrieve the last two victims. The second set of victims was taken to safety, and the boat returned to retrieve the rescuers still in the structure. Once the victims were surveyed for any medical emergencies, two members of Squad Two were sent to evacuate other structures in this area that might be in danger of rising floodwaters. We transported all victims to Station Six to await transport to shelter.

Country Club Drive: Upon arrival, we had four feet of water and high winds at this location. We rigged a boat with a main line and safety line, using Squad Two as an anchor point. We sent two rescuers on a boat to the structure to rescue the victims who were trapped in the residence. After securing the victims in the boat, the haul team pulled one rescuer and two victims to safety. We returned the boat to retrieve the rescuer still at the structure. These victims were transported to Station Six to await transportation to a shelter.

Nashville Road: Upon our arrival, we found two structures occupied by victims and two pedestrians stranded on a bridge. The closest structure was being evacuated by two firefighters already on the scene. At the second structure, the rescue proved to be very difficult. Winds were gusting to sixty miles per hour, and we were working under high-voltage main transfer lines. The electrical current had been redirected and was flowing at a high voltage near us and the structure that housed the victims. We attached a main haul line to the boat and anchored it to the fire department pickup truck. We placed two team members in the boat and anchored one team to a tree to assist the boat as it entered the current and to guide the rope upon retrieval of the victims. We reached the structure in our first attempt. We found five victims: three adults and two children. One female was pregnant, diabetic, and hyperventilating. The elderly female had heart problems and had taken nitroglycerine pills. Her breathing was very labored and shallow.

On the first rescue, the mother, grandmother, and granddaughter were hauled to safety. The second rescue retrieved the father and the son. The water level exceeded six feet, and the current was increasing in strength. The victims trapped on the bridge started to enter the water. Using the squad intercom, we warned them to stay put and told them we would try to rescue them. The female returned to the bridge's guardrail, but the male entered the water and was swept to a tree. He grabbed the tree and held on. We reentered the water to rescue this victim. The rescue was successful. We called for a motorized boat to rescue the female who was still trapped on the bridge. During this time, two Squad Two personnel transported eight victims to R.M. Wilson gym. Squad Two returned and assisted in the motorized-boat rescue of the female on the bridge.

East Duke/West Duke: We arrived on the scene to assist with rescues in progress. A city transport vehicle arrived. The driver told us that they had a victim on board who was having a heart attack. We administered oxygen and checked vital signs. We stayed with this victim for approximately forty-five minutes until Stony Creek Rescue arrived and assumed responsibility for patient care. At this point, we were told to assist Stony Creek in finding a route to the hospital. Before leaving, we assigned one member of the squad to a boat-rescue crew and one member to assist with evacuation of Riverside Apartments.

Town of Nashville: We were dispatched to meet police officers in the town of Nashville to assist with a rescue on Benny Womble Road. Squad Two arrived on the scene, but the call was cancelled.

Greenbriar Road: A dispatch to rescue three children trapped in a structure turned out to be a false call, but while we were on location, a pedestrian informed us that there were people trapped on a roof on Mockingbird Lane. We responded to this location and rescued four victims off the roof of a residence.

West Mount Drive: Squad Two responded to a gas leak, which was deemed a false call.

Thorpe-Greenville Tobacco Warehouse on Barnum Road: We assisted in the rescue of two victims hanging in a tree. These victims stated that they had

been at this location for approximately sixteen hours. Due to the depth and swiftness of the water, a motorized boat had to be used for this rescue.

Captain J.G. Pittman of the Rocky Mount Fire Department is in charge of the SCBA (Self Contained Breathing Apparatus) Program.





Rescue Efforts at Riverside Apartments

MIKE DOSS



The Rocky Mount Fire Department did everything it could to prepare for Hurricane Floyd. Contingency plans were drawn up, and officers were briefed. My shift was put on alert and was ordered to be ready to report to duty at midnight if necessary. I came home and helped my family get prepared for the worst. We filled the bathtub with water, filled coolers with ice, filled our vehicles with gasoline, and scrambled to cover all bases before Hurricane Floyd hit. We watched the TV with despair as the weather forecasters all agreed that the worst was coming. I got the call from headquarters that my shift was needed and that I was to report for duty at midnight. My family and I hugged one another and prayed to God for His mercy over each of us, the rest of the family, and our community. It was hard leaving my family knowing that Hurricane Floyd was on the way.

The winds were moderate when I arrived at headquarters, but the rain was torrential. Fire crews were already out helping people trapped in low-lying areas. Fire Engineer Wayne Rhodes and I were assigned to drive the department's sixteen-passenger van to take victims to local Red Cross shelters. One of our first assignments was in the Maple Creek subdivision. When we drove down one of the streets, we could see the water already rushing through the neighborhood. Firemen were helping men, women, and children through the rapidly rising waters.

The winds were increasing, and it was raining harder. People were screaming from the porches of their homes trying to get our attention, but

the winds made their cries almost inaudible. Some flicked flashlights on and off or tried to get our attention by waving them around. As our crews got the residents to our position, Wayne and I loaded them into the van. The firefighters appeared weary but waded back into the waters.

After the van was loaded, we headed for the shelter at Benvenue Middle School. While en route, the van was buffeted by the winds, and the road was difficult to see due to the rain. It actually took both of us to keep the van on the road. The children were crying and scared, the mothers tried to comfort their children, and the fathers tried to reassure the mothers. Some discussed what was going to happen to their homes and belongings. This scenario was repeated many times throughout the night.

Between assignments, Wayne and I talked about our own families and prayed that they were all right. Because all power and telephones were out, some first responders had no way of checking on their families or reassuring them. Soon the Benvenue Middle School shelter was full, and we were assigned to transfer people to the shelter on Virginia Street.

On one of the trips to Virginia Street, we noticed that the water was approaching the rear of the apartments on Pinehurst Drive. A large number of senior citizens and children live in this complex, so we advised the command center that we were going to check for residents in the apartments in the low areas. At approximately two or three o'clock in the morning, we began knocking on the doors of the apartments. We could hear the surprise of some of the residents as they discovered that the water was in their homes. They were very shocked when they came to the door. We advised them about the situation and told them that they needed to gather blankets and personal items and get ready to be evacuated. I radioed the command center and advised them of the situation, but no help was available at that time because the department was already responding to the devastation that was occurring throughout the city. Wayne and I carried children in our arms and senior citizens on our backs uphill to the van. Soon the shelter on Virginia Street was full, and a lady told us not to bring any more people to the site because there were no more supplies. I told her we had no other place to take these victims.

After reporting the situation to the command center, we were advised that the city had opened the R.M. Wilson gym as a shelter. During one of our numerous trips to the gym, radio messages warned that rising waters were encircling the city. Wayne and I looked at each other and shook our heads. Things were getting worse as the winds and rain increased. Our thoughts were increasingly on our families.

After daybreak and a brief rest, Wayne and I were told to report to Riverside Apartments, where a large number of senior citizens reside. We found seniors wading through the waters to get to higher ground as they carried trash bags containing their belongings and medications. Engine Number Two was at Dawson Place assisting senior citizens but was soon forced out by the rapidly rising waters. While loading these people into the van, we could feel their despair. Many were crying, worried, and upset. In the autumn of their lives, these senior citizens were losing all they had in the floodwaters. The suffering was too great for some. One of the women suffering from a possible heart attack was placed in the back of a flatbed truck.



Victims line up to receive goods at the O.I.C. located on East Virginia Street at the site of the old Booker T. Washington School.

CREDIT: NAOMI BROWN

Another person in a police van was having difficulty breathing. Firefighters were administering first aid and oxygen and doing all they could for the evacuees, but more residents were still coming out of the complex. Radio reports indicated that EMS units were having a rough time finding a safe route into the city to help. The rain had just about quit, but the Tar River continued to rise, and the wind was still gusting.

To give one of our men a break, I asked to be relieved of the transport duty. Firefighter Dunavan and I teamed up and started going door to door to check for victims. Using the two-wheeled trash carts, we transported many senior citizens to higher ground. On one trip to the complex, Firefighter Dunavan recovered a two-person sailboat that floated by. We had moved up a notch in our rescue equipment. The sailboat made rescuing older ladies easier.

The water was now over the tops of cars in our sector. On one trip, Firefighter Dunavan and I heard someone calling our names. As we looked around, we saw Fire Engineer Randy Smith holding up a frail, white-haired lady. Though Fire Engineer Smith lived in the complex and could have saved his belongings, he lost them all because his heart was focused on helping others. His lips were blue from long exposure to the cool floodwaters, and we could tell he was worn out. We caught the attention of people in a nearby powerboat and helped Randy and this lady into the boat. Both were exhausted. Before he left, Fire Engineer Smith advised us that he could find no more victims in our area. The current was becoming so swift and hazardous that Firefighter Dunavan and I decided to abandon our search before we, too, became victims. Personnel with powerboats made follow-up searches where possible.

At the time of Hurricane Floyd, Captain Mike Doss was a member of HAZMAT (Hazardous Materials Team).



Hurricane Floyd Operations: Lafayette Circle Call

CAPTAIN GERRY B. WOOD

The fire department was called to Lafayette Circle to assist in the evacuation of residents stranded by rising floodwaters from Hurricane Floyd. The rising waters from the Tar River had broken the dam behind the Lafayette Circle area.

Upon our arrival, we were told that some residents had already been evacuated but that there might possibly be seven victims still trapped inside their flooded homes. There was a flat-bottomed boat at the scene, but it had neither motor nor paddles. The owner of the boat and other bystanders were preparing to attempt a rescue. We said we would rescue them.

I spoke to a man on a cellular phone who said that he, his wife, and three small children were on the second floor of their two-story house at the bottom of Lafayette Circle. Water was approximately waist-deep in the house. The man sounded panicky and said that he was preparing to move his family into the attic. I assured him that we would rescue them and instructed him to shine his flashlight at us when he saw our light.

Fire Engineer Ray Walker, Firefighter Maurice Woodley, and I put on flotation devices and got into the boat. By this time, someone had located two twelve-foot pike poles and two paddles. With them, we began moving the boat in the direction of Lafayette Circle.

On our first entry, we located a family of five. We helped them get out through a window and into the boat. As we turned the boat up Lafayette Avenue, we heard a couple calling us. They sounded as if they were located



on the rooftop of their house. We flashed our light at them and called to them. We assured them that we would return for them. We also exchanged flashlight signals with someone else as we made our way back to safety.

By the time we returned the family of five to safety, Firefighter Earl Williams had brought his motorboat to the scene. Firefighter Williams, Fire Engineer Brett Skinner, and I went back in the motorboat to retrieve the couple we had communicated with on the first trip. We located them in the top of a tree instead of on their rooftop. We loaded them into the boat, made our way out, and asked them if they knew of other stranded victims.

By the third trip, the winds had picked up substantially. We located the couple with whom we had exchanged flashlight signals and loaded them into the boat. They showed us where another elderly couple lived who could possibly still be trapped in their home. We proceeded there and located them by using flashlight signals. The man said that his wife was still inside. We advised him to have her ready to leave when we returned. The winds were extremely strong at this time, and the water was continuing to rise rapidly. The previously rescued couple was off-loaded, and we returned for the elderly couple. Huge pine trees began falling around us. We loaded up and fled the area.

In all, eleven residents were rescued from Lafayette Circle before we had to evacuate the area. On our last trip, we did not see or hear any additional distress signals. Based on our observations and information gathered from the residents of that neighborhood, we felt that we had evacuated all the residents who were in danger. We were able to get out onto Piedmont Avenue and headed toward City Lake. By the grace of God we managed to escape from this incident without any injured firefighters or residents.

LADDER 20:

Capt. Gerry Wood
Fire Engineer Tim Turner
Firefighter Maurice Woodley
Fire Engineer Ray Walker
Firefighter Tracey Drewery

ENGINE 12:

Capt. Larry Johnson
Fire Engineer Richard Coleman
Firefighter Larry Hill
Firefighter Darvin Moore

DISTRICT 2:

District Chief Eddie Jones
District Chief Al Asby

SQUAD 1:

Fire Engineer Jamie Vaughan
Firefighter Brett Skinner
Firefighter Bobby Wilson
Fire Engineer Brent Manning

OTHER PERSONNEL:

Firefighter Earl Williams
Assistant Chief Keith Harris



CREDIT: MARTHA DANIEL

Diary of Hurricane Floyd

NAOMI BROWN

Day One: September 15, 1999—This was a day primarily spent preparing for Hurricane Floyd, just as we had for previous hurricanes. No one was particularly excited as they purchased a few necessities: canned goods, bread, batteries, and the like. The wind blew violently for much of the night.

Day Two: September 16, 1999—This morning my neighbor was unable to go to work in Ahoskie, North Carolina, because Interstate 95 and U.S. Highways 301 and 64 were closed. Word came that water was rising in the park next to our residences on Carolina Avenue. My neighbor phoned to ask if I could see water. I replied, "Yes," without much concern because I had witnessed water rising during Fran and other hurricanes. Later, my neighbor called to ask if I was all right. When I replied, "Yes," she told me that she had sent word to have her neighbors, Dorothy and Ernest Hunter, evacuated. I decided that this must be serious.

As the day progressed, I learned that many had gone to shelters near their neighborhoods, so I began listening to news reports on television and radio.

That afternoon, my cousin from the Cloverdale Community called to say that she and her daughter had to be evacuated in a boat and were with some church friends on Ashland Avenue. When I asked if she had panicked, she admitted, "A little bit." I told her that I couldn't come to get them that night, but that I would be there the next morning.

Day Three: September 17, 1999—I arose early in the morning, prayed, and walked around the block bordered by Carolina, Pennsylvania, and



Homes on Pennsylvania Avenue inundated by floodwaters.

CREDIT: NAOMI BROWN

Atlantic Avenues. Half of the 700 block of each avenue was covered in water. Mr. Alton Barr of Atlantic Avenue told me he had seen rescuers take our neighbor Mrs. Grimes away in a boat. I began to realize that this was serious. When I got home, my neighbor told me that Fairview Road was closed. To reach my cousins at 116 Ashland Avenue, he said that I'd probably have to cross East Grand Avenue and make my way over to Glendale Avenue to find Ashland. I followed his instructions, went over to Tarboro Street, made a left turn onto Glendale Avenue, and found Ashland Avenue without difficulty.

My cousin was there with many others. She was jubilant when she saw me. After thanking everyone, we went to my home, ate breakfast, and shared what she felt like sharing.

At this point, we had no knowledge of the whereabouts of my dear friend, Mrs. Grimes. Her daughter from Augusta, Georgia, had called Reverend White, her pastor. He came by, and I told him that I had tried the shelter, police, and neighbors to no avail. By the time Pastor White got to his office at Mt. Zion Church, Mrs. Bessie Dean's daughter, Rachel, called to report that Mrs. Grimes was with her mother at 1000 Rosewood

Avenue. She was fine and had asked that Rachel call me. We passed this word on to Pastor White. He, in turn, called her daughter in Augusta.

As the day progressed, people came down to see how the water covered the entire area. Photographers came repeatedly. Joyce, my cousin, and her daughter were anxious about what was taking place at their homes. We walked around the blocks near 731 Carolina Avenue and photographed the water that continued to rise. Joyce's husband Ernest, who drives a long distance truck, was trying to make his way to Rocky Mount from Chicago but was experiencing difficulty. Not knowing his whereabouts gave her more concern. He finally called at 7:45 P.M. He had reached the distribution area of Rocky Mount. From there, it took him more than an hour to get to Carolina Avenue. When he arrived, there was another family reunion.

Day Four: September 18, 1999—After breakfast, we went out to visit Mrs. Grimes. When we arrived, she began to cry. I said, "I am going right back if you greet us this way, as blessed as you are. Aren't you glad to see us?" She was.

Then my cousin, like so many others, was determined to go to his home in his four-wheel-drive vehicle. Nothing was damaged at his home. Another celebration was in order. I sprained my foot while being helped from his truck and was hampered for a month but kept on going.

Day Five: September 19, 1999—On Sunday, I walked as far as I possibly could around the blocks of Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Atlantic Avenues. The water had covered more than half of the 700 block. Many others—some in boats, others in automobiles going as far as they could drive—were also viewing the areas. It was unbelievable. Those who were not flooded out were standing around and looking in amazement. Mr. Raymond Lucas, who was checking on a house that he owned in the 600 block of Atlantic Avenue, said that no one living in the area had ever experienced anything like this. I decided to leave a day-by-day account of Hurricane Floyd for generations unborn.

I have kept all of my local newspapers, taken hundreds of photographs, and interviewed several individuals whom you will read about in my account.

I have photographed hundreds of flood scenes and interviewed many people. My plans are to share this information with family within a year if all

goes well. This experience has been one that will always remain with me.

Day Six: September 20, 1999—No travel was permitted through Interstate 95 or on U.S. Highways 301 and 64 for two weeks or more. Shelters were set up at various locations for people to come and receive food and other needed supplies. Rocky Mount, Wilson, Tarboro, Greenville, and Princeville, North Carolina, were the target cities and towns for flood relief. Governor James B. Hunt declared North Carolina a disaster area. We were losing lives and discovering bodies daily. News accounts today stated that thirteen were dead and many more were missing.

All public schools have been closed for two weeks. North Carolina Wesleyan College and East Carolina University were also closed for two weeks.

Day Seven: September 21, 1999—President Clinton, his chief of staff, Governor Hunt and his staff, as well as North Carolina representatives, talked with Tarboro residents at the Martin Middle School emergency shelter in Tarboro. President Clinton promised that the federal government would help them.

Day Eleven September 25, 1999—Teams prepared to recover bodies. The flooded town of Princeville was sealed off from the media. Officials refused to confirm or deny that the bodies of more drowning victims had been discovered.

Day Twelve: September 26, 1999—Area pastors tried to explain why this had happened. Reverend Jody Wright of Lakeside Baptist Church in Rocky Mount said, "Hurricane victims will be tempted to ask God what they have done to deserve this punishment." He reassured his congregation that they had done nothing wrong and that each day would bring something good.

Day Thirteen: September 27, 1999—The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) placed three hundred mobile disaster homes on a site at the industrial park near the Fountain Correction Center. Victims who lost their homes were provided with mobile homes for eighteen months to house them and to enable them to get back on their feet.

Day Fourteen: September 28, 1999—Nash-Rocky Mount Schools reopened with an hour delay. The school staffs have been asked to ease back into instruction by being patient and by making adjustments where needed.



The aftermath of Floyd on Atlantic Avenue.

CREDIT: NAOMI BROWN

Day Sixteen: September 30, 1999—The Reverend Jesse Jackson came with a message of hope. He came with Mayor Fred Turnage to speak at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Rocky Mount after his visit in Tarboro. Vice President Al Gore and Senator John Edwards visited area churches to give words of encouragement.

Day Twenty: October 4, 1999—Many local businesses and facilities have been impacted by the flood. Braswell Library reopened for business. Families opened their homes and hearts. Hurricanes made heroes. The Carleton House Restaurant served as a much-needed place for flood victims and local residents. The motel was able to accommodate many individuals for a few days or until conditions improved. Tarrytown Mall was completely destroyed, covered by water. The K&W cafeteria could no longer provide for the many hundreds of customers who dined there daily. For many, this had been the source of their only meal for the day. Rocky Mount residents were invited to go to the K&W cafeteria in Wilson or Raleigh for this service. Many other stores were lost at the mall: Montgomery Wards, Goody's, Dollar General, and Auto Express, just to name a few.

For two weeks after the flood, everything got worse instead of better. Helicopters flew over our homes nightly. That was a frightening experience.

I slept only two hours a night for three weeks or more. A curfew was enforced in the City of Rocky Mount from 7:00 P.M. to 7:00 A.M. We had to drink bottled water. Everyone exposed to the flood was asked to get a tetanus shot. Stores opened only at certain times during the day. Gradually life returned to almost normal.

Naomi Brown, retired teacher, taught English at Rocky Mount Senior High School and is active in the church and community.

A Time to Act

GEORGE JEFFRIES

Rising out of the once peaceful pond in the Winwood community, floodwater moved forward along the dead-end road. Three houses were already flooded, and more were sure to follow.

A woman named Ann came running up the dead-end road toward my home and screamed that her mother, Alperata, and her niece Loretta were trapped in a house on the other side of the flood water.

With the water now waist-high and rising, there seemed to be no way to get to them, but Ann was still screaming and crying for help to save her family.

Someone found a boat, but no one knew how to handle it. Tim, Ronnie, and George tried to row the boat, but the current was too strong. The only way to reach the woman was to pull the boat as we walked through the water, trying to stay on the road. Unfortunately, there was a big pond on one side and a very deep ditch on the other. With the water so high, it was impossible to tell where either was.

Tim got a stick and walked in front, feeling his way, while Ronnie and I followed with the boat. We used the trees across the water in people's yards as our guide. We went forward. As we walked slowly, following each other closely, the water got higher and higher.

When we got to the first home, a family of four—mother, father, and two children—came out. We hadn't even known that they were still there. Once they got into the boat, we headed again toward Ann's family.

When we got to our destination, we discovered that Alperata was in a wheelchair and that water was up to her waist. Her niece Lorretta was standing there unable to help Alperata or herself. We lifted both of them into the boat and headed back to higher ground.

The water was very high now, and our only guides were the people watching us from the, as yet, uncovered part of the road. The walk back through the water was difficult, but we knew that the people on the road were pulling for us. With them as our guides, we got back to dry land with our neighbors in the boat. It was a wonderful feeling to have been able to do this.

There was one thing that none of us even thought of while we were in the deep floodwater: not a one of us knew how to swim!

George Jeffries describes himself as "just a plain, simple person whose way of looking at things was changed by the flood that inundated Nashville."

A COMMUNITY
COMES TOGETHER





Where Do You Go?

HAL PECK



With the wind howling around us, we left through chest-deep water: my wife Cindy, our girls, two dogs and the cat on her boogie board. The lightning, illuminating the horrors of the storm, streaked across the sky. I truly feared for my family. The river was engulfing our home. The twisting trees, the unnerving lightning, and the swaying power lines were frightening. “God,” I prayed, “keep us safe and lead the way.”



As we sat in our cars in the Edwards School parking lot, my mind raced. Where do you go when you can't go home? What could I do to keep us safe? I know God speaks to people in different ways, and I am sure that He must have been hollering over the storm that night because I heard him. I would go to our church.

My fingers fumbled through the keys that I kept in the pocket of the van. Would the church key be there? I told Cindy and the girls that I was going to try to get to the church and would call them on the cell phone if I could make it.

Driving through a maze of flooded streets, fallen trees, and downed power lines, I searched for a clear path to the church. With the help of a local fireman, the Lord showed me the way. I called Cindy, described the turns that she would need to make, and then sat in the van praying that they would still be able to get through the streets. It seemed like an eternity, but they finally arrived.

The storm didn't seem nearly so bad from inside the parish hall. Merideth sat down at Lawrence's "choir-practice piano" and started playing "Amazing Grace." I remember thinking, "How appropriate," for we were surely there by the grace of God.

There was a lull in the storm as refugees began to arrive: a young nurse returning from the hospital in Greenville; a single man coming from Washington, D.C., and trying to reach Jacksonville; a Rocky Mount grandmother and her family from Fayetteville coming to rescue her and finding themselves stranded; and two men trying to get back home to Emerald Isle. Each knocked on the door of the Church of the Good Shepherd seeking safety from the storm.

Cindy is kind of funny about things like this and feels that all things happen for a reason. Even the smallest and most insignificant decision is part of a greater plan. If I had not had the key, if we had not made it through the streets, or if we had gone to another refuge, then we would not have been at Good Shepherd to answer the knocks at the door.

We teased about "leaving the light on" as each new member joined the group. There were jokes about the many claims to be avid members of the Episcopal faith and the numerous offers to "instantly convert." But the joking turned to amazement as each of our visitors realized just what the Church of the Good Shepherd had to offer them.

The new kitchen gave up its treasures. The junior choir "donated" snacks and cookies. The interfaith-hospitality folks "donated" bread and cheese, towels, pillows, sheets, and blankets. The day school provided mats and cushions. At what could have been a most distressing time, it was truly amazing how the Church of the Good Shepherd provided us shelter from the storm, material goods for our comfort, and the opportunity to nurture each other's spirits.

As we talked and shared stories, we had other visitors who were stranded at the nearby Carleton House Motel. All were astonished at what they found: the church doors open in the middle of a terrible storm, the separate sleeping areas that we had been able to offer, and most of all, the very warm and positive bond that was being shared.

I know that many people have terrifying memories of Hurricane Floyd and the days that followed, but things are different for Cindy, the girls, and me. The Church of the Good Shepherd not only provided a safe harbor for my family during a horrible storm, but also offered a wonderful way to share what our ministry is all about. I will be forever thankful that I was part of His plan for that night. Just don't tell Gwen and Fay about the cat staying in the parish-hall bathroom.

Hal Peck, a local decorator; his wife, Cindy, a local school administrator; and their daughters lost their home to the flood.



CREDIT: MARTHA DANIEL

Floyd Memoirs

BETTY ANN WHISNANT

When I awoke early on the sixteenth, I was curious to see what had happened. The power had gone out after we were in bed. We knew that because the outage had set off our security system. Joe and I had lived in this house only a few months, and we still weren't used to its features. The house was built so well that we thought it would be impervious to any threat from a big windstorm like Floyd. Sure enough, the house seemed to have come through with no damage. A big tree had fallen in the front yard, but nothing had hit the house or blocked the driveway. Then I looked out the back windows. The back of the house overlooks Stony Creek. The creek had been out of its banks and within about eighty feet of the house earlier in the fall. Now it was all the way up to the house.

When I opened the door to the basement, I could tell, even in the darkness of that black space, that water covered the floor. A flashlight confirmed that the basement was not only full of muddy creek water but that all of the items that we had stored there were now bobbing about: a storage shelf of wine bottles, a mini-refrigerator, and a bushel basket of daffodil bulbs. The good news was that Joe had parked the new riding lawnmower in the garage, which was still dry. The bad news was that the five-gallon cans of gasoline stored in the basement were floating; and from the way the whole place smelled, the gas was leaking.

By this time, Joe had joined me, and we considered what was happening. We were both willing to write-off any of the possessions afloat

in the basement, but we were afraid that the gas was a danger to the rest of the house. Joe waded into our basement to retrieve the gas cans and to unplug the refrigerator. A few minutes later, after he had gone to shower off, I remembered an electronic device I had plugged in days before. The water was cold and so murky that I couldn't see anything. Wading barefoot through three feet of water in the basement was an exercise in trying not to step on anything sharp or treacherous. One other fact became apparent as we explored our new basement pool. It was growing deeper. Even during the fifteen or twenty minutes that we were in the basement, the water had inched up over another step.

Joe's mother, nicknamed "Big Momma" in spite of her eighty-eight years and bird-like one hundred pounds, had awakened, and she had come downstairs to the first floor to find out what had happened. We had brought her to our house the night before because we felt she would be safer with us. It seemed like a good time to have breakfast and make some plans.

Unfortunately, the battery-operated telephone began ringing on a regular basis. Our daughters, who were in Chapel Hill and Winston Salem, wanted to know what was happening. So did Joe's sister in Durham. So did other friends in and out of the area. It was gratifying to know that they



Rear of the Autumn Corporation showing overflow from Stony Creek.

CREDIT: DICK BETHUNE

cared, and in some instances, they could tell us helpful news, such as where they thought the eye of the storm was. It was frustrating to have to stop to reassure everyone.

The sound of a chainsaw attracted our attention. Just beyond our mailbox, men were working on a downed tree. They were trying to clear the roadway so that the wife of one of them could get to the hospital, where she worked as a nurse. They did a fine job of clearing that tree, but to their dismay, they soon discovered that the road was still blocked. About a hundred yards down the road, Stony Creek was in control of Hunter Hill and Halifax Roads. The rain seemed to have stopped, and the wind gusts seemed to be less frequent, so we decided to move the mower and the cars up the hill since it seemed that rising waters might be a greater problem than falling trees. As we walked down the driveway from re-parking the cars, we looked out over the brown sea of our backyard, where an eighty-foot pin oak with an enormous canopy of wet, green leaves swayed in the wind, and then just seemed to lie down.

We got a phone call from Fred Park asking us if we were okay. We said that we thought we were, but Fred knew that several families in his neighborhood were having to leave because of rising waters, and he thought we might be affected in the same way. He also knew that there were trees down and water blocking Hunter Hill Road. He told Joe about another way that we could use to leave our area.

With this information, it seemed it might be better to take Joe's mother back to her home in Englewood and then to return to see what we could do for our house. We were able to get to N.C. Highway 43, but on the way, we saw enormous trees that had been uprooted, power lines that were dangerously close to the road, and one place where a small ditch seemed to have come close to undermining the roadway. When we tried to use Winstead Avenue to get to Mom's side of town, we were stopped by the overflow of Stony Creek. We returned to N.C. Highway 43 to get to U.S. Highway 301 and Englewood, but again we were thwarted. We took U.S. Highway 64 West back to Winstead Avenue and then doubled back east to the business exit at Stony Creek. Again, we were stopped by the creek, and our only alternative was to back up on the shoulder back to Winstead Avenue.

At this point, we decided that the best place for Joe's mother to wait would be the hospital, where Joe was on staff. We would leave her at the cafeteria and return to our home to pack, or if the water didn't rise, we would take her back to our home. The water kept rising. Step after step disappeared during the rest of the morning. We decided that we needed to move some things to the upstairs. First, we moved the computers and then a TV, then some of the audio-video equipment, boxes of tapes, videos, CDs, tools, financial records, lamps, tables, clothes, bedding, small appliances, chairs, rugs, and pictures. We took anything that we could lift. Eventually, we carried up a favorite dresser (one drawer at a time), most of our electronics, our china, crystal, silver and even the table we used for most of our meals. Finally, about 3:00 P.M., with about two feet of water lapping at our front steps, we packed what we thought we needed to get by for a week, loaded the cars with as many possessions as we could (including the dog), left food water and litter for the cat upstairs (she doesn't travel well), and bid farewell to our home. We didn't know how much farther the water would come, but by the time we left, it was within six inches of crossing the sills of our first floor.

It was also covering our exit route. At the dip in the road before the Interstate-95 overpass, several inches of water were streaming over the roadway. A drainage ditch that had rarely held water before had turned into a twenty-foot-deep lake, and Hunter Hill was its dam. Without fully knowing about the hazards of driving through moving water, we forded the stream. Fortunately, we made it. Then we began to understand why we had been hearing so many helicopters after the hurricane winds subsided. Interstate 95, the main artery of north-south commerce, was also underwater!

While our phone worked, Joe remained in touch with his partner, Bob Whitmore, who had been on call the night before. Bob was at the hospital and wanted to know what he could do to help. Joe asked him to take care of his mother. Bob offered to take her to his home, and Joe gratefully agreed. When we left, our plan was to go to Bob's home near Candlewood. Two hours later, after having traveled all the way to Castalia and back to Nashville and exploring every route we could find, we still couldn't get across Stony Creek. Finally—because we didn't know where else to go

as the daylight began to wane and because we were hungry, tired and frustrated—we headed back to Nash General Hospital.

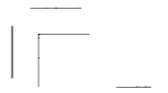
With both joy and surprise, we found Joe's mother and Bob Whitmore at the hospital. Bob had also tried, for the better part of the afternoon, to find a way home, and when this proved impossible, he had taken "Big Momma" back to the hospital. He'd even gotten her a bed. Now he was keeping busy by helping out with maintenance on the floors. He asked if we had eaten, and we suddenly realized how long it had been since we'd eaten the cold cereal. We went to the cafeteria and got a generous helping of a wonderful stew. There was even some salad and dessert. The head of the hospital, Rick Toomey, was cleaning the floor in the serving area. Joe asked if we could also stay the night, and we were able to stay in rooms in the same wing with Joe's mother. I don't think any bed ever felt better to me. Everyone was gracious and professional and did more than anyone should have to. Most of the hospital staff we talked to had been there since the day before. In many cases they didn't know what had happened to their homes or their families and friends, but they kept the hospital going.

Before I fell asleep that night, it suddenly occurred to me that we might not have a home to go back to. Even if the house withstood the flood, those brown, murky waters might harbor chemicals or germs that would make the home unlivable. I thought about how I had organized my desk and about all the little things that might be lost. We could be homeless. But faith and hope prevailed.

I still like to remember all the people who kept in contact with us, the folks who tried to clear the roads before the state maintenance trucks could get in, the friends who helped us, and the staff of Nash General Hospital. We were in the company of people who cared and who worked hard. They are the best people in the world.

Although we have been able to put this experience behind us, I know that we will never forget Floyd.

At the time of the flood, Betty Ann and Joe Whisnant had been living in their home for only a few months. The back overlooked Stony Creek. Joe was on the Nash General Hospital staff.



Flood Affects Art

AN INTERVIEW WITH BOBBI GREGORY | ROSA LEONARD AND ANN WILLIAMSON

Students at Rocky Mount Senior High School were in school the day before the fatal night of the hurricane. As the day progressed, the students and I realized that we were going to leave early. I'm sure that every teacher was talking with students trying to reassure and calm them.

My second-period photography class was very nervous. I could see it in their eyes. I was nervous, but I was trying to reassure them, so I said, "Let's work on a project." I had no idea how bad the hurricane would be. During Hurricane Fran, I was able to take my camera around the neighborhood and photograph the houses in Wilson that had trees through them and other damage. Afterwards, I had the film developed, and I gave copies of the pictures to the homeowners so that they could use them as proof for their insurance claims. A lot of people don't keep photographs, don't keep cameras available, or don't have film. I did that because I'm a photographer.

I told the students, "This is something you really could do for the community. Take your film and keep it in a safe place. Put it in a waterproof bag to keep it safe, so you can record what happens."

I cautioned them about the dangers that they might face as they were out taking pictures following a storm. I told them that if they were anywhere near downed power lines, they should not go into the area. I said, "Make sure other people don't do that, because that's one way to get people killed in the aftermath of a storm. Don't take any chances."



Jimmy Keel's mailbox on Hammond Street looking south toward the Arts Center. His house backs up to the Tar River.

CREDIT: DICK BETHUNE

Thinking about photography as a record of the storm excited some students. I had some adventurous boys in the class who thought nothing of taking their cameras when they went deer hunting, and they got excited about this photo opportunity.

Of course, that night when the storm hit, nobody had any realization of the damage it would do. We were out of school eight days. During that time, I photographed the damage in Wilson. One person in my neighborhood had a portable television, so the neighbors on the block gathered around the television every night to watch the news from Raleigh and other places to find out what was being said about us. I didn't travel to Rocky Mount until the first day we went back to school. That was the day I learned how the flood had devastated the school.

I kept wondering about how my students were doing. I had not seen any of them until we got back to school, but they had done incredible things during the flood.

Some of them got into their families' boats. They actually rode down U.S. Highway 301, and they took photographs. One student was out so early in the morning that he got pictures of the sunrise on the water. That

photograph has been published in the flood book that we created and in another book.

One student, who worked at an automotive company, took pictures of the cars that had gone through the shop's glass windows. He took pictures of cars floating everywhere.

One of the most poignant pictures was taken by a young lady who, after the flood began to dry up, took photographs of a pile of a child's toys lying in the mud. There's a picture of a Barbie doll covered with caked mud. When people see that photograph, they gasp, thinking, at first glance, that it's a real person. Then they realize that it's a Barbie doll.

There were all kinds of poignant scenes like that. My students were far enough into their photography class that they already knew about composition and telling a story in a photograph. Most of them were able to tell an important story with one photograph.

I brought my camera with me on the day we came back to school. We had an early faculty meeting in which we were told to go back to our communities and for the next days work to help those who were flooded.

Margie Holt, a guidance counselor and a flood victim, was sitting across the room. She had the most forlorn look on her face. I raised my camera and took her picture using a zoom lens. I lost some light because I was using a zoom lens, but it's a very interesting picture of her. Even the students remarked how sad she looked.

The students also photographed barefooted people walking through the floodwaters. Afterwards they all worried that those people were going to catch something because reporters on the radio and TV stations started saying, "Don't walk in the water. It's contaminated."

Some of the students who were members of church youth groups went to houses that were flooded and helped people scrape out their belongings. They spent days doing this. When we came back to school, teachers asked their students, "What exactly did you do during this flood?" Of course, I didn't have to ask my photography students. They had living pictures. They had actual proof.

We began to assemble these pictures for our booklet. In art classes we talked about the format for the booklet, and we told flood stories. In each

of my two art classes, I had at least one student who had been flooded out. We talked to the students to see what they needed. I'll never forget it.

One of the students held us mesmerized for at least an hour. The student's family lived pretty close to the river and he and his dad were in the house. The boy, a typical teenager, wanted to sleep, but about 11:00 P.M., his dad said, "Come on. We've got to get out of here. The flood waters are rising." The boy said, "No, I'm going to sleep." His dad left this big seventeen-year-old kid in the house. About 3:00 A.M., the police were up on the bridge close to his house with a bullhorn, yelling at him to get up to the window and try to get out and swim to the boat. He said that he had no clue what was going on. He had been sound asleep. When he looked out his window, the water was more than halfway up the ground-floor windows of his house. He literally had to get out and swim to the boat. He said that they saved his life. His dad had gone somewhere and told rescuers, "I left my child in the house. I had no idea it was going to be like this."

The students told one story after another. We noted in our booklet that the flood did not just hit the rich or the poor. It hit everybody. The whole community was impacted, and every person was in his own state of shock.

I, personally, have been through a trauma similar to this. I went through a fire, and I know what that feeling afterwards is like. Your mouth feels like you have cotton in it, and you walk around for days wondering, "When is this feeling going to go away?" You're lethargic. You can't focus well.

We had to take all that into consideration in our classes. Our faculty decided that we were going to be very lenient with the kids. We counted some of their life experiences during this time as a part of their grades. I personally believe that those kids learned as much in the aftermath of the flood as they may learn during the rest of their lives. They learned to give a helping hand. Most of them did not tell me any stories about greediness, meanness, or looting. We were all trying to survive and support one another.

In the photography class, the photos slowly began to come back from the developers. We couldn't get the film developed for a long time because there weren't any local places open for processing. It was nice that some of the students had black-and-white film from the class, so a few of them

could develop their film at school. Most of the students eventually went to Raleigh to get their film developed.

At first the Photography Club had decided to do a booklet. I thought that was a wonderful idea, but they couldn't quite get their act together. They kept struggling over one thing or another, such as who was going to pay for it. Finally, I just collected the pictures and started writing the text.

Ultimately, what stimulated all of us to complete the booklet was that Eastern Randolph High School adopted Rocky Mount Senior High as its sister school. They sent us a tractor-trailer load with supplies. We knew beforehand that it was coming. Obviously, I had the biggest classroom in the school, and part of it wasn't being used. They backed the truck up to the door. Art students from two different art classes helped, and students from the woodshop classes helped unload it. We unloaded that tractor-trailer! The trailer was jam-packed from floor to ceiling with bottles of water, crates of toilet tissue, food, clothes (used and new), and hats, scarves and gloves because winter was coming. It was a tractor-trailer full of stuff that our sister school had collected for us, and just as much love was packed in. I wasn't in charge of it, but it was in my classroom. We had to move to one side of the room. The storage area was filled, and the back part of the room was filled. To this day, there are still a couple of bottles of water in the room from the flood. In the back of the room there is a little-used toy that was sent for a little child to ride on. Nobody ever collected that, so we use it for still lifes occasionally.

The school made arrangements so that on Friday afternoons and Saturdays students and teachers could come and help pass out food and clothes to the families who needed the help. The principal of Eastern Randolph High School was so excited when he brought that tractor-trailer here! I don't think I have ever seen a happier person. I've heard that when you do something for others, it benefits you more than those you do it for. That was exactly the feeling he seemed to be experiencing. He was jovial and jumping up and down because he was so proud of his people for doing this. He was so excited that he kept pumping my hand up and down. He was pumping everybody's hand. The president of the student body, the principal, and some other people came. And he said, "If y'all need anything else"

It took weeks to distribute the stuff. The flood seriously impacted one hundred thirty families in the school, including two of the custodial staff and seven teachers and guidance counselors. These people would come into the classroom during the next two months and get the supplies they needed. The students and I didn't mind, since it wasn't disruptive to my teaching. The students didn't mind at all if I took time to help people. Sometimes Mrs. Webb, the PE teacher who played a really big role in the effort to help flood victims, would come to the classroom and help people. Sometimes the guidance counselors helped. As the flood victims got low on supplies, they would come back for more.

This was a serious effort on the part of the people who sent the supplies—Eastern Randolph High School—and the people who were the organizers here and the people who were accepting the help. Sometimes I begged people to take more. There was so much. People were still in shock and weren't being realistic about what they needed. Everyone's situation was different.

One of my students lived with her grandmother in a trailer that had been completely washed away. They had nothing. I begged her to take cereal. She said, "Mrs. Gregory, we don't have any bowls." I had never thought about that, and nobody had sent bowls.

I said, "Well, we'll have to get you some Styrofoam bowls." I finally convinced her in class one day.

The whole class gathered around her and said, "Come on. You need some of this. You need some of that."

It was a nice experience. I really wish the principal at Eastern Randolph High School could hear about this and know how the community felt because I later heard that he didn't get a note of thanks from us.

This was when the students and I decided that our booklet would be his thank-you. I took the photographs to Staples and had them enlarged to five-by-sevens or eight-by-tens with the words typed on the pages. We had two extra copies. One of the counselors has one.

Theresa Bartholomew typed the words on her computer, enlarged them for us and helped us make the booklet. Mrs. Bartholomew was a flood victim herself. They had just built a beautiful new home, and she and

her husband watched the floodwater rush into the house, destroying their brand new furniture. We've all praised God that their new dining-room furniture had not been delivered. Everything they owned was destroyed. They had to begin building a new house without flood insurance.

One of our students got a double whammy. The day before the flood, he learned that his mother had cancer. Their house was halfway under water. The whole family was devastated.

A lady who is on our custodial staff is one of the sweetest women I've ever met in my life. She lives in a cinderblock house that was completely devastated. She couldn't open her front door for almost a year because it had swollen so much. Step by step, I watched her get back on her feet. She still smiles every day.

There were lots of tears at first. When we came back to school, everybody was crying. It was amazing the love that everybody had for each other. We were scared to death.

I knew that the women on the staff who had been flooded out would particularly like some toiletries, so when we were sent back to our communities and told to do something for others, I went shopping. I bought everything I could find on sale. I bought little baskets and filled them up. I found some cute little hats on sale that would keep hair dry in the rain, and I put one of these in each basket. At a couple of places where I shopped, I asked, "Do you have anything I could give to the flood victims?" Some gave me things I could add to the baskets. Each basket was a pleasant surprise. Theresa Bartholomew still keeps her basket on her classroom desk and uses it to put notes in.

A set of twins was in my classes. The flood completely washed away their trailer, and they ended up in Wilson or Elm City. I've seen them only once since then in a grocery store. The flood completely changed their lives because they had to leave the community.

People really helped each other. One student from Edgecombe County came to live with relatives here and enrolled at the senior high school. Yesterday I heard one person say there had been ten people living in her house during the time of the flood. We offered our house to anybody who needed lodging. Only one person came to stay a couple of nights.

About a week and a half after the flood, I talked to Norris Tolson, head of the recovery, about Edgecombe County. He said, "Bobbi, you would not believe it down here. I have never seen anything like this." To this day you can drive on U.S. Highway 301 across from Lowe's and see in the trees all the nasty rubble and bags.

How many years is it going to take us to clean this place up? If the Corps of Engineers or somebody doesn't come in, it's not going to happen. Continea Creek in Wilson has never been cleaned up since Fran in 1996. Every time I cross that bridge on the way to the little country church my husband serves, I look over at Continea Creek and see how it has changed. Trees fell into it, and moss and algae and stuff are growing around the trees. It doesn't have the same water flow. It will never be the pretty little creek it once was. It's totally different.

Hurricane Floyd made an impression in my neighborhood. Some of the damage to my home was caused by lack of electricity. That caused the sump pump to cut off. The water went up four feet in the basement of our house. Our house had just been redone, so the beautiful steps and walls became very nasty. As the hurricane kept circling all night, rain came into some of the upstairs windows and did some damage. We also had some roof damage, but we were lucky.

During Hurricane Fran, two trees located at the front of my house fell into the home of an older lady who lived near me. She had her house and sidewalk fixed up pretty, and then Hurricane Floyd pitched two trees into the right side of her house. The trees also caused the left side of her house to fall in. She has been wiped out twice, and I am amazed that she's still smiling and happy. I hope that I would have the grace to be like her, but it would really make me mad! I also remember that the couple living two doors away from her survived during Hurricane Fran because they all jumped into the bathtub and got down level with the top of the cast-iron bathtub. Later, the police said that if they had not been in the tub, they would have been killed.

After both Fran and Floyd, our neighborhood looked as if it had been bombed. We didn't suffer with floodwater like Rocky Mount, but the huge old trees in the historical area where I live began to topple, and that

was scary. Since Hurricane Floyd, one of the things I have done is finally convince the city to take down the giant oak in front of my house. During Floyd, I watched it move from side to side, and it cracked the sidewalk. I knew that one more hurricane might take the tree out. Sure enough, when they investigated, the tree was dead at its center.

The students continued to report through their photographs what was going on in our classroom. They photographed people, mostly their backs, because they didn't want to do anything that would embarrass them as they gathered things in bags they needed after the flood. They took pictures of the staff and other helpers distributing items to people who came for help. Ryan Howard, who was a student here, has had several photos published in a book about the flood.

It was unfortunate that the Photography Club did not go ahead with its original plan to create a flood booklet. When the club voted not to do it because it was too difficult, I said to the class, "The club thought of this, so why don't we do something about it?"

It costs about twenty-seven dollars to produce each book. One of the guidance counselors paid for one of the booklets, and I still have one. Rocky Mount Senior High paid for the flood booklet we sent as a way of saying "thank you" to East Randolph High School.

Life lessons were learned here. I will never forget the joy on the faces of those worn-out people. I went down to the Salvation Army, where a voucher could be exchanged for ten items. I watched flood victims go in there and get brand-new mops, brooms and other household items that had been donated by companies all over the area. Later, when flood victims stopped coming in for the mops and brooms, the Salvation Army began selling them for fifty cents. I was the purchaser of several of those cheap mops and brooms.

People are beginning to get on their feet now, but so many have been bought out, and really don't know what they are going to do. I know how they feel. When we lost our house to a fire, for six months we were in rental property while we were trying to decide what to do. Ironically, we bought the house next door to our house that had burned, so I now have my garden on the spot where the original house was bulldozed. Tragedies and

traumas make us stronger, but they're so painful when we're going through them. People have to remember, and they have to cry.

At school, for a while, every time the sky got dark, students would squirm in their seats and get real antsy. The rest of the year, when it got dark like it had during the storm, I told them stories—real, nice, peaceful, meaningful stories—while they were drawing or sketching. Even today, I continue to tell them stories.

Bobbi Gregory, who lived in Wilson, commuted to Rocky Mount to teach art and photography at Rocky Mount Senior High School.



Letter from the Hickory Daily News

JOHN S. EDWARDS



On September 16, 1999, Hurricane Floyd devastated Rocky Mount. Entire blocks of homes and two-story apartment houses were abandoned. Sidewalks were piled with destroyed furniture, insulation, and other debris waiting to be picked up by overwhelmed city services. Mobile homes lay in a heap after floating and crashing into barriers. Storage buildings and fuel tanks had just floated away.



The Federal Emergency Management Agency requested that the Adventist Church handle the relief effort in North Carolina because it was organized to respond to disasters. The Michigan Conference of the church provided a trailer with a complete kitchen. Pastor Ken Ford was asked to lead the effort and was on the scene for weeks. In addition, the Adventists had four warehouses in Rocky Mount and used the one-hundred-eighty-thousand-square-foot Paragon Building, located on the north side of U.S. Highway 64 at Winstead Avenue, as its main headquarters.

On October 15, 1999, nine tractor-trailers, including two Broyhill trucks, lined up outside the Paragon Building with inbound deliveries of donated goods, a testimony to the benevolent spirit of the American conscience. Inside the building, twelve forklifts and twenty pallet jacks stayed in constant motion.

Between October 9 and October 16, one hundred fifteen to one hundred forty-eight volunteers showed up each day for heavy dock jobs, raising morale as high as a Carolina pine. Outside, six diesel Ryder straight

trucks, manned by volunteers, made constant cargo runs to locations from Roanoke Rapids to Wilmington. Cars and vans also delivered donations.

Meanwhile, church pickups and private trailers loaded with orders to outlying distribution centers moved the donations from morning to night. One owner-operator from Coastal Carolina Trucking donated his time and his tractor-trailer for thirty days, and he hauled one load after another for the disaster-relief effort.

Twiggy Saunders, ex-player for the Harlem Globetrotters, drove another inbound tractor-trailer. Dave Sharpe of Raleigh whizzed about in his golf cart to needed points coordinating the movement of goods. Mike Ortel, a dynamo, raced from point to point.

Many individuals who'd never met until the disaster worked like members of a seasoned team. R.A. George of Berrien Springs, Michigan, ran his forklift, while Curtis Chubbuck of Aiken, South Carolina, mastered the tow motor. Big Dave Eaton, a public-relations professional from Raleigh, met trucks at delivery points. Jason Sumpter of Elkhart, Indiana, was a workhorse on delivery schedules. When it came to tact, Paul Burns was the correct guard on duty at the gate. Paul could have sold anyone a straw hat and made him think he had bought a Stetson.

Merv and Wilma Falor of Decatur, Michigan, were indispensable, serving meals from the twenty-eight foot Utilimaster kitchen trailer they had towed to Rocky Mount. Easy-going Ed Holloman and his wife from Rocky Mount kept me in fresh clean clothes. Arnold Whitaker, a retired professional trucker from Carolina Freight Carriers, was there on a regular basis. David King of Raleigh was a rodeo trucker who could back a trailer into impossible positions—from the “blind” side.

Class VI, Red 6 of the Americorps—a group similar to the Peace Corps—also served. These young people adjusted instantly to a very strange environment and helped run the show. My immediate boss-ladies were two recent college graduates: Claire Petite from Chicago and Allyson Klebes from Cleveland. All were a joy to work with.

Even with a warehouse filled with thirty million dollars worth of goods, Disaster Response was still short of canned fruits, cereals, and canned meats. In nine days, not one case of pilferage was even suspected. What

people donated ended up with the intended recipients. The efficiency rating was estimated to be 0.998—the remaining .002 (two out of a thousand) was lost to accidental damage—an accomplishment that would be the envy of any corporation. Even the seasoned guards who manned the gates smiled at the smoothness of this operation.

Ken Ford and his team from the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Hickory, North Carolina, deserve our thanks for doing an A+ job under trying and stressful conditions. I have seen some “hotshot” terminal managers in my time, but in all my three million miles, I’ve never seen a pressure-packed operation run as efficiently and smoothly as that run by Dr. Ken Ford and the disaster team in Rocky Mount.

I had pulled a 1963 aluminum hull shed on a trailer to the parking lot at the main warehouse. With the line of port-o-johns nearby, I had my own comfortable “Silver Marriott” for thirty-four days. The “Rolling Wheels Motel”—my shelter for more than two hundred man-nights—contained a two-burner Coleman gas stove and a thirty-nine-by-eighty-four-inch sleeping bag rated down to two degrees Fahrenheit—all the comforts of camping.

In early November, forecasters predicted that the temperature would dip into the thirties. When I came in one night, my conscientious co-volunteers had manhandled the little trailer to a location inside the building, which really turned out to be pleasant.

By November 6, 1999, the giant warehouse of supplies had dwindled: only two items of consequence remained—bottled water and used clothing. The Federal Emergency Management Agency needed the water supplies for the newly created FEMA village, and the Adventist Disaster Response was set up to receive and process clothing for use in other areas. Everything that was donated was used and accounted for. The trucks were returned to Ryder, and this phase of the response came to an end. The rebuilding of the eastern part of North Carolina, however, continued.

John S. Edwards is a thirty-two year veteran of long-distance hauling (3,727 trips) who lives in Claremont, North Carolina. This letter originally appeared in the Hickory Daily Record on October 22, 1999.



CREDIT: NAOMI BROWN

Memo to Rick Toomey from Nash General
Hospital Maintenance Department

ROBERT FLOWERS

09/13/99—*Monday*: Rain bands from Floyd were over the area; some were quite heavy. Checked supplies that might be needed. Measured fuel in emergency generator tanks.

09/14/99—*Tuesday*: Moved items that could be blown around, checked roof drains and storm-sewer drains, removed debris from roofs. Filled all vehicles with gasoline.

09/15/99—*Wednesday*: Picked up additional supplies, flashlight batteries, duct tape, rolls of plastic, and continued to watch progress of Hurricane Floyd. At this time, Floyd was supposed to make landfall and start affecting the Rocky Mount area around 0600 hours, September 16, 1999. Department members were instructed to report to work at 0400 hours or earlier if conditions worsened.

09/16/99—*Thursday*: Checked all areas, ready to repair damage as needed and to assist as needed. Strongest winds came between 0530 and 0830 hours. No major damage. River and creeks continued to rise. Roads and streets in low areas are flooded; some maintenance personnel were stranded, so they spent the night at Nash General Hospital.

09/17/99—*Friday*: Maintenance Department is now divided: some at home who can't get to work, some at work who can't get home. We had adequate numbers at work to take care of problems. All equipment



Police rescue a child from a home on Westover Court Circle in West Haven.

CREDIT: DICK BETHUNE

functioned normally. Low water pressure was our main concern, but the supply remained adequate.

09/18/99—Saturday: Work schedule same as a weekday.

09/19/99—Sunday: Work schedule same as a weekday. Things slowed considerably, so I kept two men, sent others home at 1200 hours. The needs of the Maintenance Department were so well met that you would never have guessed that a disaster was taking place around us. We had plenty of food and drinks. I was proud of our department, as well as all of the others, for a job well done under trying conditions.

Robert Flowers was director of the Engineering and Maintenance Department at Nash General Hospital at the time of the flood.



99% Teamwork

A REPORT TO RICK TOOMEY | BETH GORE

Anne Chappell, one of my staff, said that Hurricane Floyd provided this hospital, this staff, and this community with a new opportunity to show how well we do what we say we do: care for the welfare of all the members of this community. Floyd was a hurricane of such depth of destruction that most of us felt overwhelmed. The good news was that we all pulled together to help everybody that we could. The staff made great efforts to provide the care needed by the patients and to provide relief for those already working. Some of the staff risked life and limb to get to the hospital. Others made sacrifices to stay, working continuously because they knew others could not get here and were experiencing destruction firsthand. Many hospital staff members performed roles they had never imagined but did so with cheerful hearts.

The staff that reported to pediatrics was wonderful. Our hats are off to them, especially to Marion Pridgen, R.N., who normally worked in radiology, but assisted in pediatrics for several days. We particularly appreciate the staff members who filled in for housekeeping, dietary services, pharmacy deliveries, and other departments. Susan Driver, R.N., who normally worked intravenous services, was also helpful to our staff. Everyone who worked was great and went the extra mile.

The cafeteria workers' response was terrific, providing extended service hours for staff and patients' families. Central supply services, linen services,

and supply distribution did an outstanding job keeping the clinical areas stocked and providing extra supplies when needed.

I'd especially like to thank Rick Toomey for his leadership and for the way he could pull a helicopter out of his hat.

During Hurricane Floyd the only thing that could have been improved was communication. Members of the staff didn't know what was going on in the outside world. Looking back on a difficult event, one can see what could have been done differently. Lack of communication is always a problem, but during a disaster, it is more distressing than usual.

I get teary every time I think about the teamwork that went on. Pediatrics wouldn't have been able to survive with our increase in patients and our decrease in staff if it hadn't been for the employees from other departments coming in to help. Their involvement really went beyond teamwork and was more like family: they were concerned about everyone's well being. It was truly amazing that when one person got weak, someone else came to ease the burden.

Beth Gore worked in pediatrics for more than twenty-two years.



In Retrospect

IDA AND BILL STANLEY

Since Hurricane Floyd, we have learned that one can literally reestablish a home and get settled again. It's not easy when you are in your mid-seventies, but it can be done.



First of all, we were completely awe-struck by the suddenness of the flood. We did not know that so much water could envelop a house so quickly and do so much damage so fast with its angry, rolling, crashing, swirling force. We were unable to open the doors of our home because of the intensity of the rising water, so we went upstairs to wait for what we hoped would be some miracle rescue.



We were touched by the continuing love of our immediate family. We had no place to go at first except to a community shelter. They came at once, helped day after day, supported us with their care and devotion, housed us, and supplied every need we encountered. We could not have made it without our loved ones.

After our rescue by brave firemen, we were stunned by the kindness of other people. We heard from so many who wanted us to know that they cared about us. They brought us food, clothing, and money. We received notes, phone calls, and visits to cheer us. People, known and unknown, showed up at our flooded houses to help us reclaim what we could and to trash the wasted relics of our thirty-four years of living in that place.

Somehow, when we needed a certain kind of help, it appeared. When we needed a large truck, one appeared from another town with a driver

offering to help in any way possible. When we needed a group of people to carry heavy loads and empty vile-smelling, bacteria-laden, awful stuff, a large group from a neighboring church appeared wanting to help. We were astounded at the kindness manifested in so many different ways.

Our church provided so much help and support that we were overwhelmed with love-in-action. There were dirty jobs to be done, but they were there to do them and to help us in ways we never dreamed we would need.

My father always told me that there is humor in every situation if you look hard enough to find it. I thought we had come across the one situation in which there would be *no* humor. However, two days after the flood, we got a random wrong-number phone call in the middle of the night. A voice asked, "Is Floyd there?" We had a good laugh when our granddaughter answered, "He was!"

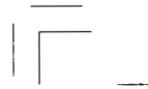
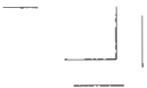
We have a new respect for the Rocky Mount community, which has shown its worth in a hundred ways since the flood. A caring, loving attitude prevails in our city. People-helping-people has been the norm and not the exception. We have appreciated so much the efforts of Rocky Mount municipal employees who have tried in every way to assist flood victims. A friend told me that she hesitated to talk about the flood to people who had not experienced it. She felt that only someone who'd been through the devastation could understand her feelings. To a certain extent this is true. People simply cannot understand what it was like. It is beyond normal imagination to picture what happened and to truly empathize, although people are well intentioned. I would never be able to understand the situation if I had not been through it myself.

Nothing is the way it used to be for us, but we are beginning to feel at home in our new place. We try not to focus on the family heirlooms that are gone forever or to dwell on what was. We try to think instead of what will be.

September 16, 1999, is a date we cannot forget, but we are grateful for today and for the days ahead that we shall enjoy. We are stronger people than we were before. We feel blessed to be where we are at this time, to

have weathered the storm, and to have reached this plateau of our lives, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically intact.

Ida and Bill Stanley have lived in Rocky Mount for fifty-four years. They lived at 1708 Lafayette Circle for thirty of those years. Today they live at 1404 West Haven Boulevard.



Cookbooks Replaced

LINDA SHEARON

During the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd, the Nash County Department of Social Services was chosen to implement the governor's Hurricane Relief Fund.

We looked into the faces of people who had walked through chest-high waters to safety, we viewed the heartbreaking pictures of the remains of their homes, and we listened to their stories.

We cried and we marveled at the perseverance of families as they sifted through the wreckage of personal belongings and wandered through the maze of all the recovery efforts that were set up to help them.

Most of the stories were sad, but one of the stories that we remember most vividly is the story of Mr. and Mrs. O. The flood destroyed Mrs. O.'s large collection of *Southern Living* cookbooks. Even though the O.'s lost much more than cookbooks, Mrs. O. was especially upset about this particular loss. Her employer found out and asked the publishers of *Southern Living* for help. They sent Mrs. O. an entire collection of cookbooks, which she was delighted to receive.

We sent this story because it tells how small possessions can mean so much, and it reflects the good-hearted nature of some people. It is also interesting that, of all the stories that the O.'s could have shared with the caseworker, they chose this one. This story and many others made us cry then, as well as now, as we share it with you.

Linda Shearon of the Nash County Department of Social Services submitted the above as the story the members of the department found most memorable.

Letter from the Office of Sheriff Jimmy Grimes

LT. DENNIS O. LYONS

Dear Mrs. Leonard:

The Nash County Sheriff's Office employees worked from twelve to sixteen hours a day during and after the flood. We assisted the National Guard by taking citizens from flooded homes to homes of other relatives or to shelters that had been opened by emergency services. Not only did we transport the citizens to the shelters, but we also posted a deputy there for safety and security purposes.

We also posted deputies at a number of other sites. Even though barricades had been placed at both ends of various bridges throughout the county, we also posted deputies to keep vehicles from crossing them until they could be inspected by the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

In several flooded subdivisions, vacated homes still contained all of the owners' property. We posted deputies in these subdivisions to keep people out of the area if they did not live there. At Golden East Mall, some of our deputies assisted in unloading trucks of supplies from other states.

These are only a few of the ways our department assisted at a time when our community needed support. Throughout that time, we continued to perform our regular duties and also offered assistance to the Edgecombe County Sheriff's Office.

Very truly yours, Dennis O. Lyons

Dennis O. Lyons began working in law enforcement in 1977, when he joined the Rocky Mount Police Department. After working there for fourteen years, he worked for the Department of Corrections for two years. In 1995, he joined the Nash County Sheriff's Department as an investigator and achieved the rank of lieutenant that same year. In October of 2003, Lyons was promoted to major, the equivalent of chief deputy.

E-mail from a Volunteer: An Outsider's View

KIT SLUDER

Greetings, friends!

Just wanted to give you an update on what's been happening around here. Last week I went to eastern North Carolina to do relief work for victims of Hurricane Floyd. It was quite an experience.

Most of my work was through the New Hope Presbytery in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. I arrived on Tuesday and went to the distribution center at the Edgemont Presbyterian Church, which is no longer an active church. The membership dwindled down to twelve members, who decided to move on. Now the church is used for other things, such as programs for children during the summer.

When I arrived, the church had been set up for disaster assistance. Donated goods sent from all over the Southeast were coming in by tractor-trailer to a nearby warehouse. Canned goods, cleaning supplies, diapers and other baby necessities, toiletries, clothing, and shoes were available for those in need.

I spent hours working at the warehouse and was there when trucks loaded with supplies arrived from Lowe's Motor Speedway in Charlotte. There were between fifty and eighty trucks loaded with supplies! As the trucks were unloaded, the boxes/barrels were opened, re-boxed with like items, numbered by type, and put on a pallet.

That's where my job began. I would inventory the items, count the number on the pallet, mark them, and then shrink-wrap the entire pallet.

Let me just say that shrink-wrapping should be an Olympic event! It was tough physical work with huge five- to ten-pound rolls of something akin to plastic wrap but as thick as a paper bag.

You may or may not know that Rocky Mount is the original home of Hardee's. I'm not typically a fast-food eater, but Hardee's was kind enough to provide free hamburgers the day that those eighteen-wheelers came in. When I finally took a break, I couldn't believe how wonderful they tasted!

The first night I stayed at Edgemont Presbyterian Church. I'd brought my sleeping bag prepared for whatever. Since I was the only volunteer that night, I ended up there alone. For those of you who have never had the opportunity to stay in an old church alone for an entire night—in a strange town—that's a test of faith. After driving in torrential rains to get there and doing physical work all-day, I was very tired. However, sleep didn't come as easily as I thought it might. I spent some time looking around the place just to get a feel for where I was. One thing I did find was a room with the best acoustics I've ever heard. So, of course, I played my guitar in there, which is relaxing to me. Then I hit the sack (literally). As I lay there, I listened. I wasn't scared in the usual sense, though I had to fight fear at times when my mind would wander to, "What if...?" Old churches do make some strange noises. So I kept reminding myself that I was in God's house, so I was really safe! I did go to sleep, finally, and slept off and on pretty well until about 6:30 A.M. or so in the morning, when I awoke hearing someone calling in the church.

At first I thought someone with a key had come in early but soon realized I was still the only one there. Okay, believe in ghosts or not, this was a strange experience. I was grateful when later that day I met the Executive Presbyter, and she invited me to stay at her house for the rest of my time there.

One of my most meaningful experiences was with a lovely lady I met and assisted daily throughout the week. Her name is Mrs. Pash, and she's a dear, dear lady. She's eighty years old, a retired first-grade schoolteacher, and a hospital volunteer. It is clear that she's used to being on the giving end of things, but she now is dealing with the loss of almost everything due to the flooding caused by Floyd. Thankfully, she has her life, and she

anticipates that, with much repair work, she'll be able to live in her home once again.

When the flooding began, her neighbor called her about 5:30 A.M. He said, "Jackie, you need to get up. Go into your kitchen and look out the window. *Do not* open the door to your garage!" She rose and, with the help of her cane, ventured out of her room. Water was already coming down the hall toward her. She made it to the kitchen, looked out her window, and saw her freestanding freezer floating in her garage.

With the water rising, she called 911. They promised to come get her, but they had many people to rescue. She waited and waited. The water continued to rise. She called again. Once again they promised, "Don't worry, Mrs. Pash. We're coming." She sat in a chair as the water rose higher and higher around her.

When her power went out, she became more frightened, so she tried to call again. This time the phone was out. Cut off from everyone, she thought, "This is it." Thinking of her beloved husband, Pash, who'd died just last year, she prayed. When she heard something out front, she worked her way through the ever-rising water to the front door. They had finally come for her.

Unable to get into the neighborhood in an ambulance or even a fire truck because of the water's depth, they had come in a backhoe. Using her cane, this lovely eighty-year-old woman managed to hoist herself into the bucket of huge piece of construction equipment and freed herself from a drowning home. Amazing!

While I was there with her last week, I grew to love this woman and to respect her immensely. She is full of Jesus. Her faith was an inspiration to me. She was honest about her critical and difficult situation, yet full of trust and love. This woman has a deep relationship with her Savior, and it's a beautiful thing to witness. It was a privilege to be near her.

There was so much to be done all around the area. At her home, we took furniture outside and placed clothes to dry. Much was unsalvageable, and those items went to the curb for trash pickup.

The house had had about four feet of standing water in it. Water takes no prisoners. It damages everything it touches, and it touches everything,

seeping even into the tiniest of holes or cracks. Mold and mildew had formed already.

The carpets had been taken up, but the floors remained moisture-laden. Even the indoor/outdoor carpet had to go to the dump because the water that had saturated the house contained all kinds of disease-producing debris. Sewage had overflowed and mixed with drowned livestock and chickens.

When I took up the linoleum in a small bathroom next to the kitchen, I found crickets beneath it. Many people had trouble with snakes. Large numbers of them had been flushed out of their holes, needed a dry place, and sought refuge in homes. One snake slithered into a rescuer's boat, made its way up to the bow, curled up and went to sleep! Thankfully, I didn't encounter any in my work.

On Thursday, we were trying to move Mrs. Pash's chest of drawers out of the house. It had some clothing and paperwork in it. One huge problem that I'd not anticipated was that drawers swell shut. It was impossible to open them to remove their contents. Imagine how heavy saturated wooden furniture is, especially with all of its contents trapped inside! We got the chest onto a dolly and tilted it up on its side to take it away. Water, mud, and grass poured out from every joint, though it was two weeks after the flood!

On Friday, as Mrs. Pash was going through things in her closet, she handed me a pocketbook that had been hanging in there. I took it outside and poured out enough water to fill two glasses. We tried to clean furniture we thought could be saved, dried out everything from photos to tax records to knick-knacks, removed all the electrical appliances, and moved everything out of the house.

Even with all the windows open, the stench filled the house. Mud and water still had to be removed from the garage area. In the midst of this disaster, there were stories to be told and lives to be shared.

Mrs. Pash had lived in that house for almost forty years. She and her husband used to have an annual fish fry on the back porch. She would spend days decorating for Christmas. Memories of a lifetime filled that house. It now stands empty and pillaged by the liquid invader that came and stripped her of so much of her life.

Still, Mrs. Pash believes that God is good: at the beginning of every prayer she voices her gratitude for the privilege of kneeling before God and for His Son, who died that we might have life. One day a small group from a church in Laurinburg came to help. We all gathered in a circle, and their minister prayed a beautiful and heart-felt prayer. When the minister finished, Mrs. Pash began spontaneously to pray: "Lord, I just don't have the words to properly express how grateful I am for these wonderful people." It's hard to describe the feeling we had standing in that damp room working and praying together, brothers and sisters in Christ, most of whom had never known each other until just hours before. It was one of the most humbling experiences I'd ever had. Not one eye was dry. I'd been asked to sing and play my guitar after the prayer.

"Oh sure," I thought, but I made it through somehow. God was truly in our midst.

I spent some time just listening to Mrs. Pash because she wouldn't eat unless I sat and ate with her. I also tried to help her stay organized. I went to the Red Cross to see where she was "in line": she was number sixteen hundred forty-seven, and they were registering numbers well into the two thousands. They said she could come in anytime.

Because she would need supporting documentation to get assistance, I dried her bills and put them in a special envelope to keep with her. I bought a notebook and made tabs: things to be done and important phone numbers, like the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Volunteers. I also called FEMA one day to make sure they hadn't forgotten her. She'd missed the assessor on Sunday because she'd gone to church.

Her only financial hope was FEMA. She was in the five-hundred-year floodplain and had no flood insurance. Her car was submerged, and her home and its contents ruined. It's hard to imagine having to start over at eighty!

Bear in mind that I've told you the story of only one person. There are thousands of others! It will take years to fully recover from this devastating hurricane. The good thing is that God is bringing people together in the face of tragedy. As much as I despise what Floyd wrought in eastern North Carolina, I must say that it has been a blessing to know Mrs. Pash.

We adopted each other, and it's unlikely this would have been possible otherwise. God is indeed good, even in the worst of circumstances.

There's so much more to tell, but I realize that this letter is already incredibly long. There are stories about the devastation in Tarboro and Princeville; about my time in the shelter at Tarboro High School, where three hundred and fifty are still "living" because they have nowhere else to go; and about what it's like to be living in a place after a disaster. It's intense and draining. Everywhere I look there are signs of tragedy: furniture and other belongings piled up at the curb, Red Cross and FEMA workers, and disaster-relief vehicles.

Hope all is well with you. Thanks for "listening". Keep in touch as you can. Until next time ... take care ... God Bless!

Love, Kit

Kit Sluder was one of many "outsiders" who came to Rocky Mount and gave her time, energy, hope, and caring to aid in helping others. She stayed with and became close to and fond of Jackie Pash, who describes her as "small in stature but a wonderful young woman with a big heart and a strong will." Jackie said that Kit plays the guitar, has a lovely singing voice, and composes songs that fittingly express the emotions and circumstances she is immediately involved with. Jackie, along with many others, is so grateful for Kit's help, encouragement, and love.

Remember When ...

GEORGE JEFFRIES

Remember when we all saw people on television in floods and thought how bad it must be? Well, now we don't have to wonder what it is like because we know first-hand that it is very bad.

Remember when the floodwaters came our way and all we had was each other for a while? Neighbor reached out to help neighbor. I know we lost a lot of material things, but we had each other.

Remember when Thanksgiving and Christmas came and things were so upside-down for us? We were at home in small relief trailers. But we still had each other.

Remember when all the help came in from some people we didn't even know? They were helping us clear out and rebuild our houses to turn them back into the places we could call home. And we still had one another.

Remember when some homes were repaired and the trailers began to leave? That was a great day! Neighbor would look at neighbor and smile because we still had each other.

There are still things that were lost and that will never come back. However, let's remember all the things that we were given and all the help from new friends. Let's think about where we were then and where we are now and be ever thankful. God has seen us through some very bad times. He gave us the chance to start over and rebuild. He let us know that there are still people willing to help their fellow man.

Step next door to your neighbor on each side and shake hands, remembering all the people and churches that gave us help in our time of need. Some people gave money, some gave physical help, and some gave a smile of encouragement and a rub on the back, saying, "Things will get better." Some got down on their knees and prayed for us. We needed all these things. Aren't we grateful that we still have each other?

George Jeffries describes himself as "just a plain, simple person whose way of looking at things was changed by the flood that inundated Nashville."

THE CITY
RESPONDS



Start-up of the Sunset Plant

JAY W. VAN HOOSE

A Brief History of the Water Treatment Plant The Sunset Avenue Water Treatment Plant, located three hundred seventy feet east of the Tar River, was originally constructed in 1934 with a capacity of three million gallons per day (MGD). Since then the plant has been expanded twice: once in 1942 to nine MGD and again in 1956 to a capacity of twelve MGD.

In 1989, the plant was renovated and upgraded to a capacity of eighteen MGD, which included rebuilding all fifteen filters and converting from single-media sand filters to dual-media sand and anthracite filters. New electrical systems, filter-control systems, filter sweeps, and turbidity meters on all filters were installed. All office spaces were renovated, and the plant's drinking-water lab was modernized. In 1995, an ozone system was added as a pretreatment to remove total trihalomethanes.

The Flood On September 16, the plant was operational until the electrical substation across the street from the plant lost power. To restore power, the generator technician needed to start the standby peak-saving generator; but when the technician arrived, the water from the Tar River had already begun to enter the substation. By 6:30 A.M., management decided not to start the standby generator due to the obvious danger of electrocution.

The river continued to rise, and by 10:30 A.M., floodwater began entering the water plant itself. By noon, the water had risen to more than four feet in the main lobby and was chest-deep in other areas within the plant. At 2:30 P.M., remaining plant personnel were evacuated by boat.

As we left, we cruised to the flooded bulk-chlorine storage building behind the plant to turn off the two-ton cylinders that were still operating and still hooked to the chlorine header. The cylinders had floated above the headers and were hanging upside-down by their pigtails to the header. Gary Weeks, lead mechanic, entered the building, stood on the frame of the chlorine header, and turned off the cylinders at the tanks.

First Post-Flood Damage Assessment On Saturday, September 17, Lead Mechanic Gary Weeks and I entered the plant in waist-deep water to retrieve supplies needed by the reactivated laboratory at our second water plant so that lab personnel could begin taking water samples throughout the city. After they made a quick inspection, we could begin planning how to get the plant operational. We made some startling discoveries. Water in the bulk-chlorine storage building was seven feet eleven inches deep. Three out of six bulk tanks had floated out of place, breaking the pipes attached to them. One twenty-thousand-gallon black-iron caustic tank had damaged both the roof and the end panel of the building and had pushed a twenty-thousand-gallon alum tank from its base. We later discovered that the caustic tank had hit the fiberglass alum tank so hard that it had fractured the windings in the tank, which meant that the tank had to be replaced. The ten-thousand-gallon bulk-fluoride and -phosphate tanks had also floated and were lying on their sides inside the building.

Sunday, September 18—Beginning Repairs We decided to set up teams to tackle each system's problem. Since we did not have the personnel to get the plant operational in a timely manner, each team would be made up of outside contractors and would be headed by water-plant personnel. The following teams were formed: Motors Team, Pumps Team, Electrical Team, Main Switch Gear Team, Bulk-Chemical Building and Tanks Team, and Chlorination Team.

Electrical-Motors Team Because the crane in the main plant was not operational, all motors had to be removed by hand. This task was completed on September 19. The motor shop inspected, cleaned, backed, megged, rewound (if needed), and installed new bearings in all motors. The motors were returned on September 22 and were installed in the following order: first, the backwash pump; then the low-duty pumps that transfer

water from the filter flumes to the clear wells; and finally, the finished-water pumps.

Electrical Team Because the main electrical-distribution room had more than four feet of water in it, we were advised that the main gear had to be rebuilt and that two two-thousand-amp distribution breakers, a twelve-hundred-amp breaker for low power distribution, and a six-hundred-amp breaker all had to be replaced. Work started on September 21 and was completed on September 22 at 9:30 P.M. We had the main power back in the plant.

Bulk-Chemical Building and Electrical Teams The first order of business was to right the tanks that had broken loose. We accomplished this by removing the roof of the building, attaching a crane to the tanks, and lifting them from the building. Then the team made temporary connections to the tanks remaining in the building so that they could get chemicals into the day tanks located on the third floor of the main building. The Bulk-Chemical and Electrical Teams had to make temporary electrical connections to the transfer pumps by using a four-hundred-thirty-volt, three-phase generator. This method got chemicals into the main plant



The power plant parking lot showing the meeting of City Lake and Tar River. Looking south, the power plant is on the right of the river, behind the lake on the left.

CREDIT: DICK BETHUNE

while we planned for more permanent repairs to the chemical-handling system. We had the chemical-transfer pump and motors repaired and installed by September 21.

Chlorinator Team An outside contractor dewatered the chlorine system and replaced and/or repaired any part necessary to insure safety and safe handling of the system. The system was available on September 22.

Pump and Clear Wells Because of the flooding, we had no choice but to pump out the filter wells in the plant. We also inspected the clear wells across the road from the plant and discovered evidence that the water inside had become contaminated, so we pumped them out. This was performed during the night. This process started on September 19 and was completed on September 21.

All Systems Go—Wednesday, September 22 By 11:00 P.M., we began operating the plant at the rate of six MGD. We started the chlorine feed to give us five milligrams per liter (mg/l) of free chlorine in the filter flumes. When the flumes were full, we began filling the clear wells. This process continued until Thursday, September 23, when we started backwashing filters and filling the clear wells.

Thursday, September 23 We continued to operate and monitor the plant with only one problem: filter-rate controls failed on two of the fifteen filters. In spite of that, we were able to maintain a filtration rate of six MGD with the remaining filters.

Friday, September 24 On Friday, we took bacteriological samples from each filter, from the filter flumes, and from the clear wells and lowered the free-chlorine level from five to four mg/l. We continued to operate and monitor the plant, though filter-rate controls failed on three more filters. This left us with only ten operational filters. Nevertheless, we were still able to maintain a filtration rate of six MGD with the remaining filters.

Saturday, September 25 On Saturday, we read the bacteriological samples, and all returned negative results for contamination. At 11:00 A.M., we started the finished-water pump and began pumping six MGD of water back into the system. The plant was out of service for a total of one hundred ninety-six hours or eight days, the first time since 1934 that the plant had missed a day of providing water to the city.

Heroes The heroes who got the Sunset plant operational in such a short period of time included the following:

- Gary Weeks, Lead Mechanic: Gary worked closely with me in getting outside contractors on site and supervising the individual teams to see that all necessary work was being performed.
- Jack Evans, Chief Operator at the Sunset Avenue Water Treatment Plant: Jack was at the plant when the flooding started. He and the operators protected as many systems as possible in the plant before rising water forced them out.
- J.C. Spell, Chief Operator at the Tar River Water Treatment Plant: J.C. worked around the clock to keep the Tar River plant operating during the storm and flood. During this time, he had to be taken to the hospital because of a kidney stone. After a short visit to the emergency room, he returned to the plant to aid his operators while the Sunset plant was offline.
- Greg Mann, Jason Friedrich, Emanuel Shell, and Joe Arrington, Operators at the Sunset Avenue Water Treatment Plant: These men worked around the clock without complaint to get the plant operational.
- Paul Dages, Ronnie Taylor, William Tucker, Robert Tisdale Jr., and Jimmy Lynch, Operators at the Tar River Water Treatment Plant: These men also worked around the clock without complaint. Though some of them had to drive one or more hours to get to the plant in order to relieve their fellow operators, no one missed a shift.
- Butch Smith, Raymond Ingram, William Bridges, Ben James, and Earl Manley, Maintenance Staff: These men all worked around the clock, not only at the Sunset Avenue Water Treatment Plant, but also at the Tar River Water Treatment Plant, to keep them operational during the flood.
- Mike Hicks, Superintendent of Kerr Lake Regional Water Plant: Because we were unable to get alum from our supplier, Mike arranged to transport some from his plant at Kerr Lake to our Tar River Plant so that we could still operate. Without his aid, we would

have run out of alum and would have had to shut down the Tar River Plant.

Conclusions We were able to get the Sunset Avenue Water Treatment Plant back on line as quickly as we did for several reasons:

- The floodwater receded first at Rocky Mount, which allowed suppliers, vendors, and contractors to reach us with help and resources.
- In a disaster of this magnitude, feeding the people on site is critical so that employees can perform at their best. With home life and food supplies disrupted, we assigned one person to gather supplies and to cook for all employees. His work assured that our twenty-four-hour-a-day workforce was well fed.

We also learned that getting enough sleep is essential. For the first twenty-four to forty-eight hours, workers can run on pure adrenaline. After that, however, the power to reason and to make good decisions becomes problematic.

We hope this information may help those who may experience a future catastrophic event.

Jay W. Van Hoose was superintendent of the City of Rocky Mount Water Treatment Plants during Hurricane Floyd.



Important Decisions

AN INTERVIEW WITH CLAUDE MAYO, WAYNE DEAL, AND BRIAN BRANTLEY | ALICE THORP



Claude: Though I had very little to do with the rescues and work that were performed by the county people, I think we were extremely lucky not to lose many lives. Some months ago, we flew out to North Dakota to Red River where they'd had a large flood several years ago. The Red River folks told us that the recovery was going to be a long, drawn-out experience. We couldn't believe it at the time, but it has been. Due to the efforts of these other two gentlemen, however, much has been accomplished. Wayne Deal, our county manager, was up day and night coordinating everything he could with our director of emergency services, Brian Brantley. I cannot say enough good things about these two people.

Before I turn the mike over to Wayne, I'd like to thank the people who are collecting these stories to preserve them for history, for our children, and our children's children.

Wayne: Hurricane Floyd is still with us and will be for a long time. In North Dakota, we were told that the aftermath of the destruction would be at its peak two and a half years after the flood. They were right; there's still a lot going on here.

When I think back to the flood, it's not the flood and the damage that I remember the most. We all saw that. My strongest memories are of the way people came together, even before the water stopped. That was just unbelievable. It reminded me of the beginning of *A Tale of Two Cities*. It



was obviously the worst of times, but in many ways, it was, and has been, the best of times. I think it has brought us together as nothing else could.

I'm sure Brian will talk about what happened on the local level, but on the regional level, people from other states were waiting in staging areas to come help us even before the storm actually began. Swift-water teams, which we didn't have, came in from Pennsylvania and western North Carolina. Those people's spirit and determination were just unbelievable. And, as recently as this week, there was a gentleman from the southwest here to continue to rebuild housing. So, there's a lot of that still going on. I'll pause at this point to let Brian speak and then come back later to some other specific memories I may have.

Brian: There are a lot of bad memories from Floyd and a lot of good memories. As Mr. Deal said, the pressure on the emergency-services system during and after Floyd is something the average person will never know about.

Many have forgotten that Hurricane Dennis was one of our major culprits. I knew, just by mowing my grass the week before Floyd, that something was wrong. We had so much water with Dennis that when Floyd came and the rain started, there was nowhere for Floyd's water to go. We knew that it was going to be bad, but we had no idea that Tar River could reach thirty-one feet and that the creeks could become deathtraps for travelers.

We had planned out and tested every phase of emergency management. Even during Hurricane Dennis, we'd had many conversations with the National Weather Service, emergency management at the state level, and all the local emergency people. Prior to Hurricane Floyd, we had pulled all our emergency services together. We had a meeting on the fourteenth of September, and representatives from every emergency-service agency in Nash County attended, as well as county and municipal officials. We were anticipating a Hurricane-Fran-type event and talked about staging deputies, ambulances, and fire trucks all over the county at different locations so that when trees went down—as they had during Fran—we could get to either side of the downed trees to help people. We had a good plan, and our plan worked. Our problem during Floyd wasn't downed trees; it was water across the roads.



A group of local leaders leave for Grand Forks, North Dakota to study restoration following the 1997 flood of the Red River of the North.

CREDIT: MARTHA DANIEL

Nash County and the City of Rocky Mount had agreed that if the wind speeds maintained 40 mph, we would not send people into the field until the winds died down because it would be too dangerous. High winds combined with so much existing ground water would endanger emergency personnel from falling trees.

Sometime in the early morning of the fifteenth, Chief Mullen called from Rocky Mount Emergency Operations Center and told me, "We've got people on rooftops. We've got people in trees. We've got firemen making water rescues, and somebody's going to get hurt or killed. The creeks are rising. It's unbelievable."

At the same time, we had a couple of accidents in Nash County involving vehicles swept off roadways by water. I'd traveled U.S. Highway 64 Bypass near Spring Hope for thirty years and had never seen water across it, but that morning, the water had swept a vehicle off the road and was up to the bumper of our ambulance. After rescuing that gentleman, the rescue chief called me to say that he was taking his men away from any swift-water rescues because they did not have the equipment to handle

them. He'd almost lost some of his men trying to rescue the gentleman on U.S. Highway 64 Bypass.

Also, early on the morning of the fifteenth, a truck carrying a National Guardsman and a paramedic was swept off the roadway while they were trying to rescue an elderly lady from a home outside Nashville. Rescuing the guardsman and paramedic on foot was impossible, and we couldn't get boats there due to the swift water. A bulldozer was commandeered from a landowner on Womble Road outside of Nashville, and the operator eventually took the two gentlemen off the truck and saved their lives.

At approximately the same time that happened, two elderly people hit high water on U.S. Highway 64 Bypass just east of N.C. Highway 58. Their truck was swept down the side of an embankment where the water was estimated to be about five feet deep. We had called for a helicopter from Camp Lejeune, which was on the way—as was a swift-water rescue team from Cary or Garner. When the swift-water team arrived on scene, they said that they couldn't handle it.

A crane—which we'd originally requested from Edwards, Inc., to help us get the paramedic and guardsman off the truck—was diverted to the U.S. Highway-64 rescue. The water was so strong that it moved the ninety-thousand-pound crane so that the crane operator could tell that he was probably going to lose not only a several-hundred-thousand-dollar crane, but also the rescuer who'd crawled out on the crane's boom to reach the victims. He had to back the crane out. About ten minutes later, the truck containing the elderly man and his sister disappeared down the embankment into approximately eighteen feet of water.

Though the helicopter arrived on the scene just a few minutes later and tried to use its rotors to move the water to locate the vehicle, the pilot was unsuccessful. The water was just too deep. Though the helicopter was not successful there, it was successful in rescuing many other people off Interstate 95, off rural paved roads, and off the rooftops of their homes.

We had local volunteers risking their lives near West Mount, up in the Red Oak area, outside of Nashville, and all over the city of Rocky Mount. Meanwhile, the water kept rising. The City of Rocky Mount was dealing

with the Tar River, which was dangerous, but at that time, it was not running quite as swiftly as the county's creeks were.

The city and Bunn Farm subdivision were hard hit, but the Winwood subdivision in Nashville was hit as hard as any area. One of our biggest fears was that we were going to lose lives down there because the subdivision backs up to Stony Creek, which was rising. Of course, we were saying, "Get out. Go to high land. We'll get you some help some way, but get out of your houses."

That's when we got the call about the elderly lady in the wheelchair, and that's when our paramedic and the National Guardsman got swept away trying to get to her. The water they were trying to drive through was probably two and a half to three feet deep. Out here, near our radio tower, if they'd driven down the hill, the water would have been over the top of their truck. That's how bad that creek was. Fortunately, the water never came closer than about thirty feet from our radio-system tower. Edgecombe lost theirs in the flood. It was unreal how rapid that floodwater was.

Wayne: A couple of days after the hurricane, we had teams who walked the creeks looking for bodies.

Brian: One of the teams was made up of firemen from Tarboro. If they were not being utilized on their boats, they helped us. We also had body-recovery specialists.

Wayne: With dogs.

Brian: We actually had two dog teams from other counties, and then, we had two body-recovery teams that didn't have dogs. The recovery teams tied chains to submerged vehicles and pulled them out. Then, the body-recovery specialists went in and got the bodies out of the vehicles. Several of the bodies were found outside the vehicles. Rocky Mount had one missing person who was found later. That was not an easy task for the men involved, and those dogs were unbelievable in helping them locate bodies quickly.

One of the biggest problems was getting from one place to another. Even though you could see the hospital, it took almost two hours to get from Sunset Avenue to Nash General on Winstead Road because the roads were flooded and the bridge on Winstead Avenue was washed out. Even if we

picked up a patient on the west side of Rocky Mount, we had to go all the way to Spring Hope and back around to get him or her to the hospital.

Lots of resources came into the county: numerous helicopters, somewhere around a half a million pounds of ice, twenty tractor-trailer loads of water, swift-water rescue teams from the western part of the state, a FEMA task force from Pennsylvania, dogs for underwater recovery of bodies, and help from numerous other response agencies. We lost seven lives in Nash County alone, all related to swift water and motor vehicles. We would have lost many more had it not been for the heroic efforts of local volunteers, firemen, and police, as well as help from outside our community.

According to the weather service, eighty percent of all the deaths in hurricanes since 1970 have been from freshwater drowning. That tells me that hurricanes are not specifically coastal events. Eighty percent of the people dying are inland—people driving through swift water. All seven of our lost lives were due to vehicles in swift water.

The swift water created havoc for our rescuers, as well. We've got videos showing people driving through swift water and the rear of the vehicle being pushed to the side and losing traction. We might have lost hundreds of lives if the water had been just a bit stronger at a given moment. We're very fortunate that we didn't lose more than seven—and that we didn't lose any rescuers. They made rescues that absolutely should not have been attempted, but they did it anyway because they felt that they had to.

Speaking of rescuers, without the help of citizens, I don't believe any government agency or unit could have saved all the people who were in trouble. It took neighbor helping neighbor, citizen helping citizen. Floyd was bigger than the government. We were trying our best, but we couldn't help all the people in trouble. Nash County had six hundred volunteers, maybe an additional two hundred police officers, and the National Guard in the field. But if it hadn't been for ordinary citizens getting people out of homes and apartments that night and the next day and night, we'd have lost many more lives. Being a lifelong resident of Nash County, I couldn't be any prouder of our citizens. They all responded like they should.

The county had a number of shelters at schools: Benvenue Elementary, Southern Nash Junior High, Southern Nash Senior High, and Northern

Nash Senior High. Winstead Avenue Elementary was on standby. I'm missing one because I think we had five shelters operating. There were about two thousand five hundred people in our shelters. Those folks and thousands more throughout the county needed to be fed.

Though hundreds, if not thousands, of individuals played a part, several specific groups should be mentioned. The North Carolina Baptist Men's Association called me on the fifteenth and said that they were headed here. They used Englewood Baptist Church as their headquarters, from which they co-coordinated efforts to feed those in need.

We also requested that the Red Cross make emergency-response vehicles (ERVs) available to help transport meals. The ERVs are small units that can travel all over the area. With their help, we set up eleven feeding stations in the county. Edgecombe County set up probably another thirty. The ERVs were all over the City of Rocky Mount as well as Nash and Edgecombe Counties. The ERVs had little cabs up front; in the back, they had areas that kept food hot and from which food could actually be served. There were also some ERVs that were just vans that carried stacks of Styrofoam plates and supplies to the various feeding stations.

The Salvation Army also helped us quite a bit. They set up at the southern end of the county and fed people for two weeks while the power was out in Nash and Franklin Counties. They also ran two shelters for us.

The Red Cross ran the rest of the county shelters, but a lot of churches opened up their own shelters and feeding stations. For example, Beulah Church set up at the North Nashville Ruritan building. We couldn't get to that area without a helicopter, so they started feeding people, bringing in clothes, and pretty much operated on their own for several days. What they did was amazing.

All of these groups of men and women were feeding up to ten thousand meals per day in Nash, Edgecombe, and Rocky Mount. The average person wouldn't believe it, but that's a fact. They were transporting meals by Red Cross ERVs to our shelter, which housed people; to our feeding stations, where people came to get food; to our Emergency Operations Center; to the National Guard Armory; to churches; to fire departments; and even to Edgecombe County. It's just unbelievable how many meals

were handed out by the Baptist Men's Association and the Red Cross. And that's just the tip of the iceberg because there were so many other groups operating independently.

Churches and fire departments also acted as shelters and feeding stations for people who couldn't get to the county ones. For instance Interstate 95, which is an evacuation route, created a real nightmare for us. In an emergency, we're a host county for the Dare County area. Before Floyd hit, they had called us to request that we set up a shelter for them, since they would be evacuating.

Most people didn't know that we had thousands and thousands of beachgoers who'd been told to evacuate via I-95 instead of I-40 who got stranded. Red Oak was full of travelers. People slept in cars all over town. The fire department pitched in to try to get them food, and we sent water and food up there.

But no community proved to be a better Samaritan than Salem, up near the northern county line. The Salem Fire Department has about twenty-two members, and Salem itself is a community of probably two hundred people, three hundred max. They had more than seven hundred stranded I-95 motorists in their little community. The power was out, and we couldn't get help up to them; the local people pulled together and collected meat and food from their freezers, which would go bad. They brought in cookers, set them up all around the fire department, and cooked meals for all those travelers.

I don't know how long those seven hundred travelers from Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey would have been in Salem if a gentleman from Virginia hadn't finally told the fire chief that he was going to find a way to Raleigh. He left, stayed gone several hours, and came back with a map he'd drawn, which he gave to the fire chief. The power had come back on by then, so they made copies of the map, passed them out to the motorists, and the people left the Salem area. They had to go many miles out of the way—up into Warren County, I think—and then back down to get to Raleigh, but that's how the community pulled together.

Whitakers Fire Department was looking after five hundred or six hundred people. Edgecombe County really couldn't get any help to them

because of the flooded roads, so we sent them water and, later, meals. County lines really didn't matter.

Nobody knows those little stories about local communities, fire chiefs, and volunteers who pulled together and fed people they'd never seen and will never see again. When you talk to some of the people who did those things, they brush it off like it was just their responsibility. Those are the good memories of Hurricane Floyd.

Luckily, the county had seen fit to put us in the twenty-first century with a new emergency operations center (EOC) one month before the storm. If we had been in the old EOC, we would have had an even worse disaster. During Fran, the old EOC almost flooded. We had very little air circulation in the building; staff had to sleep on the floors. There was no place to shower. We'd had to stay there for three or four days in a row because we couldn't get home. One month after we moved into our new building, Floyd tested our new EOC. We, as humans, made mistakes, but the building performed like it was supposed to and made our job easier.

We had twelve agencies set up in our EOC, ten phone lines, and ten computer connections. We could make contact with the state via computer instead of faxing paperwork, and the computers made it easier to track our resources. We could see where they were, see whether we were going to get them when needed, and see if they were going to be limited. So, the EOC made a big difference. It was tough seeing your county taking a beating—like watching a friend get beat up—but there were some real positives that I'll always remember.

We kept the EOC manned with thirty to forty people for two weeks. We ate there, we showered there, and we slept on cots in our bunkrooms so we could get away from the noise and the pressure. That made all the difference in the world.

Brian: A week later, social services joined us and started programs to immediately assist people. The line of victims trying to get assistance was past the Cultural Center. By 1:00 or 2:00 social services had gotten their applications filled out to get them help and run them all through. I was astonished. If we had been in the old social-services building, just handling so many people would have been a disaster in itself. So, this building

functioned like it was supposed to—not only for emergency operations, but also for the recovery efforts afterwards.

We'd also had the foresight to put the tax department on a generator. They were able to pull land records off their computers so we could do damage assessments. The damage-assessment team was able to get the reports back to this office quickly, which was very important for Mr. Mayo. He had to get a letter to the governor with specifics on damages in order to get the disaster declaration to make the county eligible for state and federal relief. We had a damage-assessment report ready by the Monday following Floyd, which was unbelievable. Our tax and planning departments pulled together to do damage assessment, even with routes blocked by water and having to travel this way and that to get around. If they hadn't known the county so well, they'd have gotten lost.

Wayne: I wasn't involved in any of the rescue efforts. I didn't have the expertise to be out there, so I spent most of my time here in the EOC. It was amazing. At various stages, I urged people to go home to get some rest. Most of them wouldn't. I almost had to drive some of them away. The dedication was just unbelievable. The physical exhaustion was obvious, and at times the mental exhaustion was, too. You'd see people with tears in their eyes saying, "I can't imagine how it feels to watch somebody be swept away when there's nothing in the world you can do for them."

Brian: When you have people out there in situations that depend on your making the right decision and on other people making the right decisions and on getting the right resources where they are needed so they can save lives, it's stressful.

We had probably fifty volunteers who had to watch people die—people they couldn't get to because of swift water. There are people who lie down every night thinking about the things they saw or did during Floyd and second-guessing themselves. It's a lot of stress when you're worried about doing the right thing for everybody.

Wayne: A counselor from mental health showed up in the EOC to assist people in working through trauma. We hadn't planned for or asked for his help, but we certainly needed it. A lot of people, like the counselor, worked

quietly behind the scenes—people you hardly realized were even there, but they made a valuable contribution in keeping the whole effort going.

There were tears, but there was also laughter. We had a man who'd gotten here named Devon Bass. Devon's a really, really, nice guy with a great personality. He had an accident years ago that left one of his arms injured so that it just dangles. As I recall the story, Devon had agreed to go on a call in Edgecombe or Wilson County because the helicopter pilot had no idea how to get there. Even though he worked for Nash County, Devon was familiar with the other counties and offered to help by looking for landmarks and so forth. Because of subsequent calls for the helicopter, he ended up being gone about five hours helping the crew. Devon was on board the helicopter when it flew to the hospital. While they were there, they got a call to go pick up a lady who was in labor. The crew had already climbed into the chopper when they realized that they might need an obstetrics kit, so Devon dashed back in to get one. In the confusion, he was a little disoriented because of construction going on in the hospital, so he was running down the hall with his injured arm flopping when he met two doctors. He urgently asked which way the emergency room was. The two doctors grabbed him and said, "How badly are you injured?" So, there was some laughter in it all, too. But mainly, I remember the way people came together. It was unbelievable.

Brian: Things happened for which there was no apparent explanation. I was on the phone with a man who had left his dog and cat when he evacuated. He was determined to go back and get his animals. I'd explained to him that we understood his desire to help his animals but that our first commitment was to save human lives and that we had our hands full at the moment. The man said, "I understand; I know you can't send anybody now, but I'm going back to try to get my animals." I told him not to risk his life and got a promise that he'd call us back before he tried a rescue. I got his number, just in case we could help him later.

While I was talking on the phone, a gentleman sat down at the table where I was. I remember noticing out of the corner of my eye that the gentleman had on a black shirt with gold letters that I didn't recognize.

When I hung up, the guy sitting in the chair said, "Sounds like you could use my help." I looked, and it was an animal-recovery specialist who was actually headed to Jones County because of the livestock problem they were having because of the flooding. He just happened to stop in to see if he could help us. I gave him the first guy's phone number.

The city and the county governments worked great together. We've learned a lot of things from Floyd. We've worked on our special-needs facilities for people who can't go to regular shelters. Since Rocky Mount is our largest municipality, they will now have a representative in our EOC instead of communicating with us by phone. After Floyd, the North Carolina Department of Transportation realized that our biggest issue was water on the roadways. They have assured us they will have a member of their staff in our EOC twenty-four hours a day during the storms. The North Carolina Highway Patrol has assured us that they now understand that they need a representative in the county's operations center.

I think that we've all learned a lot from this experience. We have about twenty people who will start training in July for swift-water rescue. They'll be local people. We're trying to get a boat donated now from a local business. Maybe we'll never need such resources. We've never needed them before, but we did during Floyd. Now we won't have to wait three hours for a team to come from another county. We'll have our own. The things that we have learned from Floyd will benefit us in the future. We made mistakes, but Nash County's going to learn from them.

In September 1999, Claude Mayo was chairman of the county commissioners, Wayne Deal was the county manager, and Brian Brantley was head of emergency services.



A Challenge

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARLENE PAYNE | ALICE THORP

As recreation superintendent, my responsibilities included overseeing the operation of six programming divisions: The Arts Center, Athletics, the Children's Museum, Neighbor Programs, Special Olympics, Senior Programs, and Special Events. The final three included the river programming in the two community centers.

We were in the process of hiring a new director for the Arts Center when the flood hit, so I was running back and forth between city hall and the Arts Center. I was serving as the Arts Center director until the new director could be hired. In fact, Jerry Jackson's interview was scheduled for Wednesday morning, the day before the flood hit. Jerry was the Visual Arts Program coordinator at the Arts Center at the time.

Early Wednesday morning, Pete Armstrong, my boss and director of parks and recreation, wondered if we should cancel the interview with Jerry because of the impending hurricane. We decided to go ahead with it.

The interview was probably a bit hurried, but it was really good that we'd finished the process because the Arts Center was badly flooded and needed someone dedicated to it, someone who could handle its issues and make decisions without having to worry about other divisions. Jerry was hired two days after the flood.

The Arts Center had flooded before September 1999. I had been in Rocky Mount only a year when Hurricane Fran hit in 1996 and flooded it. That time, water rose slowly to about twelve inches in the buildings. The



weather was hot and humid, and malodorous fumes penetrated the area. Fortunately, we did not lose any art, although parts of some of the building had to be replaced. Then, in 1998, Hurricane Bonnie flooded the building again. That time the water stayed longer, so we again had to replace some of the walls and make other repairs.

During Hurricane Floyd, each of the city's departments had specific areas of responsibility if an emergency occurred. Parks and recreation, our department, was responsible for manning shelters and for coming up with food and shelter for city workers. Pete Armstrong and I were out all Wednesday buying food. Grocery shelves were almost empty, since most people were trying to prepare for the storm, as well. I remember going from store to store until we got the van just as full as we could. We took the load to city hall, and by the time we unloaded the food, it was about 10:30 P.M. Wednesday night. The rain was pouring, and the wind was blowing.

After unloading the food, I went home to Hammond Street to get dry clothes. Pete went to his home in Northgreen. Soon after, he called and said, "You know that water is getting kinda high. Maybe you ought to check on the Arts Center."

It was really raining hard, and the wind was increasing. I drove to the Arts Center and pointed my headlights toward the Tar River, the parking lot, the warehouse building, and the areas near the river. The river was just beginning to come into the parking lot at the lowest corner. Based on the rise of water during previous storms, I thought that we were in pretty good shape and that we didn't really have to worry about anything that night.

I started to leave, and I pulled around in front of the Tank Theater. I remembered that Jerry had just moved and that his new phone number was taped to my old director's desk in the office of the Tank Theater. I really didn't want to get out in that rain again, but I decided that I'd better get his number, just in case I needed it later that night or the next day, since Jerry was responsible for the contents of the center. If we needed to move the art, Jerry would have to decide what to do.

When I unlocked the door and stepped inside, I found the water was about four inches deep and heard a noise unlike anything I'd ever heard before. At first, I thought I was hearing water from the falls, but I knew

that couldn't be. Then I realized that I was not standing in floodwater. It was backup!

I waded to where an exhibit was located, and as I did, I passed the bathrooms in the core of the Tank Theater on the first floor. I suddenly realized that the sound was gushing from the toilets. Water geysered to the ceiling and splashed down. It was amazing! I could never have imagined anything like that! When I opened the front door to let the water out, water from the river rushed in.

I called Jerry and then Larry Camp from parks maintenance to send a crew. When Jerry and the maintenance crew arrived, we began moving the art, exhibits, and any other items we could to higher ground.

The "Deaner Circus" was on exhibit. Mr. Deaner, a native of Greenville, North Carolina, had spent forty years carving a wooden circus. Jerry and I took each piece apart, packed it, and moved it upstairs. Everything else, including computers, copiers, and files, was put at least two feet higher than the water had been, but as it turned out, we didn't move them high enough. We finally left about 1:30 A.M. Thursday, not yet realizing how different this flood would be.

As I was going home, it suddenly hit me how nasty, filthy, and yucky I felt. I stopped on the back porch to shed my clothes. I still had electricity, so I took a hot bath and then fell into bed for the remainder of the night. When I awakened, the power was still on, but it went off before I left the house.

By 7:00 A.M., I was at the emergency operations center (EOC). That was an incredible experience. A couple of people from each department were assigned to take calls. The tables were set up in a "U" shape with two telephones in front of each person. Across from us were the fire chief, the police chief, and their crews, so we were very aware of the emergency and rescue calls coming in. We soon realized that people were stuck in homes, trees, and cars and would have to be rescued by boat. Once rescued, they needed a shelter away from the rising water. At one point, a helicopter crew called in to say that they had dropped off some people they'd rescued by the side of the road. For the first day or two, the activity was frantic. Though the majority of calls were serious and almost frightening, a few

were funny. One woman wanted us to send someone in a boat so that she could mail her utility bill.

The only time I remember the center being quiet was when a television news cameraman brought in a video of the flood to show us. Not a sound could be heard other than the telephones. Everyone was in awe at all of the water. It was our first look at the disaster we were managing, and we were stunned.

Most of the EOC staff arrived before the water rose and stayed until after it began to recede. They would eat, nap, and go back to the phone—working around the clock through the weekend after Floyd and into the following week. Those who could go home did so only to take a shower, catch a quick nap, and then return to the operations center. Those who couldn't go home napped in their offices.

Since my job was to coordinate food and shelter for both victims and city workers, we immediately opened Edwards Junior High as a site to feed the city workers. In previous storms, the Red Cross had set up and staffed the shelters. The heavy flooding this time actually divided the city into four areas, so people were cut off from the shelters that would normally have served them. In addition, Floyd, unlike other hurricanes, was moving from west to east. That meant that the majority of the people in the shelters were from our own area, not evacuees from the coast of North Carolina.

We opened Benvenue Elementary, Parker Middle School, and the R.M. Wilson gym but wound up with people in fire stations, churches, other shelters, city hall, and many public facilities. We needed to get people to a safe, dry place. Many people plucked from the water were soaked and arrived wet and cold. Lynn Driver and Carlton Alston, who helped run the R.M. Wilson shelter, gave them dry baseball- and basketball-team pants and T-shirts.

The whole food thing was a challenge. Since there was no power, grocery stores and restaurants were closed. The food that Peter and I had gotten the day before was gone, so Jerry Jackson went to a convenience store and got a lot of snacks for R.M. Wilson. Jacob Parker, Steve Warren, the parks-maintenance folks and I went to Raleigh, where we filled several trucks with food. The Western Sizzlin Steak House fed a lot of city

workers. Some food was catered from Raleigh. A large workforce of city employees worked twenty-four hours a day for days. We got food from anyone we could.

We were concerned about what we would find on Monday in the Riverside and Duke Circle areas. Many elderly people had been rescued from those areas, and we were very nervous and afraid that we hadn't gotten everyone.

When Monday came, it was amazing that the death toll was as low as it was. The three people who had died had been killed in cars, not trapped in houses. Considering the number of people who had been trapped in houses, that's amazing.

We lost the Arts Center, the Children's Museum, and the swimming pools. The lower level of Booker T. Washington Community Center was flooded, and the carousel at Riverside Park was badly damaged, but the children's train was okay. There was heavy park damage, too. Battle Park had many huge trees down. The flood damaged tennis courts, fences, and ball fields. This department took a big hit, as did lots of other departments. The joke around city hall was that I was the superintendent of dumps.

Looking back after two years, I'm proud of our citizens' efforts. The people have come back in an amazing way. Most people have made a real effort. I heard no whining about what they lost.



Ruined belongings at Riverside Apartments after Floyd.
Many neighborhoods resembled this scene.

CREDIT: GARY BRITT

I'd worked for government agencies for a long time before I came to Rocky Mount, and this city really cares. It handled a monumental problem in a monumental manner. I think they were as well prepared for what happened as any city could have been and probably much better prepared than most. It's not that the city is perfect. Its employees care and try. What happened reflected that caring.

City management put a tremendous amount of effort into taking care of its citizens. I was impressed with how responsibly the citizens of Rocky Mount acted during a real crisis.

Marlene Payne was recreation superintendent of Rocky Mount at the time of the flood.



Struggle for Clear Water

AN INTERVIEW WITH JACKIE EVANS | MARLENE PAYNE

Thursday morning, September 16, I left home around 12:15 A.M. Though I'd had two operators working that night because we were expecting some rough weather, I figured that they might need me. I wasn't the only one thinking along those lines. The operator scheduled to come in at 7:00 A.M. came in early, too.



We lost power around 6:30 that morning. By then, word from the power plant indicated we would not be getting power until about 7:30 A.M. because the electrical substation next to the water plant was already under water, and nothing was working over there. Though we couldn't get out of the parking lot because there was too much water on River Drive, we moved our cars to the highest ground we could find.



Our main concern was to secure the main building and to secure the outside chemical-storage building as well as we could. All kinds of chemicals are used to treat water. We weren't too concerned about those inside the plant because they were stored on the third floor, but the chemical-storage area behind the plant was obviously vulnerable. It eventually had six and a half to seven feet of water in it, and the force of the water caused three tanks to break loose from their pipes and leak.

That morning, water kept rising until it was finally coming in the front door. We moved as many computers, desks, and files as we could to the second floor. I contacted my supervisors to make them aware of the

situation, but we couldn't get out, and they couldn't get in. We were stranded in the plant until about 3:00 P.M., when firemen arrived in a motorboat.

The firemen tried to get us out the front door, but the current was too strong. By this time, the river and the city lake had joined together. It was like an ocean out there. The firemen finally got the boat around to the back door.

We walked through approximately five feet of water on the first floor to get to the boat. As we left the treatment plant, we realized that we were completely surrounded by water from the city lake to as far as the Riverside area and Duke Circle. There was no land in sight.

Homes behind the plant were being flooded, too, so the firemen had been more concerned about saving those people because we were safe upstairs. They had made sure that all of the people on Gay Street and Taylor Street were out of their homes before coming to rescue us. Those residents' lives were really changed that day. It had to be hard to leave the homes they had lived in probably all of their lives.

We had been worried about our families, since we couldn't contact them because the phones were out. My family fared pretty well. We didn't lose anything at home; however, four of the five of us at work that day lost vehicles. They were completely submerged in the water in the parking lot. It could have been worse.

Our building is an old structure, built in 1935. It has lots of character. It had been refurbished in 1956 and again in 1990. It's a beautiful art deco building, not like the industrial type they build today. If you have a mental image of an industrial plant being ugly and purely functional, you need to see the Sunset Avenue Water Treatment Plant. Everyone who sees it comments on its character and beauty.

We didn't get back into the building until the following Monday, when the water receded. It was devastating. If you'd seen it, you'd have said we'd never get the plant back on line. Everything was muddy, dirty, and probably contaminated. The smell was awful. Most of the damage was to the first floor, where the pumps are located. With all of the available operators and mechanics we could get, we took the pumps out, shipped them out to be dried, rewired, and brought back. We then had to wash the plant down with pressure hoses.



Storage units off Sunset Avenue across from the power plant on Tar River.

CREDIT: DICK BETHUNE

We were back on line making clean water in six days. I can't say enough about my coworkers. I was so impressed with them. Everybody pitched in. They worked night and day, sometimes twenty to twenty-four hours a shift, to get the plant cleaned up and back on line. It was amazing. Everyone pulled together and did what had to be done. All of us had the same goal: to get that plant back on line as soon as possible. In a city the size of Rocky Mount, it could have been disastrous if citizens couldn't get clean water. Clean water is important for maintaining good health and sanitation. All kinds of disease outbreaks occur when people can't get clean, uncontaminated water. If you've ever had to do without it, you know how important it is.

When I first looked at the devastation everywhere, I thought we'd never recover from it, but the community pulled together in an amazing way. We've learned the preparations we need to make for the future, and we have made and continue making changes that will, we hope, prevent the problems we had before. The flood drew everyone closer together.

Strangers helped strangers. It makes me feel differently towards people. We all learned something that we hadn't experienced before, and I'm sure it will help in the long run.

Jackie Evans was the chief operator of the Sunset Avenue Water Treatment Plant and had worked there since October 1989. He and six operators were responsible for running the water treatment plant, which turns potentially unsafe water into good, clean water.

No Normal Day in the Water Department

AN INTERVIEW WITH KENNY PARRISH | MARLENE PAYNE

There is seldom a normal day at water and sewer services. Our job is responding to water-main breaks and sewer problems. Though we have several programs we work on a daily basis, our day is usually planned each morning when we get to work because our employees are often responding to emergencies. Hurricane Floyd created an emergency larger than anything we had dealt with before, but the guys stood up and did a good job.

When I left the house that morning around 1:00 A.M., I noticed things didn't look like they had in the few hurricanes I had experienced, but I wasn't alarmed. As I rode around checking on things, a call came in from Thorpe-Greenville Tobacco Processing Plant on Barnum Road saying that the water was extremely high over there. When I reached the plant, the water was higher than I'd seen it in twenty-nine years. I knew then that something different was happening. Figuring that we were going to have some severe problems, I started back to the office and called in additional employees. One of the guys I called in from Nashville asked how he could reach the shop, which was at the intersection of Albemarle Avenue and Virginia Street. I told him to come down U.S. Highway 64 Bypass to Atlantic Avenue and that he wouldn't have any problems because I had just come through there fifteen minutes earlier.

About fifteen minutes later, the employee called back and said, "I'm at Atlantic Avenue and Virginia Street, and my car's flooded out." I thought that was strange because I'd come through there less than thirty minutes

before, so I got into my car and drove there. Sure enough, his car was flooded in about two feet of water.

Thinking that the car would be safe, we decided to get a loader to pull it out. When we returned about fifteen minutes later with the loader, we could see only two inches of the top of the car.

We left the car there and went back to the shop. Phone calls were coming in as fast as we could answer them. People were saying that their houses were surrounded by water or that water was in their houses. We and the fire department responded to the calls.

We rescued about twenty people by using the loader. The loader is a four-wheel-drive vehicle with tires six feet high. Its cab is eight to nine feet above ground level and on the front there's a large bucket. It took us a while to reach the flood victims because sometimes we had to drive three blocks through water to get to them and then had to drive back out.

As we drove up to houses, the tires went under water. People stepped off of their porches into the front-end bucket. Then we backed out and put them on dry land. We did that for a couple of hours until the fire department started catching up with us. Eventually, the water got too high, even for the loader.

The next morning, we were still assisting the fire department with rescuing victims when the National Guard arrived. We used some of our larger equipment to pull their boats around and to get them to areas in town where people standing on top of cars were waiting to be rescued.

As we drove past Airport Road, a woman and a man waved at us for help. We drove down there in the loader, but we couldn't reach them. They were holding on to a telephone pole, and the water was up to their knees. I told them to wade over to us and get into the bucket so we could take them to dry land. They said, "We can't. We're standing on top of our car."

At that point, I called in more people to help. One man who lived in Northgreen said he'd meet me at the office. By this time, I had been up and down Church Street probably a dozen times, so I told him to come down Church Street right to the office. About fifteen minutes later, he called me and asked, "How did you get down Church Street?" I said, "Just come down

Church Street!” He said, “Man, it looks like Gaston Lake out there. There is no street here anymore. There’s just water and it continues to rise.”

When I rode down to where U.S. Highway 64 crosses over North Church Street, sure enough, it looked just like Gaston Lake as far as the eye could see—north, south, east, and west. Everything on Church Street from Grace Street north to Jeffries Road was under water. I couldn’t see the old airport property on the northwest because everything was flooded from there past the Thorpe-Greenville Tobacco Processing Plant to Springfield Road.

Getting around to answer emergencies was one of the biggest problems we encountered. By midday, the only bridge available for crossing the river was the Falls Road bridge at the Rocky Mount Mills. Everything else was under water. Even the new parallel bridge on Peachtree Street was under water. By mid-afternoon, the Peachtree Street bridge and the Falls Road Street bridge were closed to everyone except emergency vehicles.

About this time, we had another big problem. The water plant on Sunset lost its power, and we were afraid that the entire city was going to lose its water. If we hadn’t closed the valves between the two systems, the water pressure could have dropped so low that the water quality would have been affected. If it dropped too low, we would not be able to fight fires. It took us about forty-five minutes to make our way to the water plant.

As soon as the Tar River overflowed, all the manholes were covered. The sewer system filled up and the wastewater plant lost power. The whole sewer system was flooded. People would flush, but nothing would go out. We got it back on line, but it couldn’t process anything that was coming into it.

Yet the city still had water. Though we lost pressure, we never lost water. Our pressure dropped to between twenty-five and thirty pounds per square inch (psi), which is on the verge of losing water. To maintain a safe system, we needed to maintain at least twenty psi of pressure.

We lost the Sunset Avenue water plant, but the Tar River plant at the reservoir was still functioning, so we did have water. There was a brief time during which residents were asked to boil water before using it, even though the water was never contaminated. That was just a precautionary

measure. State officials came and took water samples from all over the city. The water was found to be safe, so the precautionary measure was lifted.

During the following days, we were busy trying to rescue the Sunset plant and answering complaints from the area's citizens. The Sunset Avenue water plant was totally under water, and we lost everything in there. All our motors and controls were totally destroyed. We had to replace every bit of it. We called in all of our service people, approximately forty people, and worked around the clock. We slept and cooked down at the office, since no restaurants were open. We got some grocery stores to open. One of the employees who liked to cook prepared two or three meals a day. In about eight days, the plant was working again.

There is no doubt that the flood contributed to the whole city's coming together. Everywhere I went, people were willing to help. They were very courteous and complimentary. People realized they could work together to repair the damage. At times, some feelings of discord existed among Nash County, Edgecombe County, and the City of Rocky Mount, but all three came together, and they still are together.

One of the saddest experiences was riding around and seeing people carry their furniture and everything they owned out to the curb to put it there as junk. I saw people who I knew had lived in their homes for thirty to forty years and now had no place to live.

When Hurricane Fran came, we had some high water. We made adjustments and managed. After Hurricane Fran, we thought we were prepared for anything that could happen, but just a few years later, Floyd came, finding us unprepared. We now know that we can prepare, prepare, and prepare, but we can't prepare too much. We didn't realize that Floyd was going to be as destructive as it was, with five hundred homes flooded. Now I think we're better prepared for any disaster.

Superintendent of Water and Sewer Services Kenny Parrish and his crew maintained four hundred miles of water lines, approximately four hundred miles of sewer lines, and all the services that distribute water and collect sewage for area residents.

Washout of Four Years' Work

AN INTERVIEW WITH CANDY MADRID | MARLENE PAYNE

At the time of the flood, we were very excited because we were getting ready for the biggest expansion in the museum's history. The expansion would increase our existing ten thousand eight hundred square feet by approximately six thousand square feet. The renovations were scheduled to begin the next week.

My flood story actually begins the day before the flood. When we left the museum that Wednesday, we never thought that it would be our last day in that building. I was concerned that we might be inconvenienced by a lack of electricity for perhaps a day or so, which might delay starting the renovations. We took as many precautions as we thought we needed.

The museum had a permanent collection of eighteen live animals, so we thoroughly cleaned all the animal areas, made certain the animals were well fed and watered, and left extra food and water in case we couldn't get to them for a day or so. We also taped plastic around doors and doorframes because we didn't want the carpet to get wet, as it occasionally had during very bad storms. We locked up tight and left thinking that we'd be okay.

I went home and frantically started cleaning my house. I didn't want to have to look at dust if the electricity went off or to worry about housekeeping during the next few days in case I needed to spend more time at the museum. I also went to the store and bought extra supplies. I guess I finished getting everything spic and span about 11:30 P.M. that evening.

It didn't seem like I had been in bed long when the phone rang about 3:00 A.M. It was my friend who lived on Gay Street across from the museum. She couldn't tell how bad things were because it was dark outside, but she'd stayed awake and thought the storm was getting bad. We talked several more times during the night. Finally, about 4:45 P.M. in the morning, she said the water was so high that I wouldn't be able to get to the museum.

When I set my mind to something, I'm really motivated, so I continued talking to her while I put on my sweat pants and braided my hair so the wind wouldn't blow it around. I threw on a yellow plastic poncho, grabbed my umbrella and tennis shoes, and was ready to meet the storm.

The thing that hit me first was the darkness. The power had gone out all over town, and no light was reflected from anywhere.

I lived at Bridgewood Apartments, which are on Benvenue Road, west of Golden East Mall. Outside, the rain was horizontal and stinging, and my poncho ended up over my head many times. My umbrella bent backwards, so I was drenched before I could reach my car thirty yards away.

As I turned from the apartment driveway onto Benvenue Road, my headlights pierced the dark like knives boring into a solid object. I turned right at Golden East onto Jeffreys Road and went down the hill behind the mall. I couldn't see very far, so when I reached the bottom of the hill, I came within two feet of hitting water that was running across the road. I'd never seen water at that intersection before and couldn't imagine where the water had come from, unless it was draining off all the mall building's gutters, the parking lots, and the storm drains.

Hoping to get onto U.S. Highway 301, I backed up and went through the Golden East Mall parking lot, but the U.S. Highway 301 entrance into the mall was also flooded. Since no one else was out in the storm, I went the wrong way up the off ramp to get back to where Benvenue Road crossed the overpass over U.S. Highway 301 and headed east toward the intersection of Benvenue and Hunter Hill roads. That was flooded, too.

I called Pete Armstrong, director of parks and recreation, and told him that every road I'd tried was flooded and that I was getting ready to head down toward the Stony Creek bridge near the hospital. He told me that

the roads there were already under water. I didn't know what else to do. When we hung up, I went back to my apartment and just sat there in the dark feeling very frustrated.

I had fully charged my cell phone the night before, but it didn't hold a charge very long. I knew that I would probably need it later on, so I didn't call anybody. My friends who lived across the street from the museum hadn't called again, so I was worried about them. I managed to make it to daybreak; then, as soon as I could see, I got my neighbors to go with me to see what was happening.

We tried the same routes I'd used before, and I was amazed at the amount of water and at how many people were out this time. I don't mean to sound harsh, because I was out, too, trying to get to the museum, but a lot of the people I saw were just partying. I couldn't reconcile my frustration and concern with their light-hearted frivolity.

When we went down Benvenue Road toward the hospital, the bridge had completely washed away. A mother at the bridge was watching her child playing in the rushing water. The current was so strong that it had whitecaps. I told the mother that moving water was really dangerous and that her daughter's little feet could be knocked out from under her, but the mother didn't seem to be worried at all. That just fueled my frustration. It seemed to take forever to get back to the apartment.

Hoping that the water had gone down, I tried to reach the museum again about noon but couldn't. On my way home, I met Jan Hicks, the museum's curator of education, who'd been at the museum for almost thirty years.

She broke down and said that she had tried to reach the museum by boat but couldn't and that all the animals were gone. She literally had to swim out of her home with her dogs and had lost everything.

I think that the enormity of what was happening finally hit me. On the way back to my house, I stopped at a payphone to let my family know that I was okay because I knew they'd be hearing about the flood on TV. They wanted me to come stay with them, but I told them that there wasn't any way out of Rocky Mount and that I'd keep in touch. I also tried again to call my friends who lived across from the museum but couldn't reach them. Jan and I went back to my apartment to regroup.

Jan lived on Gay Street just below the museum, about three miles from my place, but it had taken her almost three hours to find a route to reach me that was not flooded. She was cold, tired, and traumatized, but we went out again, hoping to reach the museum the way she had come. We couldn't because additional streets had flooded since she'd made it through. Again, we were frustrated and had to go back to the apartment.

When we got back to my apartment, my friends were there waiting for us. They'd been rescued from their home by a boat, with no shoes on their feet, just the clothes on their backs. Somebody had brought them to my place in a truck. I have never been so glad to see three people and a dog in my entire life.

Luckily, my house was in order, and I was prepared with food and water. I packed Ms. Hicks a lunch so that she could be on her way to her mother's in Fayetteville. We were afraid that if she waited too much longer, she might not be able to get out because roads were continuing to flood. Then I fixed everybody else something to eat, and we hunkered down for a while.

We sat in darkness Thursday evening, each of us talking about his experiences. You wouldn't believe it, but they were still worried about the animals in the museum, too. Since I had not seen the museum, I still had a glimmer of hope that some of the animals were still alive.

On Friday, I knew that my supplies would not hold out forever, nor would the few clothes we'd found. I began the day by trying to see if any stores were open. I called several places that weren't, but we finally contacted Winn Dixie, where a worker said that they were open but didn't know for how much longer. He said that if we wanted something, we'd better come get it now. We all piled into the car, and off we went. Money was not an issue. I spent close to \$200 or more on basic necessities.

After we put up the groceries, we decided to try to get to the museum or my friends' house because they had two cats and birds, which they'd left up in their attic. We still couldn't get anywhere, but we discovered that Wal-Mart was open, so we went in to purchase shoes and odds and ends for them. That's about all we accomplished on Friday.

On Saturday I got a call from Marlene Payne to come and work in the emergency operation center (EOC) that the city had set up. By that

time, the water at the Benvenue/Hunter Hill intersection had subsided somewhat, so I was able to get to town, but I was a little frustrated because I still had not seen the museum.

People at the EOC were on overload: they hadn't slept in days, they were edgy, and they wanted to take a shower but were reluctant to leave their posts. We finally saw the first aerial photographs taken by Frank Phelps, a city employee, who had taken a helicopter ride over Rocky Mount and surrounding areas. We finally saw the devastation that we were up against.

It was mind-boggling. Up to that point, I'd really thought it was just my section of town that was involved. I hadn't realized how widespread it was. Everybody gaped at the pictures in silence.

After several frustrating hours spent trying to get in touch with animal rescue, we got a call saying that they had been rescuing horses by helicopter but had finished that job and would meet me at the museum. I'd seen Cindy Williams, the museum's outreach educator, who was seven months pregnant. She'd lost everything in her home, but on Thursday, she'd tried to get to the museum by swimming against the current but couldn't. I was



The Lowes on Highway 301, close to Tarrtown Mall.

CREDIT CREDIT: DICK BETHUNE

upset that she'd risked her life and her pregnancy for the museum but was grateful for her effort. So, with my heart literally in my throat, I left city hall and went to see the museum for the first time.

At the corner of Taylor and Thomas Streets, the water was still up and had flooded the park and around the museum. Gay Street was completely flooded, so animal rescue and I couldn't get to the museum. A man named Ian said that he wanted to take his boat down, break into the museum, and get the animals out. Larry Camp, who was parks and grounds superintendent at the time, came up to us while we were still debating what to do.

The museum was situated next to the water-treatment plant, and we were all concerned that there might be electrical-safety issues. There was also a very strong petroleum smell. If there was oil in the water, an electrical spark might set it on fire. Things could get incredibly bad. The animal-rescue people were agitated because they wanted to go in even though it might be unsafe, but cooler heads prevailed, and we didn't go in that day.

On Sunday I worked all day at the EOC, but by Monday, I was sure that I could get to the museum. Again I met up with Larry Camp, whom I will love 'til the day I die. He went into the museum and removed the carcasses so that I wouldn't have to. I don't think that I could have done that.

When he finished, he told me we had three survivors out of eighteen: Samantha, the American alligator, who is about eight and one half feet long; the Burmese python, which was a good fourteen and one half feet long; and Snarf, a crazy old Columbian redtail boa constrictor that has been in the care of the museum for more than thirty-eight years, one of the oldest living redtail boas ever.

It was about 10:00 A.M. when I finally got to walk through the museum for the first time. I was with my curator of exhibits, Steve Armstrong; several firefighters; Larry Camp; and maybe a couple of the guys from the water-treatment plant next door. We really made a fashion statement as we waded in wearing rubber boots and carrying flashlights.

The water was just below my knees, and inside, the museum looked

like it had suffered a bomb blast. Things that had been in the back of the museum were in the front. All the exhibits and displays were destroyed. Worse than the visual destruction was the smell of it. They say smell is an important trigger for memory, and it must be because, even in dreams, I can still smell that odor.

We managed to get through the front lobby into one of the galleries and were turning the corner when I said, "Stop! The exhibits' lights are still on." Everybody froze when they realized that we were standing in water with the electricity still on.

It took probably ten minutes to find the right breakers because there was so much debris and because it was very dark in the building. During that time, we were very uneasy because there was not only the flood smell but also the strong smell of petroleum. They found the right breaker, and the exhibit lights went off. By the time we finished the walk-through, it was close to noon. On our way out, I felt my knees kind of go, and I thought to myself, "Candy, do not pass out in front of all these guys." The sheer fear of embarrassment kept me on my feet.

Everybody else left to go to other jobs, but Steve and I stayed behind. We had to get the surviving animals stabilized. Steve went to the warehouse to get cleaning supplies. When he got back about 1:00 P.M., we had a quick bite of lunch and then started with the animals.

There were rumors around town that the animals had gotten out of the museum, that the alligator had been seen in Tarboro and Princeville, that she'd been seen swimming around Sunset Park. I'm here to set the record straight. Our animals never got out of the museum. They were very secure. In fact, I wish some of them could have gotten free; they might have had a chance to survive. Two doors barred the alligator. We got the first open, but the other had swollen. We had to struggle with a crowbar to finally get it open.

Since I didn't know whether or not the alligator would be in a lousy disposition after her ordeal, I wanted to be the first one in her cage. Besides, Steve wasn't really excited about dealing with the animals at this point, but (God love his heart) he was by my side to help me do whatever needed to

be done. Prior to the flood, as part of our public program, I would stand at the edge of her pool and whistle for her. It used to amaze visitors how she would come like a little dog to be fed. When she didn't come that day, I went over to her. I was still very concerned about the oil and needed to touch her to see if she was oily because it's an intensive cleanup process with reptiles. When I got to her, she was exhausted. From the look of all the ceiling and exhibit debris in there with her, I think she survived by floating up with the water. When she got to the ceiling, she must have just clawed and clawed trying to find a place to rest until the water finally went down. If I could have, I would have picked her up and carried her out—she was that traumatized!

We started cleaning with a diluted bleach solution. We didn't know what kind of germs and contaminants we were up against with the floodwater. We started hauling out the debris so she could have clean, fresh water.

Once we got the alligator situated, we moved on to the fourteen-and-a-half-foot python. I don't know how she survived because the high-water mark was a foot above her ceiling. She must have found a weird air pocket somewhere. She was a little more aggressive, blowing and hissing at me a little, but that was typical when I'd go in to clean. We removed debris and scrubbed down the area.

Then I moved on to the redbtail boa. I was very concerned about Snarf because we had already nursed her through several bouts of pneumonia and because she was such a geriatric snake. I wanted to make sure that she was back on heat as quickly as possible. Her aquarium looked like it had floated up, then tipped over on its side and filled with water as it came back down because it was full of gunk. I don't know how she made it, since she's not a water snake. I removed all the debris and hosed out and scrubbed her aquarium several times while Steve went to buy a heating pad so that I could take her home with me and put her on heat immediately.

We had started about 1:00 P.M. and didn't finish cleaning out the three surviving animals' areas until 8:00 or 8:30 that evening. I was so tired that I could hardly make it home and get Snarf set up. My friends had gotten

home, too, and we each took a halfway bath before I fixed dinner. Then I just kind of collapsed.

Tuesday I learned that the disposal team would be coming to clear the debris from the museum because of concerns about contamination. As director, I needed to do an inventory of our damage before stuff was hauled away, but my inventory information had been put into two large containers and stored on city property in preparation for our renovation. The containers were supposed to be air- and watertight; they were neither. When we finally got them open, everything was soaked. I remember thinking that a fire is a kinder disaster because everything is just destroyed. You don't have to see it again and try to clean it up. You don't have the smell.

For the next few days, I sat at a table and chair salvaged from the flood, writing as fast as I could on a legal pad. The staff and volunteers pulled stuff out of the museum for me to itemize before they put it in piles to be picked up at the curb. At the end of each day, it was difficult to look at the piles because they included exhibits I'd thought up. Exhibits are like children. You come up with the idea, you take them to design, and you're there at 3:00 A.M. when the fabricators finally finish installation. Everything in the museum was like that.

We'd just finished the renovation of the planetarium. When the flood hit, we'd had, maybe, twelve shows. Our star-ball projector had been reworked. We had animated cards for programs that we'd designed. We'd put in a new sound system and theater-style seating and had resurfaced the dome.

In the Discovery Gallery, we'd had a new zone with over \$250,000 worth of exhibits that recreated the television news and broadcast experience for children. They could go in and play news anchor, weatherman, or reporter and do news stories related to eastern North Carolina. The videophones, probably fifty to sixty thousand dollars' worth, allowed visitors to interact with one another, and they could also actually solve problems using the exhibit programs we'd written for them. The Discovery Gallery was one of only three in the United States. Another was at Epcot at Disney World. The third was at the Honolulu Science Center.

We also lost the traveling exhibit, “Children at Play,” which was on loan from Cincinnati, Ohio. That was a huge concern, since it was not our exhibit. We’ve also lost the Sci-Play Gallery, which taught very young children about science through hands-on, interactive play. We’d also had a “senselarium” for visually- and hearing-impaired visitors. I felt a great personal loss.

At the same time, I learned a valuable lesson that I’m still grappling with. Before the flood, I lived, ate, breathed, and slept my work. I still tend to, but I’m trying to make sure that I have a life outside of my work. I’ve learned that one’s work can be taken away quickly and that one has to have something left over if it is.

It was hard moving to city hall. For more than a year after the flood, my staff and I were essentially in one office. It was hard to do science education without a science museum, but folks were incredibly generous. For example, when the flood hit, I got e-mails from people in my field whom I’d met from Sydney, Australia; Columbia, South America; and throughout Europe and Canada. The staff of the Children’s Museum is a small community, but we’re hooked into a global network. Personnel from other museums asked what we needed. Colleagues in North Carolina were also wonderful.

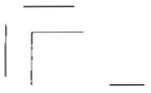
A month after the disaster, Dr. Tom Crack, director of the Life and Sciences Museum in Durham, helped us get our outreach program up and going by donating supplies. Once we got into our temporary location, Dr. Beverly Sanford, director of Sci Works of Winston-Salem, donated an exhibit. Mark Sinclair, director of the Catawba Science Center in Hickory, donated another exhibit. My very dear friend Janet Secor, with the Cape Fear Museum in Wilmington, asked her county commissioners to give us a fabulous exhibit that they’d created called “The Hole World.” Marilyn Brackney, an artist living in Columbus, Indiana, heard about our loss. She is the designer and creator of a huge dinosaur made completely of trash, Trashasaurus, which had traveled throughout the world. Approximately twenty other museums were vying for it, but she donated Trashasaurus to us. It’s helping us teach local school children about recycling and taking care of the environment.

The flood is not something I want to relive, but in the long run, it was a good thing for the museum because our plans for a new museum are very exciting. I think we're going to end up being much better than before.

For the first time, I learned what it was like to be part of a community. Moving from place to place, I'd never really felt that before. I didn't have time. But during the flood, people came to my aid, and I was able to help other folks. There's good and bad in a disaster. Luckily for me, the good far outweighed the bad.

Lots of city employees lost their homes, but they jumped right back into their jobs and did what they had to because the community was depending on them. The changes I've seen since the flood are a renaissance for Rocky Mount. We have a unique opportunity to start with a blank canvas and to see how we can make our community the best it can be. The flood helped tie people together. A few people have left, but those who've stayed are committed to making this the best place we can for everybody.

Candy Madrid, who was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, grew up in California and has spent her entire professional career working in museums. Candy returned to Charlotte, where she took a Science and American Indian Education program on a tour throughout five southeastern states. In 1995, Madrid came to Rocky Mount as director of the Children's Museum.





72 Hours

AN INTERVIEW WITH FIRE CHIEF EDDIE JONES | MARLENE PAYNE



At the administrative level, the Rocky Mount Fire Department is led by the Fire Chief and the Assistant Fire Chief who are assisted by a District Chief over Fire Prevention and a District Chief over Fire Training. At the operational level, the Tar River divides the fire department into two districts—one district located predominately in Nash County and the other located in Edgecombe County. At the time of the flood, each district had three fire stations and was manned by one of six operational district chiefs and a platoon of twenty firefighters in twenty four-hour shifts.



My shift was on duty Wednesday night when forecasters predicted that Hurricane Floyd would make landfall. Telling what happened chronologically is difficult because we worked a seventy-two-hour shift without stopping.

An approaching storm means extra duty starting days before it hits. Typically, the fire chief works hand in hand with the police chief, the city manager's office, and other department heads when a hurricane threatens the area. They gather information and continually brief us starting at least a week in advance. That was true with this event.

Because of past storms, the key issue for us was the expected high winds. We've always had isolated, localized flooding with major thunderstorms. We've dealt with that. It wasn't easy to deal with, but it was commonplace. Flooding took place in identified areas, and the people who lived in those

areas expected it. That made our job a lot easier. We'd never had to deal with any overwhelming floodwaters.

Our preparations for Hurricane Floyd were similar to those made in the past. Our efforts leaned more toward the high-wind scenario than a flood.

Before Floyd, the city and the fire department of Rocky Mount did not own any boats. We had firefighters who had been trained in water rescue, but it was not something the department practiced on a regular basis. That has changed now. I don't think our efforts were misdirected, based on our past history. We had no way of knowing the magnitude of what we would be facing over the next seventy-two hours to five days. In hindsight, there were signs that might have warned us of what was about to occur.

Our first serious calls came from Maple Creek. About 8:30 P.M., we got reports of basement flooding and of higher-than-normal water in areas that typically experienced localized flooding. We started patrolling these areas to determine what was taking place.

Though a lot of rain was predicted, we had no basis for knowing what fifteen inches of rain would do compared to the six inches the area receives from time to time. We had never dealt with that.

We had two monitoring stations on the river. One was out at Lehman's Ferry Bridge; the other was on Atlantic Avenue. The water-level monitoring equipment at each station was on a dial-up modem, so we could call and check on the water levels. We had people doing this constantly. Though some readings showed variations, none was outside normal perimeters at that time.

During the first calls, we encouraged people to make preparations for bad weather. At this point, we did not suggest that they leave. This was between 8:30 and 9:00 P.M. We were still almost twelve hours away from the time the hurricane was expected to hit this area. However, we were already getting some pre-storm winds and heavy, spotty rain. Rain bands from a hurricane can reach several hundred miles out from the eye of the storm. The bands arrived every twenty to thirty minutes and were dropping a lot of water as they passed. Until the eye of the hurricane established a predictable path that the National Weather Service could announce, we were in limbo regarding what to expect.

About midnight, the rain started to get serious. We had people working as liaisons with each county. It was a mad house. Things changed as if a light switch had been turned on. At about 1:00 A.M., we started “stacking” calls, which means that we try to evaluate the severity of the need as each call comes in and then “triage” them, just as emergency rooms do with incoming patients. We judge, based upon their urgency, how to respond to calls.

We had already committed to call in another shift to boost our manpower. Everybody knew where he or she was going to be, so our plan worked out great. Of course, staff came in to man the emergency operations center (EOC).

Though the wind was still not a problem, the rains had brought the storm to us earlier than expected, so we began making trips to areas that we had checked earlier. By this point, all of the Nash County units were constantly moving. Rocky Mount happens to be in a river basin that typically receives drainage from three directions. That’s why flooding was so bad. We began to evacuate people because we knew that if the river continued to rise six to eight inches per hour, we would soon have eighteen inches. There were no historical records of a flood of this magnitude. Most people were initially receptive when told to leave their homes, and we certainly didn’t have the



The carport of Julian Fenner’s house in West Haven was crushed along with the car parked inside.

CREDIT: JULIAN FENNER

authority to make them do so. We had prepared for an evacuation by setting up shelters countywide, but they hadn't been activated.

Around midnight, the Westminster area of Rocky Mount was getting congested. Westminster is not a typical senior citizen area: many of the occupants there are middle-aged construction contractors who have lots of resources. People with flooded basements were already making arrangements to evacuate. People brought in U-Haul trailers and big pickup trucks and started moving furniture out of houses in trouble. People who already had lots of damage knew that what was taking place was not normal and started, around midnight, making an assertive effort to move their belongings. It was good they had because by 4:00 P.M. the next afternoon, those houses were totally underwater, and the first rescues were made by vehicle instead of by boat.

In Nash County, we were in water that was just navigable, water that was waist to chest deep in spots. Homes, however, were beginning to take on large amounts of water. Residents were not in danger of drowning in their homes, but if they left their homes, the terrain was uneven. Water might be too deep to get children or the elderly out safely. So most residents refused to evacuate, thinking they could ride out the storm safely at home. Then things changed.

We were spread really thin at this point because between 3:30 and 4:00 A.M. three major rescues were going on. The city was being divided by the flood, and the EOC tried to plot how we might get to various areas. Around 4:00 A.M., our crew ended up in the Lafayette Circle area of West Haven. This was the first ultimate challenge because there was seventeen feet of water in the street, the water was extremely fast, and winds whipped everything sideways.

In the beginning, we went into Lafayette Circle with a small complement because that's all we had available. As some other special units became available, they were reassigned to that rescue effort.

We had difficulty reaching Lafayette because we were cut off by downed trees and rising water. After we cut up fallen trees to reach the area, we identified at least three families who were still in their homes on Lafayette Circle. One of our firefighters went to his home on Hammond

Street to get his pickup truck and his boat, one with paddles.

Boat rescues began at this point, and citywide we began to commandeer boats and to make them part of our squad. The state and FEMA had allocated resources to help us, but it took time for the supplies to reach us. Our goal during a situation of this kind is to survive for the first seventy-two hours because it can take that long for outside resources to reach the area.

I happened to have in my command one of the fire engineers who had just come back from a water-rescue school. We immediately brought him into our field command post and started to make a plan of action while our firefighters rigged boats and equipment and interviewed people from the neighborhood about those who were missing. Meanwhile, another went home to get a motorboat.

We tried to size up what we were facing as far as the number of possible victims, their ages, and any physical limitations they might have. We were able to identify quickly three homes we needed to check that were five hundred yards away, almost three city blocks. We tried to light up the area and look in with binoculars.

Shortly before we launched the first boat into Lafayette Circle, the water had risen high enough to hit the electrical transformers on light poles, and the transformers began to explode. Transformers are typically twenty-five to thirty feet off the ground, so we realized, to our horror, how high the water was.

Our first hard decision was to send a boat in without the safety of a rope or tag line. We were riding double that night, so because of its urgency, the decision was made by the two district chiefs who were present. The boat had four firefighters aboard but no motor, so we were anxious as we watched them disappear into the dark.

They brought out eleven people in several trips. Mr. and Mrs. Jack Bishop, an elderly couple who are well known in the community, were two whom I personally knew. The water was terribly cold and was carrying a lot of debris. I cannot imagine what energy and mental determination they must have had to hang on to a tree limb in a total blackout. They had already said their goodbyes to each other because Mrs. Bishop had told her husband that she just could not hold on to the tree any longer, though he

continued to encourage her. They were just out of arm's reach and couldn't quite touch one another. Each was afraid to try to change position.

We were delayed in getting the firefighters in the motorboat because we had to cut trees so they could get into the area. When we cranked the motor on the firefighter's boat, Mr. Bishop heard the engine. We launched the boat without delay. Meanwhile, Mr. Bishop knew that rescue was imminent.

There was also another lady who was in her eighties. Part of her family was there, and they were almost hysterical. The people rescued were physically and emotionally exhausted. They didn't talk; they didn't even have enough energy to sit up in the boat.

During the rescues, the wind increased, and some tornado-type action occurred. Many pine trees in the Lafayette area were more than a hundred years old and stood one hundred feet tall. Five or six of the trees twisted off at the ground and fell directly behind our aerial company, missing the ladder truck by only a few feet. The trees looked as if somebody had stacked them like Lincoln Logs.

The fallen trees blocked everything and brought power lines down. Now we had to deal with electrical lines hanging almost in our faces and dangerously close to the water.

The water was continuing to rise about three to six inches every thirty minutes. After taking measurements, we knew that we only had one way left to get out. If the floodwater reached that place in Lafayette Circle, we would be trapped and would have to move up hill with all the equipment. We also had to reassess how we were going to go in and out with the boats and equipment.

That was a big factor in trying to effect these rescues. The one avenue of exit we had became temporarily blocked, so we had to send firefighters down to begin cutting trees, moving logs, and testing power lines to see if they were charged. We had to make certain that we had a point of exit. The wind speed continued to increase and began causing major destruction at this point. Rooftops and debris blew into the rescue area. Lightning struck the ground nearby while we were standing in water. All of these things were going on simultaneously.

We were trying to communicate with the boats over the horrendous noise. The wind and water made such a loud roar that radio communication was impossible, so we communicated by using flashing lights. It was a “yes” or “no” type of communication.

Meanwhile, the other crew reconnoitered the area and brought back information about another family with children who were still down there. They saw flashlights blinking from the upstairs windows and doors. This information gave us a better picture of how many people we might be dealing with.

What started out to be four or five victims ended up being almost a dozen. We did not want to send the rowboat back, but the only way to stop our crew from going back was to fight them. As soon as the last victim they rescued on a trip was helped out of the boat, the boat left again. Our firefighters knew that it was a matter of life and death for those we were trying to reach. They also knew that, with a rowboat, they could not afford to make one bad decision involving the strength of the water, its direction, or its flow. The flow of the water was the critical aspect, not its depth. Structures underwater caused the current below the surface to shift. You couldn't see it, but the current squeezing between two houses underwater became almost like a riptide at the beach. If you get sucked into that force, there is no way you're going to recover, especially without a motor.

We had communicated this danger to the crews. They were taking a tremendous chance, but they were absolutely determined. They knew, without a doubt, that their lives were in the utmost danger. Those guys came back after that first try with tears in their eyes because of what they had seen, the urgency of it, and the force of adrenaline. The adrenaline rush is a big push in our profession. Without it, I don't think we could do a fraction of the things we are able to do.

For those of us waiting for the boats to return, it was hard to judge time. We sat waiting and waiting. Suddenly, one would appear out of the dark. We could not see who was coming. They would just reappear.

Communicating was a problem. We would lose radio communication and then pick it back up for no apparent reason.

The rescue mission might easily have turned out differently, but we did not lose a single person in that area to the flood. We could very easily have lost a rescue boat and not found it for days. If one of the crews had gotten into the main channel of water going east, they would have been washed downstream or gotten entangled in debris somewhere. We would have had absolutely no way of knowing where they were, and the rescuers would have become victims. That was always a real possibility. There would have been no way of retrieving them—not that night. If we retrieved them at all, it would have been days later. Thankfully, that did not happen, and the rescues were completed before daylight.

All of us got out safely and were immediately reassigned to other areas. One company of four firefighters went to Lee Street over at Riverside Apartments about 1:30 A.M. We were not able to reinforce them until almost daybreak. That one group contributed to rescuing more than four hundred people. They did it pretty much single-handed. Initially, the Riverside rescues were not as urgent as the one at Lafayette because Lafayette was getting an eighteen-inch surge per hour.

I will try to give you an overview of what was happening citywide. Our people were working independently. They made life-and-death decisions in the field without the district chiefs. No words can describe or honor the roles that were filled, not only by our captains, but also by every firefighter.

The initial plan had been to have three overlapping shifts of firefighters working twelve-hour rotations so that each shift could rest at least six to eight hours. We anticipated a long event. That schedule really didn't get implemented until later on. During the first twenty-four hours, all three shifts worked without rest until things calmed down. Some people never got a break for almost forty-eight hours. Then their breaks were only a couple of hours at a time. By daybreak on September 16, all the resources at Lafayette were dispersed to other rescues. We never had that large a group together for one rescue again—not during the first twenty-four hours, anyway.

With only minimal resources, we had a very large rescue going on at Riverside. On East Duke Circle, the northeast side of the complex, we had

a three-house island. That area was spared major flooding. They had water under the houses, but it never got into the houses. All of the rest were totally flooded. A man and his wife began to get people out of the flooded houses and to take them to the little area around their home. An avid fisherman with a nice boat started rescuing people on his own.

During this same 1:00-to-4:00 A.M. period, our four firefighters were at Riverside, but they got separated and did not see one another for almost two hours. Their first rescue started on the street next to the river, but they had to retreat because the river continued to push them away.

When I drove up, it wasn't light yet—it was a kind of twilight. The day was breaking, and the first thing I saw was the fire engineer on Fire Engine Two. He had one lady on his back and was kind of supporting one older gentleman. In his other hand, he had medicines. The three were wading in water that was waist deep.

We put a command vehicle in place. At this point, we knew of at least three hundred Riverside residents who needed to be rescued. Most of the people were senior citizens with mobility problems. The other district chief, Al Asby, and I got out and started rescuing people.

In the first house was a wheelchair-bound elderly lady. Most of the others whom we evacuated were ambulatory. Rescuing them went really well, as long as the water was knee deep or less. Once it rose higher than that, the residents didn't have enough strength in their limbs to fight the water pressure to walk through the water. At that point, they had to be assisted.

We loaded citizens into johnboats and small metal boats and then pulled the boats out with ropes. The rescues in that area took sixteen hours, with an estimated four hundred people rescued by 4:00 P.M.

After we got a command vehicle on the scene, we tried to document who came out, but the magnitude of the job made it impossible. To do it, we'd have had to have had a hundred people standing there with clipboards. There were just so many victims, and they were coming out in various states of dress. Children came out in their underwear. I remember one four- to six-year-old was wearing Underoos underwear. That's all he had on, and he was about to freeze.

The flood took these people by surprise. A wet bed awakened many of them. The water had literally soaked through their mattresses. Others got up to go to the bathroom, and when they threw their legs off the bed, it created a big splash. Panic was immediate. We rescued people who were standing on their dining room tables and holding on to light fixtures to keep their balance because the water had reached the top of the tables.

Once the water got that high, one of our major problems was identifying a house's address. We had family members saying, "My mother lives at 821. My daughter and my grandchildren live at 421 or 425 East Duke Circle." Locating those people became a problem because the water had covered all the identifying features in the neighborhood. We had to improvise and use good old horse sense. Our people found anything that was floating or that might have had a person's name or address on it in hopes of identifying the units.

During that event, we dealt with a severe heart attack. The lady didn't go into cardiac arrest, but her condition was critical. Our emergency medical technician (EMT) training was helpful. We've been EMTs for years. We've gone up another level now and can use defibrillators.

Right before daybreak, the police department and numerous other city employees assembled a number of transit vans and school buses to start moving the rescued victims to the shelters. We loaded the lady who'd had the heart attack into a police van. Our biggest obstacle was the limited number of travel routes. We only had one route from the east side of the river to the west side, where the hospital is located.

People were getting out to check on loved ones or to help them, so a massive traffic jam developed quickly. The only way from the east side of town to the west side and the only way from Edgecombe to Nash County was the one bridge on Falls Road at the dam. For miles, that was the only bridge that was left passable. The next passage across the river was north near Enfield or south almost to Wilson. Everything else was blocked by the water. The Falls Road bridge became extremely important because the EMTs were treating medical conditions in the field and needed to transport victims to a medical facility, so we tried to take control of the bridge at daybreak.

About this time, the bridge over Stony Creek, located on a main

Nash County thoroughfare to the hospital, washed away. That left us only one route to the hospital, a dangerous situation. The floodwaters were continuing to rise, and the damage was spreading way beyond the historical boundaries of floods in Rocky Mount. Major highways and thoroughfares were obstructed. U.S. Highway 64 Bypass was shut down. It was impossible to get to Tarboro.

The water was rising at such an alarming rate that we were trying to keep fire equipment disbursed as evenly throughout the city as we could so no area would be left unprotected. The only engine left at Fire Station Three became isolated and was completely cut off from the rest of the area. That neighborhood was like an island with just that one fire truck to service the area. We couldn't even get police officers in there to assist them.

In addition to everything else that happened, we answered fire calls. During that time, we fought many fires in the Shepard Drive area.

We lost a fire truck at one of the fires. The water rose so quickly that they couldn't get it out in time. The water was literally running into the windows of the cab. I'm talking about a fire truck that weighed more than thirty thousand pounds—and it floated.

To keep from losing it completely, eight firefighters walked along side, pushing it as it floated until they got it up on dry ground. Then Kenny, who was with the Water Resources Department, ran and got a large piece of motorized equipment. When they got the fire truck close enough, he pulled it out. Water poured out of every opening in the truck.

We floated both command vehicles, too. We almost lost one of those. As a matter of fact, we have had to take it out of service now because the water damage was so significant.

There is so much to tell that I can't remember everything in chronological order, but I must tell you about the rescue of a lady from the top of the bridge that crosses the Tar River at the Art Center. The challenge for that rescue was getting the boat to her. I didn't see the rescue, but I saw the pictures.

The lady had been in a car. The car was gone. She had gotten out and gone to stand on the crest of the bridge, which was the only thing not underwater. We're talking about maybe a twenty- to thirty-foot-wide

piece of concrete sticking up out of the water. The rescuers were probably a quarter of a mile away.

They used rope to secure the boat and calculated that if they launched the boat far enough upstream and were able to extend the boat out far enough with the rope, then the boat and its rider might swing like a pendulum to make an approach. They hoped that the water would wash the boat toward the victim. It took several attempts, but they finally accomplished it.

Right before daybreak, sometime between my being at Lafayette and being at Riverside, we had a rescue out on North Wesleyan Boulevard in the Battleboro community. A vehicle had washed off the road near Abbotts Laboratory, and the driver was in a pine-tree thicket hanging on to the top of the trees because the water was already almost to the top of the pines. Our seventy-five-foot ladder truck was positioned on the road close by with its ladder extended horizontally.

By this time, the guys had a boat. Where they got it from, I can't tell you. Our guys were very creative. They got life preservers from their homes because the department didn't own any. They brought their fishing rods and tied weights on the end of them so they could cast the fishing line over a wide stretch of water and then tie a rope to the line. That's how they got the rope across the water. They just used ordinary things in a resourceful way.

They came up with all kinds of creative ways to save people. This particular rescue was a case in which they had the ladder stretched horizontally. It wasn't long enough, however, to reach the victim, so they launched the boats from the end of the ladder. I can't sit here today and tell you how they did it.

They performed another great rescue of a guy down in a hollow by using the same method. They launched the boat off the end of the ladder, like shooting it off a ramp, so the water washed the boat to the guy. That was a successful rescue, too. We'd had a rough night on the west side of town. Now the water was moving east, shifting our efforts from the center of Rocky Mount to the east as the water moved toward Tarboro. The Springfield Road area in east Rocky Mount was getting washed out, and our call volume and resources shifted in that direction.

We rescued people all day Thursday; then the intensity slowed down some. A FEMA team from Pennsylvania did a few rescues for us late Thursday afternoon. They had a doctor with them. That was great because every firehouse was loaded with victims. We even had to feed people at the firehouses. The schools, shelters, firehouses, and city hall were full. We put people everywhere. Our big problem was how to feed and get dry clothing for all those people. Remember, we were still rescuing.

Some of our people showed that they were great chefs. We had people cooking and trying to feed others. Now we needed to contact merchants and get into stores. They were wonderful! They didn't have any power, so they couldn't open for the public. They were losing their products because the electricity was out. Basically, they said, "If you can use it, you can have it because we can't save it. You can have whatever you can use to keep it from being wasted." They donated a tremendous amount during those first seventy-two hours. This community is truly the givingest!

We were satisfied that our efforts to evacuate people and get them out of harm's way had been successful in the Rocky Mount area. We hadn't



Marker of Edgecombe County's oldest settlement.

CREDIT: MARTHA FOUNTAIN JOHNSON

learned yet about the extent of the damage out in the counties because we had been so focused on our little piece of the event and hadn't had time to think about the surrounding area.

After the first twenty-four hours, we had National Guard helicopters in the air that we could communicate with directly from our command vehicles. An air wing from Fort Bragg called and offered help. They worked in the N.C. Highway 97 East area. The death toll out on N.C. Highway 97 East from the Deerfield area right outside the city to Leggett would have been tremendous if it had not been for the air wing's support. All of those rescues were done by helicopter.

We've got a rock formation here in Rocky Mount that provides some hilly terrain, but east of the city the land becomes flat. That's why our forefathers built the mill where they did. Old Sparta, Conetoe, Tarboro, and from there to the coast is just as flat as it can be. Rocky Mount didn't fare as badly as Tarboro, Conetoe, and Old Sparta because the rockier terrain forced the water to stay in a channel. Even though it was wider than we'd ever seen before, it still stayed in channels that were identifiable. That made it manageable from the standpoint of being able to find a way around the water and having a place to put people. We could evacuate people to a safe haven. That was not true east of here. Once the water got to level ground, it flowed freely everywhere. It was like an ocean. There were no boundaries to contain it. We didn't have to deal with that, which was a blessing. All those things were going on at this time.

By Friday morning, we started to get reports from the helicopters that were in the air spotting for us and radioing back to the command vehicles, which were constantly patrolling. We were directing units that I never actually saw.

There was a Reds Resource Water Rescue Team that was absolutely tremendous. I never saw them, but I talked constantly with them on the radio, coordinating rescues that I never saw. I think they were from Durham County.

Finally, we also had accumulated a complement of boats that was unbelievable. In twenty-four hours, we had a fleet in operation, and none of the boats was owned by the city. They were all owned by our firefighters, friends of firefighters, or other private citizens. We were launching boats

constantly. We did whatever we had to do and picked up and moved on. The EOC had its system up and running to a point where things were manageable. Before, we had been playing catch up. Now we were actually managing things. There was a lot going on. We managed the calls that were stacked very well.

On Friday morning, we got a rescue call to go to Thorpe-Greenville Tobacco Company, which is out at the old airport on Thorpe Road across from Hardee's Boulevard. Barnum Road is along the front of the complex, and Thorpe Road is along the rear. At this point, I knew of four deaths, all vehicle wash-off related.

When we got to Thorpe-Greenville, we launched a boat. Men in helicopters did the spotting for us. They told us that there appeared to be a man and a young boy in a wooden boat sitting in a pine thicket between Thorpe-Greenville Tobacco Company and the Athletic Complex.

The water had not crested yet and was still rising. We had a huge influx of water over the barrier fences along U.S. Highway 64, which was deep underwater at this point. The combination of the very swift, very treacherous water and the huge tobacco-processing plant complex was again creating a riptide effect. The guys had to go against the current to get into the area where the man and boy had been spotted.

It took them almost twenty-five minutes to travel from where we launched the boat to where the spotter had seen the two victims. Once the firemen got around the Thorpe-Greenville complex and could see the victims with binoculars, the air spotter went somewhere else.

From our rescue boat, we could see a man and a young boy sitting in a wooden boat. I was thinking, "Gosh, how could these people be out here in a boat?" We were putting out public-service announcements to tell people that this event wasn't like anything they'd ever seen before and to stay home, but we had sightseers out in canoes who became victims.

By Friday, the water was becoming contaminated. The first twenty-four hours we didn't have to worry about that because it was rainwater and fairly clean. Later we got a lot of debris: sewage and oil and chemicals being washed out of residences and businesses.

The firefighters called back to confirm that they'd rescued the pair in the boat. When the firefighters returned to our command vehicle, their first words were, "Chief Jones, you are not going to believe it." I, like everybody else, was tired, hungry, and drained. We were all worn to a frazzle, but we were going to be professional. I walked over and said, "What?"

The story my firefighters told went like this: The man owned a business in Rocky Mount but lived in a suburban area in the western part of the city. He and his teenage son drove into town late Wednesday night to check on his business. He had heard reports that we were having some flooding. The North Carolina Department of Transportation had tried to put barriers in place, but those poor guys had no way of judging how high the water was going to get. They put barriers out thinking they were far enough ahead of the water to be okay, but the water rose more than anyone had ever seen, and the barriers were washed away. The man and his son were on U.S. Highway 64 Bypass just as the flooding encroached on U.S. Highway 64. Whether or not you actually hit a lot of water depended on which direction you were going. Well, when they got to the Battle Park area, they hit the water.

The water stalled their car in an area where the water rose two feet per hour. The water rose so quickly that they had no choice but to abandon the vehicle.

They were hoping that they could swim or wade to a dry area, but when they exited the vehicle, the swift water just washed them away. They floated. Thank God, they both were swimmers and were accustomed to treading water.

They floated around in the night for a long time. They had no concept of how much time passed, but they were smart enough to embrace each other to stay together. They had no idea where they were because they couldn't see anything.

All of a sudden, they were washed into a bush that turned out to be a pine tree in a thicket of young pine trees. The victims landed in the tops, where they just hung on.

Daybreak came on Thursday morning, and they were still there. We didn't have spotters in the air yet and were still assembling our fleet. It took us six or eight hours Thursday to reconnoiter all of these areas. The

victims stayed in the pine thicket most of Thursday, hanging on to a tree and watching the water rise.

On Thursday, as dusk approached, they saw a boat some distance away. They thought that somebody was coming to get them and waved to get attention. The boat was slow, but it started coming toward them. Right before dark, the boat was only several hundred yards out, and they could clearly see that the boat was empty. It had broken away from somebody's home or trailer and was just floating.

They thought, "God, if we could just get in that boat. We'd have something to sit in." The man said that they kept praying that God would keep washing the boat toward them. They were not going to leave the thicket to swim to the boat because it was too far away and the water was too swift. That was a smart decision. They'd been washed around for hours, so they were smart enough not to take a foolish chance. After a long time, the boat literally washed right up to the tree they were in. The boat had a very short piece of rope tied to the bow, so they were able to grab the rope and pull the boat to them. The man and his son got into the boat and tied the boat to a tree. That was where we found them.

Of course they were famished and had started to dehydrate. They had sat through a whole day of fairly hot weather on Thursday without anything to eat or drink. Other than that, mentally and emotionally they were in relatively good shape.

The only thing I can attribute their rescue to was their faith in God and their knowing that their prayers would be answered. They were overjoyed to be rescued. The joy of being rescued and the appreciation they showed were rewarding. That was a successful rescue for us.

Now a new problem developed. People had abandoned hundreds of cars. Those totally submerged trucks and autos damaged boat motors. Stony Creek Fire Department damaged one of its boat motors that way during a rescue. The whole lower part of the motor was ripped off when it hit a submerged vehicle. Not being able to see the vehicles added another element of danger to rescues. When we found an abandoned car in a street or road, we immediately worried about where the occupants were.

On Friday, we had just about finished the phase of initial rescue. Our

focus changed somewhat to reconnoitering for damage and searching for relatives whom people couldn't locate. We were like a dog chasing his tail in some cases because we were given only patchy information about where the relative might be, which we tried to put together with what we knew had happened during a given time period. Then we had to "what if" all the variables. We hit a lot of dead ends, which was stressful. We searched for anyone from out-of-state truck drivers to a son's daughter's grandchildren.

One guy died for a pack of cigarettes. He left home to go to the corner store less than a mile away, and he used bad judgment by trying to drive through water that was running across the street. He had no way to judge how deep or how strong the water was at that point. It washed him off the road, and nobody knew about it. It was not witnessed. Even after we knew where he was, we could not retrieve him right away. People learned that you do not drive through water even if you know what is supposed to be under it. During the early hours, everything was complicated by the fact that people couldn't see because it was dark.

In addition, we were dealing with something that no one had any previous experience with, even if they'd lived here all of their lives. They lost their lives because of miscalculation, misjudgment, or just a turn of events that they had no control over. Even we didn't know what we were up against, and we were the ones who were supposed to know.

The emergency service providers, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Agency (NOAA), and all the government resources that feed information to the public failed to provide the needed information. Though the National Weather Service and NOAA were able to predict the storm, its extent was beyond what they expected. They had predicted twelve to fifteen inches of rain. We had no way of knowing what fifteen inches of rain would do to Rocky Mount, much less twenty-three inches. What did fifteen inches of rain mean from the standpoint of evacuating victims? How long would it take the river to rise? Before Floyd, we had no experience. Now we know.

We had never had any reason to be aware of our river-basin geography before, but Floyd taught us plenty. Rocky Mount is located in the Tar River Basin, but the Roanoke River Basin is just to our north. The two river basins

overlap just north of town. Normally, water flows from the west to the east, but in a situation like Floyd, where too much rain is falling for either river to carry it away, the Roanoke River Basin tips the water it can't handle into the Tar River Basin like one full saucer emptying into another.

I never envisioned flooding like this, even in my wildest dreams. I had seen similar events on the national news over the years, but I could not appreciate the magnitude of what those people went through. I saw it as something that was way off. I didn't have to worry about it because it would never happen here. I had seen the misery on the faces on television and felt some of their emotions, but nothing prepared me for what happened to us. To watch the people I was closest to, my firefighters and my family, experience such problems was painful.

Going back over the events that took place during the flood reminds me of the little boy we rescued at Riverside. We stayed in contact with his mother and him afterwards. They've been by a few times to see us and to show their appreciation. This was the little boy who woke up in the middle of the night and rushed out in just his underpants. To this day, his mother tells us that every time it rains even one drop—whether he hears or sees it, whether it is 2:00 in the morning or in the afternoon—he immediately goes and puts on his shoes. He told his mother that he never wants to have to leave home again without his shoes. If it's raining, he will not sleep until he gets his shoes on. Think about the tremendous impact on that one little boy and multiply that by thousands of people who are still suffering from fears related to the flood. Every raindrop triggers feelings. At work, I can sense some of that when it rains. Even though words are not spoken, there's an edginess, a tenseness.

District Fire Chief Eddie Jones, a Smithfield native, has worked for the Rocky Mount Fire Department for more than twenty years. His office was in Fire Station Number One in Edgecombe County.



Water Resources Department

AN INTERVIEW WITH JAY VAN HOOSE | MARLENE PAYNE

In early April 1999, the reservoir was down five feet. We needed to do some repair work on the dam and were able to complete it because the water level was so low. After we repaired the dam, we started refilling the reservoir. Even by restricting releases and with the help of some thunderstorms, it took from May 15 to June 29 to raise its level one foot.

Prior to August 1999, we had been in a serious drought. The reservoir was already down about four feet. When it's that low, filling it back up might take it a week to ten days of good rain throughout Louisburg and Franklin Counties.

In August, we had successive hurricanes that we called Dennis One and Dennis Two. Dennis One came in and dumped a bunch of rain on us, went out to sea, turned and came back as Dennis Two to give us some more rain. By this time, the ground was just saturated.

Following Dennis, we began listening to the predictions about Hurricane Floyd. Greg Fishel, the weather guru for our part of the state, said that the eye was going to shift and that we would get mostly wind. Because it was a big storm, we were worried about a lot of wind damage. The day before the storm hit, we basically went into our emergency-management mode, which meant we suspended our regular operational schedule for both water plants. Instead, we had a mechanic at each water plant and two operators at each plant working twelve-hour shifts. The chief operators for each plant were also on site, and I traveled back and

forth between the two. Our maintenance supervisor and other staff were on standby in case we needed them during the night. That was our plan to make sure people had water.

Hurricanes, however, don't watch television. Instead of our getting the windy side of the eye, we got the rainy side. After the fact, I got a copy of the Doppler radar picture of the storm that showed from fifteen to twenty inches of rainfall over our entire watershed. From the reservoir plant, the watershed is about seven hundred twenty to seven hundred forty square miles. The Sunset plant's watershed is about a thousand square miles. We got so much rain that it overwhelmed the system. The reservoir filled up in twenty-seven hours.

A week or so before Floyd, I was out at the dam with my two sons and my wife. I remember saying, "You know, this is really strange. The reservoir has filled up a whole lot faster than it should." I also remember how hot it was and how strange the water looked. The water was literally black, like coffee, except for the runoff from the farms and the fields, which was a light-brown color. It looked like someone was pouring cream into a cup of black coffee as the water flowed over the top of the dam. I pointed the phenomenon out to my youngest son and said, "Look—that's really interesting."

When a storm hits, most employees of utilities leave their families to fend for themselves. During Hurricane Floyd, I was gone seven to eight days and nights straight. My wife was at home looking after my eighty-three-year-old father who lives with us. Just like everyone else, she had no power and no water; but unlike everyone else, she had no husband at home to help her. Earlier on Wednesday, the family had geared up for the storm. I did what I always do: I got our spare generator out to keep our refrigerator and freezer from defrosting and losing food, got out the camp stove and gas lantern in case the power went out, and went to the grocery store. My dad's a retired thirty-year navy man, and as long as he's got a hot cup of black coffee and a sandwich, he's okay. We always make sure that we've got those things available. Later, we checked on a neighboring widow to see if there was anything she needed. She wanted her windows boarded up, so that evening, before dark, we put plywood over her windows.

Wednesday night, as I left my house on Brassie Drive in Northgreen, I realized that the end of my street was flooded. Using my emergency light, I could see that water was all the way across the golf course at the eighth hole's tee-box. I had to back up and drive across the course behind hole number one to get over to Jeffreys Road. I noticed there were no streetlights or other lights glowing in town. It was very odd looking.

It was still raining, and the wind was blowing like crazy as I drove south down Jeffreys Road to Benvenue and turned left. Reporters on the radio were talking about water rising and the river rising. When I crossed Hunter Hill Road to go under the U.S. Highway 64 overpass, the water level was three-fourths of the way up the wheels of my full-size F-150 4x4 truck. I started to go through, then thought better of it, backed up, turned around, and tried to go up Hunter Hill Road to reach Wesleyan Boulevard. I was cut off by water flowing across the road there, so I tried to go back up Benvenue Road to get on to Wesleyan Boulevard. I couldn't access Wesleyan there either, so I just kept going all the way up Benvenue Road where it turns into N.C. Highway 43 at Red Oak. I took N.C. Highway 43 to Interstate 95 and headed south. When I had almost reached the



Jeff Batts' home at Westover Court Circle in West Haven on the Tar River.
A police boat is going to rescue an elderly lady down the street.

CREDIT: DICK BETHUNE

Rocky Mount exit, I saw that both lanes, northbound and southbound, were covered with about two feet of water. I thought to myself, "We're in for some serious trouble here."

Since I couldn't seem to get to the Sunset plant in Rocky Mount, I headed south and finally got to the I-95 exit to the Tar River Reservoir Plant, got to the plant, and drove down to the reservoir. The water was already three and a half to four feet over the tops of the gates at that point.

The Tar River reservoir dam, which holds Rocky Mount's drinking water, is an interesting construction. The top of the concrete part of the dam is one hundred twenty feet above sea level. The dam has two five-foot-tall Bascule gates that are controlled by three hydraulic cylinders. Using the hydraulic system, we can raise or lower the water level in the reservoir by closing or opening the gates. That night, the gates were in the full-upright position. When the reservoir is what we call "pool," we have a one-hundred-twenty-five-foot elevation, and the reservoir impounds about 4.2 billion gallons of water backed up in the Tar River for about seven and a half miles.

When I first saw the dam, it was probably already four feet over the top of the gate. We had some questions about whether the gate would hold or not but decided that it would, because we'd had a similar situation with Hurricane Fran. When the water level is that high and the river is backed up so much, the water that goes over the dam might drop about a foot to a foot and a half instead of the low-water level, a thirty- to forty-foot drop. It just looked like a little ripple, then a big ripple, but more was coming. By that time, it was backed all the way up to the turnaround at the observation point.

While I was evaluating the reservoir situation, the men over at the Sunset Avenue Water Treatment Plant radioed me to say that the water was coming into the parking lot. That wasn't alarming. We'd seen water in the Sunset parking lot during Hurricane Fran, which had given us the highest elevation of floodwater that we had seen in Rocky Mount up to that time. Water had gotten into the loading dock for our bulk-chemical storage building, but it had never gotten into the water plant itself. In fact, when I came to Rocky Mount in 1988, I asked an elderly operator, Charlie

Newell, who was probably in his late seventies or early eighties at the time, if water had ever gotten into the power plant, which is right next to the river. He's said, "No, sir. Now the water will get up to the entries of the parking lot, and River Drive will flood; but there's never been a drop of water in the water plant."

"Well, that's all I need to know," I said.

Now people were saying that the river was high but that it wasn't going to get much higher. But it did! Then they'd say the same thing over and over again—only this time the water just kept rising. We began to wonder when it would stop. I remembered Charlie's story as I tried to get to the Sunset plant but couldn't. I stayed out at the reservoir plant from early Thursday until Saturday morning.

Some people stayed up that night to watch the hurricane but fell asleep instead. When they woke up to put the dog out, they swung their feet off the couch and their feet got wet because the water had come into their homes.

While I was stuck out at the reservoir, Operator Mitchell Fields was stuck at the Sunset plant. Scheduled to begin work at 7:00 A.M., he had left his house in Nashville very early Thursday morning. After trying several routes to get to the plant, he drove into the parking lot in bumper-deep water at 6:00 A.M. Jason Friedrich had spent the night at the plant and was still there when Mitchell arrived. I think Jack Evans, the chief operator, and Raymond Ingram, our mechanic, were on site, too. These two men kept working right up until they lost power from the substation about 5:45 A.M.

They called the electric department on the radio and had them come out to start the generator at the Sunset Avenue Water Treatment Plant. That particular generator doesn't come on automatically. It's designed for peak-saving power during the summer and winter months or whenever there is a big demand. Someone had to come out and start it.

When the electrical-department guy came out to start it, he made the step up into the generator-control room, looked out at the river, and said, "You know, that water is high." Fifteen or so minutes later, when he stepped back to close the door, he stepped into water. In that short time,

the water had risen into the control room. He informed our guys that it wasn't safe to start the generator with water that high. That meant that the plant was shut down.

At that time, the reservoir plant was operating at capacity: twelve million gallons per day. Our concern was to keep the water tanks full because one of the first things that people do when they clean up after a storm is to hose off the driveway. That seems pretty innocent in itself, but if twenty-six thousand one-inch hoses start at the same time, that requires a lot of water. In addition, we also supply water to the towns of Sharpsburg, Nashville, and Whitakers and part of Edgecombe County and their water authority. A lot of people depend on us.

The tanks were in fairly good shape, so we were not really concerned about that. My main concern was not being able to get to Sunset to see what was going on. I was dependent upon what I was hearing on the radio. When they called me and told me that we couldn't get power from the plant anymore, I said, "Okay, we can live with that as long as we don't lose any power from the reservoir plant."

Well, we lost power at the reservoir plant. They could remote-start the generator, but the generator also is a peak-saving generator. It's designed to handle the load for the plant if the plant is up and running. The plant wasn't running. When the power went out, the plant went off-line and so did our main pump, a seven-hundred-horsepower pump. It doesn't have a self-starter or step-start, which means that it's started by a pull-demand start. When the operator pushes the button for that pump to start, it's going to pull more than one hundred amps of power (four thousand one hundred sixty volts) for about ten seconds. Unfortunately, the generator just wasn't big enough to handle that load, and it shut down. That limited us because we could make only make eight million gallons of water a day with our other pumps; however, on an average day, we need fourteen million gallons of water. Unfortunately, production-wise, September is one of our larger months. We usually average between seventeen and nineteen million gallons of water a day for the month, including the industrial usage. To help solve the problem, we got in touch with the ten major consumers

in town to explain the situation. Fortunately, they were able to cut back on their usage. Their workers couldn't get to work because all the roads and bridges were flooded or washed away. To make a simple ten-block trip, you might have to go forty or fifty miles in a big circle to get from one side of the river to the other.

Water started coming into the Sunset Avenue Water Treatment Plant about 11:00 that morning. In my office, which is in the front of the plant, the elevation changes, and water got chest-deep. Rescue operations were well under way throughout the city, so I had to wait that afternoon, because my operators were safe. They were up on the second floor and could see everything. They just couldn't get out.

By the time I got to them, the whole first floor was under water. A girl came out of a house next to the old health department, waded toward us, and asked, "Can you help me?"

"If I can," I said.

"Well, my mama, my kids, and my animals are in the attic of my house. Can you help us?"

Robbie Pate was standing next to me, and he nodded. "Yeah." Robbie is a fireman, so I'm going to pin it on him. He said they'd get right over as soon as we got my guys out of the plant, but the guys in the plant said they were dry and safe and could wait.

The lady turned and said, "Well, will they take my animals?"

"Ma'am, I don't know," I said.

"Well if my animals don't go, I won't go," she said.

I understood because I have pets at home that I thought a lot of, too.

I remember seeing firemen getting the animals out, too. I don't think they refused anybody anything.

We finally got our guys out, dried them off, and moved them to a safe place.

"I'll be in touch with you," I said. "I don't know when we'll go back to work—whenever the water level goes down."

During this time, the tanks literally went dry because we lost power at the second plant, but the water was never contaminated. To accomplish

this, we issued a “boil-before-using” advisory. The state regulations require that a city maintain a minimum of twenty pounds per square inch (psi) of pressure in its distribution system at all times. Neighborhood water-line pipe has to be a size that will maintain a static pressure of twenty psi even if firemen hook up to a fire hydrant. Because there’s positive pressure in the line, no contamination seeps into the water from septic tanks, sewer tanks, sewer lines, or breaks in the sewer line. Even if a pipe breaks, the contamination is blown away—not sucked into the line. That’s why people don’t get sick from cholera, typhoid, typhus, and other diseases.

Cholera is the big concern. Cholera comes from drinking water contaminated by human waste. That’s why we chlorinate the water—to take care of that. We took hundreds of water samples during the flood by using a quick, sensitive test, and everything came back negative, which meant that there were no signs of bacteria of any kind.

I got a call from Sammy Boyette, the executive director of the North Carolina Rural Water Association. Some small municipalities south of us were on well systems. Their wells got completely flooded, and they were trying to disinfect them. They couldn’t get water samples to Raleigh to be tested at the drinking-water lab there, so he asked if we could test their samples. Since we are a certified drinking-water lab, I said, “Without question. Bring them on.” He did, but they weren’t as fortunate as Rocky Mount. Their samples kept coming back positive. We finally went down and super-chlorinated the wells to decontaminate them.

Water contamination depended on where you lived. If you looked at a map, the Rocky Mount Mill dam is at a narrowing of the river. Upstream from where the milldam is, the flooding was probably four to six feet or deeper. Beyond that area, the land spreads out and gets flat. There are no geographical barriers to contain the water. Flooding occurred—but in the two- to five-foot range, depending upon ground level.

The town of Princeville got a lot of flooding because it is located on the edge of the Tar River and has an earthen dike built around it. The Tar River always rises in the spring, floods, and falls. Unfortunately, dikes around the town captured the water when the river rose and held it like a cup. The water had to be pumped out. Engineers always build dams a

foot or two higher than the highest flood on record. Floyd created a new flood record.

We had a similar situation here in Rocky Mount. Lafayette Circle was built beside the river. An earthen dike was built around it. When the water rose over the top of the dike, it just filled up Lafayette Circle. I think they got some local farmers with irrigation pumps to pump the water out so that the homeowners could get back in there.

I was told if I went to city hall I could get food from the EOC for my guys. I was muddy and wet, but I went.

City Manager Raper asked, "How's the Sunset plant?"

I kind of choked up and said, "It's gone."

He asked, "What do you mean 'it's gone'?"

"There's four feet of water in my office," I said. "There's six or seven feet of water in the back part of the plant, and I had to get my boys out in a boat. We can't get in to assess the damage."

"How long do you think it's going to take to get back up and running?" he asked.

"I don't know. I can't tell you until I can get back in and see what's broken, what needs to be fixed, what will work, and what won't work."

"How much water do we have in the Paul Street tank?" Mr. Raper asked.

"I don't know," I said. "I've sent guys out."

We gauge the whole system based on the Paul Street tank, which is located in one of the economically depressed areas of town. The gauging system, located inside the fence surrounding the tank, needs both electricity and telephone lines. Both the electricity and the telephone lines were down, so I had sent two people down there in a truck, usually a fifteen or twenty minute trip. An hour later, they reported that there was no water in the tank.

When I reported this to Mr. Raper, he asked, "How is the Tar River plant doing?"

"Tar River is okay, but I've got two problems. Without power we are running the plant by generator, which makes only eight million gallons of water a day. With electrical power, we can make twelve million gallons of

water a day. I can also call the state and get permission to exceed that limit, so we can pump fourteen or fifteen million gallons if we need it.

"I've called Mr. Sherk, Director of Electrical Utilities, to find out the status of getting our electrical service restored, but he said we were not a high priority."

Mr. Raper called Mr. Sherk and explained our situation. Mr. Sherk told Mr. Raper that he would get power to us within four to five hours.

"What is your second problem?" Mr. Raper asked.

"My other problem is that I've got only one water plant running. Because the waters are so muddy, I have to run higher doses of alum, the coagulant we use to take the mud out of the water. We had a load brought in earlier today, and I have another load scheduled to come in from Plymouth. That part of the state was flooded like we were and that's the problem. Though the plant itself was not flooded, the roads from Rocky Mount east were.

"If the floodwaters don't go down and if the truck can't get here within three to four days, we are going to be out of chemicals. When we are out of chemicals, we are done."

Mr. Raper called Mike Hicks, Superintendent of the Kerr Lake Regional Water Authority. Mr. Hicks had more alum than he needed and said that he would be happy to send it to Rocky Mount to keep us going. We got down to literally eight hours of chemicals remaining before the first truck arrived. It was like a hero showing up, the man on the white horse, so to speak. I'd known Mike Hicks for fifteen or twenty years. It was nice to have a colleague and friend help us out.

By the time we got the Tar River plant back up to twelve million gallons of water a day, all the water tanks were dry, and we had to refill the system.

The rumors started flying, just as they had during Hurricane Fran. If I got one call, I got five hundred during that time. People wanted to know when the city was going to cut the water off. I said, "We're not planning to."

To squelch this rumor, I made up a blurb saying that the city was on a "boil-before-using" advisory because our water pressure had gotten below 20 psi. We felt that the water was safe to drink, but just to be sure, people

should wash dishes in it and rinse them with Clorox water afterwards. Put a couple of drops of Clorox in a gallon jug of water to sterilize it.

We had people who told us later that their neighbors had said that the city was cutting off the water. That meant everybody wanted to fill up their bathtubs so that they could flush their toilets. When twenty-six thousand bathtubs start filling from water tanks that are low, your pressure drops even lower.

Two or three days later, you've got a bathtub that still has water in it; then we have another problem. Twenty-six thousand tubs drain out, causing a problem for the wastewater plant. The problem just compounds. That was one of the things we had to combat.

We got the Tar River plant back up to twelve million gallons a day, but we needed to reduce our demand by two to three million gallons a day. We asked our ten major industries if they could reduce their consumption. All but one did.

By this point, I was on my second or third day without sleep. When the message came back that the tenth industry wouldn't limit its consumption, I just said, "Well, that's great." Fortunately, the other nine industries' cooperation turned out to be enough to get through until we could get the Sunset plant up and running and the tanks filled up. The state wanted us to demonstrate that, though the tanks would go down during the day, we could ensure that they would fill up during the night. That's what we did.

The City of Rocky Mount has three water-pressure zones. A pressure zone is controlled by the water tanks that are in it. We have a high, a medium, and a low-pressure zone. The low-pressure zone is the Paul Street tank, the Marigold tank, the Airport tank, and the Mitchell tank. In this pressure zone, the water runs between 45 and 55 psi. The high-pressure system comes from the Nash Tech tank, which is up on a hill. Residents who didn't have a pressure reducer on the incoming water line had water pressure of 90 to 100 psi. The medium pressure zone is from Whitakers tank, and it's between 55 and 65 psi.

The problem was with the high-pressure zone because it had the hospital on it. That system is set up so that if the high-pressure system goes out of

service, it can be fed from the low-pressure system. Unfortunately, low-pressure water cannot reach the fourth and fifth floors of the hospital. Providence had intervened, however. The year before Floyd we had to shut down the high-pressure tank to paint it. The hospital had purchased booster pumps to pressurize their system during that period to get the water to the top floors and to run their dialysis center. When the hurricane hit and the tanks went dry, the high-pressure zone went out first because that tank is higher than the others. The hospital switched on its booster pumps to get water up to the fourth and fifth floors, and they had water in the entire time.

Overall, things went as well as they did because people went above and beyond the responsibilities of their jobs. One of my men lived with his wife and young daughters in a first-floor apartment in Sharpsburg. Water flooded it to the ceiling, and they lost everything. When he showed up at work the next day, I asked, "Why are you here?"

"You need me," he responded.

"No, you need to go home and take care of your family. Just touch base with me to let me know where you are."

While the Sunset plant was still flooded and inaccessible, we had to check the system to determine if a water line had broken under a creek or if one had been washed out with the bridge.

By the time we got to the plant on Saturday morning, the water level was down, but it was still waist-deep on me, and I'm six feet six. Water was coming across from City Lake and around the plant. It was just above the handrail for the handicap ramp. Kurt Barnes took us out there in his forty-horsepower boat, but he had to struggle to keep us going because the current was so strong.

I was the last person out of the boat. When I stepped off, I lost my footing for a second. If I hadn't held onto the handrail, I think the next sign I would have seen would have been, "Welcome to Tarboro." That's how fast the river was moving.

We finally waded into the plant and climbed to the second floor to get supplies for the lab so we could start taking bacteriological samples. We also made a quick walkthrough to see what we needed to do in the plant. The filter wells underneath the plant had to be pumped out and flushed,

so we lined up a crew from the water-and-sewer department who did that job for us. The clear wells across the road that had fresh drinking water in them were contaminated, so those would have to be pumped out. In the plant, the horizontal motors for our big pumps had to be taken out and either rewired or dried out, baked out, dipped again, and reinstalled. New bearings had to be put in each motor. If you got river mud out when it was wet, it washed right off, but once it dried, it was like paint: you couldn't get it off; you had to paint over it. Restoring the plant to operational status was a challenge.

The original plant, on Marigold Street across from the main post office, was state of the art in 1934, when it was built with WPA money for a million dollars. Today, I couldn't even replace the water tank at Marigold Street for a million dollars, much less the whole plant.

The plant design is in the "industrial arts" style and is beautiful inside. Throughout the plant there are red terra-cotta floors and black wrought-iron handrails with solid walnut handgrips. The main lobby has a three-story vaulted ceiling. What seems to be decorative woodwork is really molded plasterwork, part of the original construction.

One of the first people to walk into the door was the insurance adjuster. We were surrounded by water damage up to a level of four to six feet. He said, "I can see where this used to be a pretty plant."

I could tell that he meant that it had been pretty years ago. I said, "Let me show you what pretty was." Before the flood, cleanup crews from Fountain Correctional Institute had completely stripped the floors and re-waxed them. They had also painted the entire plant. It looked showroom new when they finished. We took the insurance adjuster up to the second floor to show him what the plant looked like just days before. The floors looked like glass, and everything was freshly painted. His jaw flopped open.

Sunday we began the cleanup. We fire-hosed everything out the doors. Early Monday we strung lights through the plant, running them on generators. Wake Forest's electric-motor-shop people pulled out all the four-hundred-horsepower and two-hundred-horsepower motors, rewired and reworked them, then put them back into the plant by Wednesday, a thirty-six-hour turnaround.

In our chemical-storage building, three huge tanks had floated out of place, causing a lot of damage. Getting the tanks back in place could have been a difficult problem, involving trying to manipulate huge tanks within a confined area.

Someone asked, "Well, how do we get the tanks turned over?"

"It's easy; we're going to take the roof off the building," I said.

We got a big crane, took the roof off, and righted the tanks. Because we still had usable chemicals, alum and caustic, in our other tanks, we were able to make temporary plumbing connections to tide us over.

Of course, our electrical system was messed up. We got a four-hundred-eighty-volt, three-phase generator from Raleigh because one was not available locally. The generator enabled us to control our transfer pumps to move chemicals from the storage area into the plant.

In the chlorine building, two one-ton containers of chlorine had floated, but they were still active and live. It was important to shut them off to prevent a disastrous chlorine leak. Maintenance Supervisor Gary Weeks and some firemen boated around the building, dived underwater to unlock the door, went into the building, stood on top of a header rack forty inches off the floor to pull the tank with one hand and close the valve with the other. Gary says that he now knows how astronauts feel when they are trying to work on the space station.

Since then, we have changed that system to a vacuum system. A vacuum regulator mounted directly to the tank shuts it off if any kind of leak occurs. We're also going to put big one- or two-inch eyelets on either side of the tanks so that we can strap the tanks to the floor so they can't float in the future.

From now on, we are going to be more proactive instead of reactive. It's not a question of if it will happen again; it's just a matter of when. People say, "Oh, but that was a five-hundred-year flood." To which I say, "Yeah, but that's statistics, and statistically, it could happen again next year or the year after."

The disaster ultimately will give Gary Weeks a nice shop where he can fabricate anything he needs to repair the plant. The Children's Museum, a parking lot, a chemical-storage building, and River Road surrounded it.

When everything was destroyed, we acquired the old health department property right next to the water plant. The health department building will eventually be torn down, and our new maintenance facility will go there, which will be a positive step.

With new regulations coming out and the city growing, we'll probably have to build a new clear well on the land that housed the Children's Museum before Floyd. That would be the most logical location for it. Right now, our clear wells are across Sunset Avenue, so we have to pump the water over there and then gravity feeds it back. That was okay for plants built in the thirties, forties, and fifties, but new water-quality standards and regulations dictate that we need to do things differently. Since the Children's Museum will soon have a new home, it's probably going to be a win-win situation.

As far as negatives go, recovering from flood expenses is probably the most difficult. If I had to pick a way to be wiped out, it wouldn't be by water. I can still smell "that smell"—the mold, the soggy draperies, the carpets, cars, homes, vegetation, and dead wildlife. It's a distinct odor that I'll never forget. Tornadoes are devastating, but the smell isn't there, so people can just kind of push everything up in a pile. If water gets in, it's just going to make everything more difficult.

Because of what we have learned through this experience, I've been placed on a statewide disaster committee. One of the things I warn others about is that after about three days without sleep, your ability to make simple decisions becomes impaired. One of the things we've planned is to make sure that people get sleep, as well as food. Providing workers with dry clothes, giving them peace of mind, and ensuring communication with their families so that they aren't worried is also crucial. Floyd taught us a lot, lessons we don't intend to forget.

Jay Van Hoose, Superintendent of the Water Treatment Plants, grew up in Virginia Beach in a career military family. He started out as a water-plant operator in Louisburg, North Carolina, became the town's water superintendent, and then was promoted to director of water and sewer. He came to Rocky Mount in October 1988 when the position of supervisor for water treatment plants was

created. He supervises two drinking-water plants: The Sunset Avenue Water Treatment Plant downtown, known as "the Old Plant," and the Tar River Reservoir Water Treatment Plant. His responsibilities include making sure that the plants comply with all regulations, as well as overseeing the six water tanks and three booster-pump stations in town. His department must make certain that any new water line installed in Rocky Mount meets engineering guidelines and that water samples meet bacteriological restrictions. His greatest challenge is keeping abreast of all the rapidly changing federal and state drinking-water regulations and developing long-range plans to comply with those regulations.

Retired and Tired

AN INTERVIEW WITH LARRY CAMP | MARLENE PAYNE

On a normal day, I administered park maintenance for the City of Rocky Mount Recreation Department, which included all grass cutting and horticultural activities. We had approximately six hundred ninety-five acres of land to maintain, and I think that, at last count, there are forty-seven parks whose areas range from a quarter acre to the fifty acres at Battle Park. I also worked with park planning, from playground equipment to tennis courts to ball fields. In Rocky Mount, we also maintain three cemeteries: Northeastern, Pineview, and a third one in Battleboro.

On September 16, only four of us finally made it to the shop at Tom Stith Park because the water rose so quickly. The next day, it took me several hours using back roads to finally get into town because I live on the north side of the Tar River.

The emergency operations center (EOC) was in place, and we were all trying to coordinate our efforts. Though our main concern was certainly the safety of our staff, we also had a logistical problem because all of our equipment was in the low-lying areas. We knew we'd need that equipment to recover from the disaster.

The rapidly rising water made for some harrowing experiences. The shop building located on Spruce Street across from Atlantic Avenue was brand new and hadn't been dedicated yet. From my office, I looked out at the parking lot and could see the water rising. To gauge how fast it was rising, we put a marker in the parking lot, and in thirty minutes it was

covered. We knew that the water was rising fast, but it really didn't dawn on us that it was going to be as bad as it turned out to be. As I was working, I happened to look down and saw water coming through the ground floor window. When that happened, it was like the water was saying, "*Hello—it's time to move.*"

Steve Warren did a yeoman's job. He assigned someone to save the small equipment in our shop area: chainsaws, weed eaters, everything that was on the floor. We made tables with anything we could and started stacking anything with a motor on top. The other two people and I started moving the heavier equipment: lawn mowers, tractors, trucks, and dump trucks.

We had to go through an alley between our building and the warehouse. The alley was a little lower than our building, so that meant that the water was already deep in the alley. Once we moved our equipment, we had to abandon ship because I was very concerned about the safety of our people. The power was still on, and water was rising almost to the receptacles. We had done the best we could, and now it was time to go to higher ground and to see if we could help with the rest of the operations. We got back in touch with the command center and reported, "Okay, the Park Maintenance Building is secured. What do you want us to do now?"

They had plenty for us to do. At the Arts Center, we had moved everything from the ground floor to the second floor the night before. Now we were concerned with moving the paintings and exhibits we hoped to salvage to the third floor. We were also concerned about the moisture buildup in the building. You can't imagine how swiftly that water was coming through the parking lots and building.

Jerry and Steve really wanted to go check out the Arts Center, so we used a little aluminum boat. I didn't feel comfortable sending them out in it, but after going over some safety rules, we decided to take a look.

I backed my truck down, and we unloaded the boat. We had life jackets and paddles but no motor, so they had to paddle against the current. We tried to push the boat out so that its trajectory would intercept a few trees that Jerry and Steve could use to grab and pull themselves over to the museum fifty or sixty yards away. We tied a rope to the boat to make sure we could pull it back in case they got stranded. Holding onto the rope with

my bare hands would have been impossible, so I tied the end of it to a stop sign. If the current had pulled up the stop sign, they would have been in trouble. They went over to the Arts Center without incident and checked everything out.

Later, we went on a search for food. It was a monumental task just trying to find something open. We kept in contact with Western Sizzlin Steak House because I was concerned that we be able to keep the staff nourished and going. Tommy Cliett at Western Sizzlin Steak House said they were going to open at 11:00 A.M. to provide sandwiches. That was one of the initial feedings. We ended up going to Raleigh to have food catered, but Western Sizzlin Steak House was very good to us, helping out in some tough situations.

Another tough job was helping Candy Madrid, the Children's Museum director, check on the Children's Museum. There were a lot of exhibits with animals, and Candy was very emotional because the animals were in confined areas. She wanted to check on them, but we were concerned about her safety.

Pete Armstrong, Director of Parks and Recreation, pulled me aside and asked, "Would you take a look at it?"

"Certainly," I said, "It's no problem. I'll be glad to when the water recedes and we can get into the buildings."



Trailers on Highway 301 North serve as temporary homes for many who have nowhere to go.

CREDIT: MARTHA DANIEL

I did not want to send the staff, so I went. It was not a pleasant situation. The odor was horrendous, and I took the dead animals out of their cages and disposed of them in bags before the museum staff could see them. It was a tragic situation. The confined animals died. We removed their carcasses and cleaned and sanitized the area as best we could before Candy went in. It was very emotional for her. It was even tough on me, and I didn't work with those animals. We knew it was going to be a very emotional time for the museum staff that had fed and talked to them each day, and we wanted to shield them as much as possible. They had not only lost a building, but also the animals.

When I walked into the building, the first thing I saw was a snake's head sticking up. At first I thought it was a stuffed snake, but when I shined my flashlight on it, the tongue shot out! I said, "Hello, I'm in trouble now." If the python was still alive, at least there was a glimmer of hope that some of the other animals had survived.

An alligator also lived in that building, so now I wondered, "Where's the alligator?" I carefully made my way into the room where the animals were exhibited and behold, the alligator was still in her cage, and she was alive. The water in the Children's Museum had been up to the eight-foot-high ceilings, so we knew that everything had floated up there.

When the water rose, the alligator apparently rose with it and got on top of a heating duct. Then, when the water went down, she rode back down with it. It was just amazing that the alligator survived. Unfortunately, none of the other animals survived.

There were rumors at the time that there was an alligator loose in the community, but we tried to squelch them. We got the alligator cleaned up and transported her and the snake to higher, safer ground. That was a harrowing experience.

Saving pythons and alligators was a little beyond the normal realm of park maintenance, but it was something we could help out with. We certainly tried.

The way Rocky Mount is laid out, the Tar River runs from the Arts Center (the "Tank") down to City Lake, the Children's Museum, Sunset Park, Tom Stith Park, the dog pound, and Battle Park. All these parks and

facilities historically lie in the river corridor, as do Booker T. Washington Community Center and Talbot Ball Field. As the river began to rise and swell, it continued right down Leggett Road. It seemed like the farther it went toward Tarboro, the wider it got. All our facilities were impacted tremendously.

We had dealt with high water on numerous occasions, but we had never seen anything of the magnitude of this flood. In the past, we'd had water cover parking lots and get into shelters as high as the picnic-table seats, but we'd never seen water on rooftops or seen buildings completely submerged. At Tom Stith Park, all we could see of the basketball court was the top foot of the backboard, which was about fifteen feet above the ground.

The storm winds also caused damage in the cemeteries. Water in a large number of drainage ditches eroded the ditch banks. We were later to install riprap and fill dirt, but water in the main ditch that runs through the middle of Pineview Cemetery was well out of its banks. To the best of my knowledge, we did not have any tombstone damage, but the ground was so saturated that when the high winds came, a tremendous number of big oak trees just toppled over, oak trees that were more than one hundred years old.

We also had major damage in Battle Park where evidence indicated that a microburst might have occurred. The water coming down the Tar River crossed over U.S. Highway 64 into Battle Park. Areas of Battle Park were under more than fifteen or twenty feet of water. Debris from ditches floated up and created logjams that got hung-up in the trees. In some areas, it had nowhere to go, so it continued to mound and build up, presenting us with a tough situation for a long time afterward.

Of course, we had to take out all the walls and the carpets in our new buildings, but we were fortunate and thankful that we were on site to be able to move at a moment's notice to save what we could. We rescued all the books and maps. We saved all the historical documents and kept them dry.

Finally, the municipal swimming pool was under water. Water was probably up five feet inside that building. Once the pool was submerged, the only thing sticking up above water level was a foot or two of chain-link fencing.

After the water disappeared, the paperwork for FEMA appeared. We appreciated their help and support, and we knew that they must have documentation. Sometimes, however, it was a little frustrating to deal with the documentation process—vehicles used, man-hours worked—when we had a cleanup job to do and were trying to do it to the best of our ability.

We had several meetings, and I said, “Guys, this is not short term. We’re in for the long haul, and cleanup is not going to happen overnight. We’ve just got to go at it in a methodical way and clean ourselves out of this mess.”

First, we had to get our shop back in place to have a central workstation. We worked with the walls gone. We had to tear out everything because the mildew bloomed once everything began to dry out.

I can’t say enough about the dedication of the park staff. When they went out to do these jobs, many needed to be working at home because of the damage to their own homes and flooded cars. Still, they were on the job working for the greater good. When they got off, they had to go home and take care of their personal lives.

The Down East Festival was scheduled for October, so Parks Maintenance provided assistance to the Programming Division. We wanted the festival to go on. From a programming standpoint, we felt it was important to communicate the idea that, as bad as things had been, survival and recovery were possible.

Cleaning up the picnic shelters and playground equipment was our first priority. We had to decontaminate those areas for the safety of the community. We didn’t know what had been in the water, but FEMA had classified it as black water and dirty water. In some areas, I’m not sure what the classifications were, but there are standards that they used to determine what we had to clean up. We sanitized all the picnic shelters and playground equipment that had been under water, repaired the ball fields and fences, and took a lot of pictures. It was really overwhelming to look at it and say, “This is what we’ve got to fix.” For the city, its employees, and the park maintenance staff, it was a challenge that we accepted.

We had to replace the fence that had bordered the Tar River as quickly as possible as a safety buffer because there were going to be people in the park. We had to make the parks safe for the public.

Community response was predictable. At first, I think there was an understanding that it was going to take time to get all the pieces back together. The longer it took, however, the more impatient people became.

The community was devastated by Floyd. Twenty-two percent of the city had been under water, and there were many people who had lost their houses. Even those on higher ground were impacted indirectly by something down the road. It was an event that touched everybody, and the community pulled together.

Some good, lasting effects are emerging from the devastation of the flood—the proposed Imperial Center for the Arts, for example. It was too bad that the flood had to be the catalyst to get the ball rolling, but we’re going to have a “state-of-the-art” city when all this is done.

As for the memories, they’ll never go away. That time heals all wounds is certainly true, but this was such a devastating event that the stories will never go away. People who had lived here for fifty years kept saying, “Well, it’ll never get to my doorstep.” And then, all we could see were their rooftops. No one could fathom that. These are the stories that will never die. Those who lived through the hurricanes and the flood are always going to be scarred in some way by those events.

But we’re resilient. Rocky Mount’s a good community, and we can bounce back and be better. Now, every time someone talks about high water or water rising, we have a whole different perspective.

What I will always remember is a human-interest story. We were trying to reach one of our employees so that he could help us out. We had an International dump truck with a flat bed approximately four feet off the ground. It’s got those big tires, and it’s high, so we decided to use it to reach him because we could get up close to his house.

The employee we were picking up lived in one of the apartments near Sunset Park. When we drove that truck into his neighborhood, everyone thought it was a lifeboat, and they started coming out of their apartments and getting onto the truck.

We had no idea that the people were still there. When the truck pulled up, everybody jumped on the flat bed, and we ferried people back and forth as far as we could.

One lady who had a broken hip was on a mattress, and people carried her to the flat bed and put her on, mattress and all. We took her by truck to an ambulance that was waiting on Sunset Avenue. Our flatbed International truck became a ferry and a medivac unit during the flood.

The flood taught us a lesson: We have to be prepared. That's the biggest key.

Larry Camp, parks and grounds superintendent, retired in May 2001 after a thirty-year career with the City of Rocky Mount Parks and Recreation Department. A graduate of Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, Larry began his teaching career in Sumter, South Carolina. In 1976, he and his family moved to Rocky Mount, where he joined the city's Parks and Recreation Department.

Firemen Wear Many Hats

AN INTERVIEW WITH KENNETH MULLEN | MARLENE PAYNE

A fire chief oversees a lot of activities on a daily basis. One is making sure that building plans comply with fire-safety codes to protect not only businesses, but also civilians. Other activities include saving lives and protecting property and providing emergency medical services to heart-attack victims and persons who have difficulty breathing or are unconscious or unresponsive. In addition, we are also responsible for maintaining our department's equipment and for training fire-department personnel so that they are able to provide these services. Finally, we do a lot of fire-prevention presentations, especially to school-age children. Fire prevention encompasses many programs and shows at schools. In a program called "Adopt a Firefighter," a firefighter works directly with teachers to provide services and information related to fire safety and fire prevention. Another program that we operate jointly with the state involves child safety seats in vehicles for infants and children up to six-years old. These programs require a lot of training, and we spend a great deal of time preparing for events that deal directly with the public or in doing field inspections. So many activities go on at the fire station other than sitting around waiting for a fire.

We have averaged about five thousand real emergencies a year since we added emergency medical services. About fifty-nine percent of our calls are medical in nature; the other forty-one percent deal with actual fires, both structural and automotive. We also respond to incidents related to the city's natural-gas service, such as metering gas smells or checking

for malfunctions in restaurants' cooking equipment and making sure that workers are not exposed to too much gas. We do a lot of things that are not traditionally thought of as fire services.

In preparing for a hurricane, we start about ninety-six hours prior to the storm's actual arrival. Because of our experience with Hurricane Felix back in the early nineties, the local governments set up an emergency operations center (EOC). Hurricane Fran gave the EOC a trial run, but what Fran taught us didn't prepare us for Hurricane Floyd. Fran brought a lot of wind. Floyd brought a lot of water.

At the EOC, we dealt with emergency management coordinators in both Nash and Edgecombe Counties. Working with both the city manager and both assistant city managers, we opened our EOC around midnight on the night of the storm. Most of the emergency service personnel, being the caring group of people that they are, had already converged on the EOC at about 9:00 P.M. that night. We monitored the movement of the storm, other weather events, and the state's operations.

At first, there was not a lot of activity, other than just monitoring phone calls and joining in conference calls. No one mentioned the amount of floodwater that we were going to have, and we'd never experienced anything like that in this area, so naturally we were not looking for it.

Things really started happening around 10:00 or 10:30 P.M., as I recall. The fire department had already called in an extra shift that was supposed to come in about midnight, but they started trickling in between 9:00 and 10:00 P.M. It was fortunate that they did. We put some reserve equipment into service and sent a truck to the Battleboro station, a volunteer station that is a part of the City of Rocky Mount. Based on our experience with Fran, we wanted to make certain that we had equipment in every area in case fallen trees isolated sections.

Normally, we would leave Fire Station Number Six and proceed up U.S. Highway 301 to Battleboro, but we quickly learned that the area around Abbott Laboratory on U.S. Highway 301 North was impassable because it was already flooded. There was also some flooding at Instrument Drive and U.S. Highway 301 South, so the vehicle going to Battleboro had to take N.C. Route 97 West to Interstate 95 and then go back through Gold



Peoples Building Supply on Highway 301 South.

CREDIT: MARTHA DANIEL

Rock. Instead of a four- or five-mile trip, the men had to travel probably twenty-five miles just to get to Battleboro. With additional vehicles in each station and extra district chiefs on duty, we felt that the city was well covered, in spite of the isolated flooding. We also put two firefighters who trained in computer-aided design in the communication center, since we anticipated a large volume of calls.

We had two different groups in the EOC. One group took emergency calls (house fires and flood calls), which came directly to the 911 number. This group dispatched the information to either the police or fire department, whichever was appropriate. Non-emergency calls went to what we called our "telephone bank," where city employees provided the proper information to the people. The EOC also determined when to set up shelter sites. We worked directly with Nash and Edgecombe Counties, asking them to set up shelters within the city limits. Parker School and Benvenue School were the original shelter sites.

We were fortunate that everyone was in place and that the EOC was operational, because emergency calls began to come in. The first call came from Hornbeam Drive, where people said that water was rising very

quickly. We sent emergency workers out to check the area for water-main breaks because the storm had not hit yet. With an hour or so, we began to get calls about roads being flooded on U.S. Highway 301. Then we began to get calls from the Westminster area, Pamela Drive, and Beechwood Drive, so we sent people to those areas.

Luckily, we had boats available before the storm came. They were not motorized boats, just the “johnboat” type that we had used in the past to evacuate people in the Leggett Road area under normal flooding conditions. Unfortunately, as the storm progressed, the johnboats proved inadequate, due to the force and speed of the current. Some of our firefighters went home and got their personal boats. The current was so strong that a sixty-horsepower motor had to be wide open just to stand still in the current to effect the rescue of a person stranded on the top of his car after trying to drive through a flooded area.

We also began to get calls from people needing help in Lafayette Circle. In the Nashville Road area, down around the Arts Center, people tried to walk out and became trapped in the current. In some areas, people were actually hanging on to the bridge.

Eventually, the water became so swift that it was unsafe to use the small boats in those areas, so we had firefighters in their personal vehicles and their personal boats following fire trucks to rescue people. One of our firefighters went home, got his boat, and went into the Lafayette Circle area, where he and others rescued about twenty people from the steadily accelerating current. Once they left that area, they went to the Nashville Road area to get more people. Stony Creek Volunteer Fire Department assisted us in the rescue of people from the Westminster and Beechwood Drive areas.

The Riverside Apartments area quickly became an issue as well. The first calls we got were from people who were awakened by a noise. As they got out of bed to see what was going on, they actually stepped into water, so we sent boats to that area, too.

At that point, we realized that we had more people in trouble than we could handle with fire trucks and fire-department vans. As we got more wind and rain in some areas, we rescued people using a van, a fire truck, and a bus.

The first shelters quickly filled, so we called-in city buses to transport people from those sites to other shelters that we were opening. It was a fairly intense operation. People in areas without shelters went to local churches, and people there opened their doors. We also had people in fire stations. We were putting flood victims anywhere temporarily, trying to get them out of harm's way and trying to get them into a safe environment. We just couldn't get all the people to the shelter sites. So we started putting people where we could get them. What do we do with them now? That's when we began to look at places throughout the city, such as the R.M. Wilson gym, the fire stations, schools, homes, churches and other safe havens. Flooding became so severe that we had to call in helicopters and the Coast Guard.

We taxed our equipment to the maximum! We did things with the ladder truck that the manufacturer would not have recommended, but our people and our equipment performed brilliantly, considering that we had very little swift-water rescue training. People told me later that they were scared to death of water but that when they saw their supervisors doing some things, they knew they could do them, as well. We have pictures of kids and elderly people on the shoulders of firefighters.

One of the stories that I remember hearing occurred in the Riverside area: one of the firefighters saw something floating through the water and reached down to grab it. When he did, it was the hair of a little old lady about seventy years old who was trying to get out. He asked, "Where are you going?"

"I'm swimming out of here," she said. They carried her out to the Gay Street area. Later, we thought that was amusing, but at the time, it was not.

On Instrument Drive, a gentleman actually hung onto a tree for twenty-five to thirty minutes as we tried to get to him. We had a seventy-five-foot ladder extended out as far as it could reach. They tied a rope around the body harness of the firefighter and then secured the rope to a ladder. The firefighter actually got out as far as he could on the ladder, and then he jumped into the water and let the current carry him back to the man who was hanging onto the tree. After he rescued this man, they pulled him back in. There were a lot of things that our guys did that they

weren't trained to do. We don't have a clue how many people we rescued. We've tried to estimate the number. Our guess is that two to three hundred people were rescued in the Riverside area, at least twenty to twenty-two people in the Lafayette Circle area, half a dozen people from the tops of cars out in the Thorpe Road area, and the man hanging on to the tree on Instrument Drive.

There was a remarkably small loss of life. People had recognized that there might be a storm, and they were a bit more prepared than usual. Of course, nobody was prepared for this situation. There was no way that we could have anticipated such a catastrophe. The three who lost their lives had been trying to drive through water. We had other incidents in which people tried to drive through water and their vehicles stalled, but we were able to get them. Loss of life was kept to a minimum because, as areas began flooding, we tried to get there quickly. We had to return to some flooded areas to get the people who had refused to leave at first.

The fire, police, and water crews were all instrumental in getting the word out that we needed to do some evacuations. The employees of all of the city's municipal departments were taxed because they were doing things they were not trained to do or accustomed to doing.

It was overwhelming to see the community effort and to see how everybody pitched in to get things done. I saw areas throughout the city where the Red Cross was serving thousands of meals three times a day. The churches set up feeding kitchens. The city manager and county offices, the mayor, and the citizens pulled together and worked for the common good. I think the beautiful part of it is that it became a community effort rather than a county or a city thing.

After the water began to recede, we realized that it was going to be a long-term effort. We began to work very closely with the city manager's office because we wanted to be able to assist in the current effort and in the long-range planning for future disasters.

The Hazard Mitigation Group, a state agency, went to the fire department first and talked with Assistant Fire Chief Keith Paris. Keith then referred them to city hall to the planning department, where they ended up in the EOC.

Now, two years later, we are still working with the Hazard Mitigation Group and will continue to work with them for probably another year or two. Ours has become a fire-service role—total recovery—not just a rescue or an emergency role. We immediately began to work with the Red Cross and the local churches to set up food- and clothing-distribution centers.

As people began to go back to their homes to clean up, we again saw a community effort of volunteers and people from across the state and across the nation coming to help. Through the mayor's office, we were able to direct the volunteers about what to do next.

While it was a sad time, it also was encouraging to see people pull together. We had to develop plans and strategies to get our community back into shape and to move forward.

I was introduced to a lot of community people with whom I had never been involved. Some of the churches we worked with began to call us. Distribution sites contacted us, and we were also working with the Red Cross shelters. There were lots of school people, clergy, and community groups that we had not been involved with before. All of a sudden, all of us were thrown in the same arena, and it was interesting to see how those relationships were formed and how they've continued to develop. The emergency-management coordinators for the City of Rocky Mount and nearby counties have established bonds that we hope will continue to develop so we can establish plans to combat future disasters.

We had learned from Hurricane Fran to report to the City of Rocky Mount Health Department those people who were bedridden, on oxygen, or had similar problems. Our Human Relations Division had made contact with hospitals and rest homes to take care of bedridden people if necessary. We prepared for power outages and streets blocked by trees. We had made the county health services aware that some people needed oxygen, so they were ready to provide some during the flood. After learning all that from Fran, we were in a little better shape with Floyd.

In addition to the monetary impact on the budgets of all city departments, the city will not be the same. Riverside, Sunset Park and the Children's Museum are no longer there. The Arts Center had been on Nashville Road all of my life. That is gone forever. Many people's homes

no longer exist. Elderly people who had been in their homes for forty to fifty years had to relocate.

But there have been benefits from the disaster—the development of a better relationship between the two counties and between them and the city. People have come together and continue working together and showing that they can recover from the most devastating disaster that has ever hit this area.

Kenneth Mullen had been a fire chief with the City of Rocky Mount for three years at the time of the flood. A native of Rocky Mount, Kenneth has worked for the city for twenty-seven years.

Generosity Surprises Police Chief

AN INTERVIEW WITH POLICE CHIEF BILL HOGAN | MARLENE PAYNE

The Rocky Mount Police Department has about one hundred fifty-six sworn officers and forty civilian personnel. As the administrator, my job is to meet the public, work on personnel matters and issues related to recruitment and selection of employees, handle discipline, work on budget issues, and guide our organization in finding ways to make our services better and more efficient. In a department this large, the police chief engages his captains, lieutenants, and sergeants and relies on them to carry out the directives. I do include those individuals in the decision-making process.

In an emergency, one of my major responsibilities is to man the command post located in the police department and to manage that operation. From the command post, we dispatch police, fire, and emergency medical personnel.

I had not experienced a hurricane or even a serious threat of hurricanes. In Newark, [Delaware,] we'd heard about hurricanes, but in reality, we only gotten some sweeping rain and wind at worst. In preparing for the hurricane that September, we put all personnel on notice. People dispersed into the field had radio contact with our central personnel. We each had a telephone. Calls that were unique for police operations rang at a special phone, which I answered so I could direct our resources.

I had been told that we needed to be concerned about the wind and falling trees. During Fran, officers had been riding down the streets as trees fell in front of or behind them. They could, literally, have been crushed by

massive trees. After Fran, we established a safety policy that, unless there was a catastrophe, we would not call in our personnel until the winds died down. We wanted to avoid endangering them needlessly.

At 9:00 P.M. Wednesday, I went into the command post, which was already operational. About 3:00 or 4:00 A.M., when the winds really got bad, we pulled our folks in. Calls were coming in about a multitude of things: people were stranded in their homes; roadways were flooded. People were trying to drive through rushing water.

One of the most chilling stories I heard was of two individuals clinging to a street sign, while the water, swirling around them, was ready to sweep them away. With the help of several citizens, our officers rescued them by using an electrical extension cord as a rope because it was all they had. They tied it around their waists and waded into the water to grab these individuals and pull them in. The citizens held them with the industrial-size extension cord and pulled them back through the water.

The three deaths in the city all occurred from people being swept off roadways. Clearly, people did not understand that once your tires lost traction, a car could be swept away.

Sitting in the communication center was almost like being a coach. I didn't have control over Mother Nature, but I tried to direct personnel. It was a frustrating, aggravating situation.

One of my most vivid recollections is that the rising water divided the city into three islands. We could not get to one island until the water receded. At that point we still had two islands in the city. I could not get to the west side of Sunset Avenue from the east side.

After a twenty-four-hour-plus shift, I finally broke away for the first time, but there was no way to get to my house on the west side of the city without a forty-five minute drive into the country because the direct route on U.S. Highway 64 was closed.

Sunset Avenue and other major arteries of the city were closed, so moving traffic was a problem. A caravan of officers had to go over to relieve the officers on the west side. Relieved officers caravanned back so they could go home. We were working extended shifts of twelve hours on and twelve hours off. This schedule basically cut our police department in half.



The intersection of Sunset Avenue and Highway 64, across from CVS Pharmacy.

CREDIT: JULIAN FENNER

Throughout the flood at the command post, I was concerned about my folks in the field. The parks and recreation department took the lead to get food so we could get meals to the people in the field. They set up kitchens, and the officers were supposed to come to those, but frankly, officers at checkpoints stopping citizens from driving into flooded areas didn't get relief. We just weren't set up to carry food to them. We had officers who stood fixed posts (no food or bathroom relief for twelve hours). That won't happen again!

We now have plans that will make a supervisor responsible for all fixed posts. That individual will be responsible for getting officers relief for bathroom breaks and breaks in general. That supervisor will also make sure that we have a team of personnel to deliver food to field positions. Officers who are in fixed locations will have drinks, food, and relief. As the chief, I feel responsible and very guilty that we didn't handle that as well as we should have.

After the storm hit and while everything was still flooded, a few sightseers insisted on cutting through restricted areas, but for the most part, people were cooperative. For two nights, the mayor, city manager, and I put a curfew in place at dark. The only people allowed to drive were emergency and rescue personnel.

A day or so later, some business owners in the areas not affected by the flood couldn't understand why we had put the curfew in place. They were angry because we told their employees to stay home, but we wanted only essential people out there.

We were also concerned about the potential for looting, in addition to the general safety of people, until we could get everything back in order. Fortunately, there was no general looting. We had some isolated incidents of breaking and entering or burglaries to businesses but no widespread looting. We were pleased and relieved about that.

Initially, the danger of rising water was the major problem. The water department notified us of changes in the flood stages. The water was rising so rapidly that police and firefighters were afraid we might lose thirty-five to forty elderly persons who might not get out of their apartments in time. It speaks to the credit of citizens—neighbors who knew they had seniors living close by—who went out and literally rescued them. Firefighters, police, and other safety personnel also got involved and helped people wade out of their homes.

The other thing that touched me as this disaster unfolded was that my own employees and their families were affected by the flood, too. One sergeant took his family out of their house by boat, unloaded them, and went back to help his neighbors. His wife and children didn't know where he was. We were frantic to hear whether he was okay or not. Another couple of employees had to wade out of their homes through chest-deep water. One of our dispatchers lost everything, but he came to work and worked extensive hours saying, "I'll deal with my problems after we get the city back in order." That was tremendous dedication.

In spite of their personal losses, their first thought was to serve this community. They provided an important emergency and safety role for our citizens. Because of the many unselfish acts by city employees and citizens, the death toll was low. A characteristic of eastern North Carolinians is their giving nature. There was tremendous cooperation and caring.

When I finally had the opportunity to go into the flooded neighborhoods, I saw tremendous devastation. My home had two shingles blown off and a few limbs blown down. That was the worst that happened to me. I truly came to grips with the idea of survivor's guilt.

Hurricane Floyd touched the rich, middle income, and poor alike. It devastated all types of neighborhoods. When I sat back and looked at my

home, I couldn't understand why I didn't have to suffer to the degree that so many had. I believe we had twelve of our employees and their families whose lives were completely devastated by the flood. It weighed heavily on me when I went to their properties and saw what they had gone through.

There will be many permanent effects on this community as a result of the flood. More than four hundred uninhabitable homes had to be destroyed. The open spaces that remain will create other problems. Many businesses affected by the flood have not recovered. They tried to hang on but now are going out of business. Some neighborhoods literally looked bombed out. My mother moved down from Roanoke, Virginia, shortly after the hurricane. I took her to various neighborhoods. It is one thing to talk about it and another thing to see it on television, but seeing it for yourself makes the greatest impact. As we drove around, we could smell the stench of the mildew and fungus that was multiplying like crazy. The moldy, fungal odor was overwhelming. Mother was shocked by the amount of devastation.

We have not seen the last of the effects. There will be long-term economic implications for us that will probably change the character and geographical nature of the city. Whole neighborhoods no longer exist; homes have been torn down and hauled away. Streets have been abandoned, and the names of some streets won't exist anymore. That's pretty powerful, when you think about it.

The flood brought out the best in most people. People really supported one another.

On the negative side, as police chief, I saw a very, very small percentage who took advantage of the relief: individuals who went to many Red Cross stations in order to take advantage of the system—the system that was so giving because people were desperate to obtain the basics of life. But those who took advantage were the exceptions to the rule.

What amazed me were the acts of generosity. Without any hesitation, corporations that had food resources pulled their supplies out and gave and gave—not just in Rocky Mount, but also throughout Edgecombe and Nash Counties. Wherever there was need, they gave.

I was impressed by this community before the flood, but after the flood, I was overwhelmed by its strength and by its positive attitude. The response was incredible.

My respect and appreciation for disaster relief changed dramatically, too. I always had great admiration for the Red Cross and Salvation Army, but seeing those folks come out in mass, bring in their food-service trailers, set them up, and feed those in shelters was awesome.

I drove around to visit those shelters because I wanted to see how many people were still out there needing help. I'll never forget meeting volunteers from Washington State and Oregon that the American Red Cross had flown here to help with the relief effort. Being involved with a disaster of this magnitude brings complete appreciation for what disaster relief is all about. It's incredible!

We are recovering, but it is a slower process than everyone anticipated. Individuals who'd had similar experiences in their communities tried to prepare us for the fact that recovery would not occur overnight. On the other hand, I talked with a lot of people outside the area who've never been through anything like this, and they've said, "I understand you had a flood. Everything is back to normal now, isn't it?"

I've had to say, "No, it is not. It'll be years before we are back to normal."

I do see growth, however. I see a community that is strong and vibrant, and I am convinced by the spirit of the people who live in this area that we'll overcome this catastrophe. I still struggle with the realization that it will not be a quick fix.

In the long run, I see a lot of positives. New communities are coming that will never flood again. Reevaluating the floodplain means that there will be stronger restrictions about building in the floodplain. We will see a stronger city because of that evacuation.

In the beginning, we worked to get the National Guard in here to relieve our officers. When we requested help from the state, probation and parole officers came to assist us. Having extra personnel out there guarding the flooded neighborhoods allowed us to respond to regular calls for service.

The flood experience still affects what we do at work. We patrol devastated homes to prevent theft while the city buys them. Other homes are rehabbed and contain brand new air-conditioning units, so we don't want people sneaking into those neighborhoods to steal things just as people are getting back on their feet.

We learned from the flood experience. We're better prepared because we immediately put a committee together to decide where we'd fallen short. Food service and sleeping facilities were problem areas. We now have an order in place that, in the event of an emergency of this magnitude, we want personnel to arrive with clothing and toiletries and be prepared to stay for a minimum of three days. The Catholic church down the street has offered to let our folks stay there so they can just walk over to the police station and relieve one another. We have purchased fifty cots. If people are stranded here for hours or days, we will have sleeping accommodations available. We have a plan for twelve hours on and twelve hours off. We can now sleep and feed the officers here with the parks and recreation department taking on the responsibility for food services. Supervisors are in place who will be responsible for responding to calls for service. Those who supervise the fixed posts will make sure that officers get relief, food, and drinks. Today, if we faced a flood, we would do a much better job—not only taking care of the community, but also taking care of our personnel.

Bill Hogan came on board as the police chief of Rocky Mount in February of 1999. The flood came in September of that same year. He was born in Huntington, West Virginia, and started his police career there in 1974. After acquiring his bachelor's degree in law enforcement and a master's degree in political science with a concentration in public administration, he was selected as the chief of police in Newark, Delaware, where he spent eleven and a half years. Looking for a new challenge and a slightly larger organization, he and his wife relocated to Rocky Mount.



CREDIT: DICK BETHUNE

Safety Is Our Mission

AN INTERVIEW WITH JANICE COX | MARLENE PAYNE

The City of Rocky Mount Human Resources Department provides comprehensive services to the city's eight hundred fifty employees. We do everything from recruiting and hiring applicants to providing services for benefits, retirement, health insurance, training, safety, etc., for existing employees. Those of us in staff positions are put in unusual situations during emergencies. Wanting to be helpful, but having no particular service to provide to the community, we tried to fill in and do our best.

Our role during the storm was to provide services for our employees and their families, if we could. One of the things we learned during Hurricane Fran in 1996 was that employees had concerns about the safety of their own families because they knew that they would be on twenty-four-hour call and might be out working during the worst part of the storm.

We decided to provide a safe space for the families of employees on long duty and a location where they could keep in touch with the workforce. We set up the training room on the second floor of city hall as a space where employees' families could come and camp out during the night of the storm. For example, a young father had a son about five years old. The employee was a part of one of our electric crews, so it was obvious he would have to be working during the storm. He sent his son to city hall with a babysitter who normally takes care of the child.

We had movies, popcorn, and all kinds of snacks set up for them. We also had a number of mothers with small children. Providing this shelter

turned out to be a really good thing to do because a couple of the folks staying there had homes that were flooded during the night. This safe haven was certainly wonderful for employees, their families, and townspeople.

Since I was going to be on duty here in the emergency operations center (EOC), my husband decided he would bring our boys with their sleeping bags to city hall and camp out in my office. There were many large trees around our home, and this arrangement allowed me to work in the EOC that evening without feeling that they were in any danger. The boys considered it an adventure to be watching Atlanta Braves baseball in city hall.

The next morning, as daylight came and the storm was still raging, I stepped out of the elevator near the back door of city hall as a couple of our building inspectors walked in with two elderly couples. The people, who appeared to be in their late seventies or early eighties, were wrapped in blankets and were wearing sweatpants and tee shirts with the fire-department logo on them. They were wet and frightened. I recognized both of the men. One was a retired Rocky Mount police officer; the other was a former chairman of the city's planning board. All of them looked extremely frightened and traumatized.

The two employees said, "We didn't know where else to take these folks, so we brought them here." I introduced myself and took them upstairs to get some hot coffee.

We had a phone in the training room, so the victims were able to find out where their own children were. Both of these couples had been rescued from the flood. One couple had been stranded in a tree in their yard for hours, trying not to drown. The wife had previously had two knee replacements and could not climb the tree, so her husband had literally pushed her up in the tree so she would not be swept away. They sat there for several hours until fire fighters rescued them.

The EOC was a room with fifteen or sixteen telephones. People sitting around tables were answering calls, and weather reports were coming in. It was action central. It was a good place to be for short periods of time because one had access to the latest information.

City employees exceeded my expectations. I was impressed and gratified by their willingness to do anything they deemed necessary. They

were creative and resourceful. Fire-department employees performed water rescues that none of them had been trained for. They were willing to do anything and did. I'm not surprised—we have those kinds of employees, but I was very gratified that they rose to the occasion.

The community responded beautifully, too. I don't think we could have asked for any more from the volunteers who came forward to assist our employees. The number of citizens who recognized what our employees were doing and took the time to thank and praise them was also impressive.

Because our eleven- and sixteen-year-old sons were at city hall, my husband and I had a good opportunity to involve them in the events. Though they didn't have a grasp of the scale of the disaster, they sensed that something big was happening and just moved with the flow during the critical part of the storm, something they'll never forget.

Late the next afternoon [September 16, 1999] it had stopped raining. My husband tried to take the boys home. It took them two hours to make a fifteen-minute trip. I was not able to get home until the next day because there was more flooding later, and the route they'd taken was blocked. That night, after the weather had cleared, they went out into the field in back of our house and were able to lie on the ground, camp out, watch satellites and shooting stars, and see things that they would not have been able to see if the power had been on. In the days that followed, we took them to the Red Cross relief centers, where they helped pack boxes of food and sort clothes. As young as they were, they were able to help and to observe others pitching in, too.

The children pay particular attention and ask lots of questions now when there are reports of hurricanes on TV. I'm sure Floyd is in the back of their minds. They did not face any danger as some children had, and we were very fortunate that our own home was not damaged.

About sixty employees' homes were either completely destroyed or significantly damaged. After the EOC operation ended, we did our best to stay in touch with those employees and to meet some of their immediate needs for clothing and housing. We set up a supply closet across the hall in the human relations department. Director of Human Relations Loretta Braswell

and I coordinated that effort, trying to make contact with our employees to determine their needs and to get the word out to the rest of our workforce. It was amazing how many people called and said, "Your employees did such a good job for our community; what can we do to help them?"

Even as generous as people were, we still didn't have nearly enough money to meet the needs of those employees, so we had to devise a system for distributing the funds we did have. That was a challenging task in itself.

Unfortunately, a number of businesses closed. Many people were displaced and looking for employment. There were people who came in and said, "We know that there are extra clean-up, maintenance, and debris-removal tasks. Can we help with that?" We made every effort to be sensitive to their needs as we assisted them.

Although some were looking for paid employment, others simply wanted to volunteer. Our own workforce, as I said, had people who needed time away to clean up damaged homes or to relocate. We really tried to work with people to give them all the time they needed to do that.

One particular flood memory relates to damage my staff suffered. At the crack of dawn the morning after the flood, in came my secretary and her husband. She was carrying a little bag of makeup and toiletries that you might take on a trip. She said, "The water was coming up to our doors, and they told us we needed to leave. We came down to city hall. What else could we do?" She and her husband relieved folks who'd been working all night. As it turned out, they had left their home just as the water was coming up to their door and had no idea that, by the afternoon, the water was well above their kitchen window. I got that information and went with our public-works director to within several hundred yards of their home. I knew that I would need to tell them what I had seen when I got back to city hall. It's not the kind of news you want to deliver to someone. I didn't have the heart to tell Linda, so I told her husband.

In the EOC, we have access to all kinds of information: police officers coming in from the street to report, bringing in communications and radio cell phones. Employees describe things that one just can't visualize. The EOC in city hall is like a fortress, and one can't hear the wind or imagine how it looks out there. I recall that one of our inspectors had gone up in



Inside Walker Ross Printing Company on Atlantic Avenue.

CREDIT: MARTHA DANIEL

a military helicopter and had brought in video footage of the wastewater treatment plant and other facilities. Complete silence replaced the hubbub of the EOC. We sat there with our mouths hanging open. We knew what we were looking at but couldn't believe it. We could see the tops of roofs peeping out of the water. Then there was a long, group gasp.

I had been in city hall going on thirty-six hours and was about to jump out of my skin. I knew that I didn't need to be out driving around and adding to the traffic problem, so I asked one of my peers who had a legitimate reason to be out checking on operations to let me tag along the next time he went out. I was flabbergasted by what I saw. It's hard today, even though I saw it, to remember and visualize the devastation. As strong as the memory is, it seems unreal.

Despite the sheer destruction that occurred, the possessions and heirlooms that people can never recover, the displaced families, the lost jobs, and the economic impact, there are silver linings. Opportunities arose for people to pitch in and to feel like they were offering whatever assistance they could. I think it unified the community, and perhaps, we can make the positive aspects last by reminding each other of what we accomplished together.

We learned how to handle emergencies better. We learned a lot of things. As I said, our employees were not trained to perform water rescues. Nobody ever imagined flooding. We had been through what we considered a disastrous hurricane just three years earlier, when Fran left heavy wind damage, trees down, and roof damage. But Floyd was quite different. Now

the city owns some boats and has access to other boats if we need them. The human resources department learned how valuable it is to have a space where employees can send their families. That was one less thing for them to worry about, so they could concentrate on doing their jobs.

We learned a lot as an organization about how our emergency operations function. The employees in public safety and the operational areas can tell about the specifics on that. We have prepared for several storms that didn't materialize. We sometimes feel that preparation is useless, but when a real disaster like this hits, we know why we do it.

Janice Cox, human resources director for sixteen years, had worked with the City of Rocky Mount for about twenty-one years at the time of this interview. She is a native of Rocky Mount.

The Telephone, FEMA, and I

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANN WALL | MARLENE PAYNE

I have experienced two floods. Hurricane Fran's flooding was a very good preparation for what Floyd had in store. With Hurricane Fran, the city got about three million dollars in aid from FEMA. After Floyd, we received twenty-one million dollars, a very large chunk of public-assistance dollars.

Federal public-assistance funds can be used to replace schools and public utilities in cities and counties. Our chunk was probably one of the largest in the state because we lost the Children's Museum, the Arts Center, and the water department substations. The twenty-one million dollars is being used to replace all the facilities we lost and to pay for the additional employee time associated with the flood recovery. Managing that public-assistance fund is a large part of what I do now, even two years after the flood.

During the flood, I worked at the telephone center with Craig Devitt, the financial director. As part of the emergency plan, Craig's job was to provide support services. One of those services was a telephone bank for non-emergency calls. Emergency calls went to 911.

The night of the flood, my son and I got to city hall about 8:30 P.M. During the first two hours, there wasn't a lot going on, so we were eating chocolate and telling stories. As the night wore on, the call load and tension increased. About midnight, we realized something unusual was going on because calls came in from people who didn't know what to do or where to go. Soon, all the shelters were full. We also began getting messages that

people needed help getting out of their homes, which meant we had to run messages back and forth between the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and the 911 center. Calls also started coming in from public housing properties that had begun flooding. We were frustrated because we didn't have additional shelters to send people to, so we kept putting out calls for people to open up more shelters.

We also received a lot of calls from people who were trying to figure out what was going on. One of the calls I remember was from a man who lived in Country Club Cove apartments, located on Country Club Drive. Because the entrance to that complex always floods, his neighbors had told him to move his car to the Moose Lodge parking lot, closer to Stony Creek. He wanted to find out if his car was okay. I told him that we had flooding everywhere and that I doubted his car was safe that close to Stony Creek.

He said, "I'm going to go check on it."

"Don't go over there now. You'll be going closer to the creek. Stay in your apartment," I warned.

He told me that he had just bought the car and had no insurance on it. I remember thinking how awful it must be to know that you are losing your car and not to be able to do a thing about it. Unfortunately, because his entire apartment complex eventually flooded, he probably lost a lot more than just his car before the flood was over.

Another call came from an elderly lady. Her neighbors had left their dog out back. Their yard was flooding, and the dog was drowning. She wanted someone to come and let the dog out. Unfortunately, her call came while we were rescuing people out of homes and trees. We couldn't send a police officer over to rescue the dog. She pleaded, "Please come. It's a terrible sound. The dog's crying."

All I could say was, "We're so sorry. We can't do anything right now." As more and more of these calls came in, we just looked around at each other. This was worse than anybody thought it could be.

I worked a succession of shifts after that. The calls were different every time I went in. People called, frantic because they couldn't find their relatives and wanted to know if we could help them or if we could tell them where to call to get help. A lady called to say, "I need baby formula. I can't



Premier Ford business on Highway 301 South.

CREDIT: DICK BETHUNE

find baby formula. Can you tell me where to find some?" All the stores were closed because there was no power. Others, anxious to call FEMA, wanted to know the number. We had to tell them that FEMA was not ready to take calls yet; they would need to wait a few hours until FEMA was geared up to help them. We walked people through a lot of those kinds of issues.

Those first five hours were pretty scary. I was frightened, not by the storm or lightning or thunder, but by imagining what was out there and worrying about all the people in harm's way.

When daylight arrived Thursday morning, we began to realize our worst fears. I saw Linda Bobbitt, a city employee, and her husband who were just coming in. I asked them how they were doing. He said, "We've lost everything: our house, our cars, everything."

I said, "Are you telling me everything is gone?" I couldn't take in what he was saying.

"We've lost our children's pictures, mementos, everything. Our neighbor called us during the night to ask us when we were going to leave because he could see that the water was coming into our house. It came so fast that we weren't able to save anything."

For several shifts in the EOC, I worked beside Richard Oxidine, who lived in Riverside Apartments. I didn't find out until several days later

that he had also lost everything. Over the next couple of days, I kept running into people who had lost everything, yet, like Linda Bobbitt and Richard Oxidine, they continued to work. I don't know if I could have kept working. Perhaps work was their salvation; they could forget for a while that everything was gone.

I'd gone to work on Wednesday. Thursday morning, I contacted my neighbor to check on my house because I wouldn't be able to go home to check on things until Friday or Saturday. I remember as I drove up, a neighbor ran over to ask why she couldn't flush her toilet. I explained, "We don't have any water pressure. The main water plant on Sunset Avenue has six feet of water in it and is gone!"

"From what?" she asked.

"From the Tar River. The city is flooded. The Children's Museum, the Arts Center, and the Playhouse are gone. People have lost their homes—everything they have. Much of the city is under water." She looked at me like I was speaking in a foreign tongue.

Her disbelief was understandable. If you looked around our neighborhood, you would have thought we'd had a summer storm—branches down but no flooding. Without power, people couldn't listen to the radio or watch television, so they didn't know what had happened in other areas and had no idea about the devastation all around them. Islands of normalcy were isolated from the reality of what was happening.

The city contacted Nash County to request that FEMA set up an office in Rocky Mount. By Saturday, we had located space for both FEMA and the Red Cross. By Monday, with phone lines and power restored, they opened their doors to the long line of people waiting to get help.

People were frantic. They had no housing, clothing, or money because the flood had happened so fast. Everything they had was gone, except what they had been able to take with them. Most people hadn't had the opportunity to watch the water rise and move stuff to safety.

Those first two weeks were pretty bad on everyone, but I think, overall, the community did really well. Once they realized what had happened, people volunteered to help prepare and serve meals. People took food and water everywhere. It was wonderful to see.

The physical damage is still pretty overwhelming. I concentrate on the physical damage because that's what I've dealt with, and that's easier for me to handle than the emotional stuff. Rocky Mount will never be the same. We can move on and can improve, but I'm not sure people will ever get over the emotional part.

I don't consider myself a victim of the flood, but I will always remember it. Every hurricane season will remind me of what happened—and what could happen again.

Working with FEMA meant specializing in details. Public assistance is reimbursement. The city doesn't get money back until we've already spent it. If we can show FEMA a piece of paper with a number on it, they're okay. You can't just say, "Trust us; we spent the money" because trust is not a word that FEMA understands. After a disaster, they send in public-assistance coordinators who tell us how to complete forms and who go out and assess the damage. The first phase is the assessment period. We couldn't just say that the Children's Museum was gone, that it was damaged beyond repair. We had to show them in detail how that occurred. The assessment period is followed by the project-worksheet phase.

The project officers worked with us to fill out a variety of FEMA project-worksheet forms. We ended up with between fifty and one hundred project worksheets that represented everything from the time firefighters spent rescuing people to the replacement of the Children's Museum. It took us six to eight months, working every day, to complete the project-worksheet phase, which shows FEMA what was damaged and how much we thought it cost. We spent hours detailing the damage: the cost of mucking out a room, sanitizing it, repainting it, and establishing the number of square feet in it.

We also had to make inventory lists for every single splinter that was carried out of a flooded building. Each item was recorded and priced. We had to account for every paper clip that had been lost to get money back from FEMA. We had to identify each file cabinet full of office supplies that had been lost and what was in it. It was easier to do for some things than for others. We had one man who spent probably six weeks just writing up the water plant. When we'd lost an entire building, recreating the contents was very, very difficult—especially when half the records had washed down the river.

We had to determine, almost item by item, what was eligible for reimbursement and what wasn't. For example, FEMA doesn't pay for live animals that die. As devastating as the loss of the animals in the Children's Museum was for those of us who used to go there, the animals were not items eligible for reimbursement. Nor does FEMA pay for landscaping, which meant that there was no money to remove or replace the fallen trees downtown. They would not pay for the replacement of a work of art because it was a one-of-a-kind item. They would, however, pay for the restoration of a work of art. All the items in the Children's Museum were meant to be picked up, manipulated, and played with and were intended to eventually be replaced.

We ultimately got 2.4 million dollars for the contents of the Children's Museum. If our Children's Museum had contained works of art, that would have been a far more difficult argument, unless we'd had American Indian art or other art with significant historical value.

During the past two years, we've learned an amazing amount about what FEMA does, how they do it, why they do it, and what, if any, their logic is. They were comfortable replacing a copy machine that might have the same value as a piece of art because the copier was an expendable item. We could show them an invoice to prove how much it cost to replace, but we couldn't do that with a piece of art. We were really glad we had carried the art upstairs. We also learned from FEMA about insurance and flood insurance, floodplains, flood zones, flood ways, and all that kind of stuff. Thank God for the Internet because FEMA put all their criteria on the Internet, and I could go there to access all of the policies.

Between Fran and Floyd, there was a drastic improvement in FEMA's web-site information. It was much more user-friendly. We could argue with them about our eligibility and still maintain really good relationships with them.

Our FEMA work still isn't complete two years later. We have some projects done, some projects ready to be closed out, and some projects that are nowhere near finished. By the end of this summer [2001], we should be nearing completion of the paperwork.

The water substations should be finished by the end of the summer, but we still have the Children's Museum, the Arts Center, and the Playhouse to go. It took sixteen months to just get the Children's Museum project worksheet through the process for 2.4 million dollars. Now we have to demonstrate to them how we're going to spend the money. It's just a drawn-out, documented process because we need to have letters showing that we monitored the contractors and everything they did and what we did to check on them. I tell people to take pictures and to have as many pictures in a file as possible because there is no better way to show what happened.

Though there's really no time limit on getting the paperwork done, there is a time limit on completing the projects. There's a little work left to do on some substations at the dam. We had to get extensions on probably twenty or twenty-five projects, but we'll have to push the limits to replace the Children's Museum, the Arts Center, and the Playhouse. Those three facilities will be housed in the new Imperial Center, located at the site of the former Imperial Warehouse and the former library.

The public swimming pools were another issue. The FEMA people wanted to give us only forty thousand dollars, based on the original project worksheets to simply clean out the pool. Replacing the structures ran the cost up to nine hundred thousand dollars. The state was really behind us. We were pleased when we got that approved because it meant that we could replace the pools.

Some flood memories particularly stand out. The lady calling about the drowning dog has been hard to forget. I still have pains about that one. I also remember going to see the Children's Museum for the first time after the flood. Water was still inside, and the banner "Children at Play" was hanging outside the building and floating in the water.

About a week after the flood, we went out to lunch with the city manager. We drove through Riverside and North Taylor Street, came down Lafayette Circle, went onto Leggett Road, and then to Melton Drive. We watched people hauling the entire contents of their homes out to the street: china closets that had probably been in their family for seventy-five years, furniture, curtains, clothes, dishes, and pictures. There were mountains of

stuff, a wall along both sides of the street. We were struck anew by what a hideous, devastating, awful thing had happened to us.

Ann Wall moved from Virginia to Rocky Mount in October 1995 to be budget manager for the City of Rocky Mount. She compiles, analyzes and monitors the city's budget, implements performance measures, and works on special projects. After the flood, Ann was responsible for securing grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.



Meeting the Needs of the City

AN INTERVIEW WITH FRED TURNAGE, STEVE RAPER,
CHARLES PENNY, AND PETE VARNEY | MARLENE PAYNE

City Manager Raper: We instituted a formal emergency operations center (EOC) in 1995. Before that, the city had an emergency operations plan for disaster response that divided responsibility for public services into the various departmental functions: The fire department and police department would be responsible for fire prevention, life safety, and rescue operations. The electric and gas departments would handle problems with outages or disruptions in services. The parks and recreation department would be responsible for manning shelters and providing food and water to department personnel out in the field. The engineering and public-works department would handle streets, barricades, and traffic signals. Everything that might go wrong with the public infrastructure was addressed in this coordinated plan.

We felt, however, that we could improve our organization by having all calls come into and directions go out from one centralized area. We developed an EOC and located it in the police department in 1995.

The night of Hurricane Floyd, we activated the EOC late on the evening of September 15. In previous hurricanes, the EOC had been open for only two or three days. With Hurricane Floyd, we manned all operations from there for about a week.

Assistant Manager Penny: I had the first watch in the EOC about 9:00 P.M. that evening. We were just monitoring things, waiting for the hurricane to



come. It continued to rain and rain. Five people answered telephone calls at our phone bank so that we wouldn't overburden the telecommunication center and the police and fire departments.

We weren't seeing wind damage yet because the storm hadn't hit at that point, but it kept raining, and the water kept rising in every low area.

About 11:00 P.M., as we monitored the river levels, one of the monitoring stations broke. The river was rising pretty rapidly. People were having trouble getting into the operations center because of high water. We sent our chief building inspector to pick up our employees, but his car flooded out. By 3:00 A.M., we heard from the police department that we had lost about four police cars sent to help people. The cars had been trapped by water rising in front of and behind them.

A call came in requesting that a dump truck be sent to push through the water to rescue people. Then the fire department requested small boats to get into flooding areas to rescue people from their homes. That was a sign of things to come, but at that point, we didn't realize how bad it was. We used canoes and flat-bottomed boats. Eventually, the water was moving too swiftly for the flat-bottom boats. We needed boats with engines.

Later, the fire chief said, "The water is rising so rapidly that I'm concerned that the fire trucks out on rescue missions will be damaged



Sunset Avenue across the street from the Hardee's next to Modern Products.

CREDIT: DICK BETHUNE

by water in their transmissions.” He quickly realized, however, that if the trucks and men didn’t go out, people would be trapped in their homes.

Sometime between 1:00 and 2:00 A.M., we looked at the water level again. It was well beyond Hurricane Fran’s twenty-six feet. It was beyond thirty-one feet and still rising.

About 3:00 A.M., I called the city manager and said, “You’d better come in now because there’s water everywhere.”

Even when Steve Raper arrived at 5:00 A.M., I still didn’t realize how bad it had gotten outside. When Steve arrived, he sent me to get some sleep as conditions kept getting worse.

City Manager Raper: Luckily, in preparing for a hurricane or an emergency, we spend a lot of time in advance making sure that crews are on-call and that equipment is gassed up and prepared. All of our trucks were fully loaded and fueled. We also had emergency provisions in various operations.

When I got the call from Charles, I had trouble getting to the EOC. I live only eight blocks from city hall in a pretty high neighborhood, but at 5:00 A.M., I had to go four to six blocks out of my way just to reach the EOC. Water was well over the curb in many areas.

Assistant Manager Varney: I left the house about 6:00 A.M. to be on duty by 7:00 A.M. I live on Avondale Court, near Rocky Mount Academy, and usually come in by Old Mill Road down Bethlehem Road, and in on Hammond Street. I decided not to use that way because of a low point on Hammond Street that floods when we get heavy rains. I decided to use Sunset Avenue instead because I knew that it was fairly high ground with good drainage. I came out on Sunset Avenue at the corner of Crescent Drive and was surprised to find the whole area flooded. I backed up to go back through Englewood but ended up driving through some flooded areas to make it to city hall about 6:30 A.M. What would usually be a five-minute trip had taken me thirty minutes.

I went directly to the EOC, where phones were ringing, and started answering calls. People who lived near the Tar River called, saying, “Water’s coming up. It’s in the yard”, or “It’s in my garage. How much higher will it get?”

We advised them to move their furniture and other things out of the way and that it was likely the water was going to get higher. We told them that if the water was in their house already, they might want to make arrangements to go to higher ground.

Meanwhile, the fire department was rescuing people any way they could, especially the elderly residents in the Riverside area. They rescued people and took them to higher ground on Thomas Street. I got involved in deciding what to do with these people, where to take them, and how to get them there. We called out a couple of transit busses and vans and sent them to Thomas Street to take the victims to the R.M. Wilson gym and Parker Junior High.

We had arranged for the parks and recreation staff to open those facilities as shelters and to equip them with food, blankets, and cots in order to have a place to put people for an unknown length of time. There were many more victims than we'd expected, and the big unknown was how many more there would be. The only way we knew to handle the emergency was to deal with each situation as it arose.

City Manager Raper: We based a lot of our actions on what had happened previously. In prior hurricanes and rain-producing floods, we'd always had a few homes that were subject to flooding, but those folks knew to leave. We really didn't need shelters for them. Our experience with shelters in the past had occurred during major ice storms or power outages, when people were without power for two or three days, or when we took care of evacuees from the coast seeking short-term shelter from a possible hurricane. We had never experienced anything of this magnitude involving our own people.

Initially, we had isolated events, then it became less isolated, and then it became whole neighborhoods: Riverside, Maple Creek, and the Tar River. As reports continued to pour in, the magnitude of the situation became apparent.

This was not a normal occurrence; this was something incomprehensible and extraordinary. Each of us took areas in which we felt we were experienced and knowledgeable, whether it was rescue operations, shelter provisions, or overall command issues.

Mayor Turnage: During this time, I was at home. Steve, Pete, and Charles were keeping me informed by telephone almost hourly about how things were going. Thursday morning, I went throughout the city with a police officer to view what had occurred, and later that day, I toured the city and surrounding areas by National Guard helicopter. It was a sober awakening to see the magnitude of the flooding. None of us could have known what to expect. How big a monster we were dealing with just unfolded as time went on.

Though I was not assigned any particular time, I was in and out of the EOC several times that day, trying to do what I could to encourage people, to thank the staff for what they were doing, and to try to keep a finger on the pulse of the various parts of the city. I received a number of telephone calls at home and did what I could to get people answers.

City Manager Raper: I was immensely proud of the way our employees responded with so much initiative. People in the field responded to the emergency by making critical decisions. Many of our employees exposed themselves to great hazards.

There are hundreds of stories to tell. We had flooding of major electrical substations, which created the threat of an explosion. In order to get the power back on, the electric utility crew had to disconnect a substation manually from the line. This operation became dangerous when performed from a boat out on the raging river.

Employees rescued people using any means available. They came in to answer phones for hours and stayed for days to help coordinate our efforts. It was unbelievable how they responded. We didn't have to ask them; they just said, "Here's what needs to be done," or they found something to do and jumped in.

I think we certainly could have prepared better, had we known what we were facing early on, but nothing like this had ever happened during our lifetimes. We were properly prepared for the typical hurricane that hits Rocky Mount. We, like most people in our area, expected wind damage, falling trees, some rain, and minor flooding but, mostly, electrical outages.

We learned a lot about where flooding can happen in our community and how we can reach people better. We have spent the last two years redrawing emergency-operations plans in terms of communication.

We had some trouble with emergency communication with the public because the power was out, the local cable television station was under water, radio stations were flooded out, and radio transmission was out. People outside the community, area, and state knew more about what was happening in Rocky Mount than the people in Rocky Mount. My dad, who lives near Nashville, Tennessee, was watching us on the news, but we didn't know what was going on.

I was proud of our community. Neighbor helped neighbor. A lot of barriers were crossed. I thought we responded well. The hurricane and flood devastated roughly a quarter of the city, about eight square miles, while some areas of the city were relatively untouched, except for a few twigs in the yard from wind.

Of course, there were a few people calling to ask, "Why hasn't my trash been picked up? Will I get my newspaper?" At first, we had a negative reaction to such calls. It was frustrating to receive a complaint, but we realized that people didn't know what was going on in the rest of the city. Once they heard about the flooding and how bad it was, they became more sensitive to the issues.

Mayor Turnage: The cooperation among people may be just temporary, but I think it will forever be a part of the memory of those of us who went through it.

In the weeks just after the storm, there were mornings when I frankly didn't want to get out of bed. There were so many people hurting and so much to be done that it seemed like an impossible task. But seeing people's responses to one another, the acts of heroism, and so many people helping others kept us going. Race, religion, and neighborhood didn't seem to matter. In just twenty-four hours, we made great progress regarding differences we'd tried to overcome for twenty-five years. We've all heard the saying, "The Lord works in mysterious ways." I think this was an example of it.

We might like to forget Hurricane Floyd, but I think there are some good lessons to be learned from it, and I see evidence that we are learning. I get a little frustrated with people, particularly those outside of our area, who say, "I guess everything's back to normal in Rocky Mount."

"No," I say, "It's not back to normal. It won't be back to normal for a long time." I might say, somewhat sarcastically, that I'm not sure that I will live long enough to see total recovery, and I plan to be around a while. I think we have made an amazing recovery so far, but there is still a tremendous amount to be done. A lot of people are still hurting.

Our buyout program has been done so well that I would match it against any in the country. The recovery that some of our businesses have made is wonderful. Many companies demonstrated real compassion by paying their employees when they were out of work and by creating funds to help replace furniture. These are wonderful things that the public never knew. It was also heartwarming to see the way churches opened their doors.

I am proud of what we have done, but we still have a whole lot to do. People from other areas are still coming here to help us, and we appreciate that. I don't think that the average citizen really understands the magnitude and the long-term effects of this disaster.

We have learned many lessons, and I hope that some of them are about relationships. I am very proud of our city workers. They've always responded well in crises. I have always admired the guys who go up a light pole with lightning all around. There is no way I would be up there. I knew that they had done well in the past, but when you face a unique, once-in-a-lifetime (hopefully) situation, you really don't know how people will respond. I think we saw the best of our city forces. We saw the best of our citizens.

If there is a lesson we can learn, I hope it's what we can do when we care about each other and when we work together. Using the storm, maybe the good Lord has helped us get over some barriers and differences that we had not been able to overcome in the past.

City Manager Raper: We had about fifty employees whose homes were either severely damaged or completely destroyed. That night, the day after, and for the many days that followed, those employees—linemen, water-and-sewer folks, and street-maintenance folks—were here working and helping other people. Some of those workers had lost everything they had.

Personally, I had a little tree fall through my roof, which caused minor damage to my house. I know how much effort it took to get things resolved and to tend to my family. I can't imagine what it was like for them, having

lost their homes and having their families in a shelter or living at a friend's or an in-law's house.

Mayor Turnage: "Build Back Better." For example, we did not have adequate, affordable housing throughout the city, and now we've got four or five new subdivisions and a couple of new apartment complexes. A local church has undertaken a large housing project. This construction is a first. Some issues that we faced were here before and have been magnified by the flood. But the flood has also forced us to begin looking for solutions.

I am concerned, however, about the long-term economic impact. A number of major employers were impacted. Some businesses will not be back, at least not in their previous locations. This will have a long-term effect on our area. We are hoping our buyout program, with its good incentives, will encourage them to rebuild in this area. We've got to find a way to overcome that, and I think we're making progress.

City Manager Raper: The flood has really changed the face of Rocky Mount. Physically, there will be areas of open space and greenways along the rivers and streams where buildings once stood. Rebuilding is occurring but in different locations. Many communities outside of Rocky Mount were flooded. Their people sought shelter in Rocky Mount and have stayed. On the other hand, people who were living here, especially the elderly at Riverside Apartments, have left. So we have had a mass immigration and emigration, too. The numbers and the makeup of our population have changed.

The city's infrastructure is another concern. We lost twenty million dollars of infrastructure: the Arts Center, the Children's Museum, the Playhouse, substations, a water plant, and parks. Fortunately, we're going to be reimbursed through insurance and FEMA for most of it. I want to commend FEMA for its relationship with the city and for getting our reimbursements made. They've been first-class folks.

Assistant Manager Varney: The decision was made fairly quickly by the city council to replace the Arts Center, the Children's Museum and the Playhouse—but to rebuild them in a different location, a location that is not subject to flooding. The city sees this as an opportunity to "Build Back Better." The phrase means that we hope to build back in a

way that will provide for the needs of our population for years to come. We had outgrown the Art Center facility many years ago, but we had not considered replacing it. The flood provided us with the impetus to build a new one that will better meet our needs. We have two water-treatment plants, one of which sits beside the Tar River. We lost it during the flood, and in the rebuilding process, we have tried to put as much as we can on the second floor so that if this ever happens again, the water plant will not be adversely affected.

We are also trying to provide supplemental power to our pump stations and lift stations. In addition, we are raising the building deck systems around our pump stations in order to get the alternative power supplies up in the air. If we should flood again, we'd at least have power at each of the pumps and could pump water and wastewater.

Assistant Manager Penny: Hazard mitigation has really gone well for a city that didn't know anything about the program before Floyd. Hazard mitigation seeks not only to reduce the potential hazard in the future, but also to help people recover and get their lives back together. People from the fire, planning, and inspections departments functioned as a team to expedite buyouts. I think we hired three people, a hazard-mitigation coordinator, a secretary, and a finance person to deal with the paperwork. We also hired a firm in Atlanta, Georgia, that helped us move our acquisition of properties along.

In fact, we had acquired more than fifty percent of the properties in the first grant, which had three hundred seventy-four properties listed. That's a total of two hundred forty-four properties that have been purchased so far.

Most people seem to feel they are being compensated fairly, and if they don't, all they have to do is to get a second appraisal. I think we've only gotten one person who requested a third appraisal to average out what we should pay someone for his or her property.

We are also helping tenants who didn't own homes. Ten tenants are now property owners as a result of relocation benefits, and we hope that number will increase as new subdivisions become available. We have two subdivisions on the Edgewcombe side of town: one contains one hundred

forty lots; the other contains an additional two hundred fifty lots. We have one on the Nash County side with an additional seventy-six lots. We've got a lot of opportunities for good housing as a result of money from the state.

City Manager Raper: When the extent of damage to people's lives and their property became apparent, the city council made helping people recover its top priority. I asked Charles Penny to give up his other responsibilities and to devote full time to head up this effort.

When people asked, "What did your city do for you?" I wanted our citizens to be able to say, "They came quickly, they helped, and we're better off with what they've done. I'm proud to be from Rocky Mount." I think we've accomplished that.

The city council has been extremely supportive. It has provided everything we've asked for and has taken the lead in going to the public and saying, "This is how we are going to do it, and we're going to do it correctly." I am proud of our effort, and I think most citizens, particularly those getting checks, feel good about living here.

Mayor Turnage: I think that's exactly right, and it is such an important part of recovery. Several of us went to Grand Forks, North Dakota, to visit a



Sunset Avenue. The sign in the window reflects the positive outlook of the community.

CREDIT: MARTHA DANIEL

community that had been through something similar. It was very helpful to us to see what had happened there and to appreciate the magnitude of the recovery process. We needed to make certain that we had successes along the way to recovery. The buyout program meant completing a complex process and really brought good feelings to the people involved because they saw things happen. They were able to move on with their lives.

Fortunately, the train-station project continued to move along. The success of that project lifted people's spirits and made them feel that there was still a future out there. In a few months, a new library will open. I don't know how long we can continue having nice things like that happen.

There are still a couple of flood casualties that bother me. The Tarrytown Mall site is a terrible reminder. Many people ride by there every day. It's depressing to those of us who live here, and it is not impressive to people riding through our town. The Riverside area is not as visible to the general public, but if you ride through there, you get an empty, sad feeling. Those are not the only locations. There are spots all over the city, but those two are stark, visual reminders.

I think the success of the buyout, the city's efforts to keep things moving, and people themselves who are coming back are certainly positive and encouraging. We've had a couple of blows economically, but at the same time, we've had some good news, particularly with small businesses. I've been amazed at the way some of them have recovered. If we can keep moving forward, keep people's spirits up, and keep ours up as well, we'll be okay.

These fellows live with the recovery every day. It can be overwhelming and draining, but a little success helps a lot. If we can keep that happening in our community, we'll come back better than we were.

Fred Turnage was born and raised in Rocky Mount. After attending law school, he became involved with city government in 1971 when he was elected as a city council member. He became mayor in 1973 and continues to serve in that capacity, representing the city at official functions, and performing an array of other duties assigned by the city manager and two assistant managers.

After managing three other cities, Steve Raper has been city manager in Rocky Mount since January 1995.

Pete Varney is a native of New Hampshire and has been an employee of the City of Rocky Mount since September 1971. His areas of responsibility are water resources and their oversight, human relations, and transit operations.

Charles Penny, Assistant City Manager, came to Rocky Mount in March 1994 as director of planning and development and became an assistant city manager in January 1995. He has been in local government for twenty years. His areas of responsibility are the police and fire departments, public works, planning and development, and human resources.

Disaster at the Arts Center

AN INTERVIEW WITH LOUISE JANELLE | MARLENE PAYNE

The Arts Center had been flooded several times before 1999. Once we had five or six inches of water, and twice the water was knee high. That Wednesday in September, I felt we were in for something more.

I live in Nashville, so it takes me only ten minutes to drive to work each day. Having been through other hurricanes, I thought that I knew what was going to happen, so I had my battery-operated radio, had taken precautionary measures at home, and had put some extra clothing, a blanket, and a pillow in my car. Since I didn't have immediate family in town, I knew that I could easily do whatever was needed at the Arts Center. I was ready to go.

I was up most of the night. When I finally felt it was safe to step outside to look around, I was surprised at the calm around my home. There didn't seem to be any damage. I was a little disturbed that the radio was out and that there was no cable TV. Later, I got a phone call from Jerry Jackson, my boss at the Arts Center, who said, "Louise, we're ruined. We're devastated. There's water in the Tank [the old water tank that housed the theater]. It's up high and still coming in. The building is destroyed."

I couldn't imagine what he was describing because I'd seen so little wind damage outside but told him I'd be there in ten minutes.

"You don't understand. You can't come in! There's no way to get here," said Jerry.

"Look, Jerry, I'll be there in a while. I'll see you," I said and hung up.

I headed to work by my normal route, but downed trees made it impossible to go that way. As I turned around in a parking lot, a man who was doing the same thing told me that I wouldn't be able to get to Rocky Mount that way. He said I wouldn't be able to get there by Spring Hope either because highways all over were closed by downed trees. Still not understanding that more than downed trees was involved, I decided to try.

I got on U.S. Highway 64 and headed east. When I got to the overpass at Stony Creek, I almost drove off the road when I looked down and saw water where it shouldn't be. When I got to the U.S. Highway 301 overpass and looked down at the Tarrytown Mall area, I was shocked to see a lake. That's when I knew that I had to do everything I could to get down to city hall.

I must have been one of the last cars to get over the Peachtree Street Bridge before it closed. I still did not quite understand what I was seeing.

Things looked pretty calm in the city-hall parking lot. I went directly to the parks and recreation department and was met by Marlene Payne and Jerry Jackson. That's when I started to get the big picture and to understand the magnitude of this thing.

When we got to the emergency operations center (EOC), Marlene asked me if I would be willing to go to the R.M. Wilson gym, which had been set up as a shelter facility specifically to take in residents from the Riverside Apartments whose homes were totally inundated. My initial job was to try to calm people down, reassure them, and let them know that the city was aware of their plight and was working actively to deal with the situation.

When I walked in, I don't think anybody could have been prepared for what was in that room. There were probably fifty to seventy-five people scattered around the room. People were still coming in, dripping wet. Some were in shock. Others couldn't talk yet. Still others wanted to talk and talk to me. It was good that they could get it out. That's part of healing.

The first thing that struck me after the initial shock was how orderly everybody was, even in the midst of the chaos. It was amazing to see how people in their situation could be so concerned and so caring about others around them.

These people had all been plucked from the water. Water in many of their homes was up to the ceiling. Some had been trapped and couldn't get



Harbor West Condos on the Tar River near the bridge across from Hammond Street and the Arts Center.

CREDIT: SUZANNE DOWNS

out without assistance. Dangerous things were floating around—animals, snakes, all sorts of things. That would have been enough to deal with, but the water was raging and dangerous in itself. Anyone who tried to move around could easily be swept away. Even cars were being swept away.

I saw everyone from babies to very young children to the very elderly in the shelter. One woman had to be carried out of her home on a makeshift pallet. She had severe arthritis and osteoporosis and was blind and quite deaf. Miraculously, they had gotten her out of her home and put her in the middle of the gym floor. She had been living at Riverside with her daughter. Her rescue was a miracle.

She could barely hear. I got down on my hands and knees, got close to her ear, told her that she was in a safe place and that there were people here who loved her. I assured her that we were going to get her to an even better place and that she would be with her family. I described the room to her, talked a little bit about what had happened, and told her that help was coming.

About an hour later, somebody from her family came with a station wagon. They were able to get her into the back of the station wagon on a

pallet and to take her home with them. Because the roads were blocked everywhere, the family members said that they'd had to go roundabout on roads and pathways to reach the gym.

There was one phone line at the shelter so people could call their families. While waiting at a telephone booth, people can get bent out of shape if they think someone is taking too long. But that wasn't the case that morning. Every person there had a critical situation, so I was surprised at the orderliness of the people lined up to make phone calls. I saw deference to older people and deference to anyone who they thought might have a bigger crisis. If someone had a greater need, I saw people step out of the way and say, "Go ahead. Make your call. I'll wait." That blew me away.

I can't remember if there were lights on in there or not. It's funny the things that you forget. After I was there a few minutes, I circled the room, looking at each situation to try to decide who had the greatest need. I saw another elderly woman and recognized her as the lady I had done some calligraphy work for. She was upset, of course, but she had so much strength that I found she was giving me strength for what was ahead. She had no family here at all, so I reassured her that I would look out for her.

We did a lot of hugging that morning. Touching people and reassuring them was very important. There was also a lot of prayer going on in that room. I saw two families who'd set up a kind of camp circle, and we all joined hands and prayed, mentioning very specific people and situations in the prayer. That was a moving experience. Just about everybody I met had a need to pray.

None of the city staff had been trained to do what we were doing, so we were going from one area to the next, seeing where the need was the greatest. I was amazed to see our staff come in with such a sense of organization and control that they were able to calm people down. In fact, I was very impressed by my coworkers during the next three or four days.

When I went back to EOC to meet with Marlene and to recharge the batteries on the walkie-talkie I'd been given, she told me that another shelter had been set up at Parker Middle School, which had a cafeteria. The R.M. Wilson gym did not. My job was to let people know that we would be moving them and that the busses were coming. The busses were

delayed because of the difficulty of finding routes to the gym, so I stayed with the people in the gym through a good part of the afternoon, helping them to get on the busses. We had a number of handicapped people in wheelchairs and on crutches who needed extra assistance.

As I drove to Parker Middle School in my car, which was lower than the busses, I wasn't sure I would get there because the road was flooded. I drove through water over that little bridge on Raleigh Road just past Grace Street. It probably wasn't the most prudent thing to do because I've found out since that I could have been washed away, but like others, I wasn't thinking about those things at the time. Most people were just jumping in and doing what they needed to do and worrying about the consequences later.

Unfortunately, when we got to Parker, the station had not been set up yet due to a communication problem. The buses had gotten there ahead of me, and people were upset. One woman needed medication and was really starting to flip out, so I needed to take her away from the group.

We went outside and talked. There was no water to drink at the facility, but I'd put a couple of gallons of water in my car before I'd left home that morning and was able to give her some water and calm her down. She wanted to keep all the water, but I told her that I couldn't let her because I needed to keep it for emergencies like hers that might come up during the day. I'm sure hard decisions like that were being made all over eastern North Carolina that day.

By using personal cell phones, people were able to make emergency calls to relatives and friends. Eventually, assistance, food, and bedding arrived. As soon as cots were available, I made sure one of them was given to the elderly lady I mentioned earlier. She was in her eighties and very frail. She needed to lie down and rest because she was not doing well. I told her again that I'd see she was taken care of.

Once things were organized, I returned to the command center for further instructions. Part of my job that day and over the next couple of days was to relieve Marlene and Arts Center Director Jerry Jackson. Among the three of us, we kept the Arts Center command post covered.

The command post and police headquarters had a surreal quality. I felt like I was stepping into a movie set. People whom I was accustomed to seeing in their normal, everyday roles stepped up to Herculean tasks—there's no other word for it. They took charge and assessed one crisis after another. I have such a respect for our city manager, for our assistant managers, and for all of the department and division heads after watching them make clear, logical decisions in a crisis. It was awesome. Grace under fire.

There were a lot of frantic calls coming in and some really silly ones. People do strange things in a crisis, and a lot of them just didn't know what had happened. Just to give you an example, we had people calling to ask about trash pickup—which was comical under the circumstances. They didn't understand the magnitude of the catastrophe that had hit eastern North Carolina. Though it might have seemed silly to people dealing with life-and-death issues, to the callers it was very logical. I was pleased by the response of our city workers. I did not once hear a rude comment or put-down. People were treated with respect, even during the crisis.

One of parks and recreation's jobs was to find food for the shelters, which was not an easy thing. Since most local stores weren't open, staff made trips to Raleigh and a number of other places. Marlene assigned me to help set up shelter and food at Edward Junior High for city employees who were performing rescue missions. For the next few mornings and at lunch times, I helped people unload food and made sure that the room was ready for our city workers to get food and water and to rest if they needed to. We also had snacks and water ready for them to take to other workers who couldn't leave what they were doing long enough to eat. The level of dedication of all types of city workers was pretty amazing.

One morning I came in with a twenty-dollar bill in my hand. Without thinking, I put my coat near the door and laid my keys and the twenty-dollar bill on top of the coat. I was there several hours. At least a hundred city workers were in and out that door. Many had lost their homes and all their possessions in the flood. Some had not even been able to contact family members they were concerned about. Many of them had personal situations as grave as the ones they were trying to solve, but they were on the job, encouraging and helping each other because the city was

depending on them. When I got ready to leave and went to get my coat and keys, the twenty-dollar bill was still there, as big as life.

I'll never forget it. I had such love and esteem for my coworkers. I know the kind of stuff these people are made out of.

After three and a half days on the job, Marlene sent me home to rest. I had checked periodically, and the deaf little lady was still at the Parker facility. When I got home, I called my friends, Monty and Steve Bennett, who live in Nashville, to ask how they were doing. Monty said that they'd been in Rocky Mount frantically trying to find an eighty-year-old lady whom they usually dropped in on several times a week because she lived alone. They didn't know where she was or even if she were alive or had been drowned. I got goose bumps, and then I said, "I know exactly where she is. I can tell you where she's lying, the cot she's on, and where it is right now."

I told them where to meet me so they could follow me in their car. The roads were still largely impassable. Everyone had to go many miles out of the way on the outskirts of Rocky Mount in order to get into the city. I walked into the gym, went to where the lady was lying, leaned over, and said to her, "This is Louise."

She looked up and said, "I just knew you would come back for me. I just knew. I have prayed and trusted. I knew you were coming back for me." She recognized Monty and Steve immediately and was overjoyed.

All three of them ended up back at my apartment. My mom had died earlier in the year. Every time I had gotten ready to dispose of her clothing, I found that I could not. I'd left about eight large boxes of her clothes in the closet. The little lady was the exact size as my mom. We got those boxes out, and I closed the door. They felt like they were on a great shopping trip because all she had were the clothes on her back.

I can't see a helicopter without thinking of the flood. Those helicopters were everywhere. As a community, we were truly blessed. If those helicopters hadn't come to our rescue, many more people would have died.

I was amazed right from the first few hours at the love people had for each other here. People didn't even think about what the right thing to do was; they just did it. There was a tremendous amount of compassion and caring. People literally gave whatever they had, sharing to a fault, giving

food and clothes, and taking people into their homes under the worst of circumstances. Many families doubled and tripled up taking people in. That was a wonderful thing to see, and it went on for weeks and months. After the flood hit, people slowed down and took time to listen to others. I saw every barrier broken, whether it was religious, racial, or economic.

I've wondered so many times since the flood, "Where do we go from here? How do I put this in perspective?" A lot of tragedy has come out of this. Many friends and coworkers lost their homes. But in almost every case, I've seen something good come out of it.

The first day the floodwater went down far enough that we could get to the old Arts Center at the Tank, our staff met there. My boss, Jerry, would not let me go into the building, though I protested mightily. He did not want me to see the devastation because I'm very emotional. Instead, he said, "I need you out here to help record what we bring out."

I remember watching my coworkers going in and out of the building (the Playhouse, the Tank, and the Pumphouse) and hugging them when they became overwhelmed. Sally Beale, our costume designer, was overcome by the mess left in the Playhouse. Then, over the next few days, I watched her forge on to do incredible things to salvage costumes, props, and furniture.

The four buildings I used to work in were flooded. We had outgrown them, and they were not adequate for the needs of our division. Plans had already been approved by the city council to make additions and changes to our facility. I'm sure that those would have been nice, but they would have been makeshift. Since the buildings were lost, we have moved to a temporary facility that is very nice. Because we still do not have a theater, we are borrowing the Rocky Mount Senior High auditorium for our performances, but the future looks wonderful. We have plans for a new facility—a state-of-the-art Arts Center. We'll have a larger and better-equipped theater, and we'll have better teaching facilities, better gallery space, and a facility with a tremendous focus on the arts in Rocky Mount.

The flood taught me that in our everyday lives we all have trials, some big and some small. In any case, you must stand fast and not flinch in the face of the storm. Just be strong and do the things you have to do, and you

will be blessed in the long run. I've realized how very precious our lives are and how precious this community is. I've realized, too, that we should not take anything for granted because it can truly be gone in a few hours.

I've also come away understanding the need for compassion because you don't ever really know what's going on in another person's life. A situation that looks as if someone should be blamed might not be that way at all. That person may have gotten "flooded" in some way and may need you to reach out with compassion. It's a big lesson to learn.

Over the following days and weeks, I realized that I had not had a really good cry, had not let my emotions out. It happened one day as I was driving home and for many days after. No one could drive through the flooded areas of Rocky Mount and not be affected by the waste beside the road: the broken windows, the abandoned homes, piles of clothing, furniture, children's toys, cameras—pieces of peoples' lives piled up in heaps of trash. It was absolutely sickening. It took months before I could drive to or from work without having a lump in my throat or actually crying. Even now, every once in a while that emotion will sneak up on me and hit me over the head when I least expect it.

After about the first three or four days of driving around the city to look at the damage, I made a personal decision that I was going to stop doing that. I couldn't change what had happened. I had to deal with rebuilding my work situation and with helping friends. Going to see how much other damage had occurred was not constructive.

I found out later that a lot of other people came to the same conclusion. Everyone has a saturation point, if you'll pardon the pun. I had reached mine. I stopped looking at the damage and focused on looking forward instead of back. Occasionally, we'll drive through neighborhoods and see homes that are going to be torn down, and it is a reminder. The good news is that people in the community are very upbeat. The movement is definitely forward. I hope that we can grow and be a better community than we were.

Louise Janelle, a volunteer at the Arts Center for years, had been its administrative secretary for eight years at the time of the flood. She had moved to Rocky Mount from New England in 1973.



CREDIT: NAOMI BROWN

“Let There Be Light”

AN INTERVIEW WITH SHEILA DOIRON | MARLENE PAYNE

At 5:00 P.M. on September 15, 2001, my boss sent me home to get prepared to come back at midnight to represent the utilities department in the emergency operations center (EOC). I gathered some things together anticipating that I might be at EOC for a couple of days. I realized that it was raining pretty heavily but did not pay too much attention to the rain.

I live in Wilson, which is fifteen miles from city hall. Just about 11:30 P.M., I drove out of my driveway and down the street. There was an awful lot of water on the road and in my neighbors' yards. I quickly realized that this commute was going to be different.

I found myself driving through quite a bit of standing water. Sometimes the water came over the wheels of the car. I drove for about three miles in those conditions. When the water actually came up over the hood of the car, the car stalled.

Now, in pouring rain on a country road at 11:30 at night, I could not get my car to start. Luckily, I had a cell phone. I called home to let my family know that I was stalled in rising water. Not comprehending my situation, they told me to call the American Automobile Association (AAA).

Before calling Triple-A, I called my fiancé to tell him my plans. He said, “No. Let me come get you.”

I warned him not to try because his car was lower than mine, but of course, he did.

In the meantime, I called Triple-A and finally got through. I reported that I needed someone to come get me because the car was stuck in the middle of the street. A representative told me that no one could come because they were dealing with emergency situations. "Why would I call other than for an emergency?" I asked. The representative told me that no one could come because there were too many calls already. If someone did come, I'd have to stay with the vehicle. That wasn't going to work because I needed to get to the EOC.

I got a call from my fiancé telling me that he couldn't get out of his neighborhood. I told him not to worry. I'd call someone at city hall or someone in the gas or electric division and have them come out with one of the big trucks. Thinking that the flooding I was caught in was a local problem, I was sure someone would be able to come out and get me.

By this time, water began coming inside my car. My first thought was that I didn't want to get my feet wet. I put my feet up on the dashboard. I have no idea how I thought I was going to get out of the car without getting them wet, but for the moment, I didn't want them wet.

A set of headlights approached. I worried that whoever was headed toward me was going to get stuck. Though my car wouldn't start, my headlights were still on—even underwater. I thought that if I flashed my high beams, the driver might notice I was stalled, but his headlights kept coming. As the vehicle pulled up beside me, I recognized that it was a North Carolina Department of Transportation (DOT) tree-trimming truck. The driver was a DOT retiree who had been called back into service that night. He had just picked up his young assistant who was going to help him. They pushed me out in a matter of minutes.

By this time, I was soaked, and all the clean clothes I had packed so carefully to last the next few days were floating in the back seat. The DOT workers asked how they could help me. I explained that I worked for the City of Rocky Mount Utilities Department, that I was already late and really needed to get to work. They were supposed to report to the City of Wilson, but the retiree said, "Okay, don't worry about it. Get your stuff and get in the truck. We'll take you." So they took me all the way to Rocky Mount and dropped me off at city hall.

After getting to work in the wee hours of Thursday morning, I did not get back to Wilson until Saturday night, three days later. My folks, who are in their eighties, had come from Florida to visit me and were scheduled to return to Florida on Friday night after Floyd. They managed to get to Raleigh and flew home on Friday, so I wasn't able to see them again before they left.

Calls came into a call center. If it was a utility emergency that helpers couldn't handle, the calls were forwarded to me. I also took calls from electric crews coming in from other parts of the state and other parts of the Southeast. Those crews were coming to help us rebuild our lines that had been damaged during the hurricane. I talked with them while they were on the road and directed them into the city.

A crew coming in from the western part of the state could not get into Rocky Mount. We tried for about six hours to get them off the highway and into Rocky Mount, but everywhere they went, the roads were washed out or stalled cars blocked their way. Bridges were washed out, too. They had to turn around and go back to Raleigh for the night and then try again the next morning. They finally did arrive, but as they were coming in, they saw a pickup truck go down a ramp and be washed away into what appeared to be an ocean.

We received many calls offering help. People called saying, "I have a powerboat. Do you need any help?" We had many situations involving people who were stranded, and the only way to get them to safety was by boat. The current was so strong that the owners of some boats with small motors had to replace them with larger motors so they could survive the strong currents.

Supermarket managers called wanting to make sure that the utility workers had food and said, "If you have a way to keep any of this food cold, come and take everything we have out of the refrigerators and freezers. Give it to anyone you can because it's just going to go bad."

At one point, we lost our entire electric system. I took calls from people who needed to get their power on immediately. Those people had medical emergencies and needed power for oxygen. We quickly found ways to get oxygen to them. An outfit in Wilson rose to the occasion and offered free

delivery to people needing spare oxygen tanks. Luckily, Nash General Hospital was able to take care of critical services.

Some very large businesses, primarily those around the Church Street and Atlantic Avenue areas, suffered heavily due to the flooding and the loss of power. Many companies suffered huge financial losses. We were very aware of their situations and are very proud of what we were able to do in the utilities department to help them. Within four days most of the electrical power was back on. It was amazing.

The EOC was truly an experience for me. I had the opportunity to work with other departments and with many individuals whom I might never have had a chance to know. I formed bonds that will be with me for the rest of my professional and personal life.

I learned that, during a disaster, the cream rises to the top for the good of mankind. A police chief had no qualms about serving coffee. A fire chief had no qualms about trying to find a blanket. People related to one another as human beings.

For a long time after the emotional shock, the community experienced many changes. There are folks who will never recover. They will never get back the things they lost. News about other areas where there are earthquakes or fires or floods used to be just news stories, but after seeing the flood in our own community, we now feel a connection with others experiencing disasters. It makes our world smaller. If there is flooding in South America, I feel connected because I understand what those folks are going through.

People help each other more now, and they have become less divisive. I think the flood brought the city's awareness of human needs to the surface. The next emergency will be a little less frantic for those of us who have been through this crisis because we'll know what to do, and we'll get it done.

Sheila Doiron, Marketing Services Manager for the Gas and Electric Division of Public Utilities, works in sales and marketing for the gas and the electric utilities. She handles regular residential customers, new customer prospects, and key-account customers who require strategic planning.

A Washout

AN INTERVIEW WITH JERRY JACKSON | MARLENE PAYNE

The Arts Center was in a low-lying area, so Floyd was my third flood at the Arts Center. For some reason, this one didn't bother me as badly as the first two.

I hadn't been here long when Hurricane Fran hit, and we had twelve inches of water in the gallery. That one really made me ill. I took that flood very personally: How dare you invade this space! We struggled so hard with that first one—trying to control the river and where the water was going. I learned that control was impossible. The Fran flood ended up being a blessing because we were able to remodel the gallery.

The second flood, about a year later, didn't bother me as much as the first one. It's not that we didn't try to prevent damage, but afterwards, we just moved on. By the third flood, we had learned that all you do is take preventive measures to limit the damage.

Hurricane Floyd and the flood afterward marked a transition for me personally. The day before the storm, I interviewed for my current position. I came in for the interview in a driving horizontal rain. The interview was relatively short because we all had things to do to get ready for the storm. Immediately after the interview, I got out of my suit and into rain gear and started working.

That night, just before the storm, Marlene Payne and I both went back and forth to the Arts Center to check where the water was and to keep an

eye on it. About 11:00 P.M., the phone rang. Marlene shouted for me to get down to the Arts Center because the place was flooded.

When I got there, water wasn't coming into the building from the river. It was coming up through the toilets that had turned into large geysers of sewage. There were about two inches of filthy water in the Arts Center at that time. While the two of us tried to get out what we could, we waited for help to arrive. Larry Camp and his crew of, perhaps, ten men from parks maintenance came to help us.

We had the Frank Deaner Circus on display at the gallery. The hand-carved circus figures and other delicate pieces filled several cases. There was also an exhibit of clay pottery. We were very concerned about both exhibits.

We tried to get ten gentlemen who were used to mowing, hammering, and roughhousing on a daily basis to carry fifty-year-old pieces of delicate clay upstairs, one piece at a time. They didn't quite understand why they couldn't just fill their arms with twelve at a time. With their help, we got all the irreplaceable art objects upstairs after a couple of hours.

Because it was so late and we didn't realize that we'd be getting another twelve inches or so of rain, we moved lots of valuable but replaceable items to the tops of desks downstairs, and then went home. There was absolutely nothing further we could do. The water was going to do what it was going to do.

I got up early the next morning to be at work by 7:00 A.M. because I was eager to see how things looked. I don't think I had even set my alarm clock.

I didn't live far from the Arts Center, but Hammond Street was blocked. Right then, I felt a sense of panic because that pretty much told me what the situation was at the Arts Center. I never, in my wildest dreams, expected there could be that much water.

I backtracked up Hammond, went around Raleigh Road, and came in on the other side but still couldn't get any closer than the parking lot across the street from the Playhouse Theater. I stood there in a daze.

The flood was a complete shock. As I looked across, I could see there was water in the Playhouse, which was a sure sign we had problems at the Arts Center.

We'd left a wonderful exhibit by Jason Bryant, an undergraduate at East Carolina University (ECU), in the Playhouse, thinking it would be safer there, since we didn't have the materials or the manpower to move the exhibit that night. By the time we'd left the Arts Center, the rain was coming in sideways. When I saw how high the water was at the Playhouse, I panicked because I knew how important the exhibit at the Arts Center was to that kid. It was his thesis exhibit, a requirement for his graduation only a few months away.

At 7:00 A.M. that morning, I was able to wade into the Arts Center, where the water was waist-deep. The water hadn't reached any of the artwork. I thought about trying to carry out one piece at a time to my car, but the current was so swift that doing so meant trying to get each piece across a river without dropping or damaging it. I didn't know if the water was as high as it was going to get or if it was going to continue rising.

I thought about how many trips it would take to move the exhibit by myself and decided it would be faster to get a boat, protective wrapping, and some help. Because the Arts Center was one of the few places in town that was prone to flooding, it didn't cross my mind that the rest of town was under water, too. There were too many variables rushing through my mind at that moment.

Somebody from Larry Camp's department came by, and we started radioing to see if we could get a boat. We quickly discovered that every boat in town was being used to find and rescue people. Since the water was already higher than I'd ever seen it, I couldn't believe that it was going to rise much more. I was still determined to find a boat and to get the art out of there, so I rode all over town looking for one. I kept seeing boats full of people or people's personal belongings, but not a one that wasn't being used.

I went back, every now and then, to check on the Arts Center, still torn up about what to do. I couldn't believe how fast the water was rising. It was like watching a sink fill up. You could stand at the edge of the water and watch it rise. It was hard to comprehend that it could rise that fast and still continue to rise. I soon realized the Arts Center was a goner and that there was nothing I could do about it.

At the very end of the day, Larry brought me a boat, and we rode to the Arts Center. I don't think I even got out. By then it was under water. That was pretty frustrating, knowing that I had to call an extremely talented and gifted twenty-one-year-old student at ECU and tell him that everything he'd done for the last two years was gone.

He took it fairly well. I think he had some sense that it was gone before I called. He knew how bad things were in Greenville, and I think he'd gotten word of the condition of the Arts Center. He had only about two months before his senior show, but people really supported him, and he produced an entirely new body of work, a real accomplishment. Someone with less talent or less ambition or less strength of character might not have survived such a loss. When his show finally did come around, I went to the reception. Jason's currently in graduate school in Baltimore and still enters exhibitions.

If I could change one thing that I did that day, I would have gone in and carried out that art four pieces at a time without help or protective material. Because the Tank received ten feet of water, I didn't. It's over and done with, and there's nothing I can do about it. Everyone who's been involved in a flood has something he would have done differently, I'm sure. When you're faced with such a disaster, I'm not sure you know, half the time, what you're doing. And, of course, there was no warning of how bad it was going to get. That's the thing I learned from Floyd. In the future, I won't make any assumptions about how much water might come in or about what a storm might do.

If I'm ever in another flood, I don't care what *it* is, *it's* going upstairs or somewhere else. We lost valuable records related to the permanent collections, things that are going to be very difficult to recreate. We don't have dates or information on the artists, and a lot of those people are deceased. Our information had been gathered from records that are now lost.

We lost only four pieces from the permanent collection displayed in the Playhouse, plus a Jane Keyser ceramic and an outdoor work both of which were stolen. In total, we lost six pieces from the collection.

We never thought water would get very high in the Playhouse. In the past, a little might get into the orchestra pit from seepage, but it never

crossed our minds that we would have four feet of water in the lobby. Luckily, most of the pieces of art hanging there were replaceable.

With the Arts Center flooded, I was pressed into service to help with shelters and finding food. I was given some money and told to go find some food. That doesn't sound like a difficult task, but when the majority of the roads in town are blocked, you feel like you've gone through Richmond to get to the other side of the town. I kept hitting water, turning around, finding new roads, winding my way through town, and finally stumbling across a store on Hunter Hill Road.

The owner had just come in to check on things and wasn't really open, but people saw him in there, and it was like everybody converged on his store. It was interesting to see what people considered necessities. People were buying beer for a party, ice, disposable diapers, and just an unbelievable range of things.

I had two hundred dollars to purchase food, so I was making little piles and hoping that no one was going to get my stuff while I was trying to figure out how much ten dollars would buy so I could figure how much I could buy without going over the allotted amount. The whole thing was surreal.

Listening to people telling each other what was happening at their places or that their houses didn't exist anymore, I began to get first-hand from the public what was happening in the larger community.

I finally found two-hundred-dollar's worth of food—some interesting food to say the least—and took it back to city hall. I took some of it to the shelter set up at the R.M. Wilson gym, and that was really my dose of reality. There were lots of frail, elderly people there who were in dire straits. That put what happened to the Arts Center into perspective.

Rescuers were bringing in people who were in their eighties. They looked to be in horrible health, and they were just absolutely dazed and didn't seem to know what was going on. The still relatively small number of people there were hungry, so when I set down the bags of food, they just started grabbing things. Some had been out in the cold all night. When I left, more people were coming to help and to administer first aid.

At the EOC, we began to hear stories about people in attics, on roofs,

and about deaths. The human impact made everything I'd been through seem irrelevant. It changed my whole perspective.

People who were not affected personally by the flood didn't seem to realize what was going on. If their yards were dry, they were like the guys in the store who were buying beer for a flood party. I think my favorite story was of the lady who called and wanted to get a boat to her house to take her mail to the mailbox so the mailman could pick up her utility-bill payment.

It was interesting to see what was important to people and how people responded to the disaster. Everybody dealt with it in very different ways. Going to the shelters was kind of a slap in the face for me that said, "This is what's going on. It's not about the Tank Theater, the Arts Center, or Jason's art. This is bigger—much bigger than the loss of buildings and things."

Meanwhile, water rose to ten feet inside the Tank Theater. Since the ceiling is only ten feet high, that meant that the first floor had reached its limit. We were told that the river still had five more feet to rise before it would crest, which meant that everything we'd moved to the second flood the night before was now in jeopardy, along with everything in the permanent collection.

I was determined to get into the building somehow, even though all the doors were now under water. The architect of forty-five years ago should be congratulated for deciding to put glass all the way up the front of the building. We figured we could get in by breaking the windows on the second floor.

Steve Warren, the city's horticulturist, went with me. I didn't want just anyone handling the exhibits and felt comfortable with him moving things. When everything is being destroyed, it's funny how you can still be concerned about a little four-inch figure and a circus wagon, but Mr. Deaner had spent forty years of his life hand-carving each little clown and circus piece.

Getting a boat was still difficult. We did. Larry Camp wasn't sure the motor was strong enough to get us upriver. Since he felt responsible for our safety, he was determined to tie a rope to the boat and feed us out on a line that would run behind the Playhouse to the Arts Center, a considerable distance, which meant we needed a lot of rope.

It took forever, and I was getting frustrated. If five more feet of water were coming, as people were saying, everything would be ruined before I could save it. Besides, I figured that if we got swept away, someone could just come pick us up in Tarboro. I had no comprehension of the real danger. It was late, maybe 5:00 P.M., before we finally got enough rope and enough people on the bank to calm Larry's nerves.

As we made our way around the Playhouse and behind the Tank, I couldn't tell where the outdoor sculpture exhibits were. Some of the taller pieces were at least eight to ten feet tall, and I didn't know where they were or even if they were still down there. When the water receded, we discovered that we had gone right over the tops of the sculptures, which was pretty amazing.

As we disappeared behind the Playhouse and around back of the Tank Theater, Steve and I tried to maneuver the boat through the debris so the rope wouldn't get tangled. When we pulled up to the front of the Tank Theater, it felt very surreal because we were looking at the second floor.

Along the way, we had picked up some two-by-fours from the debris floating around us to use to break out the window. A two-by-four that's been soaking in the water for many days is pretty slimy. When I hit the window, the two-by-four flew out of my hands and over Steve's head behind me. It must have looked comical: two men standing in a boat trying to balance themselves while they whacked at a window and dodged two-by-fours and large pieces of glass. We eventually got a "whamming" system coordinated and broke the glass. After removing all the glass from around the edges of the window frame, we crawled in and moored the boat.

We only had time to move the things we considered irreplaceable to the third floor, so we started with the Deaner Circus and the Clay Collection. If the water ever got to the third floor, we figured it was a hopeless case anyway.

Saving the Deaner Circus meant a lot to me. I didn't think I could tell an elderly gentleman in bad health that the entire collection he'd spent forty years of his life carving was gone. Being able to save his life's work made me feel like something was finally going right.

It was getting dark, and we knew Larry would be having a fit back on the bank because he couldn't see us once we got behind the Tank Theater. He wouldn't know if we were still in the boat or had been washed down river. I stowed my two-by-four in the boat as a souvenir, and we headed back. That was the end of that day.

Since there was nothing more I could do at the Arts Center, I made a couple more trips in search of food for the shelters. The search for food went on for days before local stores reopened. Steve Warren, my boat companion, and I went all the way to Raleigh. We could be in a shopping spree contest and easily win.

In Fred's, a large, discount grocery store, we made a mad dash down the aisles, taking ten of these and fifty of those. We piled our shopping carts as high as we could. Steve, who tries to be precise about everything, wanted to figure out how many ounces a normal serving would be, how many servings we'd get from a can, and the food's nutritional value. My method was to snatch whatever I could find and throw it in our basket. Our debates over what we were going to buy became comical.

As people found out where those two crazy shoppers were from, we began to get interesting reactions. They had heard how bad things were in Rocky Mount, so everyone was wonderful about helping us make logical decisions, getting an account set up, and getting the carts out to the truck. After what seemed like hours, we finally got the truck filled to the top and came back so the food could be disbursed to the shelters and to the around-the-clock work crews.

Finding food became easier once the water began to recede and local stores and restaurants reopened. I spent some time arranging with restaurants for meals for the more than eighty men on the utility crews who were working around the clock trying to get the city functioning normally again. Of course, it got easier each day as systems got up and running, especially water, electricity, and transportation.

I was amazed at the teamwork within the city and was terribly impressed with how EOC worked and also with how people like Jacob Parker in the maintenance division of parks and recreation could move the Earth if you challenged him. Whatever you needed done, he'd find

some way to do it. Everyone in every department was faced with situations they'd never dealt with before and really had to make it up as they went along. They improvised in most cases, but they made the right choices. I was really happy to be a part of that team. You knew you were really making a difference, whether you were helping a person in a shelter get a bag of potato chips or pulling someone out of the floodwaters or restoring electricity or water. It took everyone doing his part to make the whole. I was impressed with how well things ran and how people stayed on top of the situation.

I officially became Arts Center director that weekend. When I was told that I'd gotten the job, I said that I'd always wanted to be director of nothing. At that point, nobody in the city knew what the situation with the Arts Center would be after the flood. There was no guarantee that there would *be* an Arts Center after such a huge disaster, but because we'd been through minor floods before, we just operated as if things would eventually be okay, as if we would be going back to the Arts Center eventually.

Since the flood, we've had Arts Center programming in city hall, in churches, in schools—any place we could find a space. We've spent some interesting moments with our staff of eight camped in a small, cramped office in the parks and recreation department for more than a year. Eight people, all on the phone, trying to get to the computers, trying not to kill each other or go crazy. I think the Arts Center staff did a great job of keeping their act together and dealing with the crisis.

Sally Ellison probably faced more long-term devastation than the rest of us. As costumer for the Playhouse, she'd spent many years collecting things for the performances. In the weeks during cleanup and taking FEMA inventories, it was difficult to watch her cope with a total loss. She was a trooper through it all and did a great job of managing her stock.

Since we've been working out of temporary facilities, everything has seemed more challenging and more frustrating. We've had to set new standards for what we accept as normal. Now that plans are being made for a new Arts Center in the old Imperial Tobacco Company building on North Church Street across from the Episcopal church, I think that will counterbalance some of the trials and tribulations. The new Arts Center

will be a healing balm and provide growth that the city might not have seen if the flood hadn't happened.

The proposed Arts Center and other post-flood developments diminish some of the effects of the flood, but nothing can ever erase the tragedy of people losing family and homes. You have to find your own way to get over the flood and get past it. You don't ever forget the losses. You move on, focus on improvements, on what's left, and you end up being stronger in the end.

A new facility for the Arts Center is a nice bonus when you are an organization, but we're not really about a facility. We're about the programming that we do, the people we serve, and the people who serve the community. When we are actually able to put the programming elements into a facility, I think it will be something the entire community will be proud of and that will be a shining moment to come out of all this madness.

Jerry Jackson, a native of Peachland, North Carolina, is cultural resources coordinator for the Parks and Recreation Department of the City of Rocky Mount. He had worked with the city for five years and became the Arts Center director the day of the flood.

Captain Mike Doss Remembers the Flood

The Rocky Mount Fire Department did everything it could to prepare for Hurricane Floyd. Contingency plans were drawn up, and officers were briefed. My shift was put on alert and was ordered to be ready to report to duty at midnight, if necessary. I came home and helped my family get prepared for the worst. We filled the bathtub with water, filled coolers with ice, filled our vehicles with gasoline, and scrambled to cover all bases before Hurricane Floyd hit. We watched the TV in despair as the weather forecasters all agreed that the worst was coming. I got the call from headquarters that my shift was needed and was to report for duty at midnight. My family and I hugged one another and prayed to God for His mercy over each of us, the rest of the family, and our community. It was hard leaving my family knowing that Hurricane Floyd was on the way.

The winds were moderate when I arrived at headquarters, but the rain was torrential. Fire crews were already out helping people trapped in low-lying areas. Fire Engineer Wayne Rhodes and I were assigned to drive the department's sixteen-passenger van to take victims to local Red Cross shelters. One of our first assignments was in the Maple Creek subdivision. When we drove down one of the streets, we could see the water already rushing through the neighborhood. Firemen were helping men, women, and children through the rapidly rising waters.

The winds were increasing, and it was raining harder. People were screaming from the porches of their homes trying to get our attention, but the winds made their cries almost inaudible. Some flicked flashlights on

and off or tried to get our attention by waving them around. As our crews got the residents to our position, Wayne and I loaded them into the van. The firefighters appeared weary and tired but turned back into the waters.

When the van was loaded, we headed for the shelter at Benvenue Middle School. While in route, the van was buffeted by the winds, and the road was difficult to see due to the rain. It actually took both of us to keep the van on the road. The children were crying and scared; mothers tried to comfort children, and fathers tried to reassure mothers. Some discussed what was going to happen to their homes and belongings. This scenario was repeated many times throughout the night.

Between assignments, Wayne and I talked about our own families and prayed they were all right. Because all power and telephones were out, some had no way to check on or reassure them. Soon the Benvenue Middle School shelter was full, and we were assigned to transfer people to the shelter on Virginia Street.

On one of the trips to Virginia Street, we noticed the water was approaching the rear of the apartments on Pinehurst Drive. A large number of senior citizens and children live in this complex, so we advised the command center that we were going to check the apartments in the low areas for residents. At approximately 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, we began knocking on the doors of the apartments. We could hear the surprise of some of the residents as they discovered the water was in their homes. They were so shocked when they came to the door. We advised them of the situation and told them that they needed to gather blankets and personal items and get ready to be evacuated. I radioed the command center and advised them of the situation, but no help was available at this time because the department was already responding to the devastation that was occurring throughout the city. Wayne and I carried the children in our arms and senior citizens on our backs uphill to the van. Soon the shelter on Virginia Street was full, and a lady told us not to bring any more people to the site, as there were no more supplies. I told her that we had no other place to take these victims.

After reporting the situation to the command center, we were advised that the city had opened the R.M. Wilson gym as a shelter. On one of our

numerous trips to the gym, radio traffic warned that rising waters were encircling the city. Wayne and I looked at each other and shook our heads. Things were getting worse as the winds and rain increased. Our thoughts were increasingly on our families.

After daybreak and a brief rest, Wayne and I were told to report to Riverside Apartments, where a large number of senior citizens reside. We found seniors wading through the waters to get to higher ground as they carried trash bags containing belongings and medications. Engine Number Two was at Dawson Place assisting senior citizens but was soon forced out by the rapidly rising waters. While loading these people into the van, we could feel their despair. Many were crying, worried, and upset. In the autumn of their lives, these senior citizens were losing all they had to the floodwaters. The suffering was too great for some. One of the women, suffering from a possible heart attack, was placed in the back of a flatbed truck.

Another person in a police van was having difficulty breathing. Firefighters were administering first aid and oxygen and doing all they could for the evacuees, but more residents were still coming out of the complex. Radio reports indicated that emergency medical services (EMS) units were having a rough time finding a safe route into the city to help. The rain had just about quit, but the Tar River continued to rise, and the wind was still gusting.

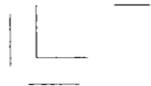
To give one of our men a break, I asked to be relieved from transport duty. Firefighter Dunavan and I teamed up and started going door to door to check for victims. Using two-wheeled trash carts, we transported many senior citizens to higher ground. On one trip to the complex, Firefighter Dunavan recovered a two-person sailboat that floated by. We had moved up a notch in our rescue equipment. The sailboat made rescuing older ladies easier.

The water was now over the tops of cars in our sector. On one trip, Firefighter Dunavan and I heard someone calling our names. As we looked around, we saw Fire Engineer Randy Smith holding up a frail, white-haired lady. Though Fire Engineer Smith lived in the complex and could have saved his belongings, he lost them all because his heart was focused on helping others. His lips were blue from long exposure to the

floodwaters, and we could tell he was worn out. We caught the attention of a nearby powerboat and helped Randy and this lady into the boat. Both were exhausted. Before he left, Fire Engineer Smith advised us that he could find no more victims in our area. The current was becoming so swift and hazardous that Firefighter Dunavan and I decided to abandon our search before we, too, became victims. Personnel with powerboats made follow-up searches where possible.

At the time of Hurricane Floyd, Captain Mike Doss worked with the Hazardous Materials Team (HAZMAT) of the Rocky Mount Fire Department.

IMPACT AND
RECOVERY



“Busy” Was the Operative Word

NASH COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT STAFF REPORT

Nash County Health Department staff answered approximately 3,840 related calls during the first month after the flood occurred. These were calls about tetanus vaccinations, flood dangers, shelters, flood cleanup, and ways to cope with the losses the flood had caused. Our clinical staff gave more than 2,000 tetanus vaccinations during September and October of 1999. In addition, we sat, listened, and cried with many residents when there seemed no place for them to turn.

The Health Department remained open to provide normal clinical services throughout this disaster. From September 15 through September 29, twenty-five public-health nurses rotated to provide twenty-four-hour-a-day staffing for six Red Cross and community shelters. While staffing shelters, nurses provided information regarding safety and cleanup after the hurricane. They provided free masks for use during cleanup. They provided medical services and located needed pharmaceuticals. They even served meals.

Floodwater contamination of buildings and water supplies forced the Public Health Environmental staff to suspend the permits of thirty-one restaurants, nine food stands, five meat markets, and one mobile unit. Later, thirty-four of the forty-six permits were reinstated.

During the first six months after the flood, 688 water samples were collected for flood victims in Nash County. Of those, 282 were positive

for dangerous bacteria. Contaminated wells had to be chlorinated to make them safe for use after the flood.

This report was provided by the Nash County Health Department.

Floodwaters Come to the Home Place

NANCY MATTHEWS

Home. That's North Carolina to me. My family has been here for more than two hundred years. It's not so easy to wash away roots that deep, but Hurricane Floyd sure gave it a try.

I used to believe that people tried to live their lives pretty much in a straight line with a life plan that, if followed, got them to where they wanted to go. For me, life didn't work out that way. Changes occurred. If you didn't expect things to change, you would be disappointed.

I knew I would have to be at work during the storm. Since I'm a labor nurse, I go at all hours, in ice and in hurricanes. I envy those who get to stay at home and swear every year I'll get a different job. I had sent my daughter to Raleigh to be with her sister at college because the weather was predicted to be less severe there. Here it had rained all week.

Night came, and I wasn't nervous about the hurricane. After all, nothing major ever happened in Nash County. It wasn't near the coast. The electric power went out around 8:00 P.M. I lit the oil lamps and enjoyed their soft light. The wind was becoming stronger, and I began to think that if the huge trees in my front yard happened to fall into my house, I would be there alone. I never thought of flooding. After all, I wasn't in the flood zone.

I have many fond memories of my house. It belonged to my wonderful great-aunt and -uncle, Eula and Emmett Dickens. I had just bought it in June 1999 and reclaimed it from the sorry state it had been left in by



Keith Werner's home in Greystone is called the "island house" as Stony Creek surrounds it on three sides. His house was built eighteen feet off the ground. The water advanced twenty feet; two feet of water covered the first floor.

CREDIT: DICK BETHUNE

renters. I'd repaired my grandmother's cane-back sofa and upholstered a chair that my uncle always used. My uncle Emmett had written notes to himself all over his workshop door. I couldn't bear to paint over them. I was glad to be there and to have a place my daughters could come to, a home. It took all of my savings and retirement fund to do it, but it meant a lot to renew that little house. The house is near Stony Creek, where my ancestors farmed, where I visited, picked blackberries in the woods, attended church with my grandparents, and played with my cousins. I can't explain memories that bond me to a place so strongly. Maybe it's a "woman thing," that urge for stability and home. I like to think it's a "southern thing," too, but Hurricane Floyd was about to test my ability to remain.

I spent the night at my parent's home outside of Nashville. When I pulled out onto N.C. Highway 58 North the next morning, a tree blocked the road to the south. When I got to U.S. Highway 64 Bypass, water was covering the road. I thought I could get through by using the westbound lanes, but before I got off the ramp, I saw that water covered the road that way, as well. Late that afternoon, Dr. Kroncke suggested a route I could

try. The tree had been removed from N.C. Highway 58 leading to Red Oak. Even though trees blocked parts of the road and parts of the road had washed away, I finally got to the hospital. The staff took turns sleeping, and I took the night watch so those who had been unable to leave since Thursday could have a break.

A neighbor who lived uphill from me called with the news that my house had water up to the windows. I remember a young nurse was addressing her wedding invitations that night. How bizarre it seemed that she could be doing that while I was grieving for my home.

Friday afternoon, I was able to find a route to my house. The stench of the floodwater permeated everything. It was like nothing I had ever smelled. Water had marked its highest level at three feet inside the house. Drawers and appliances were still full of water; furniture was overturned; every single thing was muddy, stinking, soggy, and ruined. I was overwhelmed by the loss. I just cried. No one can really understand the enormity of the mess unless it happens to them.

My daughters, Jennifer and Valerie Wood; parents, Ray and Anna Matthews; brother, Paul, and sister-in-law, Martha; sister, Deborah; nephews, Matthew, Andrew, and David; and nieces, Jessica, Anna, and Caroline came to help clean out the house. I remember laying pictures out on tarps or hanging them on the clothesline. I separated dozens of papers from my family history and tried to dry them in the oven. Everything was trash—the computer, piano, appliances, cabinets, new heating unit, insulation, and walls.

I had not felt like a victim, but when people unaffected by this storm strolled by to gawk at the damage, I felt angry. I wanted to yell at them to get busy and help somebody. I will never forget my neighbor, Lynn Holland, who showed up, unannounced, to scrub walls and floors. Her kindness meant so much.

The house I had renovated in 1999 would have to be redone in 2000. One daughter had just graduated from North Carolina State University; the other one was a sophomore there. I considered my options. The easiest and cheapest thing to do would be to walk away from it, leave it for the bank to deal with, and accept that I was bankrupt. Homeowner's insurance

was worthless, and I had no flood insurance; after all, I was not in the flood zone. I also didn't qualify for the buyout program. I chose to stay.

The paperwork of the Small Business Administration, redoing everything I had just done, enduring an IRS audit because my tax person had not calculated the loss correctly, shopping, and dealing with workmen, shoddy and good, made up the next six months while I also worked fulltime. I was blessed with my family and a place to go, but I was as stressed as I have ever been in my life.

Even in a disaster, I tried to find something to make me laugh. I loved having a fireplace. During the original remodeling, I had cut down three trees and had the firewood stacked in my garage. I had eagerly anticipated the first fire of the season. When I first saw my house after the flood, all of the wood was gone, except for one piece that had washed up on my front porch. I think of it as God's cosmic joke.

When I think about the flood, I realize it's not the worse thing that has happened in my life. It still bothers me, however, to see pictures of the floodwaters. I wonder what I would have done if I had been home in the middle of the night when the water came. I think about what everyone went through and what they lost that can't be reclaimed. If I pay back all I owe before I die, I'll be pleasantly surprised. When disaster hit, I discovered how kind some people are and how caring they can be, and that is a gift. And if one makes the choice to keep going, one can succeed. So, as I sit here in my home writing this, I can say to Floyd (I hate that name now) or to any threat, "You may knock me down, but with God's help, you don't even matter much in the big picture. So there!"

Nancy Matthews is a native of Rocky Mount and works as a labor nurse at Nash General Hospital.

New Home, New Hope

CATHY WORSLEY

I remember waiting for the wind. We always worried about wind damage. We recently had several trees cut down near the house. We waited in the hall for the wind and the rain, and the rain came in buckets. I kept asking my husband about the yard. First, the water covered the grass, then our driveway, and then our boxwoods by the front porch. When I looked out the back window, I saw the dog's "igloo" house floating near his pen. Luckily, the dog and our three cats were inside with us. Our toddler son, Joseph, who'd just had his first birthday two weeks before, didn't know that anything different was going on and, luckily, would never remember the horrible event.

The next day, when the rain stopped, the sun came out, and it was gorgeous! We checked on the trees: no wind damage! Water covered the yard halfway up the tires of the cars. Arnold marked a spot on the deck so we could check the water level. The water was dropping an inch an hour, so after lunch, we all took a nap. We figured we had weathered this storm. By the time we got up from our nap, the water would be low enough to drive the cars out.

We got up, ate supper, and got our son Joseph ready for bed. Just before 7:30 P.M., Thursday, September 16, 1999, Arnold got up from watching *Seinfeld* on TV and went out to check the water level. When he came back, he had a really sick look on his face and told me the water had risen two inches in less than an hour. He also said that he thought we should leave. I don't know why, but that made me mad, so I asked him, "How are we going

to leave?” Arnold called the sheriff’s department, and a deputy advised us to leave, if we had somewhere to go. He didn’t tell us how we should leave. I called a neighbor down the road who told us not to come down N.C. Highway 33 because it was flooded. I called another friend across town who owned a car business, thinking that, perhaps, he could get a wrecker to get us out. Bless his heart and soul, he and another friend came in a four-wheel-drive Suburban to rescue us. It was beginning to get dark. We only had about thirty minutes to get out. After that, we wouldn’t be able to see our path out. We were going to have to walk through the water in our front yard up to the road to get to our rescuer’s car.

Fear and panic grabbed us as Arnold and I ran around wondering what to do. As a new mom, I kept thinking about what the baby needed: diapers, baby wipes, food, and toys. I threw a few things in a garbage bag for Arnold and me, thinking we would get back home in two days at the most. Then we started putting things on top of the bed, on the countertops, and on the couch. I couldn’t imagine that the water would get any higher than that. Arnold, a music lover, put some videotapes in the attic along with his three best guitars, some floppy disks with music compositions on them, and a box containing the currently due bills and our checkbook.

When our friends arrived at the top of our driveway, we left the house with a couple of bags and our son and waded out into the cold, dark water. We left the three cats on the front porch and our dog on the side deck. As we departed, little did I know that would be the last time we would have a house for more than a year.

Old U.S. Highway 64 was almost impassable at some places. I remember looking out the window, and all I saw was water. I couldn’t tell where the road began or ended. I prayed to God, “Please don’t let us get swept away.” We made it to our friends’ house.

That night, as our son slept soundly on the bed, Arnold and I made a “to-do” list for the next day. We would rent a car, go to the house, get a few things, and check on our animals—just normal things. That next morning, we learned how silly our list was. Princeville was under water. I mean *under* the water, and they were our neighbors. Only rooftops were being shown on TV. There were reports of people being airlifted by helicopters. Some

of the people being rescued were our friends and neighbors. The sinking feeling began.

Survival filled the next couple of weeks: finding water, standing in line for bread, and trying to have a normal routine for my child. We were homeless for nearly a month, moving three times before we finally ended up in a used mobile home that would be our residence for nearly a year.

As difficult as it was to leave our house, in many ways it was even more difficult to return. Nothing could have prepared us for what we saw when we walked into our home. Water had reached the ceilings, and the contents of our house looked as if they had been put through a blender. The refrigerator had floated up and punched a hole in the ceiling. Nearly all the furniture was now worthless, having delaminated and separated into hundreds of little pieces. That our computer had floated up onto a shelf and not gotten too wet was one small miracle. Arnold was able to salvage what was on the hard drive, mainly music compositions and some scanned photographs for which there were no backup copies. Ironically, a "Welcome" sign had floated a mile up the road and was lying in our yard. Our ten-by-fourteen-foot deck had uprooted and floated fifty feet from the house to settle in a wooded area.

The power of nature is something man cannot control. We lost two of our three cats. They drowned, trapped on the screened porch when the water reached its ceiling. The third cat and our dog were missing. We later found the dog in Raleigh at the veterinary school. Our white kitty came back to the house, where we rescued her nearly a month after we had abandoned the house.

We are now in a nice, new house that is better than any house that either of us has ever lived in. I guess some might say we profited from this disaster, but I certainly don't recommend this as a way to get ahead! We lost so many things that money can't buy: photographs, a grandfather's old fiddle, and books. Much of this could have been saved, but the task of going through it all was so overwhelming that, with the help of a crew from Chapel Hill, we just chucked most of it by the roadside. The stress of being homeless was devastating. We were lucky that we got out when we did. One more hour would have been too late! We want to thank the

many people, both friends and strangers, who helped us recover from this disaster.

Cathy and Arnold Worsley and their two-year-old, Joseph, now live at a location between Tarboro and Rocky Mount that is not in a flood zone. Arnold teaches computer studies at Edgecombe Community College. Cathy is a full-time mother and homemaker.



The Flood Reaches Paris

PATSY CHAMBLESS

Hurricane Floyd, the Storm of the Century, the Flood of '99, the Five-hundred-year Flood—whatever anyone connected with Rocky Mount or Nash and Edgecombe Counties wants to call it—was an experience none of us ever wants to go through again.



I was out of the country at the time. I'd left for France with a friend from Tarboro two days before the storm was predicted to hit the area. Since Floyd was described as a hurricane six hundred miles in diameter, we were fairly sure it would affect both Rocky Mount and Tarboro and were glad our flight left Raleigh before any possible cancellation.



When we arrived in Paris, we called home to see if the storm had hit and if there had been extensive wind damage. My son, Hal, had gone to check my house expecting to find trees on it, as we had during Hurricane Fran three years earlier. The news was staggering. Instead of fallen trees, he found water from Stony Creek up to the steps of my back deck. Thinking it couldn't rise any higher, he left but returned two hours later to find the water at the top of the deck. When my phone call reached him, he and a friend were in the house watching the water come up through the floor vents.

Hal assured me there was nothing I could do at home and encouraged me to continue my trip as planned. They moved my most valuable furniture to higher surfaces and left the house. It took them two and a half hours to get from my house to theirs, normally a five-minute trip. Unfortunately,

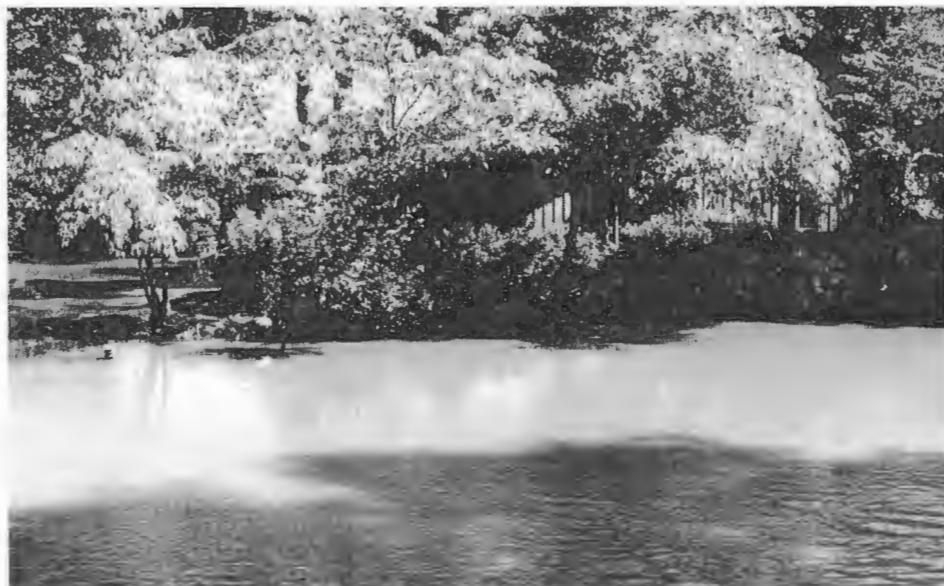
Rocky Mount was divided into three islands, and it was almost impossible to get from one island to another.

Meanwhile, in our hotel in Paris, my friend and I turned on the TV and saw news from Rocky Mount and Tarboro on CNN. We continued our trip from Paris to Provence and then to London. We were amazed to have people express concern and interest when they heard where we were from.

When we returned home ten days later, Hal spent the drive from Raleigh to Rocky Mount preparing me for what I would see at home. Nothing he described approached what I saw as he took me past friends' homes in West Haven, Riverside, Candlewood, and into my neighborhood, Creek's Bend. Never could I have imagined the extent of the damage to property and lives.

Compared to so many others, my damage was minimal, thanks to my family and friends. Even so, I was overwhelmed. My home was covered with so much water that all the floors and everything under the house had to be replaced. Though I was shocked, others had lost much more.

In addition to the devastated homes, the displaced families, the overwhelming stench from the contaminated water, the free tetanus



The view from a boat of Wardlaw Lamar's home in Candlewood.

CREDIT: DICK BETHUNE



A new home in Greystone. Rick Adams' family moved in six days prior to the flood; they lost all their new appliances and more.

CREDIT: DICK BETHUNE

shots issued to everyone, the constant lines of enormous trucks hauling refuse away, and the water marks on buildings, trees, and shrubs, I think the greatest impression this whole experience made on me was the unbelievable compassion that emerged from the community. I was fortunate to have family I could stay with while my home was restored. I actually felt guilty because I had not been here to witness the flood and to help. So many of my friends and family did for me what I should have been home to do for them.

Again, I was fortunate to have family I could stay with while my home was restored. I felt guilty as I looked at those forced to rent or otherwise relocate while their homes were repaired. I actually felt cheated because I had to ask questions about the flood of those who should not have had to answer. Now, a year and eight months later, there is never a conversation that does not include some mention of "the flood."

Patsy Chambless moved to Rocky Mount in 1971. She had lived at 17 Wisteria Drive for eight years prior to Hurricane Floyd.





Gnomes Come Clean

CHARLENE LEWIS

On the first Sunday after the storm, Susan's husband, Sam, and her nephew retrieved anything that could be salvaged from their home. Sam recovered most of her clothes, picture albums, and her collection of Tom Clark gnomes.



The bags of clothing were laced with water, mud, and who knows what else, so we sent the clothing good enough to keep to anyone with a washer and dryer. Carefully, we separated the pictures from the albums and laid them out on the deck and on every available horizontal surface.

Now came the job of cleaning of the gnome figurines that had been soaked in mud. Actually, Susan had a complete collection of the Thimble gnomes. They appeared colorless. We thought the flood had soaked the paint off and ruined her entire collection. When she saw them, Susan cried enough to create another flood. I began to run clear water over one of the gnomes and soon saw signs of life beneath the mud. A spark came to Susan's eyes. We got a few pots of water, and everyone started scrubbing Tom Clark gnomes with toothbrushes. It was a funny sight, three women, sitting in the middle of a yard full of black bags and hanging clothes, scrubbing Tom Clark gnomes with toothbrushes. We scrubbed each of those thirty-some gnomes until they were just like new.

While we were cleaning the gnomes, Susan realized that all of her makeup had been lost in the flood. Though most of us are a bit careless at times about whether we wear makeup or not and pick up a rouge here or a



lipstick there, Susan never goes out unless her makeup is coordinated. So she really began to panic.

With all of her other problems, Susan decided that makeup was too frivolous to worry about and just used some that was given to her. Monday was a trying day, and Susan missed work at the hospital. We were somewhat relieved, since Susan without makeup is just not Susan! A thoughtful friend took the opportunity to go to the Merle Norman Cosmetic Studio and asked the clerk to look up Susan's colors. She purchased a complete makeup kit and delivered it to Susan that night. I've seen reactions to many gifts, but I've never seen one as appreciated as that little bag of makeup. In the midst of despair, Susan was able to look like herself. The cosmetics couldn't replace all the things she'd lost, but they did help her to feel a bit less miserable.

Now Susan and Sam have a new home. Their old house was sold in the FEMA buyout program. There are many things that she could never replace, but the one thing that she never lost was the love of her family, her friends, and her dog.

Susan Wood, LPN, who works at Nash General Hospital, lost her home to Hurricane Floyd. She went first to Nashville to stay with her niece and later lived in a travel trailer provided by one of her husband's coworkers.



Alerted by a Cat

GWEN CORINTH



Since it had been raining so hard all day, I never ventured out. I noticed that the ditch behind my house was overflowing; and when I went to bed, it was within ten feet of my back door. Though our electricity went off soon after that, I read by the light of several candles. I woke up once during the night and looked out a back window, but I could see nothing. There was no light anywhere.



My cat woke me about 5:30 A.M., and I heard water dripping. I got out of bed to investigate and stepped into water up to my ankles. Instead of being frightened and becoming panicky, I began assembling things that I would need in an emergency. The water was rising so rapidly that I only had time to dress from the waist up, so I put on a blouse and a sweater and rolled up my pajama pants. I shoved underwear and a pair of shoes into a plastic bag, put on a few pieces of jewelry that were valuable to me, and packed my medicine and three books: my Bible, prayer book, and daily office appointment book.

By the time I finished packing, the water was up to my waist. I managed to position a chair that kept trying to float away so that I could climb up onto the kitchen counter, the highest place in my house. I had dropped my flashlight, so I was in the dark for quite a while. When daylight came, I saw my furniture turning over and some of it floating. The water had risen to the top of the counter where I was sitting and was moving like a river. I

was afraid I might fall if I tried to get off the counter. I was worried about my cat, but I couldn't go to the bedroom to get her.

I never doubted for one moment that someone would come for me. Sure enough, about 10:30 A.M., a fireman named Vernon Lynch came in a flat-bottomed boat and carried me out of my house. A kind person at the end of Horne Street had opened her home to refugees from the storm. She had hot coffee for everyone and—wonder of wonders—a working telephone.

I waited my turn and then called my son, Tommy Looney. I caught him just as he and his wife, Peggy, were leaving their house to look for me. I told them where I was, and shortly they came for me. I had to walk out because the whole area was flooded. It was fortunate that I had included a pair of shoes in my bag because we had to walk a long way.

It was a bad experience, but the Hand of the Lord was on me the whole time. So many people were kind to me, some I didn't even know. Tommy and Peggy took me into their home for four months. My daughters helped clean out my house, and my other son, Albert Corinth, came when he could. Every road from where he lived was flooded, so he couldn't go to work for several days.

After four days, Tommy and my daughter from Chapel Hill went back to my house in a boat. The area was still flooded, but the water had receded enough so they could get into the house. There was the cat! I am sure she had used up several of her lives. Kathy and Jim Wood took her in and kept her until I could provide a home for her.

There were many little worries and annoyances connected with losing important papers: bank records, insurance records, and so much information that had to be replaced. Tommy helped me, as did Peggy. What would one do without family?

For a long time, I had nightmares and did not sleep well. My health is ruined, but I am blessed to be alive in a comfortable dwelling with kind, helpful friends and neighbors nearby. Tommy and Peggy visit me often, as do Albert and my girls. My daughters—one in Chapel Hill and one in Augusta, Georgia—keep in touch by telephone. They visit me when they can.

I try not to think about the parts of my life that have been swept away: books collected over a lifetime, papers and photographs that I no longer have. Nonetheless, I have so much to be thankful for. All through the ordeal, the Holy Spirit has sustained me and provided true comfort. The third person in the Trinity is rightfully called the Holy Comforter.

Gwen Corinth has lived in Rocky Mount since she was five years old. She spent her summers in Virginia with her grandparents and there was influenced greatly by Archdeacon Frederick Nize. She lived on West Duke Circle for six years prior to the flood and hoped she would live there the remainder of her life.



Grief and the Storm

HELEN M. TONEY

Owning a funeral home means coming in contact with death on a daily basis, but it takes on a different character when your own family is involved, especially when grief is compounded by natural disaster. On Wednesday, September 15, 1999, I prepared dinner to take to my brother Carl Mills and his family in Nashville, North Carolina, because they had lost their oldest son, Carl Tyrone Mills Jr. to diabetes on Monday. Because of increasing wind and rain, my daughter, Jennis Toney, insisted on driving me from Spring Hope to Nashville to deliver the food. We talked of the approaching storm and reflected on previous hurricanes.

When Thursday morning came, we had survived Hurricane Floyd without property loss or personal harm; however, we had no electricity. Without radio or television, we did not know the extent of the damage all around us.

Jennis Toney, director at the funeral home founded by my late husband, William T. Toney Sr., moved forward with plans for my nephew's interment. We were not aware of the difficulties that people were experiencing getting from one town to another in and around Nash County.

Friday, the day of the funeral, we gradually began to learn the extent of the damage to the area. The minister had to detour several times and arrived late for the funeral. The director and some members of the choir could not get out of Rocky Mount due to the flooding. The deceased's in-laws from Raleigh had to plead and beg at the Nash County line to enter

Spring Hope to attend the funeral. As the family was preparing to enter the chapel, word came that two cousins, David Mills and Eulalia Mills Aldridge, had been pulled from a stream where they had drowned in a pick-up truck near Nashville. Nevertheless, we were blessed to be able to bury Tyrone that day and put some closure to his death.

Not everyone burying a loved one was so fortunate. Wilbert Vault Company's plant was flooded. Unfortunately, one body had remained in the funeral home from a previous funeral because they could not get tractors and trucks into the cemetery, so burial had been impossible.

Nash General Hospital contacted us and asked if we could be prepared to handle bodies that might be found as the water receded. We immediately installed six additional racks in case they were needed. Thank Heavens, they were not!

We had little time to gain strength because our cousins, a sister and her brother, were to be buried on Wednesday, September 22. We were again fortunate that the receding water allowed us to get into the cemetery. Being so caught up in a family loss and funerals, we only slowly learned of the devastation of Hurricane Floyd.

It was weeks before we learned that my late husband's relatives, Donald and Martha Armstrong and Anniedelle Armstrong had lost their homes in Rocky Mount. Day after day, we learned of other losses to family and friends.

Hurricane Floyd will be remembered for a long time in Nash and Edgecombe Counties because many people suffered losses. For my family and me, the storm will forever be associated with the loss of Carl Jr., David, and Eulalia. Every time the weatherman predicts a new tropical storm, we'll be reminded of them.

Helen M. Toney, wife of the late William T. Toney Sr., operates Toney's Funeral Home, located in Spring Hope, N.C.

From Agriculture to Aquaculture

ROBERT D. EDWARDS

“One more good rain” is what I remember telling my father we needed to finish making the crops in late August of 1999. Little did I know the consequences of my request. Hurricane Floyd turned a normal crop year into an unforgettable struggle.

From an agricultural point of view, the storm’s timing was unique. Cotton, soybeans, and peanuts did need “one more good rain” to maximize their yields. However, the tobacco crop was already made and even sixty percent harvested, and any wind would be disastrous.

Hurricane Floyd should not get all the credit for the disastrous events that took place in September of 1999. A less powerful and directionally confused system called Dennis had visited North Carolina around September 2. He liked the area so much that he visited us again on the fifth. Then came his bigger brother, Floyd, on September 16.

When the clouds cleared and the skies were once again blue, we ended up with the two inches of rain we needed plus another thirty-odd inches we did not need. The rain affected the crops in different ways, all detrimental. Cotton plants were tangled, and the leaves were beaten so badly that they turned a deep red. This made picking very difficult that fall. Hurricane Floyd had primed much of the tobacco left in the field for us. Unfortunately, instead of putting it in the barns, he probably dropped it off in New England. Even the subterranean crop of peanuts could not escape damage. Though the wind did not do much harm directly to the peanuts,

the heat and rain caused a tremendous disease problem. All of these factors created a poor quality crop, which resulted in low commodity prices.

My family was very fortunate that little of our cropland was flooded. However, some of our pastures were covered in six to eight feet of water. Once family, friends, and neighbors were all safe, our attention turned to the cattle. The only way my brother and I could reach them was by Jet Ski. I am not sure which event amazed the cows the most, the flood itself or my brother and me on a Jet Ski. Thankfully, the cows had found higher ground and were safe.

Hurricane Floyd may have flooded the land but never the spirit. We survived, and the old saying, "What doesn't destroy you makes you stronger," was proven true.

Wayne Edwards gave his son, Robert, the same advice his father had given him: "Don't go back to the farm." Like his father, Robert did not take that advice. He graduated from North Carolina State University with a degree in agriculture and returned to the farm to work with his dad. In 1999, Robert and his father, Wayne, farmed four thousand acres located in Edgecombe, Halifax, and Nash Counties.

"Robert has added a new dimension to farming," his mother said. "For convenience and growth, he put in a communication system for the farms that makes possible radio communication between equipment and vehicles."

The Angel Is Forever

PHYLLIS L. JACOBS

Because I had lost my car in the 1988 spring runoff, I heard hurricane forecasts and decided to remain awake and watchful the entire night of September 16, 1999.

Events progressed rapidly. At 2:00 A.M., it was raining outside my condo. The wind was blowing, and all the cars had been moved from the parking lot of Harbor West condominium complex to higher ground. The complex is located on Tar River. When the ever-dependable *News and Observer* carrier drove up, I walked out to get the paper.

By 2:30, the water was rising rapidly, and at 3:00 A.M. I hastily awakened my neighbor to tell her that the water was at the front steps. After she dressed and packed a few items, we called friends to tell them we were coming.

At 3:45 A.M., we walked out of our condos into waist-high water and driving rain. We finally reached my friend's car, which fortunately had been parked in the Food Lion parking lot. I drove because she has vision problems that hinder her driving at night. We realized we could not reach our friends' home, so we decided to head for the Holiday Inn, where I play the piano on Sundays.

We quickly discovered we were in serious trouble. Trees lay across Beechwood Drive. As we came to a low place on Old Mill Road, we saw only the top of a car. We turned around to try alternative routes, all of which were blocked. Finally, we were able to get onto West Mount Drive heading west.

As we reached the intersection of West Mount Drive and Halifax Road, we decided to head toward N.C. Highway 97 [Raleigh Road] in order to get back into Rocky Mount. Traveling south on Halifax Road, we came to Lamon's Ferry Bridge. Though there was water over it, we decided to try to get across and did.

Almost immediately, we spotted a tree across the road being held up at an angle by underbrush on the opposite side. When I asked my friend if her car would go under the tree, she said she didn't know if it would but to try it anyway. With many spoken and unspoken prayers, we arrived safely on the other side.

Reaching the traffic light at Raleigh Road, we headed east to return to the city. The rain was not falling as hard as it had been, and the wind was not as strong. We felt a slight sense of security, not knowing that just ahead lay the greatest danger yet—one that only the power of God could control.

About a mile west of the city limit, the car was suddenly hit by a wall of water higher than its headlights! It was up to the side windows on the passenger's side. All that I could see was my headlights piercing brown water—no road whatsoever!



Inside a Harbor West Condo.

CREDIT: SUSANNE DOWNS

A bright light shone through the windshield. At first, I assumed it to be the city lights, but the city's electricity was off. I have never driven through water, nor did I drive through it that dark morning. A greater power took charge. As quickly as it had appeared, the water was gone. About fifteen minutes later, we arrived at the home of a friend. We were drenched, the car was waterlogged, but we were alive. Praise the Lord!

The rest of this wonderful, yet awful experience was still to be realized. On Thursday, September 23, my daughter and I were able to reenter Harbor West to assess the damage and to remove anything salvageable. As we entered the living room, my Baldwin piano lay shattered in middle of the room. So much of my life's history lay in the mud and sludge. Yet, over on one side of the room, an heirloom drop-leaf table from my late husband's family sat where it had floated from the opposite side of the room. Every item from each table or chest was lying in the mud, except a beautiful Lenox Christmas angel. My daughter and her husband had given it to me for Christmas in 1998.

My daughter, Lu, grew strangely quiet as she handed me the angel because I had told her there were two things I did not want for Christmas that year: "sit-around stuff to be dusted and Christmas decorations." On that Christmas morning, I discovered that she had chosen something that was both—the angel. Because the angel was too beautiful to keep in a box eleven months of the year, I had chosen to leave her on that treasured drop-leaf table with some other special pieces. Lu now told me that 1998 had been the first time Lenox had sent her a catalogue. She started to discard it but decided to flip through it. The pages turned immediately to the angel, and she ordered it that night. All of us were strangely quiet.

On September 24, Steve Keeter, cabinetmaker *extraordinaire*, examined the table to see if it could be saved. Looking at the flood-whitened wood, he asked, "Is this where the angel was?" That one spot shone as if it had recently been polished.

Days later, after I had told the angel story to many church friends, Kelly Barnes, a youngster in our church, asked his mother, "Doesn't Miss Phyllis know angels can fly? That angel flew out of there and saved her."

Today, the angel has a special place on my mantel, as she always will. The table is being refinished, but after a year, the spot where the angel sat still shines.

Do I believe in angels? Absolutely! They are sent by God to show us that He cares for us wherever we are and whenever we need divine help.

Phyllis Jacobs, longtime guidance counselor and musician, worked in the Nash-Rocky Mount Schools for many years. At the time of the flood, Phyllis was living at Harbor West Condos on the Tar River.

A Farmer's Story

JOEL BOSEMAN

In September 1999, Hurricane Floyd came and totally destroyed twenty-five thousand acres of the five thousand acres of cropland we tended. For those of you who don't understand farming, that was a disaster because farmers plant most crops in the spring and harvest them in the fall. In Nash and Edgecombe Counties, most farmers grow peanuts, cotton, corn, soybeans, sweet potatoes, cucumbers, and tobacco. Once the crops are planted, the weather determines whether the crops will be good or bad. Now forty-six years old and having farmed since I was eighteen, I've seen plenty of dry years when there was nothing but powder to plant in, and I've lain awake at night just praying to hear a thunderstorm in the distance. During the summer of 1999, however, rain was plentiful.

Hurricane Dennis arrived first. My family and I farm about one hundred acres along the Tar River, where we grow cucumbers. Cucumbers require irrigation, and it's easier to irrigate along the river. Hurricane Dennis dumped so much rain on us that our cucumbers flooded. Television reporters came out to interview us as we tried to save the crop. The water made the fields look like a river, and we lost all one hundred acres. We knew that if we got much more rain, there would be no way to make a decent crop of anything.

Hurricane Floyd came right after Dennis, bringing a lot more rain, and this time the rivers, streams, creeks, and ditches overflowed. We did not realize how bad it was until we tried to drive out to survey the damage

and had to turn around every few minutes because water was covering the roads. We had cows on one of our farms along the river, but I could not get to them to see if they were all right. A friend of mine who sprays crops took his airplane up two days after the hurricane and saw cows inching up a hill as the water continued to rise. Their calves did not make it because the water was too deep.

All of the cropland backing up to the Tar River became part of the river. Tractors and trucks left in the fields were ruined because the water had gotten into the motors. Beehives floated everywhere. The storm spared nothing.

Putting a dollar amount on all the crops and equipment we lost was difficult. Some things were insured; some were not. Even with insurance and disaster payments, the best a farmer could get back was the price of seed, fertilizer, and some chemicals. All the time and hard work were lost. Not only did the farmer lose, but his migrant workers also suffered. They had to move on because there was no work. They depended on harvesting the cucumbers and sweet potatoes to make money. Chain stores and grocery stores suffered because they lost the Hispanic business when the migrants left early. Equipment dealers lost because the farmers didn't have money to purchase new equipment. Hurricane Floyd affected many farm-related businesses, also.

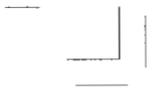
As a farmer who lived through this flood, I knew I could not quit, though at the time I seriously thought about it—not only because of the flood, but also because prices for crops dropped so low. Even now, it is hard to borrow money and hard to find labor. In addition, the government keeps coming up with new rules and regulations that increase costs and paperwork. Farming, however, is in my blood, and I truly love being a steward of the earth.

Joel Boseman grew up on a farm in Nash County. When he graduated from high school in 1972, he knew exactly what he wanted to do—farm. Jean Johnson shared the same goal. After graduation, she began farming with her father.

Joel and Jean met in a peanut field on October 1, 1974. "I was raking hay when Joel came over to bale hay for Daddy's cows. After I finished raking hay, I went over to where Joel was because he was having problems with the hay baler.

We solved the problem and went out to eat that night. We dated every night for five years. Then we got married and have been married twenty-six years.”

Joel and Jean Boseman remain active farmers, farming eight thousand acres of land in Nash, Edgecombe, and Halifax Counties. Their children, Jackson, Katie, and Sallie, and Joel’s nephew, Wayne Boseman, are part of the family’s farming business.



Destruction, Reconstruction, and Restoration

NANCY AND LEWIS THORP

Everyone's flood story is different. Ours started a month before the flood when we began an addition to our house, and it continues to this day. Through it all, we see the fine hand of the Lord making the best of a bad situation.

Building the addition to the house caused us to move temporarily into a bedroom down the hall; to hang our clothes on tall, rolling racks; and to pack our pictures and records into large plastic bins with waterproof lids. Instead of storing these downstairs with everything else, we put them under the upstairs beds.

Our home is built on the side of a hill, so we live upstairs and have garages, storage, and a playroom downstairs. One corner of the house rests in the floodplain, and even though the water had never touched the house in twenty-one years, we were classified as a high-risk flood area. The flood that came with Floyd put fifteen feet of water in the house—two feet into the upstairs area.

On Wednesday, September 15, 1999, we had just come home from a trip and were unpacking. The promised storm was only one of many we had weathered in this house, occasionally having lost a tree but never having water damage. We taped the windows and retreated to our downstairs room to ride out the night. I was haunted by a persistent feeling that I should stay dressed and awake and watch for water, which I did.

Around midnight, I realized that the rising water from Stony Creek was threatening our motor home, which was parked at the end of the drive.

I put on foul-weather gear, went outside during the peak of the storm, and backed the motor home with the protective cover still on it up the inclined drive. As I was en route, a pine tree fell with a loud crack about two feet away from where I had been standing three minutes earlier.

In the fierce wind, the flapping motor-home cover got hung up on the vehicle's air conditioner, so I climbed up to the roof and freed it in winds recorded at seventy knots.

I also realized that our cars were at risk, so I backed both of them up the drive and went to our safe room, where I collapsed.

A short time later, Nancy roused me and announced that water was coming into the room. We proceeded to stack furniture and take portable objects of value upstairs. Within an hour, it became evident that we would be trapped by the rising water if we stayed on the first floor, so we went upstairs. The water was to the second step as we started and to the fifth step by the time we reached the top, not a minute too soon.

Upstairs, we started the same procedure of saving furniture. I called our neighbors, Fred Dunston and Dennis Culpepper, to come over and help. By the time they arrived, the water was knee deep in the front yard. Our kayak floated by, so I captured it, and we began transporting things to the high-and-dry motor home outside.

By noon on Thursday, we had done as much as we could inside. The water covered our hardwood floors and ran into the furnace vents. Nancy and I rolled and lifted a large carpet to put it on top of a table. The next day, two big men who came to help could not lift it. Finally, we sat down on the sofa and watched the final destruction of our home as water rose knee high.

We finally gathered boards and paddled the kayak to what was now "Candlewood Beach" two feet from the street out front. By this time there was a swift current and chest-deep water in our front yard, too dangerous for wading.

For four days, we lived with the Culpeppers. With a multitude of generous neighbors, we went back into the house as the water receded. They helped us cut out three-foot strips of carpet and haul them out to the street. The mountain out by the road grew larger and higher. As the water went down and access to the outside world improved, our family gathered.

We began what would become a fifteen-month effort to restore order and to get back into our house.

We cannot say enough about the Candlewood neighborhood. All of us were trapped. Men could not go to work, and children were out of school. Teens gathered and helped us pack fragile china and books. The “dry” neighbors held “come as you are” flood dinners every night where we ate before going back to work. As roads opened and others were able to come, church people and friends from all over joined in. We discarded lots of furniture and other things because they were covered with mud. There just wasn’t enough time or energy to sort things out.

The interior of the house was a disaster. Downstairs, where the water filled rooms to their ceilings, everything was covered with the white mud of dissolved wallboard. Glued furniture had come apart into heaps of boards. The storage room was a cavern of broken furniture covered with mud, and the garage had leaking gas cans and boxes floating around.

Upstairs, where there had been two feet of water, there was now a fine covering of white silt. A massive dresser had floated and overturned in the bedroom. A pair of Nancy’s shoes had floated together from the bedroom to the living room, and an open plastic box of genealogy records had floated around as dry as a bone.

Fortunately, we had a builder under contract, and he appeared the next day with his crew to begin the long process of restoration. Restoration started with destruction—the walls were cleared of drywall to four feet, and the insulation was sent to the growing mountain by the street. Eventually, the hardwood floors joined it.

We spent a couple of months drying the house. Dehumidifiers, three of them, holding thirteen pints of water each had to be emptied twice a day. For five days, a man used a hot-air machine to blow through all of the cabinets to places where water was trapped. The house’s hollow interior doors drained for days and were eventually discarded.

Bob Jones arranged for furniture storage, first in his garage and then in a warehouse that his company rented. From these areas, we began the clean up and refinishing, which were not complete fifteen months later when it was time to move back.

Finally, we moved back into the house in three moves: one each from Bob's garage, the Rocky Mount Mills office, and the warehouse. We accomplished all three moves in one day because all of our children and their families came to help.

Now the house is new, and we are back into it—not completely settled but very pleased with the result. Any day now, we expect an offer from the city for a buyout, which, if accepted, would necessitate that we find another house and that this new one be destroyed.

For us, Hurricane Floyd, started one month before the storm and is not over yet.

Nancy and Lewis Thorp are local residents. Lewis Thorp is a practicing physician.

Even the Refrigerator Floated

AN INTERVIEW WITH VICTORIA JOYNER | ANN WILLIAMSON AND ROSA LEONARD

I used to live at 1617 Old Falls Drive before the flood. In 1999, between September 15 and 16, my house flooded, and the water in it was fifteen feet high. The refrigerator was floating. My piano was laid over on the couch. The water was strong.

It was terrible. It was awful. I had dreams about it in the night.

I was staying with a sick lady that night on Atlantic Avenue. She was real sick and afraid to stay by herself. She was flooded out, and we had to come out in a boat. I was afraid, and the lady who was sick was afraid, too. The water rose during the night. We were in bed, not expecting water to rise and flood our homes. Firemen came to get us in a boat. We were lucky. The phone was out, so we couldn't call for help, but we saw them coming down the street in a boat picking up people. They picked up a lot of people. They couldn't carry them all at the same time so they had to make several trips. We had to wait on the porch. Water was coming onto the porch before they could get back to pick us up. Four men came into the house, took the sick lady out in a blanket, put us into a boat, and took us to a shelter because we didn't have anywhere else to go. The first shelter we were in was on Virginia Street, but it started flooding, and they had to move all of us to another shelter in Parker School. We stayed there about five days. They had chairs, cots, and things there for us. The lady with me begged me not to leave her, so I didn't. She had family, but they didn't live here. Finally, she went to a neighbor's house. She died shortly after the

flood. When I was able to leave the shelter, I went to my house and found everything destroyed.

I went to my daughter's and stayed there until we got straightened out at 609 Clyde Street, which is where we've been staying since that time. We lost everything. Everyone on Leggett Road in this community lost everything. They had to tear it out and throw it all away. Different charities, the Red Cross and lots of churches brought food, water, clothes, and everything. The Salvation Army gave me a voucher that enabled me to get a whole kitchen set. They also came into our neighborhood with hot meals, as well as food for us to cook. They were wonderful. Everyone worked together. Black and white and Hispanic came together. I feel that we have grown from that experience. Another thing it taught us was that you could have it today and tomorrow it could be gone. There is no real security in material things. However, the one thing I miss the most are my family pictures. I wasn't able to save any.

We just weren't expecting this flood. The water rose quickly while we were in bed. We didn't think to stock up on canned food or water. Fortunately, the people who weren't flooded out brought food to the people who were. The community came together. Church members helped us tear stuff out of our houses and put it on the street.

I now live at 609 Clyde Street. When I first got married, I moved here. Both my two children were born here. My first husband died, and then my second husband died. My grandson got me from the shelter, brought me here again, and stayed with me until we could get the lights and things on. He's been fixing it up and painting it for me, too. I don't have much furniture. We brought what was usable from Falls Road. The house has lots of memories. Sometimes it seems like I hear my first husband walking around here at night. I do miss my electric stove. I have a gas one here. But I was sure lucky to have a house to come to... the Lord's got a way of working things out!

Victoria Joyner lives at 609 Clyde Street in Rocky Mount. As a nurse companion, she has taken care of many people over the years.

True Generosity and Friendship

AN INTERVIEW WITH DELL POPE | JACKIE PASH

On September 15, 1999, I heard the wind blowing and the rain hitting my house. When I got up at 3:00 A.M., I realized that I had never seen anything like that before. I became very worried and called 911. They told me that they would be here within an hour.

As I sat on my sofa in my bedroom and watched the water cover my car, I called 911 again but couldn't get an answer. I didn't know exactly what to do, so I prayed.

At 5:00 A.M. when I looked out, water was everywhere, but none was in my house at the moment. By 6:20 A.M., however, the water was up to my knees. At 7:30 A.M., a fireman knocked on my kitchen door. He was in a boat that had two other ladies in it. The boat was not a powerboat, just a little boat manned by a man with one paddle.

He asked me to open my door, but I was afraid that if I opened it I'd have even more water in my house. He said, "Please, ma'am, I've come to rescue you. Open the door." So I did. It was still raining, and since I have arthritis, I didn't know if I could climb up into the boat, but I managed the best I could.

Although the two ladies in the boat were crying, I didn't have time to cry or to be frightened. Besides, I had given the problem to the Lord the night before and had told Him, "Well, You are allowing this. I don't know what will come of it, but I don't feel like I will drown." I didn't.

After they rescued me, we went next door to my neighbor's house and got her. Then we rode to higher ground on Lee Street. Unfortunately, it was not a lot higher there because the water was still up to my knees. I finally got into a van and was taken to the R.M. Wilson gym.

Two wonderful firemen had rescued me. I don't know what their names were. I've tried to find them since the flood to thank them but couldn't. I did write the fire department a letter to tell them how grateful I was and that I knew that the Lord would bless them greatly.

I'm a travel agent, and at R.M. Wilson, I saw one of my customers. "Miss Pope, where in the world did you come from?" he asked.

"Whew, I'm so glad to see you I don't know what to do," I said. He took me by car to my cousin Charles Moxley's house on Glendale Avenue. Charles took me in, and I was so thankful to be there because they hadn't had the destruction that we'd had at Riverside. I stayed with Charles and his family for nine months and four days.

During my stay, all of my friends, black and white, came and ministered to me and helped me. My cousin's neighbors were precious. They came; they brought; they did. I'll be forever grateful to them all.

When the water went down a day later, Charles took me to see the devastation at my apartment. There had been five and a half feet of water in the apartment, water filled with mud, rot, filth, and sewage. Everything I had was destroyed. I'd lost my car and my furniture. Most of my belongings were in the middle of the floor. All of my clothes were wet. I went into shock when I saw my apartment because I thought that I had lost everything except the clothes on my back, the pocketbook on my arm, and two or three rings.

When I went to my apartment after the water had completely receded, I discovered, to my surprise, that it was not a total loss. People came by and helped me get things out. I saved five pieces of furniture. The National Guardsmen, preachers, and people from churches came to help. These blessed people, black and white, brought sandwiches, water, and drinks. They did everything in the world they could. When they picked up my clothes, I told them to throw them out because they'd never be wearable again, but some people took them home, cleaned them, and brought them back.

I'll never be able to thank God enough for the friends and people who helped me. I wish I knew every one so I could thank them face-to-face.

My wonderful friends in Rocky Mount helped me in my office and sent me money. My church, First Baptist Church in Scotland Neck, sent me money, also.

When I went apartment hunting, I couldn't find an apartment for under \$450 a month. I called everybody and went everywhere. Also, other people were trying to help me find something. Being a senior lady seventy-one years old and living alone with no family, I had to have a place that was safe. Finally, I found an apartment on Lee Street, at \$465. The realtor told me the rent would go up \$25 the first of January. I thought that was the best I could do and that I'd just have to take it. When I told Cousin Charles that I would probably get that apartment, he asked, "Do you have time to talk? How would you like to go to Westwood Crossing to see a model home?"

"Well, Charles, they don't rent those. You have to buy those houses, so there's no need to go there," I said, but he insisted that we at least take a look. Of course, it was beautiful and perfect, but I kept saying, "But you have to buy these." Charles told me we'd keep looking.

After spending Christmas in Virginia with my college roommate, I drove back to Charles's house. He met me with, "How would you like to have a house at Westwood Crossing? I'll build you a house and put you in it."

He asked how much rent I had paid at Riverside, and I told him \$300. "Well, you can pay me \$300 a month for the rest of your life." I all but fainted. I just praised God: I said, "I just can't believe this, Lord. I cannot believe how You have taken care of me. I've never in my life done so much for You that You should give me a home like this."

I have a darling little yellow and white Cape Cod cottage now. I'm having all my friends, near and far, come see what the Lord and my cousin have done.

I tell you right now there's nothing in the world like the wonderful presence of God when you love one another. The flood has been the best experience in my life because I've met such wonderful people. I just thank God that I have lived through this. I was in great trauma. Now I am a much stronger Christian and a better person.

My customers, friends, and people in my office have been wonderful. They gave me a party right here in my little house and brought me all the things that I needed. It was almost like getting married.

Every time I walk into this house, I say, "Thank You for this house. Thank You, God, for everybody that has helped me through this flood."

At the time of the flood, Dell Pope had lived at Riverside for twenty-three years in her four-room apartment.

What An Experience!

AN INTERVIEW WITH BETTY BATTLE | ROSA LEONARD

I would like to tell you about the storm in 1999, September 15th and 16th. I knew we were going to have a hurricane, but I had heard nothing about a flood. The night of the hurricane, I decided not to undress but to go to bed wearing my clothes because I did not know what might happen.

I went to sleep. During the night, I woke and found the lights were out. I couldn't use the telephone. I couldn't do anything in the house. Everything was dark, so I went back to sleep. The next time I woke, it was my usual time to get up, so I got up to go to the bathroom. In getting off my bed, I realized I was in water. I wondered where the water was coming from. There was no water on the ceiling. The house was not leaking that I could tell, so I went on to the bathroom. When I flushed the commode, the water came up out of the commode onto the floor. I looked in my bathtub and saw water coming up into it. I went back into my bedroom and looked out the window. What I saw was water! Water appeared to be almost up to my windowsill. I got on the bed again, and I began to worry. I didn't know what was happening because I had not heard anything about flooding. I got back up, and I went out of my bedroom into the hallway. As I walked, I was splashing water. I went all the way through the house into the kitchen. There was water everywhere! At that time, the water was a little above my ankle. I came back down the hall and went into the other bedroom, where the bed was higher than mine. I lay there for a while and wondered what I was going to do.

I started praying and asked the Lord, "What am I going to do?" I wrapped my legs up a little bit. I felt like I was just going to pieces. I didn't know what to do. Finally, I got up and I started down the hallway again. When I came back, the things that were on the floor in my bathroom and bedroom were everywhere—floating down the hall.

I stayed there a long time. I had about come to the point that whatever happened was going to happen. I tried to tell myself to relax. I kept thinking, "Where is the highest place in the house?"

I don't have a stairway because the house is on one floor. I had no place to go, and I was there alone. I decided to get my pocketbook, a bag, and pack some things in the bag. If somebody did come along to help me, I'd have those few things to carry out. Also, I got my Bible and other important things that I could fit into my pocketbook. I carried these back down the hall and put them on my table. I then got back on the bed and almost fell asleep.

Suddenly, I heard a knock at my door. By this time, the water was up to my knees. I got off the bed and started back down the hall. The force of the water was pushing me backward as I pushed against it to get to the door. By the time I got to the door, the people had gone. Looking through the blinds, I could see two young men leaving the house. So I rushed, as fast as I could, to get to my window. I knocked on the window. They heard me knocking and came back.

"Let's go," they said.

I said, "Can you wait a minute and let me get some shoes?" I ran back to my table and got my purse with my things in it. Ironically, I didn't get shoes or anything to wrap around my shoulders. I just had the clothes I had worn to bed and the things in my purse.

When I got to the door, the water was pushing against it, and it was hard for the young man to open the door. I walked out but forgot my Bible. They had to pick me up and carry me to the boat because the water was almost up to my neck. They got me first and then went to my neighbors' houses and got them. They pushed our boat out to Barnes Street, where we unloaded and got into a truck.

As time went by, I was thinking about what I needed to do in order

to get myself in line. Once I was out of the water and onto dry land, my next question was, "Where can I stay until I get things straightened out?" I followed my neighbor to her daughter's house and stayed there until I could get in contact with my son.

Meanwhile, he was out riding around trying to find me and just happened to come into the neighborhood. Somebody there who knew where I was staying told him. He found me and took me to his house, which was one of our family homes where I had lived in past years. I was a part of that house, it's true; but I had my own house now.

He tried to make me as comfortable as possible, which I appreciated so much; however, I still did not know what to do. I didn't have any transportation of my own. I had to get around the best way that I could. Fortunately, I had a foster daughter who took me to different places to get some necessities. As that first week went by, I filled out applications for different things available for those who were flooded.

That weekend, my daughter, who's in the military, came home to help me get situated. My foster daughter and my daughter took me to fill out applications for help from FEMA and other agencies. I applied for a trailer to put in my yard. While I was waiting for those things to come through, I stayed with my son. My children, who lived other places, came to check on me and brought clothing and other things that I needed.

As time went on, there was nothing else I could do but pray, cry, and wait. The storm really did something to me. I experienced several health problems. My blood pressure started going up, and a doctor discovered I had some kidney problems. Also, something happened to my knee, and I had to have a minor operation on it. Fortunately, everything turned out okay.

My daughter came to spend the week with me at my son's house. She called the different agencies to make sure that things were going through for me.

Because I still didn't have transportation, I decided to get a car. I started back to work at my healthcare job.

My daughter came back to see me. I had already come back to the community where I had lived. She came back to see if they had put the trailer in place. Sure enough, they had! The trailer was big enough for my

children to stay with me when they came to visit. The children helped me move into my trailer.

Somebody I didn't know had gotten word that I wanted help with my house. I came home one day from work and had a message waiting for me telling me to go to a company on Washington Street where there was somebody who could help me with my house. They gave me the name of the person who could help me. I called that person. It happened that it was a person whom I had called once before to check the roof on my back porch, and I remembered him. When he came, I explained that I wanted to get my walls in and do some other things so I could get back into the house. He let me know when he could start.

At that time, I was living in the trailer. It was a nice trailer. I didn't know how to turn on the gas and got somebody to come out and show me how to do that. Then I got a tank of gas, which made me feel a little better because I knew then I had enough gas to hold me until I could get back into my house.

My daughter came and stayed with me several times while I was in the trailer. She helped me a lot. While I stayed in the trailer, no other trailers were in this area but mine.

The storm really did something to me that I know I won't ever get over. There are things I can't replace. There were things I had from the beginning of my marriage up until the storm. I had pictures of when I was in school and papers that I was trying to save for my children so they could look back and read about things I had done and things they had done since their first years in school. I had a photo of my husband and me when we both were supposed to have been three years old. I felt lost and empty with so many of my life's memories washed away. But I realize that there's nothing I can do about it now but be thankful that my life was saved.

I have learned that material things in life are nothing. I need spiritual things because I have a soul that needs to be saved.

All the help that I got was wonderful. It let me know that the Lord had somebody in this world who had a heart of love toward the people who suffered in this disaster. I just cannot find anyone that I could say didn't give anything. People gave what they could have kept. Even the smallest

thing given to me was appreciated. I thank the Lord for opening up the hearts of these people. I still remember the people who came in and tore out my house so that the builder could come in and rebuild it.

I think about a little lady, Mrs. Betty Poplin, a Methodist, who was going around in the area trying to see the houses of people to help get them torn out. I found her and asked her if she could find someone to do my house. She said, "I'm going to send the people to help you." And she sent someone to help. I appreciated it so much. She was so nice. She came back and brought me a box of things that I could use in my house after I got it straightened out. That was a blessing from the Lord. There was also another lady, Miss Mary, who was helpful.

I wasn't turned down by anyone. When I got to my job, they said, "We're going to help you get back to where you were." I just thank God, FEMA, and the other government organizations that came in. My church and other churches pitched in and gave donations to help me. There were other individuals, my children and friends, who helped. They looked into my heating and electricity and found people to do the work at a lower price.

Even though at times I sit and think and I'm just like a bucket of water—I fill up, and I can't help myself. But I know the Lord is still blessing me because I am here today.

I'm so thankful for the people who came. Some came from other states. They helped us to recover. Now I am thankful to see our neighborhood come back together, even though we lost some in the storm and some after the storm. The neighborhood is building up now, and I hope that, in a little while, all who want to come back to their homes will be able to. Then we can enjoy seeing each other and also the new people who are coming out to be with us.

I feel that I need to mention one thing again: the young men who borrowed the boat to get the people out of their houses. We had one lady in a house who was in a wheel chair and couldn't walk. She was there by herself. Those young men checked and saw that she was in the house and that the water was rising. They asked to come in to get her out, but she refused. They finally said, "You're going to come out of this house whether you want to or not." Then they broke the glass, opened her door, got into

her house, and got her out and into the boat. They saved her from staying in her house and drowning. I thought that was just great of them because sometimes people don't think about other people when things like that happen. I understand that later, when she realized what had happened, she appreciated their efforts to save her.

Floyd certainly brought terrible devastation, but it also brought out the goodness in the people of our community, for which I shall always be grateful.

Local resident Betty Battle lived at 124 Camelia Court at the time of the flood.



From Carriage Trail to Shellcastle

BETTY PENNY



In 1993, we purchased nineteen acres of land on Carriage Trail where we could have a pasture and horses. We built a horse barn first and then the brick house. We enjoyed fencing the pasture and playing with Monet; her foal, Charm; and our Arabian horses, Shalola and Chipper. We loved seeing the horses race and hearing them gallop wide open in the pasture by our bedroom. When the weather cooled off, they would get frisky and run, buck, kick, and jump. There's a special thrill seeing Arabians, with noses in the wind and tails flying up and out like flags, run at full speed.

Fearing that the winds of the impending Hurricane Floyd might down trees, our daughter, Melinda, and her husband, "Bubba" Canady, came on Tuesday to get our horses. A horse will walk easily into a horse trailer one time and may stubbornly balk the next. If the wind and weather were to become forceful, Melinda knew that I could not manage the horses by myself and that her daddy was not physically able to wrestle them.

Though Horace usually could load the horses by himself, he was just home from Nash General Hospital after bi-femoral bypass surgery and a trip to Wake Medical Hospital for heart catheterization. A nurse came twice a day to dress his incisions. Melinda and Bubba visited for a few minutes, loaded the horses with no trouble, and left for their farm in Garner.

On the evening of September 15, 1999, the weather forecasters predicted lots of rain and possible flooding due to Hurricane Floyd. In the past, we had seen water from Stony Creek overflow into the horse pasture, but it had



never reached the barn or house. About 9:00 P.M., our neighbors, Shelia and Joe Johnson, rode by our house and called to say that water was running out of the pond across the street. Though we could not see the water, we could hear it flowing across the street into the ditch, but this did not alarm us. I filled the bathtub with water and readied the storm supplies. I was glad that we had chosen a gas stove when we built the house. At least we could have coffee and cook hot food if we lost electrical power.

We had never had any water in the utility room or in the fenced yard. During the hot summer, we had frequently kept our dogs in the utility room off the carport, where they were comfortable during the day, and we let them out in the cooler night air to run outside in the pen. With impending rain and bad weather, I didn't want the dogs to get wet, so shortly before 11:00 P.M., I decided to put them in their cages.

As I stepped down from the back porch to the carport, I discovered water from the pond across the street running through the carport and yard. I called to Horace, and we drove the pickup to the barn to check for water—no water there.

On the way back to the house, we debated about where to put the dogs for the night—in the horse barn or in the utility room. We finally decided to stack the kennels in the utility area. Back at the house, we selected six airline kennels for the dogs and the cat. The Shelties—Maggie, Bonnie, Noel, and Boomer—and the kitten, Scootin, were now inside the house; Boots, the cat, would not come when we called him. In case we had to leave quickly, we decided to keep the pickup close by so that we could transport the animals and kennels.

Horace thought that one of us should stay up and wait out the storm, so I said I would. At 1:30 A.M., I stepped outside to survey the ground and sky. It was still cloudy but not raining, and the driveway appeared dry! The water was gone. Returning inside, I woke Horace with the news that the worst appeared to be over, and I lay down on the couch in my jeans and shirt. The television lulled me to sleep.

About 5:00 A.M., I awoke. Everything was dark. The power had gone off. I could hear rain and wind, but I could see nothing, so I decided to lie down on the couch again and wait for daylight. I wanted Horace to sleep

as long as he could. I saw a flash of light and thought it was lightning but later decided that it was probably a transformer. About 6:00 A.M., Horace woke, went to the back of the house, and opened the door.

"The water's almost to the door handles on the truck," he shouted. I ran to the kitchen window to look and saw the water. I felt water on my right foot. Though I was certain that I hadn't spilled water when I'd fixed the coffee last night, I decided to worry about the water later.

Wanting a better look at the backyard, I ran to the French doors leading to the back deck and opened them. I could not see the deck, just water. The water was close to the door but was not yet running inside. Water was over the tires and fender wells of the full-sized truck.

Retreating inside, I realized my foot was wet again. I tried to locate the source of the water and soon realized that it was coming from the floor vents. That explained the water on the floor at the kitchen sink.

"We have to get out," Horace yelled. "I'll get help!" Out he rushed, down the steps and into the water. Simultaneously, the water disabled the truck, activating the flashers and alarm. Horace made his way through the swift, chest-deep, swirling water, around the side of the house, out to the dry area of Carriage Trail to a neighbor's house.

The water had cut us off from Old Carriage Road. No one could drive in or out of our neighborhood. I suddenly realized that if we had not brought the dogs inside seven hours before, they would have drowned outside before we had awakened. The rising water must have driven Boots the cat home because he was sitting on a windowsill near the back door as the dark water was rising rapidly.

Horace returned with Joe Johnson and his son, Lane. The men began rescuing the animals. The water was chest high and too swift for a man to carry a kennel with an animal in it over his head, so they first took an empty kennel to Joe's truck, then a dog or cat to put in it.

Meanwhile, I filled garbage bags with Horace's medicines and bandages and dry clothing for us. The water was over my boots in the house, so I held the bags over my head as I stepped onto the porch and down into the yard. When I reached the side yard, the water was up to my chin. We made it safely to the Johnson's home with animals in tow.

Using his Jet Ski, Lane made several trips to retrieve things from our house. He also met his sister, Dawn, who drove her car as close to Carriage Trail as she could with food supplies.

Some of the neighbors had generators. Ray and Joan Sykes brought hot coffee to us that morning as we sat on the hill and watched our six-year old home drown. The water rose to the roof on the outside and almost to the ceiling inside. Everything was ruined. Oak cabinets, furniture, photographs, piano, baby pictures, and the three daughters' wedding portraits, family bibles, and other keepsakes all were destroyed.

We spent several days with the Johnsons and then went to stay with our daughter, Melinda, on her farm outside Garner. Our good friends, Dorothy and Bill Nelson, rented us their fully furnished guest cottage in Spring Hope. As winter approached, we began to think of relocating to Garner but decided to stay here, since we had spent most of our adult lives in Rocky Mount.

Cleaning out our home was a filthy task. We will never be able to erase the smell of floodwater from our memory. One afternoon after school, I drove up to the "flood house" and saw an assortment of our wicker furniture and other items that a neighbor had found beyond the horse pasture. Three months after the flood, I was overwhelmed to see a Vietri teapot that I'd purchased in Italy in July. We never did find the lid.

When our granddaughter, Rebekah Mangum, saw the house, she sat down on a cooler and cried. Her Aunt Melinda stopped to console her.

Rebekah said, "Aunt Melinda, will we ever have Christmas here again?"

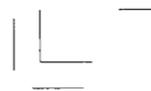
Aunt Melinda said, "No, darling, we probably won't."

The seven year-old replied, "But we have our precious memories."

Yes, we have our precious memories, as do so many other families. It is strange how my emotions have been on a roller coaster. My dogs would have drowned in their cages if we had left them in their normal place. We are very grateful that our animals were saved and that our lives were spared. There are days when I can talk of the loss of home and belongings; and other days when tears and sadness overwhelm me. But once in a while, something funny comes to mind, and I laugh.

We have relocated across U.S. Highway 64 in the Shellcastle subdivision. We are lucky and grateful for God's help, our faith, strength, courage, and family and friends who helped us.

Betty Penny, retired teacher, has served in many capacities in the educational field. She and her husband, Horace, and their family are longtime residents of Rocky Mount.



Trials and Tribulations

AN INTERVIEW WITH VIVIAN ANDERSON AND
SUZANNE SIFFORD | ROSA LEONARD AND ANN WILLIAMSON

Suzanne Sifford: I was supposed to come home from Williamsburg, Virginia, the day of the hurricane. I'd been visiting with my aunt, who suggested that I wait and go home after the storm passed. About 3:00 A.M., I got a call from my daughter, Patricia Olivieri, saying that she and her family were having to get out of our temporary home. She said, "I don't know where we're going, but we'll call you." She called me the next day to tell me where they were staying and to tell me that I probably could not get home. In spite of what she'd said, I had to try.

When I left Williamsburg and headed home, I was stopped on Interstate 95 far north of my objective and rerouted over to Interstate 85. I knew that I-85 would take me to the west side of Durham, well out of my way. I couldn't imagine the flood spreading that far, so somewhere on I-85, I took off across country trying to work my way east to Rocky Mount. I wound up in Wake Forest. I took a little country road that eventually came out in Zebulon. From Zebulon, I took U.S. Highway 264 to Wilson, where I spent the night with friends.

The next day, I headed into Rocky Mount on I-95 from the south but was stopped before I could get into the city. I showed my driver's license to the highway patrolman and told him I was a property owner and needed to get into town. He finally told me how I could make it.

Our apartment on Zebulon Road was about sixty feet from Stony Creek. There were ten steps up to the deck and another step into the apartment. In spite of the fact that we were almost seventy feet above the creek, three and a half feet of water came inside.

During the flood, our next-door neighbor, Mrs. Biggs, came over and woke my family about 11:00 P.M. to tell them how high the water was getting. My family said they sat there and could almost see the water rising but didn't make any attempt to move anything or even to pack because they didn't believe the water could possibly rise ten feet. Two hours later, it was rising so fast that they didn't have time to pack anything. They just had to get in the car and leave. Patricia's husband, James, tried to get the Biggses to leave, too, but they wouldn't, and they had to be rescued by firemen in boats the next day.

The kids had moved their cars to higher ground earlier in the day, so to get out, James backed the Suburban as close as he could to the steps of the apartment in order to get Patricia, Brandon, and James Michael, the baby. Brandon, my seventeen-year-old grandson, had to hold Patricia up because she couldn't keep her footing to go even those few feet due to the force of the water.

The water was so swift that the car belonging to the lady two doors down completely turned over and washed up into a tree. The son of Alex Biggs, our neighbor, came the following day, tried to wade through the water to get into his dad's apartment, and was literally swept away into a tree at the end of our condominium complex. The day after that, my son-in-law, who had a little rowboat, tried to get up to the condominium, but he couldn't because the current was still so swift.

Eventually, James and Brandon were on one side of the river; Patricia and the baby were on the other side—neither could get to the other for about a day and a half. They finally joined me at my son Clyde's house for the next two weeks.

Following the flood, it was next to impossible to find a place to live in Rocky Mount. Landlords were insisting on a year's lease, but a friend of ours, Howard Andrews, owned several rental properties and rented

us a three-bedroom place on a month-to-month basis. It was his way of contributing what he could to the flood relief, and we really appreciated it.

We spent days attempting to save some of our personal belongings and filling out all those forms! Twelve pieces of furniture that had been refinished after the fire we had previously had just been returned. After the flood, eleven of those same pieces (including my piano) had to go back to the refinisher.

The inventories and the forms really got to me. I had lost about thirty pages of inventory from the fire. It was truly a nightmare. I can understand how a lot of people did not get the help they needed because they either did not know how to or did not know who to go to for help to fill out the forms. I don't want to ever have to make out another inventory sheet—as long as I live.

I can remember watching the floods out in the Midwest and feeling sorry for those people, but I never got the full impact until I experienced it. Newscasts cannot convey the terror and the fear. You cannot imagine what is left when that water goes away unless you have stood in it, smelled it, and felt it. The water scenes on TV never look as dangerous as they are when you are trying to drive down the highway and it looks like a lake ahead and there are no houses where you know houses should be.

The terror lasts. I have an ongoing thing that I need to deal with. James had to carry James Michael through the water to the car that night, and in my imagination sometimes, all of a sudden he drops the baby. That could have happened, and it did happen to other families. Now, whenever I have to drive where the highway runs alongside a swampy area or body of water, I get nervous. I'd never felt that way before. Of course, when it rains three or four days steady—constant rain, like it did before the flood—I become uneasy.

Poor little James Michael gets very, very concerned. He's quite aware of when it rains and how high the river is going to get. He wants to go see the river to be sure it's not flooding. That will be one of his most vivid, early-childhood memories—that and the fire. He talks about the "smoky house" and the "water house."

One thing that I found out about myself was that, before the flood, my things had meant a great deal to me—all my portraits and my mother's bed—but those things didn't mean anything to me afterwards. Two members of my family were in our home when it burned, and all my children and my dogs were in the apartment when it flooded, but no one was injured either time. That's what was important. I'm just grateful to have what I do and to be able to enjoy my family.

It's hard to believe now just how dangerous trying to get to safety was at the time. I feel so fortunate that they made it.

I'd known that people were caring and giving, but I never had an opportunity to experience it like I have in these last two years.

Vivian Anderson: September 15, 1999, when the hurricane was coming, my son, Alan, called me and said, "Mom, I don't want you to be in the apartment by yourself. Get some sleeping clothes, and when you pick up Heather from school, come on over and spend the night." He lives on Smallwood Drive in the Englewood subdivision. So, after I picked up Heather, my granddaughter, we went by my apartment. It had rained so much that the walkway into the apartment was covered by about four inches of water. We packed me some clothes to sleep in and my cosmetic case that I usually carry with me when I go on trips and went over to Alan's.

The next day, after the storm had passed, we got up and didn't know a thing about the flood because we didn't see any water. Since Riverside Apartments had a history of minor flooding during bad storms, Alan suggested that we go over to see what was happening at my apartment. We got four blocks from his house and couldn't go any farther. There was water everywhere. I've never seen so much water in my life.

By Saturday, the extent of the flooding was obvious, and my friend, Margaret Carpenter, suggested that I move into her house and live with her for six weeks or so until I could get a place to live, find furniture, pick up and wash clothes, and so forth.

That day, my two sons, Bruce and Alan, tried to get into the apartment to get me some clothes but couldn't. The water was knee deep and still moving fast.

On Sunday, they waded through the mud to get to the apartment. To get into the apartment, Bruce and Alan had to take the air conditioner out of the window because a cabinet had fallen across my front door. We think someone must have gotten into the apartment before they went back to clean it out because nothing was obstructing the door on the second visit. There was mud inside, too, but they brought out the clothes they could, and we took those over to Alan's house and started washing.

Later in September, I took an apartment at Wellongate close to Sunset Avenue, as far from the river and Stony Creek as I could get. The workers were putting in new carpet, painting, and making other repairs. I didn't even look at it. I just signed up. It wouldn't be ready for me to move into for about six weeks, so I lived with my friend all that time.

Ten or twelve people from Trinity Lutheran Church came over to help clean out the apartment. Alan and Bruce did not want me to go inside and see the mess, and I'm glad I didn't. Many older people got sick from working in the muck. The volunteers cleaned the stuff out and piled it out on the street to be picked up by garbage trucks.

As things were coming out, I happened to think of a couple of items I hadn't seen: a box that had a doll in it and another box that contained a hand-crocheted white dress and a black pleated skirt. We never found either one of those boxes. Very little was saved. The furniture fell to pieces. The water soaked all the glue out. Nothing was repairable. The water climbed to within eighteen inches of the ceiling in my apartment, so everything got wet and stayed wet for days.

One of my brothers in Hickory called and asked if I had saved all the old family pictures. I said, "Have you ever seen a flood? I know you've never been in one, but have you ever seen a flood? No! I didn't save anything. I didn't have time to save anything." I'd never thought about a flood where everything is fine at 6:00 and at 8:00 we're in crisis. I'd always thought water rose day by day, but we had the equivalent of a flash flood. It rose rapidly during the hours when people were asleep. The two floodgates at the reservoir had been opened. That's when the water came up. The dam would have burst if this procedure hadn't been done, and it would have been even worse.

Several good things happened. I had a bowl given to me by my mother that had been given to her by her mother when she got married in 1918. It's a pretty big piece with three little feet on the bottom. It's priceless to me. It had been on the kitchen table, which turned over. The kitchen chair was broken, and the refrigerator was opened by the flood. Everything from inside it was on the floor. Alan found that bowl without a chip in it. My husband's mother had brought a china chocolate pot many years ago, and it was not broken. I also had three or four pieces of needlework on the living-room couch. Only one got damp—not wet through, just damp. The other three were perfectly all right because the couch had floated up and then back down again. A doll that I've had since I was a little girl (she must be seventy-five years old or older) was on the bed and was not hurt.

Unfortunately, I'd just gotten back two other dolls from a lady who'd cleaned them up and put them on stands for me two weeks before the flood. Those were in terrible shape.

Someone asked me, "Did you cry?"

I said, "No, why should I cry?" There wasn't any use crying about it. I lost a lot of things, but they were just stuff.

Alan said that, the day after the flood, he realized his mother was homeless. I realized it, too, but that wasn't what made me cry. I cried when somebody unexpectedly did something really nice, like giving me money, furniture, or something.

I've been so fortunate because I've had so much given to me. People I worked with gave me a washer and a dryer. A girl with whom I worked gave me a little toaster oven. A couple at church gave me a vacuum cleaner and a microwave. The Rotary Club bought me a couch.

I was really lucky when I went to the Red Cross. I signed in and waited my turn. The volunteers gave me a voucher to get a bed, mattress, springs and frame, a pair of shoes, and a dinette set with table and chairs. I had only the sandals I was wearing. My friend, Louise Sullivan, only got about three months rent. She'd lost everything at Riverside, too, but she had a different person helping her. Since the Red Cross people were all volunteers, I think how much one got depended on how well versed the volunteer was in disaster assistance. Perhaps the person who helped her just wasn't aware of

what was available. I was just fortunate to be assigned to a lady who knew. She and her husband were Red Cross volunteers from Illinois or Indiana and had both come to help out.

I was lucky that I hadn't spent the night in the apartment. A lot of people walked out, but water was up to their shoulders. (Vivian is less than five feet tall.) I'm terrified of water because I don't swim. A lot of the Riverside residents walked out together but had a terrible time getting through it. They would have had to take me out by boat because I could not have walked out. It's amazing to me that no more people died in the flood than did.

Several people who used to live at Riverside have died since, but I don't know whether the flood had anything to do with their deaths or not. When the firemen tried to rescue Mildred Sutton, she slipped and hurt herself badly because it was so slick.

Firemen manned a lot of the boats that went in to take people out. My neighbor across the street didn't get out until about 10:00 A.M. the next morning. She had time to pack a suitcase before the rescuers got her out. When I left, I had no idea that I wouldn't be going back, or I would have packed more. I could have done lots of things because I had plenty of time that afternoon. Heather and I could have moved things, taken things with us, but we'd never had a flood like that. There is no way to imagine how damaging water can be until you've experienced it.

I wasn't angry about the damage because it was just one of those things that happens. When we got married, my husband and I were so poor we couldn't afford new things. We got stuff from everybody's attic. Now, when I'm as old as I am, here I have everything new. It's just unreal.

I lost all my tapes, slides of the Holy Land trips, and family pictures, but I've got lots of memories. Nothing can take them away.

The man I work for told me, "You're the only person I've seen who hasn't complained about the flood."

I said, "Well, why complain about it? It's happened. It's gone." I prefer to think about the good that came out of it.

Our pastor at Trinity Lutheran, Don Safrit, knew that there was a lot of damage and a lot people homeless. He notified a number of churches

that formed an interfaith group. They met every Thursday at our church for months.

They now meet twice a month and have done so much to help people. People from all over have sent quilts, furniture, and anything else you can think of. The interfaith group has a warehouse and people who work there. They find out when people need things, go to the warehouse, pick the things up, and deliver them to people all over eastern North Carolina.

A pastor and about twelve to fifteen people from a Lutheran church in the middle of the state drove a van down containing five hundred dollars' worth of toys that we then carried over to a church in Tarboro for the children who'd lost so much.

We got handmade quilts from Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Santa Monica, California; some from Wisconsin; and some from other churches all over the country. Victims from the North Dakota 1997 Red River Valley flood sent stuff. Folks from Kannapolis, North Carolina, where blankets are made, sent some. Somebody from Salisbury, North Carolina, gave us a truck to haul all the stuff.

On a Saturday morning not too long after the flood, somebody called our pastor and said that there was a couple from Colorado who needed to talk to him. When he got to the church, the man and woman gave our pastor the title to the automobile they'd driven across country. It was parked outside our church for a couple of days before the church found a lady who needed a car.

Edgemont Presbyterian Church had closed because of declining membership, but they turned the building over to the interfaith group so that the people who came in from all over the country to help with the flood recovery would have a place to sleep. They had bunkrooms for sleeping, a large eating area, and a kitchen; but the church didn't have any bathing facilities.

The men's group at Trinity Lutheran Church converted a twenty-eight-foot trailer into a laundry area, dressing area, and shower stalls. Groups working together like that really broaden the meaning of the word "community."

When we started the interfaith group, there were only ten organizations represented at the initial meeting. Now, it includes thirty to forty different

organizations, mostly smaller churches. Some were from Tarboro and Wilson. The black churches are very involved, as are other organizations. The Hispanic community is represented, too. The interfaith group came together in a time of crisis, but it has continued its programs. The FEMA officials told us that we should plan for at least ten years of recovery, and that's what we had in mind for this organization—that it will still be up and running ten years from now.

Our pastor's wife, Theresa Safrit, did a lot of videotaping about the flood. We went out to Riverside one day because she wanted to get video of me standing on the steps of my old apartment telling what had happened. When my family and I had left it, it was cleaned out completely. As I stood there that day, I happened to look in and saw one of my antique lamps and two mugs from my collection. Where they'd come from, heaven only knows, but they were lying in the middle of the living room floor.

I couldn't get in the front door because the management had nailed it shut by that time. I found a side window open and said, "I'll crawl through that window." Theresa called the pastor, who brought a kitchen stepladder over to the apartment. He put it up to the window and crawled through. Then I crawled through and got my stuff. I was halfway across the window when, suddenly, we heard sirens. The police were coming, and there was the minister and one of his flock breaking and entering.

Theresa said, "Y'all hide in there. Don't let them know you're in there!" But the police car drove past without paying any attention to us. When I crawled out, Theresa took my picture, evidence of my life of crime.

One thing you realize in a flood or any catastrophe is that it has no respect for race, creed, color, or economic condition. In a sense, it serves to remind us of who we are. I just hope I don't ever have to live through another one.

At the time of the flood, Vivian Anderson—a Rocky Mount native, widow, and retired school secretary—was in her seventies. She lived at Riverside Apartments, an area populated by many retirees.

Suzanne Sifford is a retired Spanish teacher and Rocky Mount native. She had experienced a home fire in June and, before the flood, had moved to a condominium on Zebulon Road while contractors reconstructed her house.

The flad!

I had a lot of
damage. I was lucky becous
the flad did not get us. I
felt bad for the people. My
friend Tyler got fladed.

By,
Zackary Green

Zackary Green wrote this "story" in his first-grade class at Red Oak Elementary School. Though he and his family were not flooded, he was writing about his friend, Tyler, who lived in Bunn Farm and was flooded. Zackary lives in Rocky Mount with his parents, Melvin and Chris, and his younger brother, Jacob.

CONCLUSION



Back to the Future

MARTHA F. JOHNSON

When the Five-Hundred-Year Flood hit eastern North Carolina, I had just returned to the area and was unpacking in Greenville. Though only forty miles separated us, I could not reach my eighty-two-year-old father for several days. During the months just after the flood, I made the trip between Rocky Mount and Greenville many times to help him clean up after the disaster and to deal with insurance adjusters.

During those trips, it pained me to see once-fertile farmland so gouged by erosion that automobiles could be buried in the gullies that cut across the fields, homes flooded to their roof lines, and roads and bridges washed out. As the months went by, however, I watched the human spirit at work. Heavy equipment delivered mountains of new soil to heal the erosion. One-story homes stubbornly rose on pilings until they were two-stories high. Crews rebuilt bridges and roads.

Though painful and difficult, the recovery throughout Nash and Edgecombe Counties was heartwarming to witness. The love, the strength, and the determination that has helped us survive as a species, a nation, and a community was obvious everywhere.

Having been away from the area for almost forty-five years, I enjoyed taking first one back road and then another through the once-familiar countryside during those post-flood months. During the 1940s and '50s, I'd spent many Sunday afternoons with my sister in the backseat of our parents' car on long drives to visit relatives. To distract two tangle-legged

little girls from arguing over comic books, my farther used to point out landmarks along the way.

We passed fields where he'd found arrowheads and Revolutionary-era musket balls as a boy. A tree-lined curve in the river hid the place where an ancestor had lain in ambush with a group of boys and old men to kill a band of British soldiers making their way upriver to rendezvous with Cornwallis. The woods nearby still hid their secret burial site.

Over the years, many Sunday excursions took us through the cluster of homes and buildings at Old Sparta. Though Old Sparta had never been more than just a crossroads community during my lifetime, I knew that it had once figured large in North Carolina and Edgecombe County history. Frontiersmen from the coast had pushed westward, boating upriver to establish a settlement in 1726 where Mallard Creek (now Town Creek) dumps into the Tar River. Old Sparta was the first settlement in what, fifteen years later, would become an Edgecombe County that stretched all the way to the mountains. By 1740, it had become an important ferry crossing to the new settlement at Tarboro.

Having survived attacks by Indians, Old Sparta's tavern became a safe stopping place for stagecoaches traveling along the old colonial road between the interior and the capital at New Bern. One hundred years after its founding, young people came from miles around to study at the Sparta Academy and, a generation later, followed their teachers into battle against the Yankees. Entrepreneurs built stores and docks so they could buy from and sell to local farmers. Steamships on their way between Tarboro and New Bern hauled local goods to distant markets and brought visitors and foreign-made trinkets.

By my grandparent's time, Old Sparta was a popular recreational spot. Family photos showed serious-faced young men wearing straw hats and armbands rowing canoes as my wasp-waisted grandmother and her sisters (dressed in high hats, mutton-sleeved taffeta jackets, and gloves) lounged beneath parasols or trailed their fingers in the water. In the background, other weekend boaters rowed past stores and docks.

My earliest lesson on the impact of economics and the vagaries of progress came on one of those Sunday drives as we passed though the tiny

community that the once-thriving town had become. My father explained that river ports like Old Sparta had become irrelevant and declined as coaches and steamboats gave way to trains and automobiles. New towns like Rocky Mount had sprung up along railroads and highways to take their place. I remember feeling sad for all the people who'd spent their lives and fortunes along the river only to be bypassed by advances in transportation, but I'd also felt proud to be living in Progress's new hometown.

On one of my trips through the countryside soon after the flood, I passed through the intersection of North Carolina Highway 42 and Colonial Road. Then I backed up to make certain that I hadn't made a mistake. Old Sparta was gone. The ubiquitous two-story wooden general store dating from the early 1800s, the tavern turned post office turned Bar-B-Q restaurant turned video-rental store turned paint-ball arena, and the town's sign post—all had been swept away by the flood. Only the country store's gas pumps remained, rusting headstones marking the death of the community. I pulled off the road and sat for a long time, mourning the loss of another bit of our past.

Sitting at the crossroads, I remembered how stunned I'd been in grammar school to learn that the ancient city of Pompeii, buried by a volcanic eruption, had been lost to history until it was rediscovered almost



Remains at Old Sparta.

CREDIT: MARTHA FOUNTAIN JOHNSON

two thousand years later. The fate of Pompeii had been my introduction to the effects of natural disasters on mankind and on history.

The discoveries of the archeologists at Pompeii had fascinated me: families who'd fallen, their hands still joined in an effort to keep together as they rushed toward the sea; the bodies of husbands and mothers thrown across those they loved in a last effort at protection; pets and beloved toys clutched in the arms of children.

Though the passion and drama of the volcanic eruption played out clearly in my imagination, how such a large, well-known community of twenty thousand souls could just slip from the mind of man was incomprehensible to me. Our teacher explained that the survivors had moved away from the volcano and built newer, larger towns and over many years had just forgotten about Pompeii. Her explanation had never satisfied me. How could a town so filled with life for hundreds of years just be forgotten? Sitting in my car at Old Sparta that day, I finally understood.

With a lot of hard work and money from insurance settlements and government agencies, most individuals and communities were recovering from the Hurricane Floyd flood, but there were many who had slipped through the cracks, those for whom the flood was the fatal blow from which they would never recover. Old Sparta seemed destined to repeat Pompeii's fate.

Here, once again, was proof that economics, history, and natural disasters are capricious and that the memory of man is short. Sitting at the empty crossroads that day, disconcerting thoughts troubled me. What had happened to Pompeii in a single blast and to Old Sparta in just two generations could happen to my hometown.

As I'd passed from childhood to adulthood, I'd watched that long-ago economics lesson play itself out as highways became more important than railways in post-World War II America. One by one, childhood landmarks that had seemed as eternal as the Sphinx disappeared from downtown Rocky Mount: the huge railroad shops, whose whistle had been the standard for every watch and clock in town; the Center Theater, a rare example of Atmospheric architecture, where three generations of townspeople had sat beneath a midnight sky of twinkling stars as life-sized

oaks grew up the walls and spread their leafed limbs overhead; the tobacco-scented warehouses that had hosted all the post-war big bands at June Germans; the mills that had employed generations of townspeople; and the family-owned stores that had lured throngs of farm families to town during tobacco season. Each had disappeared as progress brought us foreign-made goods delivered by trucks to franchises in malls along the highway.

So, if at some future time, you no longer find us tucked into the curve of the Tar River or spread out along the railroad tracks or clustered along the roads northwest of the falls, look for us near the new space port because we were bred to survive Indians, wars, economic changes, and natural disasters.

As the stories in this book reveal, we, like the victims at Pompeii, felt passionately about our families, our pets, our neighbors, and our community. Unlike the residents of Pompeii, however, we rebuilt our town after the Great Flood of 1999. If some natural disaster, historical event, or advance in transportation has overtaken us by the time you read this, we have merely moved to a more auspicious location and gone on with the business of living. But please do not forget the determination and the passion with which we lived.

Martha F. Johnson was born and raised in Rocky Mount but left after graduating from college. She moved back to her hometown in March 2000.