



INFOCUS

Real Stories From All Over The World



The "Slow" Flood
Grand Forks, North Dakota

It is one thing to hear about floods, but another to learn what it is like to experience one. So what is a flood like? For the next month, students from all over the world will be writing to INFOCUS with their experiences.

Our newest letter comes from [Megan](#). She describes the traumatic moment when the Army finally removed the trash from her street.

[Mandy Striegl, a college student](#) writes about what it was like in Fort Collins, Colorado when a flash flood turned her movie night into an horror story.

[Sara, from Grand Forks](#), talks about what it was like to live in an airport hangar.

[Woody Renn in the Czech Republic](#). Woody lived in Los Angeles, but he is now in Moravia, a part of the Czech Republic, helping the thousands of people who were left homeless by the Oder River flood.

The Flash Flood:
Fort Collins, Colorado

-Mandy Striegl, Fort Collins Having lived in Colorado for the last three years of my life, I'd thought I'd seen it all weather wise - seventy degree Christmas days, two feet of snow one night in the middle of April, and mid-afternoon showers everyday at precisely two o'clock during the early summer. However, this past July when the rains came, no one was prepared for

Cleaning up...

-by Megan, *Grand Forks*

After the flood, when my family was back home, the day we had all been waiting for finally arrived. It was our turn to have the heaping pile of flood-damaged belongings on our berm (North Dakota word for curbside) hauled away.

I thought that day would be one of the best days since the flood. I wanted to be able to come down Boyd Drive and not see piles of sheetrock, furniture and appliances mangled by the flood lining the sides.

But as I heard the sound of the trucks coming nearer and nearer, I grew sadder and sadder. It was one thing to have everything sitting there right in front of my house. But to have it all dumped in some landfill where I'd never lay eyes upon my very first doll again - now that was hard.

My mom and I quickly went through our pile, making sure there wasn't anything we wanted to save. Then I saw it - our toboggan. I turned it on its side and ran my hand down its once smooth wooden planks.

I asked my mom if we could fix it up. She said, "Just look at it Meghan. There's no way you could ever use that again."

But I didn't see broken, splintered and faded wood. I saw memories. I pictured my dad pulling me on the long wooden sled to Lincoln Park.

the consequences.

I was spending the summer at Colorado State University participating in an undergraduate research program with a dozen or so other students from across the nation. We were having the time of our lives hiking, mountain biking, fishing, and backpacking all over the area.

There were only a few of us from Colorado, so it was an unbelievable experience seeing the others faces light up at the summit of their first "fourteener" (a mountain 14,000 feet above sea level). In a way it was like a summer camp with work on the side. We all lived together in the same dormitory, ate at the same time in the same place, worked in the same building. So at the time of the floods, we had more than sufficiently bonded in a tight friendship.

"By late afternoon it was raining steadily."

The day of the flood started off abnormal for Colorado in late July. In other words, it was cloudy. By noon it was drizzling and by late afternoon it was raining steadily. My two friends Anne (from Virginia) and Jeff (from Illinois) and I were heading over to another companion's home about 2 miles away from campus to snuggle up to a movie. When we left campus it was raining steadily, but not exceedingly hard.

In the 5 minutes it took us to get from our dorm to the Subway restaurant about 3 blocks from our dorm, the rain became sheets of water. Anne and I sat in the car as Jeff ran in to get a sandwich. We watched cars plow through the ever-deepening puddles on Shields Street, which runs along the north end of campus. The splashes they created were at least twice as high as the cars themselves, and in some places, the water level was to the base of the wheel-wells. We headed north, and up

A rush of emotion went through me.

I walked stiffly back to the house and went to my room. I sat on my bed trying to sort out my feelings.

After a few minutes, I went back outside. To my surprise, there was the toboggan laying right in the middle of the yard. My mom smiled at me. She had sensed how much that sled meant to me. I hugged my mom as the Army Corps of Engineers started loading our pile into their trucks.



Several weeks after the flood in Grand Forks, residents wait for the Army to remove the trash from their "berms."

By now the movie was no longer of interest, and Jeff and Amy Jim decided to venture out into the storm. They ended up travelling from house to house for about 2 hours, helping people carry their valuables out of basements and garages to high ground. Meanwhile, Anne and I attended to the water streaming into Jim's basement. By the time they returned the rain had begun to let up and the water was slowly receding. So we decided to head home, in the hopes of a hot shower, clean clothes and a warm bed.

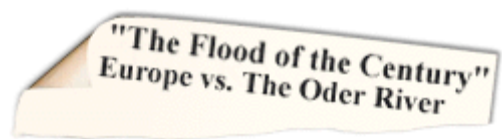
"Dark and unbelievably quiet."

It had poured down rain unbelievably hard for over 4 hours straight that night, but still, none of us expected to find the Colorado State University campus in the disarray it was in. As we rounded the corner to our dorm, we noticed the eerie strobe light flashing of the emergency lights in the newly remodeled library. And then we saw the water. Jeff parked his car a block

the hill (luckily), to our friends' house. Jeff parked his car along the edge of the street where the water was rushing at incredible speeds.

Movie night postponed.

We sat inside watching our movie and listening to the rain for about an hour before we realized that what was rushing stream of water had become a virtual river and was gushing half way up the side of Jeff's car and in through the doors. My friend Amy (the fearless one from New York) ran to its rescue, but it was too late. The interior contained a good 2 inches of water already.



Hello, or Ahoj (as they say in Czech),

My name is Woody Renn, and I am a Crisis Corps volunteer in Moravia, Czech Republic. This beautiful country in the center of Europe is very similar to the

from our dorm, and we started heading towards it. It was completely dark, and still, and unbelievably quiet. The water was up to our waists in places, but we had to tread through to reach our rooms. The rain had pounded through the roof of our dorm so the third and second floors, where we lived, were destroyed.

Luckily no one lost anything valuable, only clothes and bedding were soaked and some precious photographs of summer adventures with new-found friends were ruined. We were moved to the other wing of the dorm, where the residential advisors had provided us clean beds, but unfortunately, no electricity or hot water for showers for the next three days. By the time we got semi-settled, it was 1:30 am. We were, of course, wired, so we set out to the parking lot to bail out our cars, which had received a generous soaking. An hour or so later that was finished, so we headed out on a walk to assess the damages.

Initially, we had thought we had it the worst, but we were very wrong. A block away, Lake Street (how ironic) was flooded at least five feet and cars were completely submerged. University apartment complexes were under water right up to the base of the first floor windows. We traveled on through water as high as our knees at its lowest towards College Avenue, which runs along the east edge of campus. Our stomachs dropped as we stumbled across the trailer park that had been completely annihilated by the excessive rain and mud. Homes were overturned, and in shambles and we shuddered to think about what the determined rescue crews would find.

Dramatic train derailment.

Suddenly, we heard the most horrible screeching sound and the air filled with the smell of burning brakes. A train, attempting to pass through Fort Collins had derailed along College Ave. near the center of campus. Fortunately, no one was hurt (to my knowledge), so we spent the next hour watching the crews get it back on track. I had never seen such disaster in my life. My thoughts drifted to the people in Grand Forks ND, who endured tragedy of this sort for weeks. It's amazing how something like a flood can bring things into perspective. Before we ventured out on our walk, we were all distraught at the thought of our cars being totaled and our clothes being ruined. But to see the demolished homes in the trailer park and the debris from countless businesses on College Ave. brought me right back down to earth.

We spent the next day cleaning and moving our belongings to new rooms, and helping out around campus as much as we could. It is terrible to think of what CSU really lost in this ordeal; it was far more than money. When I left, estimates were exceeding 125 million dollars in damage, but that damage was to irreplaceable items. Thousands of books, and the college's

Appalachian mountain area in New Hampshire and Vermont in the United States.

Right now, I am working with 6 other volunteers to find computer models for water flow projections. We are also building a warning system that will not collapse when disaster comes, and working with environmental groups, schools, foundations and public officials to renew the forests by planting 100,000 trees. Many of the forests were destroyed by acid rain and mismanagement before the 1989.

Other volunteers are organizing a project to find pen-pals between flooded and not-flooded children, and helping people on different social levels to understand (through media, lectures, pictures) what exactly it means to be flooded, and how long it will take to recover...

Most of the damage has been removed or cleaned up. The people and the environment still suffer. People cannot go to movies or buy school clothing or take their vacations because homes had to be repaired and most families did not have insurance or any government program to help them. Staying home has become not an option but a necessity. Not only lives and homes were lost but jobs and businesses too. Gardens were destroyed. Basements with school books gone. Mud was everywhere.

personal research archives, a new set of uniforms for the marching band, and six grand pianos. The bookstore was completely under water and classes were to start in less than a month.

Important lessons learned.

Fortunately, the loss of the most valuable entity, life, was not extreme in the Ft. Collins flood of 1997. My heart and my prayers go out to all those who suffer the loss of loved ones. The flood made me realize what is really important in our lives, and it has nothing to do with the pair of Nikes that got trashed, the VCR that was shorted out, or my car that was totaled. Life has to do with strength, perseverance, and the ability to give and receive a helping hand.



Life in the Hangar -by Sara, Grade 8

I came home on Friday, April 18, from 2 hours of sandbagging wondering how anyone could do that for so long. I was dirty, sweaty, and sore from my legs up. People were determined to save their homes. We didn't have school that day.

You couldn't flip a channel on TV without seeing the news

In the countryside and small villages, livestock was drowned or slaughtered.

With nothing to eat, when a pig would swim by, it was often only a few moments before it became lunch.

Farmers no longer have the animals that were once their source of income.

I have seen neighborhoods and friends leaving each other as they move away to safer places, or where there is a roof and heat, or some sort of job. Many have lost everything they had, even the company of their dearest friends.

Before the flood, the villages and towns had architecture that was older than Christopher Columbus, the extraordinarily beautiful countryside provided a wonderful setting for weekend bike riding. Now, where there were beautiful hills and streams with trees, and grasses, and fall flowers and wild rabbits and deer, there is none. No it is not the bareness of the moon, but it is empty.

At last there are signs of life returning. Even the first life is not very pleasant, though. Returning life has meant swarms of flies and huge mosquitoes. Thank goodness the ground water remains drinkable and help came from many places. Still this will be remembered as the greatest flood of one, if not two hundred years!

The people in eastern Europe are fighters. They love

of the flood. I was sad. Even though the river was a long way from our place, I still felt for the people who had to watch their homes go under the fearful Red River. I went to bed that night with a dread feeling in my stomach.

The next morning my mom woke my sister and I up and told us to pack our things. The water was still sort of far away, but she didn't want to take any chances.

My dad brought us to Red River High School where we took a bus to the Air Force base. My dad stayed behind to work at the hospital because there was a shortage of workers. The place we stayed in was called a hangar. It was noisy and crowded. My sister had found a friend so I didn't see much of her. I was bored enough to sleep.

The next day my dad came and we all piled in the car and drove to my grandparents farm in South Dakota. We stayed with my grandparents and went to school in the small town of Leola. We left on May 29. I found out that the flood waters never even entered our home. We were all thankful for that.

The town was damaged to the tiniest detail. Then we saw people cleaning and working hard. The cleaning continued and life went on, but we will always remember the Red River that devastated our city.

everything American, especially McDonalds! They love American music, American food, American way of life while respecting their own values and maintaining their own culture. They idealize us and are eager to know Americans. They see America as the most responsible and free nation in the world. Even their constitution is modeled after ours. Baseball caps are everywhere with every NBA and NHL team insignia. T-shirts, blue jeans and blue-Jean jackets and sneakers are the standard wear. Football to them is soccer of course. They love to sing American folksongs, around a fire, while playing a big American guitar.

Have you ever been in a flood? [Click here to send us your story.](#)



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