

## The 1955 Flood – A Half-century Later

I imagine all of the local towns will have some sort of remembrance of the Great Flood of 1955 planned for the fiftieth anniversary, and while each town will certainly have their own unique recollections, the fact remains that this event was of such magnitude that it must be treated as a regional disaster.

In August of that year I was completing my third year in the Navy, and my ship was en route home to San Diego from the Far East. Communications then were not anywhere like the instantaneous means that we have these days. With the exception of short wave, there was no way to listen to a radio more than a few hundred miles away, and network TV hadn't been invented, so if you weren't in direct line of sight with a station, television didn't exist. The one reliable source of information was the Postal Service. I don't know how they did it, but even in combat zones, out mail seldom took more than a week to find us. I had a mother and father (mother mostly) who wrote almost on a daily basis, and managed to make each letter long and interesting. For this reason, I saved all of them, not because they were "from home", but because although they were interesting then, I knew that someday they would take on added meaning with the passing of time. These letters enable me to reconstruct the entire four-year period from 1952 until August 1956. We did not spend a great deal of time listening to the radio, and less watching the TV, so weather events were able to sneak up until they were almost on top of us before we were necessarily aware that there might be something to prepare for. Add to this the fact that the weather forecasters back then were not nearly as accurate as the ones of today, with their pipeline directly to the National Weather Bureau, and you begin to realize just how vulnerable we were back then.

Beginning around August first, my folks became increasingly more concerned with the weather patterns for that summer. On the first, the letter begins: "Heat holds and no rain comes our way. Poor old Mr. [Ed] Simonds (who lived at the Winsted YMCA) couldn't make it [up to Colebrook] yesterday – heat prostration. He just lies on his bed. I talked to him yesterday, and he's in rather bad shape. He says the temperature on Main Street in Winsted in the shade goes between 100 and 112 every day. July 5 it reached 87 degrees here on Beech Hill, which is still our yearly high, but evidently this is a hot summer throughout the east, and I bet we will get into the 90s here before August leaves us."

"August 2. This is really something – 70 this a.m., 78 now at 8:15 a.m. with an unmercifully hot sun. Yesterday it was 88 here, 90 in Norfolk. 96.7 in NYC, and Lord only knows what it was on city streets. It has been officially declared the hottest July on record since 1907, and August promises to be worse. Right now it's not so much the heat here that bothers me, but the lack of rain is really serious. The poor garden just wilts down in the sun; the soil is just hot powder, and the peas and beans are turning yellow. Unless we get rain soon, we'll lose what the deer and woodchucks left us!"

"August 5. No sign of either cool weather or relief from drought here; I don't like it, but it's just one of those things one must take.

August 6. Every heat record in Connecticut got broken yesterday. Here are a few official readings: Bradley Field, 101, Hartford, 102, Waterbury 104. It was a strong 90 here for almost an hour. Some places got electrical storms last night, but none here. We saw black clouds in every direction, but none came near us."

"August 7. The weather this summer is out of this world – straight from Hell if you ask me. Truly, Robert, you never saw anything like it around here; no one else ever has, and it seems to get worse instead of better.

August 10. There's a hurricane coming up the coast, but it won't get here – if it comes at all – until tomorrow.

August 13. The land has received a thorough soaking. It hasn't begun to run off yet and it's due to clear around here this afternoon – according to the radio, that is. Right now it isn't raining, but is very windy with strong gusts.

Paul was listening to ship to shore on the radio last night. Every ship of the Atlantic fleet in coastal waters was at hurricane moorings in Chesapeake Bay. Some of the conversations he heard were peculiar to say the least. One officer had called his wife, who lives in Virginia. She was spilling off a tale of woe. Part of the roof was gone, water all over the house, cellar flooded, etc. When she finally said 'over', the man said 'Well, this is a hell of a time to tell me all that!'

This storm is blowing itself out, but still kicking up quite a commotion. Hurricane Connie is pretty well tamed now, but there's quite a lot of spirit left in the old girl. NYC got 4 inches of rain in a few hours. Thank goodness ours has been spread over two days and no deluge at any time. As I remarked above, none ran off."

"August 15. We've had a real storm; high winds and rain, rain, rain. When it isn't raining, it's so muggy nothing could possibly dry out. Everything is sticky and horrid. Another month, though and this summer will be over.

A lot of soil was carried off the old garden by torrential rain. It practically dug the potatoes for us. Why no pear trees were broken I don't know, but they weren't – not this time at least, but wait; there's another hurricane on the way, Diane! On the other hand, we did need rain desperately and now the fruit that wasn't blown off should start growing again. Of course we had about five times as much rain as was necessary, but one can't control such things."

"August 17. Our tropical weather holds – hot and humid. The humidity today was 98, and the temperature in the mornings is around 66. The latest on Diane is that she's striking the Carolina coast today, but that all New England will get is some wind and rain. Paul is going to brace the peach and pear trees and just hope no further damage results from the winds. At least we don't have to make any preparations against flood." [This statement was prompted by official weather reports, which contributed greatly to the lack of feeling of urgency and caused public officials as well as everyday citizens to become complacent.]

"Paul went down to Winsted to visit with Ed Simonds. Ed said that he had always liked summers, but in all of his ninety years, this is the first time he'll be glad when winter comes. It really is something that will go down in the record books. I suppose when the young people of today are old, they'll remember this particular summer (no one will ever forget it), and be sure the climate is changing."

## **The 1955 Flood – Fifty years Later II**

We are extracting all the weather information that Grace Grigg wrote to her son in her letters to him while he was absent serving in the navy. Last week saw the meteorological groundwork being laid prior to the two hurricanes that hit this area in the summer of 1955. We resume beginning with August 18, the day before the disastrous flood, note the lack of urgency in her writings. This was a result of the false weather reports issued by the various weather bureaus supposedly supplying information about the advancing storm. These same reports were the only guideline the civil defense agencies had to make preparations. In this case, the forecast was that the storm would be mostly dissipated by the time it reached the Northeast, at which time we would be subjected to moderate winds and rain. It appears that the worst that was expected was wet conditions with a few fallen branches.

**August 18** Pouring again last night. I told Paul this morning if this keeps up there won't be any soil left in the old garden to put the fence around. He said we'd fence it anyway and have a sunken garden!

It's really nasty, but any kind of weather is good for something, so as soon as it lets up enough so I won't get drowned – I know it won't dry out, hasn't for a week – I'm going out and start moving raspberry roots. In weather as wet as this, the bare roots can be transplanted.

Yesterday when Paul was at Burwell's, Pete Burwell said "Well, now I know we can get a real old-fashioned, cold winter. If we can get a summer like this, we can get the extreme in winter, too." That's one way of looking at it. 66 degrees again this morning and sticky – oh boy!

**August 19** You should be here now, Robert. You "ain't seen nothin' yet!" Water, water everywhere and still coming down in sheets. Yesterday it rained the hardest I've ever known – and kept it up for hours. Paul was down at Marie's [Dr. Levy's wife. They lived on the west side of Second Bay at Highland Lake]. A regular river is coming through their place and going over their steps in a waterfall. Their driveway is gone – washed right out from under the blacktop. What's going on there now there's no way of knowing. When we got up this morning, we found that the power had gone off at 3:20 AM. Neither is there any phone, nor will the truck start. Some fun! It's about 10:00 AM now and no repairs have been made yet. I just hope the power comes on before we lose the things in the freezer. I don't know where the trouble is, but Paul thinks it's in Winsted.

When Paul came home yesterday, much of Route 8 was under water. There was a stream down by Deming's [next to the present-day Forge Fire Company] that flowed right across the road, hit Seth Seymour's house head on – split, and flowed around both sides of the house. Torrington, we heard last night, had declared a state of emergency, but I don't think the conditions prevail very far south of here. Just what's going on to the north, I don't know, but imagine about what we've been getting the past week. Anyway, yesterday the Lake Shore Limited – Chicago to Boston, was derailed in a washout up near Westfield.

I went out this morning; it was pouring rain, of course, to look at the back hill. [She is talking about the gravel section, which comprises the eastern end of Beech Hill Road.] It's far worse than the hurricane of '38. The road is gone. I got down as far as where our brook comes out [three tenths of a mile] and from there on the road is a river – no road showing. Where John's brook comes across the road to join ours [one hundred yards further east] is where it crests across the road. Just then the wind came up and I didn't dare come back under the trees, so I climbed up over the field.

After the wind died out, Paul and I got all dressed up as waterproof as possible and started down again. I wanted to go down at least one-half a mile, but we didn't make it. I think Paul and I alone could have; at least we got across the road (it wasn't safe to try the south side where the brook goes under, because in the boiling turmoil you couldn't tell where the road ended and the brook began, and it's deep there. It was like crossing a mountain torrent, but safe enough for people. Susie [their Border Collie] couldn't make it, though; she'd have been swept right off her feet and once caught in the raging water after those two brooks got together, we couldn't have saved her, so we had to come back. When this lets up – if it ever does – I'll get some pictures. I wish I could get some of our waterfalls and the raging streams, but it's raining too hard now to use a camera, and once the rain stops, the water up here will go right down.

All morning we'd watched for the postman. When he hadn't come by noon, I decided he wasn't coming, but Paul wouldn't give up until a couple of hours later. Then just for the heck of it, he decided to go down to the Center and see what was the matter. Remember, we had no phone, no power, and no mail. He came back in a few minutes. He just said, "I'm going to lock up, and you are coming with me. You haven't seen anything yet!" I hadn't. Sandy Brook

defied description. The new cement bridge stood, but between it and the end of the road was a wild, raging river. I don't know how much of the road was gone, but the violence of the water was terrible. Harry Williams stood on the opposite end of the bridge and shouted (you know what a voice he has!) We could hear him faintly, though he couldn't hear Paul over the roar of the water. He said "I'm not any better off than you; can't even get to the Center."

We then inched our way down Campbell Road to the bridge, but there was no trace of the bridge, or the road leading up to it, just a wide, raging river right up to the woods. We came back, and because we hadn't taken a camera before, I wanted Paul to go back and get some pictures. That trip he got to talk with people. There are three women from Beech Hill, Sonny Jasmin's wife Arlene, who lives just across from our bridge on Sandy Brook Road, and Ruth Brown [Bardino], who is married and lives in Winsted, who work a night shift in a factory in New Hartford. They go to and from work together in Arlene's car. When they reached Winsted around 2:00 AM Friday, they found Main Street flooded and couldn't take Ruth home. That didn't seem to be a problem; they could leave her at her parent's home on Beech Hill. They figured she could call her husband to let him where she was, only there wasn't any phones by that time! They got across Sandy Brook all right, and Arlene delivered the women to their homes, but by the time she got back to Sandy Brook Bridge, the road was gone on this side [the north] and she was stranded on Beech Hill, too.

So we were marooned on the hill, about 80 people, but we figured that wouldn't last long, just as soon as the water went down, the road crew would fill in the missing gaps, and all would be back to normal.

### **The 1955 Flood – 50 Years later III**

We are recounting the events of the '55 flood as written in letters from Beech Hill, in the northern section of Colebrook by Mrs. Paul Grigg to her son, who was serving in the navy in the Far East. The hour after hour of torrential rain has let up, and the first tenuous trips abroad were being made to ascertain the damage. The whole region is best described as an archipelago of islands; each had its own stories, and each was separated from its neighbors by destroyed highway infrastructure. The lack of electrical power kept anyone not owning battery powered radios completely in the dark as to what had happened, and to what extent the damages were. We begin with the morning of Friday, August 19 1955.

"We hadn't the least idea what was taking place all around us. Paul made me a little campfire out back so we wouldn't have to heat the kitchen, and I was having a fine time! That afternoon all the fun was gone. People with radios in their cars picked up the news of disastrous floods in seven northeastern states. We heard wild tales; one that the business district of Winsted was completely wiped out – not a building left standing, etc.

The first vehicle across the improvised road to the bridge across Sandy Brook was a car of the CL&P checking lines. People today are completely electrified; without it there is no water, lights, means of preparing food, communications, functional toilets."

"Another thing that was bad was the timing; Thursday night; very few people today keep food ahead in the house. Weekly shopping is done on Fridays when the stores are kept open until 10:00 PM. So many were caught without food and the stores, mostly located along Main Street, were full of food, all of which washed down the river.

Up in North Colebrook the Hartford YMCA has a new camping facility. Besides I don't know how many adults, there were 200 boys, and their supplies are delivered each day by truck. Navy helicopters delivered food to them for two or three days until they were able to evacuate everyone by jeep.

The helicopters are doing wonderful work. They bring all food and medical supplies going to Winsted.”

“Saturday night at 9:30 PM, the power came back on here. It was off 42 hours and 20 minutes, and our deep freeze didn’t even defrost! Of course, with power, we had a radio again. The reports were frightening. We were concerned about Dean and Freda [Stevens, who owned a hair salon next to the Winsted YMCA] and old Mr. Simonds – they both live on Main Street. The radio reports made no exceptions in their statement that all buildings along Main Street had been destroyed.

We knew that the new Buick garage and sales room, right across the street from Dean’s had gone down the river, we knew the street itself was just a deep gorge of twisted cables and broken water and sewer pipes, so you can imagine our relief when Dean and Freda managed to get out and come here about 11:00 AM yesterday. They had even saved their car. They looked pretty well done in; hadn’t had a decent meal since Thursday, and they’d both lost weight noticeably, but they were well, and except for a cellar full of water, they’d suffered no damage to speak of. However, they were hot, tired, hungry and thirsty. Freda said she’d never walked so much in her life. Their arms were so sore they could scarcely use them. They’d been carrying water almost constantly for two days. The only safe water (that they knew of) in Winsted was at the Gilbert Home just across from the hospital. Cars couldn’t reach it, so it had to be carried by hand down to Hinsdale School where Red Cross headquarters had been set up. By Sunday, trucks were getting safe water in from Colebrook, but Dean said he didn’t think they could have carried much more anyway. They said the stench down there was terrible. The flood had carried all the food out of the stores (they were fully stocked for Friday), and meat and vegetables were strewn all over. The weather is very hot, and things began to stink fast. There was half a pig caught on a pole on a side street, probably washed out of the A&P store.”

“There was a lovely breeze here yesterday afternoon, even if the thermometer did register 83 degrees, and we wanted them to stay and rest, but after a good dinner they loaded up with vegetables we had (bread and milk were about all they were getting into town) and water – all they could carry. We’d scared up 15 good clean gallon jugs with screw tops. They insisted on getting back. Dean said he’d thought he was all in, but all he’d needed was a good square meal and some coffee. They are still without power in the flooded area and have no way of even heating water. The first day, before the army and Red Cross moved in, they’d given what food they had to a family with little children caught with nothing in the house to eat. Their own children, fortunately, were with Freda’s sisters down in Washington. Dean is pretty well inured to hardship, having gone through the thick of the Pacific island fighting with the marines in the war. He claims a man can work all day with a little water; if he can have a cup of coffee, he’s good for all night, too! It’s when you have to keep going without even water that it’s really tough, and Freda claims she’d just as soon loose a little weight. So they went right back with the things they got here.”

“Dean also told us that although it had been flooded, Dr. Levy’s office was all right. [It was in the building next to the Super Saver’s parking lot on Elm Street.] It will be a mess to clean up. There’s only one way to get into Winsted from Colebrook by car yet, and it’s a very devious route, but Dean got over it, and this morning Paul left at 7:15 AM. You must have a pass from Civil Defense to get into Winsted at all. Dean had to have one to get back in yesterday, for they are keeping out everyone from devastated areas. When he gets back tonight, I’ll let you know how Aaron and Marie have made out. Paul said judging from the conditions at the house Thursday when he left, he wouldn’t be at all surprised if part of their house was torn away. Dean said it was impossible yet to get up to the lake from this side, but I don’t know about that. Bet Paul gets there.”

“In this flood, Pennsylvania was hit the hardest, Connecticut next. Loss of life and total area flooded greatest in Penn. Greatest property loss (and they say when it can be totaled, it will be astronomical) is Conn. In the order of damage here in Conn., Waterbury is the worst, then Winsted, Putnam and Torrington. Of course highways and bridges are out all over the state, but you know how quickly they get such things repaired. I heard on the radio this morning that the state police are not releasing information on repairs because yesterday when they did that, as fast as it was given out that a section of road was passable, the ghoulish gawkers rushed in, seriously hindering the work of recovery.”

### **1955 Flood – 50 Years Later IV**

The recovery from the flood lasted literally for years. In the days following the flood, citizens had to take each day as it came along. For the people living in, or having ties to Main Street Winsted, it was a matter of where to begin, and that was more difficult than one might imagine. Main Street was nothing more than a gash in the earth filled with broken and twisted pipes and cables. All objects in stores and homes that had been affected by the floodwaters were condemned to the Winsted dump, but first dump trucks had to be procured to begin the task of filling in the ravaged highway system with gravel. My mother, who stayed away from Winsted, had to rely on reports given her by my father. In a way, the content of her letters were probably more informative than if she had been writing from first hand observation, because it literally boggled the mind to see what the flood waters had done.

My father and Don Brown, a Beech Hill neighbor, spent the first two or three days hauling water from Colebrook down Spencer Hill to the hospital. They kept this up until the Civil Defense crews were able to take over. Once relieved of this task, attention was directed to friends who had been affected; in our family's case, this meant Dean and Freda Stevens' home next to the YMCA, Clinton and Gladys Ford, owners of the Clinton Studios, adjacent to the Stevens, and Dr. and Mrs. Aaron Levy, all of whom were close friends of ours. Dr. Levy's office was located on Elm St., directly across from the Central Firehouse, and thus was in the center of the devastation, although the actual structure escaped serious damage. The Levy's home was on Second Bay, and as all bridges had been destroyed, there was no way to reach them until the first Bailey Bridge was in place; consequently, several days past before we had reliable information about them.

Bailey Bridges were a type of bridge, widely used by the military, to traverse streams too deep to ford. They were built in sections, fifteen or twenty feet long, if my memory serves. After a firm base had been established along one riverbank, a second section was bolted to the first, and the two were pushed by bulldozer across the stream until it neared the balance point. If this occurred before the opposite bank had been reached, a third section was attached to the two originals, and these three were then pushed until the opposite side had been reached. When the balance point was achieved, another shove caused the first section to drop down and come to rest on the opposite side, effectively bridging the stream. The third section was then disengaged, approaches were made on each side, and traffic could then flow.

We resume the letter reports with August 22:

“Paul came home about noon. He'd helped Dean and Clint Ford some, but couldn't get in to Aaron's office, nor could he get any news of them. You can't yet get across Main Street and no one seems to know just what did happen up around the lake, which rose five feet over the spillways and dug itself a new channel into the bargain. Boats were swept down off the lake and Paul took a picture this morning of a small sailboat sitting on top of a building that hadn't gone out.”

[Here is an example of how rumors get started, and why you shouldn't believe all that you see. The boat in question happened to have been a display that was mounted on the porch roof of the building housing Manchester's Grain Mill, located across Main Street between the YMCA and Union Street. Manchester's and its adjacent neighbor, Williams' Buick Agency, were total losses, but pictures of that sailboat on the roof are still offered as examples of the height of the water as it tore through the heart of town.]

"They have another problem in Winsted aside from food, water, drug shortage and the homeless. The sewage mains are all twisted and broken and no toilets can be used even if one carries water from the river to flush them. Know what they are doing? Digging trenches. Clint Ford dug one behind their place, took the seat out of a cane bottom chair to put over it and set a screen up about it. Freda says she won't use it; people from the higher ground can look right down. Of course they are all reduced to the same expedient, for not a toilet in Winsted can be used. Paul said the YMCA, where quite a few men live, has dug a long trench and put a seatless chair over it and as it is used, they will cover it over and move the chair along.

There's no use trying to describe things; Paul says it's just impossible. They ran out of food last night, and none had come in when he left, and people were really hungry. Mrs. Ford is in charge of the Winsted Red Cross and she got Paul to go back this afternoon to deliver messages. That's where he is now, but he'll have to be out by 5:00 PM. The place is under martial law and no exceptions are made. The soldiers don't know one person from another. You see with no phones and with much of Winsted without power, they can't get messages by radio, it's quite a problem to check on people and quite a few are missing. Most of them will turn up once some of the isolated places have been reached."

"Oh – I found out why we have power out here in the country, while they have none in the heart of Winsted. They don't dare turn on any current for fear of fire – and that's all they need now, a fire with no water, no roads and no phones! So many places even off Main Street got twisted about and loosened from their foundations that electric wires were broken and power can't be restored until every place affected by water has been examined. The outlying parts of the town have had power restored, but so many places are still unsafe. Some places that are all right themselves can't get current without having it also on in danger spots that they have to go without, too."

"August 23 – Tuesday. Paul has gone back to help out in Winsted. He says he can stand it for a few days and of course we send down water and food to our friends. Aside from the sanitation problem, which gets more desperate each day, the worst is past, because now trucks can get in to either end of town. That means mail will be delivered to Winsted and it will go out if one can get it to the Post Office, but Lord only knows when there'll be any deliveries or any type of postal service in Colebrook. Heretofore all the helicopters have been able to handle bread, drugs and disinfectants. The first truck is expected in at 8:00 this morning – loaded with chloride of lime! But others will be on that one's heels. I'll try to get this out tomorrow – if Paul can take another day of Winsted!

I haven't given you any idea of the terrible thing this is. I probably have no idea myself. Paul says it's one of those things one must see to realize, and not in pictures, either. I've done the best I can though, to give you some ideas."

### **1955 Flood – 50 Years Later V**

We are reprinting letters sent from Colebrook describing the conditions in and around Winsted as a result of hurricanes Connie and Diane. Mrs. Paul Grigg sent these letters to her son

Robert, who was serving in the US Navy at the time. We pick up after the initial impact of the immensity of the situation has had time to sink in.

August 23 1955 “It will be a long time before Winsted is anything remotely resembling normal, but it’s simply amazing how fast certain things are put back in working order. Only thing we are without now is the phone. After what Paul told me last night, I thought it would be some time before the Post Office would be functioning. I spent a good part of the morning getting letters ready to go out by tomorrow morning. Imagine my surprise to see [Bill] Riiska coming along about 12:39! I was cutting okra to make chicken gumbo for our friends in Winsted, but I dropped that job in a hurry, grabbed my letters and almost flew out there. I hadn’t expected to see him for a couple of weeks. For one thing, there are darn few cars left in Winsted.

He told me how come he was around. This was his regular delivery for last Friday. You know he lives up on Wallens Hill. Friday at 2:00 AM he was awakened by the sirens giving a general alarm. No one thought of flood because as late as the previous day the damn weather bureau had been assuring us that the hurricane, which did cause the unbelievable rains, had blown itself out and would not affect New England.

So Riiska got up and began dressing to go see what was wanted. Then he happened to look out the window and went back to bed. He knew if there was that much water out there, he probably could not get downtown anyway, and if he could, what good could he do? He decided the alarm was for people to get out – not come in, and it was a darned good thing he did. Paul had told me of the tremendous number of cars destroyed and I’d supposed they must have washed down all the side streets and then been caught in the flood on Main Street.. I suppose that did happen to many. Paul says all the streets are washed out, but Riiska told me many people got in their cars and went down when the alarm was sounded and many lost their cars; they hit the water, stalled, and that was that. The people escaped, but their cars were gone.

Anyway, he had his car and this morning, when he could get out, he got as near the Post Office as he could and then carried his mail to the car on his back. That’s how they are getting the incoming mail to the Post Office and outgoing to the trucks. He said the first mail was coming in on men’s backs as he was leaving to make his run. We should have quite a bit tomorrow. Today there were just two letters left over from last Thursday. One from you – your last from Japan, written the 17<sup>th</sup>. My last letter to get out may reach you at Pearl [Harbor]. You may hear of the floods when you get there, but that’s a long way away.”

[We certainly did hear about it when we arrived at Pearl. We had heard scraps of news on the radio as we steamed within range of the Hawaiian Islands. We had reports of devastating floods throughout the northeast, and many of the crew asked those of us from New England if we thought our folks were all right. My reply was that I lived up in the hills, what could a flood do to us? Imagine my shock when upon arrival in the then Territory of Hawaii, I saw the front page of the Honolulu paper featuring a photo of what had been the intersection of Main, Elm and Bridge Street! The photo took up fully one third of the entire front page.]

Tucked into one of these letters is a newspaper account carried by the AP wire service and published in the Barre, Vermont Daily Times. The publish date is Sept. 20, 1955. You can sometimes get a different perspective on a local event if reported by a disinterested observer. Here is reporter Saul Pett of the Associated Press:

“The river flows quietly today, its muddy water reaching a depth of 12 or 18 inches, a width of maybe 20 feet.

Catching the sunlight, the river looks all innocent now. All around it, bulldozers and derricks and men with shovels are digging out in funeral gloom, but the river pretends no connection, seems to ask, ‘Who, me?’

This is the same Mad River that lived up to its name a month ago, rushed over its banks to a depth of 30 feet and in one terrible night cut the heart out of Winsted. It killed 7 people, left

1,500 homeless, destroyed 172 of the 200 shops along Main Street, washed out or immobilized 36 factories, carried off whole houses, buildings, cars and trees.”

“Only the river now maintains a fraudulent serenity. The rest of Winsted swings between rising hope and deepening gloom, between lingering shock and a slowly growing awareness of the disaster’s enormity.

But no one is alone. No one is starving. No one is without a roof. No one is without clothes. People are fighting back. People are helping each other in many inspiring ways.

Physically, Winsted still looks as if it was blitzed. Main Street, where the river gouged out a channel 10 feet deep, has been refilled, but not yet repaved. Water, light, telephone services have been restored, but half the town is still without gas. Two of the 13 bridges lost have been replaced by Army Bailey bridges.

Where they still stand on Main Street, buildings look like corpses waiting to be buried, like bodies with empty eye sockets. Some are shredded in half, vertically or horizontally, with pipes, wires, and pieces of twisted metal hanging down like ruptured veins.”

“In one store, a ceiling still sits on a crushed new car. In another, a twisted, empty luncheonette, there’s a sign: ‘Special Today – For Sale – Junk Cheap.’

Outside of town, trucks keep rolling to the city dump with the remains of refrigerators, furniture, roofs, and cars. In what used to be a playground, there are pieces of fencing and other debris high in the trees. Out on a meadow, the high school football team practices in jeans. Their field and uniforms were lost.

On higher ground, in the residential area, merchants are trying to come back to life. You see crudely printed signs on elm trees announcing the temporary headquarters of a hardware store or barbershop or clothier. You find them in homes, in garages, in barns and fraternal organizations that have thrown open their clubrooms to the flooded-out merchants.

About 1500 people still can’t go back to their homes. They’re living with friends or relatives, and one house has no less than 18 residents. About 250 can never go back to their old places. For them, the city and federal government are cooperating on providing 50 housing units.”

#### **Historic Bytes**

Bob Grigg