

Agnes Flood: Deborah Flick

Hurricane Agnes and the 1972 Flood as told to Patchwork by Deborah Flick

Interviewed by Hannah Heier and Bridgette Fedder in the Spring of 2003

Deborah Flick is a 47 year old housewife. She has lived in Columbia County all her life. She lived on 9th Street during the flood of 1972. She was about 15 years old during it.

It was in June of 1972. Hurricane Agnes caused the flood. It rained for about one whole week nonstop. Many families, including Flick's, had to evacuate their homes and go to Elwell Hall at the Bloomsburg University, where they stayed for about a week. The family brought what they could. Flick and her family stayed at Elwell Hall for about a week. Her father did not want to leave, so he stayed and tried to fix up some things at the house, which suffered water and mud damage.

PATCHWORK: How long have you lived in Columbia County?

FLICK: All my life. And I'm forty-seven years old.

PATCHWORK: What is your occupation?

FLICK: My occupation right now? Just a housewife.

PATCHWORK: How was your home affected by the flood?

FLICK: 1972? How it was affected? We had water on our ground floor, which was our basement, which came up to our first floor.

PATCHWORK: What did your family do?

FLICK: We had to be evacuated. We were evacuated and went to Bloomsburg University, Elwell Hall. For one week.

PATCHWORK: What was it like staying there?

FLICK: It was fun, I was a kid then, it was fun.

PATCHWORK: How many families were staying up at the University?

FLICK: Elwell Hall was just one hall. All the halls that were up there were all completely full. Plus there were kids staying at what used to be the Bloomsburg High School, which is up behind Bloomsburg bank, Columbia Trust. They had them all around.

PATCHWORK: And you were there for a week?

FLICK: A week, two weeks.

PATCHWORK: What kind of damage did your home suffer?

FLICK: Our home suffered mud damage. We had to tear the walls out, the waters got in between the walls, the installation, the floors.

PATCHWORK: Did the town pay for any of that or did everyone pay their own?

FLICK: No, no. Back then they didn't have, well, I think they just started out with flood insurance. Today they have flood insurance to cover all that damage, but no. My parents rented and we thought we were high enough from the river.

PATCHWORK: Who was with you at the University?

FLICK: My parents. I have two other sisters and a brother.

PATCHWORK: Were you allowed to take anything with you?

FLICK: My mother and us kids got as much clothing as we could possibly get at that time to go up there, but it was just the clothes on our back and whatever clothes were laying around that we could throw in the car.

PATCHWORK: How long did the flood last?

FLICK: Weeks. I mean, it rained two weeks straight. It was like a never-ending, once you were out, you had to go back in. It was months.

PATCHWORK: When you left the college to come back home and everything, you came to the house (INAUDIBLE)

FLICK: The first floor had mud on it. There was mud up to the second stair step, which would've been going up to our second floor.

PATCHWORK: So you stayed at your house?

FLICK: Yes.

PATCHWORK: What did the town look like?

FLICK: The town?

PATCHWORK: Outside.

FLICK: Oh, how can I describe. I mean, going down Market Street, once you hit 9th street where we lived, outside of peoples houses it was just piles of carpeting, lumber where people were tearing their walls out, furniture. Everything we all owned was sitting outside of our house. The street was just caked with inches and inches and inches of mud. There was debris, there was garbage, there was tree limbs, there was dead fish. The best I can describe it is, if it was an all week rain at the Bloomsburg Fairgrounds and then in one day the sun came out and started drying outside of the cattle barns and just what that was like. The smell was terrible.

PATCHWORK: How long did it take for everyone to clean up?

FLICK: Months.

PATCHWORK: What was the cost?

FLICK: I don't know what the cost was for my parents. My parents rented then. Our house was condemned once we went back in. I don't know if the Health Department came down and found out with all of the mold and everything in between the walls, it wasn't very healthy for us. We moved and we had moved to another part of town and thought we were in the dry again and only got into another flood.

PATCHWORK: Did stores have to clothes?

FLICK: Yes, where we lived was behind what is now Radzeviech, it was the A&P store then. Sure, they had to clothes. There was food and everything in there because the water had come up farther than that. Stores on Main Street, no, because the water got as far as 5th street. East and West. The lower ends, because the upper ends were higher. But anything from 5th street down, I mean, everything was closed up.

PATCHWORK: And how old were you at the time?

FLICK: Oh, fifteen, sixteen years old. And I'm forty-seven now.

PATCHWORK: How long did you get off of school?

FLICK: How long did I get off of school? School was closed for quite awhile, I don't remember.

PATCHWORK: Did you have to make it up in the summer?

FLICK: I didn't go to the high school where you go to school. I went up on 1st street. In the old Bloomsburg High School. The school was closed down because there was still people living there, from over in Fernville, Rupert, different areas.

PATCHWORK: Did anyone die?

FLICK: Yes, I believe there were some deaths.

PATCHWORK: In Bloomsburg?

FLICK: Yes, I believe over Fernville, over Red Mill Road way. I do remember, as a child, picking up the paper and I seen where they were taking people out in boats, rescuing people. Along Fishing Creek, where the overpass and everything is now. There used to be a lot of trailers in through there, and they had to evacuate that. And there used to be buildings in through there. Best I can describe is, they looked like little cottages. But they all were gone. The water came and took all that and they were evacuating people at that time. They didn't want to leave their homes.

PATCHWORK: How did your parents react to it?

FLICK: Well, my dad didn't want to leave. He kept saying, as the days went by, we kept looking out our back porch and we were looking down between 10th, 11th, and 12th street and you could see the people getting prepared, you'd see moving trucks, U-HAUL trucks, moving stuff out. My dad kept saying no, it's not going to come up here, it's not going to come up here. When it finally did, National Guard came down 9th street and went door by door, along with the Police Department and told us all that we had to evacuate and we only had a certain amount to do so. We could only take what we had on our backs. We were standing out on the back porch and we didn't see the water. Once it came up the hill, which is behind the baseball diamond at the Town Park, and it was really fast.

PATCHWORK: Were you scared?

FLICK: Yes, I was very scared.

PATCHWORK: How did your mom react?

FLICK: My mother was a nervous wreck. She had four kids, and her husband didn't want to leave. Although my dad did take us up to the college, he went back. He parked his car and walked down and went back. But that's the way people were back then. They knew

that they weren't going to have much when they did come back. Even as a kid. Everyday in my room, we'd go to the other end of Elwell Hall and we'd look out the back windows and there was no airport. All you could see was a little bitty part of the roof of the airport. People were crying, all you heard were people who wanted to go back, they wanted to go back but they were afraid there was nothing there for them. Their homes were gone. My grandfather lived on 9th street on the other side of us. My mother and aunts and uncle were born in that house. Now that house still stands today, but that house was completely under water, to the roof.

PATCHWORK: Do you remember when it was, in the summer?

FLICK: When the flood of '72 was? It was in the summer, yes. I don't remember exactly what month, but it was in the summer. It was a cold damp rain, even though it was in the summer, it was cold.

PATCHWORK: When you stayed at the College, did they serve food?

FLICK: Yes, they did. It wasn't free though. We still had to supply our own food and that in the rooms. The rooms were nice; they had refrigerators and everything in them. They were nice.

PATCHWORK: Was it like a dorm room?

FLICK: Yes, Elwell Hall. It's still standing there today.

PATCHWORK: All six of you had to stay in one room then?

FLICK: Well, my dad wasn't there. My dad went back down to 9th Street.

PATCHWORK: He stayed there, the whole time?

FLICK: Yes. It was my mother, my two sisters, my brother and I. All of my neighbors were there along with us. We were all kids, and my brother might have slept in another room with people that lived up the street. We were cramped, though. I mean, you walked into a room and whatever you could've taken in boxes was there. Your dirty clothes were there. The clothes that you had to wear, you had to dress out of boxes, everything was just piled in a room.

PATCHWORK: When you left, after it was safe to go back to your home, and once you saw your house, how did you feel?

FLICK: Sick. The smell, all I can remember, still to this day was the smell. And opening up our door, now my dad was cleaning up, but everything that he cleaned out of the house from the first floor was outside lying. The basement, just the smell, the smell, the

mud, the dead fish, dead animals, everything that you could think possible was in your basement and on your first floor.

PATCHWORK: Did everyone act pretty calm?

FLICK: The day that we evacuated or when we came back? The day we came back, we must have cried. To see the damage that was done. Although we were kids, everything of ours was upstairs; it was safe. Coming back to the neighborhood and seeing everything that happened, your streets, it just, it looked like a war zone. It just looked like there was nothing you could do. No way could you fix what had just taken place and what happen. You could never clean it up.

PATCHWORK: Even after everything was repaired, things didn't look the same?

FLICK: No, that whole area down there doesn't look the same anymore.

PATCHWORK: Ever since '72?

FLICK: Ever since 1972.

PATCHWORK: Wasn't it worse in surrounding areas?

FLICK: Yes. Well, when you get up closer to the river. Those homes are still down there. The architectural development has changed a little bit. But, it's people's homes. They've lived their lives. They've raised their kids there. It's hard. And some of them are still there; some families are still there.

PATCHWORK: And this flood was caused by Hurricane Agnes?

FLICK: Yes.