

Agnes Flood: Charles & Phyllis Fisher

Flood of 1972 as told to Patchwork by Charles and Phyllis Fisher

Interviewed by Amy Ryman and Whitney Heydenreich in the spring of 2003

PATCHWORK: What was the cause of the 1972 Flood?

P. FISHER: Well, it was from the Hurricane Agnes. It started in Florida and just came up.

PATCHWORK: When did you know it wasn't going to be just a heavy rain storm?

P. FISHER: Well, it started on Monday in Florida and it was a tropical storm and it just started to move up and it kept on raining and raining and by Wednesday it was really really bad and we knew we were in trouble.

PATCHWORK: What was the storm like and the power of the rain?

P. FISHER: Just a steady down pour, a hard down pour. It wasn't anything like your usual, you know like hard thunder showers something like that was coming down. But I don't know the power of the water was.

C. FISHER: Well, it was pretty tough. I mean it washed away. Well, it was powerful. It wiped out bridges on the creeks and stuff. It had good force to it.

P. FISHER: It washed away trailer homes.

C. FISHER: Do you know there was trailer homes went right down over here by the double-track bridge where Jerk Leiby's gas station was at the fore end of Bloom. Do you know where that was?

PATCHWORK: Reply (yes)

C. FISHER: There was a trailer came down the creek there and wiped under the bridge; and that was high. There's a house setting across where the Rusty Rudder Cavern (Tavern) is between that and Jerk Leiby's there was a house over and that house was pretty bad. We had boats with cables and wires across the creek. I think she has pictures of that. And we had a rowboat in there to get over to that house to get people out of that house, there's no way they could get out. There was a lot of water. The fairgrounds was completely flooded.

PATCHWORK: Would you describe what the flood was like and how long it lasted before the floodwater started to recede?

P. FISHER: It started raining June the nineteenth and went to the twenty-fifth.

C.FISHER: Almost a week.

P. FISHER: And it started raining down in Florida on Monday and on Tuesday the National Weather Service put a flood watch out for the low areas of Pennsylvania and Wednesday the Civil Defense, there was a town evacuated in Aldred where every street was under water. And it continued on raining and more than five inches of rain fell into the Alleghany River Basin. And on Thursday it was in the Luzerne, Columbia, and Montour County. It was that much rain, it was detarted a disaster area at that time in Columbia County. The Susquehanna River was more than twenty three feet and the flood stage and the National Guard was called as curfews area put into effect Bloomsburg and Berwick and the people were being evacuated from their homes by boats because there was no other way to get them and we weren't here, we were okay here but my parents were like. Okay, do you know where Coltin lives on West Main Street, Coltin Fisher? Well that was my home and my parents and grandparents were still there and they were, they had to go up by boat.

C.FISHER: There was so much water came across from Fishing Creek at the lower end of Bloomsburg over here. Do you know where the fairground entrance? And you say that you know where Coltin lives? That their driveway and different ones along there was washed completely out that I could stand and reach up and touch the porch floor of the porch. That's how much water went down through there. It took the sewer systems out and everything. Clean to the fairground fence. The back yard, you could of buried probably a dozen pickup trucks in the back of that yard or more.

P. FISHER: And then on Friday June the 23 the Susquehanna River reached between 35 and 36 feet so that was really, really high. That's the worst flood we ever had in Bloomsburg that I know of. I think it was worse than the 36' flood or 32' flood. (talking to husband) Do you remember?

C. FISHER: No.

PATCHWORK: What was it like helping people from the flood waters and putting your life at risk?

C. FISHER: Well, my life wasn't really at risk it was just a lot of work. You were out in the wet and the water.

P. FISHER: But if you got in the water you would have to be careful being washed away.

C. FISHER: Yeah the only problem or the worst problem was over here when we took the boat across by cable to get the people off of that water over there other than that it was more clean up after the water receded.

P. FISHER: I have a couple papers here and there was a teenager from Numidia he was a Brian Racker he was only eighteen years old and he died. He was swept to his death on Thursday trying to rescue people in that area Roaring Creek and another man drowned. I think he was doing some rescuing out around Knoebel's Park or yeah Knoebel's. Because that was really bad out there and he lost his life. So it was dangerous.

PATCHWORK: How many people did you help to safety and where did they live?

C. FISHER: Oh, I don't know. We just were at the lower end of Bloom up here where Montour Township ends, over here by the trailer parks and stuff. We just helped move people out of there as far as up into Bloomsburg by the fairgrounds and stuff Bloomsburg took care of all that. Montour was just here there over by the W. W. Evans School and that trailer park down through there by the Bell telephone building, just in that lower end there.

P. FISHER: Here's a picture of this is Agnes ten year later. And well anyway it shows this was just a special in ten years after the flood and this is Montour Township this one has his fire coat on and it shows him rescuing people by boat.

C. FISHER: That's the one we had cables across. (To Phyllis) Do you have the pictures of the house?

P.FISHER: Yea, I have those too. But we'll answer the questions first.

PATCHWORK: Who else helped you during this and how long did it take?

C.FISHER: Ohh, we were gone twenty four hours a day for several days, all the people in the fire hall the whole fire department. It wasn't just me; it was the whole fire department out here. We pumped people's cellars with fire trucks and a lot of people in this lower section that had a lot of water in cause it came up in the campground in Fishing creek that goes across down here where the Laws campground is where the lower end is here, that was under water, all the camping trailers were under.

P.FISHER: Ah, yesterday when I was for a walk Doug Fetterman told me that the new covered bridge here that they redid over is higher than the other one and the other one was lower and he said that Charlie Mausteller and Leonard Bootie rode in a rowboat right through the covered bridge. Where you would drive through, they rode the rowboat

and Bryan also told me Kristin's father, that what saved the covered bridge, there was a house trailer that came down around the creek and the two train bridges is what saved the covered bridge because it stopped the house trailer

C.FISHER: right came down on the train bridge as it took the course of the water before it hit the covered bridge.

P.FISHER: And it would have taken down the covered bridge he said. And that's what saved the covered bridge.

PATCHWORK: Was your home one of the houses that was under water?

C.FISHER: No, we're up to high for the water here.

P.FISHER: We had this hill over on this side, we have a lot, an empty lot that we own and that was just like a little river flowing for about four days it just kept on coming down and we did get water in our basement.

C.FISHER: That was, we wouldn't of had a lot of water in the basement, but the morning that the fire alarm went bad that we had to go help people. I went down and started to get my boots and we have a Rubbermaid mat over our drain and all the water that came in, we had about four inches of water in our basement, so I just waded across and took the rubber mat off and over the period of the day it just swirled and went down and our cellar just had water running through and down and down the drain.

P.FISHER: Thank goodness our drain worked the whole time and that was going into our septic system, we didn't have sewer at that time. And it was coming in on the rug, and I mean you just couldn't stop it. The water was coming right in on this side over here, like just like you would turn on a water spigot, just coming in.

PATCHWORK: Did your home receive any flood damage, if so what was it?

C.FISHER: Oh, we didn't really have any flood damage.

P.FISHER: No, we didn't have any flood damage.

PATCHWORK: What effects does the flood have on you and your family?

C.FISHER: Well, just her parents place, that was bad.

P.FISHER: Did your mother have any problems?

C.FISHER: Umm, well that was when the chicken coop washed away and Corn Run, it's called over there in Catawissa, that was up pretty high and that flooded coming down

through the hollow road. You probably don't know where that is, that's if you go to the top of River Hill and turn right, go down the hollow road and it will bring you to Second Street in Catawissa. There's a run coming down through there, it's called Corn Run and that was a lot of water. That Corn Run is probably four feet low from our yard; where my mom and dad is, and we had about a foot and a half or two foot of water on the whole yard so there's a lot of water that came down through there. There was a chicken coop over there that was probably thirty feet long, fourteen or fifteen feet wide eight foot high, it washed that off the foundation and moved it about six or eight feet down in the yard.

P.FISHER: Then where my parents over on West Main Street, her father, Brian and Coltin are sons, they worked over there cleaning that was terrible because the river came from the back across the fairgrounds and the creek came across the front and I have pictures here of the backyard and the way it washed under the porches and if you want to see them. But they had, that was really bad over there my mother, they went over to Quaker State plantation up on Grovania Hill and they stayed over there, Mr. Miller left them stay at the house and my grandmother didn't want to go and they had to and we had problems with looters, people were actually going around in rowboats and looting motor boats and looting in people's houses and they did break into my mother's house but I guess they got them, they didn't get away with much, but I mean the police had their hands full trying to, it's just too bad when you have a tragedy like that that happens when people had to do this. But it was really, really bad in fact Bryan got sick, he just couldn't take it, the smell was terrible. And they just cleaning up the basements and you just use shovels to throw everything out and, you can just see the debris the things that were ruined and they had, you could just see, I mean you could walk underneath the porch it just washed it away; it was like it just came through like a channel and that was right under, it took the septic system and macadam,(talking together) it just took the bank out that was just in the backyard, it changed the whole backyard, they had an old English hedges, beautiful hedges, they were all gone, just cleaned them out; it was really, really bad.

PATCHWORK: What was it like seeing Bloomsburg like that?

P.FISHER: Devastating, it really was. And people worked so hard and then you have to, you know, get it all cleaned up again and it was just never the same and heartbreaking to see things put back but not like it used to be and you try to remember the way things were and it was hard for my parents because my grandmother was old, getting very old and my parents were getting up in years and it was hard and they didn't have flood insurance so they had to go in the Federal Government to get the money and which they were helping and the State was helping and then they had to start taking out flood insurance to cover with anything and then in '75 they had Louise, but that wasn't as bad; not near as, I think that was half what Agnes was.

PATCHWORK: How much damage was done to repair it?

P.FISHER: Ah, mostly the lower end down by the houses.

C.FISHER: By the Covered Bridge and the campground, just basements with water in them and there was a camping trailer that was damaged quite a bit down by Laws Camp.

P.FISHER: Well, did they even have the campground in by '72?

C.FISHER: Well there was campers down there.

P.FISHER: I always thought it was just a field.

C.FISHER: But there was a couple camping trailers down there.

P.FISHER: But it was quiet, we didn't have the water up here, no cars were going by because the narrows were closed and everything was over, it was just so different. You could just walk out the street, I mean walk on the road.

C.FISHER: Are you familiar with the lower end of Bloomsburg by Rupert here, where it drops off to go to Catawissa? Just three houses down where it drops off there was a train bridge, the water was right up to that road, right here, our road here, that's how high it was through her, backed up.

P.FISHER: They were roller skating in the road out here, children, riding bicycles, walking dogs. It was really strange.

C.FISHER: No vehicles on the road. (P.Fisher- No) they couldn't get to Bloom or any place.

P.FISHER: They had to in fact, the only people that would know the shortcuts, we had to go to get up out of Bloomsburg, we had to go down towards Danville and cut up to Welliver Drive and go up and around and go up through like you would to get to Iron Street, I don't how we really did get around, but we did.

C.FISHER: Yea, we went around the other way.

P.FISHER: Just to get to my parent's home to help but we just had to really wait till the water receded because the only way you could get there is by row boat. We did have a boat that I don't think we used it.

C.FISHER: No, not that over there. Was that when I brought the horses out of the fairgrounds? Yea, I helped bring the horses out of the stalls over there at the fairgrounds and horses were up to their bellies in water, bringing them out. You would just hold on to their halter and they would take you right along with them. But they were right up to their

bellies, about this deep in water getting horses out, I brought two horses out from over there. A lot of water.

PATCHWORK: Is Rupert better prepared for another flood and are you?

C.FISHER: Well, I don't think there's no way to prepare for more floods, I mean it's, there's no dike or anything. If the creek backed up or the river backs up, we get water at the lower end.

P.FISHER: I went for a walk yesterday and I didn't get very far because when I went down by the Old Red Mill, right there was the end of it, the water was up over the road by Streater's, And I saw a car come in with, was it River Road, was it over River Road at all? Okay, I don't know where the car was going then. But they had it blocked, they had the road blocked up and you couldn't go under by the train tracks because the creek was over. So I don't think there is much you can do.