

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Tales from the Flood *by Andrea Granahan*

A Bark in the Night Saves Four Lives. There used to be a house at the bottom of the hill at the coastal end of Coleman Valley Road. The family that lived in the house awoke to their dog, tied up outside loudly barking. Then they heard other noises. The couple and their two children ran outside and even in the dark they could see the hillside was sliding down towards them. They ran. There was a post firmly dug into the ground. A man grabbed the post and the couple clutched their children as the slide took their house sliding past them towards the sea. They lived but some people say because the dog was tied up it died, but one person insisted it had survived, too. The family left the area as soon as they could and never came back so there is no way of knowing for sure now. You can still see the remains of the house foundation.

Rescuing the Wilds. The Wilds were a retired couple who lived in trailer just north of the bridge on Salmon Creek Road in Bodega. They woke in the middle of the night to find a foot of water in their trailer. It was still rising. They grabbed their little dog and headed out for higher ground on the south side of the bridge. The flood had taken down a huge tree which lodged up against the bridge which was under water. That was lucky for the Wilds. The current was so swift on the bridge it would have swept them away if they had not grabbed on to the branches. They yelled for help. Mani Piazza, a rancher just south of the bridge heard them and got his bucket loader. He was able to get close enough that the Wilds, still clutching the dog, crawled into the bucket. Piazza dropped them off on dry ground. The little dog would not leave the bucket. He stayed in it for a week before the Wilds could persuade him to come out.

The Muddy CCC Kids. In the middle of the misery the kids of the California Conservation Corps swooped in for a few days before they were sent south. They were not afraid of the mud and dove in to clear it out of homes and ranch buildings. At the time they were led by a hero of the Vietnam War B.T. Collins, who lost an arm and a leg in the conflict, who gave them their proud motto "*Hard Work, Low Pay, Miserable Conditions.*" I stayed at McCaughey Hall, organizing donations, heating up donated food, and mostly mopping floors. The Italian restaurants in Occidental had sent over many

five-gallon buckets of minestrone and loaves of bread. The kids would come in on breaks exhausted, starving and filthy from head to toe. I'd feed them and when their break was over and they went out again, mop up the mud. In the three days they were there they made a huge inroad to recovery. We hated to see them go. But they were desperately needed by other flood victims.

The Stranded Wellings. Sonny and Beverly Welling lived at the end of Salmon Creek Road in Bodega. Two bridges were between them and town. Both were washed out. The water rose to their home and they and their cattle took refuge in their barn which was uphill. They were stranded. Everyone worried about two families that were beyond those bridges. The other family lived high up enough they could stay in their home. Each day I called our Supervisor Ernie Carpenter to let him know the conditions. Somehow the Wellings got word out about their plight. They were worried about food for their animals. Ernie arranged for a helicopter to drop feed for the livestock, and supplies for the family until the roads could be cleared.

Two Steps up. Three steps back. In 1982, Linda Danielson and her sons lived on Bay Flat Road. She remembers "it **POURED** all night long. 9 inches+ **AT LEAST!**" The next morning with no electricity, a passing driver stopped by with a message from her Mom to "come up to Diekmann's." Linda's Mom lived a short way up the hill with her husband, part-owner of Diekmann's store. Normally an easy walk from Bay Flat Road, the main road was washed out. Linda remembers a slippery, muddy ordeal, as they climbed the hill, scrambling up two muddy steps up and sliding back down three steps. To make matters worse when the electricity came on, she slid back down and climbed up again after turning off the electric lights left on the night of the storm. It took three full days for fresh supplies to arrive.

Remnants of the road damage are visible to this day. Before the Flood of '82, Eastshore Road was a two-lane road, the main connector from Bay Flat Road to CA Hwy One. The flood washed out the hill and at least half the road. Today only half the road remains with cement barriers still in place. ■