

## Museum News: Stories from the Flood

by C. W. (Bill) Smith, curator

Terrell County Memorial Museum

Last week marked the 50th anniversary of the flood of 1965. Previously in this column I posted first-hand accounts of survivors of the flood. Here are two more accounts of those who lived through the worst cataclysm that Sanderson ever suffered.



Aerial photo of the 1965 flood destruction. The street to the right is Legion Street. The US Highway 90 bridge is mid-left with Highway 90 intersecting with Legion St. The foundation of the Sanderson Motel units are mid-picture, where the Johnson family lost their lives. Note the huge gouges washed out by the flood waters. Depth of the flood in this area, which had surged over the banks of Sanderson Creek, was estimated at about eight feet.

### Dee's Story

Dee Gray was an operator at the Sanderson Train Depot on June 10 -11, 1965. His shift was Thursday night from 11:00 p.m. until Friday morning 7:00 a.m.

When he arrived at work on Thursday night the operators were trying to round up a track crew to fix a section of track that had been washed out near Longfellow. They were trying to get bulldozers out of Odessa to help with the repairs from the water damage.

Dee's father, O. D. Gray, Sr., a railroad conductor, was called out with his crew to bring in a train that had run out of crew time between Marathon and Alpine. Union rules said a crew could not work more than twelve hours. When their time was up, the train was stopped and another crew was sent out to bring it in. He came to the depot that night and told Dee that the water was getting fairly deep around the depot parking lot and he needed to move Dee's car to Word's Service Station, a block away and uphill. His dad's crew was then transported by vehicles to try and find the dead train.

A few inches of water began coming into the depot around 4:00 a.m. Dee began to move the ledgers to higher places so they would not get wet. He remembered that there was a train crew on the engine out in the Sanderson yard.

As he talked with the dispatcher from Houston and with an operator out of Langtry, suddenly, there were sparks in the water as the water rose and hit the electrical circuits. The water rose to about four feet in the depot. Having lost contact with Houston and Langtry, he moved up into the warehouse, which sat about three feet higher than the rest of the depot, along with a couple of other people. They watched as the water carried debris, houses and cars away.

The men on the train engine rode out the flood, and were really lucky not to have been swept away.

On Friday morning the reality of what they experienced was very evident. The water had split the wool house apart, railroad track was bent like pieces of rubber and railroad ties were spread everywhere,

As the water went down, Dee and the other workers were able to leave the depot and join others to help people that lived near the cemetery shovel mud out of their houses.

### **Lupe's Story**

Lupe Hagelgans said that on Thursday the 10th of June it rained hard, but it was very steady. It rained all evening and all night. She said it was so scary in the morning that even her mother remarked that it looked bad. Her mother lived in a mobile home in the back of their house. Her house was about 3 ½ feet high off the ground. She and her mother were awaiting word from her husband Otto and her brother Joe Salazar. They had gone to the other side of town to see how bad it was...and it was bad. They had just enough time to get to the other side of town, but when they crossed the bridge going towards Dryden, part of the bridge washed away so they had to stay there. No one warned Lupe and her mom about any danger. They had to stay in the house along with Lupe's new baby, Alberta who was three months old and her four other girls Linda, Jo Ann, Tammy, and Debra. Lupe was concerned because there was so much water, and it just kept on rising.

Her mother, Angelina Salazar, was such a brave woman. She told Lupe, "Let's get a broom, whatever we can get, and move what gets stuck by the side walk." And sure enough, there came a refrigerator floating by. Using brooms, they pushed it on into the flood. They had to move three more refrigerators. It was not very hard because the water was so fast, rising, rising. But, that was when Lupe got scared...they didn't know how much damage it had caused and certainly people were dying, but they saw just one body as it floated by. At this point, in a panic, Lupe ran into the house and got a statue of Jesus from their family altar. She cried out in anguish and put the statue in the water, screaming, "Please help us, we are going to drown." She took the statue back into the house and came back outside crying. Her mother was fighting an object in the water with her broom, and then, all of a sudden, the water was going down and it didn't get into the house, after all. Their butane tank, along with dozens of others, had floated down the creek, spewing gas. Everything outside...toys, swings...had floated away, but she got her miracle when she asked Jesus to save them. She was scared, but her family was safe.

Juan Salazar, her brother and a cook at Harvey's Restaurant, had gotten his family to safety as well, and Harvey gave him and his family and Lupe's family a place to stay for two nights in an apartment he owned. Eventually, the Red Cross helped them get back into their houses.

*A collection of fifty flood survivor stories, most not published before, and photos of the flood destruction has been published in a slim volume and will be available from the Terrell County Heritage Garden Committee. Contact Dale Carruthers at the Sanderson Bank for a copy, or call the Terrell County Visitor Center (432-345-2324) for more information. All proceeds from the sale of this book will help offset printing costs and the remaining donated to help fund other Heritage Garden Committee projects.*