

07-05-1969 Wooster OH – Paul Knisley – LEO Flood Rescue Attempt Boat Accident



OFFICER DOWN MEMORIAL PAGE



REMEMBERING ALL OF LAW ENFORCEMENT'S HEROES



Bio & Incident Details
Age: 30
Tour: Not available
Badge # Not available
Cause: Drowned

Sergeant Paul H. Knisley
Wooster Police Department, Ohio

End of Watch: Saturday, July 5, 1969

Sergeant Paul Knisley and Patrolman Robert Goodrich drowned in Little Apple Creek while attempting to rescue several people whose boat had capsized.

Sergeant Knisley was survived by his wife and two children.

Honoring fallen peace officers

<http://www.woosterweeklynews.com/article/20110427/FEATURES/704279962/-1/wwn>

By Sharon Haught

Sgt. Paul H. Knisley and Patrolman Robert C. Goodrich, of the Wooster Police Department, who died in the line of duty in 1969 when they were swept away by the floodwaters of the Apple Creek and drowned while attempting to rescue flood victims stranded on the roof of their home

A strange kind of day got "worse and worse and worse"

<http://www.the-daily-record.com/local%20news/2009/07/05/a-strange-kind-of-day-got-worse-and-worse-and-worse>

July 5, 2009 By BOBBY WARREN Staff Writer

Forty years ago a flash flood ravaged this area claiming 22 lives, and it was an act of nature "full of tragedies from start to finish."

Ralph Linsalata, at the time director of Orrville Civil Defense, said it was a strange kind of day when those rains and flash floods hit.

Linsalata was playing softball, and he could see black clouds coming in from the north. Usually, storms came from the southwest and sometimes southeast.

"My recollection when I first noticed there was something strange was that it was going to rain, and it got worse and worse and worse," Linsalata said.

About 9 p.m. July Fourth, the rains started hitting Wayne and Holmes counties. By 11 p.m., the calls were coming in so fast they could not all be logged. "That's when all hell broke loose," one Wooster patrolman said at the time.

The Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center recorded 10.55 inches of rain for 72 hours, beginning 9 p.m. on July 4.

Flash flooding started, and it continued throughout the night, Linsalata recalled. "A lot of people were caught unaware -- everyone was caught unaware," he added.

Few people had experienced flash flooding and weren't aware of the dangers, Linsalata said. Some people were trapped in their cars; children went out into the waters to play; creeks came up quickly; cars were swiped off of highways and roads; and people got into the water, then people tried to save people and some lost their lives, he added.

"Some bodies have never been recovered," Linsalata said. "It was just full of tragedies from start to finish."

What stands out four decades later was working on the search team. "Helping to carry the police officers' bodies out was very rough on people," Linsalata said. "I was there to help do that. Many people were there."

Two Wooster policemen drowned in the flood, Sgt. Paul Knisely, 30, and Robert Goodrich, 56. They, along with Goodrich's son, David, went in a boat to help rescue victims in the Bauer Road area on July 5. Their boat capsized. David Goodrich was

found downstream later that morning. Robert Goodrich's body was found July 7, and Knisely's body was found July 8.

Ross Knisely, a younger cousin of Paul Knisely, was 15 during the flood. He and his family traveled to Whitehall, Mich., to do some camping. They heard the news of the storm and tried unsuccessfully to get an update on what was happening in Wooster.

After about 12 hours, his mother finally heard the news Wooster was hit hard.

On the way home, Ross Knisely said he remembered hearing the names of the missing policemen on the radio. Getting home was difficult once they reached Ohio. He estimated it took half a day to travel from Norwalk to Wooster, which is about a 55-mile trip.

"It was like everywhere we looked, water was on the edges," Ross Knisely said. "It was scary coming home."

His family finally arrived in Wooster around 1-2 a.m. on July 6. They lived on state Route 3 south of the city, and the flood conditions prevented them from going home right away, even after they made it to Wooster.

Though his cousin's body was not found until a couple of days later, "By that time, I think all of the family knew he was dead," Knisely said. "It was just a relief that they found him."

Knisely said he doesn't think about the flood at all until the Fourth of July rolls around -- and especially when there is a storm.

Judy Goff, then 11 years old, was camping with her family, and several others, around Pleasant Hill Lake near Perrysville. She was sleeping in a Conestoga wagon when the rains started coming. Her sisters were in a tent next to the wagon, and the water rushed underneath their cots.

Early the next morning, the camp director said if any of the families wanted to leave, they better go quickly. Goff's family was one of two to leave, and it took them seven hours to get home via a circuitous route that had them coming in to Wooster from Burbank. Seventeen times their car drove over water covering state Route 83.

It was a scary time, Goff said.

Ted Bogner, president of Bogner Construction, was 26 years old when the flood hit. He remembered going to the Mulberry Street office around 6 a.m. July 5 and working until midnight.

Bogner helped fight a fire in one of the buildings used to store cranes. As the water level rose, fuel came out of the tanks and caught fire. Firefighters climbed into a rowboat with a hose and went out to extinguish the flames.

However, when they turned the hose on, the pressure forced the boat backward, and they had to rethink their strategy. They next climbed onto the roof to attack the fire, Bogner said.

"I was living in the country, and I was the only one who had water and sewer," Bogner said.

Despite the area being inundated with flood waters, one of the biggest impacts on the community as a whole was a lack of drinking water, Bogner said.

The water plant went off-line around 5 a.m. July 5, and service was not restored until July 8 -- the same day Gov. James Rhodes toured Wayne and Holmes counties.

After "observing the ravages of Ohio's worst storm, after seeing the devastation left by the ensuing floods, after visiting the homeless, it is impossible to find the words that can replace this great loss of those concerned," Rhodes said. "Here in the Wooster area ... what can I say to lessen the pain, burden and grief of the loved ones left behind? As a man humble before God, I can only offer a prayer."

Linsalata said when the rains and flood came, the people here were not prepared to react to the dangers of a flash flood. The event led to "a lot of lessons learned," he said, adding "there needed to be some changes in the way rescue procedures were done. That was not uncommon. Experience teaches us what to do next time, heaven forbid, there is a next time.

July 4th 1969 Flood

<http://waynehistoricalohio.org/2012/07/06/july-4th-1969-flood/>

JULY 6, 2012 POSTED BY [WEBMASTER](#) ·
AUTHOR: S. ZIMMERMAN-WOOSTER, OH



It's been 43 years since the flash flood of 1969 that affected so many people's lives in Wayne County. Now there are whole generations of folks who don't know anything about it except the stories they've heard from their parents or grandparents.

For those that lived through the 1969 flood many can recall the event with vivid and emotional detail much like they can remember where they were when President Kennedy was shot, the space shuttle Challenger blew up, or when the September 11th attacks took place.

There were no early warning systems in place or widespread weather radars like we depend upon today. The people of Wayne County and all across northern Ohio were unprepared for the impending disaster.

What many thought was going to be a relaxing holiday weekend turned, literally overnight, into a nightmare and for 22 Wayne Countians the raging flood waters ended their life.

Ominous clouds rolled into the area around 9PM on July 4, 1969. Many fireworks displays were cancelled as heavy raindrops began to fall around 9:30PM. Most people simply returned to their homes and went to bed thinking it was just another passing summer thunderstorm that would blow out of town quickly. They simply fell asleep to the pounding rain on their rooftops and crackling thunder. But as they slept the rain continued to pound down and did not stop.

It rained continuously for almost 13 hours with intense lightening and thunder in Wayne County. By 2:00AM local police and fire departments began getting frantic calls from residents seeking help as rising flood waters began to surround their

homes. The storm affected practically every portion of Wayne County, but perhaps the worst hit was the Bauer Rd. area, also known as "Soaptown", in Wooster, Ohio.

Located in an area where the Little Apple Creek tributary passes on it's way to join the main Apple Creek the water rose so quickly and with such force that residents in permanent home structures were forced to flee to the highest floors of their house where they helplessly watched the trailer-type homes in the area get washed away or smashed with floating debris.

One of the Bauer Rd. residents that suffered great losses during the storm of 1969 was Paul Taylor. He lived on Bauer Rd. along with his wife, Lovina, and 9-year-old son Dale in a trailer home. For the holiday the family had made plans to visit Taylor's sister in Zanesville and watch the Zanesville fireworks display. Mr. Taylor invited his eldest daughter, Doris Wirth and her children: a 6-week-old welfare infant Doris was caring for at the time named Anthony, 4-year-old Sharon Wirth, and a family friend, 12-year-old Patricia Lovett, to all make the trip to Zanesville for a day of family fun. They made the trip to Zanesville in a car driven by Paul Taylor and returned to Wooster around midnight.



Smashed buildings show the damage caused by flood water from the Little Apple Creek that swamped the area around Bauer Rd. in Wooster, OH. Photo courtesy of Vicki Slater.

When they reached the Bauer Rd. neighborhood they could see the water was already deep, but lights were on in nearby houses, so he continued on toward his home. At the time Taylor drove a semi-tractor transport truck for Ford Motor Co. and had left a fully loaded trailer of new cars in front of his mobile home and wanted to see if everything was OK.

Driving into the flood water he could see that his home was already flooded and he decided not to try and go into the house and attempted to turn around. But the water was high enough that the car stalled-out and would not restart. Mr. Taylor got everybody out of the car and they slogged there way to the Henthorn house across the street where a number of the neighbors had already gathered to wait for the water to recede. However, the water kept rising as time passed.

Members of the Wooster Police Department came by in boats a couple of times urging everybody in the area to evacuate. At first nobody wanted to go, but as the water kept coming down and the police came by again telling them to get out, the decision was made to send the women and children out first, but the small police boat could not hold everybody.

A resident of Pittsburg Ave., John Mann, had heard that there were people in the Bauer Rd. area that needed help and boats were needed to get to them. John Mann had a boat sitting on his property and did not think twice about taking it out in the dark during a storm on flood waters to go help.

He picked up three Dowell Co. employees who had been stranded at the plant: Walter Campbell, John Baumgartner, and manager Basil Bright. At the time the Dowell Co. was a subsidiary chemical company of the Dow Chemical Corporation with their plant located on Bauer Rd. north of U.S. Rt. 30.

The group of men travelled 100 yards south into the residential neighborhood and were flagged down to pick up the women and children at the Henthorn house. Climbing into Mann's boat along with the Dowell employees, was Lovina Taylor, Doris Wirth holding the baby foster child, Sharon Wirth, Patricia Lovett, Dale Taylor, Roger Henthorn, and two dogs and a cat. The group pulled away from the Henthorn house and were heading for dry land on old U.S. 30 when halfway to safety disaster struck. Churning in the raging flood waters was a metal tank from a drilling company's station that hit the boat with such force that it capsized the boat and threw everybody into the water.

Hearing screams for help another small boat manned by Wooster City Police officers, Patrolman Robert Goodrich, along with his son Patrolman David Goodrich, and Sargent Paul Knisely, swung into action and attempted to rescue the people fighting for their lives in the fast moving water. However, the boat spun out of control in the swift current and the same fate that struck the Mann boat hit the police boat.

Debris bouncing and careening through the tumultuous water struck Goodrich's boat and all three policemen were thrown into the water too. One of the survivors recalled that as the torrent of water carried them over a steep embankment into the Little Apple Creek waterbed where it narrowed under the highway bridge the water exploded with speed and waves as it reached the opposite side of the highway.

It was a miracle that anybody from those capsized boats survived. Out of the 14 people that were in the two boats that capsized that night only three survived.

Dowell Co. employee Walter Campbell was able to grab onto a tree and wait to be rescued the next morning. He thought he saw Doris Wirth and Dale Taylor grab onto the boat that was floating upside down before they got swept farther downstream. Dale Taylor reported that he got caught up in fence after getting sucked into the torrent of water on the opposite side of the bridge. He heard Doris scream but never saw her again.

The raging water eventually tore the 9-year-old from the fence but he was able to grab onto a tree which was swirling downstream. Riding the waves three-quarters of mile south he was thrown against a tree still standing firm against the flood water.

I hung on to a low branch, swung my feet up higher and grabbed the tree around the trunk.

Little Dale Taylor held on to that tree until about 9:30AM the next morning when someone heard him calling for help and directed firemen to his rescue. ***Patrolman David Goodrich after being swept downstream was able to tie himself to a tree along the bank of the creek with his belt and was rescued at daybreak by fellow police officers looking for survivors.***

Wooster was not the only area in Wayne County where people lost their lives. In Millersburg, Ginger Hinkle (8), was drowned in the first surge of flood waters that struck Hickory Lake where she had been camping with her family.

Kathy Schonauer (10) was drowned when she was swept into Newman Creek while attempting to cross the Clermont Ave. bridge in North Lawrence with her brother

Roland Schonauer (14), and friends Robert Moser (12), and Ted Myers (8). The children were walking along the Penn Central railroad tracks by the Clermont Ave. bridge about 2:30PM July 5, 1969. A woman who lived nearby reported that she saw the children try twice to cross the bridge covered with water but backed away because the current was too swift. The four then joined hands and started across again but midway across were knocked over by the rushing water.

Robert Moser was able to cling to the bridge's railing and had a hold of Kathy's hand but she was ripped away from his hold. The Meyers boy managed to get out of the water himself and the other two boys held onto the bridge or debris until rescued by firemen. Kathy's body was not found until days later.

In the Jeromesville area, Smith Dairy truck driver, Homer Hostetler of Dalton, was drowned after his semi-truck went off the highway likely due to water on the road.

It is believed he was swept away in flood waters when he attempted to exit his disabled truck. In Killbuck, John McMillan (86) was found dead in his flooded house trailer. Paul O'Donnel watched his Killbuck valley neighbors Earl and Ada Elliott disappear in flood waters that surrounded their house. The elderly couple had parked their car in O'Donnel's driveway after returning from the grocery store and saw that the lane to their house had flooded. They told Paul O'Donnel, "We'll be right back, as soon as we take the first load in, and get our dog."



The area of the Wayne County fairgrounds was nearly completely flooded during the July 4th 1969 flood.

File photo of the Akron Beacon Journal.

They walked across the highway and started down their lane with groceries in hand.

O'Donnel watched the couple from his driveway. The water became higher and higher as the Elliott's waded in trying to reach their house. He noted that the groceries they carried went from their arms, to their shoulders, to the top of their heads. O'Donnel began to count the fence posts that lined their lane as the couple passed them; thinking surely they should be emerging into more shallow water soon. But on the count of four, he saw the groceries fly into the air and the two heads disappear beneath muddied water. With the phone service out he was unable to call anybody to bring help. Later that night he learned that they never made it to their house and had drowned.

In Burbank, the Dickens brothers, Robert Dickens Jr. (16) and his 12-year-old brother attempted to assist a young girl who had stepped into hole where she was wading in shallow water from the overflow near their family's farm along Interstate 71 and got swept into deeper water. All three got into trouble in the high water running in the ditch and Robert Dickens Sr. (40) brought a rope and attempted to rescue the group. Somehow the girl was pulled-out safely and the younger 12-year-old Dickens boy was rescued by a passing helicopter that saw the trouble and dropped down and lowered a rope to pluck the boy out of the ditch. However, the father and older 16-year-old Dickens boy disappeared underneath the water and later their bodies were found less than a quarter mile from the farm home; the father's hands said to be still clutching the rope.

Mabel Frantz who was well-known in the Orrville and Kidron areas worked at the Apple Creek Development Center (ACDC). Despite hearing many of the area roads were flooded and travel was dangerous she got in her car to make the drive to work at ACDC. She got as far as the road over Kidron Creek. She attempted to cross the flooded road and her car was quickly swamped by the water and disabled. When she exited the vehicle she was swept away and became another victim of the flood waters of the July 4-5, 1969 flood.

In total there were 22 Wayne Countians that lost their lives during the 1969 Flood:

John Baumgartner (34) – Wooster
Basil Bright (38) – Wooster



It was Governor Rhodes while touring the area after the devastation who suggested that the high water marks left by flood waters at the Wayne County fairgrounds be painted white. He said it would help you remember how high the water went and hope it will never happen again. The 1969 Flood lines are still marked to this day on the Colesium and Racehorse Barn 21.

Patrolman Robert Goodrich (56) – Wooster
 Roger Henthron (6) – Wooster
 Patrolman Sargent Paul Knisely (30) – Wooster
 Patricia Lovett (12) – Wooster
 John Mann (37) – Wooster
 Lovina Taylor (34) – Wooster
 Doris Wirth (26) – Wooster
 Sharon Wirth (4) – Wooster
 baby Anthony (6 weeks) – Wooster
 Shirley Morris (31) – Ashland Rd. area
 Robert Dickens Sr. (48) – Burbank
 Robert Dickens Jr. (16) – Burbank
 Homer Hostetler (57) – Dalton
 Ada Elliott (56) – Killbuck
 Earl Elliott (57) – Killbuck
 John McMillin (86) – Killbuck
 Mabel Frantz (53) – Kidron/Orrville
 Ginger Hinkle (7) – Millersburg
 Kathy Schonauer (9) – N. Lawrence

It took days and in some cases over a week to recover the bodies of those lost. It was unclear if the bodies of little baby Anthony and toddler Sharon Wirth were ever found. Most of the remaining family members and friends of those that died during the flood kept asking themselves “what if?”. What if they had made a different decision, what if they hadn’t gone that way? What if they hadn’t tried to do that? Paul Taylor asked what if everybody had just stayed in the Henthorn house?

Wouldn’t they all still be alive? After John Mann’s boat had picked up the women and children from the Henthorn house on Bauer Rd. and later capsized no other boat could navigate the angry flood waters that surrounded the

house. The remaining men retreated to the second floor of the house as the water rose to the top of the stairs of the second floor but the house stood firm. They were all rescued the next morning by a much larger boat than the ones used the night before. While some of the deaths were unescapable, a number of the deaths could have been avoided if the people would have simply followed the old adage of “Turn around don’t drown” when faced with a torrent of muddy flood waters.



After the flood waters receded the grim task of recovering drowning victims bodies had to be done. Pictured carrying a body from the fields near Schellin Park and the U.S.30 expressway are (cameraside l to r) volunteer Jon Zerrer, and fireman Richard Landis, followed by Richard “Red” Drabenstott behind the main group.

Note: This article would not have been possible without the assistance and references provided by the librarians in the Genealogy Dept. at the Wayne County Public Library. Thanks for all your help!

Comments

1. Thomas P. Cloyes says:

April 2, 2013 at 1:12 am

I had just received my first 35mm camera and was going to shoot the fireworks that night. Living a block north of the campus a friend and I started walking to the stadium area. We had only gone one block when it started raining, and what a storm! The rain was so heavy that by the time we got back to the house we were both soaked. I have never experienced rain that heavy until I came to live here in Singapore, where it rains like that every day! There are some pictures that I took in Wayne County posted to my web site. I will make a category for the flood, so I can get those pictures up in the near future.

o Garrett Scott says:

October 26, 2013 at 11:11 am

On July 3 or fourth, 1969 my parents and my brother and I (the four of us) ventured from Creston Ohio to stay at our camper/trailer situated on the Huron River several miles in land from Lake Erie. By the afternoon we got to the park entrance, the road descending down to the trailer park was already flooded and blocked. We sat in the car waiting for the storm to pass, thinking maybe the water would recede. Just before dark, the one side of our car was illuminated as if by a large floodlight. At first I thought a police officer was shining a light into our car. I remember my mother's face being strongly illuminated from the side. The intense light lasted several seconds during which you couldn't look directly at it. As it faded away, we could see that it originated from the top of a power pole about 100 yards away across the field. The intense light had emanated from the top of the power pole. It remained glowing with embers and smoking after the light went away. As near as we can tell, it was what is called "ball lightning" – something I had never seen before and have not seen again since that night in my 67 years. But that wasn't the only riveting experience.

Thanking the storm had passed, but realizing that we could not enter the trailer park, we attempted to drive toward downtown Huron. We were on a road paralleling the Huron River on the crest of the hill when the wind and rain became so intense that my father could not see to drive. He pulled the car halfway off the road, put it in park, and set the emergency brake. The wind and rain became so intense that it started pushing water up inside the defroster vents. Then the car started inching backwards on the road with the tires crumbling on the gravel with each gust. My father put his foot on the brakes attempting to hold the sliding with much effect. The wind let up enough after about a minute that the car quit sliding.

We ultimately resumed hitting for downtown Huron looking for accommodations. We spent at least one night in a high school gymnasium sleeping on cots.

We were not able to return to Creston until a day or two later due to road to being blocked by trees and water. We found the basement of our house flooded with about 2 feet of water, from the power having been out, and the sump pump not running. Also there was a hole punched in the roof of the house, but with no sign of what had caused the damage. We figured out later that the wind had removed the top 20 feet of a maple tree in our front yard. The big piece of tree was nowhere to be found but we figure the hole in the roof was created by the large piece of tree as it flew through the air on its way to oblivion.

We went back to the trailer park some days later, after the waters had receded. The water had been up in the trees about 11 feet, meaning that total rise in the water was probably about 15 feet. Some of the camper trailers had been washed out into Lake Erie. The rest of them were strewn about and trapped amongst the trees. I think our trailer was stacked on top of another up against some trees. I have a picture showing the trailers being pulled around and sorted out with a tractor.

- **RICH EASH says:**

July 1, 2015 at 3:40 pm

Camping on Catawba Island on Lake Erie. Had been on beach when we seen storm clouds approaching. We got back to campgrounds just in time. It came with such force that it actually was blowing water in at the screw holes around windows of our pick up truck camper. Our RV was rocking from side to side, while our friends was rocking end to end [had parked perpendicular to each other] We spent the night watching every tent eventually blow down, When it ended many hours later on following morning, boats on trailers were floating in the low spots in the campgrounds and just about every RV had to be pulled out by tractors unto firm driveways. Not knowing the vast extent of the storm we went to Cedar Point which was open much tree damage there and few people. We left there and went to Lorain to stay the night at the pier. It was the next morning when we went into the bait store and a TV was on, the clerk asked us where we were from and he told us what he seen on TV about the Wooster area. We headed home immediately making detour after detour. Seen National Guard evacuating a very big trailer park where water was up to doors, i remember In Vermillion crossing the river and it looked like a mini Niagara Falls. NO CELL PHONES BACK THEN AND REGULAR PHONE SERVICE WAS OUT SO MANY PLACES. We didn't know how family was, all we knew was several dead or missing in Wayne Cty. THAT NIGHT WAS THE FIRST TIME I SEEN MY FORMER MARINE DAD LOOK SCARED

- **RICH EASH says:**

July 1, 2015 at 4:17 pm

We suffered no damage to our home, but the little creek flowing into Sugar Creek that was at the rear of our property had filled completely up with anything imaginable due to a small dam upstream breaking. This water and debris stopped within 10 feet of 2 house trailers that rented lots from us. That was GOOD NEWS the BAD NEWS was the family that lived in the one trailer had taken in relatives that lost their Bauer Road trailer and just about everything else except the dog and some photos that they hung on clothesline to dry.

▪ **Carla boatman says:**

July 3, 2016 at 2:05 pm

My parents had a converted school bus camper at that park along the river. After the storm and water had receded my dad headed down there to check on the camper. It had not moved...mud was 3 ft deep inside the bus. There were hand and foot prints on top of the bus so we think people too refuge on top. Normally, we would all have been camping the 4th weekend but dad decided to stay home. So thankful he did, there were 5 of us that probably wouldn't have made it out. I don't know how my dad did it but he got the bus cleaned up and got it started. He moved it to our home where it became our playhouse! I was only 10 at the time but vividly remember the storm. We lived near mill hollow park and remember the flooding in vermilion. We had a pond in our yard that flooded so severely it almost made it to the house which was 50 yards away.

▪ **Carla boatman says:**

July 3, 2016 at 2:08 pm

Garrett Scott we had a camper at the same place on the Huron river

Karen Osburn says:

April 21, 2014 at 1:15 am

It will be 45 years this July since my father drowned in the 69 flood. I often wonder what it would have been like with him in my life.

○ **Joy Yoho says:**

July 1, 2015 at 7:16 pm

Karen, I am terribly sorry for your loss. It is awful to lose a parent, let alone so early. I am 71 yrs old and I worked at what used to be American Petrochemical in Wooster right along side of the creek that flowed through that area, so I remember well how bad it was.

2. Kelly Hoffman says:

June 15, 2014 at 4:04 pm

I remember this very well. I was on the ferris wheel in Orrville when the storm hit us. I had gotten back from my duty with the U.S. Navy in Viet Nam. I was working for Smith Dairy at the time. I was asked to try and get food, milk, dairy products to the residents of Millersburg, Killbuck, Fredricksburg area of Ohio. I knew all the back roads through Wayne County and Sugarcreek counties. I also helped within Orrville in helping people cope with what had happened there. Orrville was without electricity for a long time. I believe it was pushing 7 to 10 days if I remember correctly. My father was a volunteer fireman for Orrville and also a electrical contractor in Orrville. He had Hoffman Electric Company and I remember him having his electricians and himself working very long hours throughout the town trying to make safety and power concerns available to businesses and health services.

o **Lisa Miller Rychel says:**

July 2, 2016 at 8:40 am

I was on that same ferris wheel with my brother. We were at the top and saw it coming. I have never been that scared since. Nor have I been on a ferris wheel!

3. Kenneth James Voshel says:

June 23, 2014 at 1:58 pm

I was three months shy of my 5th birthday when the flood stranded my family and I on a rented farmhouse about one quarter mile from the nearby creek. We did well have all we needed but fresh water until the locale react club came in a small boat .We took some fresh water and stayed until the water returned to the creek. It was something I for one will never forget.

Carol (Rose) Yoders says:

June 30, 2015 at 9:24 am

I was 7, we lived in Milan, Ohio, but had gone to Byesville to visit family, watch the firework show in Cambridge; then we were going to leave our dog at Grandmas and go for a vacation. Except when we got back from the fireworks show, news of the storms prompted Mom and Dad to head back to Milan, to check on house, sump pump etc. We didn't hear from them for days! Somewhere in the Wooster area, after detour, after detour, they were driving down the road, and as Dad said, " wall of water came across the road, and took the car" they banged their way through a gully area. The car (and VW) finally got wedged against some trees. They got out of the car and onto a log. Shortly afterwards the car dislodged and went on down the gulley. The car ended up standing on its backside, headlights shooting up, their beacon of help! I remember dad saying this model of car was the first year the electrical was encased in plastic. They were found and rope rescued! Mom had a

bad bruise on her bum, as she sat on a knot, to afraid to move and possibly dislodge the log. As a true lady of the times, she still had her purse hung on her arm! LOL I can still see our dog, jumping as high as their heads, when they finally could get back to pick us kids up! God was good to us that night!!!

4. Susan White Brenneman Pierce says:

June 30, 2015 at 9:13 pm

I lived at Prairie Lane Shooting Preserve. High way patrol man Dick Starkey and Terry Johns friends of my parents came in by boat and rescued us. I remember my friend Peggy Wall and I were going to camp out at the lake that night. My dad Lester "red" White came to our tent and said bad weather girls need to pack up. The boat took us to our hunters cabin were we stayed for an extensive length of time till we were able to move back into our home. We lost everything in our basement but nothing else. I remember hearing my mom say I'm not getting in that boat I'm afraid of water, well guess who was the first person in the boat that day my Mom. Later in life when my parents took over the Farmers Market a mobile home by the market was occupied by Paul Taylor and his son Dale. Paul said if it floods again I'm safe up here on the hill. Dale worked for my dad for quite a few years. Quite a tragic event that day. Many brave people tried to save other people.

5. Donna (Foster) Fry says:

June 30, 2015 at 11:08 pm

I remember this event very well, living in Rittman at the time, I was at Orr Park when the rains started. We headed home and made it safely. It was a terrifying time. My father worked at the old Orrville Milk Co located on Westwood Ave he was the garage night mechanic. Homer Hostetler was a driver for the Orrville Milk Co. and my father begged him not to leave the garage that night, but he refused. When my father learned of his death he took it very hard, as we all did that knew him.

6. Dave Amstutz says:

July 1, 2015 at 12:09 am

I remember the flood of July '69 very well. I was marooned in it for 23 hours. I was 20 years old & working for Penn Central Railroad in traffic control. I went to work at Big Run Tower(the local traffic control location) at 11pm on July 4. It was located off Prairie Lane Rd behind the old Timken plant & the block plant. Killbuck Creek run along the railroad opposite my location. All night long I watched the rain pour down & the creek rise up. During the night a passenger train arrived in the area carrying crew & approximately 60 passengers. He first went west toward Shreve & was stopped by high water. Then he backed back to me & tried to back to the old

Wooster depot at which point he was prevented by washed out track behind the Timken plant.

There he sat for the duration.

At one point a news helicopter dropped a supple of sandwiches to the train. Later on the 5th in the evening, railroad workers were able to rescue the passengers by hauling back to Wooster depot track maintenance machinery. I was among the last to be carried back to the depot after being stuck in the flood for 23 hours. My father, also a traffic control employee for Penn Central, was working at control tower in Orrville. Though he also experienced the flooding, he did not get marooned. He also had a passenger train stopped by the flooding at Orrville.

However, they were rescued by the railroad without delay. I do not recall the number of occupants of that train, but it was considerably more then on train near my location. The saga of the train near me could have turned out a lot worse. After the fact it was determined that the railroad had suffered a major washout up by new Rubbermaid were the Dix Expressway & Little Apple Creek shared an underpass under railroad. The train near me had traveled over that location earlier in the night when the creek was rampaging & causing the damage to the railroad base. The train crew said later that this location felt “..a little unusual..” when they went over it. For those who experienced the flood & remember it, may recall that this washout was very large & took months to repair.

o **Renee Smith says:**

July 3, 2015 at 9:28 am

My father was the Penn Central railroad station agent at Millersburg at the time. Luckily he was off work. But I road with him to see the damage, it had all been flooded with the tracks washed out all over Holmes & Wayne County. Many of the tracks were never replaced, and many railroad stations closed. Horrible damage with so many lives lost. Most people in the area knew someone who died or would know people later who had lost family members. It must of been terrifying to be in that tower. When the stations closed, my father worked at various stations, and finally took a tower operators job in Massillon to work his last two years until retirement. Those towers are a bit spooky on a good night.

7. Bret E. Curren says:

July 2, 2015 at 10:47 am

“The Flood of ‘69” is forever etched in my memory. As a recent 11-year old, I remember that day of July 4 as one which started with a day of swimming with a childhood friend at Long Lake Park. It was an extremely warm and humid day which saw the skies become thick with clouds by early evening. My mother packed myself and soon to be 10-year old brother into our car for a trip from our home at the Big Prairie-end of Odell’s Lake to Shreve for that night’s Fireworks show. While getting

fuel for the car at the Shreve Sohio, it began to storm dropping huge buckets of rain. Without a doubt this 11-year old was highly disappointed that there would be no fireworks that night.

Little did I know.

As bed-time neared, I voiced to my mother I was concerned about the heavy rain as my brother and I raised 4-H rabbits. And, the hutches were no more than 50 yards away from the shore of the lake. I was told everything would be fine. At roughly 3:30 a.m. July 5, I awoke to the sounds of my mother yelling at someone.

I walked from my bedroom to the front door and saw a torrent of water roughly 2 to 3 feet high rushing through our breezeway and surrounding area. I immediately began to shake uncontrollably. The next thing I knew, I jumped from our top step – the house was raised onto a three foot foundation in the mid 1960's after flooding in 1960 and 1963 nearly got into the house – into the arms of a man who was attending that weeks family camp at the Assembly of God Church camp located on that end of Odell's Lake in 1969. My family was not members of the church.

Our house, along with several other private owners, just happened to be there.

A line of vehicles had been driven into the waters acting as a way for people to escape. The man put me onto our car and told me to crawl over it to the vehicle parked perpendicular behind ours and to keep doing that over every vehicle. As I crawled over the top of our vehicle I looked back as my brother jumped to the man.

By the grace of God, the man caught my brother by only my brothers wrist. My brothers legs swung to the top of the water. I can still hear my late mothers screams. Somehow that man pulled my brother against the torrent to him and got my brother onto our car. As my brother and mother and I crawled onto the next vehicle, the volunteers were helping to get our next door neighbors, an elderly couple – Roy and Evelyn Jordan, out of their home. At one point, Mrs. Jordan lost her footing and went under the water, but again by the grace of God, a volunteer held onto her.

Again, something burned into my memory.

Once we were out of the flooding, we stayed for awhile in the cafeteria of the church camp which was being used as a refugee center. I use the word 'refugee' because that's what it felt like. Campers, church camp staff, the private owners...we were all there. Because we couldn't go anywhere. County Road 100 was impassable to the west. To the east, the iron bridge On CR 100 that crossed the creek that runs parallel to Lake Memorial Park and feeds into Odell's Lake was washed out. We spent the morning and afternoon of July 5 in the cafeteria and that evening and night at neighbors, the Merriman's who lived at the entrance to the camp just off of CR 100 and had suffered no flooding.

The next day, Sunday, July 6, the main caretaker of the camp, an older gentleman – Mr. Giordaningo (sp) is all I remember – who lived at the camp year-round and

was friendly to our family, told us he would get us to my maternal grandparents as he had heard there was a way. He loaded us up in his car and taking the long way, which included crossing a washed out bridge that was 'temporarily' repaired by our Amish neighbors on 'Crow Hill', delivered us to my grandparent's farm between Lakeville and Nashville. Other than our clothes on our backs, we had nothing.

I can still distinctly remember my grandfather's words when Mr. Giordaningo (sp) delivered us, "I tried to get to you but I couldn't. I figured you were all fine or you were all dead." Ha! My grandfather. He wasn't one to beat around the bush. Until mid-October of 1969 my grandparents' farm was 'home'. We had lost everything after nearly 4 feet of water swamped the inside of the house. That's another thing.

I'll never, ever forget the smell of post-flood clean-up. Even after a complete rebuild that smell is always there. And, I must say if wasn't for the Red Cross and other family and neighbors my family wouldn't have been able to rebuild. Still to this day, I remember those folks.

Thank you!

July 4 - 5, 1969. I'll never forget it, or those that lost their life in Holmes and Wayne counties, and their loved ones. I know Dale Taylor, having worked with him for several years. Those of us who went through that flood and survived, still remember that night like it was yesterday.

We always will.

8. Patricia Roth says:

July 18, 2015 at 7:37 pm

Thanks for this! I was 9 months pregnant and lived across from the fairgrounds on Liberty St. I remember laying awake all night as one T-storm after another rolled over Wooster. In the morning I looked out my kitchen window and saw a huge lake at the fairgrounds.

We were several days without electricity and carried buckets of flood water to use for flushing. People constantly repeated one sentence to me: "Don't go into labor!" (I didn't for two more weeks.).

Definitely a scary event!

9. Nancy Green says:

August 26, 2015 at 9:39 am

I was born and raised in Rittman. Our family spent the 4th of July holiday with my dad's parents in Girard, and we were traveling home when the rain hit in full force.

My dad could drive in just about any weather, and I remember his pulling under an overpass to wait out the heavy rain. Dad owned Daley's Furniture at the south end of town. I remember being waked up in the middle of the night as our family gathered for prayer regarding our circumstances.

The next morning we were up early and headed to the store. We all worked hard as furniture was moved from the back room at the lower level to the second floor of the building. Then we began moving furniture from the first floor to the second floor. In the early afternoon, water began rising through the knot holes on the first floor, but we kept on working. Finally, I (15 yr. old) I thought I felt a little tingle in my foot in the office. Dad said that was it, and we were heading out. We took the most important things with us, and headed up Main St., walking 2 by 2 because of the current, to safety. Later, we realized that any of us could have been sucked under through an open man hole in the middle of the road. We were protected, not realizing how dangerous the situation was.

Later that afternoon, Dad received a call from the fire department, saying that our store was burning. There had been a gas explosion, and everything would be destroyed. What a major life change for a man whose livelihood was destroyed, and he being under the age of 50, had to figure out what to do to support his family.

I remember how frustrating it was to have news people interview Dad and ask, "So what are you going to do now?" The poor man was in shock, and I remember resenting their attitude. We were just a part of the news.

I remember being shocked by the looting that some people did when the waters finally receded, taking advantage of the situation.

I remember thinking about how I would have to find a new job, to earn money for college.

But in this loss, as I read the article, I was reminded that not one life was lost in Rittman. The loss of our store was huge, and it was months until the fire insurance companies settled our claim, but we all were still alive. That is the greatest blessing.

o **Renee Smith says:**

August 26, 2015 at 7:27 pm

So sorry to hear of your losses. Is was just 1 month shy of my 17th birthday. We drove out around Rittman on our way home from my Grandma's house in Ashtabula to get home to Apple Creek. So many losses.

10. nellie vanetta says:

December 2, 2015 at 10:55 am

my uncle was Paul Taylor, it was his wife and daughter that drowned in Wooster, he has passed now but his life was never the same, I was very young but I can still remember going to the funerals and the pain, such pain on his face.

11. Landon OBrien says:

July 1, 2016 at 4:33 pm

My family was at Chippewa Lake across from the amusement park fishing and waiting for the fireworks when the rain started. A tornado siren went off and dad had us all jump into a ditch and cover up. He told us he saw a tornado touch the water and turn white then leave. We packed up and went home to bed. In the middle of the night we got woke up by a banging in the basement, it was the washer and drier hitting the ceiling floating in the rising flood waters. We lived on Egypt road between the tracks and where Rohrer road shot off up the hill. My parents rushed us to the car which was up to the wheel centers in water. We drove out through water half way up the side of the car and went to sterling for the night. There was mud a foot high up on the walls on the first floor of the house when we could get back home.

12. Tresia ferguson cutright says:

July 1, 2016 at 11:16 pm

I lived in Lodi Ohio in 1969 on a 98 Acres Farm there was a creek on the right hand side of our property and there was a pond on the other side of our property also our property but it up against holes book potato farm they had large irrigation ditches we flooded all over except for around the house we were very lucky our barn was flooded all you could see was water for miles my uncles had to bring in drinking water milk pop and food by row boat. Me and my brothers and sister's made the best out of a bad situation we got inner tubes and we played in the floodwaters what are inner tubes . when the water went down a bit my dad took his tractor to check on our neighbors he got one neighbor off of the roof of their house and took them to dry land I will never ever forget that day and I was 8 years old getting ready to go to Chippewa Lake to watch the fireworks but we never made it we went back to Lodi but got caught in the storm it was bad

13. Christine Hinton says:

July 2, 2016 at 9:31 am

I was 11 years old back then and remember it like it was yesterday. We had horses housed at the fairgrounds and we were returning from a horse show in Norwalk. It took us over two hours to get in town. We kept the two horses on the trailer and parked in front of the house. I remember going over the creek at fairgrounds, water

just about ready to spill over the bank. About 6 a.m. someone knocked on the door and told my dad to come down and help find the horses either trapped or swimming. We had 8 horses and ponies that were taken to various farms, not knowing where they went for a few days.

Years later, I married one of the WPD officers involved in the rescues, Sgt. Jerry Hinton. He was the kindest person you would ever meet. He often talked about the devastating flood and the officers that died that day.

He also recalled saving another one, Lindsay Jackson.

I became friends with Dale Taylor and his wife a few years ago and the dots were connected! I am so very proud of Jerry and thankful of his service, both in the Army and Wooster Police Department.

**Julie Rome says:
July 2, 2016 at 3:33 pm**

We were on Lake Erie on our boat when it hit hard. I remember my Dad (Dave Waldron of D A Waldron & Associates) trying to navigate the boat with the heavy wind and rain hitting. We finally made it back to our marina, covered the boat and headed to our place at the lake to ride out the storm overnight. In an effort to open the door, the wind was so strong that it broke the springs from the storm door. We headed out the next morning so that my Dad could check on his business and our house. The drive back to Wooster was rough, but somehow we made it through the water on the roadways. All along the way, my Dad was keeping in contact with his key staff via his cb. When we got home, we had no water, but we lived up high enough that we didn't have any flooding. Our neighbor had a well to get water to flush the toilets, and we were more fortunate than so many. My Dad's office was a mess. All of the oil well drilling logs were soaked. We ended up having to spread them out in our basement to dry, but we were so very fortunate. I was about 12 at the time, and was unaware of the magnitude of devastation. The experience has stayed with me all of these years.

14. Kelly Hoffman says:

July 2, 2016 at 5:27 pm

I remember it well.... I was on the ferris wheel at the park in Orrville with Joan Vining. I had gotten back from my tour of duty in Vietnam and had started back to work for Smith Dairy. What a "storm" that all had to endure. At that time my father Doyle Hoffman was a fireman with the Orrville Fire Department. After the waters subsided and calmed down I was sent to Killbuck and Millersburg by Smith Dairy with a truck load of milk and dairy products to help feed the people in that area. Route 30 at Riceland was no more. Those big pieces of concrete road was moved sometimes several miles from where the road was to start with. I had to take the back roads and shortcuts through the county and private farms to get the goods to

the destination. All people involved with emergency and food and medical were very busy for days on end. The devastation was unreal out in the country from all the water that flooded the county. I wish I could have taken some pictures but I was too busy driving trying to get my goods in the truck delivered to the people that had nothing left. I'll never forget the incident and will always remember the less fortunate victims of that incident.

15. Vickie Walker Shifflet says:

July 2, 2016 at 7:30 pm

Living at home, we had a camper sales and rental We were also camping at Wally Camp ground, Loudonville. Dad woke us up in our fold down camper as the water was coming in the door and got us to safety but the camper went quickly down the Blackfork river. We had several campers out that were damaged by water. But we were safe.

16. David MacAnally says:

July 3, 2016 at 4:29 pm

Thank you for sharing the amazing recollection of people touched by the horrible floods and storms of July 4, 1969.

I was 11 years old at the time and my parents, younger sister and I were a board Penn Central's Broadway limited from Philadelphia to Chicago.

We left North Philadelphia station around 530 the night of the fourth. We woke up the morning of the fifth surrounded by floodwaters. I've never seen anything like it. It appeared we were on a causeway over a giant lake.

It seems hours past before our train eventually pulled into Orrville Ohio. I remember the name on a water tower and my dad pointing it out.

Our train straddled what seem to be a fairly major road through town. They left the vestibule doors open so folks could walk from one side of the street to the other by crossing through the train car vestibule doors.

I bet this is the train one of the writers referenced above. The number of passengers and crew I'm sure numbered several hundred. We waited some time, I'm not sure how long, before a line of buses arrived to transport us across Ohio into Indiana where we stopped for box lunches at Penn Central's Fort Wayne station. We arrive Chicago Union Station sometime in the very dark of night, the early morning hours of July 6th. We then spent a long night listening to the homeless man sleeping on the bench is nearby.

It was such a thrilling experience to share with our relatives when we finally arrived in Colorado on the seventh. A day late. So many people were delayed by the flood that Santa Fe Railroad put on extra cars to haul those who missed their ride the day before.

It was not until today that I realized the full and sad scope of the storms. So many lost so much in Ohio. We were so lucky. Thank you for this learning experience.

17. Nora yoder Garrett says:

July 4, 2016 at 11:21 pm

I remember it well! I was 15. We lived outside of Clark at the Holmes/coshocton county line. We lived down from Lake Buckhorn and on the radio they kept saying the dam was leaking and breaking. I was scared witless! Water filled the fields and covered the roadway. Thank God our house sat up on a little hill. Our cow was standing in front with only the very tip of her back sticking out. There was a mouse and a bumblebee clinging to that little spot on her back! Later when the water subsided I remember driving down by coshocton n seeing dead cows lying in fields. I'm so thankful that God kept us all safe!

18. Frank Sanor says:

August 2, 2016 at 5:40 pm

I was part of the Red Cross communication team. We provided emergency communication via amateur radio for the area until the Thursday after it hit. We lived in Shreve and could not get into Wooster so I contacted the NCOIC of the Shreve armory and he allowed us to set up a shelter in the *armory*.