

Treading Water: A Social Worker's Personal Narrative

I joined thousands of other community volunteers who were attempting to prevent an epic flood during the spring of 1997 in Grand Forks, North Dakota. The volunteer fight was strong, but the battle was lost and the flood resulted in 3.6 billion dollars in damage. This paper describes the author's professional social work and personal response to a natural disaster. It will provide a general description of how disaster evacuation and recovery occurred. It will also describe my experiences as a victim/survivor of the flood, including conflicts I experienced in balancing my personal responsibilities with my professional obligations to assist in times of public emergencies.

by
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Introduction to the Disasters

They were brutal and deadly, Andy, Betty, Christopher, Doris, Elmo, Franzi, Gust, and Hannah. But the most brutal was Hannah, which was a storm with the force of an Atlantic hurricane and the cold of an Arctic night (Jacobs, 1997). In Grand Forks, North Dakota, we name our blizzards like others name their hurricanes. These eight blizzards contributed to an accumulation of over 100 inches of snow in the Red River Valley during the winter months of 1996/1997 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1998). Two weeks following Hannah, on April 19, 1997, the residents of Grand Forks experienced the worst flood on record as the snow began to melt. Seventy-five percent of the city was inundated with water and most of the 50,000 residents, including me and my family, evacuated to all corners of the country. A smaller city located across the river, East Grand Forks, Minnesota, suffered an even worse fate with all its 9,000 residents being evacuated. The population of rural communities in the area doubled as Grand Forks residents evacuated to towns

nearby. During the afternoon of April 19, while the evacuation was in progress, a fire of historic proportions began in downtown Grand Forks, eventually destroying 11 buildings (Jacobs, 1997). Within only a few hours, two once thriving communities were decimated.

On April 28, 1997, the day after my return to our flooded house, my friend, Marcia Harris, who was a reporter working for the Grand Forks Herald reported:

"It's all on the first floor, Marcia," Thom said. She took me inside, under balloons hanging in the doorway. The balloons were from son Evan's first Communion party just two weeks ago. I had helped Thom pick out the decorations. "Look at this. Sewage and mud all over," she said. Several pairs of ruined boots sat in the entranceway. A water line showed that the filthy water had come up at least three inches in their living room.

"The couch clearly was ruined. While Al cleaned out the refrigerators and freezers—"Fish is the worst. Tell people that"—Thom and I went into the boys' rooms. Wearing rubber boots, we squished our way



across the ruined carpet to the bedrooms. Luke, 6, had tried to save some of his things by stacking them on his bed. But some of his toys were on the floor of his closet. Fire trucks, hot wheels, a bag of books and tapes. Maybe some toys, in plastic tubs, could be washed with bleach and salvaged. It was hard to say. Wearing rubber gloves, Thom picked up Luke's soaked "Thomas the Tank Engine" Hat. Luke has been crazy about trains all of his young life. That's when she lost it. My heart broke, and I held her, but her arms hung by her sides. "We can't even hug our friends," Thom said. "We're afraid we'll contaminate them." We went into Evan's room. He is 8 and had managed to get most of his toys out of harms way. Thom looked in a fish tank. "They're alive!" she said, and she fed them. Back in Luke's room, on the floor, sopping wet, was the "Discovery Box of Stars." It was my Christmas gift to Luke this year. I cry as I write this. The flood has come home to me.

Loss of Faith

The disaster not only destroyed property and the personal financial security of much of the Grand Forks population, it also destroyed the confidence of many hearty North Dakotans and Minnesotans who believed that planning and hard work would avert any flooding. The people of North Dakota and Minnesota are generally proud of their abilities to weather any storm and to survive the harsh-

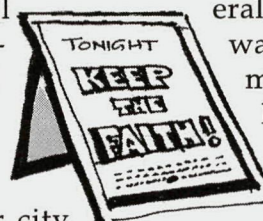
est of winters. The spring disaster of 1997, however, left in its path thousands of people who will spend the next few decades rebuilding their lives, their homes, and their communities.

Prior to the flood, residents of Grand Forks had little fear that a monumental disaster might occur. Flood forecasts were very similar to the 1979 flood which had reached the 49-foot level, and we were clearly more prepared in 1997. It was expected that, at most, only low lying areas of the city would be flooded. Community leaders were confident that media reports and National Weather Service forecasts were accurate. We believed that we were doing everything necessary to prepare for the 50-foot flood crest predicted by the National Weather Service to occur on April 15. We had faith in the technology used by the National Weather Service and we believed, with our city leaders, that the sandbagging effort had created plenty of available freeboard on the top of our dikes. But we were not prepared for the final 54-foot flood crest.

The dikes, in spite of the best of human efforts, were breached, resulting in water covering all of East Grand Forks and most of Grand Forks in depths from inches to twenty feet. Water entered the cities by river, over land, and through storm sewers. The United States Department of Commerce reports that estimated damages from the fire and flood, which covered 2,200 square miles in

North Dakota and Minnesota, totaled about \$4 billion, with \$3.6 billion occurring in the immediate vicinity of Grand Forks and East Grand Forks (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1998). The Red River in Grand Forks was three miles wide at points where it normally is only 50 yards wide. One-hundred and forty thousand cubic feet/second of water ran through the middle of our two towns in a channel that was accustomed to only 780 cubic feet/second (City of Grand Forks, 1998).

Later, during disaster recovery, many residents would question why federal and city government officials had not warned us to protect our property from this flood. Some also questioned why accessing federal disaster relief services was so difficult. At times, many of us seemed to lose faith in the institutions that once protected us. One response to this loss of faith was a production staged by young people in a local performing arts group who wrote and performed a play entitled "Keep the Faith." This play provided comic relief and heart-warming thanks to those who helped the community during initial flood recovery. The cast of the play performed to sold out audiences during several performances, and was videotaped for commercial production. It was difficult, however, to keep the faith during times of personal crisis and increased dependency on governmental agencies for disaster relief.



Disaster Preparedness: Personal and Professional Response

As a social worker and university professor who teaches community practice, I knew I had a professional responsibility to assist with community preparations for the flood. Moreover, I did not want to be perceived as an educator who did not care about the concerns of the "real world" of social work practice. So in early April of 1997, when I received a telephone call from a good friend and social work colleague requesting that I arrange for student volunteers to assist in the development and staffing of a local flood evacuation center, I immediately agreed. My friend had been assigned to work with the American Red Cross. If disaster struck, these centers would be necessary as a temporary resource for individuals residing in low lying areas. Clearly, our preparations proceeded with the strong underlying belief that any breach in the dikes would be minor and limited to a small area of town (Johnson, 1997). The primary concern expressed at our early meetings was how our local volunteers could help adjacent rural communities which were at greater risk of flooding. Ironically, they ended up helping us.

My immediate responsibility was to help establish an evacuation center in Grafton, a rural community located 45 miles north of Grand Forks. It was anticipated that this community, located on a tributary of the Red River, would experience

more severe flooding than Grand Forks. After making some preliminary contacts to assure that my students and I would be welcomed as volunteers, I began making arrangements for students to accompany me and assist with this work. Their interest and commitment to the volunteer project was exhilarating. Clearly, participation in the project would be excellent preparation for generalist social work practice (Brustad, 1997). It would be an opportunity to fulfill a community need and work with local human service providers, not something I could have expected students to do without my direct involvement. As for myself, I was confident I would be able to serve as a volunteer because, unlike many others, my home was not located in the 100-year flood plain. Therefore, I wouldn't have to worry about saving my property in the event of a breach in the dike.

The evacuation center in Grafton was only one of the projects in which I became involved. Volunteers were needed for a variety of flood-prevention tasks, although much of this activity was not directly social work related. I also helped out at the local "Sandbag Central" which began operation in March. At Sandbag Central, a machine with octopus shaped appendages poured massive quantities of sand into bags held by volunteers at the beginning of an assembly line. The bags were tied, placed on pallets, put in trucks, and distributed throughout the city, where they were placed on the top of clay

dikes, after the snow was removed.

Community members were also assisting colleagues and friends who resided along the river. A former colleague, now retired from the Department of Social Work, needed friends to lay sandbags in his back yard, which faced the quickly rising Red River. Several social work faculty, including myself and students in the undergraduate social work program, assisted him and his family by joining an existing sandbag line. The water was splashing up against his dike and it was difficult to stand on the existing sandbags to lay more heavy bags.

Later that same evening, I attended a family fun night at my children's school where the only adult conversation was about the possibility of flooding and how we all needed to do more sandbagging. There was growing concern about how to balance family, work, and community responsibilities. This balance was becoming more difficult as the snow melted. Then, the last blizzard of the year hit us.

Balancing Responsibilities and Exhaustion

Like other residents, I became exhausted from the need to maintain family and other work responsibilities, and at the same time to follow through with volunteer commitments. When I left Sandbag Central on the afternoon of April 4 during a fierce rain storm, other commu-

nity volunteers were laying sandbags on dikes outside in the rain to prevent flooding in a low area of town. They were the strongest and most committed of the volunteers, continuing to work as the temperature fell below freezing.

My husband, a local attorney, was returning from an out of town two-week trial and I was growing concerned about his safety while traveling in this storm. He did arrive home that weekend, just prior to the travel warnings being issued. We then lost our electricity as the temperatures began to plunge. For the next 18 hours, with below zero temperatures outside, we had no electricity in our home. Even so, we were more fortunate than some because we could stay warm with a wood stove, which we rarely use, and we were able to listen to the only radio station on air through a battery operated radio. During the week following Blizzard Hannah, the weather warmed again and I spent many hours preparing for my eldest son's April 13th First Communion. My family arrived for the event.

The Flood. . . Evacuation Begins

On the morning of April 18, we awoke to disaster warning sirens. Immediately I reported to the local evacuation center, where I had agreed to be on call in the event of an emergency. Up until this point, there had been only a few low-lying neighborhoods evacuated. When I left the house, my

youngest son was crying with fear on our sofa because of the noise from the sirens and my husband was comforting him. We had just learned the previous day that he did not need skin grafts on his hand. As I drove to the evacuation center, an announcer on the car radio said that the local public schools had canceled classes for the day. I would have to rearrange my schedule so someone could be home with the children. It turned out later that all schools, including the University, would be canceled until the next fall and many students would never return to the same school. Upon arrival at the evacuation center, I learned that the center had been moved to a location further from the river. Many people arriving at this new shelter were friends, as well as some former students. They were being evacuated from a neighborhood that I had left seven years earlier, because the home we had in that neighborhood was in the 100-year flood plain.

I assisted with the establishment of a new shelter that morning by unpacking boxes of food, putting up cots, tables, and chairs and assisting local social workers and Red Cross volunteers with registration. While registering those evacuated, I learned from an evacuee that water was now moving toward my current neighborhood, a quarter of a mile from the river. Quickly returning home, I discovered that many colleagues, friends, and family had arrived to help in our neighborhood. They had heard media reports that morning of a break

in the temporary dike built only five blocks from our home.

Several other colleagues and family arrived to help us out personally. None of these people were asked to come—they just knew of our need and arrived. My brother, who lives 150 miles south, arrived with a friend to help move things from the basement and sandbag. My sister, who lives 260 miles southwest, arrived with a friend to help. We built a sandbag dike in our back yard and finished moving possessions from our basement to our main floor. We didn't bother moving things from the main floor because it was not supposed to get wet, even in the worst scenario.

Eventually, I went to Sandbag Central with a colleague and her two-year-old son to secure sandbags to place in our backyard, now dangerously close to the rising water. When we arrived at Sandbag Central, we learned that all remaining resources were needed to keep the last bridge connecting us to Minnesota open. Two other bridges had been closed due to the rising water and subsequent flooding. A truck driver reported that people were trying to take sandbags directly from his truck while he was stopped at stop signs. He was concerned about the personal safety of these residents and the panic he was witnessing among citizens. After a half hour wait and much frantic discussion, it was agreed that someone would drop sand in our back yard if I picked up the bags directly from Sandbag Central. I wondered if I was receiving a special favor because

I had worked politically with the person in charge of the sandbag distribution. When I mentioned this concern to my colleague, she assured me I should quit worrying about social justice issues and start saving my home.

As we laid sandbags, neighbors who thought we were overreacting to the possibility of flooding stopped by to assure us that our neighborhood had not flooded during the last big flood in 1979. In response, I took some remaining sandbags to a neighbor's homes and placed them in her window wells. She accepted the sandbags and I promised to remove them after the flood. I explained that I had witnessed the panic at Sandbag Central and was very concerned that our neighborhood would flood.

Later in the afternoon, my brother took our children to my mother's home, which is located near his home community. As they backed out of our driveway, the disaster warning sirens were ringing and the helicopters were blaring loudly overhead. My youngest child looked scared and tired from all his worrying during the previous evening. I didn't leave with them because I needed to stay in Grand Forks to follow through on my professional commitment to set up an evacuation center in Grafton and to protect my property. My husband agreed to stay back with me and continued to move possessions from the basement. I did wonder about the advisability of being separated from my children, but consoled myself that my family would

take good care of them. The children had helped sandbag and move things in their bedrooms so they had been part of the flood prevention effort, which was important.

For the most part, I continued to sandbag with family and friends throughout our neighborhood. The flood prevention effort now appeared to be focused on laying secondary dikes with sandbags. The City Mayor asked that all liquor establishments close because of her concern about the quantity of alcohol being consumed during flood fighting efforts. Businesses were closed and there was no school, so there was opportunity for people to party.

**"Please, for your safety
leave at once. . ." We Are
All Evacuated.**

At 2:00 a.m. on April 19, we learned from a neighbor that another emergency clay dike, built the previous day and located a half a block from our home, had been breached. Water was slowly flowing into the neighborhood from the swollen river. Water was also coming up through the storm sewers. A short time later a red emergency vehicle, with lights flashing and a bull horn blaring, announced that we had to evacuate immediately. We left in a hurried, unplanned manner, taking with us an elderly neighbor to assure that she arrived safely with family. Just before we left, I called the student volunteers to inform them that it would not be safe to travel to Grafton, as planned.

None of the students I called were sleeping; they were all planning to leave the city.

We planned to stay with my mother during our evacuation. When we arrived at the local evacuation center to register our plans, the director of the local human service center asked me to stay and assist with registration. I agreed. The evacuation process was very orderly, but sad. The faces of evacuees were hollow, empty, and full of disbelief and disappointment. The governor of the state arrived to tour the evacuation center. People appeared despondent and worried about the uncertainty of the situation. Many apologized for crying or being too nervous to complete a registration card. Some evacuees had been evacuated from their homes the previous day and were staying with friends in town, who were now being evacuated. One woman tearfully reported that she had been evacuated three times during a 24-hour period as she continued to relocate to various friends' homes in Grand Forks. Some parents talked about how difficult it was to get their teenage children to leave their homes. A colleague working at the shelter had reported that a parent could not get her teenage daughter out of the car into the shelter. Many of the city's teenagers had worked very hard to assist in the sandbagging effort. They could not believe that the battle had been lost and that their basement bedrooms with all their possessions still in them would be flooded. They wanted to stay and protect their property.

The greatest concern expressed by residents was that they were separated from family members. This was a difficult aspect of serving as a local volunteer in a small community. Evacuees were aware that we were acquainted with their family members, and friends were asking us about their whereabouts. I was concerned about sharing this information because I was performing in my professional capacity and would need to adhere to rules of confidentiality.

They didn't want to hear about confidentiality issues in a disaster. But in general, there was no way to locate missing family members because registrations were not entered on a computer system, only handwritten on cards. We tried to sort through the cards, but it was a difficult task because there were just too many. It was also difficult, at times, to read the handwritten information on the cards. People were very anxious and found it difficult to focus on completing a form. Clearly, a computer system to register evacuees would have been helpful.

There was also concern about the safety of pets who had been left behind. Evacuated residents were worried that they had not disconnected their power prior to leaving their home, which the City was encouraging. They were reassured that they could leave town and the City would cut off the supply of electricity when necessary. Numerous friends and acquaintances filed in from the sandbag lines in dirty clothing

and without a change of clothes. Our former child care provider arrived with her family. Like many, they had to be evacuated by the National Guard because their vehicles had been flooded. People were crushed that they had lost a battle after having worked so hard to keep the city from flooding and had done little to save their own personal possessions.

One woman was experiencing problems breathing because she was allergic to animals and there were animals in the bus which had transported her to the evacuation center. She had no time to secure her medication prior to evacuation. Other evacuees had forgotten their medications or were unable to rescue adaptive equipment. Serious medical concerns were referred to the City Health Department, but there was significant confusion about what resources would be available. Free tetanus shot were being given at the evacuation center for those who decided to take the time. The next day the only local hospital was closed due to flooding.

My husband accompanied me to the Air Base because we did not want to become separated after hearing others express this concern at the last evacuation shelter. After passing Air Base security, we arrived to join other community social workers and to meet with Red Cross and Air Base personnel to determine an appropriate plan to assist the most vulnerable evacuees. A plan was designed to reach out to individuals who were at the greatest risk during

evacuation, including those who had been receiving the services of the local human service center. I assisted two former students in their work. We then moved onto the hanger with a plan in place.

One of our first scenes at the cargo plane hangar was a child vomiting outside a portable toilet. The odor from the numerous portable toilets was foul. We witnessed a very large room full of people with mere walking space between the cots. Three thousand people were taking shelter in three 175,000 square foot hangars. There was no running water. Many had only the clothes they were wearing. I witnessed many pets waiting in hot vehicles, because animals were not allowed in the hangars. People were lined up to use the public phones so they could reassure family members of their safety. It was very difficult to locate anyone.

We then visited a school, also located on the Air Base, where nursing home residents and individuals with developmental disabilities were being housed. These people would need to be moved in the next 24 hours because there would be school in the building on the Monday following the evacuation. Some former clients, whom I had assisted over a decade earlier during their process of deinstitutionalization into the community, wanted to talk to me. They knew that they were being moved to an institutional setting that they had left behind many years prior.

Clearly there was a need to provide support for individu-

als who were disorientated from the experience of being evacuated and then moved into a confusing situation. There were not enough resources. A former student, now employed with a public human service agency, was providing me with directions on how to assist. She joked with me that she wanted me to critique her community work, while I took instruction from her. This was a juxtaposition which often occurred throughout flood recovery.

The Recreational Center at the Air Base was also housing evacuees who drove directly to the Base. This center was not nearly as crowded as the hangars, and there were toilet facilities as well as televisions playing live footage of the fire which had started in downtown Grand Forks. There I visited with a close friend who was watching the office building which housed her non-profit agency burn. She was also distressed about her daughter, who had severely injured her arm roller skating at the evacuation center. She was also concerned about the safety of her elderly father-in-law and the pet she had left in their vehicle.

As the sun began to set, I realized how tired I was. I needed to leave my professional obligations behind and check in on my children. Prior to leaving, I told all my friends and acquaintances to leave the base if they had a vehicle and access to cash or credit cards because we would not be returning to our homes for up to two weeks and the base accommodations were temporary. Also, I had

been told by Red Cross volunteers that there would be relocation funds available through Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). At that time, the majority of evacuees had no understanding of what resources, if any, would be available to assist them during evacuation, except a cot and a hot meal provided by the Salvation Army and Red Cross. We were all beginning to realize that there was no water in the city. Also, the electrical power was threatened. There was a fire spreading out of control in the downtown area because the streets were under at least three to four feet of water. It was also clear that the flood had reached the main floor of some residents' homes, so it would probably take years to rebuild the city.

When we arrived at my mother's home, I watched the fire live on television. It was still burning and spreading when I went to bed at 3:00 in the morning, over 24 long hours after evacuation. I felt as if I had just experienced the Apocalypse. The next day we learned that early reports that my husband's law office had burned were inaccurate, but the devastation was still overwhelming. We realized the foolishness of abandoning my vehicle at our home. We also began to accept that our basement was full of water and hoped that the main floor of our home had been spared.

The following day, we were told by a radio announcer to enroll our children in a local school. This seemed important because there was almost a month and a half of the school

year left and they had missed many days of school due to storm cancellations. The kids were scared and we were frustrated. We purchased new school supplies and followed through with enrollment at a local Catholic school, assured there would be no cost for tuition. I registered for a FEMA number, an essential in flood recovery, and picked up a Small Business Administration loan application at a local flood center south of Grand Forks. We were not a small business, but I was told to pick up an application anyway. I wondered why we had not secured flood insurance.

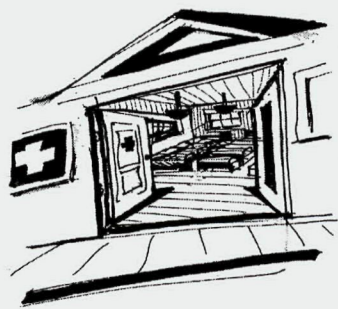
I was able to secure an office with a computer which had e-mail access at a local community college. Although I would need to complete some work-related activities during evacuation, I abandoned any thought of working professionally in flood recovery in the immediate future. I knew the tasks associated with personal flood recovery would consume my time.

It is all over the main floor . . .

During evacuation, a national Red Cross volunteer told me that the recovery process would be more difficult than evacuation. We were not unique. In fact, many lost more. Because we were unable to fit all of our damaged materials on the berm, we put some garbage in our backyard, only to learn later that the Army Corp of Engineers

would not pick up materials from alleys. All this awful garbage would need to be moved to the front yard! Clearly, I couldn't ask volunteers to help with such a dirty task, so I decided to try to hire someone. Before I could do it, 10 volunteers arrived at our door, having been told by neighbors that we needed help. They were from the Carson Corporation in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and had flown in to help residents. These people, like thousands of others, volunteered to help us by willingly moving our garbage. As neighbors arrived with equipment to assist the volunteers, I was overwhelmed by feelings of gratitude. In need of temporary housing in Grand Forks, we learned of a property that would be available June 1. Because it had only suffered six feet of water in its basement, it was made habitable quickly, and we remained there until mid August when we moved back into our partially rehabilitated home. I agreed to provide public testimony about our personal situation on video tape at the request of our United States Congressman, who was producing a video to assist in his efforts to secure critically needed funds for disaster relief. I also testified by telephone for a United States Senator from North Dakota who was gathering support for disaster relief funds. Other community members who testified at this meeting were experiencing a much more severe hardship than my family. A local labor organizer discussed his wife's struggle with end stage cancer, how his

home had been totally destroyed, and how he was planning to rebuild his life with his four children. Political advocacy was necessary. But there was also a need for neighborhood activism, as decisions were being made about what areas of town could be rebuilt and information was needed on the implications of these decisions.



Finally, there was a need for case advocacy as flood victims struggled through the maze of federal disaster relief programs. Like most in our community, I applied for federal disaster services, which required that we complete lengthy forms and wait in long lines to secure information about my status.

At the large Recovery Center, established at one of the former evacuation centers, we waited hours to see various representatives who punched our personal data into a computer network. Each technician expressed shock regarding the severity of our damage considering that we did not live in the 100-year flood plain. I wanted to cry but couldn't—I knew too many people working at the center and wanted my privacy. Ironically, only two weeks earlier, I was the bureaucrat con-

cerned about protecting confidentiality. Keenly aware that I was now the recipient of government benefits, I was also aware that I had to place my financial security in the hands of others. Although I have trained social workers to deal with these situations and have explained to them why anger and frustration accompany clients' feelings of helplessness, almost overnight I became that difficult client, rendered into an access number punched into a computer. We did not have an advocate or case manager during our recovery. We had only numerous voices on the other end of the telephone line or individuals facing a computer screen at the Recovery Center. Many were helpful, but I was still frustrated with the bureaucratic maze that had created such an impersonal approach to such severe crisis.

Work Responsibilities

Although there was more than enough to do on the home front, during this time I also needed to maintain work responsibilities, which included serving as a liaison for summer field placements for the Department of Social Work. Summer school was going to be held and the focus of the University effort was on keeping our existing student enrollment and returning the campus to normalcy. Normalcy, though, was hard to come by. During my three-hour drive to campus the morning summer school started, there was snow in the air—in May!

I also needed to follow

through on a commitment I made to host three National Conferences in August of 1997. We did co-host the conferences with our Division of Continuing Education and also sponsored a preconference session which focused on disaster recovery. The preconference, entitled Crisis Work with Individuals and Families, was attended by 157 local professionals. The evaluation results were very positive. A national expert on rural disasters, who was planning to attend and present at the national conferences, donated her time and skill as a presenter for this preconference.

During this time, I continued to supervise and participate in the activities of social work students whose efforts were focused on assisting the community with disaster recovery. The students conducted community assessments to determine the impact of the flood on neighboring rural communities, designed a recognition ceremony for youth involved in sandbagging, conducted outreach activities for the local Salvation Army, assisted in the development of a local food cupboard, and hosted an intergenerational dialogue during the one year anniversary of the flood. In addition to supervising their work, I have been doing "flood work" of my own.

I am writing about the great flood of 1997, using my personal experiences as well as the empirical research data I have gathered. This writing will include information about lessons learned in disaster preparedness, evacuation, and re-

covery. I am also conducting an exploratory study to determine the human service delivery system response to the flood. This will include quantitative and qualitative analysis of respondents' perceptions of the flood evacuation and recovery.

The NASW code of ethics unequivocally states, "That in times of disaster social workers should provide emergency service "to the greatest extent possible."

Reamer (1998) states, "It may not always be feasible for social workers to devote great amounts of time and resources to provide assistance during public emergencies; their family commitments, job obligations, and financial needs also must be taken into account (p.252). An answer to this ethical dilemma must depend upon each individual's personal circumstances, the nature of the disaster, and the disaster's direct effect upon the social worker.

Upon reflection, for example, I now see that I should have spent more time with my family and not worried so much about public perception that professors are too removed from practice. I should not have separated myself from my children at the time of their evacuation. Social workers involved with evacuation efforts would have understood my absence. There have been consequences of these actions displayed in my youngest child's behavior. I should also have been more available to help my husband with our personal flood recovery. Looking back now, I can see why I made the decisions I did. My office

was not flooded and I have always enjoyed working with community agencies and students. I did not wish to spend time in our flood damaged home because it was too depressing, so I left my husband there while I went to work.

I also learned that it is much easier to be a provider of services than a recipient. I did not want to trust former students with my personal problems when they arrived at my door step in their professional capacity as outreach workers. I did not want to be seen as weak in any manner because the flood had only resulted in property loss, not human loss. But I still know my FEMA number and worry that my youngest child will become distressed when sirens scream.

Finally, I learned about the kindness that came in the form of thousands of volunteers who assisted community members when we could no longer assist each other. These volunteers provided housing during evacuation and assisted with home reconstruction. They displayed human goodness and reminded many, who had lost faith, that goodness should be received and returned.

This year, I am on developmental leave from the University conducting research and writing about human service response to the flood. I am working from my partially repaired Grand Forks home because I cannot afford to travel out of state but also because I need to spend time with my family, finishing our home reconstruction, and taking my

children to piano and swimming lessons. Thanks to the flood of 1997, I will be responsible for returning the goodness I experienced and learning how to accept kindness when I am vulnerable. I have also learned the importance of placing my family first during times of personal crisis. □

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