

AND THE RAINS CAME -

Around the middle of June 2013, a weather system started pushing up against the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains in southern Alberta. For days this system dumped huge amounts of water on the foothills and edge of the mountains which resulted in rivers flooding anything in their paths. The towns of Canmore, Bragg Creek, Kananaskis, Calgary, Turner Valley, High River, Siksika, plus other assorted towns and settlements located downstream from the mountain runoffs, swiftly and suddenly were swept under by the flooding waters.

The result of this flood, was total devastation and destruction for many people's property including 3 deaths. 32 states of emergency were declared. Everyone has seen the news media coverage of this drastic event. Even the media could not do justice to this tragedy.

Soon the call went out for help from the federal and provincial governments, counties, municipalities and volunteers. All resources available including the military, were sent in to help.

Volunteers from across the country came to the aid of those in need. All those who attended, were totally shocked at what lay in front of them. People were being rescued by boats, tractors, combines, anything that would stand up to the power of the water. At one point in High River, the water was so high that it completely covered a school bus.

On Tuesday 9th July two aircraft from the Civil Air Search and Rescue Association, (CASARA), Red Deer zone, carrying 8 CASARA members, plus one aircraft from the Red Deer Flying Club, and 3 club members on board flew down to High River to assist with the clean up and recovery operations.

Upon arrival we were driven to a staging point where there was food, and water, and briefings on the dos and don'ts of what they wanted us to help with. On route to the staging area, we began to see some of the devastation. Boats that were for sale at a boat mart, were scattered all over the area, and tangled up and covered with trees and debris; the railroad was a tangled and twisted mess. It reminded me of a roller coaster that does a complete loop; businesses were boarded up; sand and silt covered everything. But nothing had prepared us for the stench we smelled when we stepped out of the cars. The smell of must, mold, damp and most of all, rotten food from all the freezers and fridges that were sitting out on the streets after being without power for about 2 weeks.

Prior to arrival we had been advised to bring rubber boots, coveralls, respirator masks and rubber gloves. Gloves and masks were also provided when we arrived. We were tasked to assist anyone that needed help. To start with we were taken to an elderly couples place where all the worldly belongings were piled at the curb alongside a huge dumpster. While they watched, we loaded everything in to the dumpster.

As we moved along the street of a new neighborhood as far as you could see, the street was piled with house hold and personal rubble to a height of about 6- 8 feet deep. We spoke to many people to offer our assistance. Some needed it, others didn't. But one thing was very evident as we moved about in a group, everyone NEEDED help in one capacity or another, whether it was to remove debris, clean areas, or just a comforting hand on the shoulder. Even though we didn't help them, many people would come out from their houses, or yard, to shake our hands and offer their thanks for coming to help.

We saw many seniors sitting or standing in their garages, or driveway, just staring at a huge pile of rotting rubble that used to be their total life. For many of them, this had been their retirement homes, and now everything was gone. Many of the homes were no more than about 5 years old. We have since been told that many of them were to be bulldozed down because of the rot and black mold that has taken over.

We spent the whole day there, helping where we could. Then it was time to come home.

As we were being driven back to the airport, we were all totally overwhelmed by the enormity of the situation and the pain and suffering that these poor people were enduring. We didn't feel that we had done anything to help, but we were assured over and over again by the coordinators, and locals that we did as much as anyone could do in a day. Even if we didn't do a bunch of physical help, there was a huge amount of moral support to the locals, seeing groups of people like us coming to their aid.

We were only there for the one day, and I know that there have been literally hundreds, maybe even thousands of people who have spend many days down there doing whatever they could to try and get the people back on their feet again.

Some areas, like the Siksika Nation, is still under water because the water table is so high, there is no place for the water to be pumped to, or run off. There is nothing anyone can do to help with the recovery of their homes and land, at this time. They continue to live in tents and temporary trailers.

The struggle continues to this date.

Submitted by

Jim Thoreson



Household goods and articles put out on the street to be hauled away.



The railroad through the Town of High River



The group of CASARA and Red Deer Flying Club members.



Eastern portion of High River that was still under water 3 weeks after the start of the flood.