

The Flood

"Where were you," so goes the old courtroom cliché, "on the night of May 8, 1995?" I wish I could forget, because I was in my house, watching the water rise.

When we bought our home in the New Orleans suburb of River Ridge nearly 14 years ago, we were told that the land was high and that the lot had never flooded. With a smug sense of security, I noticed that our lot had been filled in higher than the adjoining lots. No way was my house going to get flooded. The required flood insurance was an expenditure I felt to be necessary as blizzard insurance.

I have been humbled.

I wasn't too concerned as the torrents of rain poured without respite, illuminated by almost constant flashes of lightning. I was only mildly concerned as I watched the gutters - which I had cleaned out the day before - overflow as the rain fell faster than the gutters could remove it. And I was only moderately concerned when I saw garbage cans and other flotsam drifting toward the drainage canal at the end of my street.

What really got me worried, however, was when I saw a Great Wooden Boat drift into the vacant lot across the street. From it an old man in a long robe and with a white beard reached out and plucked from the trees and the water two possums, two racoons, two garter snakes, two squirrels and stowed them along with pairs of other animals inside the ominous vessel.

The boat drifted off and I ran back into the house and began to carry valuable items upstairs. By midnight, the water covered the first step of the stairs and was rising, and the rain kept coming down. While I wondered just how high it would get if it kept up for the biblical 40 days and 40 nights, the rain slacked off. In a little over four hours, 18 inches of water fell from above, and a lot of it was in our house, our garage, our cars. The water crested at just over the second step.

Daybreak allowed a view from an upstairs window of what it must have looked like in the olden days when the levees broke. It was time to survey the devastation, and I found that my wife's car had saved my canoe from drifting away. Canoeing is one of my favorite recreations, but I hope that I will never again be able to canoe my neighborhood.

But lest we become discouraged and disgruntled in talking about the flood, we should consider the strange and wonderful phenomena that it causes.

To begin with, frogs entertained my wife in our living room. As the waters receded from my garage, a good-sized garter snake that hadn't made it onto The Old Guy's boat challenged my presence. There were tales of nutrias and alligators under cars and in carports. People told hor-

ror tales (none confirmed) of cotton-mouth moccasins invading homes. But the nastiest aspect of the flood - and perhaps to be described in psychologists' trade journals as Post Flood Stress Disorder - is that most American of activities, the thing that no one wants but no one wants to lose: The Lawsuit.

In my neighborhood, the flood brought forth frustrations and emotions that manifested themselves in another Great American Pastime, one often linked with The Lawsuit: The Conspiracy.

Not a mere continuation of the Who-Killed-JFK or U.N.-And-Black-Helicopters plots, this is the They-Didn't-Turn-On-The-Pumps conspiracy and its subsidiary, The-Dam-In-The-Canal.

The fact that nature in all her disrespect chose to dump 18 inches of water in less than five hours on a drainage system designed to handle less than a third of that is beside the point. "They" (Ah, the great indefinite, conspiratorial "they") didn't turn the pumps on in time. "They" didn't care whether we went under. To add to the evil, the construction in the main drainage canal, planned to improve flow, created a "dam" which kept the water from escaping.

Lawsuits began even before the plaintiffs' shoes had dried. I haven't seen the suits, but I'm wondering if Mother Nature and The Old Guy in The Big Boat are named as defendants.

As long as we're suing, why doesn't somebody file an after-the-flood suit on behalf of the alligators, some of whom were merely establishing a claim to their ancestral territory? The fine old legal doctrines of "adverse possession" and "riparian rights" immediately come to mind. The former can be translated as "I've had it longer than y'all," and the latter as "I live in the water so I get to use the shore."

Sign up now gators. Even reptiles have rights. Δ

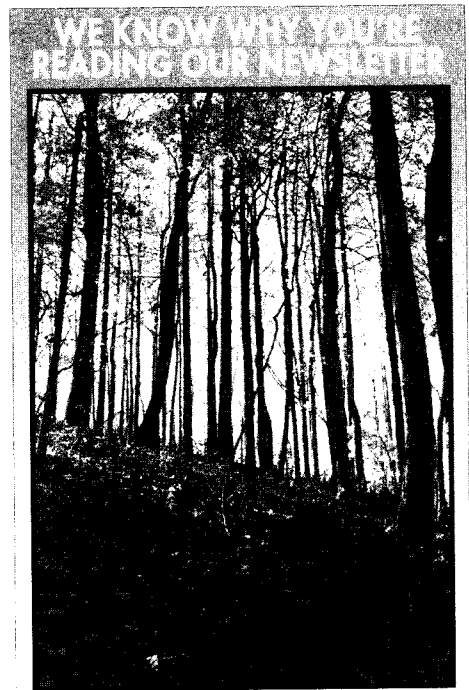
- Earl Higgins

Legacy

What will be yours? You joined the Sierra Club because you are concerned about the well-being of the Earth.

Continue your involvement by remembering the Sierra Club in your will.

For more information and confidential assistance, contact John Calaway, Sierra Club Planned Giving Program, 730 Polk St., San Francisco, CA 94109 (415) 923-5538



Chances are you're already interested in the outdoors. That's why you're reading this publication. As a Sierra Club member, you'll share that love of unspoiled wilderness and adventure with over 500,000 members who, like you, care about the wild places on earth.

As a Sierra Club member, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are part of a vital and growing effort to preserve our natural heritage.

Join the Sierra Club Today!

Yes, I want to join! I want to help safeguard our precious natural heritage. My check is enclosed.

New Member Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

	Individual	Joint
REGULAR	<input type="checkbox"/> \$35	<input type="checkbox"/> \$43
SUPPORTING	<input type="checkbox"/> \$50	<input type="checkbox"/> \$58
CONTRIBUTING	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100	<input type="checkbox"/> \$108
LIFE	<input type="checkbox"/> \$750	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1000
SENIOR	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15	<input type="checkbox"/> \$23
STUDENT	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15	<input type="checkbox"/> \$23

Annual dues include subscription to *Sierra* (\$7.50) and chapter publication (\$1). Dues are not tax-deductible.

Sierra Club

P.O. Box 53968
Boulder, CO
80322-2968

W 3500
FRIP No.