

How we recognize it's always the poorest who suffer the hardest.

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"Floods"

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Are we better for Agnes and the flooding of June 23, 1972? I confess that I'm selfishly grateful for Agnes, for that's how my wife and I dated. A friend of a friend, she joined my New Jersey church youth fellowship alumni to lend a hand. Agnes wasn't Danville's first flood, won't be our last. Doing research for a historical fiction I'm writing about the Susquehanna, I came across one of our more interesting floods: The pumpkin flood of 1796. The waters rose that October and fields of pumpkins floated downstream. No pumpkin pies.

Despite my personal gratitude for this east coast disaster, who would be foolish not to regret this historic flood's disruption, dislocation, destruction? Who can dismiss the heartache, the sadness, the loss, the deaths? Who still can smell that mud's peculiar odor? I remember helping an elderly woman in Wilkes Barre sort through her muddied family albums. Few were salvageable. My brother lived near where the picnic table was photographed having floated to the top of a telephone pole. The trailers in his trailer park got moved just in time. A church elder who lived along the West Branch in Jersey Shore mentioned how folks are still bitter about the handsome homes that were decreed to be demolished and the exodus of young people.

Are we better today for Tropical Storm Agnes?

Courtesy of Agnes, this region gained an abiding respect for the Susquehanna's susceptibility, given her width, shallowness, low banks, abundant tributaries, and winding course. Another beneficial result is recognizing that it is nuts to try to deny reality, how we must learn to cooperate with nature, for Mother Nature is tough to fight. Deniers end up dog-paddling in contaminated water – it's just a little rain, glug, glug -- or rely on rescuers to risk their lives to save your foolish skin.

Other positives?

Perhaps we learnt how we must imitate the Boy Scouts and 'Be Prepared,' realizing our need for ready clean-up buckets, Red Cross cots, evacuation plans, rapid communications, food and water, flood prevention walls, and a handy National Guard. How we cherish local communities that step up to meet the challenge and help neighbors, even if we haven't spoken to our neighbor in years, and, how we wish this same spirit might last beyond the crisis. Folks of all stripes filling sandbags. How events such as Agnes provided new data to improve weather forecasting. How we recognize it's always the poorest who suffer the hardest. How flood insurance is essential, along with the necessity for intelligent zoning. We here face floods, in California it's foolish over-building in fire zones. I'll help muck out your house one time; It's on you if you stay in the flood plain.

Perhaps the best positive from Agnes was us learning from our mistakes, failures, and bad decisions. Isn't that often the case? I've rarely met any person, any church, any community that changes willingly.

We recently finished our AYSO soccer season. A buddy and I, the grandpa brigade, coached a U-12 team. I love working with Middle School kids. Last season we won one game. This season we ended up

with a winning season. We didn't win them all, and that's good. Teams learn to win by failure. Why did we give up three goals the last quarter? I apologize here to my boys and girls. You gave it your all. It was my mistake as coach when I weakened the defense. The real issue mature adults face is: how do we respond when we fail or when we suffer?

Adversity: not as if adversity can be avoided. I bet your stormy times, your calamities, were your most productive times, most growing times. How we handle what floods our way reveals our nature, what kind of man or woman we are. Only when we are wise enough to be honest about the reason for the pain can healing and progress begin. I thank God when I am disturbed by the truth. I thank God when truth makes me uncomfortable, when I can say I was wrong. I'm better when I am held accountable. Well, I am afterwards.

Dr. Who, my favorite timeless British Science Fiction series, often offers flashes of brilliance. The President-elect of planet Gallifrey is complaining about a tough decision. He thinks it best to get rid of the Doctor so as avoid making the decision. Another leader tells him: "All leaders are faced with difficult decisions; It is by their decision they are judged."