

"Even if you are under water, it is still home."

By GEOFF KENNEDY

Ten years ago this week the Chena and Tanana Rivers overflowed their banks, drove people from their homes, and swept away or ruined their possessions, but, apparently, did not destroy the spirit of Interior Alaskans.

"I was no stranger to floods," recalls Anna Frank, a Fairbanks resident but a Native of Minto. She was let off her job at noon, Monday, August 14, 1967. Watching the slowly rising Chena River, she began packing what she could into suitcases and piled the suitcases high on the tops of bunk beds.

That task finished, she gathered her nine children and in-laws (they had come to Fairbanks for the Eskimo-Indian Olympics the previous weekend) for the University of Alaska.

By this time the water had already climbed out of the slough and was slurping along College
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Flood Memories Still Vivid After Ten Years . . .

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Road.

"It was kind of sad and frightening. But I had gone through floods before. It was nothing new. You had to keep your cool."

Her decisiveness paid off. Since she had arrived early, she and her family slept in dormitory rooms at the university. Later evacuees had to sleep on classroom floors and in other uncomfortable places. "I felt sorry for those not used to that kind of life."

After the flood, Anna Frank not only had to restore her own Fairbanks home, but she also had to decide what to do about her home town, Minto.

"We did not want to move. We were hoping for some money to build up old Minto, but we had no funds. So, for sanitation reasons we had to move. We used to have beautiful gardens, but every year they were under water when the waters would come, people just put their dogs in their boat and stayed with their dogs as their cabins were being flooded. It's hard to get people to evacuate from the village. Even if you are under water, it is still home."

But helicopters did take some of the older people, people with babies and others who wanted to leave.

Today, Anna has mixed feelings about the decision to move the village to its new site. "New Minto is much safer from the water. It's high on a ridge. We have modern facilities, running water and sewage system, when it works. " But I miss the old place."

She prefers the log cabins of Old Minto to the modern frame houses, designed in the Lower 48 states. She has sentimental reasons, too, "You were born there and you don't forget the times you spent there."

Eliza Winfrey doesn't forget Old Minto, either. Even though she was only 11 years old, she

remembers her mother's instructions to the children to pack things as high as possible in the cabin. When they finished packing the family climbed a hill overlooking the cabin, pitched tents, and tried to sleep as the river streamed through their cabin below. Eliza remembers, "It was scary."

The Minto flood had at least one positive aspect for Eliza. At least no one was lost in Minto, not even dogs, as far as she knows.

Mary Moses, of Fairbanks, saved her dogs but suffered heavy losses. The Chena almost reached the ceiling of her home in Graehl.

"The floor had been ripped up and big holes were in the floor. Things you thought you could wash out were just rotted. A family bible and a few records on a shelf near the ceiling were about the only things saved."

Mary remembers a phone call in her Bureau of Indian Affairs office in the Arctic Bowl building on Cowles Street at noon on Monday, August 14. It was Edward Mayo.

"Your dogs are in water. You'd better move them."

She thought for a moment. Her baby was in the child care center, out of danger for the time being, at least.

She got in her pickup, drove home, loaded her dogs in the back of the truck, and drove them to higher ground. Next, she went over to the day care center to pick up her baby. By this time high water in the streets of Graehl cut her off from home.

Fortunately, some other employees who lived in the Fairview Manor apartments on Airport Road offered her a place to dry off and to rest. She and her baby moved in.

But not before the B.I.A. social Services staff had appropriated her pickup to evacuate fellow employees and clients



Nenana, pictured above, Minto and Fairbanks were hard hit by flooding 10 years ago this month. A source at the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers says flood control projects underway in Fairbanks will be of no use to Minto and Nenana.

The University of Alaska is sponsoring a commemoration of the flood August 14th at 1:00 PM in the Wood Center (on campus). People are invited to bring their movies, photos and memories. Photo credit: Alaska Railroad

from the Hamilton Acres area.

Mary remembers her stay in temporary quarters on the second floor of Fairview Manor as physically comfortable but emotionally uneasy. "We were afraid the water might reach the ground floor where we were or that we might run out of groceries."

Within a few days she went back to work. She looked for evacuees from villages and tried to locate members of their families. She and her B.I.A. colleagues tried to find persons who needed doctors or medicine immediately. When the waters went down some more, she returned to the B.I.A. office to dry out the records and clean the place. Finally, she returned to what had been her home to salvage

what she could.

But Mary had little time for her own life. The B.I.A. sent her to Nenana to survey the damage there. She interviewed Athabascan families, took pictures, listed items lost or destroyed in the flood, and prepared an inventory report. Her work helped the B.I.A. appropriate money for a housing project in Nenana, she says.

Like Mary Moses, Nenana residents faced rapidly approaching winter without places to live.

Sharon Sunnyboy was one of those Nenana residents. She remembers a flood earlier that year and figured "that was it for the year."

But early Saturday evening, August 13, her uncle came to her house. "The river's getting

higher. You'd better come over to my house. It's safer."

"Okay, I'll be over in the morning."

"No. You'd better come now."

She waited a while and then decided to take her uncle's advice. "The next day four feet of water covered my house. It would have been a little damp in there."