

A soggy wedding album and emergency chef

By BILL HESS

Tundra Times

No one died when the mighty Yukon surged past its banks, but there were some close calls.

Four people in a small boat were navigating their way down the street through rapidly rising and fast flowing water, carefully avoiding the great chunks of ice which were helping to make a mess out of Fort Yukon, when they heard a call for help.

Already, they had rescued a number of dogs. They rounded a street corner, and Frank Francis saved another, pulling him from the chill waters and flopping him into a nearby boat. Then they spotted Doris and Ruth Ward, standing with a very small child and an infant, on the porch of Doris' HUD home.

Doris had a boat waiting, but it was on the other side of the fence, was filled with dogs, and was out of reach. A pile of skinny logs about four feet long bobbed up and down between the women and the people in the boat.

Francis scurried across the logs, grabbed four-year-old Warren and quickly deposited him in the boat, where Junior Eiles and Irene Hamcutt waited. Ruth was holding the baby, and seemed a bit hesitant to let it go. The water was rising fast. Francis lunged across the logs once again while Paul Williams of Arctic Village poled hard to hold the boat steady in the current.

The porch began to float away and the mother realized that baby Gareth's best chance was in the arms of Frank Francis. She handed him over.



Richard Carroll (left) and John Thomas inspect the damage in Carroll's backyard, including a totally destroyed snowmachine which Carroll gave his son, Tony, as a Christmas present. At right, pups belonging to Richard Carroll, Jr., are alive to enjoy the sun after their master rescued them from certain drowning.



PHOTOS BY BILL HESS

"Those logs were just going like this under my feet," Francis recalled the incident later, pumping his hands up and down. But baby Gareth was safe.

By now, the porch was gone and the two women

went to the back of the house. Three teenagers, Duane Solomon, Billy Gjesdal and Karl Bergman also had been rescuing dogs, and now they came paddling by in two canoes. Solomon and Gjesdal paddled to the porch in back of the home, loaded the two women and deposited them safely in their own boat.

"In situations like this, it's good to help people," Francis explained his actions later. "It makes me feel pretty good, you know."

Three days later, battered furniture, soggy clothing, inedible salmon and meat, together with all of the little things which make a house a nice place to live, litter the yard of a once-handsome log home. "We'll just have to throw most of it away, I guess," muses Rich Hardy, who lives here along with his wife Salina and their two young children. Salina is expecting another child very soon.

There is a look of resigned despair on Hardy's face, but he busies himself with what looks like an almost impossible clean-up task. "I've got to do it, I guess," he sighs. Nearby, carefully placed photo albums dry in the sun. "Thank you for sharing our joy!" reads a message placed next to some wedding pictures.

Hardy had built this house himself not long ago, and had raised it a couple feet off the ground to protect it

from potential floods. Yet, the water rose to a depth of three feet inside.

Next door, his mother, June, faces the task of putting the restaurant and hotel she owns and runs with her husband John, back into working order. The kitchen and dining area already are surprisingly clean considering what they have been through.

On a table in the kitchen sits a platter piled high with delicious-looking tomatoes, and nearby there are stacks of canned pop. "Condemned!" she declares. "They have all been condemned, and we are just going to have to throw them out!"

They may look clean, but the flood waters which washed over them had picked up sewage, oil, gas, and who knows what else. All 10 rooms in the hotel had been reserved for workers expected in that day on a government contract, but now that business is lost. "I can't say just how much we're losing," June Hardy ponders. "But it's a lot."

Outside, husband John is tinkering with an outboard boat engine, one of four he hopes to get running. He is surrounded by clutter which only a short while ago was his livelihood. The garage behind him and all the tools in it

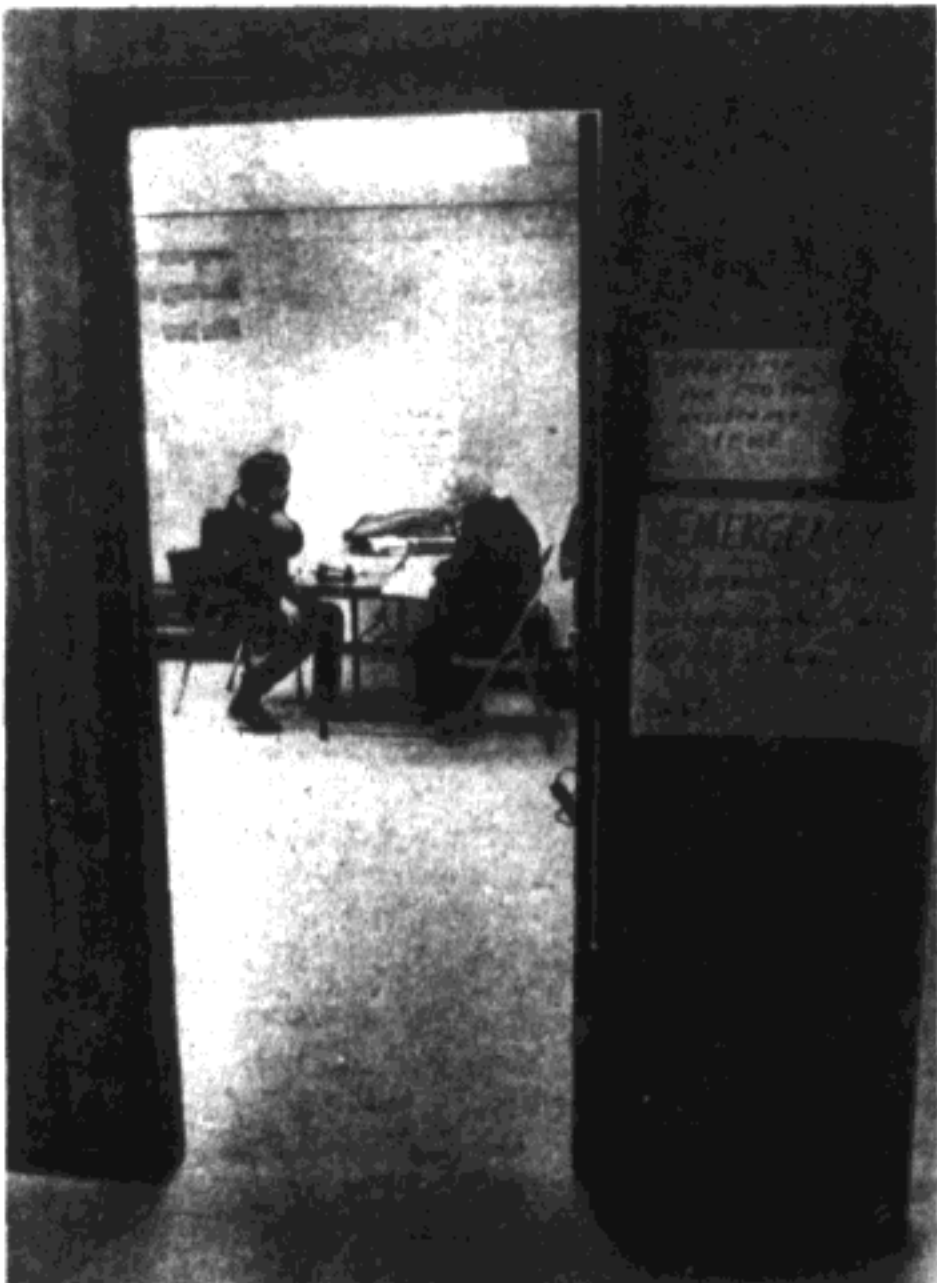
have been devastated, as have the two trailers nearby which also serve as hotel rooms.

"They say this is an Act of God, and you've got to expect it," he says. "They also say a bad flood happens only every forty years. We've had two in three years. I don't know where they get this 40 year stuff!"

The Hardy's have no insurance; it costs too much in this part of the country, and they view promised help with a bit of skepticism. "We'll get up again," June Hardy promises. "We're tough people. We have to be."

The white, mushroom-shaped hat atop Ernest Carroll's head labels him as a chef. About a month before the flood, Carroll returned home to Fort Yukon from Tacoma, Wash., where he had successfully completed a two-year chef's course in just 13 months.

There is not a lot of work for a chef in Fort Yukon, and Carroll had been unemployed until the flood struck and he was asked to cook for the flood victims of which he was among the hardest hit. Now he is providing the people of Fort Yukon with perhaps the tastiest cuisine ever laid



When Emil Carroll saw the river rising, he ran home, unchained his swimming dog, ran in the house, put his belongings in high places, threw a tub out the window, and jumped in. The tub sank, his house washed away, and Carroll lost everything. Here, he visits emergency offices in search of help.

Returning chef pressed into service

(Continued from Page Eight)
out as disaster fare. Baked salmon. Spaghetti topped with a sauce in which mushrooms, green peppers, onions, and just the right spices have been sauteed.

"That Ernest, he's really doing a good job!" a happy diner is overheard to say in the school cafeteria.

"I take a lot of pride in my work," Carroll explains as he prepares one of several

turkeys for an evening meal. "I take as much pride in this as if I were cooking for a fine restaurant in Fairbanks or Anchorage." It shows. At 10 p.m., when fatigue lines his face, and he is through for the day, the pride still beams through the chef's eyes. He has been working since 6 a.m.

Carroll and his two assistants are faced with the possibility of working these hours every day for anywhere from two weeks to two months. "I don't mind," Carroll beams happily.

* * *

Nancy James, president of the school board, is taking her lunch in the cafeteria. There was damage done to her home, but not as bad as to many of her Fort Yukon neighbors. When the flood first struck, the school board and their superintendent, Beatriz Apadoca, made the immediate decision to convert the school into a disaster center, and to close school early for this year.

(Continued on Page Twelve)



Frank Francis and wet dog. Francis rescued an infant, child, and several dogs.



The flood caused school to let out early, but that didn't stop the students from attending a special awards ceremony, where young Marty graduated from Junior High.

Relief promised but no money arrives

(Continued from Page Nine)

Such a decision was easy, says James, in a small community like Fort Yukon. "People here are doing as much as they can to help everybody," she explains. "They are concerned people. They want to help. That's what makes it worthwhile to live in a small community."

"When the flood first hit, nobody panicked. People took individual actions. In our culture, we have a sense of humor in everything we see. It helped get us through the flood."

"It'll start, pretty soon!" a Fort Yukon resident promises as he turns over his key, and gets only a click from the starter of his car. About five minutes later, the promise comes true.

As he drives down the streets, the Fort Yukon man tells of navigating these same roads just a short time earlier by boat and canoe. "The real reason so many of us were out here in our canoes and boats," he explains seriously, "going up and down these streets, is because of Grafton Bergman."

Befgman is heading up civil defense operations in town. The driver laughs. "You see, during the flood of '49, Bergman was all over these streets in his canoe." He laughs again, louder now. "For the past 30 years, we have all

had to listen to Grafton tell us, 'I went here in my canoe during the great flood of '49!' He laughs louder yet.

"Now, we're going to be able to tell Bergman where we went in our canoes!" His laughter reaches a high peak, then suddenly falls off as a look of mock horror crosses his face.

"I guess this also means that for the next 30 years, we're going to have to listen to Grafton Bergman tell where he took his canoe during the flood of '82!"

Albert Albert has been struck with both humor and bitterness as he sees what the flood has done to his community. "Can you get this to Paul Harvey?" he jokes.

The joke is a thin veil over his true feelings. As far as he knows, the disaster in Fort Yukon is not receiving any attention in the Lower 48.

Albert is a field worker for Tanana Chiefs Conference. He tells of a worker who was burned in flood cleanup operations, and claims he was unable to have him flown out to a hospital because of government cutbacks in medical care to rural Alaska. "You've practically got to be dead before they'll fly you out now!" Dirk DeBrockert, director of the Yukon Flats clinic, says one burn patient came in. "His burns were not serious. We were able to treat him here,

and he is doing fine." In an emergency, he would have been flown out, DeBrockert says.

* * *

"They say, never live in the first house you build," Richard Carroll, Jr., muses as he surveys the damage done to his home, "and now I believe it!" When Carroll built the home, he raised it a few feet off the ground, on stilts. Still, the waters got to it, and a small iceberg struck one corner, nudging it off the foundation, without doing any serious damage.

He points to a log jam on the edge of his lawn. Before the flood, these logs had been stacked about one block away, waiting to rise up as the walls of a neighbor's home.

Carroll credits the logs with saving their home. On the other side of the road several huge icebergs are sitting, having been pushed there by heavy equipment. "That ice was headed straight for this house," Carroll notes. "If those logs hadn't jammed up there to stop it, well..."

Stepping inside the house, Carroll hits the keys of a tiny piano. He is pleased with the sound. "You should have heard this before the flood, it sounded pretty tinny. Now it sounds pretty good!"