

Beth's Flood Story

Beth trudged into the kitchen and shrugged off her school bag.

"How was your day at school?" asked Stan, sitting up in his dog basket and wagging his tail.

"Pretty good, actually," Beth replied. "I've nearly finished my New Zealand disasters project."

"What disaster are you doing your project on?" Stan asked as he stood and stretched out his paws.

"Well, I remember Dad telling me about the big floods that happened before I was born, when he was still living with his parents in Invercargill. So I decided to do my project about that. Do you want to see it?"

Beth bent down and opened her bag. She pulled out the project and spread it out on the table. Stan jumped up onto a chair to look at it.

"Is that your dad?" he asked, pointing his paw at a photo of a smiling young man standing on the front steps of a house. "Boy, he looks young."

"Well, it was a few years ago now," smiled Beth. "1984 to be exact."

"And what's this newspaper clipping," asked Stan, peering at a yellowed scrap of newsprint enclosed in the project folder. "It looks like a weather forecast."

"You're right, it is," replied Beth. "I'll read it to you. '26 January 1984 – heavy rain in Southland and Fiordland for the next 18 hours. A northwesterly air-stream meeting with a southerly front is going to cause heavy falls of rain in the hills.'"

"Was the forecast right? Did it rain heavily?" asked Stan.

"Dad said it sure did. Apparently it rained cats and dogs ..."

"Hey, careful with the metaphors," interrupted Stan, smiling.

"Oh, sorry ... it teemed down. Before they went to bed that night they heard there had been some surface flooding in parts of the city. Dad didn't think too much of it at that stage, but then his parents woke him in the middle of the night."

"Why? What had happened?"

"Well, there was just too much water coming down from the hills. The rivers broke their banks, and even the walls of sandbags couldn't stop the water flooding into houses, shops and factories. Even the airport was under three metres of water. Dad said that the mayor had to call a state of emergency."

"Must have been bad, then," nodded Stan. "They only declare states of emergency when the normal emergency services, like police, ambulance and fire, can't cope any more."

"Yes, they even had to call in the army and air force to help," replied Beth.

"What did your father and his family do?" asked Stan.

"They had to move all their valuables up as high as possible. Dad said they lifted whatever they could up into the attic. That way, if water did get into the house, the important things wouldn't get ruined."

"I hope they also moved their chemicals up high, too," remarked Stan.

"You wouldn't want things like weed-killer and pool chemicals floating around in flood waters."

"Yes," answered Beth, "and they also had to make sure their pets were safe, too."

"Phew, I'm glad about that," said Stan.

"Well, the water kept on getting higher and higher. They listened to the radio for weather reports and updates. In the end, the water got so high my Dad and his family had to climb up on the roof. Luckily they had organised their getaway items, so they had everything they needed when they got lifted off the roof by helicopter."

"Wow, helicopter! Where did it take them?"

"There were welfare centres set up. They must have been pretty busy places, though. About 5,000 people had to be evacuated, and every one of them had to be fed and looked after. They even had to give them water, which seemed a bit odd when there was so much of it around. But you can't drink floodwater."

"No, floodwater isn't safe to drink because it could be dangerous for your health," said Stan. "You never know what could be mixed in it."

"They couldn't come home till they were told it was safe, which took about a week or so. When they were eventually allowed to go home, they had a massive job cleaning up. Just look at this photo."

Stan stared at the old snapshot that Beth was pointing at. It showed Beth's father, wearing gumboots, pushing a broom through a sea of mud inside the house. Piles of sodden carpet and water-logged furniture were stacked in the background.

"At least they could actually move back into their house, though, once it was cleaned up," added Beth. "A lot of houses were so badly damaged that they could never be lived in again."

"There was one good thing that came out of it all," said Stan, smiling at her.

"What's that?" asked Beth.

"It gave you a terrific story for your project!"

Note: This story is based on the real Southland floods of 1984, which caused \$55 million worth of damage. No people were killed, but 12,000 sheep, 100 cattle, 334 pigs and 75 deer were lost.

Floods Quiz

1. A flood can be caused by:
 - A. Rising rivers
 - B. High tides
 - C. Heavy rain in a small area
 - D. All of the above (correct)
2. Which of the following should you do in a flood?
 - A. Go sight-seeing
 - B. Drink the water
 - C. Put valuables high up (correct)
 - D. Water the garden
3. Is it safe to drive through flood waters?
 - A. Yes, a car is heavy enough to not be swept away
 - B. No, a car can be swept away (correct)
4. What is a flash flood?
 - A. A sophisticated flood
 - B. Power lines fallen in flood waters
 - C. A deep flood
 - D. A flood that happens fast with little warning (correct)
5. Which is the most common type of disaster in New Zealand?
 - A. Floods (correct)
 - B. Earthquakes
 - C. Tsunami
 - D. Volcanoes
6. Which of these items is the most important to store high up out of reach of flood waters?
 - A. Carpets
 - B. Chemicals (correct)
 - C. Clothing
 - D. Toys
7. What is the main reason you should not drink floodwater?
 - A. It tastes horrible
 - B. You have to save water
 - C. It could be contaminated (correct)
 - D. It is the wrong temperature
8. When can you return home if you have been evacuated?
 - A. When the rain stops
 - B. When the floodwater goes down
 - C. When you feel you are ready
 - D. When you are told it is safe (correct)

9. Is it OK to go sight-seeing in a flood?
- A. Yes
 - B. No (correct)
10. Which of these problems can be caused by floods?
- A. Landslips
 - B. Sewage contamination
 - C. Destroyed crops
 - D. All of the above (correct)