

# Delaware Valley News

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## Flood of '55 book engrosses, educates

Every time the Delaware River floods you're sure to hear, "This one is not as bad as the Flood of 1955."

We weren't living near the river in 1955, and I really didn't know a lot about that flood. When we moved to Smithtown in Tinicum Township in 1977 we didn't hear a great deal about the flood. Apparently most people had put it out of their minds. Not far from our home, there was a Flood of '55 high-water mark painted on rocks on the west side of River Road. It is still there.

As I started writing about the canal and the people who had worked on it, I did hear some scary stories about people who had lost their homes. I also saw photos of washed-out roads and canal sections. I heard that children had been evacuated by helicopter from islands in the Delaware River.

One woman whose home above Point Pleasant backed toward the canal and river but was some distance away from them, told me that she awakened to beautiful sunny skies after the storms passed. When she went to her window she was shocked to find her property completely surrounded by floodwaters.

I never was able to find a definitive history of the flood until last week when I bought a new book by Mary A. Shafer, "Devastation On The Delaware." The book is fascinating and extremely well written. I truly could hardly put it down. The book is based upon the stories of people affected by the flood. I had previously learned that the flood started in the Poconos, but I never knew to what extent towns and camps in the mountains were devastated until I read this book.

Mary Shafer lives in Ferndale. She has a background in publishing and self-published "Devastation On The Delaware." Although we both write articles for a Bucks County newspaper, we had never met and I thought it was time to remedy that, so I

Betty Orlemann

Columnist



picked up the phone and called her.

She told me that she spent three years researching "Devastation." She admitted that if she had known what she was getting herself into, she might have abandoned the project!

I was not surprised to hear that she cares a lot about people. The book is personal in its compassion. Mary has written it in a fictional format, but the events, of course, are true. I felt myself drawn to the people who never believed that the gentle Delaware River or its tributaries could possibly spill over into their cabins or houses.

Even as the rivers and tributaries topped their banks, wiping out bridges, destroying buildings and taking the lives of more than 70 men, women and children, other people were blissfully unaware of the tragedy all around them until it was too late.

Of course it was fascinating to read about people I know. It was also interesting to learn just what happened along our stretch of the river.

I'm not going to tell you anymore about the book. Go buy it for yourself. It is sold at The Book Garden on Bridge Street in Frenchtown and at the Bookshop on Main Street in Doylestown.

*Betty Orlemann lives in Tinicum Township. Her column appears every other week.*