



Gray surveying his home: 'this was our whole life'

Mopping up

Chest-deep in water, dragging a canoe behind him, Bernie Gray finally made it home. But everywhere he looked last week, the 63-year-old, semi-retired Winnipeg businessman found nothing but devastation. All 15 hectares of his horse farm in Grande Pointe, just southeast of the city, that he had to abandon on April 26 lay immersed in viscous muck and murky water. It washed through the handsome bungalow he shared with his wife, Lucy, swirled around a guesthouse and two barns, rolled over six paddocks, and completely submerged four miles of white picket fence, carefully erected and lovingly painted as a gift to their parents by the Gray's seven grown children. "My wife and I, this was our whole life, our retirement home," Bernie whispered, fighting back tears as he waded through floating furniture in what was once his living room. "How do you put a price on something like that? You tell me."

The hard part is now beginning for the Grays, just as it is for the 28,000 other Manitobans who fell victim to the latest demonstration of the Red River's power and caprice. As the swollen waters of the worst flood of the century slowly ebb along the the snake-like course of the Red's 150-km run from the U.S. border to Lake Winnipeg, some of those forced to flee are starting to go home. A lucky few are finding intact dikes, dry basements and manageable—if sodden—farmsteads. Most, however, are returning to discover

scenes of woe. Some, especially Bernie Gray's neighbors in flooded Grande Pointe, are angry, lashing out at what they claim is government ineptitude. But no matter what their situation, everyone in Manitoba is bleakly aware they now face a truly monumental task of cleaning up the mess the flood is leaving in its wake.

There is, as yet, no accurate estimate of the total costs. But three people died, several more suffered serious injury. Cpl. François Guay of the 1st Combat Engineers Regiment lost his left hand when he touched a submerged power cable while helping to evacuate residents from Emerson, hard by the U.S. border. "I had some bad luck," said the 26-year-old Quebec-born, Edmonton-based soldier, a veteran of 30 months' duty in Croatia as a UN peacekeeper.

On the material side, the bills, too, are starting to arrive. Manitoba officials estimate that 800 properties in the Red River Valley have suffered flood damage, including 30 homes in Winnipeg, another 100 in the Grande Pointe area, just beyond the city's southeastern perimeter, and over 100 more further south in the town of Ste. Agathe. In the rural municipality of Ritchot alone, where Grande Pointe and Ste. Agathe are located, insurance companies expect flood damage to reach \$50 million.

The Red has inundated five per cent of Manitoba's farmland—some 200,000 hectares. Most of that is grainland, but more than 150 hog producers and at least 16 dairy farms are also affected. Key-

Manitobans face the hard part as the flood recedes

CANADA

stone Agricultural Producers, the province's main farm group, claims it will take \$40 million to replace flooded hog barns. For dairy farmers who lost milk production, there is no compensation. As for the outlook on the grainlands, much will depend on how fast the farmers can get back onto their fields. "Last year, we had a bad flood but they still managed to get their crops in by June 10, and they got a good harvest," said Dave Champion, product manager of export grains for the Pioneer Grain Company. "This year, I suspect they'll plant early-maturing grains, but still, they'll need to be able to get their machinery onto the land by June 15."

Like southern Manitoba's human inhabitants, the province's flora and fauna have felt the Red's ravages. The heavily wooded river course is a ribbon of habitat surrounded by bald prairie, and animals had nowhere to go as the water rose. "They're not accustomed to coping with flood-water so they find a high piece of ground along a road or someplace, and then soon enough they're surrounded by water," said environmentalist Ken Cudmore of the province's Fort Whyte Nature Centre. "Deer, rabbits, chipmunks, foxes—they will all be wiped out by a lake 40 km wide. It will take years for them to migrate back into the valley and repopulate." With even the earthworms eradicated by the floodwaters, Cudmore predicted that 1997 will turn out to be "a lost year not only for farmers, but for many plants and animals."

In partial confirmation of that dire forecast, St. Boniface General Hospital nurse Therese Brown reported travelling to Ste. Agathe to help relatives in the stricken town pack up. "These beautiful deer were feeding in the field," she recalled. "The next day, I went back and my son pointed and said, 'Santa's reindeer are in the water.' I looked and it was so sad. About 10 of them were floating in the field, drowned."

While it will take some time before wildlife returns to the Red River Valley, that is not likely to be the case



Filmon: 'we have to ask, where does personal responsibility come in?'

for the human residents. Late last week, in pelting rain and driving wind, an early morning convoy of some 2,000 residents of the Winnipeg suburb of St. Norbert

lined up at a police checkpoint, awaiting permission to return to the homes they had been forced to leave as a precautionary measure on April 29. Most were undamaged as the dikes kept the suburb dry. "We're so glad [to be going home] we couldn't sleep," said Tom Keir as he waited in his vehicle. They were among the first wave of the province's flood evacuees to head back home. But with the river still surging through and around Winnipeg just five feet below its May 1 crest of 25 1/2 feet, most still faced a considerable delay before they could get back to survey the damage. By week's end, Manitoba officials estimated that, of the original 28,000 evacuated, approximately 19,500 rural residents and 6,000 Winnipeggers were still awaiting permission to return home.

As they waited, donations of food and supplies poured in from across the country. Nowhere was the evidence stronger than in a Salvation Army warehouse in Winnipeg's north end. Late last week, the building buzzed with activity—forklifts charging back and forth, dry goods stacked ceiling high on pallets, bins full of clothes, canned food, shoes, mattresses. "There

TOM THOMPSON FOR MACLEAN'S



JUST DOING WHAT HAS TO BE DONE

An old man, dirty and tired-looking, steps from his pickup truck and approaches a line of people heaving sandbags. He has obviously just left another sandbagging site, but he finds himself a place in line and joins in. Asked whose house he is trying to protect now, he pauses briefly to reply, "I don't know," before turning back to his work, discouraging further questions. No one else on the line knows either. Winnipeg has been that kind of town for the past two weeks.

As the flood slowly recedes, Manitobans are shaking their heads at how eagerly friends and strangers alike waded in to get

the job done. When the dike behind City Councillor Allan Golden's house sprang a leak at 8 o'clock one morning, someone called a radio station, which spread the news. Within 10 minutes, "I had approximately 200 people in my yard," he says, "most of them I'd never seen before. They worked until 1 in the afternoon, when the dike was fixed, and then they left before I had a chance to thank them."

As more than 300 media teams converged on the big story, many Winnipeggers found the best TV coverage on an all-volunteer community-access channel, Cable 11. About 170 extra people signed up to help provide programming around the clock for 16 days—everything from the mayor's news conferences and live reports from flooded areas to lessons in how to fill

sandbags. One scoop dropped into Cable 11's lap when flight attendant Louise Barrette on Air Canada's Winnipeg-Chicago run called to say she could locate some hard-to-come-by backup valves. Winnipeg stores had sold out of the devices that prevent sewage water from flooding up through the basement drain. Barrette brought back 300 from Chicago—where Home Depot sales clerk Ed Bodnar had paid for them with his own charge card. "We ran a feature, and sold them all at cost in one day," says aspiring film-maker Norm Richards, who put in 18-hour days as a volunteer producer. Barrette will get the money to Bodnar. It is that kind of flood.

JAKE MacDONALD

THE DONATION FLOOD

To most Canadians, the flood in southern Manitoba is all about water, a muddy brown lake covering 2,000 square kilometres that forced more than 27,000 people from their homes. But last week, Salvation Army officers and volunteers in Winnipeg confronted another inundation—a deluge of blankets, sleeping bags, clothing, bottled water, cleaning products and other flood relief material that poured into the Manitoba capital from the rest of Canada. With a 9,000-square-metre warehouse already filled with material that has not even been sorted, Salvation Army spokeswoman Anne Bennett asked the public to stop sending donations. "It's overwhelming," said Bennett, as transport trucks kept rolling in from east and west. "It's like trying to stop a train with no brakes."

Canadians were also reaching for their wallets. In the first two weeks of its Manitoba flood relief campaign, the Ottawa-based Canadian Red Cross Society has collected \$4.4 million towards its \$10-million target. That includes \$1.3 million raised by the CBC's Red River Rally, an appeal broadcast on radio's *Morningside* and TV's *Midday* on May 2. More than 16,000 listeners and viewers responded. "Astonishing, isn't it?" said *Morningside* executive producer Gloria Bishop.

Organizers of other campaigns were equally flabbergasted by the response. When a Toronto community organization called Project Warmth announced a flood relief effort on April 30, firefighters and police officers within a 100-km radius pitched in to collect material. By last week, the Rotarians had sent 14 transport trucks to Winnipeg. When relief organizers there called for a halt, the Toronto collectors still had enough goods on hand to fill another six trucks. "We never expected anything like this," said spokesman John Andras. "We've sent over half a million pounds of stuff from southern Ontario."

In Edmonton and neighboring communities, students, churchgoers, senior citizens, retailers and others collected

at least 90,000 kg of goods, and a charitable organization called the Edmonton Emergency Relief Services Society loaded them onto trucks. "We've already sent four or five semi-trailers," said Carol Smith, a society director, "and we still have enough stuff to fill two more."

As for the cash donations, the Red Cross has established a 14-member committee—federal, provincial and municipal officials, clerics, native representatives and others—to determine who is to get handouts. If the organization's most recent experience with flood relief is any indicator, there will be no shortage of needy recipients. The Red Cross raised \$28.4 million for victims of last summer's devastating floods in Quebec's Saguenay region—and most of that money has been distributed.

D'ARCY JENISH



PHILL SNEEL/MACLEAN'S

Furniture on a roof in Ritchot; Richard in the Salvation Army warehouse (right): 'overwhelmed'

has never been an event like this in the history of the Salvation Army in Winnipeg," said Steve Richard, executive director of recycling for the charity, as he stood inside the beehive. "About 50 tonnes of supplies are coming in daily from across the country and we have hundreds of volunteers working to organize it—off-duty policemen, firemen, schoolkids, soldiers, you name it. In fact, we're so overwhelmed with emergency supplies that I'd have to say it's time to stop right now."

More than material assistance, what most of Manitoba's flood victims require is cash. Many are eligible to receive up to \$100,000 in governmental assistance to repair flood-damaged homes and properties under a program funded up to 90 per cent by Ottawa. For some, however, that is far from adequate. More than 500 homeowners from Ste. Agathe and Grande Pointe,

TOM THOMPSON FOR MACLEAN'S





JOE BRYRSA/WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Soldiers fortify a dike at St. Jean Baptiste, south of Winnipeg: evacuees not allowed back

complaining of inaccurate water level predictions and bungled assistance, hurled insults and invective during a meeting with provincial and municipal officials last week. Residents of the two communities, hardest hit of all Manitoba towns, demanded government at all levels underwrite the full cost of rebuilding their homes. And they heard encouraging words from Liberal MP David Iftody, whose Provencher riding includes both towns. "Grande Pointe died to save the city [of Winnipeg]," said Iftody, placing the blame for the flooding in Grande Pointe on the floodway and the Brunkild dike that protected the capital. "I'm saying that this is a time for a little compassion. You've got young couples with \$200,000 mortgages."

In an interview with *Maclean's*, Manitoba Premier Gary Filmon did not entirely rule out exceptions to the \$100,000 limit, which includes a \$20,000-deductible provision. But at the same time, he cautioned: "We can't go from one emergency to another, making up policy on an ad hoc basis. Whatever terms we settle upon have to be applicable to all circumstances." Filmon also made it clear that he considers the plan reasonable, "given that the average home in Manitoba is worth somewhat less than \$100,000." At an earlier news conference, the premier voiced doubts about the wisdom of granting generous compensation to people who persist in living on what amounts to a flood plain. "At some point," he said, "we have to ask, 'Where does personal responsibility come in, locating your home next to a river that floods frequently?'"

Jane Gray, vice-president of a clothing sales agency living in Winnipeg's River Heights district, was one of few Winnipeggers willing to go on the record with similar sentiments. "I sympathize with the people in Grande Pointe," she said, "but I really think that there's a risk in building too close to the river. The point is, there are costs to living outside the city, and the lack of protection is one of those costs."

Arguments like that offered small comfort to Bernie Gray as he inspected his submerged Grande Pointe horse farm. Gray said he had asked provincial authorities dozens of times in recent weeks about the dangers his property faced. Each time, he was reassured that his land, which sits far from any of the region's rivers and streams, was not threatened. Just to be safe, he was advised to

build a three-foot-high dike. But he never suspected any serious problem, he said, until two Manitoba Hydro employees showed up as the flood crest was creeping slowly northward. "They wanted to move the hydro meter another three feet higher on the pole and it already was fixed five feet above ground level," Gray recalled. "I thought they were nuts when they told me that was the level of the flood that was expected." When the flood waters reached five feet, Gray no longer questioned the wisdom of moving the meter. "If those Hydro guys knew the water was going to be that high," says Gray, "why didn't the gov-

**More than
24,000 are
still kept
from their
homes**

BARRY CAME with
JAKE MacDONALD in Winnipeg