

**A tad of history A new perspective
and a new slant comes with a drive**

By J B Leftwich

Making choices during disasters

You drive along Interstate 40 on a Friday before a Saturday when the Vols are inactive and you resolve to think of your trip to visit family and to put aside pervading and depressing thoughts of Katrina.

Through Buffalo Valley, the village of your youth, and paralleling the route of the old Tennessee Central Railroad now obscured by lush foliage bordering the highway you drive while exercising your resolve.

But you are reminded of a time when the residents of this small commercial and residential center had to evacuate because flood waters were creeping along Little Indian Creek and Big Indian creek toward the homes and stores.

Eventually, water swamped the village, in some cases leaving only roofs visible. It was a dramatic event for people from miles around the site who came on horseback, in wagons and in automobiles to view the vast lake spreading over a community.

This was the Flood of 1928, which reached a new level in a series of floods that inundated low lying regions, including the site of a new school believed to be above the flood plane.

There was a redeeming feature: Homeowners did not lose their household belongings. The Tennessee Central parked boxcars on a siding several feet above flood level, and families moved their furniture into the carriers. Eventually, people restored their damaged homes and moved back.

And there they remained until the next flood sent the Caney Fork River surging up the Indian creeks.

This potential for flooding no longer exists. The government constructed Center Hill Dam upriver and the backwaters came no more.

But there was a flipside. The government also built in the center of the village an interstate highway and exit and entrance ramps, which took a huge hunk of the territory and left the community critically divided.

In devastated New Orleans and maybe in pockets of Mississippi too small to make the evening news, such conditions may still exist. Even the dramatic pictures provide only vicarious experiences to those away from the scene.

You think as you drive along the highway about having to abandon your home and possessions. What things would you pack into your car and what would you abandon forever to the devastation of wind and/or water?

You would not take your television set but maybe your computer, which stores valuable information. You think first of essential medication, water, food and clothing. Your checkbook? "Family photographs? Your camera?

What about an heirloom quilt or a cut glass pitcher inherited from your grandmother? Hand tools? If you owned two vehicles, would you take both? Certainly, you would take valuable jewelry.

En route, you would likely think of items deemed essential and wish you had brought them instead of some things you chose

We asked selected friends to list essential items they would carry with them if they were abandoning their home. Among them were two retired U. S. Navy officers, a retired colonel, business persons, a lawyer, a graduate student, a Vanderbilt professor, a newspaper editor, housewives, et al.

Said Lebanon attorney Bob Lee: "Important documents. Your will, for instance. Everybody should have a metal box for such documents."

Others specified documents— insurance policies, birth certificates, vehicle titles.

Anna, our granddaughter, stressed inclusion of pets and transportable keepsakes, adding: "Most everything else we own can be replaced."

John Means, a San Antonio editor and a Lebanon native, was unique in his suggestions. Said he: "Camera, shotgun, M-1 Carbine and two handguns." I think he was kidding about bringing an arsenal, but serious about including a firearm.

A firearm also was included in the list of Ed O'Neal, a Castle Heights alumnus and a retired Navy officer.

Bob Cleveland advised including a list of key telephone numbers. Maybe, a telephone book? Jim Jewell, a Lebanon native, would bring treasured books.

Esther Arrington, of Lebanon, housewife and retired nurse, said: "Hearing aid batteries, eye glasses, cell phone."

And, with a bit of wry humor, she added to her personal bring-along list, Carl, her husband.

As you continue your drive, you wonder: Whatever became of Cindy Sheehan? Of Pat Robertson? Katrina knocked them off the TV news and newspaper front pages.

Katrina did one good thing: She gave us a new perspective.

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