

Toll Bar-on-Sea

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Our Heroes

This book is dedicated to all who helped during the floods but especially to those who protected, cared for and rescued day and night, 26 to 29 June 2007, until the emergency services arrived.

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Fire and Rescue
The Police
The Salvation Army
Council Staff
...and many many more who
helped in all sorts of ways.

This list is not exhaustive. It was compiled by those who came to tell their story on 8 December 2007. It names just some of those who helped during and after the flood and who are continuing to help today, as the community rebuilds.

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The photographs in this book come from numerous sources. We would like to thank everyone who donated photographs, particularly Chris Northwood.

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Leading learning and skills

Introduction

It was raining again on Saturday 8 December 2007 when we all met up in the newly refurbished concert room at Toll Bar Club. Since the devastation in June, the Club has served more than ever as a centre where members of the community can come together, socialise, and share activities as well as the latest news on the state of things locally. Kids in the Saturday club can get giddy in safety, playing pool and air hockey. Many, with Christmas almost upon them, are still living in caravans.

The Academy of Community Leadership at the Northern College working with the Toll Bar Forum had come together with Pontefract Press to produce in a single day a book of local people's stories of the terrible flood and its aftermath.

From just after nine in the morning, a team of listeners, writers, typists and editors was assembled in the club to take down memories, experiences, views and opinions from as many local people with things to say about the flood as could be accommodated in that lovely room. Dozens of people, young and older, came to have their say; to describe the abiding nightmares, to find the words to say 'thank you' to local heroes and to try to express some of the many wide-ranging feelings that six traumatic months can provoke in a community - positive as well as negative.

This is the book of all those stories. It is a cry of community anguish and anger interwoven with a laugh or two. It stands as a celebration of people's ability to endure even when the bounds of community are stretched to breaking point. Every house in the community will receive a copy. This can remain within people's reach as a song of collective resilience, of hope for the future and of resolution that things in that future will be different.

The making of this book is part of the huge process of recovery. Experiences of catastrophe inevitably bring changes. People in Toll Bar are making it clear that the village will no longer be left out on the edge of things. If they were unable to control the forces that brought such devastation to the village in June many are determined that the voices of this community will be heard clearly enough from here on in. This book is a first statement and chorus.

'Raining again,' I said to Nimrod as I peered out the door for a breather. 'Aye, raining stories,' he says!

Ray Hearne



When all this started I was at home. Water started coming in at around 11.30pm at night. I felt quite sad and I started panicking - the water was coming up the drains and through the toilets.

My husband started putting wood at the doors as a type of defence but this was a waste of time. A lorry load of sandbags was thrown at the street but for some homes it was too late - by this time they were heavily flooded.

That same night my family and I went to a Salvation Army hostel. It was nice and the people were friendly and kind. I had three grandchildren with me. They were upset that they'd lost all their things. I didn't come home for about ten days. My niece fetched me some of her clothes. We had been broken into a few times so my husband refused to leave the house.

Eventually, we were able to communicate by mobile phone. I took both mine and my husband's by mistake - he had more credit on his phone - but I managed to send his back to him. The grandchildren stayed with me for four days and then went to Askern where my daughter lives.

After ten days I went to Cleethopes - we have a caravan there. I took the grandchildren and my mother. At this time my husband was still at the house. I bought a small caravan in Cleethorpes and towed it back to Toll Bar. It's got no bedrooms so what we do is convert it on a night so that we can sleep in it. I am still living in there with two grandchildren, and my husband is still at the house.

I have had some restoration work done but it got pulled down because it wasn't done properly. This time I am hoping that it will be done properly. It's a big job. I have had to throw everything away and it will all have to be replaced. We have been told by the builders that we should be in by February 2008. The insurance company have been shameful, they paid the contractors out of our

money and the work had been condemned. We are having a new builder come in and re-do the whole job from the beginning.

I feel stressed all the time. I have lost weight and can't sleep. I can't be bothered to do anything and feel depressed. I have been to the doctors and he has prescribed Prozac but I refuse to take it. I am moody and unexcited about everything. I am sick of living with my coat and boots on. I am always cold though the children seem to have adapted to the different temperatures.

I think this could happen again. No-one has told us that this won't happen again, so who knows. I have no real plans for 2008. I just want to get back into my house and think of a name to call it. My husband is stressed. He is helping the workmen as he wants to be there to help them to get it right. He releases his stress through shouting and though this helps him a lot our relationship has been strained - sometimes you daren't look at each other because the tension is so high.

Karen Mason





Toll Bar-on-Sea

We are proud of what we do and get respect for those reasons. One of us cares for people in their homes and the other carries a stick that looks like a lollipop. She takes care that motorists behave and children are protected. At Christmas she trims up the lollipop stick.

We also work at the school. We are known and know what is going off therefore we are keen to ensure that this small village is recognised as the strong community it undoubtedly is. We also see the threats. The school under Mrs Northwood is wonderful. If Doncaster move it out of the village, as they've threatened to do, then that will be the end of this community. It focuses on the school.

It's odd but the floods mostly brought out the best in people, not the worst. For us it will be a time we will always remember.

Thelma and Anne

Good Floor, Poor Furnishings

When you hear that the houses have been 'done up', remember this; 85% of those in the old council houses did not have house insurance. This is a poor community and hardly any of the houses on the Manor were in private ownership. The floors and walls may look fine but what you put on them, especially material that has wintered in damp houses, will be next to no good and will need to be replaced.

In material terms, relative to a lot of villages round here, this is a poor village. Our riches are found in our attitudes to each other and to life. That is why this hall where we are working today is filled with a range of people. They have brought their children so you will find here a young lad who is three and a woman who is 72. Some of the kids are running around and playing but none of them are bad.

Don't be fooled into thinking that all the kids are difficult all of the time. Even some of the roughest were heroes during the floods. One lad, who does not usually have a lot said in his favour, was one of the first out there helping the old people when the bungalows began to flood. He went into the houses and helped to get people to safety. In one he put on some socks on an old lady.

'You've put on odd ones,' she said.

To this he replied, 'Are your feet cold?'

'No.'

'Then who is bothered about style?'

We liked that. On the other hand, we can be more stylish than most if we want to be. For example, the main services were slow getting to us. So eventually we decided that when they came we would surprise

them. Instead of looking downcast and in despair we brought chairs and a table onto the patio and having advance knowledge of their timing, waited. When they got here I said, 'Where have you lot been? We've been waiting three days. Tea or coffee? The kettle's boiled!'

Anne Needham



Where's My Rabbits?

You will have heard a lot about how houses were wrecked and carpets destroyed but what got to me was how much time was spent making sure that pets were looked after. As things became more and more stable and the children and adults were shipped out to places big enough to have us - to schools and colleges, Adwick, Don Valley, Ridgewood, High Melton, the Doncaster Dome and the Earth Centre - we would visit to see if we could be of help and we always got the same sort of question. 'Can you see that the rabbit is okay?' Having promised there was no way we could avoid paddling through several feet of dirty water to feed him.

The centres were superb, each one deserves a medal. The people were well fed and dry, but they lacked privacy. At best, a curtain separated one bed from another. People who wanted to let off steam, or to cry, couldn't. Everyone was wondering what would happen next. Yet, for all the hardship, there were never more protected kids.

Listen to what children say. The younger ones have nightmares about the floods. They know they have happened before and will happen again. It is alright those who have a bit of clout turning up when there are camera teams about and promising change but we want action. Some even want an enquiry. This isn't the first flood, remember.

One little lad turned to me in the playground only the other day and said, 'Do you think that they should have taken the sand-bags back?' Now there's a big question.

Anne Needham

The Children

I am 11 and the twins are 13. We are friends because our mums are mates.

The first thing that I saw was that the school hall had flooded and the gym benches had to be used so that we could cross from one side to the other. That was on the Monday. By that time the rugby match had been cancelled and Mum was down at Mrs Leith's house, helping her move their things upstairs. Before we eventually went to bed we had gone round to all of the old people's bungalows checking if any of them wanted anything. One lady wanted bread and milk so we went and got some from the Post Office. The water was lapping around the door-steps of all of the houses on Askern Road and was getting into some. Everyone wanted sand bags.

When we got home I was scared that the dogs would drown because the waters were rising and one of them was very small so we put them on the settee. The water rose and it started to float. Later one of the dogs saved my life when I fell in the water. She dragged me out.

That night my mum, Julie, moved out and gave her house to Velda and the girls. They all shared beds. Some of the men started protecting the houses because everyone feared looting. We stayed with friends on higher ground. The next night we decided that we should walk to one of the centres. Mum said that we should walk because the older people needed the transport.

Nicky Harvey



Every village needs its diarists and local historians and Sandra is both. Throughout the floods and beyond she kept a diary, parts of which she abridged for inclusion in this book. She also remembers her mother, Freda, and her uncle, Roy Machin, telling her about the 1947 flood;

Both remembered it well. Roy told me, 'Suddenly there was a noise like a steam train and a great wall of water flooded down Hall Villa.' I also remember him saying that during an earlier flood a piano shop had been flooded and pianos were floating about. They are heavy things are pianos, so I never put much credence to that story.

Our own flood experience began Monday 25 June 2007. The Spring and early Summer had been one of the wettest in years. Monday, it rained all day; heavy relentless rain that had not been seen for years.

Because of the rain I didn't venture out at all. Dad went to Bentley to do the necessary shopping and when he came back he mentioned that some houses on Manor Estate on the A19 were flooded and that fire engines were pumping out. Why didn't alarm bells ring? I sat in my comfortable recliner chair, nice and cosy in our lovely home, watching the rain beat down. I watched as the water crept up the length and breadth of the garden moaning about the flotsam it brought with it from other gardens! Alarm bells began to ring then, albeit ever so faintly.

I rang the local council to ask about flooding and the need for sandbags to be told that 'someone would come and assess the situation'. Said 'someone' came and told us that there was no danger of flooding and that no sandbags would be left with us. Come bedtime, the water had gone, presumably to where it had come from and we gave no further thought to it.

Tuesday 26 June 2007 and Dad had an appointment at Doncaster Royal Infirmary. As we left at 8.00am there was no water at all, just the flotsam left by the water. All went well at the hospital and we

were ready to leave about 10.00am. Dad said that we should go into Doncaster to shop and have some lunch, his treat. For some reason I thought it best to go home, probably to clear the garden. As we came over St George's Bridge, lots of police were gathered by the Don. No alarm bells ringing at all!

We called at Morrisons and before we had finished shopping, our car registration number was called over the tannoy - the car park was flooding rapidly! Still no alarm bells ringing. That soon changed as we arrived home. Dad unloaded the shopping and as I walked to the back door a wave of water came across the garden. Panic began to set in, but we never thought for one minute that this was the start of it.

The water was flowing very fast, straight past the front door into the front garden and on into the gutter. All well and good until the drains couldn't cope and it began to gush back out like a fountain! By this time alarm bells were ringing so loud I couldn't think.

I rang the local authority to ask for help for Villa Gardens telling them that water was rising rapidly and that some residents were less mobile than others and would need help. I was told, 'You are in no imminent danger of flooding.' Ok, right! Foolishly, I gathered sheets, towels anything to hand to prevent the rapidly rising water from coming in the doors, then got back on the phone to be told, 'We have your name and contact number'. By now the water had come into the back door and I cannot find words to describe how I felt. I was heartbroken and in total shock that everything we had worked for over the years was all gone, and that we had no help from any authority and no acknowledgement that it was happening.

I left a message on our neighbours' mobile phone telling them to come home and save what they could, only to find they had left it at home. Another neighbour left her bungalow in the early morning to visit her son to return in the late afternoon to find it flooded! I had no way to contact her.

When we saw the water at the door, Dad said we should just grab anything we could lay our hands on. I grabbed the TV remote and the Sat Nav! Why?! All the precious photos were forgotten. As we put chairs, the sewing machine, shoes, anything we could grab, on to the bedroom furniture - surely it wouldn't get this high - we saw the water had seeped through the walls and floor into all the rooms. I think this was when I totally lost it. The water was getting higher and flowing faster and it was getting harder to walk - especially since my black wellies with the pink spots leaked and I had two pints of water in each - so Dad thought it best to leave for our own safety. Looking back, we could perhaps have done more. I don't know. We had never been flooded before and I realise now that we were both devastated and in total shock.

We were evacuated to the Community Centre, helped by others who had also lost their homes to the flood waters, but who thought enough to come to Villa Gardens to help us. I cannot name anyone but I thank all of you, especially the kind soul who picked up my strawberry-pot, full of flowers, and put it high on the wall away from the water. It gave me such a boost when I returned home.

We were taken care of by a very calm, caring and level-headed Anne Needham, who made sure all residents of Villa Gardens were safe and accounted for. What would we have done without her? Thank you, Anne. Whilst at the Community Centre we were looked after very well - hot food and drinks if required - by Julie Harvey and others I cannot name, but who did a marvellous job. Thank you Julie and others!

We were not at the Community Centre long before that too was flooded. Still no acknowledgement or help from the local authority! The next evacuation was to Adwick Leisure Centre, where every kindness was shown to us by the staff. Thank you to them also. Fortunately we had to spend only the Tuesday night there.



Now, in November, I still cannot describe how I felt at the time of the flood. That was bad, but I think the aftermath is worse and even now I cannot say it gets better, because it doesn't. I still cry now although I am looking forward and planning our new home. It's going to take a lot of getting over!

I had never heard of Ea Beck or whatever it's called, the damn thing, but now I know where it is and I've got a watchful eye on it! And I suppose it will be a long time before I stop looking how high it is.

On Monday 25th June, when the rain was at its worst, Anne Needham, Julie Harvey, and lots more people from Manor Estate came to each bungalow in Villa Gardens and they made sure all tenants had the basic needs such as milk and bread.

On Tuesday 26th June when it became inevitable that we would flood, men, women and children once again came to Villa Gardens, leaving their own homes to help us in any way they could. Unfortunately, because we live in bungalows, there was little we could do.

Other than Anne and Julie I cannot name these people who came to help - I was totally shell-shocked by what was happening to us - but my husband and I would like to thank all who offered their help on that horrible day.

Sandra White



exerpts from conversations compiled by Lorraine Cryer

I started coming here three months ago. Audrey told me there was a lady who needed to talk to someone. Sandra was in a constant state of upset - she couldn't talk about what had happened and kept breaking down if she tried. She didn't come to the first few Monday Clubs.

When we first talked, the distress was very fresh and events still raw in her mind. Even trying to write things down she would break down. We decided to get together and talk, to get her feelings off her chest and get her experiences down somewhere.

She'll say herself what happened but I think at the moment she feels angry at the council officials because there are people who should be given support who aren't getting it. Work on her Bungalow was supposed to begin a few days ago but it still hasn't been started.

At a meeting with the Environment Agency last week she actually had to leave. The EA guy stood up and simply said nothing would be possible for 18 months and it's very likely that you will flood again. This upset a lot of people - and Sandra especially because of the trauma of not being in her own home and the thought of having to go through all this again.

The man was so smug. It hadn't happened to him and yet he was boldly saying it will probably happen again.

She can't sleep now, all she can see is that man's smug face. The thought that it'll happen again keeps her awake. She feels bypassed because she's not pushy. Someone from the council has said, 'You're a lovely couple,' - that's because she's made no demands, so now she's decided that she needs to start. Hopefully, her anger will start coming out. She's so angry at the Mayor in particular that she used such strong language we can't put it in the book. But she's made a good point; it's hard to be polite when that is how strongly she feels.

One lady was telling me about when Prince Charles came to see everybody in the Leisure Centre. He talked to everyone including the children. The Mayor was a complete contrast. He sat down at the desk and expected everyone to talk to him. And who was the royalty? That kind of attitude upset quite a number of people - they feel he's really not come back to see anyone. He came back for Calendar to put the tree lights on and give a speech. I'm sure it wasn't very popular.

It was nice to see everyone enjoying themselves at the concert though and to listen to the children rehearsing hymns. When Nick Knowles came down to see the centre he actually went to the school and asked about the children's lives. He asked how many had been flooded, how many live in their own homes, and how many were living in caravans. All these hands went up. I think it dawned on him then, the reality of all these children living in caravans, in tiny, enclosed spaces.

Lorraine Cryer





Claire: The water had been rising all day and as Tuesday turned into Wednesday, it continued to rise. We'd put the boys to bed earlyish - they went about nine - and we sat around waiting for the sandbags to come. While we were waiting, we were balancing our furniture on garden chairs in the house and trying to move as much as possible upstairs. The water was half-way down the street at this point but we still didn't think it would come to us.

We were in contact with local people but no-one else really. We kept knocking on each others' doors. Eventually we realised that we had to move out. The police said there was no good reason to stay, so I phoned my mum in Bentley. We are a local family. Gwen Ashton, my grandmother, lived on Hall Villa Lane in Toll Bar. Although my mum, Lynn Caldbeck, went to live in Bentley and I was brought up there, I came back to live on the Manor Estate after I married my husband, Steven. We had a support system because of the family.

I told my mum that I was bringing over Zac, the rottweiler, Jake, the collie-mix, Nathan aged 11, and Matthew aged 9 - both in their pyjamas. They were our priority - getting the boys and the dogs out. The budgies stayed - they came upstairs with us. We never worried about the house then. By the time we got the boys out the water was at our neighbours. We took them to my mum's and only worried about what came next then.

Matthew: I was asleep when mum came into the room and said we couldn't stay. I was worried at first because I thought of the tidal wave that might come if the Uly Dam broke. But Mum reassured me and I went into Nathan's room to tell him it would be ok. We only took some clothes, a teddy, a blanket, and my Nintendo DS and charger, so I could play Mario, Pokemon, and Transformers. Everyone outside was walking around and we could see the water coming down the street. Dad tried to help people with his work van but the police stopped us because the water was so high. We had to walk through a dry snicket to get to Gran. The next-door neighbour was driving

people through the water in his tractor so they could get to the coaches. A 4x4 tried to drive through but got stuck and had to be rescued by kids in a dinghy - that must have been embarrassing!

Claire: It wasn't cold even though we only had pyjamas and slippers. I guess the adrenaline had kicked in. My mum was moaning - she wanted me to leave the house because I had a kidney transplant and am immuno-suppressed but I didn't want to.

Ours was the last house on the road to flood. I thought the water might be here for a couple of days. It was eleven days. It rose a foot up to the first stair. We came back to protect the house - my husband did patrols of our neighbours' homes too. There were looters and people from Bentley taking photos. My kids stayed with their grandmother. She spoils them and they had the dogs there but they had to sleep in double beds and were worried. They always wanted to ring home to check on us and the house. When the water went back down to the skirting board we let the boys come round to have a look.

My mum and dad did the shopping for us. We had no electric so I went to Mum's for a bath. I missed that the most, just being able to run hot water, although it was nice and quiet with no kids! Once the water had gone from our house we still had no power, as we had to wait for the whole street to get dry, so it was nearly three weeks without. As soon as the power came back on the first thing we did was put the hot water on. We'd bought a generator so we could use the kettle and radio.

We'd go wading out to the dry bit and meet up with others who'd stayed, to swap information. For three or four days no help arrived. We just had the community police - no council or fire brigade. The Mayor came to deliver sandbags on the Saturday. Apparently, the delay was because he'd been battling the 'powers that be' who wanted to divert resources to Sheffield. After a few days we had lifeguards, firemen, police and ambulances.



When the water went we were left with sludge and lots of worms. They'd expanded in the water and were really fat and horrible. There was sludge and sewage everywhere. We threw bleach on the floors and ripped up the carpets.

When the boys came back, they had to wear wellies inside. They'd visited before as they'd needed to see the house, but they'd seen the news and were worried - the news had glorified everything and put them in a state of panic. They came back and played on the trampoline in the back garden even though the water was still there.

When the tv crews were here, our Matthew kept riding past on his bike trying to get in shot. I'd told him not to be interviewed. It was his birthday on July 24 and we had to have his cakes - he gets two - in the kitchen. As soon as we could we got the kitchen and living rooms sorted but under the stairs, the downstairs toilet and the utility room are still not done.

Even now I still can't believe it happened. It's really surreal. I worry every time it rains. When we were removing the sandbags, Matthew panicked. He thought the floods would come back.

I work at the local primary school as a learning mentor - it's like a counsellor. Some of the children are still stressed and panic when it rains a lot. They don't like living in caravans, you can see they are stressed. It's affected their behaviour - they are more nervous and panicky. Some don't want to leave their mums. The school is a temporary building - the old one's wrecked and we lost everything. We're in portacabins on the playing field. The kids are in temporary homes too and it's got to have affected them somehow.

The school was alerted at half-past ten on Tuesday and all the kids evacuated, but no-one alerted the residents. We knew of the past floods, but thought there were things in place to prevent it happening again. There was no flood alert on the Environmental Agency

website for Toll Bar, even when half the town was flooded. We needed more communication. We've not heard anything about preventing floods in the future.

Claire and Matthew Didcott



I'm involved in Bentley Tenant's and Resident's Association. Although I wasn't flooded, I worry about what provisions have been made for the future. It's Climate Change I'm worried about. I don't feel as if the government is listening properly. We've seen all the evidence - we're having it put to us day and night - but what are we doing? I know nature's a funny thing, but the worry is there's a strong possibility that this will happen again.

This has been devastation. The community's lost things and it was a deprived community to start with, after the pits closed. Even though places had insurance some haven't opened up again. The corner cafe's not opened up again. We need this type of shop. They need a lifeline. There's got to be funding made available.

The authorities have done work. It's wonderful that the Ea Beck didn't burst, or we'd have all been underwater, and they've found people accommodation - they've built the caravan park. But visiting my friend's mum's, I couldn't walk in. The damp made me feel sick. There's a possibility it'll be another 18 months before it's fixed. Help needs to come quicker.

I'm not going to say that all this water was from the Don. A lot of the water was surface water and some drains were blocked. Certain pumps weren't working. A river has to be flowing or all it does is recycle water. We had a week's weather in two days. We'd never had that much rain. We couldn't control that, but we could've been better prepared. It is the responsibility of Environmental Health and the Water Board and I don't want to blame parties because then nothing will get done but I feel we need more drains. We need to stake our claim to a fair share of the money and the Council needs to apply for funding. I also want to know what strategy they've put in place for the near future.

We should write to MP's and not be wishy-washy. Climate change is a bigger threat than any terrorism. We can all con-

tribute to reducing emissions. Make transport cheaper and people may put cars away. I'd like to see more people coming to meetings rather than burying their heads in the sand. But what can we do to get people to come? There's still apathy.

Tim Knowles





The disaster didn't happen over one day. For some it happened over two days, for others it was three. We were living upstairs and by the time we went to bed, it was over the first stair. By the time we got up next morning, it was up to the window-sill. For those on the main road the passing traffic was causing some houses to be flooded with the wash.

On Wednesday morning we were living upstairs - me, my husband and our dog Tess - surrounded by water and wondering what to do about Tess. Do we put her in the bath to wee?! Fire and Rescue took the dog and let her swim to the top of the estate. This was an emotional moment for us as well as many of the neighbours who knew the dog. People were talking to each other through the upstairs bedroom windows. In the afternoon Fire and Rescue came with boats and told us we had to get out. We had to go there and then. We put a few items of clothing in a bag and got in the boat. Our neighbour, who was on her own, came with us, along with her cockatiel.

We were taken to my brother-in-law's house, Sandra and Dennis'. They put us up for a few days, our neighbour slept on the settee. Our friends, Eddie and Mary, asked us to move in with them, our neighbour, her cockatiel and Tess came too. We were there several weeks. Eddie and Mary's family pulled together and got us all a bed, an arm-chair - so there were enough seats to go round - and all sorts of things to make life as comfortable as possible. One family member baked pies. Everything happened due to the kindness of family, friends and neighbours. We can never thank these people enough. We lived from day to day, and got into a routine of living in someone else's house. We had a kitty for grocery shopping, and we had to plan use of the bathroom, washing, and cooking - almost everything. It was an 'open house'. This gesture from our friends was absolutely amazing. The kitchen roll bill must have trebled - and that goes for toilet roll too!

Eddie did most of the cooking and my husband thought it was marvellous as Eddie definitely cooks better than me!

It took approximately one month to return to the village. Access to our house came sooner than this, but there was no full access to the village. Our friends' lives were totally disrupted, but they were happy for us to stay as long as necessary. We were fortunate to be insured and were issued with a caravan by the insurance company and so decided to move into that, parked on our front garden.

We were still going backwards and forwards to our friends for things like washing, showers and of course for Eddie's cooking!

When we came back, the Neighbourhood Team issued everyone with cleaning materials. We had to get rid of all the damaged furniture, whilst also trying to manage on a day-to-day basis. We got a great deal of comfort from neighbours because we all had the same problems. Balfour Beatty staff and the Neighbourhood Team helped us empty the houses and put things into skips. People were cleaning the streets of debris. Those involved in helping were emotionally affected by what they saw. What you see on TV doesn't truly reflect the real situation. It was like a war zone with all the support services in place and so much activity happening at once.

The water first came through the old folks' bungalows and when the Council were contacted, they didn't realise how serious the situation was. The local residents evacuated the old people. Lots of local youth were involved and many others, who might not otherwise have got involved in community activity. They were taken to the local old people's centre and given refreshments. The local authority then turned up to find out what was happening.

Fire engine pumps and other equipment were in Rotherham at the time, because of the floods there and the threat of Ulley reservoir flooding, which could have flooded the power station and motorway. This delayed equipment coming to Toll Bar to assist with the clearing up process.

Pam Sutton



The Toll Bar Forum did exist prior to the floods but, due to personal circumstances and lack of support, it had become dormant in the past couple of years. Since the floods, the Forum has become active again and been involved in organising public meetings as well as social activities such as The One o'Clock Club run by Audrey and Pam, and the Kids Club - both of which have started since the disaster. Dare to Live Church have been involved with the Kids' Club. The local club has become a local venue and has kindly been upgraded with the aid of DIY SOS.

Other social activities have included a day visit to Northern College in Barnsley organised through the Academy for Community Leadership. We've had trips to Alton Tower for local children and youth, run in partnership with BACUP (Bentley Area Community Partnership), who have been very active in Toll Bar, particularly since the disaster. This was partly funded through the Youth Engagement Scheme. Kitchen Kev has managed the advice centre kitchen in the 'Sooty Shed' portacabins put in place by the Local Authority. They've also set up a Neighbourhood Team to manage the situation. Pat manages this on a daily basis and is supported by his team.

Audrey and Pam started to build a 'scrap book' of what's happened since the floods. Activities have also taken place to make items for the Christmas Fair at Toll Bar Primary School through Mrs Northwood and the One o'Clock Club.

The Forum was involved in co-ordinating public meetings, some of which were lead by the Local Authority and others lead by the local community. The first community meeting was to get people to come and ask the questions that they needed answers to. On the first day of the disaster, whether or not you were affected by the water, people's lives stopped. The electricity was turned off.

The second meeting was to get the answers to the questions, mainly from the Environment Agency, Local Authority and Primary Care

Trust. The number one question was, 'What are you doing to prevent it happening again?' Unfortunately the only answer we got was - 'the report!' This was not what people wanted to hear.

It has taken a disaster to get Toll Bar 'on the map'. A great deal of partnership work has taken place and this has been especially good to help pull the community together.

Without membership of BACUP, I would not have had contact with Dare to Live Church, and without this contact I couldn't have had a bath as they supplied me with a boiler big enough to fill a bath!

When it rains now, lots of people are worried that it'll happen again.

The Environment Agency are preparing a report, which is needed to get government funding, but it could take 18 months just to prepare this report. Local people need some kind of contingency plan now, not in 18 months!

Pam Sutton





I was at school the day it happened. Mr Cross ran down the corridor saying, 'Everyone's got to get out, we're going to flood!' I was scared because it should just have been a normal day. Our teacher showed us a picture of the River Don on her phone and I wondered if we were going to flood or not. My sister came for me and my little sister. When we got home I was very scared, I didn't know what to do.

My dad turned up with a load of sandbags and we went to get my Auntie Madge who's house was one of the first to flood. It slowly got worse through the night and I couldn't believe how much water there was. There had been a month's rain in a day.

The electricity went off at about ten o'clock and we had to go to my grandma's, but my dad had to get my mum's car to take us there. We had to wait because the A1 was really busy. I heard on Tuesday that the Ea Beck had burst it's banks but I didn't believe it. It actually came through, due to the pressure.

I felt really sad. When I left my house I took my Playstation and my clothes. Going through the water was fun at first but when I realised how serious it was, I was frightened. Some people were trying to pump the water out, but it didn't work. I thought they were wasting their time because you know it's going to flood and you can't stop it.

We didn't actually get flooded. We moved back into our house on the Saturday as we had a generator for electricity. But I was thinking about my friends and what they were going through.

My dad told me that the River Don runs through Barnby Dun. When it's high the floodgates can't open and that's what made all the water back-up and what made us flood.

When the water had gone there was help from all over. A lot was donated. They came with great big lorries with cleaning stuff and disposal stuff, and afterwards everything damaged beyond

repair was moved out. I've never seen so much that people had lost in my whole life. I couldn't believe it.

Once the clean-up had started we had a Neighbourhood Advice Centre and the Salvation Army came, which was absolutely brilliant. They gave out free food like hot-dogs, crisps, KitKats, Snickers and hot and cold drinks.

People are living in caravans on the estate. Some people down my lane will be back in their homes soon and have started getting new furniture. We thank DIY SOS for coming to do the club.

We have started using everything round here more since the floods. There's dj-ing and there's a youth bus and arts and crafts. It's much better for children now. The Advice Centre set up an activity club all week in October half-term and it was brilliant because they did athletics, football, martial arts, cheer leading and street dance. On the Friday we did a great thing, we went to the Keepmoat Stadium and had a 5-a-side match.

Thomas Taylor





At first I thought it was exciting, but then it was scary. On the first day it was a normal school day. It was raining and all the fields were flooded. It looked like a river. After lunch our parents came in because some of the houses in Toll Bar were flooded and we were evacuated from school.

On the second day it seemed just like a normal day although we went back to school at playtime. But the playground was still like a river and we had to go home again. The school was told by the Local Authority to evacuate again as Toll Bar would be underwater in an hour. The water was coming out through the drains and I was scared. We went with Jay and Ross Whitehead to Bessacarr where their uncle lives. We stayed there until Thursday.

Ross and Jay's family were staying at the Lakeside, near the Donny Dome. My mum and family were staying at Adwick Leisure Centre and I went to stay with them. I enjoyed it - we had a lot of friends there and made a lot of new friends too. We slept on air-beds in the big hall. We were told we could stay at High Melton but then we went back to the Leisure Centre and stayed there until we got a static caravan.

The caravans are a bit small but it's our only option. Our houses are still being worked on. We have a Christmas tree and are trying to be as normal as we can. It's just me and my mum in the caravan now. My grandma was living with us but now she has her own caravan.

An advice centre has been set up and they've organised trips for us, to places like Cleethorpes, Scarborough and to Alton Towers for the older children. A lot has been donated to us, like toys and games and things, from Radio Sheffield and other organisations and individuals.

We are extremely glad we are living in a caravan and not still living in the Leisure Centre.

Amy Cooper

We couldn't save the sofa

The day we got flooded, my brother ran into the house and shouted, 'Quick, get all the stuff upstairs, the rain's running down the lane!' I got all my mum's wedding pictures down. Me and my cousin, Lauren Butler, moved a coffee table and we got my mum's big picture with all the family on and a big mirror down. We took it all upstairs and put it on my mum's bed. We got the telly upstairs but we couldn't save the sofa.

My mum came home from shopping and asked why we had taken all the pictures down, because it wasn't going to get that high, but it did!

We were evacuated from school. I ran inside and got a big bucket and went to my friend Trisha's. We were filling bins of water and throwing it down the drain. Then I went to Heather's, where some school children were crying. We got them on our backs and carried them across the water. I went to see if my granny was ok - she didn't have any water at that point.

Me, my mum, dad, brothers, sister and Roxy all went to the old folks' bungalows and helped them out. We took them to the old folks' centre as it wasn't flooded there. A bus then came for them.

My uncle Mark took me and my friend Amy Cooper to have a look at the River Don. It was really high. We went to his house and I phoned my mum to see if she was ok. We slept three days there with my brother. Then I went to Lakeside, near the Dome, but Amy had to go somewhere else. I missed Amy because we are always together and I was worried about other people, not just myself.

We stayed at Lakeside and had to sleep on air-beds. It wasn't comfy. People were pinching shoes, sleeping bags and other things. They were letting air-beds down.

When the water had gone and we could go back into Toll Bar, we had to go to another school - Bentley High Street. We got there on the bus - but at least we got free tickets to go see Ronan Keating.

Afterwards, we went to live in a caravan. It's hard living in a caravan. We hardly have any space to move around and we have to be together all the time. In a way this is ok, but we are used to being in separate rooms. We are trying to make it as Christmassy as we can but we only have a small tree and we're not allowed to put Christmas lights on our caravan. We won't have a very good Christmas as Mum is saving for new things for the house.

When I went to our house it was really bare. All the walls were knocked through. I felt really sad when I saw this. My mum started crying.

My little cousin, Lucy Morgan Riley, got really poorly and I got Scarletina because of the floods. Local residents thought the Mayor opened the floodgates to save the town and let us be flooded out.

The clubhouse is brilliant now. We come here everyday. We have sports, healthy club, bus trips, and dj-ing.

The floods have actually helped some people. My mum said it has done her a favour because now she won't have to decorate the house!

Jay Michael Whitehead

We were not actually affected by the floods, but we were frightened to see friends being evacuated, and thinking about the children and pets. We think we were protected by the Optima House factory, as that flooded and probably saved our houses. We couldn't sleep at night for wondering what was happening and we were up very early to see what level the water was at. We were affected by the power and gas being cut off on a regular basis. My friend's husband bought some portable barbecues and we had evening barbecues in the night. The kids thought it was great to be cooking in the dark.

When it first happened there was no support at all. Only local people were there. Traffic was still coming through, causing waves which then helped to flood the houses. It was interesting that the fire brigade arrived immediately when Bentley flooded.

We tried to support each other as much as we could. We did stews and bacon sandwiches, my husband helped out in-between working night shifts. My husband and my friend's husband took children to Bentley New Village School as Toll Bar School was closed. Our children went up and down on the boats. Every time they went out they were wet through.

There wasn't much happening in Toll Bar before the disaster but since it has happened there seems to be more coming our way and there are certainly more activities for children. We've met some new people and have started using the club on a Saturday when we can. There seems to be new things happening every week.

We now wonder if this will happen again. Whether you are affected or not it will affect everything in the area. - house prices, families, older people - everything.

We have been given no assurances that this won't happen again, and don't know what is being done to prevent this - cleaning drains and the like. We aren't kept updated enough on what's being done

to prevent this happening in the future. Some local residents don't want to come back because of the fear of flooding again.

Anonymous



I first came to Toll Bar in the summer to support the first public meeting. I did know the area a little, as I had worked in Bentley a few years ago and Toll Bar was one of the areas I covered.

I had seen the news and the pictures and although I felt pity for the local residents, I had no idea of the real impact this has had on people's lives.

Liz Pickering from Academy for Community Leadership



This is my second visit to Toll Bar. I came here during September 2007 to support the Toll Bar Forum. This was the first time I had been involved in anything like this. I'm from West Yorkshire where we had little if any flooding so this was quite an eye opener.

I remember watching the news and seeing the pictures of people's homes, some trying to salvage what they could and others looking from a distance at what used to be their home. Then there were people's belongings - irreplaceable personal items. I felt the speechlessness and the shock of what had happened. I know how I feel when the water from the kitchen sink slightly overflows onto the work surface and how I panic cleaning it up. This was gallons of water in every space of their homes, in every crevice of their world.

Talking with local people and observing their reactions - to questions and responses from the Local Authority, partnership agencies, and the school - has shown me how important it is for communities to communicate.

Recently, I have tuned into my local TV stations to hear Toll Bar being mentioned, and how developments from the disaster are taking shape. There is great concern amongst my colleagues and the college I work for - Northern College - that more needs to be done and that we must not forget the people who are working hard to bring some normality to the lives of families and in particular the children.

The Christmas season is upon us and one can only imagine the heartache for families and the elderly who, this time last year, would not have imagined they could be victims of a flood disaster.

Having spoken to some of the locals here I can see and feel the community spirit getting stronger and stronger. I pray they may obtain the strength to continue believing in their community and never lose hope for good things to come.

Jacqueline Morgan from the Academy for Community Leadership

Rain, rain, go away - I wish!

It started on the Monday. After several days of heavy rain, I went around all the bungalows in Toll Bar village with a friend, Anne, my son Nicky and a friend's daughter, Sophie, checking if the residents had the essentials such as bread and milk, and if they needed anything else.

Later that evening, my friend Velda's had already started to flood. On Tuesday, we went over to help her bail out and mid-morning I helped a group of Toll Bar residents evacuate OAPs over at Hall Villa Lane and Hall Villa Gardens. By late that afternoon Velda came over to my house because we didn't think the water would get that far. I went opposite, to stay at another friend's, taking two of my three children and the dog. My other child stayed with Velda in my house, along with her three children and four dogs - I think the children thought it was an adventure.

It well and truly hit us that night. Early Wednesday it was time to decide - should I stay or should I go? Me and Velda set off - two adults, six kids, and five dogs in tow - heading towards Don Valley Rescue Centre, where we were welcomed with open arms. We were then split up due to personal circumstances. Later that evening it was discussion time yet again - should my dog go to the kennels, so that I could pay more attention to my children - Nicky aged 11, Megan, nine and Holly, eight? We only had the clothes we stood up in and each other.

After spending a week at Don Valley, we were moved to Adwick Leisure Centre for another 18 days. We left there when we were given a house in Bentley for a short period of time and then we made an 'agreed swap' to a caravan, where we will live for at least six months. Near enough from the day we moved into the caravan my children seem to be more like themselves. You see, my children have never lived anywhere but Toll Bar.

Since June me and my kids have moved a total of four times.

Even now, people ask what one word describes how I feel. You tell me! Alone, sad, angry, disappointed, guilty, helpless - my body was there but my mind wasn't - and many more. The only word I can think of is 'jigsaw'!

Julie Harvey





I live near to Toll Bar and have a great interest in the development of the community. Over thirty years ago, I worked as a Youth Leader and the Manor Estate had just been built. During this time, there was a great need for something to happen and I was asked if I would get involved in a playgroup project in Toll Bar.

The estate was built in the summer of 1972 and this is where the first play-scheme was developed. We ran a play-scheme from a youth club called Arksey Youth Club. Don Valley High School and Youth Action Doncaster were both involved. In the following Easter, Don Valley High School's sixth form raised the money for a play project to run on the Manor Estate. The scheme ran from the Doncaster Book Club Story Van.

These schemes identified the needs of the community and various schemes were then set up, like the parents and toddlers group. A lot of other activities also took place, like the local gala and the garden fête, co-ordinated by a lady called Betty Ball. She was very involved and co-ordinated a lot of activities, eventually receiving an MBE.

The Youth Leader at the club was Betty Gelder who was employed by the Further Education Department to work with the school and the community.

Recently, the youth club was taken away. It is now used as a foundation unit for the primary school. In effect they have taken away a community building and it's not been replaced. Young people have been displaced. Pam Sutton has some views on this. They have now started a Saturday club at the Toll Bar Central Club, where they do all sorts of things for children, in all-ages group activity sessions. There is minimal support for this club and little funding available, because they cannot pin the club down to a specific age group. But there has been a grant from the Youth Bank Initiative.

What we need in the area is youth workers to support the local young

people - to attend to their needs and to instil in them the legacy of community development in this modern time.

Some of the worst kids in the area were local heroes during the floods and they need to be acknowledged. There needs to be an awards ceremony to highlight our appreciation for what they did.

We want to encourage our young heroes to be strong leaders for the good of this community. When launching our local history book, we want to give acknowledgement for these young people by providing them with an award as a mark of their achievement. We want our young people to be involved with this all the way.

I work in the background and want to remain in this position, to enable others to participate and work for the good of this community. The floods have been devastating to families but working together and having support from organisations like Northern College has made huge in-roads into our future development.

Anonymous



Life Ends at Bentley and Restarts at Askern

At one time of my life, perhaps 30 years ago, I sometimes used the back road from Pontefract to Bentley via Campsall but I have no recollection at all of Toll Bar. I guess that I saw it as part of Bentley and not as a place with an identity of its own. Of course I had since seen it on the television, and now here I was at eight o'clock on a December morning, looking at it more closely. In a couple of hours, local people would come into the village's working men's club and tell me and my colleagues about the days, six months ago, when the floods came to Toll Bar. Together, we would all write a book-in-a-day. I was there at dawn because I didn't want to seem a total dunder-head. I wanted to know how one part of the village related to another and the main landmarks.

In the early morning light, I parked the car at the end of the lane that comes in past Adwick station. The streets and houses seemed normal enough but as I began to walk I noticed that things were a bit different to what I had expected.

At first I discounted it, but gradually I realised that very few homes had their lights on and more than usual had smeared a thin covering of dry white powder all over the window. One had a mobile number written on the inside. It was back-to-front. There is still a tendency to be house-proud in this part of Yorkshire. More than one had old curtaining, put up quickly to stop you looking in.

Only one of the houses on the west side of Askern Road had a light on. It was in an upstairs room and was of the sort that people leave on to fool a burglar - the occupant is probably out. By contrast, across the main road, car mechanics were bustling about and in the garage, lights were blazing. This hive of activity stood alone just up from an old West Riding Primary School.

In the backs, there were puddles and a lot of rubbish. Here and there was a caravan. The Post Office was shut but there was a poster inviting people to come to the club at ten o'clock and contribute stories to the book.

As I walked on I noticed that, although the next few houses were unoccupied, one was not. A young girl was sitting at the dining table. This one was very different. Not only were the windows crammed full of Christmas decorations, including several large Father Christmases, but the girl would stand up and suddenly appear next door. I beckoned to her and she signalled back. As I opened the gate and walked in she disappeared altogether. There was nothing for it - I knocked gently on the door. As I did I realised that the two houses had been knocked into one.

Instead of it being opened by the girl an older woman stood there.

'I'm sorry to disturb you, but I am working in the village and have been looking at the houses. Your house is such a wonderful contrast.'

'Yes,' she said. 'We do it every year, though this one we have toned it down. I was tempted to do away with it altogether because it seemed a bit of a slap in the face for the families who are living in temporary accommodation in the fields. When I said that, the very people who I thought might object said, 'Put up the decorations. We'll talk about you but at least the place will look alive!'

'I'll see you around dinner-time.'

Brian Lewis

I had gone up to Aberdeen and was watching TV when I heard that there were floods in South Yorkshire. From then on, it was 24-hour Sky and BBC 4 viewing. My daughter Velda had phoned and said that they'd had to abandon the house that night and were now going with the children to friends' houses.

On the 7 July, the night of my birthday, I arrived on the edge of the village. I was stopped by a policewoman who, at first, stopped me going in. I wasn't deterred and eventually, at 11 pm, I got into the house. I discovered that everything from downstairs, including the parrot, was now upstairs. I can't say if he was talking or not. He doesn't say a lot, just 'hello' and the names of the dogs: Massy - she had been Tyson until we found out she was a girl - and Erimi. Downstairs there was a lot of water.

They had first got worried on the Monday afternoon when puddles had appeared on the kitchen floor. The bath was quickly filled with stinking water. Julie realised that she could not stop the water - there weren't enough sandbags - so after some discussion they locked the door and made it to the other side of the village. When they got there they saw there was no escape. A village of 400 homes was sitting in a pond of water. In our house it was ten inches deep.

Why didn't we move? It was partly because I had little faith in the council and the police services being able to protect us. There were already some hints that looting was going on and I was not going to risk being caught out by them. If I had been there we wouldn't have moved at all, but Velda has a responsibility to the children we foster. Looking after the twins and the young baby, she had her hands full.

My son from Barnsley was there to help out and the one in Holland even came over. As well as having local friends, Velda and I, we had a strong family unit. We would have been silly not to have used it. We are one of a handful of house-holders who never moved.

Doreen Leith



We were told to be on red alert. Shortly after, I was told I was being evacuated and had to be ready in half an hour. The police came to say the electricity was being turned off. I am on oxygen therapy and was worried about my machine. My daughter, Karen, needed to get me out but received no offers of support. She took me to my granddaughter's in Intake, about five miles away.

I was worried and upset. I had no idea what was happening. My breathing was very bad and I was so worried. I was worried about my family. I didn't know what was happening to the children. In a few days, I found out where the family were. I was relieved and I wanted to see them all. I stayed with my granddaughter for two weeks and then with my daughter, in her caravan. I had to be taken to an old people's home for a bath. My granddaughter did not have a stair-lift and I couldn't get to the toilet, so the mop bucket had to come out. My bum got stuck in the toilet and I couldn't get off! The only toilet that I could use was across the road in the SureStart project but that closed at 6pm on a night and was closed most weekends.

I was very lucky the water didn't rise too far - it only came in downstairs. I have been back in my own home since September and I feel fine. I'm very glad to be back - I know where everything is and I can get about. I live in a three-bedroom house and it's all been dried out.

I have six children, five sons and one daughter. They are respectable children and were no trouble being brought up. My eldest son lives in Ramsey, Peterborough. The others live in Gloucestershire, Scawthorpe, there's one in Rossington and then one who lives with me. My daughter lives across the road. We are a close-knit family - the children visit when they can and always phone.

Things could have been done better; I waited six weeks for a cooker from the Council. I used my daughter's cooker top to survive, as I needed a cooked meal and that was the only way.

It will be difficult to prepare Christmas for the little ones because there is nowhere to hide the presents. But my daughter looks after me really well - we have a great relationship and we will be spending Christmas together.

I don't know the future. We can't say we will or won't get flooded again. I am hopeful for 2008 that everything will get back to normal and that we can resume our lives again as a community.

Mary Evans





It started on the Monday, when we had some really bad rain. When they said we were going to flood I didn't believe them, to be honest, but Monday night it came through the door and all the kitchen tiles were wet. I got a load of bedding to dry it up and next morning it was dry as a bone, no water anywhere.

The children went to school and had only been there an hour when we heard that a warning had been issued that Toll Bar was going to flood. You had to be here to see it. I was watching 'Deal Or No Deal' and I kept saying, 'It's not going to get to us.' A friend came to the house and couldn't believe that we weren't preparing for the flood. At four o'clock the house was dry, but the garden was filling up with water. My husband was at work so there was nothing much I could do - we moved my daughter's baby things, like her Moses' basket.

Eventually, water came up from the floor. We stood on the corner of the street, watching the water - there was nothing you could do. The police knocked us up to tell me about my mother's house, then set about trying to get her and us all evacuated. Stevie-Leigh was the youngest evacuee in our family to experience this flood. We were taken to the Leisure Centre and we lived there for the month. We had no clothes - we had a lot given but had to buy some too.

Twelve days after the water had gone, I went to the house and cried when I saw the state of my home. Things had to be thrown away.

The house is still wet - the floor and outer wall - and there is nothing they can do. I don't think I will be in my house until June 2008.

Over ten years ago, Toll Bar was shut off because all the drains collapsed. It were like that for months until they had them sorted out. They have not been to see to the drains since. They have collapsed again and the council has not been to repair them. So what's going to happen if the rains come back?

I thought we would be home for Christmas but the house is a shell. I love Christmas but I can't stop here for the holiday - we are going to Spain.

I was offered a two-bed flat in a place near Donny town centre to begin with. It was a flat and it was scary - I wouldn't put a dog there. I refused it and said I would wait. They were sending people miles away, to accommodation that was inappropriate.

The council was overwhelmed by the flooding at the beginning. We feel Toll Bar was flooded on purpose, to avoid Doncaster town centre being flooded, with the new college and new bus station. They couldn't afford to have the town centre flooded and pay for these new buildings to be re-built.

I don't think they care about us. They are trying to help us, but they could have helped more. I just want my house back so that we can live as a family. The caravan is so cold, it costs a fortune to heat up and we are never warm, as there's always a draft. I'm dreading it when the winter is really bad.

One day, we will look back and think 'Did it really happen to us?' We have had unbelievable support from charities and churches - too many to mention.

The kids thought it was a bit of an adventure when all this water came, but now they really miss home. They miss their creature comforts -being able to get to their room to do the things they want to do. My son really misses not having his own room.

Our biggest regret is not being insured. To get some now is out of our reach and it's so important to people on the estates, because no one wants to be in this position again.

Dawn Bacon



I remember a serious flood in the early 1930s and being carried out of my home. I was put onto the back of a horse and cart and taken to Allerton Bywater, near Castleford, to an aunt's house. The floods did eventually reach there too but didn't hit my aunt's house. In the 1947 flood, my father was given disinfectant from the Council to clean his home up. He let it dry out and then redecorated. My father wrote a diary about the experience in 1947. I think there was also a flood in the 1950s, but I was away in the navy at the time so missed it.

The floods started coming in on Tuesday morning. The first people to be badly affected were the older people in the sheltered housing on Hall Villa Lane. They were taken out of their homes and into the community centre nearby. I remember wondering where the water was coming from, as the River Don hadn't breached. It had come from Ea Beck towards Adwick, not from the Don.

I was stood with one of my sons, by the edge of the water on Askern Road, when he received a phone call from a gentleman asking if he knew the whereabouts of his Uncle Stan. The house was close by so, having Wellingtons on, I went to have a look. The front door was open when I got there and I saw Stan sat on the staircase. He was trying to put his boots on, no socks. I told him to go upstairs and wrap a blanket around himself as he was cold and wet and that I would get help to get him out.

He didn't seem to understand what I was saying, so I stepped into the house to try to get him upstairs. Bad move! The floor inside the door was no more and I was waist deep. I got myself out and called my sons over. They and others came and together, we found a way to bridge over from the doorway to the stairs and got Stan out. My son Marc took him through the floodwater in his 4x4 to his nephew in Adwick.

Stan had been trapped all night on his own and if he hadn't been got out when he was it may have been too late, as I think hypother-

mia was setting in. I went home and got a hot shower and into dry clothes. My sons live in the area and one of them was on holiday at the time, so we went to check his home too.

The Salvation Army emergency canteen team turned up a couple of days after the flood and set up on the forecourt of the car wreck yard. They came from Worcester, Norfolk and Castleford. I let the Salvation Army and fire and rescue workers use my bathroom, as there were no toilet facilities until a private company delivered some mobile toilets. Unfortunately they weren't emptied quickly enough and were not usable for very long. Doncaster Council sent out the refuse trucks to collect rubbish but access was difficult from the Doncaster side. They could only get in from Adwick with the large trucks as those could cope with the water.

I set a tent up in the garden for the men in the community who stayed there at night to keep an eye on the empty properties and watch for vandalism. The same group during the day found a boat and ferried people from their homes to safety - they had life-jackets to make sure people were safe. Food hampers were distributed by the local church, which were very gladly accepted as the local shop was flooded and closed down. There was no easy access out of the village to go shopping unless you had a 4x4 and many of the people who had one brought shopping for others in the village. The local children went to the rest centres with their parents. When the electricity went off, all the freezers obviously shut down so food was lost. Each resident affected received £100 from the flood relief fund and those more badly affected could apply for more money.

Fire and Rescue teams came from all over the country - the furthest was possibly Hampshire. They brought the pumps along to pump away the water, once they had made the Ulley dam safe. The RNLi even came from Poole in Dorset, with 2 inflatable in-shore life boats, which were used to ferry people from their homes to safety.

Prince Charles visited a couple of weeks after the floods and was talking to residents. He spoke to my son, Marc, and asked about going in a boat - his bodyguards advised against but Prince Charles was adamant and got in the boat, he was very concerned about the local school and wanted to see it. Marc was very impressed with Prince Charles and his real concern for the people of Toll Bar. Gordon Brown and other politicians visited later.

Some residents will be back to normal by Christmas, but many will be in caravans for the Christmas period and well into 2008.

Allen Birkby



Community Spirit

The emotions I still go through are things you wouldn't expect to feel in your lifetime; one minute you can be ok and the next in tears.

Roxanne



My parents are both almost 80. They called me in the night, to get them out of the house. When I arrived, there was a trickle of water coming down Tilts Lane but in a matter of minutes it was a stream. Five minutes later, it was up to the front door and in another ten it had risen a foot outside the door - it was only held back by sandbags. The only thing we could move upstairs was the TV, it happened so quickly. We had no time to get any clothes or anything else - my mum still had her slippers on. Someone knocked on the door to tell us we had five minutes to get out, and we went. We left everything except what we were wearing and left all our valuables in the house. I took my parents to the Earl of Doncaster Hotel, as advised by the insurance company.

The following morning at 6.30am, I went over Toll Bar hill and on the Toll Bar side was stopped by the police. All I could see was water everywhere. The police told me I would probably not be able to reach my mother's house. Once I reached Manor Estate, I was shocked by what I saw - water, several feet high. I couldn't get around the back of the Club to reach my mother's house and had to give up. I went home to Bentley and told my wife the unbelievable news, then went to see my parents. My mother was very upset and both were very shocked - my dad asked about his tomatoes but they were underwater.

That night they had no money and so me and my brother decided to get to the house to find their valuables and money. We went down in the evening and spoke to the police for permission to try to get into the property. They said it would be very difficult but it was up to us. The water got up to our knees, then our waist and then our shoulders near the garage - that was the deepest point - then it began to get lower. The water was freezing.

It was a shock to see the inside of the house. The smell was enough to make you sick and one of the most upsetting sights was mum's slippers, floating by with many other items. Only the heavy furniture wasn't floating. We went upstairs and found all the valu-

ables and money, collected it all together and had another look at the devastation. My brother decided to take some photos of the scene. We then set off for home back through the water passing an ITV camera crew - we were on television the next day.

Since then the most difficult thing has been sorting out the house and the insurance. The insurance company, Barclays, was brilliant. Accommodation for my parents was sorted out straight away. They stayed at the Earl of Doncaster for ten weeks until they were ready to get back to a real home. They stayed at my youngest brother's for another ten weeks then moved recently to the home of my eldest brother. They will spend Christmas there alone as he is away for three months, which will be nice for them after being with other people for so long.

My dad was in hospital with pneumonia just before the floods and the stress of the flood made him feel much worse - he worried at one point that he wouldn't get back into his own home. This is his third flood - he lived through those in the 1930s and 1940s before now. This year, he's recorded his memories for BBC Radio Sheffield and Sky TV.

The house has now dried out and work will begin 10th December, which is my dad's birthday. My mum says there is light at the end of the tunnel and they both look forward to getting back into the home they have lived in for over 20 years. It should be completed by the end of March 2008. They worry greatly that it will happen again and hope it isn't in their lifetime if it does. It has put a great deal of pressure on the whole family and on me because I've had to sort everything out. My wife and I foster children so have lots of pressure every day as well as the flood situation - my mum says we've been a rock for them throughout the whole experience, which made me feel proud and appreciated. It is great to be able to help out your parents and I'd do it again tomorrow if I had to - I just hope I don't have to!

Tony Herring

It was different in 1947. We didn't have all the help that they had in the recent floods. We had to do it ourselves. You've never seen anything like it - there were dead animals floating past the house, hens and dogs. We were cleaning up the mess for weeks. We did not get caravans, we had to go to relatives. I was six in the 1931 floods, but don't remember those like I do the one in 1947. It left mud up the walls in the houses and it smelled for weeks.

We got evacuated to Adwick in the recent floods. We were one of the last ones. When we got there, the help we got was marvellous. ASDA sent food and clothing and bedding. I was given a pair of knickers and when I opened the pack they were thongs! I said 'I'm 82!'

Lots of people helped us. The local chip-shop and bakery sent us fish and chips and sandwiches. People were really kind.

Gwen

As a Toll Bar resident I can never thank all the people who helped myself and my family, nor would I attempt to. All I can do is say a massive thank you on behalf of everyone at Toll Bar and an especially huge thank you to the ones who stayed behind. You do not need naming - you know who you are and Toll Bar will never forget.

Karl



Caravan Number 3

I live with my two twin grandsons and my daughter. As soon as the water got deep, I sent the children to their other nan's and afterwards, they spent some time with their mum, who also looked after my dog. The children were out on the street in their wellies, having a great time watching the water come down. I had to be encouraged to leave my house but when I was told, 'Wrap your legs around me and hold on tight,' that's exactly what I did!

I stayed at the home of a family member and then went to Adwick Leisure Centre and stayed for four weeks, sleeping on blow-up beds. There were over 100 people staying there and we had a great time, laughing together and making friends. We turned the squash nets into a massive wardrobe and hung our clothes on it. We could use all the facilities except the swimming pool and food was brought in by Metro Catering, which is owned by the Council. During this time my dog got out of my daughter's house and was knocked over and died. This added to the stress and upset at the time.

I've had many visitors in my caravan, including Mayor Winter, many of the DIY SOS team and Ed Miliband. I met Prince Charles in Adwick Leisure Centre and he was great. Me and my friend, Jane, helped out the DIY SOS team when they did up the Toll Bar Club and Nick Knowles interviewed us in my caravan. He asked how they felt about the floods and how the renovation of the club might begin to make things a bit better. We will be appearing on TV on 27 December! A lot of the community came in to the club to help out, as well as the territorial army, who were drafted in. We had a great party with the DIY SOS team once it was finished and didn't get in until 2.30am. A great night was had by all, though nobody is giving away any secrets!

Angela Mahoney

They put me in the boat with Kerry Overton, Jamie Lee Overton and her best friend. Demi came too. When we got to the lifeboat Cheryl Harris was crying and holding her rabbit, Murphy. I waited with Cheryl and Demi because I knew we would be safe. We met up with mum on the bus.

Little Heather Thomas



My flood story

I had been shopping in Doncaster on the Monday when the rain started. As I arrived home, the water had started to rise in the streets so I took my shoes and socks off to get back to my house. I managed to get into the house through the back door. Once in I blocked off around the back door to keep the water out. I thought that was it.

In the early hours of Tuesday we were out in the street trying to get sandbags - dragging them through the street to place at the door.

On the Wednesday morning we had two friends' children staying with us. We didn't move any furniture at this point. As the water was getting close and others moved out, we were left feeling like we were the only people in a ghost town. We took some things upstairs and when we realised the water was coming into the house, we all went upstairs. Dad told us to go and get as many clothes as possible.

The fire brigade came with a boat. They told us to get into it, but I can't swim and was very frightened. I kept refusing to get in. A man picked me up off the stairs and put me over his shoulder! He carried me out, up the main street and up to high ground. We waited for a bus and no-one was talking, as we were all in shock. I was only in my pyjamas and coat. We went to stay with some friends down in Bentley for a few days, but felt isolated - we didn't know what was happening. A kind lady gave me some shoes and socks from her shop in Bentley and we moved up to the Adwick Leisure Centre. Everyone in the Leisure Centre felt lost and walked around in a daze.

When we were finally allowed back home it was terrible what with the mess and the smell. We'd lost precious photos, my school certificates, our tv and clothes. I spent days crying over everything I'd lost.

We were asked if we wanted to be re-housed, or put in a caravan. We chose to go to a house. It was terrible - dirty, smelly and a mess.

So then we told them we didn't want to stay and went back home. We had a right old fight to get a caravan but we finally got one and are back in the community where we belong.

Anonymous



I feel that to some degree this disaster has helped to pull the community together. Unfortunately, it has also split the community into different factions. For instance: were you insured or not? Did you move away or stay? Do you live in a caravan? Do you live in a private house or a council house? And so on.

There are a great deal of worries about how people will pay their bills. No-one is living rent- or bill-free and all are affected. Some people are essentially in two homes, paying for electricity in caravans but also paying to heat homes drying out. Where's the answer? Where's the support?

Anonymous



All in the Same Boat

The side of our house is on the front of the main road, straight across from the rugby ground, which was worst hit. Some of the neighbours who lived on the front were flooded worse and I said, 'The flood won't get us, let's help everybody else.' I got a black eye helping with the stereo at Mrs Kerr's. My son Craig helped those who were worst off take their stuff upstairs. We only got an inch on the Monday and when the rain stopped on the Tuesday, all the water had gone. We thought, 'That's it now.' We took the carpets up and hung the underlay out on the line to dry. It was still there ten days later!

When we got home, it was already coming in through the fireplace, so we moved the telly upstairs. We couldn't move the furniture, so we put it on the dining table and on the chairs. There were no sandbags. We had to pay £1.60 for them at the local DIY store. We could only afford four sandbags. One hour later they were £2 each when Cheryl Harris went for ten! Not as if they did any good. At 4pm, sirens went off and we were told, 'If you want to evacuate, you can.'

One and a half, maybe two foot of water was in the house at this time. I went to my mum's - she's 80 and was flooded as well, so we made her come to my house. She was scared. She'd lived through the 1931 and 1947 floods. This was her third flood! There was no transport offered, none at all. I told mum to bring medication, fags, money and a few clothes. At this stage, no support was offered from the public services.

My brother, David, my mother and the cat, Princess Alexander - also known as Sally - came to our house. I cooked a lamb dinner with the water up half a foot. I cleaned the cooker, saying, 'They're not going to call me mucky!' Water was coming through the fireplace, the walls, the floors and finally, through the door as I was washing the pots. We thought we wouldn't be able to cook later, so I made lots of rice and pasta and we had to fill flasks of hot water



to take upstairs. We kept going out to see what was happening. My daughter, Heather, was recovering from major bowel surgery so couldn't risk infection but she was still exposed to flood water for two days. We couldn't move mum from upstairs, she was too heavy. We played cards and the cat kept running around all the bedrooms. Everyone went to sleep apart from me.

At 1am Cheryl texted to say lifeboats were coming. We looked out of the window and saw my neighbour Alison riding on a boat with her 16 year old daughter. I shouted out of the window, 'When are you coming for us?' We were told to walk to the top of the street and the boat would pick us up. I said, 'I've got an 80 year old mum and a poorly daughter!' They said they'd be back in ten minutes.

One hour later the lifeboat came but there wasn't enough room for all of us. Mam said, 'Make sure the kids are safe', so they went in first. We all had to wait at the bus stop. It was nearly another half-hour before the boat came for me, my mum and Craig. Firemen lifted Mam into the boat and took the skin off her legs, so when we got to the bottom of the bridge where the bus was, the ambulance men had to see to Mam.

In the end, Mam refused to go to the hospital and stayed, so they bandaged up her legs and put her on the bus. When we got on the bus, her slippers were covered in blood that had leaked out through her bandages. I got off the bus and threw them over the bridge - I hope no one finds them because they'll think some bugger's been murdered! I got back on with Mam and the kids - my brother wouldn't come as he wanted to stay with the cat.

We got to Adwick Leisure Centre at 3.30am and Demi had an exam at school the next day so she had to go. The volunteers at Adwick Leisure Centre took me to Asda and bought us everything we needed - school clothes, everything. Demi took the exam after no sleep and got a 'C'.

People started coming the next day. We just stuck together. No bickering, we wouldn't allow it. We had to stick together. We had a laugh and a joke. The staff at Adwick were brilliant. They took us out to see the dogs and really looked after us.

We slept for four weeks on blow-up air beds until the caravans came. We were one of the first there - it ended up being 153 people. They made the badminton courts into a bedroom and we all slept in there. Mam went to stay in Kirk Sandall.

Heather Thomas





Michelle: We were camping on holiday in Brighton at the time of the flood. Stuart's a fireman and some of the lads had gone past the house and sent us a picture they'd taken of it. Then we saw the pictures on the news as well. When people were telling us we just thought there'd be an inch of water and there'd be nothing we could do. Then we saw how deep it was.

We got back about 5am in the morning. They had patrols out and boats. On the wrecker's forecourt, people were helping to make sandwiches and tea for coppers. We took over from my dad. There were just four or five people up - just the lads that were on patrol. Michelle's brother was going around in waders up to his chest. He'd paid workers from his security firm to patrol the village. We got home on Thursday and found out there were people looting - you could hear people wading through and rumour had it they were just sneaking through from other villages.

I first saw the house at 6am or 7am. It was about two foot deep in water, up to four or five foot at the back. Alan, Stuart's dad, just lives up the road. He'd gone in with my brother-in-law to move pictures and all the precious stuff, like photographs. But when we got there we couldn't save anything more. The car on the drive was a write-off. A 4x4 with the water up and over the seats!

We stayed on the forecourt that night, in the camper. Then we drove to Bentley and parked up where we could see our house. That way we could look after that end of the village on our own. We did that for the next few nights. And I've got to know more people than I knew before the flood. There's a right good community spirit now. I didn't know many names but now everybody knows each other.

The police weren't issued with wellies - they wouldn't come with us. There were no supplies - no portacabin - the police had nothing. We got to know them really well, fed them and gave them hot drinks. Sean, the gaffer, were right funny. A couple of months

afterwards, we went to Ladies' Day at Doncaster Races and this copper we knew, Stuart, were on duty there - we asked him if he had his wellies on! The crowds were massive and we got him to escort us to the front of the bar all day.

After a while, we went to live with my family at Hatfield, and we're still there now. We'd usually go to their's for Christmas anyway. There's no furniture in our house - you can't put a tree up or anything. After Stuart's holiday ended and he went back to the firestation, he came to his own village to help pump the water out, but we had to wait our turn!

My son Jake, who's nine, has been transferred to Hatfield School 'til we move back. We only moved here three years ago from there, so he's back where he went to nursery now and he gets spoilt by his nan. But he plays rugby here so he sees his friends here too.

Once the water left, the smell hit you as soon as you went in. We did a video diary for Look North, filming every so often. They said they wished they could capture the smell. It stunk. Sky news filmed inside our house, and Nick Knowles wanted to do our house too. All the media coverage really helped with the insurance claim - at first they just said clean the cooker, though it was a foot deep in sewage water and there were dead fish everywhere! Ponds had filled up and the fish had just floated off.

The drains run next to our house and every time it rains now we expect to be flooded again. They need fixing but they've not got round to it, because the agencies are still arguing over whose they are. The water went through our house first, then all around, and then came back - we're a natural basin. We've been on to the EA to clear the ditches but they've said they don't own them and it's the Council's responsibility. The weather's not going to wait for them to make their minds up. I say, 'If you's two won't do it, we will,' but they won't allow that either.

We just want defences and all that sorting. We're not bothered about anything from charity organisations, we just want it to not happen again. You can't worry about the weather. We still use hairdryers and drive cars around. I personally think the water was directed to this village.

Stuart: It is global warming. You can't say it's not. But the water changed route because there aren't as many drainage ditches as there were.

Michelle: We've had a kitchen delivered and you worry putting new stuff in - if it'll happen again. Before the flood, we'd had the house up for sale for three weeks and it were all freshly painted to make it nice for views. I wouldn't want the kitchen to be flooded again. It's just a lifeline - I mean it's awful to wash pots in a bucket, or in bath upstairs. It's just things you take for granted like putting the kettle on in your own house, or the three of us sitting together on our own sofa watching tv.

The family's been split up while Stuart's working on the house. If he's on nights, Jake doesn't see him at all. There can be days on end - we're totally split up, which is worse than losing all your possessions.

Michelle and Stuart Birkby

Big Black Clouds Around Us

I went away on 22nd June, taking my three children and grandson to Skegness. The rains came down from out of nowhere and on the Sunday when we woke up, Skegness was flooded. Ducks were floating about all over the caravan park. The children came home on the train on the Tuesday, to help their dad with the flood. I came home on the Wednesday, the day of my son's 16th birthday. I received a phone call at 1.30pm from my husband to say he thought we would flood. From the train on the way home we could see all the water around the region. We arrived in Doncaster at 7.30pm and when we got home, we were devastated at what we found.

The water hit our house at 11.30pm. My daughter's baby scan pictures were ruined, which was very upsetting. We had been staying in a small caravan in the back garden until three weeks ago, when we moved back in to the house. It was really great to have a bath in my own home, as we had no access to a bath in the caravan, just showers. The house looks great now and we are getting over the shock. Ed Miliband visited on 7 December and had a look around the house.

We went on holiday to Salou in October and the streets were covered in water - they'd had very bad weather in Spain and my family arrived in the middle of it. It really couldn't get much worse! I'm now known as 'the lady with a big black cloud over her head!'

Jane Mannifield



Sharon: When the water came down Villa Gardens, at 11am in the morning, I said to my husband, 'Take my television upstairs.' He thought I was panicking, exaggerating. I finally convinced him. He took my tumble dryer up to the bathroom and I made him get my fridge and freezer up on the work top - when it finally came in the water was one inch below the work top, so they were saved.

By 9.30pm that evening the water was in the house. Me and my daughter went to my sisters. At 10.30pm she gave us tea, then we had a bath and went to bed - by 1.30am the following morning she was flooded too. My daughter was terrified and my dad couldn't settle because he was worried about the rest of the family - how they were and whether they'd been evacuated or not. At 4.00am, a boat came for us. It took us to the edge of the village, then we went to my sisters in Bentley. After that, we were with my brother and his family for four weeks.

They came with sandbags five days after we'd been flooded. The water were already waist high. And we had to fight to get a caravan. We got nothing. No, that's not true - I got an air-bed, a single air-bed! We came back to Toll Bar every day, even though we couldn't get back into our house. We started off in chest waders, then down to ordinary waders, then wellies, and finally we could wear shoes. It was like winning the lottery when you could get back into your property.

We felt like we were being penalised because we stayed with family. We couldn't work - I worked in a shop that was flooded out - so we had no money coming in. My brother and his wife are only on low incomes and they were keeping us, so we asked the council for some help towards food bills, but we got no help at all.

This community was absolutely brilliant before the flood and don't get me wrong, during the flood everyone pulled together. It was afterwards that the Mayor caused a massive rift between council

tenants and private residents - the biggest rift ever! He made promises that were not kept. Everyone should have been treated the same.

Eventually, we got a caravan. We were six weeks out there on a car-park before we got onto the caravan park. When we arrived, we got a bill for £330 - six weeks rent arrears for while we were on the car-park. How can they charge you for being on a carpark? For our house - that's a full house, with an upstairs - we paid £62 per week. We pay £55 for a caravan!

Some of our family in private houses aren't much better off, even though the insurance paid out. My nephew and sister have both got touring caravans at the house, off the insurance. Think of the size of a tourer! And they've no running water. They're going away for Christmas - they can't stand the thought of being here in that.

You can't imagine the mess when the water left - all the kitchen pans in the cupboards, full of sludge. I've got a big stew-pan that was my mam's. I was heart-broken when I saw it. It seemed to sum it all up, everything that had happened. A friend took it and scoured it and put it through the dishwasher about four times so we managed to salvage it.

Mick: Some daft things happened as well. One of the neighbours couldn't catch her cat so we tried to get it for her - in the end we had to use a keep-net, one of them that fishermen use! I lost loads of weight as well - about a stone and a half - wading up and down in that water pulling boats.

Sharon: I've lived all my life in Toll Bar but if it ever happens again I'll leave and I'll not come back. And I'll never go in a caravan either, I want a house. The Environment Agency wanted us to join 'Flood Watch' you know - they held a public meeting down here. Give us your telephone number they said, and we'll ring you if we get word of any 'severe flood warning.'



'What time did you issue the warning to Toll Bar last time?' I said.

'About 4.00 pm.'

'Well, I knew five hours earlier at 11.00 am - I'll tell you what, you give me your number and I'll ring you!'

I can't prove it but everybody here will say the same. We were flooded to save the centre of Doncaster. Think about it - the new College, Frenchgate centre. Just imagine if it had hit all that lot!

But loads of local people were fantastic. Donny Motor Spares put the drinks machine for their workers on free so we could all go and get a drink. They were excellent. They lent us fork-lift trucks as well, so we could get through the floods.

Mick: One old lady baked us a fresh-made cream cake every single day - it was a godsend. I'd like to thank her personally 'cos I ate most! Askern Boating Lake too, they sent us a couple of boats to help out and the Firemen were brilliant too - when they eventually got here.

And the Salvation Army were brilliant. I'll tell you now, I always used to laugh at them if I saw them out and about, you know, happy clappy, onward Christian Soldiers and all that - but not any more, I've changed my views. My hand is straight in my pocket now. They were fantastic. Tea and sandwiches all night when they were needed. I bet they didn't even get a thank you from the Mayor.

One bloke, whose stuff we carried out in a boat, wanted to give us £20. He kept insisting that we take it, but we kept saying, 'No, we don't want it.' In the end we took it off him and donated it to the Salvation Army.

Sharon: Just imagine going back into your house after it's been

weeks underwater, with everything wet, damp, smelly and all the food in the fridge gone rotten.

Now the house has been declared dry. It's all stripped down to the shell - it's among the first batch of ten that they're going to tackle, but it'll be well into the new year before they start.

Mick: We got no warning from nobody, nothing at all - and for the first three days we got no help at all.

It started coming off fields behind Hall Villa Lane. We were just stood there watching it, 'til we could see it were getting a bit serious. Next thing, it were coming down the fields at back of the wreckers, towards the old folks' bungalows. There were no-one at all to help - locals had to evacuate 'em to the community centre. We thought they'd be safe there, but even that flooded later on.

At home, when we saw what was happening, it were a matter of shifting stuff, moving as much as you could upstairs. I got the washer on to the table and the three piece up on chairs, but that were just ruined. We were luckier than many - most of the stuff I managed to get upstairs but carpets, table and chairs, three piece and the cooker were all ruined. Not everybody could shift stuff - if you were old or out at work you'd had it.

Some people lost everything. If there'd have been a bit of help we could have saved a lot more, but there were nothing. In our front room, there was fruit floating around, papers and stuff.

Then it was a matter of waiting. No-one came to warn us at all. Bobbies came at 7pm that night with the tannoy telling everyone to evacuate - this was when village were already flooded. No boats, no coaches, nothing.

When we saw the water coming, I dug a channel in the garden in the



hope it might flow away! They laugh at me now but you just don't know what to do! It were already four foot deep across the road.

We just weren't expecting it, how it came so fast. We had no sand-bags, nothing! Come afternoon we were four foot under water - it was up to the window sills. During the last floods in 1947, it was up to the bedrooms of the old houses over by the rugby field.

The cross bar of the goal posts is fifteen feet. Water was about a foot below that - fourteen feet! It were unreal, you could only go there in a boat.

First three days we didn't get a thing and we had to guard the estate ourselves. Half a dozen of the local lads, against looters and burglars. We were here every night keeping an eye on things. We had to, there were absolutely no police, no council, nothing.

After three days the Mayor came. One of the local lads, Michael Murtagh - he were nose to nose with him - made him admit on national television that he'd failed Toll Bar village. If it weren't for lads like Michael we wouldn't have had half of the bit of stuff we've had.

First few days we were tret like rats - that's what really hurts people. I'm not saying the Council hasn't been good since, but it were people like Michael that pulled everyone together. There's some in the community got awards - what for? Michael hasn't got one!

Some of the other neighbours were godsend, making tea non-stop and giving folk shelter. Cath Howard opened her house to everyone to get a wash or get showered.

We've got five lots of family affected. My father-in-law's living with us in our caravan. His bungalow was all destroyed - he lost everything and he'd lost his wife shortly before so loads of her stuff went too.

Anniversary presents, family papers, all sorts. He's insured, but that's not the point - it's a lifetime's memories that's just disappeared. If she'd have been here, she'd have had her say about all what's gone off.

There's 200 odd houses, so there should've been 200 odd caravans but there were only 50. It's the Mayor's fault - he's divided the community. Everybody should have been tret equally but they haven't been. We only see him if there's a camera here - he'll be telling them everything he's done.

People not insured got no help whatsoever. Because we went to my wife's sister in Bentley we got nothing. They concentrated on people in the centres. Of course they needed help but we did too.

My father-in-law were with us but it was weeks before anyone called to see if he were ok. It were chaos - you had to see it to believe it. There were one 80-odd year old found, sat at bottom of the stairs with water round his feet and hypothermia. Another couple of hours and he'd have been dead. It's a miracle no-one died.

Mind you, we had a few laughs. I took one of the neighbours in a boat back to their house. I went inside and I heard this, 'Mick! Mick!'. I looked out and the boat were floating off down the river. I'd not tied it up properly!

Sharon and Mick Sanderson

