

An Evacuee's Story: Nisqually Delta Woman Hopes for the Best After Fleeing Floodwaters

Marliese Hall Was One of 700 to 1,000 People Impacted by Evacuation Advisory Following Tacoma Power's Release of Water From LaGrande Dam

BY PAUL DUNN
Nisqually Valley News



Paul Dunn / Nisqually Valley News

It's 6 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 6. All is quiet on Riverside Drive in the Nisqually Valley — except, that is, for the comforting patter of rain the wintertime Delta knows so well.

But listen closely ... there's another sound — and it's not so tranquil. As darkness shrouds the neighborhood, a distinct rhythmic lapping beats against a nearby home's fence.

Inside the home — a former garage converted into a one-bedroom apartment — Marliese Hall has vowed she'll stay put. No evacuation for her ...

But there's a catch: Unusually persistent downpours over the past month and Tacoma Power's release of water from the hydroelectric LaGrande Dam on the Nisqually River has threatened to turn her yard into a swimming pool that could eventually inundate her apartment. Water, in

fact, is cascading down her street from both directions, effectively closing off the whole area. By Thursday afternoon, Hall had been one of an estimated 700 to 1,000 residents who were advised to evacuate, but she was stubborn and reluctant.

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"I wanted to stay in my home," Hall, 74, said, "but my daughter had other ideas."

By the time said daughter Lisa McDaniels arrived at her mom's apartment Thursday evening from her home in Tenino, she was in no mood to hear excuses.

"My daughter said, 'You're not staying here, and we're not

going to be worrying about having to get you out of here when it's too late.'"

So taking those wise words to heart, Hall left her two cats atop the refrigerator where they had meandered — along with their food — jumped in her car and hightailed it out of the apartment.

"I had to drive through water that was coming down from both ends of the street to get out of here," she said. "And I knew I wouldn't be able to get back in once I left because the whole area would be closed off."

And that was that. She spent Thursday night in a Dupont ho-

tel for \$140, hoping against hope she'd be able to return home by the next night or find another place less expensive. Staying with her daughter was out of the question; Hall's extended family who live with her — and her two dogs — wouldn't have fit into her daughter's home, so it was a hotel or nothing Thursday night.

And that's how she ended up at the Thurston County Emergency Management/Red Cross shelter Friday afternoon — which had hosted only two people Thursday night but was braced for more if the rain continued, a Red Cross volunteer said.

Hall wouldn't be one of them. Her dogs, she discovered, wouldn't be able to accompany her unless they were restrained — and she figured they'd howl the night away locked in kennels. So she found a cheaper hotel Friday night — \$75 this time — and hoped it would be her last.

Hall, who was born in Mannheim, Germany, and immigrated to the United States in 1962, said she hadn't experienced flooding of this magnitude in the seven years she's lived on Riverside Drive. She didn't seem bowed by it all, though.

Makes sense when you realize she has battled breast and bladder cancers in the past year — and an unrelated stomach infection three years ago that she said had put on life support. So ... a little water probably wasn't going to faze a brave woman who'd been through so much — and had had the energy before she retired to own both a security company and a restaurant.

"I hope for the best that my home will stay dry, and I'll clean up what needs to be cleaned up when I get back to my house," Hall said matter of factly. "It doesn't do any good to frown. You just take it as it goes and do what you can."

Thurston County Emergency Management's evacuation advisory remained in effect Friday night as Tacoma Power reduced the flow on Friday from the LaGrande Dam from 15,000 to 11,000 cubic feet of water per second. Floodwater began to recede at about 9 p.m. Friday night, though the evacuation advisory lasted until Sunday, Feb. 9. The Red Cross shelter at the Gwinwood Camp and Conference Center in Lacey was set to remain open until residents were able to return to their homes.

'Be Prepared': Nisqually River Flooding Just the Latest Stop for Red Cross Volunteer

Onalaska Resident Malcolm Hanrahan says There's No Such Thing as 'Little Disasters'

BY PAUL DUNN
Nisqually Valley News

There's no such thing as a "little" disaster.

Just ask Onalaska resident Malcolm Hanrahan, who's seen just about everything in his 20 years as a Red Cross volunteer: hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, mudslides — you name it, and it's been on his radar.

But it's the less sensational catastrophes that most tug at his heartstrings — the individual instances of unimaginable suffering that often fail to garner the world's attention as, say, a Hurricane Katrina might.

"The little disasters are huge disasters for the people affected by them," the 68-year-old said. "Home fires are probably the worst for me. People are left with nothing, and they have no resources but the Red Cross. It's especially devastating when people die or lose their animals."

This time around, Hanrahan — a semi-retired forest steward and former commercial fisherman — was overseeing six or so other Red Cross volunteers last week as shelter supervisor at the Grinwood Camp and Conference Center in



Lacey. Sustained downpours over the past month and discharge of water from LaGrande Dam on the Nisqually River flooded the Nisqually Delta, forcing some residents to flee as their streets and homes filled with water.

Though Hanrahan and his Red Cross compatriots had little company during their Grinwood deployment — most flood victims apparently able to find other accommodations besides those at the camp — they shared welcoming smiles and empathetic concern with those who visited the shelter seeking information.

"It's (the camp) not their first choice as a shelter unless there's

something major going on," Hanrahan said. "Usually they are able to stay with family."

For those who did wish to stay at the shelter, Hanrahan and his staff followed strict guidelines regarding anonymity, requiring newspaper reporters, for instance, to go outside the shelter as flood victims were interviewed.

And perhaps in the forefront of Hanrahan's mind as he spoke with flood victims, and recalled some of his other Red Cross deployments — among them Hurricane Sandy in 2012, the Oso, Washington landslide in 2014, and Lewis County flooding in November 2006 — were these words he stresses more than any others: "Be prepared — in big, red capital let-

ters. You never know what's going to happen."

And that's just what he was thinking on Thursday, Feb. 6, as the Nisqually Delta flooded, more rain appeared to be on the way, and Tacoma Power considered discharging more water from the LaGrande Dam.

"This is just a lull," he said, looking outside as a light drizzle fell. "The high water is still out there, a lot of water is in the soil, and landslides are possible. This type of flooding seems to happen about every 10 years."

Years, as in age, also occupied Hanrahan's thoughts as he sat at his post inside the shelter Thursday. He and his Red Cross

staff didn't seem to be getting any younger, he lamented.

"Right now, we're kind of the 'Gray Cross,'" he laughed, looking around at his co-workers. "We need younger people to volunteer."

In the meantime, though, Hanrahan's still enjoying every minute of his Red Cross experience — and the gratitude that naturally accompanies it.

"It's really satisfying giving back to the community, and the people we help appreciate it," he said. "Everyone helps each other — especially in the big disasters — and it's kind of nice."

It's not uncommon, moreover, for people who haven't benefited directly from the Red Cross to offer congratulations, too.

"We'll be deployed somewhere and happen to be in a restaurant for a meal, and people will notice we're from the Red Cross and pay for our meals. 'Thank you,' they'll say. 'This one's on us.'"

Congratulations, in a sense, also come from Hanrahan's shelter co-workers.

Liz Schroeder, 74, was working Thursday as a disaster services associate under Hanrahan's supervision. The Winlock resident had spent 31 years volunteering for the Red Cross and enjoyed working alongside her slightly younger administrator.

"Malcolm's a friendly fellow, and he knows what he's supposed to be doing," she said.

There's no such thing, after all, as a "little" competence when you're helping people in need.

By Sunday, Feb. 9, floodwaters in the Nisqually Valley had receded enough to allow some evacuated residents to return home, and most roads in the area had reopened by Saturday.