

ARCHIVAL NOTE: *The attached letter, which is a most vivid description of the last Florida hurricane, with its accompanying flood, was written by Mark S. Gibson of 430 N.E. 9th Avenue, Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Mr. Gibson was a Lieut. Colonel in the last war and now owns and operates the "Florida Welding & Mfg. Co." The letter was written to his wife's parents, Dr. and Mrs. J. B. Hanson of 21001 Edgecliff Drive, Euclid, Ohio.*

October 12, 1947

Evenin Folks:

One thing about living in Florida at the present moment is that one seldom lacks excitement. Just a few weeks ago we had a little blow which you all probably heard someone talking about or maybe even your newspapers carried a little one-inch column on it. Wasn't serious, just about flattened the town of Lauderdale, Pompano, Deerfield, and West Palm Beach; blew my trees away, flooded Doctor's house, and caused me to lose one night's sleep due to having to work like mad to board up.

Well, that all passed and things were getting back to normal at a rapid clip when all of a sudden that man on the radio began to talk about another disturbance brewing in the Caribbean which no doubt would develop into something of a hurricane and might even come our direction. No one paid too much attention to it, however, after sweating out the 150 miles per hour wind of the first one, it seemed that nothing could upset anyone again, so as I just said, not too much attention was paid to the hurricane warning, other than keep in close touch with the radio to see if the thing would turn our way or go the opposite direction.

All was going fine, it was going right on up the west coast pretty much out to sea in the Gulf when all of a sudden about five o'clock yesterday afternoon (Sat.), the barometer here dropped almost out of sight and the nasty man on the

radio said, "Sorry folks button up, she's a commin across the everglades right now hittin about a hundred and will be upon us by midnight."

That did it. All the usual hustle and bustle connected with boarding up and fastening down loose stuff, preparing food, getting lamps and water and other necessities lined up was occupying everyone's time. All day it had been raining. Preceding one of these semi-tropical storms the weather becomes heavily overcast and grey, with heavy rains the usual pattern of things. So you can almost sense a bad storm by the looks of the weather.

Well, to go back a little, I had been keeping close account of the radio reports as I had a scaffold hanging from a big hotel in Hollywood which had to come down if there was any danger of a storm. So about noon I had to take one of my crew with me to Hollywood to tear the thing down. I had never been wetter. Had I been submerged in the ocean I wouldn't have been more damp. All afternoon the rain increased in tempo. Lots of lightning and a little wind, mostly gusts though. Dark and raining.

Johnny and Arlene had invited our family out to their house in Davie for dinner last night. I got home about five or a little after and we dressed and took off. All the neighbors and friends who knew our plans fussed and complained about our going to Davie on such a night. But John and Arlene had no way of knowing we wouldn't come, and why should I stop because of a little rain. T'was never known that any of the Hanson tribe ever passed up a dinner date (and my wife is still a true Hanson). They might be an hour or two late but they would get there even if they had to go through hell and high water, and that just about describes our trip to John Jr.'s Orange Grove, which as you know is 12 miles west of Ft. Lauderdale.

So with no further thought about it we just loaded up and away we went. We anticipated driving through some water on the Davie Road as I knew the canal was out over the pasture lands in some spots and of course over some of the roads a few inches. But with a good meal in sight I wasn't about to be discouraged or stopped from trying anyway. It takes six feet of water to reach my nose, Spike can float, Marge swims very well indeed, Connie and Midge could put their feet in my pockets and ride. No worries at all, even if worse became even worse and worse.

Well, like I just said we anticipated some water and we found it sooner than we wanted to. The road to Davie from Dixie Highway on the north side of the canal was already closed. Well, that just meant that we would have to go up the south side instead, which we did. But dangd if we didn't have nearly a mile of water to drive thru on that side, not deep but possibly six inches in some places. Being so level and flat it became difficult to see the road sometimes. It was raining pretty hard but no harder than an afternoon hard rain in Missouri or Ohio or Nebraska in early Junes. Just a good hard downpour. Of course this was in no way alarming and we were all getting more hungry at every turn of the wheel.

Johnny had begun to worry about our coming so he was out to meet us in his car, being the only cars on the road he naturally recognized us as we passed in a huge spray of water. So he turned around and we all went to his house in fine style. He had laid a nice two by twelve plank from his driveway to his door step for us to walk on in order to keep our shoes from getting wet in the grass. We did have a most fine meal. We all enjoyed it in leisurely fashion, there was still three hours until the wind was to come up, there was nothing to worry about whatever.

During dinner we were now and then aware of the rain coming down at a greatly accelerated tempo. Gusts of wind now and then blew a little rain under the heavy curtains on Johnny's porch. To take care of that, we just put a big pitcher under one place where it was dripping in a little.

Soon after dinner we were very much aware of even heavier downpour. It seemed to be coming down in solid form. Seemed as though it would drown man or beast just to stick your head out the door.

In a few minutes the pitcher was full much to our amazement. I opened the door for John to empty it and we noticed water standing about an inch up on my tire, the light from the porch thru the open door shone squarely on my back wheel, so we noticed it plainly. The pitcher was replaced and some small talk was made concerning the storm and such a rain. At the same moment many little streams of water were plainly noticed coming under the curtains. So pans and pots were promptly brought in to use to catch the flood. Even Johnny's gum boots were employed very successfully for this task.

In a surprisingly short interval, all pans were running over and Johnny's boots were also full. John's boots ain't exactly pint size as you know. So once again the door was opened for the emptying process. This time we were somewhat amazed to notice the water had risen to the rim of my back wheel. That made about six inches of water in John's front yard. Still the rain poured even harder if such is possible. At any rate there was not one drop less per minute, that we were sure of.

John has a little dog which he keeps in his garage. Knowing the water was six inches deep in the front yard, we figured maybe it would be wise to go see about the poor little dog, so John and I stripped off to our shorts and with flash light headed for the garage. In entering the garage we found the poor little hound swimming or rather trying to, he was about worn out trying to find a high spot. John grabbed him and put him in his car. Then we hoisted his light plant up on blocks right quick and decided, among the howl of the storm, to get his car out on the road. I went to move mine out of the way and found water clear up to my running board in just that short time.

The rain was cold as we all got out and nearly had us stiff in just those few minutes. Mine ran alright but John's was drowned out. So I tried to hook on to him and pull him out but couldn't do it. Then I figured it best to get the kids loaded up and take off without further delay. So I hoisted the kids thru the water and poor mamma half undressed, and waded across to the car. It was impossible to see to back out so John had to walk along side of me and shout directions, either right or left and so on.

We got to the road alright and headed for home. We knew we couldn't make it the way we came, so we went west to the end of John's road where we crossed the bridge there and headed north along the New River Canal cut off road or dyke, to highway 84. That is a pretty good stretch itself and going in the opposite direction from home. Winds were a bit more gusty by then and the rains had not diminished in the slightest.

These tropical rains when they are fierce are hard for me to describe. It seemed like a steady shower from a powerful hose was hitting us on all sides at once, water poured in and leaked at every joint in the car. That never happened before. The lights seemed to be shining into a blank wall most of the time. Every second or two a sheet of water blew past which momentarily opened your line of vision to a few feet in front of us on the road. Water was inches deep on crowned roads, even running off in rivers it seemed. As we crossed the canal bridge, we noted that the approach was washed out just leaving enough room for one car width. It was hoped by Marjorie and I both that we would not have to retrack our steps, as the approach might be all gone in a few minutes.

We could only drive between fifteen and twenty at the fastest, once in a while I could give a little burst of speed thru a clear spot, but that proved a bit unsafe as tree limbs were covering the road pretty fast. Marjorie glued her nose to the windshield to help me see, the kids were safe in the back huddled down, smilingly enjoying it. At any rate, Marjorie and I tried to make light of the situation in order not to get

them scared but I better confess right here that your correspondent was more than a little bit uneasy. I had never been over that particular road before and wasn't sure but what we might run into water at any moment. The roads were alive with snakes. Snakes every place, big and little, rattlers and moccasins strewn in among the hundreds and hundreds of water snakes. I had visions of a flat tire, changing it in that kind of a spot without benefit of light of any kind would have been a most unpleasant task indeed. The car might have drowned out, imagine walking down that road in bare feet to call a wreck truck. I decided if that happened, we would just bed down in it for the night.

Fortunately no such catastrophe befell us. After what seemed a whole night's driving, we reached the edge of Lauderdale only to really run into something pretty terrific. At the City Limits we ran into water clear up to our running board. Cars were standing along the road in lines, all drowned out. We kept going slowly and arrived clear to the Andrews Bridge, driving thru water all the way. Cars stalled every place. People trying to push them out of the way, some trying to push others and quite a mess in general greeted us. We crossed the Andrews Ave. Bridge and thought our troubles were over only to find that from there to our house was the most difficult trip we had ever undertaken.

From the bridge crest we could see the town was entirely flooded, the river was out of its banks and that meant a high tide along with the torrential rains which could go no place. We couldn't come thru town at all, but had to turn west a block, water running thru garages and store windows like a river, charging out of door-ways like a falls. We rounded a corner going slowly as possible, feeling our way thru stalled cars and passed a creamery. Milk cans were floating toward the river at a fast clip, so fast that it was wise to dodge them in order to avoid one crashing into your car and smashing a light or denting a fender. Boxes, cans, crates, lumber and all manner of things were floating right down the middle of the streets. We could get a glimpse of people in stores frantically trying to move furniture and other merchandise up on shelves and counters. Every down town store was under water. It was a problem to try to figure out where to go, it was like driving thru a lake, where there was an intersection, the natural depression in the lake. It all looked so different, it was difficult to recognize where you were.

We knew it would be tough trying to find a street leading us to the Northeast section and home, as most of the streets between Andrews and Federal highway are low anyway. We found a cop and asked him and he said, "Hell, you can't even get there afoot now." So we figured we best keep movin in order to avoid stalling the engine and started to go around a block which I thought was high enough. But instead of it being high, we dropped down very suddenly in a hole which brought water right up in the front and got my bare feet wet, that's how deep the water was. Coconuts floating along bumped into my wooden doors and sounded like a horse kickin a barn door.

That deep hole really took my breath, I thought, brother this is it, I now got to carry three sleepy kids eight blocks thru this rain and flood to home. But you know that blamed Ford didn't even miss a lick, just kept chuggin along, our exhaust pipe was under water and sounded exactly like a motor boat. Water was up to my lights at one time and that's too deep for any car to navigate without pontoons.

To make a long story short, we were in a terrific sweat about our own house. So we kept plugging, trying to find water shallow enough to get thru. Every street was under, there was no dry land any place. Just an ocean of water. People were moving furniture up in every house we passed. Finally we went north clear to Tenth Street, crossed the railroad and doubled back on a street which we hoped would be alright and eventually made it, after one hour's time from the time we hit the Andrews Bridge. That was the worst part of the trip. We held our breath as we drove up our street, as it was entirely under water, my truck was stickin out alright but we didn't know about the house, but were we relieved to see our green grass showing thru the water in the beam of our headlights.

My back yard had about five or six inches of water, everybody else around here was under water, but no water in anyone's houses on our block. On all sides though they had water. Our good neighbors, Childers, had inches in their house. When we opened the door of the stage coach, water poured out like from a tank. It was soaked in and out. We put

the kids to bed and by then it was blowing good I mean. I had me a big stiff hot toddy and wanted to go to the sack, as for me, I had had enough of floods and hurricanes. But Marge had never seen a hurricane so we sat up and watched until two o'clock. The lights went off when the winds hit fifty miles an hour which was midnight, so we lit our lanterns and were in good shape. We sat in the car and listened to the weather bureau in Miami broadcast the progress of the storm until two, and that seemed to be the height of the storm. It was doing a pretty good job but not quite like the last one. We went next door to have a good night drink with Hornors and then hit the sack during the screeching and howling storm. I was glad to be home, tired of hurricanes, tired of floods, and just tired.

We slept until nine this morning when the Childers walked in our bed room and awakened us with the news that they had inches of water in their house, they worked most of the night trying to keep ahead of it with moving their furniture up, but couldn't keep up. Finally gave up and went to bed. It looks so silly to see a refrigerator sitting in a kitchen on two chairs.

As soon as I had breakfast I fired up my truck and went back to Davie to see how John Jr. was. The scene between here and Johnny leaves me helpless to describe. I can't do it. Nothing but water as far as you can see. All houses under. Some all the way, others just to the windows. Cattle, hogs, chickens, deer, all standing on high spots in dykes. All cattle out in pastures looking very dejected, cattle men trying to round them up in motor boats, believe it or not. All orange groves under water, tons and literally hundreds of tons of fruit floating under citrus trees which are dying or are already dead. It looks like Davie citrus is wiped out completely and entirely. All trees are dying. The loss is so terrific that it puts a lump in your throat to drive by and see such destruction in miles and miles of groves. I hope the loss is not as bad as the agriculture experts predict but after seeing it I guess they are right, and that Davie is done for.

After wandering thru the canal and dyke roads and thru water, I finally got to Johnny's house. What a mess. Water is less than two feet from his living room floor. As you know, his floor is five feet or more from the ground. He had taken barrels and set them in his driveway from his front door to the road and bridged them over with planks. The tops of the barrels are only a few inches out of the water, so that may give you some idea of how deep the water is in his yard now.

I guess the poor guy worked all night trying to keep things above water, such as his light plant, when I left it was only about eight inches off the garage floor but when I waded back there today, he had it propped up almost to the ceiling. It is awfully heavy and he had some time lifting it and putting two by fours and other props under it to get it above the water.

On the way back I stopped on the road to investigate some of the big dead snakes a goodly number of which line the roads and that's when I found out there were a good number of rattlers and moccasins. Last night I just figured they were all water snakes with maybe the possibility of a rattler or a moccasin, not realizing so many were bad ones.

I am worried about my shop at this point. I am afraid of what I may find there in the morning. If my equipment stood under water last night that means that I'm in sad shape. I've been buying that stuff gradually for two years and if it's all ruined-oh brother. No use to go see it today, if it got wet last night then that's the end, nothin to do about it today, so I'll find out in the morning.

Well, I guess that's enough for now. Will save my breath until the next one. No doubt the old weather man is cookin up another hurricane out there in the Caribbean.

Me