

Yes, A Flood Can Be Educational

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Why Johnny can't read — or write for that matter, is a question that has pushed many parents to clamor for the back to basics approach to education.

Ironically, the winter flood of 1982 supplied an opportunity to find out just what Johnny, and some of his friends, can do.

The Santa Cruz Flood of 1982: A Student Analysis, was produced through the combined efforts of students from two Santa Cruz County junior high schools and their advisers.

Harry Card of the Central California Writing Project worked with Robert Hagopian of Scotts Valley Junior High and Lee Davis of Del Mar Middle School in coordinating the effort.

Card describes the book as a special education project for high-achiever students. As a preliminary step, he went to the two schools and discussed the storm with them.

Card, along with Davis and Hagopian, talked with students about how to conduct interviews. The students, in groups of five, were also helped by working over practice questions.

During the course of the writing project, the students, according to Card, conducted interviews with police and fire departments, insurance agencies, and others strongly affected by the flood.

Card says he considers the experience not only an educational aid but also valuable in developing citizenship.

"People don't feel they can have any effect on what happens in their community," says Card. "One way to change this is to involve students in assignments that help them participate."

Students who did participate have a variety of stories to tell. Some recount nervousness during the interview, while others talk about the struggle to write the story from their interview material.

Michelle Liles of Del Mar was close to her interview appointment time when she discovered something.

"I accidentally forgot my tape recorder," recalls Liles. It worked out for the best, she says now, for taking notes proved to be more effective.

Liles, who interviewed the owner of Tortilla Flats Restaurant in Soquel, said she was very nervous because she felt "small" and unimportant, but she adds, "I don't think I will be afraid the next time I interview someone."

Laura Tomley, also a Del Mar student, approached her interview with Greg Mahoric with a similar case of the jitters.

"I'm a pretty shy person," Tomley explains.

Mahoric, a laborer on a bridge crew, worked to clear the roads on Highway 17. Tomley says his attitude, among other things, helped to ease the tension.

"He was very helpful about it," recalls Tomley, adding that since she had been a babysitter for Mahoric it helped to cut the ice.

Tomley wrote down the questions she thought would be most useful and backed up her notes with a tape recorder. Writing the story, however, presented some special problems.

She says she listened to the tape, wrote the material down word for word and then edited. The experience was both challenging and rewarding for Tomley.

"It was difficult to do on your own. You have to have the time and ambition. I like the

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feeling of doing something on my own and being able to finish it."

Although she admits to some nervousness at the beginning of her interview, Niki Henneuse, a Scotts Valley student, says the tension drained off after the first 15 minutes.

The hardest part, according to Henneuse, was in getting the interview. She originally had planned to go to Brookdale Lodge but, "they said they didn't have the time to talk."

Of the interview process itself Henneuse reasons, "The person you are talking to is probably as nervous as you are."

She interviewed Annette Marcum, who worked at St. Andrews Episcopal Church, donating her time as a volunteer. Henneuse has the lead story in the book.

As she remembers, the interview began at an accelerated pace.

"She was very nervous in the beginning because she spoke very fast," says Henneuse of Marcum.

What about writing the story? Did that present any special problems?

"I always have a problem writing the beginning of a story," says Henneuse. "I didn't know how to get started and I tried about 10 different leads. I wrote as fast as I could."

Mark Hager, a Scotts Valley student, came up with a novel approach to conducting his interview. While he asked the questions, Pat Crook, another Scotts Valley student, took notes. Why this technique?

"When I am writing I can't really hear what the other person is saying," explains Hager.

Hager and Crook interviewed Stephanie Hauk, director of the Santa Cruz County-Wide Citizens Disaster Relief Committee.

Explains Hager, "There were a lot of things that happened and they were right at the center."

He says his biggest problem was transportation. Getting to the courthouse was a problem. The eventual solution was to use the bus.

Although he had done some writing for his school paper, Hager says working on the flood project did force him to grow.

"I learned how to take more information and there were a lot more areas to cover," says Hager.

One of the primary goals of the flood project book, according to Card, was to bridge the gap between classroom and community.

"Many assignments in school are so divorced from reality that I find they are a problem," says Card. "It is important to teach people how to think."

Copies of The Santa Cruz Flood of 1982: A Student Analysis are available for purchase at a price of \$4 per copy at Del Mar School, 1959 Merrill St., Santa Cruz. Telephone number at the school is 475-6565.