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In Flooded Bootheel: Don't Forget About Us

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In Flooded Bootheel: Don't Forget About Us

*By Allen Palmeri,
Special to the ShowMe Times*

BREWER LAKE, Mo.-Brandy Crisel stares into the slowly receding waters of the New Madrid Floodway, trying to see her childhood home. It might be one-quarter of a mile away.

For two solid weeks, the house built by her parents, Roy and Barbara Smith, has been engulfed by the Mississippi River floodwaters. The federal government's decision to blow a hole in the nearby Birds Point levee May 2 has assaulted dozens of houses and led Crisel and her parents, members of Wyatt Baptist Church in Wyatt, Mo., to trust even more in Jesus.

"I've said over and over again that God sees what we can't see," said Crisel, 36, who teaches the women's Sunday School class at the church. "We live in a bubble. We only see what's around us, but He sees the big picture.

"For whatever reason, I know it's going to be OK. I know that God's going to provide and that this was done for a reason. We may not understand it, but He knows. With Him, that's all we need. We've cried, of course, at the loss, but I know that He's in control of it."

She remembers her father working 60 hours a week and coming home on the weekends to

tear down old houses for salvage material that the family would use to build their home.

"It started out with just one big concrete room, and we built it to a two-story house," Crisel said. "I watched my dad sweat, and I watched my dad ... one hammer and one man. Me and Mom have said that all our lives, but we couldn't hire anybody to come in and do it.

"We would hoist plywood up with a rope and nail it to the side of the house on the upstairs. There's just a lot of heart and a lot of sweat poured into this house that he built for my mom, so it is hard."

She is glad that her husband Ray and children have helped her take her parents into their Charleston, Mo., home. She said the house near Birds Point will be rebuilt, even if her parents need to start all over again with four concrete walls.

"They go paycheck to paycheck," she said. "They don't have anything to fall back on, so it's hard losing their home.

"Growing up, Dad would build us clubhouses in the trees. I remember Dad building the stairs, and it took him a while. Mom grew up really poor, and she just knew that rich people had big houses, two-story homes. It wasn't fancy. It wasn't top-notch. But it was her two-story house."

Many stories of resilience, pride, and faith can be found in Mississippi County as 2011 is forever linked with the monumental floods of 1927 and 1937, but it will not knock the residents off their land. The spillway is filled with steely resolve as farmers, pastors and workers wait for the water to go down.

"Don't forget about us," Dean Wallace, pastor of Wyatt Baptist Church, said.

Allen Palmeri is associate editor of The Pathway, newsjournal of the Missouri Baptist Convention.

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