

No reconciling fury of river with Missouri of my youth

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Abstract: The scenes of sandbags piled along streets in downtown, people scrambling to protect their homes, and parks that have turned into swimming pools don't match with my glossy memories.

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Full text: Growing up in Pierre, the ever-present Missouri River was my playground. Much of my childhood is marked by memories that are tied to the river.

I remember Sunday afternoon picnics on our family's boat, the Crestliner we call Queen Mary, and the taste of salty and crisp fried chicken mixed with the smell of suntan lotion as the sun shone high in the sky.

I remember tubing with friends near the face of the Oahe Dam, climbing onto an inner tube and grasping the mesh handles so tightly my knuckles hurt.

When I fell off, I tumbled through the water, and then felt the reassuring bob of my head in my life jacket as I reached the surface.

I remember anchoring our boat at a sandbar near the Stilling Basin, climbing out and watching my late grandfather Raymond roll up his Wranglers to walk on the sand.

I remember the numerous times I have watched Fourth of July fireworks displays at the Fort Pierre rodeo grounds from our boat, along with hundreds of other onlookers in their boats.

I would gaze up at the sky and listen to the boom of the fireworks echo in the woods of LaFramboise Island behind us.

Then, just before the finale, my dad would race back to Downs Marina to beat the other boats. I'd look back at the brightly lit sky slowly fading in the distance.

It's difficult to correlate those carefree memories with the threat of devastation that flooding is causing in my hometown.

My childhood memories bubble to the surface in stark contrast to what's happening now in Pierre and other communities along the Missouri River.

In some ways, I feel like the river I love is gone. The scenes of sandbags piled along streets in downtown, people scrambling to protect their homes, and parks that have turned into swimming pools don't match with my glossy memories.

How can something so wonderful, something that many people have built their lives and houses around, turn a community upside down?

Today, the river seems like Janus showing us his other face.

The images and stories from close friends in Pierre are heartbreaking: some homes already destroyed and chaos in a place that I never imagined would deal with a flood.

And while I have been watching the flooding from afar, I'm proud to see the communities of Pierre and Fort Pierre come together to help neighbors and strangers.

Of course, I'm not surprised. That's just what South Dakotans do. And I'm thankful for everyone who is helping during the flooding.

I understand the seriousness of what's happening, and that some people will struggle to recover fractured lives and homes. Some people already are angry and hurt and tired. It's a lot for anyone to grasp.

I wonder how long it will take my hometown to return to normal. I desperately want the community - and our river - to be how it was before the flood.

But I know that some things won't ever be the same.

Still, the resilience of the community will go on, and the Missouri River will continue to mark our lives, both for good and bad.

I pray for the people in my hometown, and I'm confident that we'll move forward.

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About the writer

BryAnn Becker has been a reporter with the Life section of the Argus Leader since June 2008. She is a 2004 graduate of T.F. Riggs High School in Pierre.

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