

## ***A Flood of Memories***

*Emmett Frank*

I thought it was the pounding rain on the roof that woke me last night, until I heard three soft electronic chirps. A thin band of light penetrated the shades of my bedroom window, followed by the roar of tires fighting against the flooded road outside. After the car had passed, I strained my ears to locate the origins of the chirping noise. Believing it to be a smoke detector, I reluctantly rose from the warm comfort of my covers to investigate. I kept the lights off as I roamed through the kitchen and living room. Listening intently for the three consecutive trills, I explored every nook of the single-story house to no avail. Giving up on my search, I returned to bed and let the rain soothe me back to sleep.

Silence greeted me the next morning. The rain had petered off before dawn and golden sunbeams were now beating against my blinds. I began my morning routine by starting the kettle boiling and surveying my backyard through the kitchen window. I was amazed to see the yard's transformation. The mountains of snow had been reduced to low plateaus. Small rivers carved canyons through the icy glaciers, revealing green patches of grass. I felt encouraged by this small demonstration of spring. Two robins pecked at the dormant ground as they danced around a large branch that had fallen in the storm. Convincing myself that it was necessary to remove that branch from the yard, I left the house.

I took a moment to breathe in the clean and mild air. The robins abandoned their morning hunt to watch as I wrestled the large branch over the small stone wall at the edge of my yard. Heading back towards the house, I noticed a small stream had formed. The trickle passed through the snow piles before branching into miniature tributaries and deltas that fed into a large lake on my patio– and the abutting basement window.

I sprinted back inside the house and threw open the basement door, descending the stairs two steps at a time until I splashed into the aquifer at the bottom. With no drain underneath the concrete floor, the water had slowly filled the basement overnight and now covered the tops of my boots. Cardboard boxes, leftover from the move-in two years ago, sagged against the water surrounding them. The smell of soggy cardboard permeated the space. Unpacking the boxes was a chore I had successfully deferred until now. Sitting on top of a stool pedestal next to the boxes was the culprit of the nighttime chirping. A light flashed steadily on the front of the dehumidifier to remind me to empty its full bucket. The soft chirping was the dehumidifier's pitiful war cry in its fight against the onslaught of moisture.

I donned a headlamp to help me see in the dimly lit basement. The narrow beam of light exposed the moisture and musk emanating from the liquid floor. Trying not to inhale too deeply, I hastily grabbed the nearest box and hoisted it on top of a rickety workbench. The bench swayed as I tore at the saturated cardboard. The soft walls of the box caved inward to reveal a pile of old clothing I had intended to donate. I unfolded a well-worn black t-shirt near the top that had escaped the water. A white graphic of a bird in mid-flight adorned the front. A bodiless hand controlled the bird's flight with marionette strings attached to its wings. The cotton felt as soft as silk as my hands traced between familiar holes that should have earned the shirt a place in the trash can. But I set the shirt aside and pulled more boxes out of the deluge.

Ruined boxes of junk too trivial to unpack before the flood became treasure chests to me. I waded through boxes and memories. I uncovered an iPod from high school with the earbuds still wrapped tightly around its enclosure. I was delighted to find it still charged and thrust the earbuds into my ears to block out the unabating sound of dripping water. The time capsule to my teenage musical tastes became the soundtrack to my rescue mission.

I plucked a three-dimensional apple puzzle from one of the last boxes. Each of the unique, red-painted pieces interlocked together around a solid core. I shook my head as I remembered how my grandmother had always placed it precariously close to the edge of her coffee table. Feigning surprise when one of her grandchildren knocked it to the floor, she would admonish the offender and ask them to put the forty-piece puzzle back together. I placed the apple carefully on top of the nearby washing machine and backed away.

With the boxes salvaged, I attacked the source of the flood by redirecting the river away from the house. As I shoveled a trench around the perimeter of the patio, I was reminded of a game I played as a child after school. My friends and I would dig our booted heels into the mud around a large pool and channel the water into new puddles. The goal was to build the largest puddle. The professed victor would have the privilege of jumping into their puddle with both feet to splash the losers– and any other unfortunate bystanders. The losers would jump into their own puddles anyway, so it was hard to determine the actual winner. I couldn't help but laugh at the idea of jumping into the puddle that was now in my basement.

After diverting the source of the flood, I emptied the water out of the basement. First dipping the rim of a small bucket below the surface to let the water fill the container and then migrating the contents into a larger five-gallon bucket. Heaving the bucket upstairs and outside, I would pour out the intruding water. Every trip to dump the water outside was an opportunity to enjoy the early-spring day. Despite the nuisance of the flood, I felt richer for having recovered the memories trapped in the boxes. As I finished mopping up the last of the water, I realized that I had finally finished unpacking. The basement was clear. No more boxes crowded the floors, which now had a gentle sheen of moisture. I reinserted the empty bucket of the dehumidifier and received a chirp in return as it went back to work and I returned upstairs.