

## Randolph Native In Wilkes-Barre

# 'We've Got To Flag

## A Helicopter'

By WILLIAM DONOVAN

WILKES-BARRE, Pa. — "We saw a straight line of cars parked on a used car lot. All of a sudden the water came and drove them in every direction, turned them upside down, smashed them into each other, smashed them in every direction, into plate glass windows and storefronts."

"A tractor trailer cab was just pushed over and pushed under a bridge."

This scene took place Friday night in front of Joseph D. Berry, a student at Wilkes College and a native of Randolph Township, N.J., as he stood stranded on a dike in Kingston, across the Susquehanna River from Wilkes-Barre.

Berry and two companions had to be airlifted to safety via helicopter shortly afterward, when, in his words, "There was only about three or four feet of ground on each side of me — I was marooned."

Berry had become stranded after he, along with thousands of others, responded to a call for volunteers to help build up the dike that borders the Susquehanna as it passes through Wilkes-Barre and Kingston. With flood crests some 41 feet above normal river level, the two municipalities were among the hardest hit by the weekend's floods.

Berry and his wife, the former Mary Christie, also of Randolph Township, and their daughter, Nina, 14 months, live about a mile from the Susquehanna on Market Street in Kingston. Early Friday morning they were awakened by their landlady, yelling from their living room: "I've been trying to get you. The river's rising. Everybody's being evacuated."

After bringing Mary and Nina to an evacuation center, Berry headed back for the river. He carried shovels and pillowcases. "All my pillowcases are on the dike," he said.

On the way he saw others responding in a different way to the flood emergency.

"At a storefront, there were three men backing a U-Haul truck up to the front of the store. They looked as if they were going to empty the store of all its merchandise. One of them gave me a little laugh and said, 'Hey, get going, they need you, buddy.'"

At the dike, the volunteers worked at a feverish rate. "The whole time, I don't think I saw one argument. There weren't any bosses. They were just people."

They quit working in midafternoon. But later that day, he and two college friends returned to see if they were needed again. No one was working on the dike, so they roamed around to view the damage. The water came rushing around the dike downstream on the Kingston side.

"We could see the water rushing into Kirby Park (a park just behind the dike) at tremendous speed. It was like a riptide . . . like a continu-

ous ocean wave. In a matter of 20 minutes, the entire borough of Kingston was flooded."

They spotted a youth whom they had seen wading off nearly an hour before. He was up to his neck in water.

"Have you been walking all this time?" Berry asked him.

"You can't walk where I've been," the youth said. "I had \$2,000 worth of drums in my living room. I was trying to get them up to the third floor."

"We passed by a recently built garden apartment complex with water up to the roofs," Berry said.

"We saw houses on fire, and there were electrical transformers blowing off all around us."

"Finally, I said, 'Hey, listen, we've got to flag a helicopter.'"

The helicopter brought them and two others fished from a floating log to the Wilkes-Barre-Scranton airport, where some 7,000 refugees

were being housed. They spent the night in private homes, and returned to the airport Saturday and helped load relief supplies onto helicopters.

Later that day, Berry hitched a helicopter ride across the river, and was able to spend the night with his family in the small town of Dallas.



Clean water is trucked in

... stricken areas in New York, Pennsylvania get relief