

The Adventures of Dixie Miller in 1947

Part 1 – The Flood



Ottumwa during the 1947 flood

Dixie was 8 years old in 1947. There were a lot of big events in 1947. Two of these events are the focus of this week and next week's stories. This week we will cover the flood of 1947. Next week we will cover the John Morrell strike of 1947.

We start our story with the river already high. Downtown Ottumwa was partially flooded. Then the levy broke.

Dixie was living at 502 S. Fellows at the time. This is located down behind Sutherland Lumber. Dixie was on her way to the store. The flood water was slightly over her feet. Within one block the water had risen to over her knees. Needless to say she was panicked. She headed immediately home. On the way home she noticed a young baby playing in a backyard. The baby was 2-3 years old. Dixie stopped to pick up the baby and put it inside the baby's house. She then proceeded on home. Nobody realized the levy had broken yet.

When she got home she found out the levy had breached by what is now Wingers Plumbing and Heating. At home were Dixie's mom Hattie and her brothers and sisters Lad, Lois and Patty. They moved upstairs and planned on staying there the duration of the flood. The Navy showed up in a boat. They said "We gotta get you people out of here". Dixie's mom said they were going to stay. The Navy then picked up everyone and placed them in the boat. The Navy boat then proceeded to take them and drop them off at the railroad tracks (by where Wanna's restaurant was) where the flood water had stopped.

Hattie and the kids headed to grandmas. This was Hattie's mom who was also named Hattie. Grandma Hattie was mean and didn't like any of the kids. She would pinch Dixie and the others and say stuff like "you kids better be good", even when they were being good. Grandma Hattie lived by Anne G. Wilson School. Every day Dixie would walk down to the flooded house and check it out and play in the flood water. John Morrell's was closed and flooded during the flood as well.

Eventually the flood receded. The water had gone all the way up to the fourth step of the stairs upstairs. All the floors, appliances and furniture had to be replaced. The Red Cross came in and saved the day. It was the Red Cross that replaced the floors and worked with Hattie to buy all new furniture and appliances. The replacements the Red Cross bought were really nice. It was the nicest stuff that mom remembers having as a kid. Mom thinks it only took the Red Cross about two weeks to have all the floors, appliances and furniture replaced. Everyone also had to go to the Morrell's plant to get shots. She assumes these were tetanus shots. Dixie remembers standing in dirty old water with no shoes on to get these shots.

It was this flood that caused the Army Corp of Engineers to straighten out the river. This resulted in the creation of all the Ottumwa lagoons which were part of the Des Moines River before these changes.

Stayed tuned next week for part 2 – The John Morrell strike which includes information on strike tactics and the soup kitchens.