

Reading for Information

MAGAZINE ARTICLE Though technology can help us predict natural disasters and often reduce the extent of their destructiveness, nature still has a mind of its own.

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Nine-year-old Amber Colvin Rides Out a Killer Flood in Ohio

About 9:30 on the night of June 14, 1990, a flash flood hit the small town of Shadyside, Ohio, leaving death and destruction in its wake. Before the rain started, Dennis and Karen Colvin had driven to a nearby town to do errands and left their daughter, 9-year-old Amber, playing at home with her friend, 12-year-old Kerri Polivka. Suddenly the flood was in full force, and Amber and Kerri were on their own, fighting for their lives.

The Colvins' basement was inundated, and soon the girls were ankle-deep in water in the living room. At Kerri's suggestion, they got into the bathtub for protection, but within minutes the surging

waters broke down the bathroom door and swept the tub from the floor. "It took me so far up I bumped my head on the ceiling," Amber recalls. . . .

When the two girls pressed their hands against the ceiling, it gave way, and they were flung out into the full fury of raging Wegee Creek. . . . As the tub splintered into pieces, Kerri was hit on the head—and was lost. "I tried to save her," says Amber. . . . "I saw her hair and tried to grab it. I pulled it up, then I had to let go." Amber then lunged out, grabbed a floating log—and clung to it all the way down the Wegee and into the Ohio River, 1½ miles away.

"I went under twice," she says, "once when the house went and the second time when I tried to save Kerri. . . . I was

thinking there was no hope for me to live." Once she survived the millrace ride to the calmer Ohio, though, Amber realized she had a chance. She floated for seven miles more, at times dozing briefly as she gripped the log for eight hours, until it drifted ashore around 6:30 a.m. near Route 7. Amber managed to flag down Randy and Mitzi Ramsey of Bellaire. . . . "Amber was cold—but real alert and talkative," says Mitzi. . . .

When Dennis and Karen had tried to drive home the night before, they had been stopped at a police roadblock. The Colvins then walked down a hill untouched by the flood that stood behind their rented two-bedroom home, only to find the house had vanished, torn away by Wegee's waters. "Denny and I just held each other," says Karen. "Right there, I thought, there's no way. I thought she was dead," says

Dennis. "Somebody was looking out for her, that's for sure."



Amber Colvin and her parents