



Literary Speaking

Come into the Water: A Survivor's Story

By Merlyn Janet

Reviewed by Kathy Jacobs, Library Director, Yankton Community Library

remember the Rapid City Flood of June 9, 1972 and the havoc it played when a peaceful creek that I loved turned into a raging current, causing massive devastation of both property and lives.

Merlyn Janet Wagner was one of the victim's of the flood, losing her home, both of her parents, and a brother to the raging waters. She managed to escape by clinging to the roof of a house downstream and was rescued the following morning. Thus began her "new life," a life without a home, parents or brother.

Merlyn had an older brother who was in the military and was a serving a second tour in Vietnam. He came home to help bury their parents and brother and promptly left to finish his tour of duty, leaving Merlyn alone to deal with her grief. They never reconnected and, in a few short years, he was also dead of a sudden, massive heart attack.

Merlyn spent the next thirty plus years trying to find purpose to her life and answers as to why she was spared. While life went on around her and she seemed to be engaged, her heart was empty and she found it impossible to express her feelings

or the pain she was enduring. As she so aptly puts it, "My heart had gone down with my family when they all left together. My body had survived, but my most vital organ, though still beating enough to keep me alive, had shriveled and closed."

This was not a time when Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome was recognized. In fact, the advice of the day was to move on, get on with life. In the course of trying to do just that, Merlyn spent time in the Black Hills but soon began a journey that took her around the United States and then the world. All the while visiting beautiful places and meeting wonderful people, she still lived with a great void that no one and no place could fill. This book is her personal journey to find meaning in her life.

While many of us have not faced the violence of a sudden catastrophe such as the Rapid City Flood, most of us have faced questions about the meaning and purpose of our lives. In that way, we can relate to this book and the pain Merlyn faces. It may help us become more aware of our true feelings and thoughts. The easy reading style of this book holds the attention of the reader and keeps us moving forward, turning pages to yet more heartache.

It seems especially appropriate to review this book as this year is the fortieth anniversary of the flood. Other titles that the library owns that are devoted solely to the flood are *The Rapid City Flood... June 9, 1972: A Unique Historic Picture Magazine* and *The Black Hills Flood of June 9, 1972: A Historical Document*. These books can be found in the library's regular collection.

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