

William Merritt Clarke - February 14, 1937

Excerpts from a letter to daughter Jean Clarke who was away at college:

"I know you all were very much disturbed there with so much trouble and disaster so near you. I was uneasy and anxious about you, and got all the information I could from the papers and traveling men as to what section of the State you were in. It was an awfully serious thing and I know you all were bothered. A great number of people kept asking about you, if we had heard, some called up from Spray and Leaksville, to know if we had heard from you. A man who travels in Kentucky, said London was an in-land place, and some distance from where the trouble was, and so I felt easy about it because I told you if any thing happened to you to wire me at once, collect."

I was wondering what the "trouble and disaster" was, so I looked up the history of Kentucky in 1937. The "Great Flood of 1937" had just hit the Ohio River Valley in January of that year. No wonder Daddy Clarke was concerned for his little girl.

Residents of the Ohio Valley during the flood of 1937 though, would not be as fortunate. In January of 1937, rains began to fall throughout the Ohio River Valley, eventually triggering what is known today as the "Great Flood of 1937". Overall, total precipitation for January was four times its normal amount in the areas surrounding the river. In fact, there were only eight days in January when the Louisville station recorded no rain. Though the rains began to fall early in the month, the most significant rainfall occurred between the 13th and 24th (4). These heavy rains coupled with an already swollen river caused a rapid rise in the river's level. The morning of the 24th was perhaps the darkest moment in the history of the flood as the entire Ohio River was above flood stage (4). The river in Louisville rose 6.3 feet between the 21st and 22nd. With the river reaching nearly 30 feet above flood stage, Louisville had the greatest height of the flood. The previous record set in 1884 had been broken by 11 feet. The river did not crest at Louisville until the 27th. It measured 57.1 feet on Louisville's upper gage while farther down the river, in Paducah, the river crested at 60.6 feet on February 2nd. Damages from what could easily be considered one of the most powerful floods of the century were extensive. Louisville was the hardest hit city along the Ohio River, where light and water services failed (4). Almost 70 percent of the city was under water, and 175,000 people were forced to leave their homes. The entire city of Paducah was forced to evacuate as well. The Weather Bureau reported that total flood damage for the entire state of Kentucky was 250 million dollars, which was an incredible sum in 1937. Another flood of this magnitude would not be seen in the Ohio River Valley until 60 years later.

-Source: The Kentucky Climate Center at Western Kentucky University
(<http://kyclim.wku.edu/factSheets/ohioRiver.htm>)

Another excerpt from a letter to daughter Jean Clarke who was away at college:

"My Dear Baby Girl;-

I have thought of you every day and tried to get the chance to write you and say how much I really did appreciate that good birthday letter, -the best one I ever received. I never tried to pay much attention to my birthdays and never could remember any one else' birthday. But for several years when the 16" of March come around I would get a letter from little Carola, Vashti and Lois. And now each one that you have been away from home another one has been added to the list, and I just can't tell you how much I really do appreciate these letters. When I see them in the mail I have to take them and go away to myself to read, for tears somehow just will come in my eyes and I am ashamed to let people see them. I thank the Dear Good Lord for you, and praise His Dear Name that He has permitted one such as I to live to have a dear child like you. I do not mean to say that you are mine only, for I gave you to the Lord Jesus when you were born, I told Him that you were His, and I wanted Him to use you for His glory all the days of your life."

William Merritt Clarke - March 31, 1940