

# Mississippi's Great Flood

Emma Spinks

Honorable Mention—Essay Competition

The rain pelted the tin roof of the trailer, and I felt the dark waters rising up from the canal.

I could feel it creeping up the banks, swallowing up the small vines and grasses. I smelled its cold, muddy water slowly overtaking the forest. My heart thudded into the mattress. I knew that if it got higher, it would take our trailer. I would be fast asleep in my bed as our raggedy trailer sank to the bottom with the alligators and bass.

It was a completely irrational belief to think that the canal could possibly reach our trailer and overtake it. Even more crazy was thinking that I could drown without knowing.

But I believed that the river could take me, mercilessly.

---

The Yazoo River destroyed the Mississippi Delta every summer, without fail.

She drove the deer out of their home and forced the raccoons to shelter in the trees. The river's children swam in and out of the towering oaks and cypresses, slipping gracefully through the thorns. Farmers lost their crops to her mighty waters before she destroyed their homes. When she receded, we had nothing left.

One summer, she was particularly cruel. The entire forest was covered in murky water, full of unknown dangers. One of the older men at the camp reflected on her, sipping his beer at ten in the morning.

"The river's got its wet and dry periods." He finished the can. "We're in a wet period. It'll probably flood three times this year."

My dad and his friend didn't let the river stop them from exploring the deep swamp. He

packed up a tin can of a boat with a cooler full of food and drinks. He made sure I wore sunscreen and bug spray, and he took my book away from me.

"You're not bringing a book along."

"Where are we going?" I asked.

He shrugged, "Wherever we can."

We loaded into the ranger and pulled the boat to a ramp off the levee. He and his friend talked to one another as I sat in the back of the ranger. Mosquitos hounded me even though my arms dripped from the bug spray. A soft breeze blew my sweat soaked hair from my face. I felt thoroughly miserable and alone.

We set the boat in the water and pushed our way into the swamp. I sat at the front of the boat as my dad and his friend swapped the duty of manning the boat motor. Despite the unhappiness I felt on the drive over, I couldn't help but find the flooded swamp held its own kind of beauty.

The sun shone through bright, summer green leaves, casting shadows onto the water. I let my fingertips grace the surface of the water as we made our way down covered trails. I watched the water bugs hopping. A great blue heron soared up from the water, through the tall trees.

We ended up coming out of the forest into Greasy

Lake. My dad cranked the motor to full throttle, and I felt the freedom that only the forest could give me. I closed my eyes, letting its wild spirit fill my lungs. I inhaled peace and set free of my fear. The river wouldn't take me away while I slept soundly in my bed. She was not cruel or merciless. The river was Lady Justice, blind to everything but the truth.

The tiny, rickety boat was my own metal ark, and I was Noah. I didn't have two of every animal, but I



Autumn

Qiancheng Sun

Photography

held on to the tranquility, freedom, and wildness of the swamp.

This was our Great Flood.

Did Noah find it beautiful when he stood on the deck of his magnificent ark? I imagined it would be impossible for him not to find something heavenly in the churning of the waters. The ripples and waves were mesmerizing, alluding to some hidden beauty underneath that we could never know.

Soon after that trip, the river took too much. We couldn't go back for a while, and we waited patiently for our olive leaf.

When the river receded that fall, the stench of dying plants overwhelmed the forest. Decaying fish lay on the ground or stuck in fences. Stinking mud clung to my boots when I walked down the ruined trails. My dad cleared away the dried carcass of a doe, her child still inside of her.

The swamp I'd loved so much, understood so well that summer, was gone. I looked at the river, and I cursed her for her cold-heartedness. She was not just, only cruel. She stole from the land, and she did not

care. I cursed her quietly for flowing slowly without a care, lapping softly at the roughened banks. Her churning whispered a soft apology, but she was not sorry for the flood.

Only for the pain it caused.

- - -

We drove back down as soon as we could that next summer. The river had not raised her waters again, perhaps deciding that she delivered enough damage last year.

I rode through the somewhat dry swamp, smelling the growth of new, healthy plants. The frogs and bugs hummed a loud song to the melody of the swaying tree branches. I watched the smaller birds glide through the air, picturesque against a bright blue sky full of fluffy clouds. I stopped in the road, admiring the swamp, when I heard the rustle of branches. I looked ahead to see a young, strong buck racing through the woods. That same wild spirit, that same peace filled me again. The river did not destroy everything.

It simply breathed new life into the swamp. △



## Transfixed

Logan Harden

Acrylic