

Snoddy's, a family owned general store that has been a beloved focal point of the Boonville community for nearly 100 years is now on the brink of closing for good after being partly submerged in a flood three months ago. For fourth generation owner Jim Snoddy, the store holds a lifetime of memories and friendships. However, as FEMA funds continue to be denied to the county, his hope for a turnaround fades with each passing day. I met Jim in the early morning on the first day of the workshop. I had been told by passerby of a longtime general store across the Missouri River that had survived the great 93' flood. Figuring I could at least grab a sandwich and talk to some locals there, I changed direction. It was a far mistier morning than usual around this time of year, and coming off of the bridge the sun was beginning to rise and the surrounding landscape was slowly coming into view. Across the river from Boonville are thousands of acres of farmlands stretching for miles across the flat earth. Known as the bottoms, this entire area lies in the floodplain of the Missouri; and flood it does. This land was the site of the once prosperous town of Franklin that acted as the eastern terminus of the Santa Fe trail. Floated as a possible choice as the capital of Missouri, nature made its own decisions as the town was largely destroyed by a devastating flood in 1827. The last major flood occurred in 1993 when the river crested over 37 feet, collapsing the earthen levees to inundate this entire area; including the original Snoddy's store that was built by Jim's great grandfather in 1924. The current Snoddy's building was completed by the Snoddy brothers and their father shortly after the flood, with concrete flood walls built into the interior to keep water out. What they didn't know then was that the floodwater that would rise in their store 26 years later wouldn't come from the outside but from underground through their storm drains. And by the time they attempted to seal them off, it was too late.

Knowing none of this as I walked up to the store, I was surprised to find the store unlit and wrought iron bars covering the entrance. A man in a red shirt and shorts with an easy smile appeared from behind the bars and invited me inside. The shelves of the store were completely empty, and a stark line of dirt and mold from the floodwaters lined the walls. Jim's brother Chris was helping someone carry away plastic pipes; selling whatever they can that isn't already in storage while Jim explained to me what had happened. When asked if the store was going to reopen, he took a long look around the store before settling his eyes somewhere outside, a tired "I don't know" was his reply. The cost to repair the store would be upwards of 150,000, and without assistance from FEMA, the likelihood of the Snoddy brothers returning behind the counter was low. Since the flood, Howard and neighboring counties had applied for disaster area status in order to be eligible to receive disaster relief funding; a status that was rejected by FEMA. While the rejection has been appealed by the counties, there's no telling how long that will take or if the decision will even change. Meanwhile, the slow work of rebuilding the levees continues, with no guarantee that they will be enough to stop another flood. As climate change continues to

severely affect the American heartland with heavier rain and evermore frequent 1,000 year floods, the situation is likely to only get worse. For farmers and business owners like the Snoddy's, the long term outlook is grim.

The next couple days Jim showed me various places; the levees that collapsed after absorbing two months of heavy rainfall. The grave of his great grandparents, the church he attends in town and his home. Jim and I spent a lot of time together over the course of the week, and there were a lot of things he told me that he prefaced with "between you and me". I want to respect his wishes in keeping those things confidential, but often times I found that the things he didn't say or just hinted at that were the most telling.

"I never had to deal with loneliness," he told me on the second day we were with each other as he paced between the dim aisles for the umpteenth time. For nearly his entire life each day he'd be busy from dawn to dusk with running store operations until going home to his family. Now he finds himself with more time on his hands than ever, and doesn't seem sure of what to do with it. He does whatever he can to stay busy, shuttling back and forth between the store and his house. The first two days I was with him he made a mission of cleaning the back wall of the mold that had accumulated over the last couple months. When his son stopped by to help with unloading soft drinks that had been in storage, he was perplexed as to why his dad was doing that; as they were going to remove it anyway. Whether or not that's the case, it didn't seem to matter to Jim. It was his store, and he was going to do everything he could for it for as long as he could.

Jim isn't alone in going through all of this. However, he has two older brothers besides Chris, and his wife Sherry. They met each other through mutual friends while in high school, and have been together ever since. Sherry works as a house cleaner who services many elderly people throughout the Boonville community who can no longer maintain the cleanliness of their homes themselves. She's home by 2pm, and they spend the rest of the day with each other until falling asleep on their respective couches in the living room watching tv each night. Despite recent events, Jim also remains strong in his faith. Every morning around 5am when he wakes up, he makes himself some coffee and reads his morning devotionals. "I can't remember the last time I didn't".

It seems that after four generations of Snoddy's, Jim, who just turned 60, and his older brother will be the last to run the store. Jim's daughter lives in Maryland with her husband who is on active duty in the military, while his son lives in town and works in real estate. While the two brothers keep their options open, auctioneers have come by to appraise the building to see how much it may go for if the brothers ultimately decide to sell. In the meantime they wait for the results of the FEMA appeal.

Overall, I'm so thankful to Jim for allowing me to spend time with him and trusting me to tell his story over the course of the week in Boonville. And I'm grateful to the workshop for the many lessons it taught me...The process of finding a person, getting to know them and them getting to know you, knowing when to gently push forward and when to pull back in the process of telling their story, coming to understand how far you can go and how much you can tell in a certain period of time...I realized that none of those lessons learned would have been possible if I had simply been handed an assignment to photograph someone who had preemptively agreed to being documented. Of course, that isn't in any way knocking other workshops that do so. I still treasure my experiences at workshops like Eddie Adams, but in terms of practical education, the Missouri photo workshop taught me more than I ever thought it could. The workshop taught me to not focus on making portfolio worthy pictures, but to be faithful in telling someone's story in a way that is both honest and visually coherent. As one of my team leaders said, it's not about the images you'd make at the workshop, but the pictures you would take after it. It is an honor and a privilege to do what we do. We should never forget that.