

OPINION

OUR VIEW

One for the record

Looks like June is one for the record book, and not just in Borderland.

Traveling from here to the Twin Cities, it's apparent this is a wet time for Minnesotans from the top of the state to the Iowa border.

Previous rainfall records set in 1950 and 2002, the last time significant flooding occurred, are not just being broken, but completely shattered. As of Wednesday, Borderland has received 9.93 inches of rain since June 1, surpassing the average amount of 3.22 inches of rainfall for the same time period. It's not just June that is remarkable, the National Weather Service says, because International Falls is heading toward the record for the wettest year. Since Jan. 1, more than 18 inches of rainfall has been recorded, marking the fifth wettest year. The wettest year was in 1941, when 34.35 inches of rain was recorded in International Falls.

There's more rain on the way.

State and local officials are doing all they can to obtain financial assistance for the 35 counties included in Gov. Mark Dayton's emergency declaration.

U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar Thursday urged the Federal Emergency Management Agency to thoroughly conduct the Preliminary Damage Assessments to evaluate the impact of the devastating flooding across Minnesota in order to get federal assistance to communities as quickly as possible. Klobuchar called the Regional FEMA administrator that covers Minnesota, Jan Odeshoo, and urged

the agency to grant the official request for a Preliminary Damage Assessment submitted by Dayton Wednesday. Torrential rain from the Canadian to Iowa borders has caused significant damage across Minnesota.

Said Klobuchar: "Our state always pulls together in the face of big challenges, and that's exactly what we'll continue to do in the days and weeks to come."

We certainly sympathize with businesses and property owners feeling the financial impact and heartbreak of seeing water lapping near their beloved resorts, homes and cabins.

While we may feel Borderland's looked better, our summer is still serving to showcase what's best about our community.

We're hearing reports about visitors coming to Borderland for other purposes being amazed by our scenic beauty, great fishing and camaraderie. In between sandbagging, soldiers with the Minnesota National Guard said they would be coming back to our community to spend time at resorts or considering cabins.

The iconic Rainy Lake mermaid, located in Ontario's Silver Island Narrows, has weathered many conditions on Rainy Lake. Constructed in 1932 by a Minneapolis architect, she's watched the water rise and fall.

Today, sporting swim goggles and a snorkel placed on her by a boater with an obvious sense of humor, she's ready for anything that comes her way. We urge area residents to take her advice and hope for the best while preparing for the worst.



GUEST COLUMN

Eddie & the Fourth of July

Editor's note: The following is an excerpt from Tom Purcell's new book, "Comical Sense: A Lone Humorist Takes on a World Gone Nutty!"

When I drove by Eddie Gabor's old house, I was transported back more than 20 years — back to the wonderful Fourth of July outings my family once enjoyed there.

Eddie Gabor was my grandmother's longtime boyfriend and companion. For the last 20 years of her life, Eddie treated her like gold.

My grandmother had a hard life, after all. Widowed in her late 40s, she struggled for years to pay the bills and tend to the last of her six children.

Then Providence intervened. My grandmother, a regular churchgoer, had caught the eye of another parishioner — a colorful old bachelor named Eddie Gabor.

Eddie and his brother ran a successful office-cleaning business. They had hundreds of employees who maintained the interiors and exteriors of Pittsburgh's biggest high-rise buildings.

Eddie and my grandmother hit it off instantly. They went to Mass together every day. Eddie took her to Pittsburgh's finest restaurants every night.



My grandmother brought Eddie to every family event.

Eddie made the last 20 years of her life her best years — he made our Fourth of July celebrations wonderful, too.

Eddie lived in a beautiful stone home up high on a hill above a park. Every Fourth of July his township gave an incredible fireworks display. Eddie's backyard offered a perfect view.

So every year, he set out tables and chairs. He made refreshments and food. Just before dusk, my grandmother's children, grandchildren, their spouses and more would arrive.

As the adults laughed and caught up with each other, the children danced around the yard, giggling as their sparklers burned bright.

Soon, the sky would fall black and the fireworks would begin. As we

"ooed" and "aahed" — as the sky exploded into light and just as quickly returned to darkness — Eddie would be next to my grandmother, as contented as a man can be.

Eddie threw his last Fourth of July party in 1993, five years after my grandmother died. He died the following winter. Our sadness at the loss of both hit hard the next Fourth of July when we could no longer gather at Eddie's to celebrate.

The fact is there was no better place to celebrate the Fourth of July — not just because Eddie made my grandmother's last years so wonderful, but in part because of Eddie's father.

Eddie's father was born in Hungary poor. He came to America seeking a better life for himself and his family. He took the first job he could get — janitor.

Where others may view mopping and cleaning as demeaning work, Eddie's father didn't. He saw opportunity.

He started his own cleaning business. He began by cleaning small commercial buildings and kept moving his way up.

His company was soon maintaining larger buildings. He soon had the means to send his sons to college, so they could help grow and manage the business. He built himself a fine stone home

in one of Pittsburgh's finest neighborhoods — the home in which Eddie Gabor would live the rest of his life.

The story of Eddie's father is an American story. Through hard work, he made an incredible life for his family, and unwittingly made an incredible life for my grandmother.

As I first drove by Eddie Gabor's old house, I was initially filled with sadness — sad that my grandmother and Eddie have been gone more than 20 years already.

But as all the memories came flooding back — as I pieced together what the old house really symbolizes — I couldn't help but smile.

The house symbolizes all of the incredible blessings our country bestowed on Eddie's father, Eddie, my grandmother and my family.

That's what I'll be thinking about when I take a drive by the old place this Fourth of July.

Purcell, author of "Misadventures of a 1970's Childhood" and "Comical Sense: A Lone Humorist Takes on a World Gone Nutty!" is a Pittsburgh Tribune-Review humor columnist and is nationally syndicated exclusively by Cagle Cartoons Inc.

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WHAT OTHERS SAY

The Afghan challenge has changed

Afghanistan held its presidential runoff election over the weekend, and, as was the case in the first round of balloting, the turnout was reportedly high (some 7 million votes cast) amid a relative lack of violence.

As Kevin Sieff of the Washington Post reported this week, the Taliban is not a viable threat to the Kabul government. It can make attacks, it can cause pain, but it cannot overthrow the government.

The most realistic threat to the Afghan government is ... the Afghan government.

Whoever is declared the

winner when the vote count is announced next month, be it former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah or former Finance Minister Ashraf Ghani, needs to clean up the corruption and incompetence of the outgoing administration of Hamid Karzai.

The West's tendency is to view Afghanistan largely through the prism of our immediate concerns, which is terrorism. We went to war there because the Taliban provided shelter if not outright aid to al-Qaida as it planned and carried out the 9/11 attacks.

But the realistic issue there is domestic. It's establishing a legitimate, competent government in

a "nation" long resistant to such an entity.

The United States has spent considerable blood and treasure in Afghanistan and Iraq over the past 12-plus years. It will leave Afghanistan as it left Iraq: with a militant presence not entirely quashed, but sufficiently weakened that the new government should be able to cope with it.

That didn't happen in Iraq. Nouri al-Maliki, the prime minister of Iraq, followed a policy of sectarian division. He alienated the Sunnis and created an environment in which the militants could regenerate. The crisis in Iraq today is political rather than military; al-Maliki failed

to establish a government worth fighting for, and so his army didn't fight as the militants captured city after city.

What happened in Iraq is indeed a cautionary tale in Afghanistan, but not for the United States. It's a warning for the Afghans themselves. If the new government avoids the corruption of the outgoing one, if it puts its effort into building the economy and public institutions, if it regards its duties to be enhancing the lives of the citizens and not enriching the well-positioned, the Taliban will be increasingly irrelevant.

The Free Press of Mankato, June 18

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