## **Family**

THE NEWS HERALD

From A1

photos soaking wet. The pictures show the couple in their early 20s, before Jim Morgan would start building their house on Libby's family's land on Powerhouse Road in Morganton.

#### 'Starting life over at 82' Jim, 81, built the A-frame house

on the property when he was 32. "I never built anything bigger than a picnic table," Jim said, looking at the still-standing home. "And I think I built it about as perfect as you could build a house."

Several additions have been made to the home since the initial A-frame was built. An office, separate from the house, then later a large hallway were added on. Eight years ago, he built a large bedroom with a sunroom on it, where the couple enjoyed a morning cup of coffee.

"It really was just perfect," Jim said.

The couple heard Hurricane Helene was expected to bring some flooding to the area but did not imagine water levels would be like Hurricane Frances in 2004. In the 2004 storm, the water came up to just under the floors of the home, but never got into the house. The couple couldn't get flood insurance after Frances, and had not tried to get it in recent years.

This time, though, the water got as high as the attic. Jim had been out of the country on a trip to Canada. He drove five days to get home on Sunday.

"I got back, and I started laughing," Jim said. "I thought, 'This can't be true! I just laughed. I laughed, and this morning I woke up weeping.... Then I couldn't do anything but weep. I slept in my could sleep on this property.

"I'm turning 82 soon. I'm in good health, but do I want to spend the next three years, from 82 to 85, trying to get this house livable? It doesn't make sense," Jim said.

Jim said his childhood was turbulent. He left home at 14 and has been supporting himself ever since.

"This is really the only place I've ever thought of as home ... This is really gonna be an adventure, for sure," Jim said. "It's like starting life over at 82. ... I just don't know if I'm up to it."

### Houses, memories washed away

Up the street, Libby's sister, Hilda White, sat in a lawn chair memories from items that survived the flooding from Hurricane Helene. on Monday, three days after the storm. Her daughter, Lori Stock, found out how bad the flooding and grandson, Spencer Stock, was but was unsuccessful. sorted through picture albums and set photos out to dry.

only one of Hilda with her late husband, Ralph, was among keep it dry and safe." the pictures. A teapot a relative brought from Russia survived top of the driveway, too. The boat bought all the land for farmland. without a single chip on it.

But White's house is gone. The family tried to save some of her belongings by putting them in my daddy's boat trailer," Lori said. a moving truck and putting it at "It's like losing my daddy all over the top of the driveway, but even again." the truck was washed down the road, getting pushed into some She canceled her flood insurance trees and stuck in a ditch. Spencer in 2021 when it got too expensive tried to move the truck when they to keep.



Cindy White looks at the remains of her family's Morganton home on Monday. White and her husband, Keith White, had only finished the property months before floodwaters left the property in shambles.



car again last night, and I can't see Suitcases, clothing, and family albums lie out to dry outside the White family's shed in Morganton on Monday. when — in six months — how we Important documents, heirlooms and other personal belongings were destroyed in the flooding despite residents' attempts to store them on higher ground.



Libby Morgan goes through a box of her mother's letters on Monday, three days after the storm. Libby and her husband, Jim, reminisced over

"We've been pulling photo album after photo album after photo Family history Another wedding photo, the album out of here," Spencer said. "We moved everything up here to

> still hadn't been found on Monday, but the trailer was found.

"I burst into tears when I saw dants.

Hilda has moved in with Lori.

"Mama won't ever live up here

# on Catawba River

again," Lori said.

The land has been in the fam-Ralph's boat was moved to the ily since 1948 when Rom White Over the years, the property has been divvied up between descen-

> another home on the White family property.

"Devastated, just devastated," Cindy said. "Just no words." The White family wants to keep the property in the family, passing

An American flag and debris hang from the branch of a tree outside Jim and Libby Morgan's home. Floodwaters from Lake James and the Catawba River rose up to the second story of their home during

Hurricane Helene on Sep. 27.

it down through generations. "We had gutted our house, so proud of it," Cindy said. "My kids - this was going to them. It goes has been washed away. It also was to each generation."

chandelier over the dining table the family recover. Cindy and Keith White live in was mangled. Furniture is strewn about inside the house. Buildings, roofs and more litter the yard. But just like with Hilda White Chrissy Murphy is a staff writer and the Morgans, there are some and can be reached at

treasures to be found. A military plaque honoring or at 828-432-8941.



Spencer Stock shows a compilation of photos of his grandfather, Rom White, outside of a destroyed storage unit in Morganton. Rom White bought the property in 1948 and built White Cabin, later a community center. The cabin was demolished by flooding caused by Hurricane Helene on Sept. 27.

Keith's dad, World War II Navy Seaman 1st Class Roy Edward White, remains in the ground though coated in sand.

When Keith's dad, Roy White, died, the first military plaque that came for his grave was chipped. The family kept it and just a couple months ago placed it in the ground with some other flat rock to make a cozy spot by the river for a fire pit. The plaque and the fire pit survived the storm.

The family also found a quilt protected by a vacuum-sealed bag. The quilt, handmade by a grandmother, didn't appear to have any water or stains on it.

"(It's) the place where my kids grew up," Cindy said. "It's just things in life, but it meant so much."

Standing under a sign that reads, "The river restores my soul," Cindy said she didn't know what the family would do. They, too, had just canceled their flood insurance to make sure their home on the coast had full flood coverage. "We've got to decide," Cindy said. "Are we going to demolish it? Are we going to try to (save it)? It's a lot. It's a lot."

#### **Community gathering** center lost

When Rom White bought the land by the river, the first cabin he built was for church and family

gatherings. Through the years, it has been used for birthday parties, church gatherings and civic organization activities. Emergency rescue teams have even used the building as a place to stay during swift water rescue training events.

The building washed away Friday. Parts of the cabin were strewn around the White family property on Powerhouse Road and down the river.

Some parts of the cabin are still standing, like the kitchen and bathroom. Most of the walls are gone, making it look like a dollhouse with one side open.

It's not the first time the cabin lost during Hurricane Frances in In Cindy and Keith's home, the 2004, but the community helped

> The Whites are hoping to get that same support this time.

cmurphy@morganton.com



