

EVENING OUTLOOK

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Mud reigns in Mandeville

By AL BOCK, Evening Outlook Staff Writer

Floods and fires have afflicted Mandeville Canyon residents often enough, but it was never like this.

At least that's the way it seemed to Jeremy Van Ness Tuesday as he stood atop a heap of shale, looking down on his soggy, mud-streaked house at 3676 Mandeville Canyon Road — warily watching

from time to time the cloudy skies above.

The shale, a small mountain of it, wasn't there two days ago.

It had come down suddenly and crushingly — along with just about everything else in the canyon — during the ceaseless rainstorms that began assailing Southern California last week.

"It happens so fast — in a split second," said Van Ness.

Now the pile of rocks and mud pushed stubbornly against the house of Van Ness' next door neighbors, William and Diane Burke.

Some of it, like toothpaste, had squeezed through windows and doors of the Burke home, filling rear rooms to the ceiling with mud.

Directly below where Van Ness was standing, buried deep in the mountain of mud, was the Burkes' automobile.

The Burkes and their 4-month-old daughter, Robin, were unharmed when the slice of canyon wall slid into their home late Sunday. They're living temporarily with friends in Westwood, where Van Ness sent his wife, Elizabeth, and their 3-month-old daughter, Sarah, for the storm's duration.

"I just can't believe this happened," said Van Ness.

"We got through the fire in '78 and the flooding before that and after that. But nobody expected this."

The Van Ness home escaped the worst of the slide only by a curious circumstance.

"We've been remodeling it, adding four rooms, so one whole wall was already knocked out, and the water could flow right through to the street. . . We had been complaining that the contractor was moving so slowly, but it turned out to be an act of God, I guess."

The Burkes had moved into their

Mandeville Canyon home just last October.

"They came here from Malibu," Van Ness said. "So they know the risks of Lotusland."

From nearly one end of Mandeville to the other, the canyon looked more like a region of ruthless hydraulic mining than a gently winding road lined by comfortable suburban homes.

What was left of any pavement had become the bed of a gushing river as street maintenance crews, firemen, police officers and lifeguards struggled to help residents fight the mud back, clear channels for the water to flow and sort out the debris.

Cars and small trucks were overturned. **Turn To Page A-4** **Column 4**



Evening Outlook Photo by James Rueschman

CHANNELING RUNOFF — A sandbag-lined channel Tuesday is used to divert runoff from a

debris basin in Mandeville Canyon away from homes at into a flood control channel.

Only few escape Mandeville mud

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turned or sunk so far down in mounds of mud and rock that owners weren't sure where to begin to look for them.

"Our house is in perfect shape so far," said Douglas Stanton, as he and neighbors cheerfully set about digging out his van, half-submerged in silt and rocks at the corner of Mandeville and Sherry Lane.

Stanton lives up on the lane, but his van and his sedan car were washed

down to the bottom while he was out helping flood other flood victims.

"They were worse off than us," he said. "It was a wall of water. There wasn't time to do much of anything."

While he tried to extract the van, a couple of wetsuited county lifeguards pulled up in their pickup, hopped out and, using a rope, yanked out sticks of lumber that were jammed beneath the van.

Down the canyon about a mile, resi-

dents near The Meadows — usually a site for picnics and horse shows but on Tuesday a more likely spot for boating — only hoped that a flood control debris dam wouldn't break.

"If it does, it'll be worse here than it already is," said one resident, pointing to a garden umbrella barely sticking above a sea of mud four feet deep.

"If it would only stop raining for 12 or 18 hours, the storm drains would clear and we might be all right."



GRIM EXPLORATION—Pamela Pine examines a belongings retrieved from wreckage of her

parents' Mandeville Canyon home. Foreground, her brother's El Camino. Her car is missing.
Times photo by Ken Hively

BATTLE WITH NATURE

Couple Keep Desperate Watch at Periled Home

By **BOB SECTER**
Times Staff Writer

Mandeville Canyon Road closed from 2621 to the northerly terminus because flood waters have overflowed the channel and covered the road with debris. Jones says he is unable to estimate when it will be reopened but it is passable to heavy duty city equipment.

Neville Van Assche was peering through the early Thursday morning dreariness outside the living room window of the Mandeville Canyon home he was determined to save, checking the color of the week-old stream rushing down the driveway.

The water was clear—a good sign. If it had been brown, Van Assche would have had to roust everyone from their sleep and get them dressed and outside in case the nearby hillside collapsed.

"We watch the water," he explained. "If it's running clear it's just runoff from the rains. If it's muddy, you know it's undermining something and you're in trouble."

Water-watching duty is just one of the required chores for those opting to stick out the seemingly endless

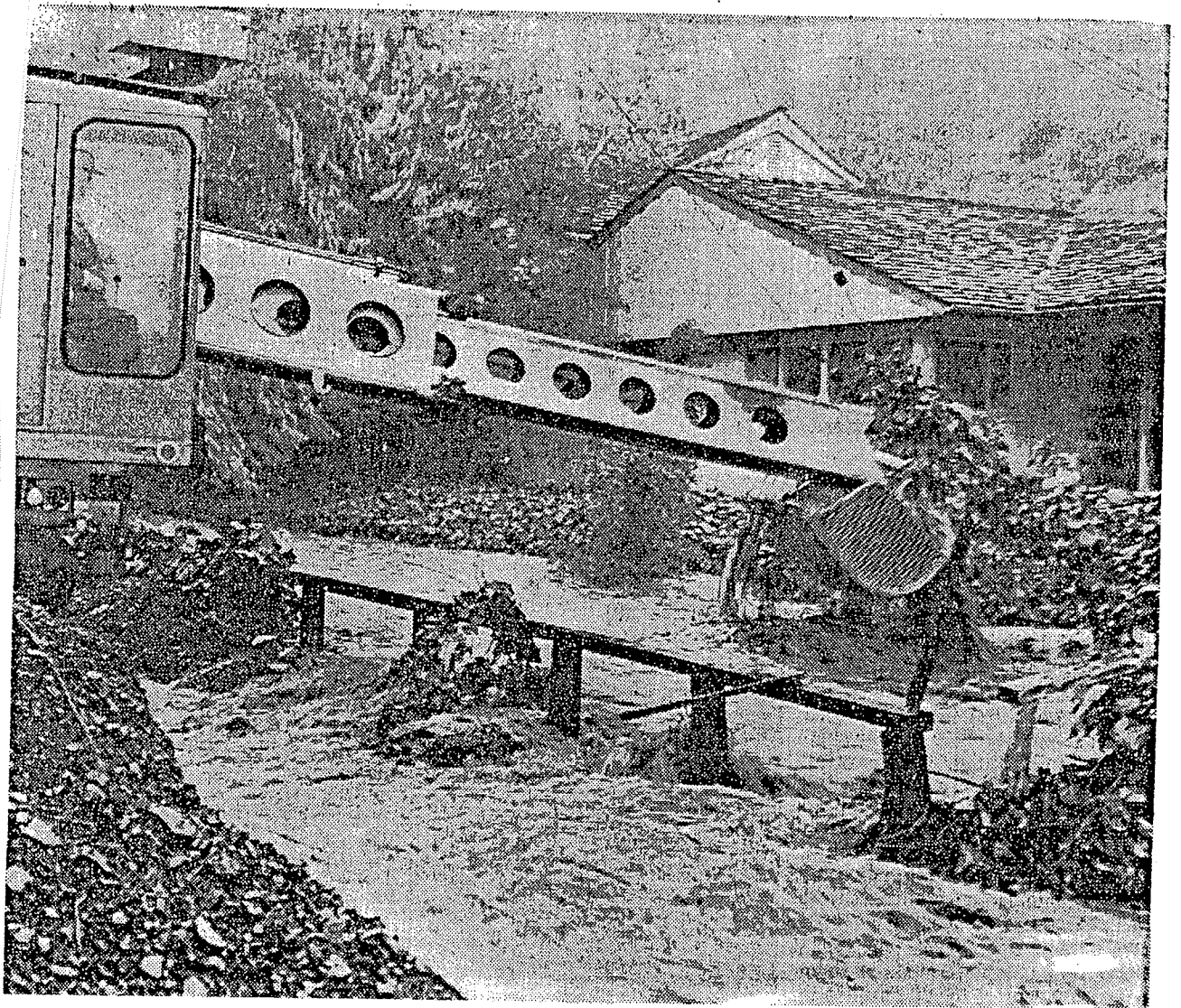
string of winter rainstorms that have drenched this posh but slide-prone section of Brentwood.

Most residents in the narrow upper half of the canyon, where weekend slides killed one person and destroyed or damaged several homes, have evacuated the area. But Neville and Maria Van Assche have stayed even though the single-story ranch home at 3626 Mandeville Canyon Road is surrounded on three sides by hills and was grazed by two slides last Saturday.

"More and more people are leaving," acknowledged Neville, a former seaman in the British merchant marine. "Only us crazies stay."

Actually, the Van Assches have decided that bailing out would be

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STRUGGLE AGAINST TIDE—Hydraulic shovel digs into flood ditch in front of home on Mandeville

Canyon Road in effort to deepen channel to keep water from rising. Many homes were flooded.
Times photo by Don Cormier

DESPERATE WATCH KEPT AT HOME ENDANGERED BY SERIES OF STORMS

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even crazier than staying. "If this house is destroyed we'd never own a home again," he said. "Because of inflated values we can't afford to carry the insurance on this house that it needs. If it goes, we're wiped out. So we feel if we stay and try to fight this thing, we're at least giving it our best shot."

There was another reason for staying—a painful memory haunting Maria. As a teen-ager in war ravaged Berlin, she had been forced from the home she loved by occupying troops.

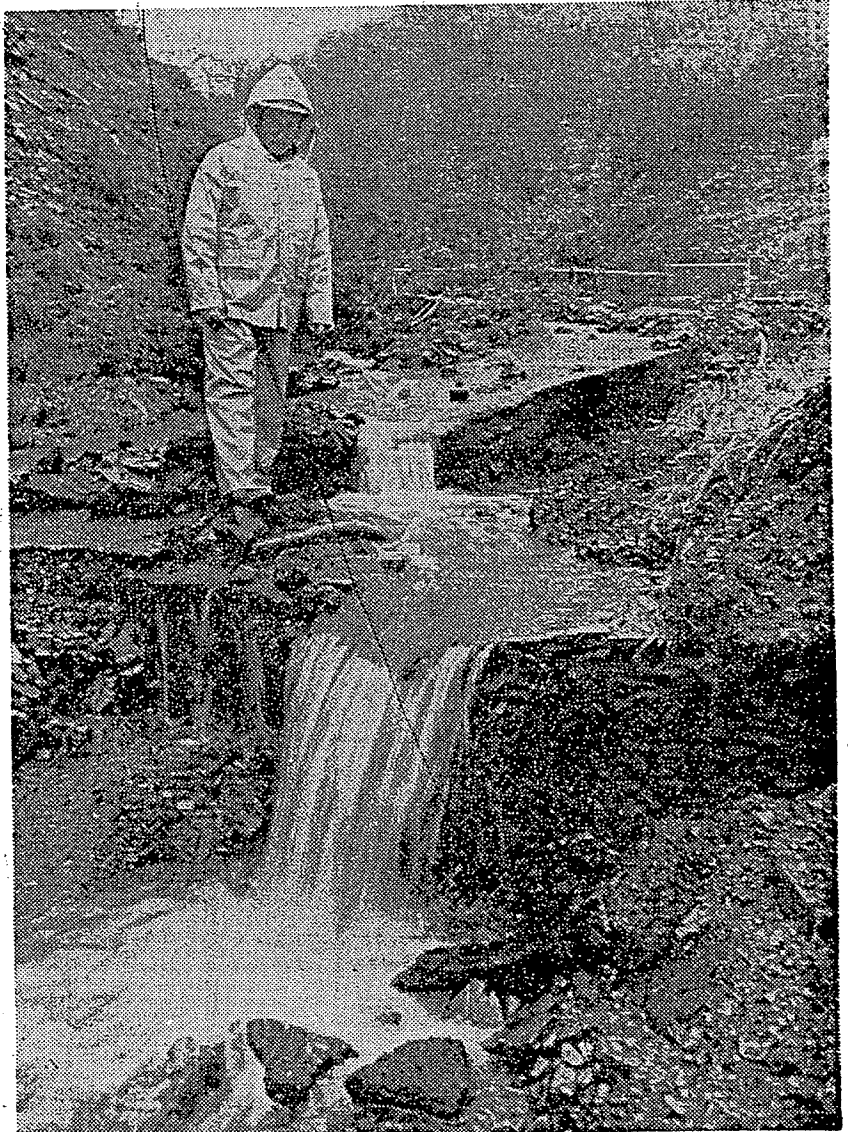
"I lost my house once to the Russians and I'm not going to lose it to anything again," she declared.

Armed with that resolve, the Van Assches have waged an almost continuous battle with nature over the last several days, hauling dirt, shoveling debris, clearing rocks and flirting with disaster.

At night they take turns sleeping on the living room couch close to the window with the best view of the menacing stream. It was Neville's turn Wednesday evening. He did not keep an all-night vigil, but did get up periodically to check on the steady downpour and the color of the stream water.

Neville has been sleeping restlessly since the series of storms began. It is an uneasiness caused not so much by fear of what could happen but by pain in the shoulder and back of the 49-year-old plumber who spends his days raking mud off his lawn and removing rocks from his driveway. Just in case he has to jump outside quickly he sleeps in his plumbers uniform.

Unlike her husband, Maria has kept a sleepless, constant watch when it has been her turn on the couch. One night she crocheted an entire baby blanket. Another night she spent hours typing up reports for the Sea Cadet program that she supervises.



WATERFALL—Neville Van Assche watches the floodstream pour down what had been level driveway of Mandeville Canyon home.

Times photos by Boris Yaro

Shortly after the storms broke, the couple sent their daughter, Valerie, 17, to stay with Maria's first husband. But they have not been alone. Several teenagers, involved in youth programs supervised by the Van Assche's, hiked into the canyon to help them.

The couple experienced their worst days last weekend. On Saturday, a retaining wall several dozen yards uphill from their home collapsed, sending a lava-like head-high flow of mud slithering down the driveway just past the house and down a steep embankment to the street.

Even more alarming was the ap-

proximately 20-foot square patch of shale that tumbled to the patio from a 50-foot high hill that sits almost on top of the house. Although mud had slipped from the first hill in past years, nothing had ever come down the second—nearer—hill before.

Shortly before dawn Sunday, the Van Assches were startled by policemen knocking on their front door, asking them to evacuate. They went in the bedroom, talked it over, and made their decision to stay. Maria said that was the only time during the entire ordeal that she has broken down and cried.

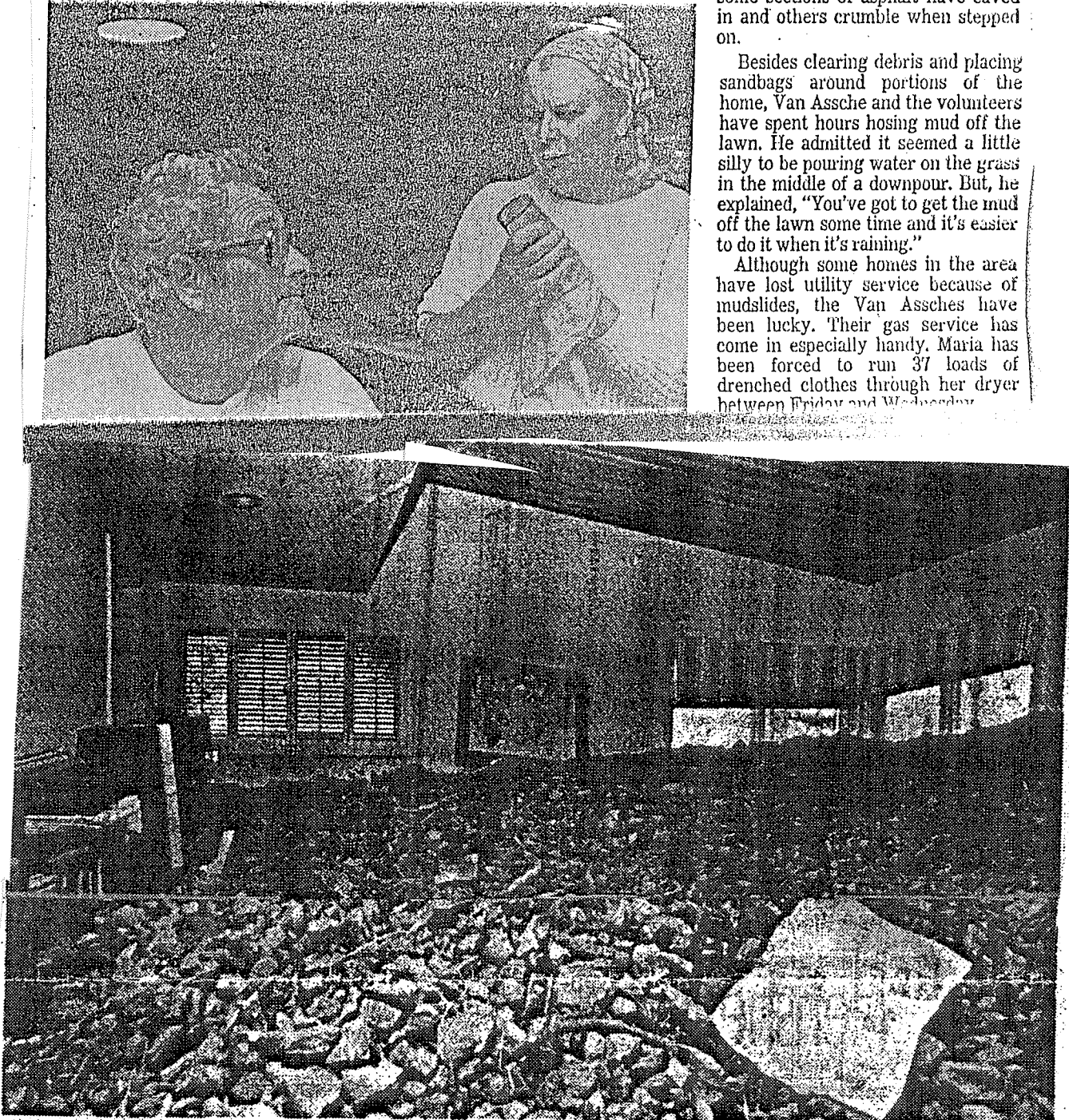
Later that day, city cleanup crews, trying to cut a path through mud-

clogged Mandeville Canyon Road, also used their heavy machinery to scrap a path up the Van Assche's driveway, a steep spur of road leading to three other houses as well. Meanwhile, Neville and the young helpers carted dozens of wheelbarrows full of fallen debris from the patio.

Even after the driveway had been cleared of most of the rubble, the Van Assches have kept a close watch on it. The stream of water running down the driveway, with a current as fast as a mountain brook, is in constant danger of being dammed up by rocks and limbs that occasionally tumble to the ground. The stream has weakened the driveway so severely that some sections of asphalt have caved in and others crumble when stepped on.

Besides clearing debris and placing sandbags around portions of the home, Van Assche and the volunteers have spent hours hosing mud off the lawn. He admitted it seemed a little silly to be pouring water on the grass in the middle of a downpour. But, he explained, "You've got to get the mud off the lawn some time and it's easier to do it when it's raining."

Although some homes in the area have lost utility service because of mudslides, the Van Assches have been lucky. Their gas service has come in especially handy. Maria has been forced to run 37 loads of drenched clothes through her dryer between Friday and Wednesday.



Evening Outlook Photo by James Rushman

BED OF ROCKS — Rocks from the hillside above buried most of this master bedroom in

Mandeville Canyon. Many other homes in the canyon suffered a similar fate.

TOYS, TREASURES BURIED IN MUD

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"I see so much of my past life. . . we had all my stuff in the garage."

Pine, 25, was the only one at home Wednesday, having flown in Sunday from Chicago where she lives and works, to help her parents and to salvage what was left of the dowry saved up and stored there for her August wedding. It was all under the wreckage—the furniture, the pots and pans, even the car, she said.

The wedding reception is planned for the backyard, around the swimming pool. And Wednesday that part of the home, a scant few yards ahead of the destruction, looked picture perfect. The pool was a brilliant azure and the grass newly planted to prepare for the reception was long, green and lush, fed by the rains.

Pamela said she hopes the house will be repaired in time for the wedding, but it was obvious that it will take a long time to undo what had happened in just a matter of minutes last Saturday afternoon.

A quick tour through the house showed how quickly her parents, Ben and Rue Pine, had had to scramble for safety over the back fence when a wall of water and mud collapsed the garage and family room, stopping the clocks at 4:22 p.m.

"There's the Peking duck my mother was preparing for guests," Pamela said pointing at the brown duck sprawled on top of the tile counter and still looking delicious. "Those

were the Chinese noodles," she said pointing to a nearby bowl.

Another 10 feet through the kitchen the floor-to-ceiling cabinets of spices collected by her mother, a cooking instructor, tilted crazily, pushed into the room from the bottom.

The tailight and bumper of a house guest's car punched through a hallway wall into the living room.

Looking out the living room window, down steeply curving Sherry Lane, one could see her father's red compact car, upside down and full of muck on the outer edge of the curve.

Behind the house, on what once was a driveway behind where the garage had been, her brother's El Camino pickup truck was mired in mud up to its windows.

The old-fashioned fenders of the 1941 Graham her father was restoring lay near the top of the pile of debris.

But on the very top of all that mess, accessible to anyone who wished to poke through, were the papers and knickknacks, toys and treasures that had been so much a part of Pamela's life.

"My mom said there were love letters from my boyfriend in junior high school floating around up here," she said.

"This is one of them," she said, picking up a black envelope that once had been written upon in white ink. She opened it and read for a moment.

"Oh no, I just hope nobody read any

of these," she exclaimed.

Nearby was a string of wooden blocks. "I had these in the first grade when my teacher couldn't teach me to count and my parents got me these blocks to learn with."

And behind them was a soggy pile of old Teen magazines and an unfolded poster of The Monkees. "I really loved The Monkees when I was a kid," she said.

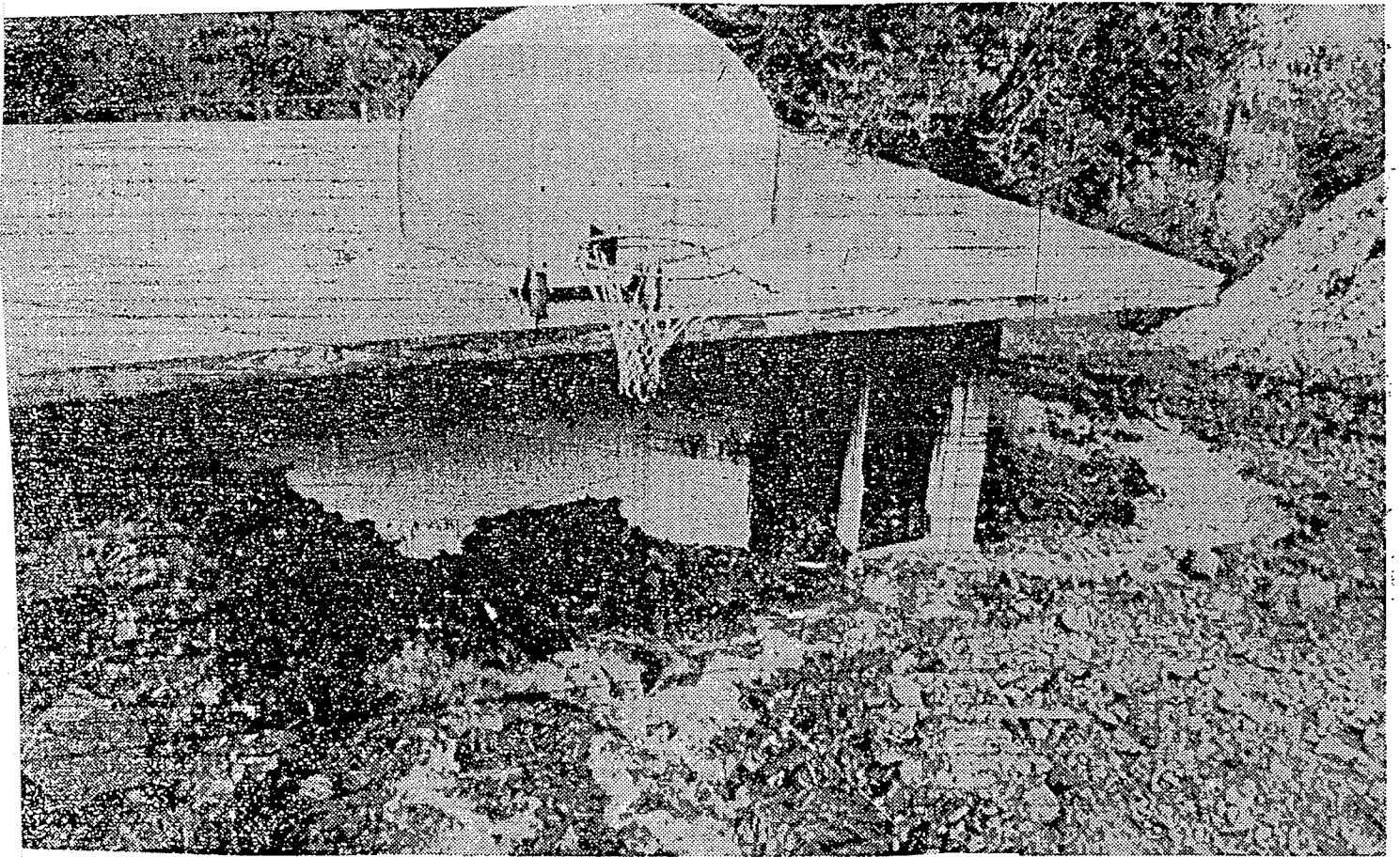
A few minutes later she picked up several records and identified them as old Mickey Mouse Club 78s. "I think these can be saved, can't they?"

Watching her rediscovering her past, one could almost imagine for an instant that it was a wondrous experience, the sort of experience one could have on a rainy afternoon going through boxes in a dusty attic.

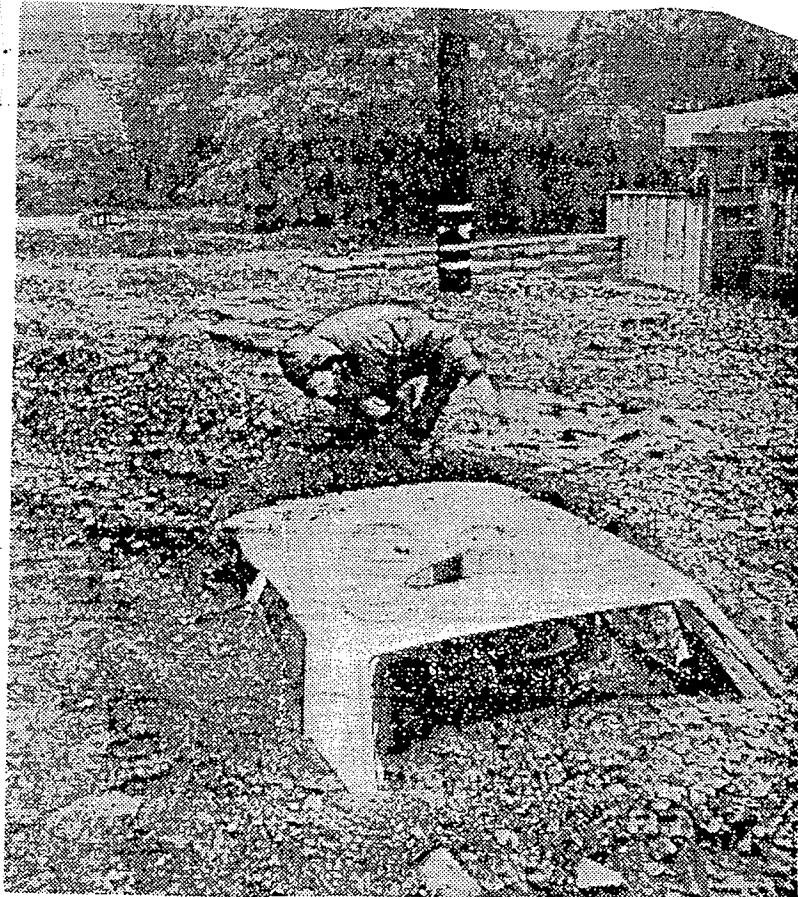
She held up a red broomstick horse with a red vinyl stuffed head. "This was from Romper Room. I was 4 years old. This is what they give you when you graduate."

But, of course, Pamela was not in a warm, dry attic on a rainy afternoon. She was atop a pile of muck that defied any careful effort to remove. Only an archeologist could bring order from the mass of memorabilia.

But you knew that would never happen. In a few days or a few weeks a big power shovel would come in and scoop up the bits and pieces of Pamela's life and dump it into trucks to be hauled away and converted into landfill somewhere.



CANYON MUDSLIDES—Basket house in Mandeville Canyon,



ball hoop atop left, is an easy

shot with mud up near eaves in some areas. Car, above, was nearly buried in canyon mud.