

STORIES FROM THE STORM

Editor's note:

Saturday July 21 saw the heaviest rainfall to hit Beijing for the past decades, resulting in deaths, flooding, power outages and landslides. Six days after the tragedy, normality has returned to the streets of the capital and few traces are left of the devastating downpour that cost so many lives.

But for some, life will never be the same: A daughter who lost her father, a wife who will never see her husband again, a woman who narrowly escaped the flood with her 8-year-old daughter, and a man who volunteered to help people stranded at Beijing Capital International Airport.

Here, they recount their stories.



Hou Wanlin

Hou Shuai, 17, is a high school student in Beijing's Shijingshan district.

I have lost my father (Hou Wanlin) forever. I always felt secure when he smiled, but that's not going to happen again. My father's body was found in the Yongding River in Shijingshan district two days after he disappeared during the rainstorm on Saturday. My father had been on his way to pick up my mother in Haidian district. But at 10:20 pm, he called her to say the car wouldn't start. After that his phone couldn't be reached. My mother reported the situation to the local police who told her that there were reports a car had been swept into the flooded river.

My mother prayed that everything was OK and waited in anguish for more information, but she didn't tell me what was happening.

When he retired, my father bought a new car for his fishing trips. Sometimes he went to visit friends and often stayed overnight, so on Sunday I didn't realize anything was wrong when he wasn't at home. I just watched my favorite movies.

On Monday, I realized that my father had not been home for two days. That night, I put a message on my micro blog: "I can't find my father, Hou Wanlin. He went fishing at Yongding River on Saturday. My mom is going crazy. If anyone sees him, please call me." Hundreds of my friends forwarded the micro blog, but there was no news of my father.

On Tuesday, I stayed at home to wait for news from friends and relatives. My mother went with my uncle to ask for help from the local police and other rescue teams. The Lantian Rescue Team discovered the body when they pulled my father's car from the river at 6:30 pm. I really appreciate the help I received from friends and the efforts of the emergency team that retrieved my father's body.

I dare not sleep. Tears wet the pillow as soon as I lay down my head. I can't believe this has actually happened to me. Can anyone tell me it's just a dream and my father will come back?

I can imagine how hard my dad struggled to get out of the car, but no one could have helped him. There are no words, although I have so many things



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Qiu Yan holds the picture of her husband **Ding Zhijian** at his funeral. **Ding** was one of the victims in the devastating downpour in Beijing on July 21.

to say to him. The man I loved the most has left my world and I had given nothing in return for his love.

Hou Shuai spoke to Hu Yongqi (huyongqi@chinadaily.com.cn)

Qiu Yan is the wife of **Ding Zhijian**, a 34-year-old magazine editor who drowned in his car on the Second Ring Road.

On that abnormally sultry Saturday afternoon, my husband said he would go out for an appointment with friends in the publishing business at around 2 pm. I complained, saying that weekends were not for business and that he should spend more time with our daughter. Moreover, it was going to rain soon.

So we made a deal: I would call at around 4 pm to remind him to come home quickly.

When I called, it was already raining, but he said there wouldn't be a problem on the journey home.

An hour later, I began to get worried and called him again. He said he would be back soon. However, he didn't leave until the meeting finished at around 7:30 pm. He called me for help about 10 minutes later. He was trapped in water on the road beneath the rail bridge, 300 meters west of Guangqumen Interchange. He sounded in a tremendous panic. He said the SUV was stranded in the rising water, which was surging back and forth, and told me his position.

He said he could not open the vehicle door and was unable to contact the emergency services, although he had dialed 110 (the number for the police). I told him to try kicking the door open. After hanging up, I called all the emergency services: 110, 120 (paramedics) and 122 (traffic police). Both 110 and 122 were permanently engaged and the paramedics on 120 said it was not their business and told me to dial 122 instead.

Close to 8 pm, my husband called again, sounding extremely anxious. He was starting to cry and pleaded, "Help me, quick! Help me! The air inside the vehicle is running out!" (The engine of Ding's SUV had cut

out, so the electric windows and doors wouldn't work.) I dropped the phone, took a hammer, asked a neighbor to help, and rushed out into the rain to head to the place where he was stranded.

As I was about to leave, our 3-year-old daughter cried and asked to go with me. My mother-in-law held her tight, comforting her and saying I was going to save her dad because his vehicle was trapped in water. I heard my daughter say, "I want to go with Mom, too, to save Dad!"

About halfway to the place where he was stranded, we hit a traffic jam. I jumped out of my neighbor's car and ran towards the place (a distance of around 2 or 3 km.) I didn't notice the distance, but just ran and ran and ran, crazily.

The only person that offered to help was a stranger who tried to swim in the surging water. He was forced to give up because the underwater currents made it too dangerous. I hope I can thank that man in the future.

Then I felt helpless and hopeless. I had no strategy. I borrowed a loudhailer and shouted "Ding Zhijian, I am here. I'm coming to save you!" in the hope that my husband would hear me and hold on a little longer.

Two hours later, I finally watched his black vehicle being pulled from the water, the last of five cars submerged on the main road — and the only one with a body trapped inside.

I didn't want to hurt my daughter's feelings, so I just told her that Dad has become a star in the sky, watching her from above. She asked how she will know which star is her father. I told her that if she is good, he will fly back to see her.

I can't raise my daughter on my own. I will wait for the government and the working unit to give us an explanation and compensation. We — my family and I — will wait."

Zhang Yuchen compiled from media reports (zhangyuchen@chinadaily.com.cn)

Wang Muxue is a Beijing native who works for a bank. On Saturday, the 39-year-old took her daughter for dinner at a restaurant in the central district of Xidan, despite the rain.

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Wang Muxue is a Beijing native who works for a bank. On Saturday, the 39-year-old took her daughter for dinner at a restaurant in the central district of Xidan, despite the rain.

After the meal at around 7 pm, we were on our way home when the horror began. Wherever we went there was deep water. I felt trapped and completely helpless.

So many things went through my head as the water kept rising at a frightening rate and waves were breaking over top of my car. I pictured the worst-case scenario: My daughter and I would be trapped in the car after suddenly stalling in the fast-rising water. Like many Beijingers, I didn't believe that could happen in the city.

I struggled to keep the engine running in the torrential rain while my 8-year-old daughter freaked out and cried as water began to get into the car.

After more than 30 minutes, I noticed a patch of dry land at the top of a slope that led to the entrance of a school. I quickly drove to the dry land and waited for the water to retreat.

My brain was blank. All I could do was hold my daughter very tight and listen to the sound of the floods swallowing my city. We are lucky to be alive.

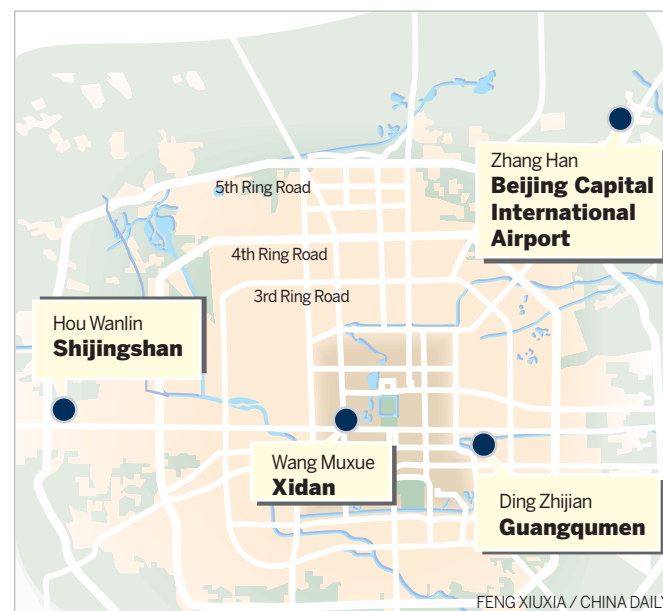
We are angry. How could anyone drown on the busiest roads in central Beijing? The people haven't even received an apology from the local government.

Wang Muxue spoke to Cui Jia (cuijia@chinadaily.com.cn)

Zhang Han, 34, from Jiangsu province, is president of Eduwo.com, an overseas education agency based in Beijing.

I read on a micro blog that cars were trapped in the water under the bridge near my home in Guangqumen. When I arrived there at about 9:50 pm, the water had already receded a little, revealing the roofs of several cars on the bypass, which is more than one meter higher than the main road. I couldn't see any cars on the main road, just water.

I asked a man standing nearby about the situation. He was guarding the police cordon and looked like a plain clothes police officer, but I'm not sure. He told me there were submerged cars on the main road and said there



were people in the cars, but he didn't know how many. He said police officers had been trying to save them for more than an hour.

I can't swim, but I saw several young men try to get into the water and search for the trapped people, but they were all stopped by the police cordon.

I went home and around midnight I read about the death of Ding Zhijian under the bridge on the micro blog.

The electricity supply in my apartment and the surrounding area had failed. I followed the situation on the micro blog by using my cell phone, and wondering what I could do to help. Then I saw the news that residents of Wangjing residential sub-district were organizing volunteers to pick up people trapped at the airport. At least you can help this way, I told myself. So at about 2 am on Sunday I went out in my car, even though it had been slightly damaged in an accident on Friday.

I drove along the Second Ring Road and the Airport Expressway. When I reached Chaoyangmen Bridge, I saw a man waiting at a bus stop. I stopped and asked him where he wanted to go, he told me and asked about the fee. I told him it was a free ride, but he said, "Forget it, then." I don't know why.

So I continued on to the airport. I knew that the group of cars from Wangjing was heading to Terminal 3. So I

decided to go to Terminal 2, in case no one was offering help there.

When I arrived, I saw hundreds of people waiting at the taxi rank. There were also people lying on the floor of the building, as if they were preparing to spend the night at the airport. Only a couple of taxis were parked nearby, but the drivers didn't seem to have any intention of accepting passengers, at least not during the 10 minutes I was there.

I explained why I was there to a staff member. He immediately arranged for me to provide a ride for four foreigners. But they had so many pieces of luggage that I couldn't fit them into my car. Finally, a family of three from Hangzhou got in.

As we were heading toward their hotel some 25 km away, they told me their flight had been delayed for about 12 hours and they had waited at Terminal 2 for more than two hours.

Driving on the Airport Expressway, the rain was so heavy that I could barely see the road even with my wipers on the fastest mode. I kept my speed to about 60 km and I had to watch the taillights of the cars ahead of me to work out where the road was.

When we arrived at the hotel, my passengers offered money and cigarettes as a thank-you gift, but I refused.

On the way home, I saw two women waiting at Chaoyangmen Bridge. I offered to transport them too, but they said

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HOU SHUAI
A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT WHO LOST HER FATHER

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QIU YAN
WHOSE HUSBAND DROWNED IN HIS CAR ON THE SECOND RING ROAD

"We are angry. How could anyone drown on the busiest roads in central Beijing? The people haven't even received an apology from the local government."

WANG MUXUE
A BEIJING NATIVE WHO SURVIVED THE FLOOD

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ZHANG HAN
A BUSINESSMAN IN BEIJING

they were waiting for a friend to arrive. Maybe they were, but maybe they just didn't want to get in my car. When I finally got home, it was nearly 4 am.

Zhang Han spoke to Wu Wencong (wuwencong@chinadaily.com.cn)