A “Shining” Day at The Stanley Hotel
By Dr. Richard Kelley

During the past week parts of the state of Colorado have experienced unusually heavy rainstorms, which caused extensive flooding and property damage, particularly in the towns north of Denver along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. My wife Linda and I were right in the middle of it and, when we checked into the historic Stanley Hotel in Estes Park, we saw a team of hotel workers come together to keep their property running and their guests safe and comfortable in a tradition that I have also proudly observed on a number of occasions at Outrigger and OHANA hotels across the Pacific.

The Stanley Hotel, which opened in 1909, is located a few miles from the entrance to Rocky Mountain National Park, which receives over 3 million visitors a year. It became famous when novelist Stephen King, traveling through the area, got snowed in. He checked into The Stanley Hotel and was the only guest for the evening. That night he was inspired to write “The Shining,” which was later adapted into the 1980 horror movie of the same name (produced and directed by Stanley Kubrick) as well as a television mini-series. (While parts of the TV mini-series were filmed at The Stanley, the movie was shot not there but mostly at a film studio in England and at another resort, Oregon's Timberline Lodge, which is where readers who might wish to spend a sleepless night in a cold sweat should consider a visit. Just kidding!) The Stanley also “starred” as one of the locations in the film comedy “Dumb and Dumber.”

We arrived at the Stanley late in the afternoon on September 12 after driving in heavy, blowing rain through Rocky Mountain National Park on Trail Ridge Road at altitudes as high as 12,000 ft. (nearly 3,700 meters). We found the nearby river overflowing its normal bed and onto the main street, pouring into the shops, thanks to a gargantuan increase in its volume from a normal 100 cubic feet per second to a phenomenal 5,280 feet per second.

Fortunately, The Stanley Hotel is located on high ground and we found the entrance. However, the parking attendant was not in his booth. We ran through the rain into a ground-level snack shop and found a number of hotel staff coping with water that was seeping up between the floor tiles. A bellman suddenly appeared and helped us with our luggage. Despite the record-breaking storm, the hotel sustained very little damage in comparison with other hotels nearby.

The front desk personnel were efficient and courteous. Matthew, the front desk manager, advised us that dinner was available in the dining room but that it would be from a limited menu. He added that over 12 inches (30 cm.) of rain had fallen over the past 24 hours and, due to washed-out bridges and roads, many staff...
The Stanley Hotel

members could not get to the hotel for their shifts. Telephone service in the area was not functioning either, so the hotel could not predict who might be available to help with dinner. Most restaurants in the town were either flooded-out or inaccessible.

In the dining room, the “limited menu” was more than adequate and despite everything was even freshly printed for the menu folders. Dinner was excellent and as we were enjoying dessert, a gentleman named Ian, wearing a chef's hat and jacket, came to the table to ask if everything was satisfactory. We complimented him on his cooking but asked why his jacket had the Hilton Hotels logo on its pocket. He confessed that he was not the regular chef but actually the director of Food and Beverage. He said he was assisting the chef who was stuck in a nearby community, cut off by washed-out roads. However, as the normal attire for a director of Food and Beverage would be coat and tie, which would hardly do in a busy kitchen, he had pulled out of the closet the chef's garb he still had from a previous position at a Hilton hotel.

The next evening, we attended a cocktail reception in honor of Lady Geraldine Dunraven, an old family friend from Ireland, our guest on this trip, and, as best we know, the first Dunraven to visit the Estes Park area since the fourth Earl of Dunraven, a hunting companion of “Buffalo Bill” Cody, fell in love with the area in the 1870s. Lord Dunraven left his name on several local landmarks – e.g., Dunraven Inn and Dunraven Restaurant in Estes Park, and Dunraven Peak and Dunraven Pass in nearby Yellowstone National Park – so despite the flooding, wind and rain, over 100 guests turned out for the gala event honoring our guest. The hotel prepared a delicious traditional Irish buffet and once again the limited staff, many of whom had worked multiple shifts, did an outstanding job, providing first-class service.

Mayor Bill Pinkham presented a proclamation to Lady Dunraven, declaring September 13, 2013, Dunraven Day in Estes Park. Lady Dunraven (widow of the seventh Earl of Dunraven) and her daughter, Lady Ana, were each presented with a book, Art of the National Park, by The Stanley's general manager, Rick Benton. Lady Ana's husband, Duncan Johnson, was presented with a Denver Broncos jersey with the name "Johnson" on the back, a happy coincidence as the team has two Johnsons (Jeremiah and Steven) on its roster. In return, Lady Dunraven presented the hotel with a beautiful color reproduction of her portrait of Lord Dunraven (Buffalo Bill's companion, that is), to replace the black-and-white photo of the painting until now hanging in the hotel lobby.

Local historian John Meissner also took our group to visit the Dunraven Cottage and other nearby historic buildings. Stanley Hotel Sales Manager Patty Twogood told me that she and her colleagues at The Stanley and the people of Estes Park were honored that our group made the trek to Estes, despite the virtually biblical flooding the town had experienced.

Warmest congratulations to The Stanley Hotel staff for their efforts and accomplishments in the face of a flood of challenges! We wish them and all the residents of Estes Park the best as the town recovers from this devastating deluge.