After the Storm: A Tobacco Patch Parable

Smyth County saw its share of unprecedented weather events last month. We’ve seen hurricanes blow through and floods sweep the countryside, but last month’s storm touched areas that have rarely seen that type of damage before.

Several of us remember the devastation of the Flood of 1977. Those waters topped the Interstate 81 bridge just west of Exit 35, shutting down traffic completely. That said, when the water receded the bridge was still there.

Several of our farms and homes along the streams and rivers suffered extensive damage. Miles and miles of fence along with gates and accompanying infrastructure are missing or badly damaged. Many had personal bridges that were swept away or left unsafe to cross.

Barns and sheds were leveled. One was literally plucked out of the ground, turned upside down and place a few yards from its original site. Hay crops, which were scarce already, were swept away or left waterlogged and injected with mud and other foreign material.

With all this destruction, likely the most devastating damage was done to the human spirit. Several home and farm owners reached out to share their losses as part of the Extension Office’s agricultural loss assessment. Many were so disheartened; they really had no idea where to begin to clean up.

Their mental state took me back the helplessness felt by the victims of the April 2011 tornado outbreak. To be honest, that assessment was much easier than last month’s task. While damage assessment is no one’s favorite chore, a tornado has a distinct and easily seen path. Follow the path, record what was lost, tally the results. The damage from Hurricane Helene was widespread and often hidden by roads that were busy with emergency vehicles or just gone altogether.

But we can all take a bit of comfort in the model for recovery tornado victims set for us. Do what needs to be done, get some rest, and hit it again tomorrow. The recovery from Helene will take months if not years, and somethings will never be the same; however, some things will be rebuilt better than ever. It will all take time.

And that’s where the tobacco patch come into play. Hoeing tobacco had to be one of my least favorite jobs. It was hot, pain-taking work that required stamina and focus to be done to my Dad’s satisfaction.

One thing hoeing tobacco taught me was to not let the task before me overwhelm me before I started. “Don’t let the patch ‘white-eye’ you,” as Dad would say. “Just focus on the plant in front of you and the next thing you know, that row is done; then the next row, and the next thing you know, you’re standing at the end of the field thinking, ‘that wasn’t so bad’!”

Dad always preached that the worry of tackling any chore was always worse than actually doing it. I think that is why he was so successful even though his eyesight was poor, and he had no high school diploma. He didn’t worry about doing anything. “If we can’t buy it, we’ll build it,” he’d say “and if we can’t make it, we’ll make do without it.”

Another one of Dad’s favorite saying when faced with a crushing task was “We’re going take this thing like a cat eating a grindstone. We’re going to swallow it one nibble at a time.”

And that is my advice if you find yourself cleaning up after this storm or any other personal tragedy. Set a reasonable goal for today. See that goal through to its completion and then set another goal for tomorrow. And as you go, think about Glade Spring.

Those of us who remember can still see some scars from the April 2011 tornado, but it is also amazing at the recovery they have made with little to no help from anyone other than themselves.

When there didn’t seem to be a square foot of space in Glade that didn’t have a board or a piece of insulation spread across it, they did like the old cat eating a grindstone. They whipped it a piece at a time.

Upcoming Events

Oct 19 Clinch Mountain Tractor Show, Lebanon

Nov 5 VQA Sale 7pm Be advised the old call in number may be unavailable

Nov 11 VQA Steer take up

Nov 13 VQA Heifer take up

Nov 18 Private Pesticide Recertification Course, Extension Office 6 PM

Nov 20 Private Pesticide Recertification Course, Extension Office 8 AM

Dec 2 VQA Sale

Jan 7, 2025 VQA Sale

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact Andy Overbay or Pam Testerman at 276-706-8339 /TDD (800) 828-1120) during business hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event.

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