

Dear Friends,

I don't know where to start; not just in writing this but in all things right now.

On the morning of December 3<sup>rd</sup> Heidi and I were awoken by the barking of our labs. You see, this late in the season I do the market in Oly on Saturdays, and Ballard on Sundays. Because it was the weekend after Thanksgiving Ballard was closed so I did two days in a row in Oly. As a reward for the effort I was snoozing when the dogs went off at about 7am. Heidi's parents were at the door and frightened by the fast rising water of Stillman creek which runs behind their house on the PeEll McDonald Rd. I shrugged it off to their not being familiar with just how much water can come down off Boistfort (pronounced Baw Faw) which rises to just over 3000 feet and drains into Stillman creek. I put on a pot of coffee and endeavored to ease their minds.

The water was high behind the house, but not past the point of any other hard rain with a thaw. By 7:30 the water was beginning to surround the apple trees out back, I had never seen this. Heidi's Father, John and I began jockeying equipment; moving some of the larger stuff like seeders and transplanters away from the river which was now topping its banks, onto higher ground. By 8:00 the water was coming up into the fields and threatening to cover the road. We started moving tools up onto shelves in the shop, and raising our freezers up onto pallets. By 9:00 we were wearing hip waders and moving the tools we had moved up further up and onto stairs. We moved all the vehicles to the highest spots on the farm. We set up our market tables and started stacking anything we could on them. We quite simply looked around and tried our best to raise everything we could as high as we could. By 10:00, water had crossed the road; it had inundated our fields and was flowing across the barnyard behind the barn with significant force. Things get a little hazy from there on out. I remember raising the freezers on blocks until they touched the ceiling of the garage. I remember opening the greenhouse doors and the doors to the shop so that the water could flow through. I remember watching the level of the water rise using the printing on the Tyvek of the shop as a gauge. It was coming fast, so fast that we eventually cut the back stairs free from the house to allow the water to flow more freely through the breezeway. The exercise went something like this: locate an item, assess its vulnerability to flood damage, assess its monetary and sentimental value, and act quickly and accordingly. I remember watching certain things float away: our wash tub, our fire wood.

By noon the water was up over my waders. I distinctly remember the string of profanity as my socks got wet, not the specifics, but the ferocity. I knew.

In the house my family was safe and sound for the time being. Heidi and her mother Vicki had rolled up the carpets and pulled the lower drawers from all the cabinets. The four of us with little Natalina and our two black labs Manny and Ed were an island. From twelve on can best be described as surreal. The water could not get any higher; it had already drowned our vehicles, and was threatening to enter the house. It had to stop. Yes, definitely, the water was to stop rising and gently recede. But it didn't, it continued to rise. John and I took turns futilely leaving the house and checking on things, or retrieving

things from one vehicle or building or another. By 1pm it was time to concentrate on an evacuation plan. We called 911, were referred to EOC and got our name on some vague and distant list. As the water continued to rise we could see it in the floor vents, and when it entered the house it was like something from a Stephen King novel, and I am no Stephen King fan.

I called 911 again, was again referred to EOC and this time explained in no uncertain terms what I thought about our situation and our need for rescue. As the water entered the house I remember the confused looks on our dogs both of which continued to pace from room to room looking for dry land, their feet splashing with each step on the fir floors. We hunkered down I think its called, we waited. I ran through every flood documentary and cheesy 80's disaster movie I could remember trying to guarantee our safety and avoid the obvious blunders of all the bit actors and unfortunate victims I could recall. We would not enter the crawl space without a chainsaw, we would not wait until dark, would not go back into the house for fill in the blank. We listened to the thoroughbreds scream across the road as the water rose in their paddocks.

Occasionally we would hear what sounded like a boat. We gathered a few belongings. I went out once more to get a watering trough from the barn, remembering that anything that could float would be an asset.

Sometime around 2pm the boat came. It was a jet sled, captained by a local fishing guide. Guides had apparently answered the call from local officials and where staging rescues from the first patch of dry ground on Curtis Hill Rd. The boat picked us up and ferried us to safety. The captain endeavored to keep to the roads, but the current and the conditions had us weaving through trees and eventually motoring through our neighbor's barn yard, over top of his tractors and truck. When we arrived at dry land, we climbed out and stood there, a mile or so from the house, happy to be safe and dry, new refugees. We walked a bit. I guess I was looking for a phone so that I might call a friend and get a ride to their house, sip coffee and talk about the events of the day. But we were landlocked. As we passed John White's house he flagged us in and elegantly made sense of the notion that we spend the night and join him for the meatloaf dinner he had cooked for the local Lions club potluck, which had of course been cancelled. John's effortless generosity and thoughtful concern were to set the tone for the rest of this adventure.

We did get out the next day, rescued by Tom Knee, a friend and motorcycle enthusiast, the kind of friend we are lucky to have. He had been watching the news and realized the severity of the situation. Tom builds roads for logging operations; he is one of the few people able to visualize the circuitous route it would take to get from Chehalis to the Boistfort Valley when most every access was still covered by water. The 15 minute drive took no less than 45 minutes, over hill and dale.

Tom and his wife Wendy live across the street from my life long friend Andy in West Chehalis; a neighborhood dominated by homes built at the turn of the century by logger barons and captains of industry. We; Heidi, her mom and dad, Natalina, and our dogs, settled in with Andy and his wife Thea.

The South Fork of the Chehalis River is little more than a creek during the summer. It originates on Abernathy on the eastern slopes of the Willipa Hills. The South Fork is joined by Stillman Creek just south of Lost Valley Road, and together they flow due North into the main branch of the Chehalis just north of the Hwy 6 bridge. These waters are the drainage for the Boistfort Valley and are fed from springs and the rain that falls in the Willipa. In winter they swell with the snow melt from these hills. They come up fast and go down fast. The main branch of the Chehalis originates in the Willipa as well, about 20 miles north. Everything east of Pluvius drains into the Chehalis, everything west, drains into the Willipa River.



When the rain came it was a “pineapple express”, a storm which originates in Hawaii; warm air which picks up water as it travels east over the Pacific. When the storm hit there were no less than 24 inches of snow on Boistfort Peak. The temperature rose about 14 degrees, and an additional 12-15 inches of rain fell in the Willipa Hills. The storm was so wide that it hit both Boistfort Peak and Pluvius, melting the snow in the hills and swelling both rivers. In the Boistfort Valley the water rose 5-10 feet higher than in 1996: The perfect storm.

I went back to the house as soon as the water receded; the afternoon of the 4<sup>th</sup>. Heidi and the family stayed at Andy’s.

The Boistfort Valley was a disaster; a real disaster, a war zone. Mud, debris, the bodies of animals, flooded vehicles. The beauty of this Valley made the contrast so much sharper. The pride of ownership and careful attention to cultivated fields and homes were buried beneath silt and anything that wasn’t tied down. Our walk-in cooler, measuring 7’x28’, had floated ¼ mile down the road and was perched on a car next to the Curtis store. I went in the house and outbuildings. Everything we had tried to save, with some few exceptions, had been ruined. What we had stacked up to keep from harm’s way had been toppled by the water, or had floated. The vehicles and tractors had been submerged. The wash station and the greenhouses were still standing but everything in them had floated out and was strewn from the farm to who knows where. I saw a hot water heater from the greenhouses a few miles down the road. One of our harvest bins was hanging about thirty feet up in a tree



north of route 6. Bags and boxes lined the fences north of the farm. The house and outbuildings were covered with a 6 inch layer of silt.

**There is nothing to save, now all is lost,  
but a tiny core of stillness in the heart  
like the eye of a violet.**

**DH Lawrence**



I stood there dumbfounded, in shock. Everything I knew was gone; my home, my business, my once beautiful fleet of tractors and trucks. I would walk to the store. I needed human contact, needed to share my grief. The Curtis store had been inundated with 6 feet of water, the house next door with 8. Cheri Watt stood at the street in tears. Don Koidahl the owner of the Curtis Store extended his hand, saying something like “there’s the man”, but there was no man; there was me, feeling helpless. I shook his hand, which is about the size of a Christmas ham, looked him in the eye, shook my head. A cameraman approached me, he was using my cooler as a backdrop

for the news. He asked excitedly if I knew of a “good location to shoot from, you know, a house off its foundation”, I am not proud of my response. I tried to console Cheri. I was useless. I walked back to the house.





The chronology of events is somewhat sketchy from here. I know I pulled myself together; I dug in. Friends started showing up from all over. The local grange set up an emergency response center. At night we would get calls from Olympia, Seattle, Eastern WA; people wanted to help. I called upon our dear friends the Johnsons. I called our secret weapon, Jordan. Julie and Cliff pulled in the drive and offered to rent us a house down the street. Volunteers started showing up from everywhere. We needed organization; we had a project, a

big project, and the man power to get it done. I was back, I love this sort of thing; insurmountable task meets willing participant.

We moved everything worth saving to the rental. We cleaned out the shop and garage and set up a make shift command center. We listed daily and long term objectives, put people in charge of specific tasks and gratefully accepted the help of a tireless army of volunteers. The Saturday after the flood we had no less than 50 people working to get things back in order. We cleared the drive and laid down new rock. We scraped mud from the buildings. We cleaned all the tools one by one and got the shop back in shape so Jordan could start draining and starting tractors. We hauled off garbage. The previous owner stopped by and inspired us to cut back the dry wall. In a week's time we had made some very real progress. The fir floors in the house were taken up and warehoused to dry. The shop and



garage were functional. Hannah Johnson was spearheading the volunteer coordination. Donations of money and goods and labor were rolling in. The Grange was cooking three hot meals a day. Local restaurants delivered food to the farm for hungry volunteers. While all this was going on I diligently inventoried our losses and starting calling insurance agents, FEMA, the SBA, the USDA, the Farm Bureau...



We have all but finished phase one of the project which was to clean up, and arrest the potential damage of wicking and standing water. Mike and a crew of lovable miscreants from Action Renovation have removed the mud and sanitized and anti-microbialed all the surfaces in and under the house. With the exception of a few loose ends and the continued necessity to try to salvage our equipment, we are on to phase two; reconstruction. Once we have established our financial condition, and spoken in more detail with our insurance agents, the SBA, and the USDA, we will form a plan and set it in motion.



I don't know where to begin thanking people: The Gonads; you guys really rock, no seriously, the Mennonites, the Boistfort fire department, Charlie at the Market, Ashley's dad, Hannah and Darren, Jory and the DeLucas, the Cauliflower; without whom I would certainly have made the situation worse, Jordan, John H. and Jimbo, Andy and Thea, Julie and Cliff, Rob-o, the Oly Coop crew, Brenda B., Joey and Julie; thanks for the use of the truck, Rene thanks for the truck, and Bud; thanks for the dump truck!!, there are so many operators who stopped by with excavators and dump trucks, people that delivered firewood, Art and Elizabeth who



blew me away by still being there pulling nails long after I thought you had left, the guy with the Bobcat, The Red Cross, United Way, Tim Lyons, Jerry Zabriskie; who is probably still washing dishes, the ladies in the kitchen of the grange, Noa, the guys at Polybag, The Farm store, the awesome crew at Auto Motive, Terry, Grilla Bites in Seattle, the ladies in Ballard, Oxbow Farm, Rising River Farm, Travis, John White, Rick Strange, the Boistfort EOC, Omrauh, Betsy and Kerry Hines, Leon and the crew at Barnett, the Boistfort School, those crazy electricians, the guides who boated us out, Chef Peter & Mo & the staff @ Rays Boat House, the Lewis County Farm Bureau, Bucoda Christian Assembly, SPUD, WSU, Shelli and Low, Paul and Dusty at FP, the LDS Church volunteers, the Club, that kick butt crew from Tonga, Jennie Looker, River Burke, Greg Peterson, Joe & Monika, Da Raguccis, The Tenino Drill Team, Osborne Seed Co., Danny, Hillbilly and Bubbles who picked up the sleds, all the staff and vendors at the Oly and Ballard Markets, Terry's mom, Diana, Spyhalsky!!!!, and Kassey, Momma Kat & Peanut, Kris & Laurie, the Ladies at Sterling, Jim and Lisa Johnson &

Elise, Zach Lyons, the incredible Wren family, Jerri and Jeff and the crew at Papa Rays, the Country Cousin, and especially all of our generous customers and vendors who have sent donations and good cheer. A special thanks to all the people that should be on this and are not, I know I could not have covered everyone.

I cannot begin to describe the spirit of the community in Boistfort. I recently watched the four part documentary by Spike Lee on the Katrina disaster. The residents of Boistfort by comparison do not know the meaning of the word victim. They are generous and graceful to a fault. They are skilled, tireless, humble, hardworking, proud, diligent, quick thinking and resourceful with a good sense of humor and an admirable sense of obligation to their neighbors. I have cried, cried because of the kindness extended to myself and my family. I have been taught the nature of humility, I have been bound through the generosity and selflessness of others to extend a hand whenever and wherever I am able. I have been graced with a sense of my duty to continue to contribute to family, customers, friends and community.



Today I am at the computer. I am supposed to be wading through the pile of paperwork that has accumulated since the 3<sup>rd</sup>. I used to joke that I measured the bills by the inch; when they got to three inches it was time to pay them. Now I have to measure by the pound. I have a box full of correspondence. I have not made payroll since the beginning of the month. There are bills, letters, Christmas cards, insurance questions, applications for loans and grants. I wanted to write this instead. I wanted to say hello and to say thank you. I wanted to get this out of me.

The fire is going in the rental, it's toasty warm, and Natalina and Heidi are in the living room safe and happy. The dogs are curled up by the woodstove and life is good. There is a certain stillness in my heart.

Mike