

# Floods of Compassion

by Libby Rushton

In the early morning hours of Aug. 21, 2021, unexpected rain began to fall on the town of McEwen, Tenn., and it didn't let up. This rain led to local flooding which began to run downhill toward the neighboring town of Waverly. Even though Waverly received less rain, the runoff from McEwen caused Trace Creek to begin to flood the town.

Flooding has happened several times in recent years, and many residents began to go through the "routine" process of getting their possessions to safety. Unlike any previous routine, though, Trace Creek pooled behind the railroad tracks along Highway 70. In an unexpected turn of events, the ground beneath the railroad tracks gave way and acted like a levy breach, sending fast water into the town, catching everyone off guard.

Waverly flooded in a matter of minutes and total devastation was left in the wake.

After the waters receded, some 700 homes were flooded in the county, 271 were completely destroyed, most being in Waverly. Sheriff Chris Davis was quoted as saying, "We have well over 125 homes that are just gone — off the foundation, twisted, turned or just gone."

Waverly Elementary School and Waverly Junior High School were completely destroyed, and the local high school was also affected. Roads, including main highway routes into the town, including Main Street itself, were impassible into the first evening. Numerous crops, livestock and fences were lost throughout this county that is home to three rivers and numerous creeks. Cell phone service was down, which made search and rescue efforts more difficult while many were missing and 20 lives lost. This sadly only scratches the surface of that horrible event.

Someone said they were so thankful for those whom the world calls "a bunch of rednecks," who took to the water in john boats, jet skis or just waded in to help others. That day many churches were open as shelters, and people offered rooms in their own homes to complete strangers. Even before emergency supplies arrived, they were cooking, boiling water, blowing up air mattresses and bringing anything they could offer. They were searching, helping, praying and simply "loving their neighbor as themselves."

When roads opened the next day, help was sent from everywhere. Waverly was again flooded, not by water but by love from neighboring communities and states. We were so humbled and grateful.

Waverly is my hometown and these are my people. It was this place that shaped me into who I am today. I was educated in the



Libby Rushton, membership chair

classrooms of those destroyed schools, and we have all said a prayer of thanks that this happened on Saturday instead of Friday. I began to realize I appreciated these "salt of the earth" people even more because I was raised in farming and ranching communities among them.

Where many were surprised by the flood of love, I recognized the faces of hard work, compassion and strength that is influenced by being involved with rural 4-H, FFA and cattle showing communities. I had seen firsthand people coming together from near and far during times of need through my Herford family, whether it was just lending a helping hand in the barn or fundraising to support our fellow breeders. I always knew that my Hereford family was there for each other no matter the circumstance. This time was no different. The Hereford community has been a major part of my home's rebuild, and in today's reflection, I just wanted to say thank you.

Thank you for investing in and raising young people, like me, who know what helping their neighbor is all about. Thank you for your continued prayers for my hometown. We still have a long road ahead. **HW**



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