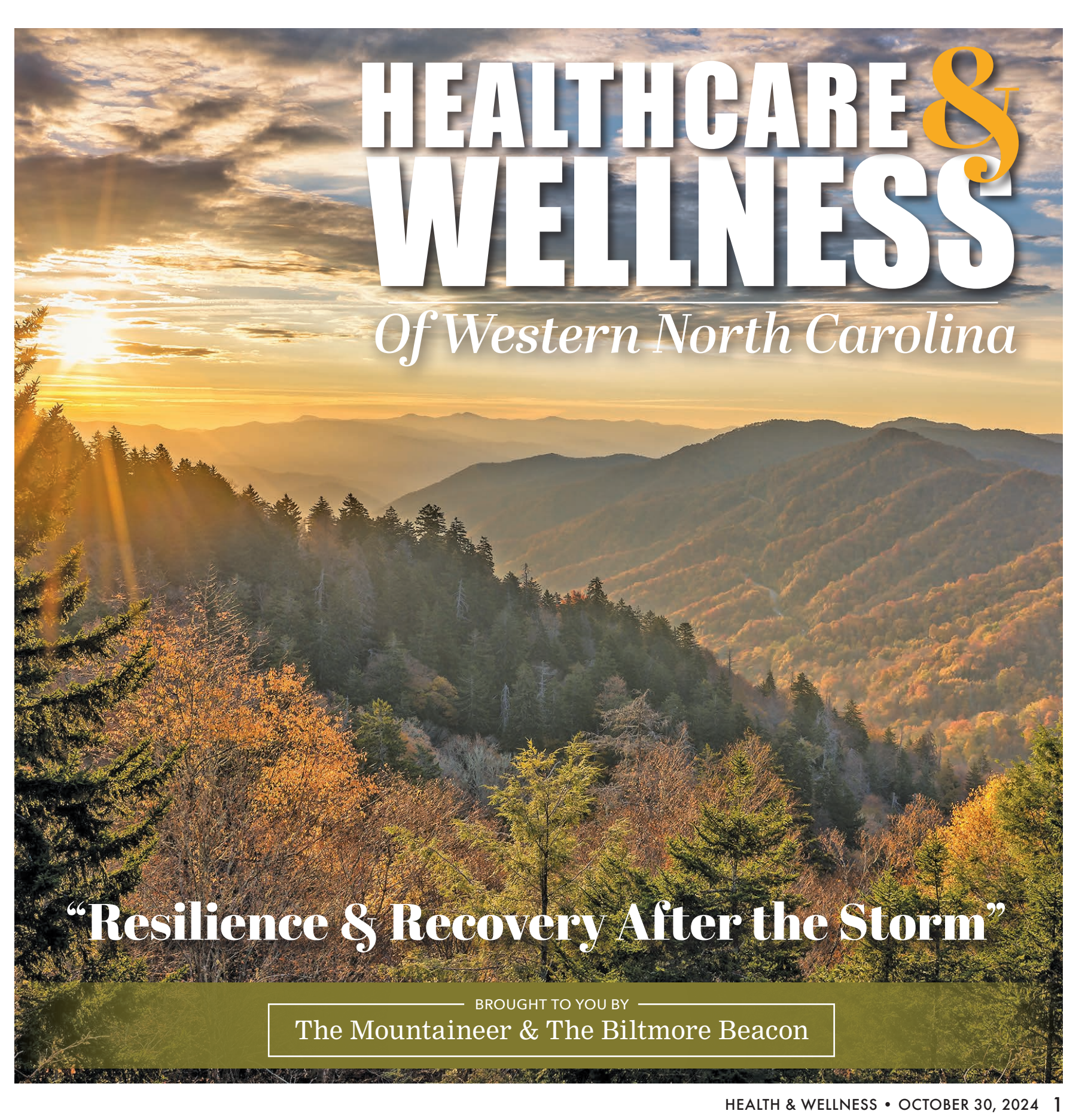




HEALTHCARE & WELLNESS

Of Western North Carolina

“Resilience & Recovery After the Storm”

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HEALTHCARE & WELLNESS

Of Western North Carolina

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A theme demanded by our times: Health and Wellness after Helene

By Kathy N. Ross

You'll find that Health and Wellness is a little different this fall.

This publication, which is produced four times a year, normally focuses on a range of health topics. This time, however, you will find a much greater focus on health, safety and wellness issues related to the natural disaster that plowed through and tore down much of Western North Carolina in late September.

Buncombe County has been ravaged by the storm, with 42 deaths confirmed, the highest Hurricane Helene-related total in the state. Asheville remains without a potable water system as of this printing, and its neighboring town of Swannanoa was all but washed away. One family lost 11 members in landslides and flooding while entire communities were cut off for days when their roads washed off mountainsides.

Haywood County was among the suffering mountain counties, with five



When it comes to health and wellness, we cannot ignore the challenges made by Hurricane Helene.

confirmed deaths as of this printing and the crumbling of Interstate 40 through the Pigeon River Gorge. Both counties, and the counties surrounding them, have witnessed the destruction of literally hundreds of homes and businesses.

You just can't bypass that level of trauma

and tragedy when you talk about health and wellness.

So, in this edition, while you will find articles related to general health, you will also find a number of pieces related to the following issues: health challenges following a natural disaster; emotional

recovery and support; practical advice to help property owners stay safe and sane during cleanup and advice on where to go when you need a mental and emotional break from coping with Helene's aftermath.

A list of recovery resources is also provided, since those resources are key to helping us get through the long climb back out of the debris and chaos Helene has inflicted.

One more thing. Please use those resources. Don't be hesitant to ask for help. Appalachian folk are an independent people, a trait born of necessity from years of relative isolation. We have taken pride on being the ones who help others, not the ones in need. But Helene has taught us that we cannot always go it alone. We challenge you to be gracious enough to allow others that great privilege of sharing their love, talents, finances and resources in your comeback journey.

– Kathy Ross

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Working through grief: Community event to remember loved ones

One of the most enduring methods of coping with the loss of loved ones is to celebrate their lives.

The annual Celebration of Life, hosted by Haywood Hospice & Palliative Care, has been re-scheduled for 4:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 7, at Wells Events Center, located at 296 N. Main Street, Waynesville. The event is hosted by Haywood Hospice and the Haywood Health Foundation.

"Our annual service is a beautiful and healing experience, and we invite both our hospice families and anyone in our community who has lost a loved one to attend," said Chaplain Peter Constantian.

"We know that our entire community is grieving in the aftermath of Helene, and we wanted to offer a time of healing and celebration of the lives we've lost this year,"



Haywood Hospice will hold a Celebration of Life at 4:30 p.m. Nov. 7 at Wells Event Center.

Constantian added.

Attendees may contribute to The Memory Tree by sharing stories or writing down memories of loved ones to hang on the tree.

In addition to the Memory Tree, the celebration will include readings and special music provided by hospice volunteer Luci Frahm.

For more information on the Celebration of Life or other grief gatherings, contact Haywood Hospice at 452-5039.



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In times like these, joy and grief intertwine — and that's OK

By **Kathy N. Ross**

Seventeen years ago, my mother-in-law died. Though she had been ill, her death was unexpected and shocking.

I loved her. With the exception of my mother, she was the woman I was closest to in this world. I spent the next year in mourning. And in laughter. And joy.

Though I had lost one of my dearest friends, my youngest son had just passed his first birthday. And that second year of life is such a marvel. First steps, first words, first funny sayings. Every day sparkled with his energy and wit.

At first, a stab of guilt would follow that shaft of joy when my son did or said something remarkable. How could I have a moment of pure happiness when the loss was so new and raw? But in her death, Louise Ross taught me another of many great lessons, this one being that joy – or the important but lesser happiness – and sorrow are not exclusive. I could be enchanted by the



Kathy Ross

wind and sun lifting my son's wispy baby hair and turning it into a halo – then weep because Louise was not there to see it.

It's a reality I've experienced many times since, most recently following the furies of Hurricane Helene.

I've mourned the sight of the Ferguson dairy with generations of work swept downriver, shed tears at the films of Bat Cave, a community that is part of my heritage. I've also wept tears of joy at the sound of my cousins' voices assuring me of their safety and marveled at the kindness we have shown each other following the catastrophe. I've had moments of pure delight at the stunning beauty of autumn sunshine on green-gold leaves. There have been days since the storm that are so beautiful they almost created a physical ache of wonder. And days when the sight of so much wreckage settles in the heart like a knotted, gnarly tangle of sorrow.

Both are part of living. And neither experience negates the other.

So when those moments of joy or happiness come, whether you're dealing with the death of a loved one from this disaster or the loss of a home, don't let guilt dimmish them. Don't let sorrow, the tedium of recovery, the grief of others keep you from embracing the bright



There are days in fall so lovely that they fill one with wonder. Embrace those moments in a time when our community is overwhelmed with loss and destruction; they give us strength.

moments. They will help carry you through the darkness and give strength as you love on folks so overshadowed with sorrow or deep in depression that the light cannot yet pierce through.

Joy and grief do not cancel each other out. We need to embrace them both.



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Help others cope with tragedy by listening with the heart

Presently, many of those who have experienced and are still wading through the disasters and tragedies caused by Hurricane Helene are just barely able to access the most basic of needs (food, water, shelter, physical safety).

And although mental health professionals are and will continue to be a big part of perpetuating healing from these traumas, those that don't have their basic needs met might not yet be in an emotionally or physically stable enough position to devote limited internal resources to therapy sessions.

This doesn't mean that mental and emotional healing isn't taking place in the daily acts of living. It does mean that these mental health moments occur organically and unexpectedly.

It might happen as they're receiving provisions for their family and are brought to tears; or going through the checkout line at the grocery store and



Audrey Snyder

a friendly face innocently asks how they are doing and unintentionally ends up in a conversation about a flooded home; or when physically working side-by-side during clean up and rebuilding naturally leads to camaraderie.

In those interactions, you might feel compelled to suggest a therapist or another professional listening ear. Before you do so, I implore you to first listen to the person presenting their heart to you.

Don't worry about saying the right thing (or potentially anything at all). Try not to rush through this moment of human connection. Commiserate, but don't try to "one up"—there is no winning in making comparisons of loss. Try to show your interest and caring by maintaining an open and relaxed face and body position. And then, if the timing feels right, share what mental health resource information that you have.

Good listening skills are simple but take practice. There is no better time to practice fully listening than in those moments when you are helpless to do anything except bear witness to another's grief and humanity. Helping them hold this burden, even momentarily, is how we help heal ourselves



Ainus Khakimov/Unsplash

Listening is one of the most important skills to cultivate in helping others cope with grief and loss.

and others. If you can do this, you've actually done quite a lot.

Audrey Snyder, LCMHC, LCAS, CCSA, M.Ed is a mental health therapist living, loving, and working in Haywood County.



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Tetanus: Precautions now can prevent agony, event death, later



Surgeon Sir Charles Bell painted this graphic portrait of a soldier dying of tetanus that he received through gunshot wounds. As disturbing as it is, it is a vivid reminder of the importance of ensuring tetanus vaccines are up to date.

By Kathy N. Ross

There is a reason that medical clinics are promoting tetanus vaccinations in these days following the floods of Helene.

While exposure to flood water technically does not increase the risk of tetanus, the risk does rise during rescue efforts and cleanup, because that is when folks are more likely to experience cuts while are handling shattered building materials, shredded metal, wood debris and flooded household items. Any of those items might have soil containing the spores that causes the disease.

Tetanus is caused by a bacteria, *clostridium tetani*, whose spores are commonly found in soil. When those spores enter the body through a cut, they become a bacteria that produces toxin. While it can be transmitted by stepping on a rusty nail or by a cut with rusty metal, the rust is only one of several potential carriers. The bacteria also can be carried on soil, feces or saliva. So while floodwater itself is not the cause, flooding creates the potential for injuries, and the soil or waste in that water can carry tetanus spores.

Tetanus is rare in the United States,

with only about 30 cases reported per year, thanks to vaccine protection. While children whose vaccines are up to date are well protected from the disease, adults need a booster every 10 years to ensure they maintain that protection. And that's where it gets tricky.

It is easy to lose track of time, to let those 10 years between tetanus boosters extend beyond that limit. And when you're engaged in cleanup or rescue work, whether helping a friend clear out a business or trying to remove wood and metal from your own property, you may believe you're too busy to worry with that extra step.

But tetanus, or "lockjaw," is scary stuff. Statistically, one in 10 people who get it will die from the infection. It is painful and terrifying, causing intense muscle spasms or contractions, including around the jaw, giving the disease its nickname. In many cases the contractions start around the face, followed by spasms in the neck and progressing downward in the body.

According to the Mayo Clinic, "usually, the neck and back arch, the legs become rigid, the arms are drawn up to the body, and the fists are clenched. Muscle rigidity in the neck and ab-



Though people traditionally think of tetanus as being carried into the body on rusty metal, other materials can also carry the spores, which are activated once they enter through a cut. Among those materials are wood, soil and dirt.

domen may cause breathing difficulties." These spells can last for several minutes. Other symptoms can include extreme blood pressure, either high or low, fever and rapid heart rate.

In other words, it's agonizing. Sometimes deadly.

The best precaution, if you haven't already done so, is to make sure your tetanus vaccine is up to date. The Haywood County Health Department has tetanus vaccines available, as do some of the temporary medical clinics established after the flood. Health department immunization clinic hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Call 452-6675 to schedule an appointment.

A second precaution is an immediate cleaning and disinfection of any puncture of the skin. The Mayo Clinic offers the following advice:

"If you have a simple, clean wound — and you've had a tetanus shot within 10 years — you can care for your wound at home.

"Seek medical care in the following cases:

- You've not had a tetanus shot within 10 years.
- You are unsure of when you last had a tetanus shot.
- You have a puncture wound, a foreign object in your wound, an animal bite or a deep cut.
- Your wound is contaminated ... or you have any doubt about whether you've cleaned a wound sufficiently after such exposure. Contaminated wounds require a vaccination booster if it's been five or more years since your last tetanus shot."

Exercise key to slowing advance of Parkinson's Disease

By Emily Fisher

In 2022, 90,000 people in the United States were diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease (PD), a 50% higher incidence rate than the previous 60,000 cases diagnosed annually. Currently 1 million people in the U.S. live with PD, and it is expected to climb to 1.2 million by 2030.

What is PD

Parkinson's Disease is a progressive neurodegenerative disorder of the brain where neurons that produce dopamine die and no longer function. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter in the brain that controls body functions including memory, movement, motivation, mood, attention, and other areas.

Symptoms

Symptoms can vary from one person to another. Some common motor symptoms are resting tremors (typically in the hands, but tremors in other areas can be seen), slowness (bradykinesia) and freezing (hypokinesia)

with walking and other movements, shuffling of feet with lack of arm swing while walking, stiffness in the limbs (rigidity), and postural instability causing difficulty with walking and balance, smaller handwriting and facial masking.

Some common non-motor symptoms noticed are loss of smell and taste, depression, REM sleep behavior disorder, fatigue, hallucinations, and speech and swallowing issues.

Treating PD

There is not a cure or standard treatment for PD, and treatment should be tailored to each individual. Medications are used to treat the symptoms of PD that help with movement issues and others for nonmovement issues like sleep and constipation. Often physical, occupational, and speech therapy are prescribed.

Exercise is the most important recommended treatment an individual can do for themselves. Research has shown that moderate to high intensity exercise can slow the progres-

sion of PD. The types of moderate activities recommended include walking, yoga, swimming, Tai Chi and flexibility training.

Research has also shown that high intensity exercise helps the body make neuroprotectants for the brain, which promotes the growth of neurons and neuroplasticity. Types of exercises that are beneficial for PD are aerobic classes focused on PD like "Delay the Disease," group cycling classes, dancing, and a popular growing class, non-contact boxing like "Rock Steady Boxing."

Boxing For PD

A major benefit of boxing is how it works on a multitude of areas that are affected by PD.

Non-contact boxing is a 'forced' activity that focuses on gross motor movements, high intensity exercise, balance, stability, core strength, and rhythm. Working these areas together helps improve an individual's endurance, mood, range of movement, flexibility, posture and gait. It also aids in the ability to



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'Rock Steady Boxing' is a form of exercise that has shown significant benefits for patients with Parkinson's Disease.

perform activities involved in daily living.

Make sure you talk with your healthcare provider before starting any exercise classes, and that you choose a class with a trained instructor that understands PD to help prevent any injuries.



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Healing after in Helene; the long term, survivor's guilt and reaching out

By Martha Teater, MA, LMFT

For many in Western North Carolina, time is now split into before and after Hurricane Helene. Everyone in the area has stories about their experiences with the storm. For some, the damage was minimal, for others it was catastrophic.



Martha Teater

As a long-term Disaster Mental Health volunteer with the Red Cross, I've responded to many national disasters, starting with Hurricane Katrina. This storm was different, and the images were more personal. This ravaged where I lived for 30 years and impacted people I know and love.

The Long Haul

People are wondering how they will get through this. They question if their reactions are normal.

Thoughts and emotions that commonly arise after a national disaster include: fear, anxiety, irritability, sleep troubles, and a change in appe-

tite. People also struggle with the lack of routine, a sense of isolation, guilt, fear, and sadness. They may feel a lack of safety and security, struggle with financial worries and concerns about their children. They may develop worry about future storms. Others are experiencing damage to property, loss of work, and upheaval in their usual life patterns. Others grieve lives lost.

From crisis highs to doldrum lows

In the early days following a disaster, adrenaline may provide energy to get things done. Support in the community can be heartening, and seeing the kindness of friends, first responders, churches, nonprofit organizations, government entities, and neighbors, is encouraging.

This honeymoon phase often shifts to a period of disillusionment. People may become fatigued and discouraged, which can lead them to feel angry and blame others for a slow response, a lack of resources, and how long things are taking.

There are things you can do to help yourself meet and conquer the long-term challenges:

- Stay connected with others.
- Share stories.
- Find moments of joy and hope.
- Seek counseling if it might be helpful.

• Find meaning by reaching out to those who have been through this shared community experience. There have been powerful stories of heroism, courage, strength and resilience. This has highlighted acts of service and compassion that connect rather than divide people.

Survivor's Guilt

Following a devastating event, we often hear survivors express feelings of guilt. They apologize for complaining or for being upset, saying that they realize that other people have it much worse. They downplay their own suffering, feeling that it doesn't compare to those who lost homes, cars, or loved ones.

These kinds of comparisons aren't helpful. They lead people to dismiss their own emotions and downplay their own challenges. It's much more helpful for people to shift feelings of guilt to feelings of gratitude and compassion, both toward others and themselves.

How to Help Others

Some people have lost everything, and all have lost something. Some have lost housing, vehicles, money, jobs, family members, and friends. Most everyone has lost a sense of security, safety, and peace. You might worry about yourself and also

have concerns about others.

One way you can manage the aftermath of the storm is to find meaning. How can you provide support to others? Perhaps you are open to volunteering through your faith community, your neighborhood, your children's school, the Red Cross, or a local organization. If you are in a position to donate money, there are multiple trustworthy groups doing amazing work. Maybe you have a car that you don't need any longer that could be a lifeline for someone. You may have furniture or household items that could be a valuable gift to someone who has lost a home and all their belongings.

Talk with people. Better yet, listen to others. Ask them to share their stories with you.

There is deep goodness in the people of Western North Carolina. This is a place where neighbors really do help neighbors. This is a place where that help is sorely needed, now more than ever.

Martha Teater is a licensed therapist who began her practice in Haywood County in 1990, where she lived for 30 years. Now living in Denver, Co., she sees people in North Carolina and Colorado through telehealth. Her website is www.marthateater.com.

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End of life care and comfort care often available through same agency

What is the difference between hospice and palliative care?

Hospice care is specialized medical care providing pain and symptom management, emotional, and spiritual support to patients of all ages (including pediatric patients) who are no longer seeking curative treatment and for whom life expectancy is six months or less.

Usually, this care is provided by an interdisciplinary team of hospice professionals that can include physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, certified nursing assistants, social workers, chaplains, a music therapist, volunteers, and other specialists who work together with the patient's primary health care provider.

Palliative care is an approach to care providing patients with relief from the symptoms, pain, and stress of a serious, often life-threatening, illness.

A palliative care team consists of health care professionals, social workers, spiritual counselors and other specialists who work with the patient's existing health care providers to provide relief, whatever the diagnosis. This extra layer of support is appropriate at any age, including pediatric patients, and at any stage in the serious illness. In fact, you can involve palliative care upon your initial diagnosis. Palliative care may be provided along with curative treatment (for example, alongside chemotherapy).

Facilities like Four Seasons Hospice offer either service.



At home care may be palliative, aiming to provide relief during a serious illness, or may involve hospice care, which steps in when a patient is no longer seeking a cure and whose life expectancy is 6 months or less.



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When logic is bypassed: Tips for calming body, mind

By Audrey Snyder

In times of emergency or major stress, our body is programmed to bypass the logical parts of our brain and focus on communication with nerve centers and other brain areas that help us have an immediate physical response.



Audrey Snyder

This programming is excellent when caught in a stampede of miniature donkeys (or something more dangerous and less adorable), but less useful in our day-to-day lives. And sometimes, even when you logically know the difference between dozens of flying hooves and an annoying but innocuous e-mail from your co-worker, your body can't always tell the difference.

Fortunately, there are many things

we can do to reduce this fight-or-flight response, re-regulate our body, and get our rational brain back online.

Here are a few easy examples (bonus points for including friends in on the fun—boss level for remembering to physically re-regulate next time politics comes up at the dinner table):

- **Singing/Humming:** Singing or humming aloud massages and relaxes parts of the parasympathetic and autonomic nervous systems; therefore helping you calm your body and mind.
- **Get Low:** Sitting or lying on the ground or walking barefoot is often re-centering. There's lots of research and debate about why this works, but it does seem to work.
- **Slow Sips of Water:** Taking your time drinking water forces your body to regulate your breathing and massages the vagus nerve, therefore signaling to your body that you are safe.

• **Shoulder and Head Rolls:** Gently rolling your shoulders forward and back and your head side to side massages the vagus nerve and releases muscle tension that your body associates with a fear response.

• **Rhythmic Moving:** Light physical rhythmic moving — dancing, swaying, swinging, light bouncing, yoga — helps us regulate our breathing, give our body a place to expel extra physical energy and tension, and releases feel-good chemicals such as dopamine and endorphins.

• **Cold Water on Wrists:** Turn on the cold water and let it flow on your wrists for 1-2 minutes. This helps reduce blood flow (and therefore energy) to the vagus nerve, which is a major player in our stress and danger response.

• **Deep Breathing:** Try the box breath: Inhale for 4 counts; hold breath for 4 counts; exhale for 4 counts; hold the breath for 4 counts — then repeat at least



Sitting or lying on the ground is one technique to help reduce our body's fight-or-flight response.

4 times. Boxes not for you? Inhale and imagine that you're going to fill your stomach until your belly button touches the wall in front of you, then exhale until you feel like your belly button is going to touch your spine. Then repeat.

Audrey Snyder, LCMHC, LCAS, CCSA, M.Ed is a mental health therapist living, loving, and working in Haywood County.



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educate, share both life and learned experiences, and create a unique shopping experience for their customers! Dale and Kate leverage their extensive knowledge and personal experiences to offer recommendations to customers.

Dale, a native New Jersey, moved to the mountains over 30 years ago. Kate, who grew up in Cullowhee, learned about alternative health options while home on leave from the military during the early 2000's. Once she retired in 2013, (she's a retired US Army General), she returned to the mountains and Dale and she have worked together ever since.

In 2022, they decided to make their dream of owning a business come true and opened up a website then a storefront on North Main Street, Waynesville.

Frog Level was the intended site for their original storefront. “Frog” symbolizes transformation and the “lotus”, associated with the frog, symbolizes resilience. The lily pad the frog sits upon is a metaphor for life's fragility. As we have all experienced recently, life's course can change with the slightest touch, just like their change of location from Frog Level to North Main Street.

Frog Leap Wellness offers a wide range of health and wellness products, with a focus on premium supplements, fresh bulk herbs, spices and teas, as well as local crafts.

We all have been impacted in one way or another from the events that our mountains have experienced. We have missed you all and look forward to being with you again.



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Transitions: Scaling back on 'stuff' can be liberating for seniors

Seniors who are considering a transition to a retirement community can be faced with many important decisions during the process — decluttering may be one of the tasks that can feel overwhelming. However, it doesn't have to feel like a chore. Following the tips below can help.

Decluttering isn't just about sorting through possessions; it's a transformative process that liberates seniors from the weight of accumulated stuff. Here's why it matters:

- **Streamlined Living:** Downsizing allows seniors to focus on what truly matters. By shedding unnecessary items, they create a more streamlined living space where everything has a purpose.

- **Easier Maintenance:** Uncluttered homes mean less maintenance. Seniors can spend their time enjoying life rather than dusting shelves or organizing overflowing closets.

- **Emotional Freedom:** Letting go of possessions can be emotional, but it also frees seniors from attachment. Memories reside within us, not necessarily in material things.

Following are some tips to aid in the decluttering process.



Deciding which items to keep is an overwhelming task when downsizing, one made easier when it is broken into steps and taken a piece at a time.

- **Start Early.** Begin decluttering well before the move. Tackling one room at a time can help prevent overwhelming feelings. Try creating three piles: keep, donate, and discard.

- **Tackle sentimental items.** Sentimental items hold memories, but they can also weigh us down. Choose a few cherished pieces to keep and consider digitizing

photos and letters.

- **Pare down clothing and accessories.** Seniors often accumulate a lifetime of clothing. To decide what to keep and what to release, ask these questions:

Does it fit?

Have I worn it in the last year?

Is it in good condition?

Donate gently used items to local charities.

Decide on furniture and appliances. Measure your new space — only bring furniture that fits comfortably. Consider multipurpose pieces, such as a sofa bed, to maximize functionality.

- **Reduce books and paperwork.** Digitize important documents and reduce paper clutter. Keep favorite books and donate the rest to libraries or schools.

- **Keep only useful electronics.** Dispose of outdated electronics responsibly. Keep devices that enhance daily life, such as tablets for communication or e-readers.

For seniors, transitioning to a retirement community can be an exciting time full of new possibilities. Streamlining the amount of stuff you take with you can help ensure that transition is smooth and worry-free.



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If you find solace on the trail, your options are returning

Those who seek comfort in the outdoors following tragedy and destruction such as that wrought by Hurricane Helene are beginning to have some options for returning to their places of refuge.

The Pisgah Ranger District of the Pisgah National Forest reopened to hikers Oct. 18.

That district includes the Shining Rock and Middle Prong Wilderness Areas in Haywood County, which can be accessed by U.S. 276 through Cruso and N.C. 215 past Lake Logan — both of which are now open. Hikers could encounter trail hazards caused by storm damage that aren't yet fixed, however.

The Appalachian and Grandfather Ranger Districts of the Pisgah National Forest are still closed, which includes the Max Patch area and Harmon Den in Haywood County.

"We understand the forest is a place of refuge for many, especially during times like these. There's still plenty of work to do, but we look forward to once again having folks back on their public land," said Dave Casey, District Ranger, Pisgah Ranger District.

The Blue Ridge Parkway remains closed, but the Great Smoky Mountains National Park is also open, except



FALL TAPESTRY — The Pisgah Ranger District is open again, which includes the Shining Rock Wilderness in Haywood County. Trailheads are accessible from U.S. 276 and N.C. 215, but not the Blue Ridge Parkway.

for the Haywood County areas of Cataloochee and Big Creek.

Like many areas in Western North Carolina, the Pisgah National Forest was heavily impacted by Hurricane Helene, and visitors may encounter several hazards caused by storm damage, such as:

- Landslides along forest service roads and trails

- Fallen trees and large limbs crossing trails
- Washed out trails and bridges
- Rough roads that require high clearance vehicles where previously they did not
- Limited cell phone service in case of emergency
- Several restroom facilities on the Pisgah Ranger District are currently out of order and will remain closed.
- The following roads in the district remain closed.
- Avery Creek Road
- Yellow Gap Road (between Wolf Ford and North Mills River)
- Headwaters Road (from 475 – to the Sunwall TH)
- Catheys Creek Road (northern portion)

For the status of campgrounds on the Pisgah Ranger District please contact Naventure at naventure.com/outdoor-adventures-north-carolina

For the status of the Cradle of Forestry on the Pisgah Ranger District please contact FIND Outdoors at gofind-outdoors.org/sites/cradle-of-forestry/

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Need to get outside but avoid the hard hikes? Consider these sites

By Kathy N. Ross

Along with the welcome news that the Pisgah Ranger District is again open, those who love the outdoors have other options for enjoying autumn or simply escaping the stress of flood recovery for a few hours — and in places where reminders of Helene’s fury aren’t lurking around every bend.



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Lake Junaluska’s walking trail around its 200 acres of water is a lovely journey no matter the season.

Among them:

- Lake Junaluska Retreat and Conference Center near Clyde escaped Helene’s fury comparatively unscathed, and boasts a 3.8-mile walking trail around its 200-acre lake. For years the center has been open to the public at no charge. Parking is available at a number of sites along North Lakeshore Drive. 800-222-4930.
- Maggie Valley’s greenway suffered flooding, but much of the trailway, which follows the creek, has been repaired. Like Junaluska, there are several parking sites throughout town and access points to the trail. For information on the greenway, call town hall at 828-926-0866.
- Haywood Community College has a trail system both around and above campus that is available to the public. Check with the college before venturing on the 3.8-mile dahlia ridge trail loop to ensure it is accessible. 828-627-4500.
- Biltmore Estate near Asheville has announced that it will reopen Nov. 2, allowing visitors to enjoy the elegant home and grounds for the fall and holiday seasons. Though the grounds were damaged by flooding and fallen trees, crews have



Biltmore Estate

Biltmore Estate will reopen Nov. 2 and plans to go forward with its holiday festivities.

been working for weeks to clear roads throughout the massive estate. For more information call 800-411-3812 or visit biltmore.com.

- The North Carolina Arboretum, located just south of Asheville near the Bent Creek Community, is closed while its staff assess and makes repairs following damage caused by Helene. However, there is a possibility the arboretum will reopen in mid-November for its Winter Lights Show. Check ncarboretum.org for updates.



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Stretches can help ease back pain following rigorous cleanup

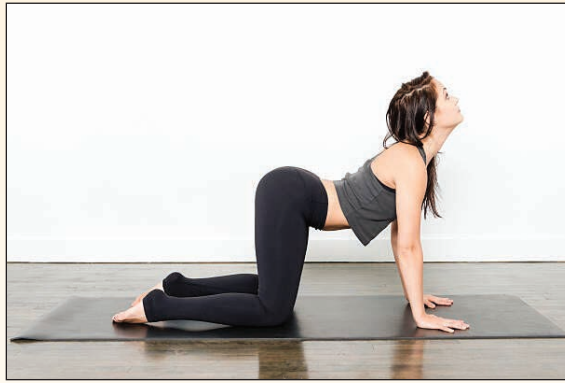
One of the many challenges of self-care following a natural disaster is taking care of the body, particularly the back, as rigorous cleanup and lifting can strain those muscles.

Cleanup of debris, whether hauling away flooded furniture or clearing fallen trees, can create muscle pain, especially in the lower back. Fortunately, roughly 90 percent of lower back pain cases are temporary and treatable without surgery.

The following stretches can be performed at home to help individuals alleviate minor lower back pain caused by over exertion.

- **Knee-to-chest stretch:** Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Grab one leg beneath the knee with both hands, interlocking your fingers, while keeping the other leg flat on the floor. Pull the knee up toward your chest, holding the stretch for 15 to 30 seconds. Keep the lower back pressed to the floor for the duration of the stretch, which can be repeated with the opposite leg. Perform the stretch between two and four times for each leg.

- **Trunk rotation:** When beginning a trunk rotation, lie on your back and bring the knees up toward



The cat cow stretch is a yoga exercise that can help alleviate lower back pain.

your chest. The body should be positioned as if you're sitting in a chair. Extend arms out to the sides fully, with palms facedown on the floor. With knees together and hands on the floor, roll both bent knees to one side and hold for 15 to 20 seconds. Return to the starting position and then do the same for the opposite side, repeating several times for each side.

- **Cat-cow:** Various yoga exercises, including the cat-cow, can help to alleviate lower back pain. Begin slowly when attempting to alleviate lower back

pain, doing the cat-cow 10 times, once or twice a week. Kneel on all fours with hands flat on the floor and arms positioned straight under the shoulders and knees directly below the hips. Breathe in as you drop your stomach toward the floor, arching the back and looking up to the ceiling. Hold for one to two seconds, then reverse. Breathe out as you pull your stomach back toward the back, rounding your back upwards and dropping the head toward the floor.

- **Seated hamstring stretch:** The seated hamstring stretch can be beneficial because tight hamstrings are believed to be a common contributor to lower back pain. Stretching the hamstring muscles helps to release tension in the spine. Sit on the floor with one leg out in front of you and hook a bath towel around the heel of your foot. Gently bend forward at the hips, bringing the belly down to the thighs. Keep your back straight as you grab the towel so you can bring the belly closer to your legs. Keep the stretch until you feel mild tension in the lower back and the back of the leg. Hold for 10 seconds, rest for 30 seconds and repeat three times for each leg.

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Strength in community: Places to connect and rebuild



The YMCA of Western North Carolina operates a mobile fresh food truck and mobile kitchen to provide healthy food around the region, one way the community center has reached out before and after Hurricane Helene.

After a natural disaster like Hurricane Helene, finding support close to home is crucial.

Local community organizations, including places like recreation centers, churches, and the YMCA of Western North Carolina, offer a variety of services to help people recover and rebuild. These organizations provide

more than just a safe space—they help people heal, connect, and find the resources they need.

Community organizations help us rebuild by providing:

Connection with Others: Being part of a community is one of the most important things after a disaster. Local groups help people connect, share their experiences, and support each other. Whether through group activities or simply having a place to meet, these organizations foster a sense of belonging.

Distribution Centers: Community organizations also became vital distribution centers for basic needs like food, water, clothing, and toiletries. This makes it easier for families to access critical supplies during the toughest times.

Essential Services: After Hurricane Helene, community centers throughout Western North Carolina stepped

up to provide essential services. For example, the Reuter Family YMCA opened its doors to offer free showers and device-charging to those without running water or power, giving community members a place to refresh and regain a sense of normalcy.

Support for All: From emergency childcare to wellness programs, community organizations offer many ways to help families get back on their feet. After a disaster, they provide spaces for children to play and adults to relax, giving everyone a break from the stress.

Volunteer and Donation Opportunities: Nonprofit community organizations rely on volunteers and donations to keep providing help. People can get involved by volunteering for clean-up efforts, organizing food drives, or offering their time and skills. Donations of money or supplies go directly to helping those in need.

Community members can get involved by:

Joining a Community Group: Becoming part of an organization like a recreation center or the YMCA gives you access to the programs and services that can support your recovery.

Volunteering: Helping others in times of need is one of the best ways to support your community and improve your own well-being. You can join volunteer efforts like distributing supplies or assisting with clean-up.

Donating: When deciding where to donate, consider giving to local community organizations. Doing so ensures ongoing support for local neighbors in need.

In times of crisis, community organizations come together to offer the services and support we need. Whether by joining, volunteering, or donating, your involvement helps build a stronger, more connected community ready to rise above any challenge.

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The YMCA is a community-based nonprofit that serves your spirit, mind, and body. We invite you to be a part of something bigger. Join us to help our community recover and rebuild.

CONNECT GIVE VOLUNTEER

- Connect through a wide variety of programs, including group fitness classes, mental health programs, community groups, swim lessons, youth sports, and more.
- Give to meet urgent needs for community assistance and to support our efforts to care for children, feed the hungry, reduce social isolation, and build healthier lives for all.
- Volunteer with our food outreach programs. In the aftermath of Helene, the Y is WNC's largest provider of fresh produce and shelf-stable goods. You can help our mobile food markets and food box deliveries feed those who need it most.

Learn more at ymcawnc.org



YMCA OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA

Cleanup process could take months. Here's how to do it safely, effectively

By Kathy N. Ross

Hundreds of homes have been damaged beyond repair by Hurricane/Tropical Storm Helene's flooding and landslides. Others, however, may be salvaged or have suffered lesser damage such as flooded basements.

If you are a home or business owner trying to salvage or restore your building, you've likely been at the task for weeks already. However, there are some guidelines for doing the work safely, effectively and efficiently. The Centers for Disease Control and the Federal Emergency Management Agency have web pages devoted to that goal. Here are some of those ideas that are particularly applicable to WNC counties.

Gear up

First, make sure you have the right gear. Depending on your location, that may include hard hats and steel-toed boots. If you're working with heavy equipment, ear protection should be a given.

Some of your most important gear should be a first-aid kit, lots of topical antibiotic and disinfectant. Any cuts, no matter how slightly, should be disinfected, treated with antibiotic ointment and covered with a



Vicki Hyatt

At Main Street Dental in Canton, new owners Dr. Amy Perlow and her husband Dan Corey shovel mud off the sidewalk days after Helene's flooding. Business- and homeowners are facing a long cleanup and restoration process.

bandage or band-aid to prevent contamination.

And if you need to use a chain saw, in addition to wearing the proper equipment, have someone with you. It's standard safety advice, but lives are too often

lost because individuals decide they can manage a chain saw job alone – and no one is there to help when the worst happens.

You need to have goggles to protect your eyes from dust and other hazardous particles, including fiberglass, that might be floating in the air. You also need N95 masks to protect from those same substances, or, even better, a respirator. Heavy work gloves are a must. The CDC also recommends having at least two fire extinguishers on hand.

If you're in an area that has been contaminated by sewage, you need to have rubber boots and rubber gloves as well as goggles.

Planning

Part of taking care of yourself mentally and physically during cleanup involves prioritizing. When faced with a home or business that has been flooded or destroyed by landslide, or when facing those same catastrophes in a community, the brain can be overwhelmed and go into shutdown. It's like what happens when you walk into an unbelievably cluttered and messy room and don't know where to start the cleanup – only on an almost infinitely greater scale.

Continued on page 21



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So make a list of jobs that need to be done. Just get them down on paper. Then list them in order or priority, or at least prioritize according to most urgent, important, and jobs that can wait.

This does a couple of important things mentally as well as practically. Mentally, it provides a thread of control where you feel like you have had none. (Checking items off your list of tasks will also help you feel like you're reclaiming a little bit of control.) Secondly, it brings mental order, which helps you realize there is the possibility of bringing some measure of physical order back into your life as well. Practically, the job list helps you focus on the most important tasks and helps keep you from veering off into other projects, because those needs will be bombarding you from every direction.

And pacing

Pace yourself. In the initial rush of adrenaline, and perhaps with the numbness that comes from shock, you can wear yourself out without realizing the strain you've put on the body. You need to be in this for the long haul. It will take years to rebuild homes and communities. Make sure you care for yourself so that you will be here for that marathon. Take time to get away from the cleanup and the chaos.



Pictured is the Thrifty Treasures in Clyde flooding destruction left by Helene. Once such chaos is created by natural disaster, the cleanup seems overwhelming. It helps to break up such big jobs into a prioritized list of tasks.

That awful mold

One of the most challenging aspects of flood cleanup is that of controlling mold. Areas that are flooded may not only have contaminants carried by the waters but are also highly likely to breed mold afterwards.

To help prevent mold growth:

- Clean up and dry your home as quickly as you can.

- Air out your house by opening doors and windows. Use fans to dry wet areas. Position fans to blow air out doors or windows.

- Throw away anything that you can't clean or dry quickly (such as mattresses, carpeting, books, and stuffed animal toys.)

- Remove and discard drywall and insulation that has been contaminated with floodwater.

- Thoroughly clean all wet items and surfaces with hot water and laundry or dish detergent. For example, you'll want to clean any flooring, concrete, molding, wood and metal furniture, countertops, appliances, sinks, and other plumbing fixtures.

Clean up mold with a mix of bleach and water.

- Never use bleach in a closed space. Open windows and doors first.

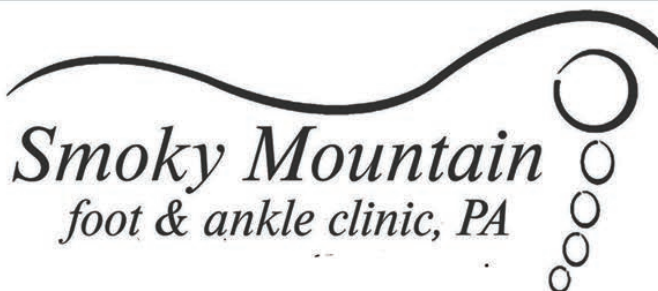
- Put on personal protective equipment to protect your eyes, nose, mouth, and skin. Wear goggles, an N-95 respirator, and protective gloves.

- To make your cleaner, mix 1 cup of household bleach with 1 gallon of water.

- Clean everything with mold on it.

While mold cleanup is a safety measure in itself, it is also important to do it safely:

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Continued from page 21

- Never mix bleach with ammonia or any other cleaner.
- Wear rubber or other non-porous boots, gloves, and eye protection.
- Try not to breathe in product fumes. If using products indoors, open windows and doors to allow fresh air to enter.

Other hazards

- Never use generators, pressure washers, or other gasoline, propane, natural gas, or charcoal-burning devices inside your home, basement, garage, or camper—or even outside near an open window, door, or vent. Carbon monoxide—an odorless, colorless gas from these sources that can cause sudden illness and death—can build up indoors and poison the people and animals inside.
- Call the fire department to inspect or remove chemicals, propane tanks, and other dangerous materials.
- Wear protective clothing and gear (for example, a respirator if needed) when handling hazardous materials.
- Wash skin that may have come in contact with



Kathy N. Ross

Any stuffed animals that were exposed to flood water should be discarded. Painful as that may be for some children, new stuffed animals are waiting for them, such as these inside a cardboard bin at the WNC Regional Livestock Center.

hazardous materials.

- Wear insulated gloves and use caution if you have to remove a car battery. Avoid any acid that may have leaked from a car battery.

Those beloved toys

It's hard to tell a child why a beloved toy must go,

but your priority is to ensure the safety of your precious children. Following are tips on cleaning toys – and what really needs to go in the trash.

- Make a cleaning fluid by mixing 1 cup of bleach in 5 gallons of water.
- Wash off toys carefully with your cleaner.
- Let the toys air dry.
- You may not be able to kill germs on some toys – like stuffed animals and baby toys. Throw out toys you can't clean.

At the end of the day

Wash up with soap and water.

- Wash yourself thoroughly with soap and water once you're done cleaning.
- Seek immediate medical attention if you become injured or sick.
- Wash all clothes worn during the cleanup in hot water and detergent. These clothes should be washed separately from uncontaminated clothes and linens.

For more information on a variety of topics related to safety cleanup, go to www.cdc.gov/natural-disasters/safety. For more information on mold, visit www.cdc.gov/mold-health



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PTSD often follows trauma — how to recognize the signs

Experiencing a natural disaster can leave more than just physical damage in its wake — it can profoundly affect mental health.

Flood victims often endure the overwhelming stress of losing homes, personal belongings, and, in some cases, loved ones. This trauma can lead to long-lasting psychological effects, with many survivors developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

What is PTSD?

The American Psychiatric Association defines PTSD as “a psychiatric disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event.” PTSD also can occur after witnessing traumatic events, including natural disasters such as the catastrophic landslides and flooding experienced in Western North Carolina on Sept. 27.

PTSD has been around as long as there have been traumatic events, though its name is more recent. It has been known by various names in the

past, including “shell shock” and “combat fatigue.” These names are no longer used in part because they give the impression that post-traumatic stress is exclusive to combat veterans. That’s a misperception. One study indicates one in 13 Americans will deal with PTSD at some point in their lives.

Who can get PTSD?

Exposure to an upsetting traumatic event is necessary before a diagnosis of PTSD can be made. However, that exposure can be indirect. For example, police officers who are repeatedly exposed to details of heinous crimes can develop PTSD even though they are not victims of those crimes and did not witness them. But the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs reports that individuals are more likely to develop PTSD if they are directly exposed to a trauma or injured.

Symptoms of PTSD

The APA places symptoms of PTSD into four categories:

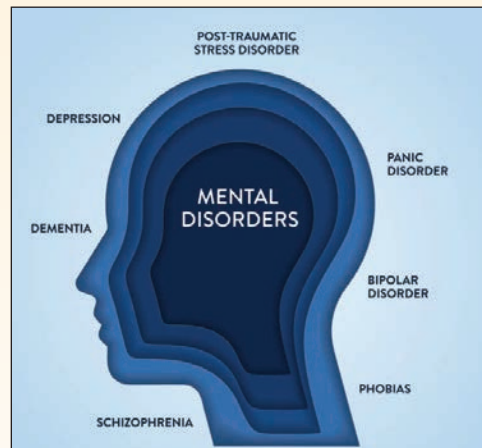
1. **Intrusion:** Symptoms in this category

include intrusive thoughts, such as repeated, involuntary memories; distressing dreams; or flashbacks of the traumatic event.

2. **Avoidance:** People with PTSD may avoid reminders of the traumatic event. These reminders can include places, activities, objects, and even people. Individuals also may resist talking about the event and how they feel about it.

3. **Alterations in cognition and mood:** PTSD can result in an inability to remember details of the traumatic event. Individuals also may develop negative thoughts and feelings that lead to ongoing and distorted beliefs about themselves and others. Individuals may blame themselves for the event or experience ongoing fear, horror, anger, guilt, or shame. A sense of detachment or estrangement from others also may occur.

4. **Alterations in arousal or reactivity:** Symptoms in this category may include being irritable and having angry



outbursts; being reckless or showing potentially self-destructive behavior; being overly watchful of surroundings; being easily startled; or experiencing difficulty sleeping or concentrating.

If you or someone you know is experiencing these symptoms, talk with your family medical practitioner who can recommend care.

More information about PTSD is available at www.psychiatry.org.



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The project described was supported by Funding Opportunity number CMS-NAV-24-001 from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. The contents provided are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of HHS or any of its agencies. GetCoveredWNC serves WNC with support from the Dogwood Health Trust, and Haywood County with support from Haywood Healthcare.

'Wish I had known:' Hospice families benefit from early calls



For most people, the word "hospice" brings fear and sometimes anger, especially if they have never experienced hospice care with a friend or loved one.

The irony is that the majority of families who have hospice care for their loved one often say, "I wish I had known about hospice sooner."

Hospice started as a volunteer organization in Haywood County in 1983 under the direction of Dr. Michael Pass. Since then, Medicare recognizes and pays 100% of hospice services, including the following:

- **A Medical support team:** Medical director, nurses, nurse aides, social

worker, spiritual caregivers;

- Medical equipment for the home, including hospital beds, bedside commodes, and more;
- Medications to address pain and symptom management;
- Respite stay if needed for caregivers;
- On-call emergency support;
- Bereavement coordinator to provide resources and support following a death.

Who can benefit from hospice care at home? Anyone with a chronic or terminal illness who has a life expectancy of six months or less if the illness runs its normal course.

On average, patients who are on hospice at least six months receive 100 visits from their hospice team. In sharp contrast, patients who are only on hospice one to 10 days receive an average of six visits. Calling on hospice earlier can make a significant differ-



ence in the quality of life for patients and peace of mind for caregivers.

A family member sums up her experience in a Google review:

"They were incredibly professional, helpful, and supportive throughout the entire process. I never expected to genuinely enjoy the people who helped me go through her loss, but they treated me and my grandmother so kindly and made a really tough transition as easy and beautiful as possible."

One family had this to say about their experience:

"Our family doctor recommended

bringing in hospice early on, and what a blessing it was. They were such a big help, taking some of the daily tasks off of the family, especially my elderly aunt who wanted the best care for her husband. They made him as comfortable as possible, and they were very personable."

Haywood Hospice Executive Director Chelsea Johnson encourages family and caregivers to call and ask for a free home assessment to find out more about comfort care.

"Anyone can refer a patient to our service. One of our team members will visit you to assess your needs and work with your doctor to determine if you qualify for the benefit," Johnson added.

To learn more about the benefits of hospice care, contact Haywood Hospice at 828-452-5039.

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Have Questions About a Living Will or Healthcare Power of Attorney?

Attend one of the following free community programs to receive a copy of the Five Wishes document. Learn more about the different plans of care available when you or a loved one has a serious illness.

"Five Wishes & The Gift of Advance Care Planning" | Nov. 12

Haywood Senior Resource Center | 1:00p.m.

"Aging in Place with a Chronic Illness" | Nov. 15

Haywood County Public Library in Canton | 1:00p.m.

"Five Wishes & the Gift of Advance Care Planning" | Dec. 3

Haywood County Public Library in Canton | 1:00p.m.

For more information or to register, call 452-5039.

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— Leigh Ann Mertens, Hospice Volunteer Coordinator

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HAYWOOD
HOSPICE & PALLIATIVE CARE

Resources available to help those recovering from Helene



Becky Johnson

Canton Mayor Zeb Smathers, flanked by Gov. Roy Cooper and FEMA head Deanne Criswell, walk the grounds of the IP Sports Complex in Canton. FEMA has established disaster recovery centers in both Haywood and Buncombe..

The following is a list of resources for storm victims in Haywood and Buncombe counties, as well as volunteer and donation opportunities.

FEMA assistance

FEMA now has now opened a permanent Disaster Recovery Center in Haywood County at the Haywood Community College High-Tech Center in Waynesville.

The center is a one-stop shop where survivors can meet face-to-face with FEMA representatives and apply for FEMA financial assistance — which can include money for basic home repairs, personal property losses or other unin-

sured, disaster-related needs, such as childcare, transportation, medical needs, funeral, or dental expenses.

It also serves as a clearinghouse to direct people to other assistance programs, including storm-related unemployment and low-interest disaster or economic injury loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration.

The center is open seven days a week from 8 a.m.-7 p.m. HCC High-Tech Center is located at 112 Industrial Park Dr., Waynesville. People can also apply online at Disaster-Assistance.gov.

In Buncombe County, the FEMA disaster recovery center is located at A.C. Reynolds High School, 1 Rocket Drive, Asheville, 28803. It is open 8 a.m. until 7 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Mass care medical unit

A Mass Care Medical Unit is set up at Haywood Health and Human Services from 9 a.m.-6 p.m., providing non-emergency health care services such as simple medication refills, insulin management, tetanus vaccinations, etc. Located at 157 Paragon Parkway, Suite 300, Clyde.

Community Care Stations

In Buncombe County, community care stations have free showers, laundry, food, and more for Helene survivors. The locations for these are:

- AC Reynolds High School
- At Home Store (Parking Lot)
- Big Lots/Innsbrook Mall
- Buncombe County Sports Park
- Bethel United Methodist
- AC Reynolds Middle School
- Ingles Swannanoa
- Morgan Hill Baptist Church

Central hotline

Haywood County has set up a hotline for all things Helene. The Emergency Call Center can answer questions, direct people to the right place for the information they're looking for and provide information on resources. Open 8 a.m.-5 p.m. daily. Call 828-356-2020.

Buncombe County has activated the One Buncombe Call Center for residents to report storm damage, access resources and find storm-related information by calling 828-250-6100. The call center will operate seven days a week.

Disaster unemployment assistance

If your employment has been lost or interrupted because of Helene, you may be eligible for Disaster Unemployment

Continued on page 26-27

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Assistance, including self-employed and business owners. The deadline to apply is Dec. 2. Apply online at des.nc.gov or call 919-629-3857 for assistance.

Mental Health support

The following resources are available to anyone who needs mental health/substance use support:

- Vaya Health Behavioral Health Crisis Line 800-849-6127. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, free and confidential. TTY: Contact Relay NC at 711.
- Call or text 988 for mental health support from a trained mental health professional. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week — free and confidential.
- Call NC's Peer Warmline at 1-855-733-7762 to speak to a peer living in recovery from mental health or substance use issues. Available 24 hours, a day 7 days a week — free and confidential.

There are also walk-in centers for people experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis, similar to urgent care clinics that does not require an appointment.

- Appalachian Community Services, 91 Timberlane Road, Waynesville. 828-454-1098.
- Blue Ridge Health/Meridian, 131 Walnut St., Waynesville. 828-456-8604.

Listening Circles

If you are feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or upset; if you

saw or responded to something hard; or if you are looking to connect with others in the community, join an online listening circle as we lean on one another and highlight what is getting us through this difficult time and practice tools that can help with the stress.

Listening Circle sessions held over Zoom from noon-1 p.m. every day through Oct. 18. Free, no sign-up needed. Visit bit.ly/WNCListens or call (646) 876-9923 (meeting ID 847 0135 3002).

Learn more about Resources for Resilience Listening Circles by watching a short video at bit.ly/AboutListeningCircles.

Mental health

Emotional support, stress relief, and mental wellbeing services to those affected by the storm is being provided by the Pollinators Foundation for Wellness and Social Healing, located at the Folkmoot Friendship Center in Waynesville.

The Pollinators of Hope project aims to provide compassionate connection, listening, and healing.

Trained volunteers will be deployed to key locations such as resource centers, food distribution sites, and community gathering places to offer emotional support, document stories, and invite individuals to participate in healing activities, including art and storytelling circles, stress relief techniques, mind-body and mental wellbeing classes, nature walks, and support services.

Services are free, donations welcome. Volunteers needed.

To participate in healing services or to volunteer, contact Executive Director Marga Fripp at margacfripp@gmail.com or 828-424-1398.

Business loans

The U.S. Small Business Administration is offering low-cost financial assistance for businesses impacted by Helene.

- Business Physical Disaster: Loans to businesses to repair or replace disaster-damaged property, including real estate, inventories, supplies, machinery and equipment. Nonprofit and churches are also eligible.
- Economic Injury Disaster: Working capital loans to help small businesses who may not have been physically impacted the storm, but have suffered revenue loss as a direct result of the disaster.

Survivors are now encouraged to simultaneously apply for FEMA grants and SBA low-interest disaster loan assistance to fully recover. Disaster survivors also should not wait to settle with their insurance company before applying for a disaster loan, as borrowers can use insurance proceeds that come in later to pay back the loan.

Apply online at sba.gov/disaster, call 800-659-2955 or apply in person at the Asheville Chamber of Commerce at 36 Montford Avenue. Deadline for physical property damage is Nov. 29 and for economic injury is June 30.

Free legal assistance

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Ad31235

Storm Helene. Through a partnership among Legal Aid of North Carolina, the North Carolina Bar Association, the American Bar Association, and FEMA, low-income storm survivors can access free legal help via a toll-free hotline: 866-219-5262.

This service connects eligible callers with volunteer lawyers to assist with FEMA appeals, insurance claims, contractor disputes, and more. It's a critical resource for those navigating the aftermath of the storm.

Well testing and ag assistance

For well water testing in Haywood County, call 828-452-6638. For agriculture assistance, call 828-452-2741, Ext 3.

In Buncombe County, call the health department at 828-250-5000. If you would like to have your well tested for bacteria, you will be asked to apply in person at the department's Permits and Inspections office at 30 Valley St., Asheville, 8 a.m.-4 p.m. weekdays. You will be given a water sample test kit with instructions on how to use it.

Debris removal

Debris cleanup efforts in WNC are underway. Please follow the guidelines below for proper placement:

- Place all debris on the right of way along the road
- Keep debris clear of fire hydrants, fences, mailboxes, and other obstacles to ensure safe and efficient removal

To help keep the process moving efficiently, ensure that debris is out and ready for pickup by the time crews arrive

in your area.

For FEMA documentation purposes, it is critical to document your debris before it is removed. Take photos and keep detailed records of the damage and debris on your property.

Flood clean-up assistance

If you or someone you know needs help cleaning up damage from Hurricane Helene at your home/residence or house of worship, call Crisis Cleanup at 844-965-1386 to ask for help.

Crisis Cleanup is 100% free service that connects volunteers from local and national relief organizations, community groups, and faith communities who may be able to assist with mucking out after floods, moving debris to curbs, tarping roofs, and chain-sawing downed trees.

Volunteer opportunities

In Haywood County, a centralized clearinghouse for volunteers is being organized by Orchard Church. To find out how to help and sign up for a volunteer shift, visit theorchardnc.com/relief.

In Buncombe County, the Volunteer Reception Center is officially open Saturday from 8 a.m. — 1 p.m. at 50 S French Broad Ave, Asheville, NC 28801 (United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County) — anyone in the area looking for a volunteer opportunity is welcome to go to this location to be assigned to a need. A variety of skills are

wanted, so there should be something for everyone.

Volunteers and donations must be coordinated to ensure the needs of the community are fully met. Visit handsonasheville.org for more information.



Becky Johnson

HELPING HAND — Volunteers are making the world go round in Haywood County post-Helene, especially at the donation and supply distribution sites. Picture is Tuscola student Juliette Wenzel (left) and Pisgah student Annabelle Keilberg. Volunteer opportunities are being coordinated through central sites in both Haywood and Buncombe.



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How to tackle mold after a flood

Mold almost always follows flooding, and can pose a significant health threat. Mold can be especially dangerous for people with respiratory issues like allergies or asthma.

In the wake of flooding such as Western North Carolina has experienced, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention places a priority on helping those affected learn how to safely clean up mold. Here are its recommendations.

Mold cleanup must be done with a sense of urgency, as mold can grow very quickly in damp environments. It's vital that homeowners only reenter flooded properties when it's safe to do so. Reentering too quickly and before government officials say it's safe to do so can put residents in serious jeopardy.

Once it's safe to reenter a home, the CDC recommends the following approach to address mold after a flood.

• **Wear personal protective equipment:** Gloves, masks and goggles should be worn to protect the eyes, nose, mouth, and skin. While personal protective equipment can be highly effective, anyone with mold allergies or preexisting respiratory conditions like asthma should leave mold cleanup to the professionals.

• **Discard certain items:** Items that are wet with flood water but cannot be cleaned and completely dried within 24 to 48 hours should be discarded. People with flood insurance policies may need to take photos of items prior to discarding them if they hope to be reimbursed.

• **Open doors and windows:** Airing the home out by opening the doors and windows can inhibit mold growth when humidity levels are lower outside than inside.



Protective equipment is necessary for safely cleaning and removing mold from a flooded home.

• **Circulate air around the house:** If it's safe to turn the electricity back on, circulate air inside the home with fans. In addition, use a dehumidifier to remove moisture from inside the home.

• **Do not mix cleaning products:** The CDC notes the dangers associated with mixing cleaning products. For example, mixing bleach with ammonia can produce toxic vapors.

• **Scrub surfaces:** Use clean water and detergent to remove all visible mold from surfaces around the house. Dry the surfaces immediately after cleaning them.

• **Avoid refurbishing until all mold has been removed:** Mold can grow even if it's been painted or caulked over. The CDC urges anyone tasked with addressing flood-related mold to make sure surfaces are completely cleaned and dried prior to refurbishing rooms.

• **Dry the home as quickly as possible:** Drying the home as quickly as possible, and ideally within 24 to 48 hours of the occurrence of flooding, can inhibit further mold growth. However, it's imperative that residents only reenter a home after getting the go-ahead from local authorities.

Telehealth appointments — preparation is key

When traveling to in-person doctor visits becomes risky, many doctors increase telemedicine offerings, allowing patients to call in and discuss issues or symptoms over the phone. And in the wake of the flooding from Helene, a number of medical offices, particularly those in neighboring Buncombe County, are offering this service.

In many instances, doctors can prescribe medications or recommend treatments without seeing patients in their offices, and patients may appreciate that convenience even after the pandemic has ended.

Telehealth appointments can be valuable for anyone, and patients can take steps to ensure their telemedicine sessions with their physicians are as productive as possible.

Here are some tips to get the most out of a telehealth appointment.

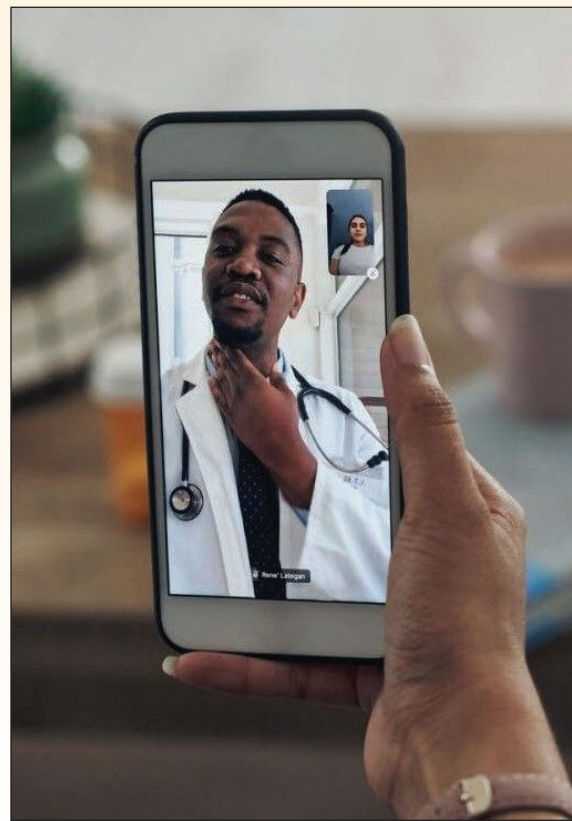
- **Write down questions:** Prior to an appointment, patients can write down any questions they have for their physicians. This helps ensure nothing is forgotten during the appointment. Writing down questions is especially important

for telehealth appointments, as it can be easy to be distracted when calling in from home.

- **Keep a health diary:** A health diary can help patients point to symptoms or other persistent issues they've faced in the weeks or months leading up to their telehealth appointments. Jot down everything from the severity and frequency of symptoms to fluctuations in weight to any reactions to medications. No detail is too minor, as the more informed patients are, the more fruitful their discussions with physicians can be.

- **Photograph any extraordinary symptoms:** If any unusual symptoms or issues like rashes arise, document them by taking photos and measure the size of any lumps. Any symptoms should be reported to a physician immediately, but documentation like photographs can ensure nothing is lost in translation during telehealth appointments.

Telehealth conferences are being used following the floods of Hurricane/Tropical Storm Helene, particularly for doctors in medical practices that were flooded or whose facilities do have yet have their water systems restored.



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Ad34418

Men are often reluctant to get help for mental issues

Awareness of mental health issues has grown considerably in recent years. Prominent individuals from various industries have come forward to speak about their struggles, and that has done much to remove the stigma that was long associated with mental health challenges.

Though more people recognize the important of mental health issues and treatment, men tend to be a tougher audience to reach than women.

A 2019 study published in the American Journal of Men's Health noted that men have historically been more hesitant than women to seek help for mental health difficulties. That hesitancy can have grave consequences, as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that men are more likely to die by suicide than women.

Recognition of the symptoms that suggest someone is experiencing mental health troubles could compel men to seek treatment or lead to their family mem-

bers encouraging them to get help.

The National Institute of Mental Health reports that men and women can and often do experience the same mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety. However, that does not mean their experiences will be the same. In fact, experiences can differ widely among men as well.

A 2017 study published in the Journal of Counseling Psychology found that men who exhibit stereotypically masculine personality traits often have worse mental health outcomes than men who do not exhibit such traits.

It is critical to know and recognize the signs of mental issues such as depression, anxiety or obsessive/compulsive behavior. Such recognition may compel individuals to seek help for their own issues or serve as warning signs to concerned friends and family members, potentially prompting them to initiate discussions that can save a loved one's life. According to the



Men are often more reluctant than women to seek help in addressing mental health issues such as depression.

NIMH, the following are some symptoms of mental health problems.

- Anger, irritability, or aggressiveness
- Noticeable changes in mood, energy level, or appetite
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- Difficulty concentrating, feeling restless, or on edge
- Increased worry or feeling stressed

- Misuse of alcohol and/or drugs
- Sadness or hopelessness
- Suicidal thoughts
- Feeling flat or having trouble feeling positive emotions
- Engaging in high-risk activities
- Aches, headaches, and/or digestive problems without a clear cause
- Obsessive thinking or compulsive behavior
- Thoughts or behaviors that interfere with work, family, or social life

• Unusual thinking or behaviors that concern other people

The NIMH urges individuals in crisis or people who suspect someone is in crisis to call 911 or to call or text the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. More information about mental health can be found at nimh.nih.gov.

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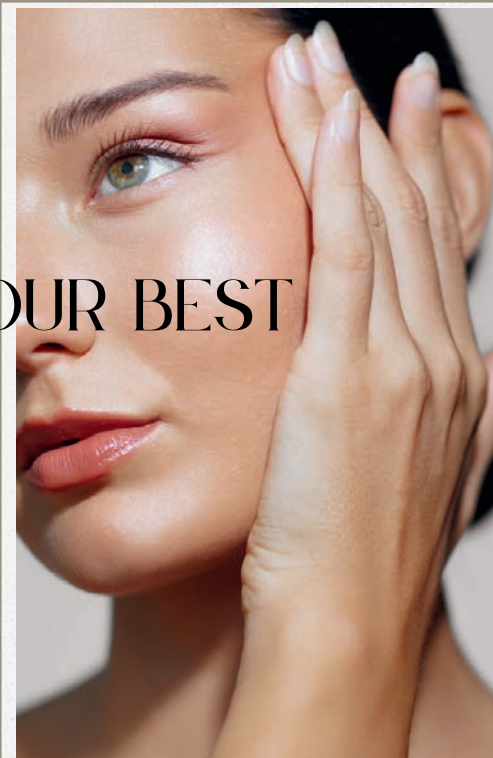


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‘Where was God?’ the accuser challenges. Grieving and loving through the storm

By Maureen Miller

“So, you recently mentioned not being afraid, how God spoke through a children’s song to bring comfort on the Wednesday just prior to this horrendous storm.”

A snide laugh before adding, “But then Hurricane Helene hit less than 48 hours later. How, may I ask, do you explain that?”

This was how the conversation began, and it left me without answer.

My pause beckoned the barrage that followed.

“Where exactly was God when winds and rain washed away those homes, hopes, and dreams—that which you wrote about, hmm?”

Still, nothing, so he again took advantage of my silence. “He’s got the whole world in His hands, huh? Really? The wind and the rain too? And how about those itty-bitty babies verse three speaks of? The sisters and the brothers from verse four? What about them? Haven’t you heard the news? Many children, beloved brothers and sisters, were washed away.”

A pause. Then, in a mocking tone I can’t adequately convey. “His promise? ‘When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you...’ Ha! Don’t you know those rivers, those waters, did overtake more than 200 people, one of them being your friend’s brother? What about them, huh? Your words, they were nothing but lies—misleading people, making them think they’d be OK. Truth is, they’re not. They won’t be. How does that make you feel?”

Speechless for one more moment, I almost allowed his accusations, his words, to settle, sink in, penetrate my broken heart, fragmenting it even more.

But then...

Squaring my shoulders, lifting my chin, I replied. “How do I feel? My heart’s heavy, my words few. I fear if I stop long enough to allow myself to cry,



Maureen Miller

really cry, I’ll never stop, the devastation’s so vast.”

I took a breath. “But those words I wrote? They weren’t mine. They came right from The Word, straight from God’s Word. Therefore, no matter what you say, they’re true—today, yesterday, and always.”

Another inhale as I prepared to continue. “God does have the whole world in His hands. He does. Don’t think for one moment He doesn’t. He didn’t cause this catastrophic flood. His grief over the loss is more than everyone else’s combined. Truth is, He can’t wait to reveal all He’s making new, and until then, He’s right here with us.”

I sniffed, the tears beginning to flow, but rather than silence me, they fueled my courage.

“And while I’m talking about God, about His promises—those proclamations I wield when facing an enemy, even a Category 4 ‘Red’ storm—

He was present in it, and He’s bringing comfort in this devastating loss. He will continue to use His people—those brothers and sisters, yes, even children He holds in His hands—to offer encouragement, much needed supplies, and...”

What? What will God use them—and me, too—to bring? Oh, yes...

“Hope. Hope and joy. He is and will continue to use us to bring this and more to those who are suffering in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. Just you wait for the stories.”

One final deep breath, then, “They’re coming. I’ve already heard some of them—testimonies of those watching as others were carried away by waters too strong, too swift. And guess what people are saying, what they’re testifying to?”

This time, the one who, only moments earlier, came at me with accusations, remained silent. “They’re saying that, in what should be the most terrifying of times, victims of Hurricane Helene are, with their final words, victorious. And you know how?

“Because they’re calling out one word.”

Right then, I saw it. My accuser flinched. After all, he knew what was coming.

But me? I smiled before I spoke, because I always

“You will go out with joy and be led forth with peace. The mountains and the hills will break forth with singing and the trees of the field will clap their hands...” (Isaiah 55:12).



Myjenta Spivey Vaughn

AND STILL THERE IS JOY — Myjenta Spivey Vaughn captured this image of her daughter, a joyful Karaline Vaughn, soon after the family lost all their possessions to Hurricane Helene.

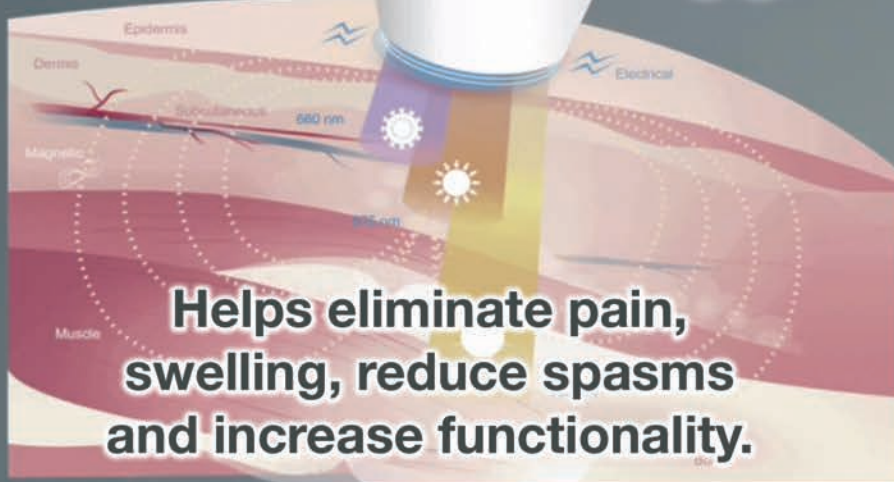
smile, even through tears, at the mention of His name. And what I said caused him to recoil, disappearing from my presence.

“Jesus.”

And, though nothing’s changed — my heart still heavy with the grief of loss — I’ll turn and do the next thing. Indeed, I’ll appropriate another promise. It’s an anchor, one I’ll cling to until the end:

“You will go out with joy and be led forth with peace. The mountains and the hills will break forth with singing and the trees of the field will clap their hands...” (Isaiah 55:12).

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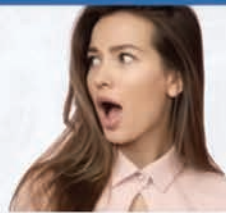
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