

The Road:

The road has fallen. In some places there is nothing where the road used to be. We have walked that road. We've ambled on it. We gawked at the sights. We took our time. We enjoyed the stroll.

We walked it again today. Huge pieces are missing. The mud is deep, the slopes are unsure. There are fallen trees everywhere. Nothing is certain, no footing is sure. It's a long way down to the left with a lot more ready to fall on the right.

It rained here. It rained a mighty rain. It rained as if there was no more rain to be rained after this night. It comes in sheets and curtains and rapids and boulders and mud. There is nothing like it. It is a particular message of nature, the easy message that we visitors mean nothing. We are gone in a clap of thunder. Look over your shoulder, no time to duck, that old oak is coming down and you're gone. They'll find you tomorrow. Or they won't. Either way, you were in the way.

There's no muss or fuss in the process. The old lady, or gent, as you prefer, doesn't much give a hang if you have kids or a sickly mom or a mortgage or a condition. Nature has its own agenda, its own itinerary, and its own schedule. It is inscrutable. It doesn't ask us what we think. It behaves, as it will, as it must. Nature does as it must, and that's what we have to deal with. Take it hard or take it easy, it doesn't matter. We are in the way sometimes and sometimes we pay the price. We pay the price for living in this paradise. Part of the reason that this *is* paradise is that *we* are not in charge. The hills are, the creek is, the clouds are and the river is. They call the dance. We pay the piper.

Payment, in this case, will be long and complicated and money will be the least of it. There is the grief for the lost and the hurt. There is the anger at the crazy, dumb luck that your place crashed down the hill and so many others didn't. There's the time it takes, the thousands of hours that it will take, to get things halfway back to normal. There's the loss of a truck or a shed or a beautiful crop. There's the fear that sits and waits for a hard rain later this week. It's all part of the price we pay for this place.

Folks will quit. It will be just too hard for those folks. We understand and we wish them a new place that affords more peace and less uncertainty. In another time with a slightly different outcome, any of us might quit. Who's to say?

We like to think we can deal with anything but who knows for sure? If it were your mom or your home or your sleepless fear.....who knows? To our neighbors who need to relocate we say, "Come back whenever you can, the light will be on for you."

For the rest, for the people who will be here tomorrow and the days after, it is simply the renewal of an unspoken vow that the land and the water and the sky and the herd and the next crop are what it's all about. We are as connected to this place as the oaks around us. Some of us will surely fall. But the oaks will remain the oaks. We are as fluid as the creek that runs through. We will change course when it storms. We will find new boundaries in unexpected places. It's a choice. We choose to be of this place.

We received our umpteenth wake up call from nature this week. We got the latest in an unending string of invitations to reconsider our place in the scheme of things. This was a monumental storm. But they have happened before. There will be another as time passes. Our kids and grandkids will figure out for themselves where they fit. They will be part of the storms and the droughts and the floods. They will also be part of the perfect days to come, the record crops to come, the hoedowns and the county fairs. They will be the beautiful new babies and the respected old timers. They will choose for themselves as surely as we choose.

It's a ways down the road, so sometimes it's hard to see. But it's on that road nonetheless. The road that was here, and then it wasn't. The road we used to walk. The road we will walk again.