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NEIGHBORS

Nance again. She's one of the town's widows. Lives right over there.

Oh, Jerry, I forgot about him. If he made it, he'll need more oxygen soon.

Most volunteer group leaders give the same orders when setting up in the most rural of mountain areas between hard-hit Asheville and Hickory, a city an hour northwest of Charlotte.

Find a local. Find out what they need. Find out where to go.

When streets are shredded, rivers are relocated and forests turn into fields of logs, rescue teams can't always get to the stranded. For a few days, they don't know who the stranded are.

But neighbors do. Helene turned some small mountain towns into mostly rubble buildings. Still, community remains.

Helene, the Category 4 hurricane that made landfall in Florida's Big Bend region, hit North Carolina as a tropical storm. But even before Helene's bands barreled over mountaintops, Appalachia saw days of rain — 10 inches, in some places.

By Sept. 27, as Helene settled over the sloped towns, houses and Christmas tree farms that dot the region, the area became overwhelmed with floods, mudslides and log-slides.

First came rescue, now comes restoration.

Across the U.S., more than 200 have been reported dead so far in the monster storm. Some remain missing.

SINKING IN MUD

Logan Brown had a home near Frank, an Avery County town about 150 miles northwest of Charlotte. It perched atop a hill and had a view of the scenic Route 19E and North Toe River.

That's where the 17-year-old sat on Sept. 27. He was inside the two-story, green-shuttered house with his dad and siblings.

Then came the roaring mud. The four escaped out the back before Helene gouged logs into the door frame and punched holes into the rest of the house. Brown says they sat by the

river, waiting for the storm to pass. Then they made it to his dad's work truck down the road. Then to his girlfriend's mountaintop trailer home 10 miles away, which — miraculously — made it through the storm, says Ashley Clawson, the girlfriend's mother.

"He was just caked in mud," she says, "from head to toe."

Brown was in new clothes taken from a store with a broken window, she says.

"I don't blame him for stealing," she continues. "What else was he supposed to do?"

Brown has stayed in their trailer for the last few days, Clawson says.

On Thursday, Brown's hands are cut from moving branches and debris to make paths near his home, but they aren't nearly as muddy.

He and his dad, with shovels in hand, walk up the highway to their driveway. They decline help from a makeshift group of volunteers, passing their toppled, nearly vertical, 6,000-pound RAM truck without a second glance.

In Western North Carolina, mangled metal has become more common than a deer sighting. Trailers wrap trees like tinsel. Asphalt crinkles like paper mache. Wooden crosses and Jesus statues poke out of piled debris.

The Browns have a mission. The Clawsons — from nearby Clawson's Holler, where all but two people share her family's name — are there to help.

There's four dirt bikes inside a shed next to the Brown homestead. They're getting them out.

"Be careful," Brown's ax-holding brother cautions as Clawson's children leap into the mud and around an old-school can of Mountain Dew.

Jennavi Clawson, 11, makes room on a branch resting above the mud. Ashley Clawson and her grandson — a tall 2-year-old named James, pull themselves onto it.

Brown heaves the bikes out, easily revving the first, second and third bike.



ASHLEY CLAWSON AND HER CHILDREN NAVIGATE THICK MUD AS LOGAN BROWN, 17, DIGS OUT HIS FAMILY'S DIRT BIKES FROM A SLUDGED SHED ON OCT. 3. HURRICANE HELENE BURIED MANY ITEMS.

The fourth sputters as his brother tries to start it.

"That one might not work," Brown says. "It's hard to start."

He leaps on the red and white frame, pumping his cowboy boot on top of the kick starter. It rattles, then shoots out a cloud of exhaust toward the forest behind him.

Everyone smiles.

"We don't have much, but we make do," Ashley Clawson says, watching her daughter's boyfriend of two years load the bikes onto his trailer.

This is a highlight of their day. On Oct. 1, their source of light was more literal: candles on Brown's chocolate swirled ice cream cake. He turned 17 four days after the storm stopped debris onto his bed pillows.

SENDING SUPPLIES DOWN THE LINE

In Turkey Cove, a ravine 60 miles south of the Browns' home, down past Spruce Pine and Little Switzerland, a 57-year-old woman wears a "Glenwood Elementary" t-shirt. She responds to volunteers asking if crated dogs on a disheveled hill need anything.

They're good, she says before loading them into a silver Nissan Rogue.

She drives down the bumpy side road and stops to talk to four men helping deliver supplies

and a Charlotte Observer reporter in a fleet of ATVs.

"My daddy did a good job, didn't he?" Karen Hollifield says, pointing to the small wooden cabin her father built on the hillside above years ago. It survived Helene.

Somehow, in a house half a mile up the mountain, so did her brother and sister-in-law, she says.

The couple lived in a double-wide trailer nestled up the side road Hollifield just drove down. They heard cracking and rushing water. They stood up and took one step, but the mud stopped them there. It launched them out of the home, broke Hollifield's brother's back and buried her sister-in-law up to her neck, Hollifield says.

Her dad's craftsmanship held up once more. His china cabinet, ousted from its spot in the corner of the room, fell on top of the sister-in-law — trapping her, but also shielding her from the rushing water above.

Hollifield's brother got out first, she says. Then he went to the neighbors'.

"I give all the credit to them," Hollifield says. They dug her sister-in-law out.

Her family and their neighbors all survived, but the seven dachshunds that roamed the property are gone. Hollifield found one of them dead, she says as she

shooed a yellowjacket away from her bicep.

The bees have sent several people in Western North Carolina into anaphylactic shock, according to officials who made calls for more Epipen and Benadryl donations.

Both are stocked in one ATV manned by an Operation Airdrop volunteer from the Outer Banks. He and his neighbor drove west to put their hobby to use — to help.

Hollifield doesn't want either medicine. She just needs to make sure she doesn't get stung, she says, her t-shirt sleeves rolled up, resting on top of her shoulders, exposing her arms.

Down the road, at Turkey Cove Baptist Church, a lady with the same "town name" — Hollifield — similarly rejects supplies, saying other places probably need it more.

The church got its first stockpile on Oct. 1, four days after the storm severed them from the rest of the world. Many members of the congregation stayed as the "little bitty creek" flooded, says April Hollifield, 72. They stayed in the days after, too.

They knew what would happen if they left before the storm: they wouldn't be able to come back, she says. Not for a while, at least.

The souls who stayed through the storm quickly threaded lifelines between each other.

"The immediate response came from the citizens... from the victims," says Jennifer Bowman, a volunteer who took Jeeps, trucks and horses stocked with supplies to Burnsville — one of the state's hardest hit towns.

A "sweet local lady" had set up a distribution point and was trying to manage it by herself. Bowman and a fleet of others organized the supplies, multiplied them and dispersed them.

"Nobody wanted to take more than what they absolutely needed," Bowman says.

One woman asked for just two rolls of toilet paper. When Bowman brought out a "Sam's-Club-sized" pack, she cried and muttered.

I just feel so greedy taking that much toilet paper.

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Haley on Trump:

- "... **chaos follows him**... and we can't have a country in disarray and a world on fire and go through four more years of chaos. **We won't survive it.**"¹
- "He went down a path he shouldn't have. And **we can't let that ever happen again.**"² (Haley regarding January 6.)
- "He's just trying to control as much as he can control, but **we don't want a king in America.**"³
- "He said that **he would stand with Putin and encourage him to invade our allies**...Trump would side with a dictator who kills his political opponents...**Trump is going to side with a madman who's made no bones about the fact he wants to destroy America.**"³
- "This is a man that **put us \$8 trillion in debt**... who **praised China's president Xi a dozen times after China gave us COVID**... a man who now wants to **put 10% tariffs across the board, raising taxes on every single American.**"³
- "If you are going to hit our military, **you are not qualified to be president. Period.**"³
- "**Every single thing that Donald Trump has said or put on TV has been a lie.**"³

She Said It. She Meant It.

AND IT'S ALL STILL TRUE.



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