

Heather MacIver Arnold '95

The year after I graduated from college, I worked in Circleville, West Virginia as a Spring Break Coordinator with Habitat for Humanity. Our job was not to build homes but to clean up a flood that had occurred weeks before our arrival. Our days were long and eye opening. We lifted and dragged water sodden remnants of what were homes, to burn piles. As we shifted through rock piles and mud we found all manner of personal belongings. A photo here, a doll there; we put them aside saying silent prayers for their owners.

Everyday I thought we were making progress. Then one Friday while I was driving down the all too familiar road and looking out my window I realized there was over a mile that we hadn't even touched. Our work was far from over. In that moment I was overwhelmed. This project, this riverbed was going to be what I pointed to when people asked what I was doing with my life. It was how I told myself I had a plan for how to contribute to the world. That night, like every night, I sat on the porch swing watching the sun set behind the Shenandoah Mountains, but tonight for the first time in a long time I felt small. This riverbed was seemingly never going to be cleaned up. In the following weeks I continued to sit on the porch each night and silently talk to God about this world and where I fit in to it.

In the years since, I have returned to that porch and that riverbed in my mind, time and time again. The world as I find it is not too far from the riverbed in West Virginia. In such a world, it is my time digging up mud and lumber, which has taught me how to live. Each of us in some way has a broken or crumbling section of our own life road that is slowly, painstakingly being renewed by God. This is what God created our lives for. We were entrusted with gifts enough to start the clean-up. We are alive to serve each other. We serve, not because of any reward or acclamation, but because we have no choice—their road is all too familiar. Their brokenness is ours.

Years later, friends in Circleville still talk of sections that aren't as restored as they could be. But they also talk of what that flood did to restore community. They talk about the hope it brought to have strangers help them. Never fully restored, along the way, we point out to each other where God has come to us in love and grace.