

When Rain Falls

By Sheila Johnson

I grew up in a city with high curbs that bordered the neighborhood sidewalks. Drainage systems were scarce. The summer temperatures in El Paso averaged between 90-110 degrees Fahrenheit, and the median yearly rainfall was below most cities in Texas. So it made sense that when the engineers designed the city blueprints, drainage systems were low on their priority list.

But when it rained, it rained and rained and rained. The entire city celebrated, especially the kids. We were allowed to play in the water that rose up next to the curbs and driveways. We would find old empty tin cans, empty toilet paper rolls, wooden scraps from building projects, and anything that would float. My father even carved out small pieces of wood that resembled boats. I would pretend that they had sails and oars, and that I would be the only one sailing down the river in my sailboat. We would run and try to keep up with these “boats” while they moved from one end of the block to the other. We knew our time was short, for soon the rain would stop and the sun would dry up the rivers, lakes, and streams that we had imagined.

I miss that part of my journey. That road has been dry for some time and “real world” stuff came into view. I soon became aware of overflowing rivers and lakes, and witnessed, via the media, breaking levees that flooded people out of their homes taking all their belongings with it. There were rescue planes and helicopters and rafts—none of which had sails and all of which were crowded with people trying to reach safety. I became painfully aware of universal politics, and greed, and racism, and elitism that saves some lives and lets others go.

I’ve always fought for human justice and the rights of others. I believe that everyone should have equal opportunity to succeed or fail. Lately, I find that I have become stagnant compared to my youthful, playful, imaginative self, and I don’t like it. I spent the summer of 2019 reconnecting to family and life-long friends. I observed their lifestyles and I was very inquisitive about the hows and whys and whens that have made them who they are today. It was very uplifting and encouraging. They have traveled roads that were much different yet very similar to mine. We have shared similar grief, joy, pain, and accomplishments.

In addition to my summer visits, I was blessed to attend my fiftieth class reunion this past October. It was good for my soul to see so many of us who have survived. We have survived the wars and the rumors of wars; famines and floods; dysfunction and mental illness; government and even the Church.

With the rainfall of new aches and pains, compound disappointments, more revelations and enlightenments about the goodness and life-giving elements that are still present, I guess I’m read to get back on the road again.