

THE BUILDING

“Jack Hazelwood, the first time I saw you was in the movies!” His ready laugh and shake of the head confirmed my story. Before I ever came to the Hazelwood farm as a new girl in Jack’s son’s life, I had watched a homemade tape of Jack and his brother Donnie making maple syrup in a humongous steel kettle. I knew the maple sap was harvested from trees right there on the homeplace. The kettle took up the better part of one section of a solid little edifice standing in the side yard. It appeared to have evolved to the right from an original small shed. It overlooked the creek, in convenient proximity to the gas tank and the outhouse. On one end a weathered tree stump had stood up to years of wood splitting. By the time I arrived, several new sections had been added on. They contained over 50 years of accumulated artifacts of life from the Hazelwood farm. The place was called simply, “The Building.”

The contents of The Building actually facilitated much of what has happened on this farm. The buckets and taps for collecting from the maples were kept here. And the family didn’t run to a Home Depot every time something broke. They’d search for a rusty hook, a jar of nails, a piece of board just the right size. Jack and Donnie could fix anything, and the sons that grew up here are the same. Their stockpile of materials was and is in The Building. Somewhere.

Sometimes cousins who have fond childhood memories of days and nights on the farm will scrounge in there, sometimes looking for a particular thing, usually just curious. One, whose father died young, found his father’s Air Force duffle bag. Another found a little wooden car with wheels he’d made entirely from scraps when he was a little boy. One found an old cabinet with blistered paint, and turned it back into a beautiful piece of furniture.

I’m told countless childhood projects, including many for 4H, were completed right there in The Building. In my time various sections have housed a jeep, a riding lawnmower, a canoe, and an ATV. The ATV! I was on crutches when I got my first ATV ride around the property. Off we went, my leg resting on a crutch hanging off the side of the vehicle. We went right through the creek a few times—old hat to a Hazelwood but a new thrill to me. The roads, all built by Donnie’s dozer, took me across miles of stories.

“Dad hauled this old milk wagon up here so we could camp in it. He knocked the passenger side window out so a stove pipe could stick out there. I’ve gotten a couple of deer from this spot.”

“These cliffs are the best place to hunt turkeys, or to just watch them. Fun to watch the tom show off. Turkeys like to roost way up there—guess it feels like a safe place.”

“Used to be a bunch of apple trees over there on that hillside. We boys had to pick them. Mom’s applesauce was kind of tart, not too sweet. Her apple pies—can’t beat ‘em.”

“One year when we were bringing the picnic table back out here to the pond after the family reunion, me and my uncle got talking and didn’t notice till we got out here that the table had fallen off the truck a quarter mile back, right in the middle of the road! Felt foolish going back there to get it!”

“Tried raising Christmas trees over there one year. Deer ate ‘em.”

“When I was a kid, I thought I saw a monster in that cave right there—wouldn’t come back out here for a year.”

The stories would come as long as we were out there, one after another. By the time we returned to the Building, the farm had become a little bit more a part of me. It’s been years now; the stories go on. So much of this history, spreading out over almost four hundred acres and three generations, has been anchored right here, in this sacred Building.