

## THE PARABLE OF THE THREE FLOODS

*Thomas C. Galligan, Jr.*

“Okay, let’s talk.”

“Sure thing; we’ve done this before.”

“Yes several times but this time let’s do it a little differently; this time—no characters; no settings; just talk.”

“No Amanda; no Tony?”

“No characters.”

“But why not; I liked them.”

“I know; I liked them too but let’s face it you are a man and everyone who read these (and I have no reason to believe very many people did) knew you were really describing what happened and what mattered to you.”

“That’s true I suppose but I was getting in touch with my feminine side. Who needed another dialogue with two men?”

“Yeah and when you really needed to make some gender based point you got her to do it by telling a story about her so called husband right?”

“Am I that transparent?”

“I know you too well.”

“Who are you anyway?”

“Some deeper part of your subconscious I guess or maybe just some vehicle you invented to talk to. Maybe I’m the questioner. Your father was a lawyer after all and you grew up answering questions so I could be that voice in your head you can’t shut up: asking, asking, asking.”

“I prefer to think of you as a vehicle. But without characters and without identifiers at the end of what we say; how will people know which one of us is doing the talking when?”

“They will have to pay attention and so will you.”

“Fine.”

“Stepping down as dean huh?”

“Yup.”

“Voluntarily?”

“Yes. You know that.”

“Little testy?”

“I hope not but it does get a little old when people ask why you don’t want to be dean any longer and then think there’s more to it than there is to it.”

“So what is there to it?”

“Time to change basically. After all, by the time I step down I will have been dean for eight years. If I were President of the United States that would be the end of me so eight is enough.”

“Ouch! Bad TV joke.”

“Thank you. Anyway, I do need change; I really think it’s good for me and the institution. I also think you ought to leave the job while you still love it and before anything you have to do really becomes rote.”

“And?”

“And I got into this because I love to teach and I love to write and I think I need to get back to that.”

“But you have taught and written as dean; haven’t you?”

“I have but it was a lot easier to say yes to a question like that through Amanda because then it didn’t sound like I was bragging or something.”

“Give it up. Like I said, everybody knew it was you; your articulated modesty is too, too much.”

“Okay back to the subject and away from this self-analysis (assuming you are a part of me), I have taught and written, but it is time to get back to it full time.”

“You mean if some other great opportunity comes along in the next year, you won’t take it because you really want to get back to teaching? Be honest.”

“I don’t know; I will certainly listen I guess but even if I do take it; even if I don’t end up back in full-time teaching, change is good and if I do go and do something else it’s better to have let the institution find itself a new dean rather than stepped down as dean and had an interim appointed; isn’t it?”

“Probably depends upon the institution, doesn’t it?”

“I suppose so.”

“Not to change the subject but I will anyway. I notice that the title of this conversation is *The Parable of the Three Floods*. What’s that? Some sort of mythic thing?”

“No, that’s my story of being a dean.”

“Your story of being a dean?”

“Yes, sort of.”

“Talk on, man.”

“Will do. One summer afternoon in about my third year as a dean, our Development Director, Keith Carver and I were about to go for a run. He actually may have been Interim Director of Development at the time. Whatever, we were on our way out for a run when the weather got really bad—thunder and lightning. I suggested that we go run anyway because it was not raining hard yet.”

“What have you got, a death wish?”

“I am a big Charles Bronson fan but no I don’t have a death wish. I just thought we’d be okay.”

“What about your friend Keith?”

“He was not as wild about running as I was. He was a lot more worried about the lightning than I was.”

“So did you go?”

“No. And it was good we didn’t because about five minutes after we decided to wait, the sky opened up; it was one of the heaviest showers I’ve ever seen. It was so thick you couldn’t see for a few minutes.”

“Apocalyptic?”

“Maybe not that bad. But, as we were watching the rain, someone from our cleaning crew found us and told us water was coming in at the loading dock.

Fall 2005]

*PARABLE OF THREE FLOODS*

97

You see our loading dock is actually at the base of a driveway that runs downhill. There is a storm drain near the door but something or other had gone wrong with the pumps and the water was so strong and fast it was just running over the drain and into the doors.”

“So, what did you do?”

“We told the person from the cleaning crew to call for help and we headed down there. Water was just pouring in all over the floor. And then Keith noticed the closed doors of the room right by where the water was coming in and asked me what was in there. I told him it was storage and he asked if we should check it out to make sure there was nothing on the floor that could be damaged. By this time the water was headed toward the storage room door. I almost told Keith that there was no need to check it because nothing could be there but then I thought twice so I ran up and got my pass key. I ran back down and saw that the water was now just under the door. So I unlocked the door, opened it, and flicked on the light.”

“You weren’t like electrocuted or something were you?”

“Would I be here?”

“Good point.”

“No I wasn’t electrocuted but there on the floor were computers in boxes everywhere.”

“Had someone been stealing computers?”

“No silly; no one had been stealing computers. We had just gotten in a shipment of computers and that was where we were storing them.”

“And they were getting wet. Actually they weren’t getting wet but they were about to.”

“So what did you do?”

“What do you think we did? We started moving computers. We started getting them off the ground and up on pallets and shelves and whatever else was around where we could put them. One or two boxes had gotten wet and we opened those up and got the hardware out of the wet boxes.”

“And, how many computers were damaged? Did you lose any?”

“Not a one.”

“Okay, that’s the story of the first flood; the second?”

“The second flood actually is two floods. Our University created a foundation—a private foundation—which was not free of controversy. But that’s not this story. This story is about the building the foundation built behind us—high rise, private housing for students. While they were building it they had to dig up the streets to improve the plumbing in the area. I guess they were updating and widening the pipes.”

“I can see where this is heading.”

“Actually by the end of the story you can smell it. But this is not the end; we are still early on. One day during the summer I got a call from Doug Blaze, the Director of the Clinic, and he said that the Clinic had some sort of water damage. You see our Clinic is on what we call the ground floor—some might say it is the basement. The point is that it sits on ground level—in some places it is below ground level. Anyway, it looked like the toilets had maybe overflowed. There was some odor but not awful. When Doug reads this he will say I am

underselling it and I may be but it makes what happens later a better story to undersell a bit now. Right away we called the University facilities folks and they came over and told us they could fix it up and who knew why it had happened—maybe the construction; maybe the plumbing repair—these things are complex. In any event Doug and Ramona Armstrong, the Clinic Administrator, were sure to ask them about sanitation, health, bacteria and clean up. We were assured all was well and we need not worry—a good washing, a vacuuming, and a dusting would suffice.”

“And that was that?”

“That was that until flood two, part two. Sometime during the fall semester, just before Thanksgiving as I recall—the fall after the summer flood—at about nine in the morning. Water and all sorts of crap\_\_\_\_\_”

“And you mean that\_\_\_\_\_”

“Yes, I mean that literally. And it was all running out of the doors of both the men’s room and the women’s room.”

“Now that’s a flood! What did you do?”

“At first I didn’t do anything—I was out somewhere—but Doug and Ramona took action and evacuated.”

“Man!”

“Man is right. We called the University folks and by the time it stopped we had water and stuff everywhere. And it stunk. There were literally stains from water damage a couple of inches up the wall in the hardest hit places. This time the University called in the town’s utility folks who were doing the plumbing work on the construction project and they more or less told us to stay out of there and brought in these environmental clean-up experts to test and clean and test and clean.”

“Which they did?”

“Which they absolutely did and we set up shop all around the building for the Clinic until they told us the results were okay and the reconstruction work was finished.”

“Reconstruction work?”

“Yeah; they came in and ripped up carpet, replaced parts of walls, replaced carpet all over, and repainted walls.”

“So, it worked out?”

“It worked out but, in large part, thanks to Ramona and Doug who were totally on top of it in every way. Did make me wonder about not doing some more antiseptic cleanup the first time but I filed that one away in my brain.”

“That’s two floods or two and one half—the third?”

“The third flood was another summer flood. It was Friday afternoon and we were headed into the weekend—relaxed and calm—sitting around the dean’s office patting ourselves on the back.”

“For?”

“Graduating a class, admitting a class, raising money, planning, managing budgets, you know that sort of stuff.”

“When\_\_\_\_\_?”

“When one of our staff members, Mary Carper, came into our office and said that one of the toilets in the women’s room on the third floor of the building (we

Fall 2005]

*PARABLE OF THREE FLOODS*

99

basically have three floors) was running. Well at that point being a veteran of law school floods, I knew we might have to mobilize. First we called our crack maintenance guru, Art Tezak, and told him about the problem. Then, John Sobieski, our Associate Dean and I, headed in the direction of the third floor women's room. I hope people read that last bit in context."

"Good time to revive Amanda, huh?"

"Yeah but, baby, this is real."

"Gotcha—you and John are headed for the third floor."

"And by the time we got there somebody else had beaten us and flushed the toilet again."

"Here you go again! Third floor is a mess right?"

"Not quite; the third floor was actually pretty cool. Some water had overflowed but it wasn't awful and it seemed clean—I mean it's all relative."

"Tell me about it man; you're having a conversation with your subconscious here pal, this is incredibly clean—I know you."

"Oversharing friend—let's get back to the flood."

"But it isn't a flood yet. You said the third floor was clean."

"I did but when we come out of the third floor and looked over the balcony in that part of the building, we saw water everywhere streaming out of the first floor women's room."

"Wow—you mean that the system was backed up."

"Backed up and spitting up. The flood was on the first floor."

"Is there carpet down there?"

"Luckily no. There's carpet on the third floor but not on the first floor. There the floors are marble."

"Marble in a public school?"

"Beautiful marble and some of it comes from Tennessee so don't give me any crap about it."

"Not another crap joke—ugh!"

"John and I ran downstairs, yelled to Art who was on the line to the University plumbers. Then I ran up and called our Vice President for Operations, the one and only Phil Scheurer, who made sure the plumbers were on the run."

"Then?"

"Then, I got Mary Ann James, who really runs the law school and the dean's office and is in charge of our HR, and my assistant, Anita Monroe, and our Building Manager, LaVaun Browder, to put signs up on all the restrooms that the toilets were out of order and shouldn't be used."

"Then?"

"Then John and I got back downstairs as an army of plumbers showed up. But water is still flowing so John and I start moving furniture out of the oncoming torrent. And just when the water was about to get to the classrooms and to the furniture, the plumbers shut the water off and it miraculously stopped flowing further."

"Miraculously—now I see why this is a parable."

"I was speaking metaphorically."

"And the water was off?"

"Yes the water was off."

“What time of the afternoon was it?”

“By this time I bet it was around 4.”

“But you were open and there were people in the building while it was open with no water—meaning no toilets?”

“Yes but it was Friday afternoon in the summer so there were not many students and a flood can be an opportunity.”

“An opportunity?”

“Yes, an opportunity to send the staff home early on a Friday afternoon.”

“Oh wise and gentle wussbag.”

“Thanks for the confidence but I bet they liked me for it.”

“Faculty?”

“Our faculty are fantastic but if I tried to send them home they would stay so we just let them know what was going on. One of my senior colleagues thought it was the height of administrative insensitivity to make him go across the street to use the rest room in the heat of summer. But how could I reply to that? After all, he was *there* late on a Friday in the summer.”

“How about clean up?”

“The University was great; they sent a clean up crew over once the problem was fixed and that crew went to work. By this time it was probably six o’clock. Now, I still had the second flood in my mind and I wanted to make sure that the clean up crew was going to do more than mop; I wanted to be sure they were going to sanitize too.”

“And did they?”

“Absolutely.”

“So what did you do? I said thank you and Mary Ann called and ordered a bunch of pizzas and we took the pizzas down to the people cleaning up to say thanks.”

“And then?”

“Then we went home for the weekend. And no flood since.”

“Nice stories but what is the point and what relevance is any of this to being a dean? Why aren’t you talking about big gifts and planning and budgets and admissions and the future of legal education? Those are big topics. You are just telling little stories about floods.”

“Maybe you’re right. Gifts (big or small) are wonderful; faculty and student accomplishments make you feel ten feet tall. And the budget and planning processes make you feel you have a hand in something bigger than just your own personal goals. All those things and more are a key part of being a dean—trying to emphasize the importance of diversity and inclusiveness and supporting pro bono and public interest legal work are two things that mean a lot to me that I haven’t written much about in these essays.”

“So, why the floods?”

“Now I’m going to sound silly. But floods (real or not) happen. And you have to deal with them. And when you deal with them you have to be willing to roll up your sleeves and get involved. You have to move boxes or move furniture or whatever.”

“That old pitch in; don’t ask anyone else to do what you wouldn’t do sort of thing?”

Fall 2005]

*PARABLE OF THREE FLOODS*

101

“You’re making it sound clichéd and silly.”

“You started it.”

“I knew I should have kept Amanda and Tony. Besides in a flood not only do you have to jump in but you also have to rely on other people when you aren’t there and to come clean up and fix the pipes and put up signs.”

“Teamwork; can’t do it alone; part of a bigger whole.”

“Man, I am a walking platitude.”

“A benign bringer of bromides and banalities.”

“And there’s something else about the floods.”

“I hope so.”

“My wife, Susan, worked in a management position in savings and loans for a few years before we went into teaching and she never received anything but the highest evaluations.”

“Good someone in the family is talented.”

“But once in an evaluation, a man told Susan that she should beware of becoming friends with the people who worked with her.”

“As in, don’t get too close in case you have to stab ‘em in the back?”

“Maybe. But she walked out of there and said to herself that was one piece of advice she was not only not going to take to heart but that she was flat out going to reject it. And she was right.”

“And, the floods\_\_\_?”

“In each of the floods, as we worked through a crisis, I think all of us involved not only solved problems under fire—problems no one would read about in the alumni magazine—but we became closer and better friends as a result. And becoming closer, better friends with people who matter to me may be the best thing about being dean. See ya.”

“Take care.”