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Barnyard caches need to be moved

By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va. Farms generate heaps of stuff that hang around year after year like the too-small clothes that breed in your closet.

I call them stockpiles of about-to-be-repurposed materials when I'm subjected to enhanced interrogation. I try to resist confessing to the accusation of junk.

Awaiting their applied future are piles from my past—good dirt, so-so dirt, bad dirt, big rocks, little rocks, old broken things, spares, extras, scraps, leftovers and even retirees preparing for a second career.

I have, for example, clumps of new and used plastic pipe, ranging from ½-inch diameter to 12, in lengths running from six inches to 100 feet.

I have stacks of metal pipe (copper and galvanized), plate steel, sheet roofing, gutters, downspouts, fence posts, buckets, cans, barrels, tanks, trays, fence wire, vehicle parts, hardware and several whatchamacallits whose first function I've long forgotten or never knew.

I have mounds of lumber collected over 40 years. Narrow boards, wide boards, beams, girders, joists, paneling, strips, trim, shakes, rough cut, dressed, fence rails, stakes and posts. They are walnut, ash, sugar maple, cherry, elm, locust, chestnut and pine.

I have extraneous coming out of my piles of miscellaneous wheels, tires, cement blocks, old double hung windows, old unhinged doors, hoses, sprung springs, chicken coops, milk cans, fuel cans, jars, wood boxes, greases, oils, fuels and containers of dried paint, paint thinner, paint restorer and paint remover.

With the exception of the air-cured, hardwood lumber, these units of storage have little value in the free market. But in the

closed economy of a mountain farm, they always come in handy, because some odd something is always needed when I don't have one.

I prefer being referred to as a barnyard recycler rather than a peasant hoarder or junk junkie.

Compared with other farmers, I rank below average in packrattiness. I am not opposed to improving my standing, however.

My caboodles of stuff would not merit a column unless they presented some higher meaning. (I can only squeeze so much literary pizzazz out of a pile of mixed nuts and stripped bolts.)

So beyond their heapiness, I offer this.

It's an iron law of barnyards near and far that every old pile will eventually be in the way of something else, usually a new one.

As a law-abiding citizen, I find myself moving old piles from here to there, often no more than a few feet. This task calls even as I write these words.

Nonetheless, repositioning gives me the opportunity to get rid of an item (or even two!) that I've dragged behind for years. It's never easy to part with something familiar, even a stone in your shoe.

Here, then, is my humble point.

As we pass through life, we create piles of stuff—family, friends, formers, enemies, failures, successes, regrets, missed opportunities, bad behaviors, hurtful words, jobs done, accomplishments, embarrassments, accounts and things.

The greater the distance we put between a pile past and us present, the softer these memories. The most intense experiences can be reduced to highlight head tapes available for instant replay.

Every once in a while, we find that we need to move one of

these piles. Stuff is stirred, and then resettles. Sometimes, we pitch an item, which can make us feel worse before it makes us feel better.

Because we have come to know our individual emotional topographies, we generally think that its best to tiptoe past old stockpiles, leaving them where they are.

The good ones, sure.

But the bad ones should be kicked in the shins every once in a while...and moved to a more distant place.

My pile of about-to-be repurposed materials calls from the barn.

