

Grandfather's Story -Storms make you Stronger

By: Dwight Bain

The major hurricanes a few years ago brought out the worst in nature and the best in people since there were countless stories of how neighbors connected to each other as neighbors to recover after the storms. Still, I believe the greatest stories are the ones that will be told a generation from now. Stories like this one between an aged grandfather and his grand kids during a fierce afternoon thunderstorm some sixty years from today.

Picture an old man distracting frightened children from the wind and rain outside by sitting them down to tell about the time that he and his daddy made it through the "*Monster Storm Season back in '04*". How his family reached out to help the people in the neighborhood to get back on their feet after being knocked flat with 100 MPH winds because they were too overwhelmed to make it back up alone.

The grand kids sit wide-eyed in anticipation of a story from their poppa. He takes a breath while balancing a sleeping grand baby on one arm and pulling the little ones close with the other. He comforts them with the calming sound of his words and the peaceful connection that only grandparents have with grand kids. As he begins to talk about his experience he gets overwhelmed with emotion and his voice chokes up a bit as his eyes mist with tears. The painful memories come alive again as he describes the terrible destruction he saw after the storms when he was a little boy, barely older than they are now.

He describes thousands of houses with roofs ripped right off, cars crushed by trees the size of trucks, airplanes tossed around like little toys, traffic lights ripped from cables and shattered into tiny pieces scattered by the hammering winds and pounding rain. How it was so dark and lonely when the lights went out and the TV silenced, followed by the crashing sounds of things breaking outside and how his momma cried and held them all close, and how his daddy prayed for safety while the dogs howled at the darkness.

He told how his whole family, cats and dogs and all spent the night huddled up in the laundry room waiting for the sun to shine and for things to get back to

normal. The sun came, but normal never did. Nothing was the same after those terrible storms hit; nothing would ever be the same.

When he went outside the first time, he saw the big trees in the backyard that once had been the perfect place for a boy to climb and imagine grand adventures now splintered and tossed in every direction. Some limbs from those mighty trees had crashed across the back fence and were in the neighbor's pool, some limbs were burying most of their house and others had pulled the electric power lines all the way to the ground. Out front it was worse. The whole neighborhood looked like it had been bombed by terrorists.

Roofs ripped off people's house were tossed everywhere, their street was blocked by dozens of big trees and power poles and there were pieces of tool sheds and back porches scattered around like confetti after a party. Their basketball net had crashed through the windshield of his daddy's pickup and there was no way to raise the garage door because there was no electricity. It was sunny outside, and starting to get hot like any other summer day in central Florida- but inside it just wasn't right... something just wasn't right.

The tears flowed freely down the old man's face as he remembered how his daddy had rolled up his sleeves and clinched his jaw and dug in with the strength of a man who loved deeply. Loved deep enough to lose sleep over helping strangers. Loved strong enough to do without to give to someone facing greater problems than his. Loved great enough to model what his faith was about in such a real way that anyone could see that he loved God openly by living out what he believed.

Integrity shined forth with every cut of his chain-saw and it was easy to see that the monster storm didn't crush his daddy- the monster storm challenged him and drew something courageous out of him. It was like something in the monster storm only made him stronger. The old man's face brightened as he explained how his daddy taught him that faith is about what you do- not what you say. And real faith isn't even discovered until you need it the most.

Just then a sudden flash of lightening followed by a roaring clap of thunder startled all of them and even woke the baby up crying as the lights flickered in

the house. Grandfather gave them all a comforting squeeze, while calming the baby down and then went back to telling the story. His face tensed as he described the weeks of hard work to dig out from under the damage brought on by a series of killer storms. How that the hard work of clearing trees and debris was made harder because of the wave after wave of dark skies that threatened yet another storm and how each one terrified him more. He described living in continual fear of the next monster storm coming back to crush the few trees left on their street and of being so scared that the storms might one day take his daddy away too.

The old man paused for a minute, then he took a deep breath that calmed his voice and told them how those terrible hurricanes actually connected he and his father together in a powerful way. He described how he watched his daddy deal with each storm and how he had learned from him how to press on and not whine and keep going, especially when it was so hot and hard to go on. He misted up as he remembered his daddy teaching him that God allows storms to test you. To shape you and show you what you believe. His daddy taught him how to go from being a boy to becoming a man by standing up to the storms of life. Standing tall beside his greatest teacher and greatest friend, because standing next to his father during those storms had taught him how to stand up to life.

And then the old man sighed from somewhere deep inside as his face relaxed and the tears freely rolled down his cheeks as he whispered how they got through it together as a father and son. How their family made it together mostly because of that- they were together. It didn't matter the circumstances. Sometimes they were together working through the heat and discomfort to rebuild the things that matter most in this life- family... friends... churches... schools... hospitals... and how that year, way back in 2004 when their family came together with some others to pitch in and rebuild a whole neighborhood. Not only that, but how his dad and some men from their church went out of their way to help some small businesses hit hard by the storm, not for money, or politics or power or fame, but because it was the right thing to do-to come alongside and help another man provide for his family too.

Quietly refreshed after the emotions, the old man feels renewed inside by passing along his story to another generation. Energized by doing what others had done for him- finishing his journey well so the next generation could learn how to live strong. Teaching them how to face pressures today, so they might

one day pass along this secret to the next generation- The best place in life to find strength is in the storms. Strength always comes from the storms.

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