

MOMENTS OF MISFORTUNE

**A six part story of the trials and tribulations of a family
during a major disaster event.**

Parts 1-5

The final part, (Part 6) to be released in November 2018

MOMENTS OF MISFORTUNE – Part 1

By Chuck Wallace
Edited by Lisa Ballou

I knew it! Here he comes. Just like clockwork. He must have been waiting for me in the parking lot! My co-worker Matt dashes toward me in the pouring rain.

Trotting up, he loudly asks, “Hey, did you feel the earthquake last night?”

I heard him ask me something, but I was still leaning into my car to retrieve my briefcase, umbrella and cup of coffee when he asked.

I responded, “Sorry, Matt. I didn’t hear what you said.”

He breathlessly repeats, “Did you feel the earthquake last night?”

I reply, “I didn’t. I just heard about it while driving into work this morning.”

Excitedly, Matt exclaimed, “It was a 4.2 magnitude earthquake just offshore of the State Park, south of the Indian Nation. Lots of people felt it in the county!”

I answered, “Yeah, well, I didn’t feel anything or even know until the radio news broadcast the information.”

Matt further explained, “The radio said, there was no damage, but it was felt as far away as British Columbia and Oregon!”

I replied, “You do know we live in earthquake country. We just don’t have that many and the ones we do have, are fairly small. Hardly anyone feels them.”

Matt pressed on, “Sooner or later we’ll have a really big one. That’s what scares me the most.”

Walking away, toward my office, I answer over my shoulder, “Yeah, well hopefully, we’re all long gone when it does happen.”

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I rub my forehead while sitting at my desk, fairly exhausted and semi-perturbed after answering the same questions about the earthquake all morning. The theme of the day continued during my morning phone call to my wife.

“Yes dear.”

I continued, “I heard about it. Ever since I walked into the office, everyone has been talking about it. You’d think the world was ready to tilt off its axis.

“I know, but nothing even really happened, I mean, with the exception of a few people feeling the ground shake. It’s just one of those things.”

I tell her, “We’ve lived here for 10 years and nothing has happened even remotely impacting us. This is the first earthquake we’ve had close to us and we didn’t even feel it.”

Half listening to her questions and concerns about the earthquake, I patronizingly offer, “Hmm, yeah, right. Look, don’t worry about it. It’s over. Hey, I have to go, I have a conference call starting in a few minutes, ok? Yep, yeah, everything’s alright. Ok. See ya tonight. Good. I love you too.”

~ ~ ~ ~

Sitting at my desk, shuffling through the stacks of files to find the particular one I need, I think to myself, boy, am I glad I didn’t go to the meeting in Seattle today, I have too much to do. Thankfully, I don’t have to pay too much attention to this conference call. I can chime in from time to time, while responding to some of these never ending e-mails.

After half an hour of listening to the same exact issue we discussed last month, I unmute my phone and break into the meeting, “Yeah, I agree with what was just said, we need to begin working on the next objective of our strategic plan.”

Someone else comments, "I'd like to revisit the notes I have from the meeting two months ago."

Not believing what I just heard, I make a strong recommendation to the conference members on the phone, "If we don't begin moving forward...." --What the...?

My entire office lurches forward, shoving me against the edge of my desk. The shelves hanging along my wall all tear away with books and files bouncing and falling in complete disarray on the floor. My computer screen goes blank as the office lights flicker.

I jump up, "ahhh," shouting out as my steaming hot cup of coffee goes flying cross my desk, spilling everywhere and over everything, including me, soaking my shirt and trousers, onto my stomach and into my lap.

A few ceiling tiles begin to fall on the other side of my office as I hang onto the desk, half standing, attempting to wipe the coffee and cool the blistering heat in my lap. Suddenly, the light fixture over my desk swings down and slams into the side of my head. I feel like I've been hit with a baseball bat. I grab the right side of my head and fall to my knees, knocked senseless from the blow.

The entire event ends after a few harrowing moments. My right ear has a constant ringing. I can hear others in the building yelling, but am unable to make sense of what they are saying. I look around my office, my right hand holding the side of my head, and see everything in disarray. Walking down the hallway, passing the other offices in my building, I see a mess of papers, books, pamphlets, tumbled file cabinets and fallen ceiling tiles.

The department head from down the hall asks all in the corridor, "Is everyone here? Are we all ok?"

One of the women from the office down the hall asks, "Aren't we supposed to evacuate and get to high ground?"

A male voice responds, "Are we in an inundation area? I think we're on high ground."

Another person in the office calls out, "Where is the Weather Radio? Information should be broadcast on that."

The woman answers, "I don't think we have one. I've been here for 6 years and I've never seen one."

A male voice from the middle of the crowd asks, “Well, what are we supposed to do?”

Half of the nine or so people in the second floor hallway are texting or trying to call someone.

A man from an office on the other end of the building shouts for all to hear, “The cell lines are busy.”

Another says, “I think I can text!”

The department head states in a loud authoritarian voice, “Let’s get outside. We’re supposed to go outside after an earthquake, then have the building checked to be sure it’s safe.”

Another woman in the building speaks up and exclaims, “I’m not leaving the building. If a tsunami is coming, I am not going to be on the street.”

Their babbling and indecisiveness is driving me crazy as my head continues to pound from getting hit with the light fixture.

I shout, “Yo! Hey! Listen Up! We are not in a tsunami inundation area. Let’s just go outside like the boss said, and make sure everyone in the building is safe. We can figure out what to do once we’re outside.”

Matt approaches from the other end of the hallway wearing a rain poncho and backpack. He slowly high steps through the debris, shuffling it with each step, as he walks around the overturned file cabinets and maneuvers himself along the wall.

He asks, “Is everyone all right?”

I reply, “We’re going to get out of here and see if everyone from the building is ok.”

A voice from the back shouts, “It’s pouring rain out there. Can’t we just stay here?”

Matt responds, “Actually, newer buildings are built so they don’t collapse during an earthquake onto the people inside, but I think this is a fairly old building. Either way, they are only designed to prevent collapse from one earthquake. I’m not sure what would happen if we have an aftershock.”

The office manager asks “Where did you get that information?”

Matt replies, “I’ve read about it and have gone to a few conferences where they talk about building safety in earthquakes, non-reinforced masonry buildings, non-structural damage...”

Another worker cuts him off, “Yeah, well, I’d rather be wet than trapped in here if we have an aftershock.”

Hesitantly, the group agrees to leave and we begin exiting the building through the stairway at the end of the hall. My head is pounding as I follow the group and try to call my wife, worried about her and my kids. Attempting the call, all I hear is a busy signal.

I whisper out loud, “Unbelievable,” as I try twice more with the same busy signal. I think to myself, “I guess that’s why they’re called family plans, when one phone won’t work, none of the others will either.”

Walking out of the building into a gusty, steady downpour, toward the assembly area, I see other employees from the building congregating in their pre-designated assembly areas in the parking lot, the same ones we use for a fire drill. Everyone looks drenched from head to toe. Glancing to my left, I look at Matt in his rain poncho and backpack and begin to chuckle. What is this guy doing?

I teasingly offer, “Did you pack for the weekend?”

He says, “It’s my Go Kit. Don’t you have one?”

I look at him like he’s crazy, “What are you talking about?”

He replies, “A Go Kit. Everyone should have one. In case of earthquake, flooding...”

I interrupt, not wanting to know any more, “Yeah, well I don’t even know what you’re talking about.”

He responds, very concerned, “It’s a necessity for everyone living around here. I have food, water, a radio, clothes and a first...”

I speak over him, “Yeah, sounds great. But I’m not carrying all that stuff with me all day.” Changing the subject, I ask, “Where is our assembly area anyway?”

Matt replies, “Follow me. I know where we are supposed to go.”

Rain water is running down my back as we move across the parking lot to join the others. I slowly begin to survey the area immediately surrounding us through the sheets of rain and gusty wind. The chimney has collapsed on the home across the street and one of the parked cars in front of our building has a large tree branch laying across the hood. This earthquake was worse than I thought. People are congregating on street corners and in other parking areas. It's almost surreal looking at the panicked expressions on the faces of everyone as they gather. Their voices are muffled by the continuous honking, wailing and whooping of the multiple car and home alarms activated during the ground shaking of the earthquake. Looking up, I see Harry, a first floor employee, limping toward us.

Someone yells out, "Oh my God, Harry has blood all over him!"

A small crowd gathers around him as he tells them he is fine. He explains how a cabinet in his office fell over and hit him on the corner of his eye, causing all of the blood.

Harry says, "It's just a cut. I'm all right."

Someone shouts out "I have a message! Texting works!"

Others begin confirming "Me, too!"

"Yeah, mine works."

I notice almost everyone around me texting on their phone. I pull mine from my pocket and begin to text my wife and kids,

Are u all ok?

Within seconds, my wife replies via text, I'm ok. It was scary. House shook like crazy. Lights r flickering. Nothing from the girls - YES, your dog is fine!

She continued, Radio said EQ centered off coast. Some cities - Aberdeen have damage. That's where the school is & where Janie works!

Adding, No message from Katie's school. Hopefully, they r ok. I'm worried.

I reply, trying to remain calm in the moment, but very worried about my kids. We have a few minor issues. I don't think it was anything major. The girls will be fine. They know what to do.

Impatient, frightened and very concerned, she texts, *Well, for knowing what to do, nobody's doing anything!*

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Matt, has been attending to the cut above Harry's eye with the first aid kit he stored in his Go Kit, walks over and hands me an extra rain poncho he is carrying.

"This will keep you dry."

I thank him but give the poncho back, "It's a bit late for that. I'm soaked!"

Matt nods and stores the poncho in his backpack.

With a concerned look on his face, he offers, "The USGS said it was a magnitude 6.3 earthquake about 6 miles off the Grays Harbor coast along the Cascadia Fault Line. I looked at some social media sites, and they say there is moderate damage to some homes and buildings along the coast."

I ask, "Do they say anything about people hurt?"

"Not really," he adds, as he scans the various social media sites.

Wiping the droplets of rain from my phone screen, I try to call my daughters, but the lines are still busy. I heard one person talking to someone on the phone, but I guess with the earthquake being local, everyone is trying to make a call.

The building manager comes out and asks all to gather around.

The drenched group huddles around as he starts, "We don't have anyone qualified to inspect the building for damages. There are a few cracks along the first floor storage areas and at this point, I don't believe it is safe to re-enter the building without someone with some engineering knowledge looking at the damage. My suggestion is for everyone to go home, check on your family and then for tomorrow, confirm whether the building will be safe to re-enter with your supervisor."

A voice comes from the middle of the pack, "Are we getting paid for this?"

The manager just looks at the person and shakes his head, apparently dumbfounded by the question.

The voice asks in a very irritated manner, “Are we still getting paid?”

The manager replies, much more composed than I would had been, “I don’t know. Let’s get out of the rain and attend to our families first. We can worry about money when the dust settles.”

As the crowd begins to disperse, I start walking to my car and realize my keys are on my desk in my office.

Exasperated, I blurt out, “It figures.”

Matt who is walking beside me asks, “What figures?”

I say, “My keys are on my desk.”

Matt offers to take me home, but I’m hesitant to accept his offer. And then, realizing I’m cold, wet and there may not be any other solution I tell him, I’ll take him up on his offer. Suddenly, half startling me, my phone rings. It’s my wife.

“What’s up kid?”

My wife begins talking a mile-a-minute, half sobbing. I can’t make out what she’s saying.

I say, “Slow down, I can’t understand what you are saying.”

She says, “Jack! Jack! Oh my God, Oh my God.”

I realize something is terribly wrong and try desperately to focus on her words.

“Shar, you have to slow down. I can’t understand.”

She composes herself and says, “The school called. Part of the roof collapsed onto some classrooms. They think Katie is trapped under the roof!”

END OF PART 1

MOMENTS OF MISFORTUNE - Part 2

By Chuck Wallace
Edited by Lisa Ballou

My knees buckle at the news my daughter is trapped at the school. I'm not absolutely sure I correctly heard what my wife just told me. I feel as if I'm going to become physically ill.

After what seems like an eternity, I'm able to swallow the lump in my throat and ask for clarity, "Tell me again Shar, what happened?"

My wife once again blurts out "Katie is trapped inside of the school, it collapsed! The school called and told me and ..."

I become oblivious to everything else she is saying. My entire soul is on the verge of panic. I don't know how to respond to my wife. I'm having trouble thinking straight. My mind begins whirring; oh my god...oh my god.... The news is crushing. My heart is beating so fast and hard, I can hear the blood pulsing through my veins. I feel as if I'm going to pass out, as I drop to one knee in the puddled parking lot.

Matt, reaches out and grabs my arm, steadying me. "Are you ok? Are you alright Jack?"

I struggle to look up. I nearly drop my phone as I cling to Matt's arm and leg. I'm barely able to nod my head.

I can hear my wife shouting, almost pleading for me to begin conversing again, "Jack, are you there? Jack? Jack?"

Matt helps me to my feet and guides me past two other cars. "Here, sit in my car, get out of the rain."

Finally I'm able to put together a coherent thought and ask, "Shar, can you get to the school? I have to figure out how to get there."

She responds, "Where is your car?"

I tell her, "My car keys are on my desk in my office. We had to leave the building because of structural damage and I can't get back in."

My wife begins to sob, "I thought you'd pick me up and we'd go together. I don't want to go alone."

“Shar, I can’t use my car. I’ll try to get a ride to the school with someone and meet you there.”

Matt overhears the conversation and offers, “I can take you wherever you need to go, Jack.”

I look at Matt through the tears in my eyes and nod.

I tell Shar, “It’ll be alright. Just get to the school. I’ll meet you at the entrance.”

Hesitantly, and still sobbing, she agrees.

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The drive to the school is taking forever. Some streets are blocked and Matt is doing his best to navigate secondary routes. It’s all I can do to maintain my composure while I sit in silence.

During the ride, my oldest daughter, Janie, texts my wife and I, *That was crazy! R U guys OK?*

Shar texts back, *Thank God U R ok. We’re good.*

Janie texts, *I’m at a friend’s home. They closed the office. She lives around the corner. I’m helping her clean up.*

Adding, *The earthquake knocked me down and I broke the heel on my boot, tore the knees out of my pants, broke 2 fingernails and I think I lost my lipstick!*

She continues, *On top of all that, my mascara isn’t waterproof and now I have black streaks around my eyes and down my face.*

I smile and chuckle; her message taking me away from this frightening moment.

“You really scared me to death out there,” Matt offered, trying to work up a conversation to keep me from thinking about my daughter. “I thought you were having a heart attack. Are you sure you’re ok?”

I shake my head and reply, “I’m ok.”

My wife returns Janie’s text, *Janie, I just tried to call you, but the phones are still busy. Katie has been involved in an accident at her school.*

Texting more, *Dad and I are heading there now. We will let you know more when we do.*

Janie texts, *WHAT? What's wrong, Is she hurt?*

Shar replies, *We'll let you know more when we do.*

Matt, showing great concern for the situation, reaches over, puts his hand on my shoulder, squeezes it and says, "Don't worry buddy, it'll be ok. We'll be there soon."

Not really listening, I grunt a few times to appear I'm paying attention to him, but can't keep my mind off Katie. She must be terrified buried under the building. I feel helpless.

Matt states, "We're here, but it looks like they're restricting access to the school."

I don't hear a word he is saying.

After a few seconds he declares, louder this time, "Jack, we're here. We're at the school."

Matt parks the car along the side of the road. There is gridlock at the school entrance.

I am entrenched in my thoughts about my daughter. Panic catches me again, at the sight of the flashing lights of police and fire vehicles.

"Please let her be safe," I mumble as I weakly step from the car. Matt immediately joins me carrying an umbrella, protecting us both from the rain. He offers, "I'll go with you. I'm here for you, buddy."

After a few steps, I see my wife attempting to get through the barricaded parking entrance to the school. An officer is talking to her, but I'm still too far away to hear. She's soaking wet, and I see the puffiness of her eyes along with expressions of fear and disbelief.

I walk up behind her and put my hand on her shoulder. In fear and frustration, she jerks away yelling, "Don't you touch me!" Glancing around, she recognizes me and hugs me tight.

"They won't let me in, Jack! They won't let me see my own daughter," she exclaims loudly so all nearby can hear.

I plead with the officer, "The school called us, and said our daughter is trapped in the school. Please let us enter."

The officer looks at me and explains, “Everyone needs an escort. All families need an escort to a specific location.” He further exclaimed, “I’ve radioed for someone to come and escort your wife. They will be here soon.”

Someone saying they’re from a news outlet overhears our conversation and asks for an interview.

I softly reply, “I’m sorry, not right now.”

The newsman continues to ask, “Who are you? It will only take a few seconds.”

Continuing to hound us, he holds out his cell phone and holds it in front of my wife’s face asking more questions.

I get extremely angry and shout, “LEAVE US ALONE! What’s wrong with you? We want to be left alone. What’s wrong with you people?”

The police officer at the entrance beckons us to step inside the barricade. “Please just stay here until your escort arrives. They can’t bother you in here.”

We thank him for his compassion. Holding hands, we start into the entrance.

Matt hands me his umbrella and says, “I have my poncho. You guys need this more than I do. Take care of your family.”

I take the umbrella, look over my shoulder and say, “Thanks for everything, Matt.”

He gives sort of a half salute and waves goodbye.

Waiting silently, holding each other close, we await our escort. I feel Shar sobbing, as she pulls me tighter. I pull her to my chest, under the umbrella, comforting her as I attempt to keep us both dry. She’s softly praying to herself.

A few minutes later, a young woman approaches and speaks to the officer. He points to us and she makes her way toward us.

She asks, “Are you Mr. and Mrs. McFadden? You’re Katie’s parents?” As we nod, she introduces herself, “I’m Susan Griffin, a nurse with Public Health. I have wonderful news, Katie has been found and she seems to be fine. I’m going to take you to see her. Right now she’s being checked out by the paramedics.”

My wife and I both break down, crying, hugging and thanking Susan. She smiles and says, “Let’s get you both to where she is.”

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We’re led to a modular school unit far away from the affected school building. Stepping inside, I look around and see our daughter sitting up on an ambulance stretcher. She has a slight smile on her face, but I can tell she has been crying.

I quickly move to her and hug her tightly, “I’m glad you’re safe, baby.”

Katie breaks down, “Oh, Daddy!”

Shar approaches from the other side of the stretcher, hugs Katie and whispers, “I was so afraid. Are you alright?”

Looking around at the paramedics and others in the room she asks, “Is she alright?”

Not giving anyone a chance to answer, Shar turns back to Katie, “You’re alright, right? You’re not injured?”

One of the paramedics reveals, “She seems to be ok, other than a few cuts and bruises. I would suggest getting her a Tetanus shot soon, if she hasn’t had one recently. Your daughter told us she hid under a table during the earthquake. Everything collapsed over and around the table. Another girl was with her. Neither were hurt. The table protected them. They were just trapped where they were. Firefighters and a few construction workers helped to get the girls out.”

My wife says to Katie, “I prayed they would find you. Thank God you’re alright.”

Another paramedic offers, “We can transport to the hospital for an observation by a doctor if you’d like. The decision is up to you.”

I ask Katie, “Do you want to go to the hospital? Do you hurt anywhere?”

She replies, “I just want to go home, daddy, I don’t want to be here anymore.”

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Maneuvering away from the news media and the crowd of people attempting to get a glimpse of something, we arrive at my wife’s car and begin our journey back home. As I drive, I can feel my stress level drop significantly. It’s amazing how different I feel now that Katie is safe.

My wife begins questioning Katie about the earthquake, what happened in the room and how did the girls know to get under a table?

Katie doesn’t want to talk about it, but my wife won’t stop probing Katie with questions.

Suddenly, Katie yells, “It really scared me, mom!” Then lowering her tone, “The building started shaking and making noises. Sara, the other girl who was trapped with me, told me to get under the table in the room. I closed my eyes as hard as I could, wishing the noise and shaking to stop. The next thing I knew, everything started falling... I don’t ever want to go through that again! I’m never going back to the school again, either.”

Shar responds, reaching for her hand, “I’m sorry, honey. You don’t have to talk about it anymore. Just sit back and relax. We’ll be home soon.”

As I continue driving, I notice a few homes have chimney damage along various streets.

I ask my Shar, “How did the house hold up to the earthquake?”

She says, “Some of the book shelves fell and the spices from the kitchen cabinet are all over the floor. I was so worried, I didn’t finish cleaning everything.”

Chuckling, she tells me how our dog, Kailani, ran under the kitchen table to hide. Maybe Kailani knew the earthquake was coming, because she ran under the table before the shaking began.

Then in an alarmed tone she states, “Oh No! Your dog is probably eating the spices! I didn’t get the chance to clean them up. She’ll get sick.”

I jokingly respond, “She’ll be sorry if she gets into the chili flakes.”

Looking into the rear view mirror, I’m relieved to see Katie dozing off to sleep. My wife finally gets a phone call through to our daughter Janie, explaining what happened and that we’re all fine and are heading home.

Suddenly Katie starts shouting, “MAKE IT STOP.” She begins thrashing around in the back seat, straining against her seat belt.

I nearly drive off the road as her yelling practically scares me to death.

I shout, “What the..?”

Shar shouts, “What’s the matter? What’s the matter?”

Realizing Katie has had a nightmare about her ordeal, I pull over. Shar gets in the backseat with Katie, holds her and strokes her hair, calming her. She stays in the back seat, comforting Katie the rest of the way home.

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“Well, the damage wasn’t too bad here, and the dog seems to be fine,” I state later that evening, as we finish cleaning up. Katie is asleep on the couch.

I add, “There are a few areas I may need to patch on the walls, but it’s not too bad.”

Out of the blue, my wife declares, “Jack, I want to move.”

Dumbfounded, I ask, “What are you talking about?”

“Jack. I want to move. I’m serious. It’s too dangerous here. Our daughter isn’t even safe at school. Our home is broken. I’m scared. She’s scared. Did you know I had to sit in the bathroom while she showered because she was afraid to be alone?”

I stare at my wife, trying to understand exactly what she’s saying.

She continues, “I don’t feel safe. We’re not safe. I want to move.”

I reply, “Shar, it’s over. Yes, we had two small earthquakes, but we’ve been here for 10 years and never had anything like this before. It’s just happenstance.”

She cuts me off, “No Jack. I’m serious! I want to move. Our daughter almost lost her life!”

Raising my voice in a flustered tone, “So where are you gonna go?”

She responds, “I don’t know. I just want to move.”

I assert, “Shar, no matter where you go, there is always something that could happen. You just need to be prepared and understand what the issues are and get ready.”

She demeaningly fires back, “That’s great to hear, Jack. We’re not prepared for anything.”

I respond, “Then, we’ll get ready and start preparing.”

More demeaning than before, “Yeah, right. I asked about that preparedness business before, and did it happen? No. You’re just trying to buy time, hoping this blows over.”

Just as Shar begins to storm out of the den towards the dining room, the dog bolts upstairs ahead of a loud rumble that echoes throughout the house. Our home begins to shake and jerk. Everything goes dark as the lights go out. The motion knocks my wife to the floor near the dining room table, tosses me out of my chair, and flips the couch on top of Katie. The noise increasingly intensifies until it’s almost deafening. Glass is breaking everywhere, the walls are creaking and Katie is screaming at the top of her lungs from under the couch.

I yell out, “Katie, stay where you are! Shar, hold on to the table leg and stay there!”

It’s pitch black. I try to crawl to the table Shar is hiding under, but the jerking of the house keeps pushing me in different directions. I cover my head with one arm as some sheetrock from the ceiling falls onto my back.

Katie is screaming, ” MAKE IT STOP...OH GOD... STOOOOOOOP!”

Shar is crying out “Katie, stay where you are...stay where you are! Jack? Jack?”

I puncture my hand on a nail that fell onto the floor, cursing as I crawl over broken glass, cutting the palms of my hands. As I finally make my way under the table with my wife, I feel the warmth of blood seeping around my knee. This is really, really bad! My eyes are darting all around the room trying to see what is happening.

Katie screams, “DADDY? DADDY? WHERE ARE YOU? HELP ME. MAKE IT STOP!”

I yell across to her, “Just stay still baby. Stay where you are. I’m here. It’ll be over soon.”

But it seems to last forever. The noise is getting louder. My home appears to be disintegrating as it jerks left, then right. Everywhere, I hear objects crashing onto the floor, walls and wood

creaking, and glass is breaking. Katie begins to scream hysterically. Shar is sobbing and has a death grip on the center post of the table. I have never been so frightened in my life.

END OF PART 2

MOMENTS OF MISFORTUNE - Part 3

By Chuck Wallace
Edited by Lisa Ballou

The pandemonium is unrelenting. Glass shatters. Objects fall with a crash, creak, bang and thud echoing throughout the darkness, painting mental pictures in my mind of the destruction of our house by the earthquake. Falling debris is pummeling my head, back and legs as I struggle to crawl to the dining room table. I feel like I'm being beaten and punched as my nostrils fill with the smell of brick dust and sheetrock. My eyes burn and I choke on the dust, as I maneuver through the darkness and debris. Finally, reaching the center post of the dining room table next to my wife, I feel relief from the protection afforded by the tabletop.

The sounds of my wife choking and crying, and Katie's muffled screams sift through the thunderous noise of the event. I am helpless to assist either of them as Mother Nature thrashes each of us and our home.

I muster everything I have to comfort my wife, "I'm here Shar. It'll be over soon."

I only hear the sound of her coughing, sobbing and crying. Abruptly, the entire house jolts to the left. Shar and Katie both yelp and cry out. Then, unexpectedly, the house shifts to the right, heaving upward, throwing me forward, head first, into the center post of our dining room table. My head makes impact with the center post, exactly where the light fixture hit me on the left side of my head earlier today.

Cursing and seeing stars, I attempt to place my hand over my head, still holding the table center post with my other hand. The house jolts once more, much stronger than before. I'm propelled forward into the center post again, this time smashing the fingers on the hand covering my head. Everything is creaking, cracking and falling down around us, creating noises that terrify me. The darkness makes the entire ordeal more frightening than any event I have ever experienced. Will the house collapse over us? Will my family be alright? How much longer will this continue?

Shar is sobbing and praying out loud for everything to stop. Katie is still calling out for me, screaming as another loud noise resonates around the room.

I yell out, "I'm here Katie. It's alright. Just stay where you are. I'll be there soon."
As we all remain under cover, I begin to worry about if my other daughter Janie is safe at her friend's house. Then, just as suddenly as the earthquake began, it stops. Home and car alarms are blaring throughout the neighborhood. Debris is slowly and randomly falling around us, and I can hear the flow of water leaking from the second floor and possibly from the kitchen. Shar and I begin to crawl out from under the table. It's so very dark. I can't see anything.

I ask, "Are you alright?"

Shar, still crying, answers, "I don't know...I think so... Get Katie!"

I say, "Just stay here for a minute. Don't move around until I can find some lights."

Moving toward Katie, I yell, "I'm coming Katie. Hold on, baby. Daddy's coming."

Reaching into my back pocket, I pull out my cell phone and turn on the light. The white light pierces the blackness of the room. I'm amazed at the debris and the luminescent curtain of floating dust particles I see throughout our home, as I move toward the couch where Katie is crying. I step over fallen, broken sheetrock, and weave my way around items from our shelves and cabinets that have overturned and emptied their contents all over the living room. Once at the couch, I begin pushing pieces of sheetrock off its back, and clear an area where I can flip the couch over to check on Katie. Lifting the couch, I peek under to see her balled up tighter than seems possible. I roll the couch away. She doesn't move.

"Katie? Are you alright? Are you hurt?"

Slowly opening her eyes, squinting at my cell phone light, she whimpers "No, I'm alright, but... I'm really scared."

"We'll be ok," I respond without much confidence, and add. "Do you have shoes on?"

"No, I took my slippers off to lay on the couch" she replies.

I begin looking around the couch with the light from my cellphone and find one slipper, handing it to her. I flip and toss some of the debris around, but can't find the second slipper.

"Shar," I shout out, "do you have shoes on?"

She responds, "I have my sneakers on."

I ask, "Are the boots you wore clam digging last week in the downstairs closet?"

She replies, "Yes, I just put them away."

I tell Katie, "Stay here, I'm going to look for a pair of shoes or boots you can wear to get out of here. Do you have your phone with you?"

She pulls it out and shines the light. I tell her to shine it on her mother until I get back with her shoes.

I call out, "Shar, stay where you are until I get Katie some shoes. I'm going to try to get to the closet. We'll work our way outside together, when I get back."

Working my way through the debris and broken items on the floor, I can see our front door is jammed open at an angle. I can't see anything outside, just darkness. I get to the closet door. It's partly open but won't budge far enough to get inside easily. I look inside and see the boots. Kneeling down and reaching in as far as I can, I'm able to grab one, then use the other to drag the far boot closer to me. I pick them up and maneuver over, across, and around everything that fell during the quake.

I reach Katie and hand her the boots to put on. "Dad, these boots don't fit. They're too big."

I reply, "Just wear them. There is too much broken glass, nails and who knows what laying around here to cut your feet on."

After Katie adjusts the boots on her feet, we work our way to Shar, and using the lights from our cell phones, we trek through the debris, through the partially open front door, to the outside. It's a bit chilly outside, but it has stopped raining. We walk to my wife's car, which is parked in front of our house. Luckily, I carry her car keys on my key ring. I pull them from my pocket, open the door and pop the trunk to get out two blankets for them to drape over themselves, along with a large LED flashlight so we can see better.

Katie says, "Where's our Go Kit?" Looking directly at me she asks, "Don't we have a Go Kit?" She turns to her mother, "What about water?"

Shar immediately replies, "Ask your father why we don't have any."

I look over at my wife, sigh heavily, and give her the exasperated, I get it look. I'm guilty of not preparing our family for disaster. I admit to Katie, "We don't have a Go Kit."

Katie cuts me off, “Dad, we’re supposed to have a Go Kit. We learned about disaster preparedness in school and that we’re supposed to have a Go Kit.”

Shar chimes in, “Your father didn’t go to school that day, honey. He had something better to do on that particular day . . . and every day after.”

I try to ease the situation. “We don’t have anything else in the trunk we can use. Let’s make the best of what we have. In the morning, I’ll go back in the house and get what we need.”

Katie exclaims, “What if I need to go to the bathroom? Do I have to go back into the house?”

I ask, “Do you need to go now?”

Katie responds, “No.”

Then Shar asks, “Is anyone going to ask me?”

I ask, “Do you need to go?”

She says, “No, but I might soon.”

I say, “Well, try to hold it until I figure out what to do.”

That was enough to set Shar off on a diatribe about my disaster preparedness neglect, “This is not good Jack. I don’t like this at all. We aren’t ready for this. We have no food, no water, and no bathroom. I told you time and time again about this. . . .”

I say, “Please, Shar, I get it. But we can only do what we can now. . please try to relax. . . .”

“Don’t tell me to relax,” she yells back. And although I can’t see her eyes in the darkness, I can tell they are glaring at me.

I ask, “Please, can we just work to make things better for all of us?”

Luckily, Katie jumps in, “The phones aren’t working, other than the light. We can’t text either.”

I tell Katie to turn her cell phone light off to save it in case we need the cell phone lights later. I turn to see if I can light up the front of the house with the LED flashlight. There is a large crack from the mid-roof level running down next to the front door. All of our windows are broken and I notice the curtains blowing around in what's left of our window frames.

I hear Shar gasp and begin to cry again, "Oh my god! My house. Oh god. It's broken. Oh, what are we gonna do?"

Suddenly, a large commotion comes from inside of the house and our dog Kailani, comes bounding through the doorway. I call her over and attempt to put her in the car with my wife and daughter.

Katie excitedly says, "Kailani, you're safe! Mom, she's safe! Good girl. Come here puppy. Get in the car...that's right. Good girl."

Kailani looks more relieved than we do that the earthquake is over. She lays over Katie's lap in the back seat of the car.

As I hand the car keys to Shar, she holds onto my hand and asks, "Do you think Janie is safe?"

I answer as I squeeze her hand, "She's smart. She knows what to do. I'm sure she's safe."

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Looking around, I don't see or hear anyone else outside and tell Shar, "I'm going to walk up the street to see if anyone needs help."

Be careful Jack. Don't get hurt."

I respond, "I will. You know I'm always careful."

She adds, "Like I said, be careful."

Unexpectedly, the ground begins to shake again. I kneel down and Shar ducks and covers her head as Katie pulls Kailani tight and holds on for dear life in the back seat of the car.

Shar yells out, "Not again...oh goddd!"

It only lasts a few seconds, maybe eight to ten. It was nowhere near the size of the earthquake we just survived. As the aftershock stops rumbling, I hear more debris falling from my home and from nearby homes.

I get up, look to see if my wife and daughter are alright, asking, “Are you ok?”

“Yes, We’re ok, Jack.”

I respond, “We’ll probably have these for a while. If this was a coastal earthquake, it probably generated a tsunami. I hope everyone understands what to do.”

Shar looks at me in panic, as does Katie, “We’re safe, right?”

I say, “Yeah. We’re safe. We’re nowhere near the inundation zone. We just need to stay safe while walking around in the debris and stay safe during the aftershocks. They can be pretty big.”

“I’ll be back soon,” I declare, as I begin walking up the street using the flashlight to light my way.

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As I’m walking up the street, I see two or three lights in the distance. I hear a few voices from far away, calling out asking if people are safe. I stop at my neighbor’s home, knock hard with the flashlight and try to open the front door. It’s locked. I yell into the broken front window and listen – nothing but water running and the faint message coming from an All Hazard Alert Weather Radio that must be buried beneath the debris in their living room.

Moving from home to home, I encounter a few neighbors, all with damage to their homes, but none were injured by the earthquakes. Some have Go Kits, most do not. Some don’t even have flashlights. Many have candles and have moved a few chairs to their front lawns. Nobody feels safe in their homes, especially since we can’t truly see the damage incurred.

Every once in a while, a small group of three or four people walk up the street passing our homes. I chat with a few, who tell me they are moving toward Sam Benn Park, because someone told them the assembly area for tsunami was situated there. I told them I hadn’t heard that information, but that didn’t mean it isn’t true and disclose the park is about two blocks away. They said the damage from the earthquake on our street was similar where they lived, about four blocks down the street toward the river. I asked if anyone was hurt, but all they knew was

someone broke an arm running from his house during the earthquake. Most injuries they heard about were minor.

Meeting up with Bill, a neighbor from up the corner, I notice the sky beginning to lighten, signaling daybreak approaching. Suddenly I realize I've been walking around for hours. I talk Bill into joining me to check on our other neighbors. Methodically moving from home to home, we arrive at a home on the other side of our street where Pearl and Joe live, an elderly couple with a small poodle. I go up to the house, and the door is closed, but unlocked.

“Hello?” I knock, open the door and call out into the living room.

I see lots of debris and then see Pearl sitting on the floor holding her dog.

I move to her, and ask, “Are you ok Pearl?”

I notice a small cut on her forehead as she looks to me. She is mumbling to herself.

I ask, “Where's Joe? Where's Joe, Pearl?”

She continues to mumble and points to a large china cabinet laying on the floor. I shine the light to it and notice two legs, most likely Joe's, sticking out from underneath.

I gasp, “Oh Jeez.”

I move to the cabinet quickly and attempt to lift it up. I barely get it up to my knees when Bill appears out of nowhere and helps push the cabinet upright. Joe's hands are shaking but he isn't talking. I lean down to get a better look and Bill said not to move him. He might have a broken neck or back. I hand Bill the flashlight and run out using the cell phone light, to get one of the blankets from our car.

I return and say, “We can't leave them in this place. Things could still fall and Pearl is having some issues. Let's get them outside.”

Bill asks, “What about Joe?”

I respond, “I don't know yet. I just know they can't stay in here. Maybe we can put them in their car.” I search Joe's pockets and exclaim, “I got em,” as I pull his car keys out! “One of us can stay with them until we get some help.”

We move some of the debris surrounding Joe, so we can roll him up in the blanket, hoping to stabilize him as best we can. Bill and I move Joe's arms ever so slowly to his sides as we wrap him up *papoose style*.

I ask Bill, "Do you want me to move Pearl to the car? I'll put her in the front seat and then we can get Joe into the back seat."

Bill responds, "I can get her, you stay with Joe."

I hand him the flashlight, and he talks to Pearl, slowly helping her from the home to their car at the curb. Pearl refuses to let go of her poodle. Just as Bill begins to close the door to the car, the ground begins shaking again. I look to see the cabinet next to Joe begin falling. Moving quickly I step under it and try to keep it from falling on Joe. The ground motion and the heavy, bulkiness of the cabinet causes it, as well as me to fall. It positioned itself over my lower body as I lay atop of Joe, on my back, perpendicular to his lower body with the cabinet on me, but not touching him. Struggling to move, Joe groans. I realize I'm having trouble moving myself. The tremor stopped quickly.

I yell out, "Bill..... Bill? Hey Bill, are you there?"

There is no answer. I struggle to move from under the cabinet again. Joe groans louder but doesn't say anything. I don't think I can get out from under here without someone helping.

Afraid I may hurt Joe more than he already is, I try to yell out louder, "Hey Bill? Bill?"

I lay there for fifteen or twenty minutes attempting four or five times to get from under the cabinet, but can't without hurting Joe.

I yell out, "Bill? BILL? Are you there?"

Jeez, where did he go? He couldn't have just left me here.

Suddenly a larger rumble begins and large pieces of ceiling tiles and sheetrock fall directly upon Joe and I. A large piece crashes into my head, and I see stars. More debris tumbles and falls over us as I'm hit with something very solid and hard, a brick. I attempt to cover my face as bricks thud down upon us. Abruptly, I am smashed with hundreds of pounds of bricks. Oh god, the chimney has fallen through his roof.

After what seems like an eternity, the earthquake stops. I cannot move at all. I can't see anything other than a small bit of light from what I believe may be the sun coming up.

I can barely breathe. I try to yell for help, but not much noise is produced as I yell out, “Help...help...” I’m choking but can’t cough.

I am having trouble breathing. We’re being crushed under the bricks.

I try once more to call for help, “Help ... Bill?”

I couldn’t even hear myself call out. I think I’m going to suffocate. I close my eyes, listening to my heartbeat get softer, and slower as I can barely draw a small breath. I see my family on my closed eyelids. I should had said I love you more often. I listen to myself breathing, shallow, panting, and slowing. Breathe..... breathe..... brea..the..... brea....t.....h.....e..

END OF PART 3

MOMENTS OF MISFORTUNE - Part 4

By Chuck Wallace

Edited by Carmin McCullough

As dawn approaches, the muffled and distant noises of the ongoing events, begin fading from my ears. Struggling to listen, I believe I hear an AHAB Siren wailing in the distance, but the contemplations within my mind, take precedence to what I hear. I’m unable to struggle against the heaviness upon me; my arms and legs pinned, helpless under the debris squeezing the life from my body. My memories, fleetingly come to life, as if in narrative within my own head, as the weight of the bricks upon my chest begins to diminish thought and feeling from my body.

Panic begins to overtake me, with the realization, I am completely helpless under this debris. No one can hear me and I’m being suffocated by the weight of the bricks. I am sweating from every pore on my body. My heartbeat has increased considerably and is pounding in my head, but I notice each succeeding heartbeat is occurring one fraction of a second slower. Each is less intense than the previous one, as the weight of the bricks upon my chest, begins to reduce the ability of my heart to beat and my lungs to expand. I’m going to die here.

I attempt to shout for help once again. My lips form words but, I’m unable to force their escape from my mouth. Struggling mightily, I form the words, “H..e..l..p,” but am unable to produce a sound.

Each time I exhale, I lose more and more ability to fill my lungs. I suck at the air, struggling to admit the shallowest dust filled breath, into the diminishing space available in my lungs.

B. r...e...a...t...h...e. With eyes darting about the semi-darkness of dawn in the room, attempting to focus and refocus, I begin losing my ability to determine between what is real or hallucination, as life slowly and silently, departs my body. With a final moment of clarity, I struggle and strain once more, trying to draw air into my lungs, B...r...e... My chest cannot comply. It is unable to expand. The muscles in my torso collapse from exhaustion. They can no longer able to hold back the weight of the bricks. My mind is expiring, as each remaining molecule of air, is forced from my lungs by the heaviness atop my chest.

Each moment seeming an eternity, I bear witness to my life dwindling away. As my body slowly succumbs to the crushing suffocation, my mind focuses on my wife and kids, and how I will miss them. My thoughts appear distant and flicker like an old movie projector casting glimmering film shadows upon a wall. Please, I don't want to forget them...., but I'm unable to see their faces in my mind's eye – Shar, Katie & Janie.

I struggle to gasp for air one last time, but cannot. My last moments have arrived, as the final few grains of my existence empty into the lower chamber of mortality's hourglass. The end is upon me.

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Suddenly, the suffocating weight of the bricks is abruptly removed from my chest. I involuntarily and frantically inhale, rapidly filling my lungs with life reviving air, mingled with a heavy curtain of brick dust, agitated by the incident. I become barely conscious enough to recognize a scream. Laughter and cheering echo around me. I feel hands sweeping across my eyes and face, followed by a blinding beam of light, channeling deep into my eyes, as I hastily gulp down more reviving, choking breaths. I'm able to roll to my left side as I choke and gasp as my demise from this world begins to reverse. Many hands are gripping my arms and legs, trying to hold me still, as I gasp and gag on the dense brick dust filled air.

I hear different voices saying, "Well, look what we have here! He's alive! Hey, they're both alive! Come on let's get them out of here."

I'm placed onto a hard, unforgiving, spine board and someone attaches the most uncomfortable cervical collar around my neck. It feels so tight, I'm sure my eyes are bulging. I hear people speaking to me, but I'm doing all I can to just breathe. Bright lights pierce my pupils as I'm carried out of the home and laid outside on the front lawn. Still coughing incessantly, my lungs struggle to reopen and fill, as they cough out the viscous brick dust that has clogged each one. I celebrate the moment I'm able to draw in a long, deep, breath of fresh, clean, cool air, without choking. With each deep breath I take, I can think again. I can see more clearly. I can also feel my body beginning to ache, almost like having a deep bruise all over. I can feel everything again, including how very uncomfortable it feels to be laying on this spine board. As my senses and strength return, I notice how foggy and misty it is outside this morning. I get a slight chill laying on the spine board without a blanket and begin feeling extremely uncomfortable. I can't take how this spine board and collar feel. My back is killing me. I begin reaching to remove the straps and collar.

“Jack, is that you?” I look to see who is speaking to me, but need to close my eyes because of the light shining from to his helmet. “It’s me Matt. It is you. How do you feel?”

Pulling at the cervical collar straps, I reply, “I’m trying to keep from being blinded, take your helmet off.”

He complies and attempts to stop me from removing the straps and cervical collar. “Jack, you should keep that on until someone can check you out. You might have broken something.”

I tell him, “I thought I was a goner in there, but right now, I actually feel pretty good, other than a few bruises and the gunk in my lungs.” Hacking more brick dust up, I say, “I need to get this stuff out of my body.” Adding, “How did you get here?”

Matt responds, “I belong to a CERT team here in the tri cities area, Aberdeen, Hoquiam & Cosi. We were called out a few hours ago. We’ve been checking many homes for quite a few blocks, trying to provide help to people we find. Luckily you had the sheetrock and the cabinet over your body. We lifted it up and the majority of the bricks just fell away. When you gasped for air, it scared us all half to death. Did you hear Julie, one of the women with us scream? She thought you weren’t alive and was bent over you, checking for a pulse in your neck. When you took that breath, we all jumped about five feet in the air and Julie screamed like you were Dracula waking from the dead. She ran out cursing you and crying. It was pretty funny..., but I suppose not so much to you.”

Still tugging at the collar straps, I sincerely tell him, “Look Matt, I’m really glad you guys showed up.” Coughing I say, “I thought it was the end of me. I couldn’t move or breathe.”

He looked at me and winked, “Don’t worry about it man. That’s why we all do what we do. You are a bright spot in our searches today. You’re alive. Yeah, both of you are alive. That’s always good”

I respond, “You don’t have to tell me.”

I finally release myself from the collar and move my head from side to side.

“Ohhhh man,” I exclaim, as the muscles stretch and pull in my neck. “I feel like Walter Brennan from The Real McCoys.”

Matt responds, “Who’s that?”

I tell him, “It’s an old TV show from the late 1950’s and early 60’s. The guy played the older father, walked with a hitch in his step and....”

Matt, looking very puzzled says, “Never heard of it.” Then asks, “Are you ok?”

I say, “Yeah,” as I chuckle to myself, “Just stiff.”

I continue releasing the straps of the spine board. Matt begins helping.

I slowly roll to my side and work my way onto my knees. “Help me up will you?”

Matt grabs me under my right upper arm and assists me to stand. Everything hurts like I’ve been run over by a truck, but I’m not telling him that. He’ll make a fuss and they’ll put me back on that spine board. That’s not going to happen.

“Oomph,” I let out a series of small gasps, as I begin stretching my arms and legs, working my hips and neck more. I cough and choke again, feeling pain everywhere. “Ahhh, oooohh ho ho ho.” After a minute or two, the stiffness starts leaving my body, but the constant pain from the crushing bruises on what feels like every inch of my body resonates.

Matt asks, Are you sure you’re ok?”

I nod yes, as I continue to take deep breaths, choking and hacking out the brick dust. I never knew air could feel this good.

Mat inquires, “Is this where you live?”

I reply, “No, I was helping to check on neighbors. That’s when I found that guy over there, Joe, in his living room with his wife.”

Joe is strapped upon a spine board laying on the front lawn. A person with a CERT vest is tending to him.

Still bent over from hacking and coughing, I ask, “Hey, a guy was helping me check properties. He took Joe’s wife outside to sit in their car to get out of the elements and away from the house. I think it was that Ford where the crowd is standing. The roof and chimney came down on me while I was inside with Joe. I was yelling for the guy to come help, but he never did. He said he was putting Joe’s wife, Pearl in the car, and would be coming right back to help me.”

Angrily I continue on, “I can’t believe he left me. Did you see him anywhere? He was wearing a Seahawks sweatshirt. Matt, I almost died in there, because he left us.”

Matt looks into my eyes and says, “Jack, he didn’t make it.”

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Astounded, I ask in disbelief, “What? What are you talking about?”

Matt continues, “Neighbors found a guy next to the car in a Seahawks sweatshirt, with a massive head wound, and flagged us down as we were checking homes on this block. There was an older woman and a small dog in the car next to him, but she was kind of out of it, maybe dementia. He was barely alive when we got here. He was able to tell us what happened, but he died a few minutes later. We tried CPR, but his head wound was really bad. There was just nothing we could do. We called for assistance, secured the scene and we moved on to search the home where we found you two, after others arrived to help.”

I feel like I’m losing my mind. “What? What are you talking about? He only had to put her in the car and come back. Are you sure it’s him? That it’s Bill? He’s wearing a Seahawks sweatshirt?”

Matt states, “We’re sure it’s him. We found his wallet.”

Very concerned, I look at the crowd around the car and ask, “Is he still there?”

Matt discloses, “No. We contacted our command post and they relayed the information about his death via ham radio to the authorities. We were asked to bring his body to the command post. We flagged a guy down with a pickup and he took your friend’s body to our command post with two of our members.”

Extremely disturbed by the news, I continue to query him, “What about his wife? Did anyone tell his wife? They only live a half block away.”

Matt replies “The command post dispatched another team to inform his wife and bring her to their location to be with his body. I heard they were heading to the command post with her about thirty minutes ago.” Adding, “I know there are a few medical professionals on another CERT team there. Hopefully, they’ll be able to assist her to deal with his passing.”

He looks at me and states, “I’m sorry you lost your friend.”

Dumbfounded, I continue to tell Matt. “I asked him to come help me. I can’t believe it. Oh my god! It’s my fault he’s dead. Oh my god.”

Matt tries to console me, “It’s not your fault. You didn’t do anything. He told us he fell during an aftershock and hit his head on the curb. It’s just one of those things. You couldn’t have prevented it.”

I continue on, “What do I say to his wife? He was with me! This wasn’t supposed to happen.”

Matt interrupts, Jack, it didn’t happen because of you. It’s just one of those things. Like fate.”

I'm speechless. I feel responsible. I feel horrible. I asked Bill if he wanted me to take Pearl to the car, but he volunteered to do it. It might have been me laying there. Maybe not. Oh god. My mind is spinning. What do I say to his wife?

Matt asks, "Jack, are you ok?"

I look at him, and nod that I am, and say, "This is unbelievable. Joe and I almost died. I was angry at a guy just helping out, and he ended up getting killed. It's not right Matt."

Matt offers, "Life isn't about right or wrong. It just happens. It isn't supposed to be any particular way. There isn't a script to follow. Some people live and others don't survive. Life is about continuing to move forward because we can't change what has already happened. We can only live for what is happening now and for the future."

Suddenly, my mind vividly clears. My wife and kids!

I panic and exclaim to Matt "Oh my god! Shar, my girls! I need to get back to them to see if they're alright."

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Matt answers a call on the Walkie Talkie he's carrying. He looks up at me and says, "Jack, I need to get my CERT partner and continue down the street." He adds, "Where is your wife?"

Still hacking up the dust, I say, "We live two blocks away. I left her in our car with my daughter and our dog when I started searching homes, but that was hours ago. I haven't talked to her since I left."

Still hurting all over, I start checking my pockets, front to back, then back to front.

Annoyed I say "Jeez, I lost my phone. It's probably under the bricks in Joe's house." Anxiously adding, "I need to get back to my family and let them know everything is ok."

Matt says, "We'll go with you to be sure everything is alright. Are you sure you don't want to be seen by an EMT or Paramedic? They're with us here."

I respond, "No, I'm good. I just want to get back to my house to check on my family."

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Still shaken by the news about Bill's death, I begin walking toward my home with Matt and another CERT Team member. Every step I take is painful. I notice car traffic is bumper to bumper driving up the street. Crossing at the intersection, I observe an RV has crashed into the front of a tree on the block next to me, causing traffic to stop. There are many standing beside their cars watching the events unfold. I don't see any response vehicles though, but there are many people tending to the scene. I also see two people in CERT jackets.

Matt says, “There are many people attempting to drive away from here, but the earthquake has brought the bluff down in Aberdeen and created other landslides. They say many areas in the tsunami inundation zone are flooded. There’s no place to really go. I’ve seen a few cars driving around, two, maybe three times. It’s almost like they are driving in circles trying to find a way out.”

Astounded at what I heard, I interrupt Matt, “Wait, are you saying we had a tsunami?”

He adds, “That’s what I hear. I haven’t seen anything, just reports over the radio. They say South Aberdeen has been inundated about 3 blocks into the city from a small wave. The reports say, the entire area has either low flooding or earthquake damage affecting most main streets. There have also been some reports of Westport and Ocean Shores not being drivable at all.”

Looking at the cars waiting to move on, I see most are full with people, adults, children and a few dogs. A few have overloaded trunks, with what appears to be furniture, suitcases, blankets and other personal belongings, tied shut.

I continue probing him, “Are many people hurt?”

Matt responds, “There aren’t many reports of people hurt. It appears most in the low lying areas did the right thing and headed for high ground. Our CERT command post has set up in Sam Benn Park. They have ham radio capability and reported there are about 150 people in the park, asking if help is coming.” He adds, “I don’t think anyone is coming though. From what I hear, there is no way to get here, and if they could, what could they do? People can’t drive anywhere, except in circles and the ambulances are cut off. Hopefully people are at least a bit prepared with Go Kits or some type of container with food, water and items to keep warm.”

I respond, “I thought all of that prep stuff was a waste of time. Maybe just be ready for a power outage for a few days, but a major earthquake...and a tsunami? I can’t believe it really happened.”

Matt adds, “From the reports I hear over my radio, it really happened. Luckily our CERT team is all local to the tri cities area. We were able to mobilize and get here on foot to help those in need.”

Matt chats with many people carrying personal belongings up our street toward the park. As I listen to the conversations, they talk about their homes being flooded or damaged from the earthquake. Most say there are many more people displaced, but only a few have injuries that they know of. They claim the aftershocks have really unnerved everyone though. These groups of people have decided to come to Sam Benn Park, because of information circulating in the damaged area and on the areas of high ground, that there might be some assistance there.

Matt tells them the command post for the CERT teams of the tri cities is there. If they continue on, they could contact the CERT members there, who may be able to provide more specific information obtained via ham radio communications.

Continuing our walk, virtually every property has observable damage. Shattered windows, collapsed chimneys, cracks on the walls, and broken fences surrounded properties. Tents and

lawn chairs are scattered on numerous lawns. People are camping out. The sound of generators cuts through the light breeze of the early morning, carrying the smell of coffee up the street. Thank god the majority of the people living in the county are avid outdoors people. They're pretty much at home living out of a tent. I notice some people have large plastic containers with food and water they're sharing with neighbors. Every so often, I can hear a radio transmission on an All Hazard Weather Radio, one of the people on the block is monitoring.

Most people are concerned about leaving their property. They tell us they don't want to leave their home, because someone might break in and take their belongings. Many are also afraid to go back into their home, because of the aftershocks. They don't want to get trapped inside or risk injury. I wonder what they will do if no assistance comes soon. I worry even more about what I will do with my family. We aren't prepared at all, and my inaction and procrastination has put us in this predicament.

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We finally make it to my property, Shar and both of my daughters, Janie and Katie, are sitting on the hood of our car drinking bottled water. Kailani is tied with a rope and her leash to the tree in our front yard. There are two other young women about the same age as Janie, standing with them. Kailani is announcing my arrival by barking and crying. Sharon looks up and as she recognizes me, slides from the hood of the car and runs up to me, hugging me as tight as she ever has. The pain is almost unbearable and I let out a loud groan.

Half crying she says, "We were afraid something happened to you," pulling me tighter as she hugs.

I grunt again, trying to back away from her to alleviate the immense discomfort I feel.

Then, she pushes me back, looks into my eyes, and immediately begins firing off question after question, "Are you alright? You're filthy. How did you get like that? Why didn't you text or call us? We've been trying to contact you for hours. Where have you been?"

I look at Matt and shake my head indicating no, don't say anything. If she knew I nearly lost my life she would go crazy. It will be hard enough dealing with what is happening now.

I respond by saying, "I was helping other people. I couldn't contact you because I lost my phone someplace. Adding, "The phones are out, I couldn't have called anyway."

She continues, "We have been frantic worrying about you since the last aftershock. Janie and her friends came here on foot about 3 hours ago. They are ok, but her friend's home was impacted by the tsunami and flooded into the first floor. She said they also had some pretty significant earthquake damage."

I ask, "Are all of you alright?"

Shar responds, “We’re good. We had some beef jerky and ... “

I stop her mid-sentence, “Where did you get that?”

Shar looks at me, raises her eyebrows and says, “Janie’s friends Lauren and Kim, the tall girls over there, brought their Go Kits with them, and shared everything with us. They have water, some snacks, blankets, ponchos and even a first aid kit. Unlike us, who have two old blankets, a small flashlight and a crushed, half used box of tissues.”

Matt joins into the conversation, “Be glad you have something. I think we’re all going to need food and water over the next few days.”

I look at Matt with a, “*really, did you have to say that?*” look. It’ll be bad enough dealing with things as they are and you just said that? Come on man, give me a break here.

Matt he gets a message on his Walkie Talkie which I can’t understand and provides a short answer.

He tells us, “I need to see if anyone else needs help down the street. You’re going to need some place to stay overnight. I was told most roads are not passible. Most are blocked with downed wires and trees. There are quite a few landslides and there are no traffic lights or power anywhere in the county.

Shar jumps in, “I’m not leaving my home until I get my belongings. Look around. Everyone is afraid to leave. They know someone will be sneaking around tonight. I’m not going to let them steal my stuff.”

Matt looks at me, shrugs, and raises his eyebrows. He offers, “Well, my partner and I need to move along. We’ll stop by in a while to see if you need anything.”

I say, “Thanks so much Matt. You have no idea how much I appreciate what you and your team did for me.”

Matt responds, “We’re just glad you’re ok. I’m sorry about the other guy.”

I say, “Yeah, me too.”

Shar jumps in, “What guy?”

I respond, “I’ll tell you later.”

She continues, “What happened? What guy?”

I say, “It’s not anything, I’ll tell you later.”

Matt turns and says, "I'll stop by later to check on how you're doing."

I call out as he walks away, "Thanks man."

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

The ground rumbles and shakes slightly with another small aftershock, lasting only a few seconds.

I can hear my neighbors calling out, "Here comes another. Hold on."

Another yells across the street, half-jokingly, "Oh, that wasn't nearly as bad as the others."

Everyone looks at one another to see if there will be any reaction, but all continue going about what they are doing, sensing there is no danger from this tremblor. It seems kind of strange that, even with all of the damage to their homes, some still can find a bit of humor during all of this turmoil.

Shar is adamant about protecting our belongings. I walk to the front of the house and look inside the front door, determining I want no part of entering my home again, especially after what happened to me earlier. I walk around back and see my shed is open and relatively stable. Picking through the items, I'm in constant pain as I lift, pull and move. I find our old tents and a few folding chairs in the damp, musty enclosure.

Walking back to the front with two folding chairs, I hear noise almost like people cheering, coming from down below, in the area they say the tsunami impacted. I try looking toward the area, but with the low haze, it's hard to see anything very far away. The noise is kind of faint in the breeze and the mist has changed to a light drizzle. I tell Shar we have our camping equipment, and ask her what she will want to do if no help comes for a few days?

I tell her "We have no food, probably not enough water and it's supposed to rain harder later today, into the end of the week."

She stubbornly says, "I'm not leaving my home open for someone to get inside and steal everything we have."

I emphatically say, "Where would they go if they did take everything? The roads don't lead anywhere right now."

Suddenly, I hear a voice calling out, yelling; almost screaming at us. Matt is running up the street. "Jack. Everyone. We need you! We need everyone, come help! A second tsunami just swept by down below. Many people were walking near the flooded area helping some of the victims of the first tsunami. The second wave took them by surprise. There was no notice. People were running for their lives. I'm sure all have not made it far

enough up hill to escape the wave. I saw the water running over Market Street pushing cars around. Hurry please! Come down and help us. Hurry!!

## **END OF PART 4**

### **MOMENTS OF MISFORTUNE - Part 5**

My legs and feet are nearly numb from the coldness of the water I'm wading through. God only knows what kind of funk we're walking in. The smell of the water lingers in my nostrils and mouth. It's reminiscent of the sewage odor of low tide in Budd Bay in Olympia.

I half expected the water covering the area to be still, like a large lake covering the area, but it's not. I notice the rainbow sheen of light oil and gas moving quickly on the water. It's moving with the flow of the Chehalis River, strong enough to where I feel the swiftness of the current tugging at my lower legs and feet as I take each step.

Matt, Shar, Katie, Janie and their friends are searching along the edge of the water's inundation. I hear the girls complaining how cold they are, but they all continue searching. Their comments make me feel colder.

Cold and tired, we unwaveringly continue our search for people in need. The affected we're searching for were impacted by the last tsunami wave that snuck up on everyone who were inspecting the damage from the earthquake and the first, much smaller tsunami wave from earlier in the day.

We're pushing through jagged, half floating debris, moving it away from ourselves as we comb the area. I notice most homes have some type of damage from the tsunami, with wood walls, shingles, and siding torn away. Many have crumbled chimneys and broken windows from the earthquakes, and numerous cars have been scattered to lawns and intersections, motionless monuments to the disaster, resting in a few feet of water.

It's eerily quiet. I guess the home and car alarm batteries have been exhausted. Most people appear to have left the area for higher ground, although from time to time, we encounter a few people on the second floor of a home asking for information. We usually can't tell them much more than they already know, but do tell them where they could possibly obtain more up to date information and some fresh water at the CERT command post in Sam Benn Park.

I'm so tired after searching for the last 24 or so hours I can barely concentrate on what we're doing. My head is pounding from the lack of sleep and the stench of the water. It's all I can do to keep focused on the task at hand.

Matt, walking and wading a few feet away from me states, "The radio's been pretty active with information from some of the other groups searching the area. A few people have been found stuck in cars and homes. Most are ok, but one search group did call for assistance when they found two people who appear to have drowned, along with 2 cats in South Aberdeen. I didn't hear exactly where though."

I know he was talking to me, but his words barely registered in my mind.

I managed to respond with, "That's not good."

He says, "Hopefully, we're able to help the people we come across."

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As we continue our search, not finding much but floating boards and pieces of wood, trash, clothes and empty cars, we encounter a family of four approaching us. A man and woman in their late twenties to early thirties, stumble through the debris. They're holding what appears to be everything they could possibly carry, while pulling two small, maybe 5 to 7 year old children wearing backpacks alongside.

The man, completely disheveled and wet asks, "Do you know where we might be able to get some help and stay for the night? Someplace safe? Maybe get something to eat or drink?"

Matt responds, "If you head toward Sam Benn Park, up that road, there is a CERT Command Post there, who has communication with some other response agencies. They have water. There are others there waiting for help. It's probably your best place to be right now with the kids."

The woman begins crying, "It just came out of nowhere. Water began coming into our living room and before we knew it, there was 3 feet of water everywhere. Everything we own is ruined."

One of the children shouts, "My daddy put us on the dining room table so we didn't get wet. Mikey and me had to stay there."

The woman, sobbing, says "I thought we were going to drown in our own home."

The man utters to no one in particular, “I gathered everything I could, papers, clothes, keep sakes, and put them in sheets and tablecloths.

With tears running down her face, the woman utters, “What are we gonna do? I don’t know what we’re gonna do. We don’t have insurance. We both work part time to pay our rent and now we have no place to live.” Looking at my wife, she says, “I don’t know if the places we work will be open, or if they’re still there!” She begins sobbing again, “What are we gonna do for money? How are we gonna live?”

Suddenly another aftershock brings a hard jolt, making it a struggle for everyone to stand. The earthquake is strong enough to bring a medium sized chop to the water with waves along the edge of the water rising to a foot or so tall. The jolt and the action of the water is too much for the youngest boy from the family. He falls backwards, the weight of his backpack pulling him under as he disappears beneath the murky water.

Katie yells out, “Somebody get him!”

Matt and I move closer.

He says, “Where did he fall? I don’t see him”

Katie points to an area about 6 feet away from us.

She yells out, There he is!”

Suddenly, the boy surfaces and screams, splashing in the water, disappearing again.

The other girls are screaming out, calling for the boy. Everyone converges to the area where Katie is pointing.

I jump to where he was, frantically grabbing and reaching out under the water for him.

I shout to everyone nearby, “Get him, Jesus, somebody get him. MATT!”

Matt yells, “I can’t find him! Where is he?”

All of us are thrashing hysterically in the water. I dive under and sweep my arms and hands along the street below, feeling nothing but pieces of broken wood and other debris as I have to come up for air.

Shar is submerged so only her head is visible in the water, sweeping her arms and kicking her legs, attempting to find the boy. His parents are frantic, flailing in the water in search of their son.

The older boy is standing in the water crying out, “Mikey, Mikey! Where are you Mikey?”

As Shar wildly searches the water, she begins yelling, practically wailing, “Oh my God! The baby! Where did he go? KATIE ... JANIE ...JACK!”

Hearing the commotion, other searchers working nearby scramble to join in the search.

Numerous voices are calling out for him, “Mikey...Mikey!”

Suddenly Janie shouts, “I see his backpack over here, there’s somebody here. See? See? I can’t get him, help me.....hurry help me.”

I rush as fast as I can in the water, to where the Janie said she saw the boy.

Another person shouts, “There he is. See him?”

Fleeting, I get a glance of him. I reach out but can’t grab hold of him. I see his face under the water, near the surface, as the current pulls him away. I desperately attempt to reach out for him. I begin lunging toward him into the deeper water, but he begins moving farther away from me, his eyes staring at me, pleading for help.

I shout out, choking on the water, “Help me. Hurry. I can’t get him! Oh my god. Somebody get him! Get him!”

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My body flinches as I yell out “Get him!”

The ground is vigorously shaking under me, another aftershock from Mother Nature, thankfully waking me from my nightmare. I must have fallen asleep against the tree on my lawn for a few moments. I’ve been awake for close to 30 hours, but each time I begin to doze off, I am jolted awake by an aftershock or become panicked enough to wake myself during a nightmare about the day’s events.

Sitting up slowly, my body feels worse now than ever. The pain and bruising from being under the debris at Joe & Pearls’ home is affecting every movement I make.

Grunting, I slowly sit up and refocus on my surroundings, “Ohhh, uhhhh,” breathing deeply between groans, heightening the pain I feel everywhere, “Ohhh crap.”

Propping myself up against the tree, I sit steadying myself with my left hand on the ground. Shivering from the cold and how damp I still am, I notice the campfire I built is smoldering. I see Shar, the girls and their friends are asleep in the musty tents I retrieved from our shed. Kailani must be inside one of the tents with them.

The past day has been nothing short of horrendous. My family’s entire world has been turned upside down by these earthquakes and tsunamis that have assaulted our community and our lives. The only thing I can feel grateful about is, my family is safe with me.

Matt approaches me with two other people and offers, “Jack, why don’t you and your family head to the Command Post? There are a few large campfires there to help dry everyone off and keep warm and it appears one of the preppers from the area is handing out MRE’s to eat. At least you can get something in your belly.”

One of the other people with him offers, “There is word that WSDOT may reopen Hwy 12 at the bluff in another day or two. Supplies will be arriving, as well as opportunity to leave the area if you wish.”

I say, “I’m not sure where we can go. My guess is most places close by with electricity and running water are full by now, but getting dry and having something to eat would be great.”

As I attempt to get up, I roll to my knees and reach out toward the tree to help me stand. The three of them see me struggle and help me to my feet.

I groan out loud and exclaim “Oh my god. I’m stiff as a board. I hurt like hell all over.” Looking at Matt, I say, “It even hurts to breathe. I coughed a few times and thought my ribs were exploding in my chest.”

Matt reveals again that there are EMT’s and Paramedics at the Command Post, saying, “Jack, I think you might have broken ribs ...maybe more issues. Why don’t you let them check to see if you’re ok?”

I respond, “I might just do that, the pain is killing me.”

He says, “I really think you should. Do you need help getting there?”

I respond, “Naa. I’ll get there. Slowly, but I’ll get there.”

Adding, “Ok then. We’ll see you later. We’re going to tell the others around here the same information we just told you. They’re finally relieving us in a few minutes so we can catch a few hours of sleep. You should try to get some too. Don’t forget about the CERT Command Post. There is food and help there.”

I reply, “I’m going to head there as soon as I wake the rest of my family.”

Matt, still wearing that stupid looking backpack and the other two head toward the other families on the street who are camping out, to give the information they just told me. I think to myself, how I wish I was the one wearing that backpack and the items he has packed inside it. I’m a fool for not taking preparation seriously. Now my family is suffering because I didn’t care. I never gave it a thought, even when Shar gave me a hard time about being unprepared. What an idiot! I look up to the sky and whisper to myself, “I swear it’ll never happen again.”

I wake the girls along with Shar and tell them we can get warm and maybe get something to eat at the Command Post. Shar still put up a fight about leaving the house open for trespassers to enter, but since so many of our neighbors were camping on their lawns, I convinced her by telling her the neighbors could keep an eye out. We could be back fairly soon to make sure nobody took her possessions.

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Upon arrival at Sam Benn Park, Katie’s friend observes, “There are so many people here.”

Shar offers, “So many children too. Jack, this is horrible. All these people. What are they going to do?”

I say, “They’ll do like everyone else. They’ll wait until the road opens and some relief agencies get here. We’re lucky these CERT teams were nearby and brought water and medical supplies.”

The sound of children laughing and playing, is in stark contrast to the faces of concern on many of the adults sitting around. There are people in their pajamas, without shoes or jackets sitting in small groups around the large campfires. Looking closer, it appears the majority are here without any belongings at all.

There is a group of young adults tending to some of the elderly, bundling them up in blankets, sitting them in folding chairs and moving them close to the warmth of the fires that are burning. The expressions on the faces of the elderly will remain with me forever as I see how grateful they are to those who have exhibited such extreme compassion and empathy toward them in a time of great need.

Janie says, “Dad, there is a line over there, it looks like they’re giving something away.”

Shar responds, “Can you tell what’s going on there?”

Janie says, "People are eating something as they leave the line."

Katie follows, "Yeah dad, they have food."

Her friends concur, "Yeah they're eating food."

A helicopter flies overhead, to the sound of a cheer from the gathered crowd. It's the first I've seen although I believe I heard one or two flying nearby over the past day or so. The helicopter hovers over us for a few moments and then continues on its journey away from us.

I say, "Well, at least they know we're here."

Katie asks, "How long do you think it will be before they bring help?"

I reply, "I don't think we're going to see much help until they clear the bluff. Matt and his friends said they were working on clearing the bluff, but it may be a day or two before it's reopened."

We wait in a line of nearly 20 other people and are handed a small bottle of water and an MRE. I'm so hungry, I almost forget how much pain I'm in. We sit in a small open area near the fire. It does feel warm, cutting the chill I've had for hours. All of us received a beef stew MRE with a fig bar. Hunger has a way of making very average meals taste like gourmet fare. We all begin eating our food, not knowing when we might eat next.

After wolfing my meal down, I say, "Now I'm really hungry."

One of Janie's friends picks at her food and states, "Ewww, I can barely eat this. It tastes horrible!"

Shar states, "I feel sick. I'd rather stay hungry than eat this."

I respond, "Be grateful we all have something to eat. Just appreciate someone was willing to share what they had."

Katie harps, "They can keep it next time!"

A woman next to us, sitting in a folding chair holding a small dachshund chimes in, "Mine was so bad my dog wouldn't eat it." Tilting her head toward her husband sitting next to her, she adds, "He ate both of ours though."

Her husband adds, "I didn't think it was that bad. Actually it was pretty good, not like Olive Garden, but pretty good."

I say, "I liked mine too."

The woman begins talking to Shar and the girls, "We were heading home from the Safeway store when the earthquake hit. The road became blocked and we were told by some people to get up here in case there was a tsunami. The siren went off and was so loud we couldn't talk to one another. And Roxy, the siren must have hurt her ears because she howled every time the siren went off which was . . ., oh I don't remember, maybe three or four times.

Her husband interjects, “It went off three times.

She replies, “Well, ok.” Adding, “We’ve been here for about a day.” Continuing with, “It’s really uncomfortable here. I can’t wait until I get home to my bed.”

Her husband jumps in, “No, we’ve been here for almost a day and a half.”

She responds, yeah, well ...I’m Mary, we’re from Grayland. He’s Frank. Where are you from?

My wife and the girls continue to have a conversation with Mary about where we live, the living conditions here at the park and how bad the food is.

I begin chatting with Frank, “Our home was pretty severely damaged in the earthquake. No tsunami issue though.”

Frank reveals, “I’m not sure if our home is still there. We’re pretty close to the beach. If a tsunami came through, who knows what condition it’s in now.”

I ask, “If you can’t go home, do you have some place to go when the road opens?”

He responds, “We have family not too far away and can stay with them for a while. We’re probably much better off than most of the people here.”

I say, “Yeah, It looks like most have everything they own here with them. Hopefully there are services to assist all of them once the road opens. We’ll need to find someplace to stay because my home is a mess.”

My daughters and their friends interrupt and tell me I have to see an EMT or Paramedic. They say Matt told them I was hurt and needed to see someone. I attempt to argue, but finally agree to let a Paramedic look at me. They help me to the medical tent where some people are milling about.

One person asks, “Can I help you? Are you hurt?”

I say, “I might have cracked ribs, but I’m not sure.”

Another person, wearing a jacket that says ‘Paramedic’ joins the conversation and asks, “Can you tell us what happened?”

I make my kids and their friends go away and tell the story of what happened at Joe & Pearl’s home.

The Paramedic states, “You should be in a cervical collar and spine board, not walking around.”

I tell them, “I’m ok, other than my ribs and some deep bruising, definitely deep bruising.”

The Paramedic tells me to lay down on a low cot in the tent and puts his hands on my chest and gently squeezes.

I grab his wrists and blurt out, “Yo man! That really hurts!”

He says, I think you have a few broken ribs. How is breathing?"

I respond, "It hurts a little."

He has his partner join him and they attempt to put a cervical collar on me. I tell them I'm not wearing the collar. I get up and tell them I'll see a doctor in a few days, once the road opens. Both tell me I should stay there and let them provide the first aid I need, but I decline and leave. My daughters are not very happy about me declining the medical attention and they let me hear about it all the way back to where Shar is sitting. The girls, never ones to keep secrets, tell Shar I declined the medical attention and another voice is added to the conflict.

As I'm being berated by the women in my family, Mary overhears the conversation and says, "You do look kind of beat up. Why would you not let them take care of you?"

I give her a side-ways glance, like really? You had to add fuel to this fire?

She notices and says, "Well, I'm just trying to help."

Before I can say anything, a news helicopter hovers over the park. They are filming everyone on the ground.

Shar states, "Must be 4 o'clock. Time for the news. Nothing like showing the devastation and the plight of us refugees before returning home to a warm comfortable home and dinner."

This helicopter is attempting to land. As it gently descends towards the ground. Blankets, stones and debris is flying everywhere causing people to scatter and fall to escape the swirling dust and wind of the rotors. Unexpectedly, a blanket is blown airborne and gets tangled in the rotors causing the chopper to tilt, the rotors striking the ground, splintering everywhere. As the body of the chopper hits the ground, it flips into the crowd striking many people with a flash and an explosion, causing small fires among the campsites of some of the families congregated nearby. Everyone is turning away to avoid the dust and debris.

Suddenly, Katie screams, "DAD!"

I turn toward her and notice Mary and Frank are both unconscious on the ground with a piece of the shredded helicopter frame next to them.

Janie yells, "Oh my god! Are they dead? Dad? Dad?"

END OF PART 5