

The Day the Storm Stood Still

We lived in a church. When missionaries/pastor of First Crow Indian Baptist Church (FCIBC) our living quarters were a part of the church building. We shared one wall with the Fellowship Hall, and another with the church Kitchen.



The church sat just across the tracks from the main street of the town of Lodge Grass. The area was known as Greasy Grass, because when the deer ate the grass their muzzles turned back from grazing. When naming the town, however, the translator confused the meaning of the words, so Lodge Grass has been its name ever since.

The same thing happened to the names of some Crow people when interpreted and recorded by the government. Like the name of the Tribe, "Crow". They are the Apsaalook'e. The People of the Long Beaked Bird. Which, by the way, was not the bird called a Crow. The "k" is pronounced as a "g", and the "e" like an "a". So, the phonetic pronouncement is more like "Ap.saalow.gay"

Along with my wife and children, we lived in the heart of Apsaalook'e country. On a map it's called the Crow Reservation, found in south central Montana. Those were some of the best years of my life on this earth. It's the only place where my heart naturally feels at home.

This story takes place during a day that our church members were going to pray for the town of Lodge Grass, along with some people from a Church in Colorado. It was summertime so the days were long. The plan was to meet at the church at 6:00 pm, get into small groups of two or three people, and sort of surround the town with everyone praying at the same time, in different place around Lodge Grass.

Then we were to meet at the school where we would join hands in a large circle and pray for the children, young people, teachers, and parents. Then we were going to all go to the Westwood Ranch just south of town for a great time of grilled meat with all the trimmings, and lots of excellent fellowship.

Lodge Grass was experiencing increasing problems due to an increase in drug use and other issues. As on most Reservations all the major societal issues like disease, drug use, alcohol abuse, infant death, suicide, and others are three to five times greater than for any other people group anywhere in the United States. Our opportunity was to intentionally join the Lord through prayer in holding back the forces of evil that were trying to destroy the people in our town.

Now that may sound strange to some of us. It was a different focus for me because “holding back the forces of evil” wasn’t a concern of mine. Can the forces of evil, Satanic powers, be held back? Sure. I just don’t worry about it, because God will take care of that if we are obedient.

For me, we need to do what the Lord is leading us to do right now. If we keep doing that then there is nothing better we can do. There’s no reason for concern because “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.” (1 John 4:4b)

After this experience, however, it was clear there are times we need to actively demonstrate what God is doing in this regard. Why? Because in this case that was what God wanted us to do at that time, and it’s impact we clearly witnessed.

On the day planned for this event my wife and children were gone visiting my wife’s mother in a different state. We had recently gotten two kittens and had them declawed four or five days before. One of my jobs was to babysit them to help them through the process, along with my regular responsibilities.

The morning of the day we were to pray for Lodge Grass was beautiful. By mid-afternoon, however, things began to change dramatically. The distant sound of rolling thunder could barely be heard, but the sky over Lodge Grass was still clear. When looking out the door to the south the bottom of dark clouds could just be seen in the far distance.

As time passed the thunder rolled a bit louder and the clouds were a bit closer. So far, nothing unusual. I’d spent years on the flat plains in the mid-west and had seen this type of thing many times. Squall lines of clouds marching across the plains that could top out at 60,000+ feet high. Huge storms, hiding all kinds of things including large hail in massive amounts, and tornados to keep things really interesting.

So, some clouds in the distance with some thunder wasn’t of much concern. My only thought was the timing of its passage, hoping it wouldn’t interfere with our plans to pray. That caused me to pay more attention as the clouds began to march along in our direction.

About that time, it seemed there was thunder coming from more than one direction. So, I checked to the East toward the Wolf Mountains, the North up the Valley of the Chiefs, and to the West over the hill that rose up on that side of Lodge Grass.

In every direction, exactly the same kind of clouds were slowly closing in on our town. As the circle of blue sky over our area grew smaller the bolts of lightning came into sight.

On the open plains the thunder storms give you something to remember. Especially the display of lightning. Cloud to cloud, and cloud to ground arrays of lighting that are stunning with some very large bolts of lighting touching the earth. It was best not to be outside anywhere walking around.

With the storm closing in on all sides of Lodge Grass I was shocked to see the immensity of the size of the bolts of lighting. They were huge, just gigantic; thicker, stronger, louder than anything I'd seen before, or anything I'd even heard about.

If all other lighting could be compared to a pencil lead, then this lighting was like the thickness of the entire pencil. Not kidding, or exaggerating here!

These large and foreboding clouds with this immense lighting was closing in on all sides. Now, they were about ten or so miles away. I was standing inside by the door on the south side of our living quarters holding the cats whose fur was sticking out in every direction.

Fixated I watched as the storm closed in on the town, and that's when I heard it. Voices clearly coming from upstairs somewhere. Now that got my attention because there was no one else inside besides me, the two cats and our dog, and none of them were talking. Besides they were all with me. Safety in numbers I guess.

Two more times I heard someone talking, so clearly there was no doubt, I wasn't making things up. It was time to take action. Up the stairs I ran as quietly as possible, stopping on the landing half-way up to try and determine which room someone was in.

Loudly the voice mixed with the thunder came directly from my son's bedroom straight across from the top of the stairs. So I shot up the stairs, still holding the kittens because there was no way they were letting go of me with everything going on.

Then around the edge of the door of the room I darted into my son's room only to find, no one. Stunned, my mind raced to make sense of things.

About then this robotic toy about 12 inches in height began to swing its arms and clearly say, "I love you. I want to be your friend." Totally freaky. Now, how was this happening?

Finally, getting loose from the kittens I picked up the toy and looked at the switch. Perhaps it was switched on, and the batteries were low periodically triggering the toy to do its thing. Nope, the switch was off. I turned it on and off twice to make sure.

Then with the switch off, while holding the toy it started to move and talk again. "I love you. I want to be your friend." There was so much electricity in the air it was causing the toy to react. Good thing it didn't say something like, "I hate you. I'm going to hit you on the head." I'd been stomping the thing to bits for sure! Pretty funny.

OK, problem identified and resolved. At that moment a bolt of lighting struck with a deafening crack and the house seemed to shake a bit. I jumped into the hall, holding the kittens again, checking for the hole in the ceiling at the West end of the house where I thought the lighting had struck.

Thinking I'd be going into firefighter mode next it was a great relief to find nothing. So, I went to the window and saw the huge elm tree in the front yard, 50 feet from the church, split wide open from the lighting strike. Then the phone rang.

Down the stairs I went to answer the phone. It was one of the ladies who worked at the store across the railroad tracks calling to see if I was still alive. She'd seen the lighting and wasn't able to see if just the big tree had been damaged. I assured her I was OK, hung up the phone, and then I glanced at the clock.

5:45 pm. "Ok Lord, what do you want me to do....." Prayerfully waiting....nothing... "Alright Lord if You want us to pray then You're going to have to stop this storm. So, if it's not stopped by 6:00 pm as we planned then I'll cancel the event."

The wind was screaming through the trees, the rain was pouring down, and the air was littered with branches and leaves while the thunder growled out its continuous roar. Then at 5:50 pm the phone rang again.

It was Virginia Westwood. The wonderful lady who pulled this idea together, and got everything organized. She was asking me what we were going to do? So, trying to outshout the thunder I told her I'd prayed, so show up at 6:00 pm and if the storm is stopped then we'll go ahead, otherwise we will cancel all aspects of the event. "OK, I'm trusting the Lord", was her response.

Several seconds after 5:59 pm the rain stopped. The wind stopped, the lightning and rain stopped, and a small spot above the town seemed to lighten up a bit. At 6:00 pm I went outside with a jacket on because it was chilly after the storm. So, we divided up and went in teams to our designated places.

Later as planned, we all met at the schools, which were a connected set of buildings where preschool through High School was held. We formed a large circle in front of the school under a cloudy sky, held hands and prayed together.

As we prayed, I felt the warmth of the Sun on my face and saw its light through my eyelids. While we'd been praying a round hole had opened in the sky in the exact place for the early evening sun to shine directly around our group. Just a few yards outside of that circle of light the area was still in the shadow of the clouds.

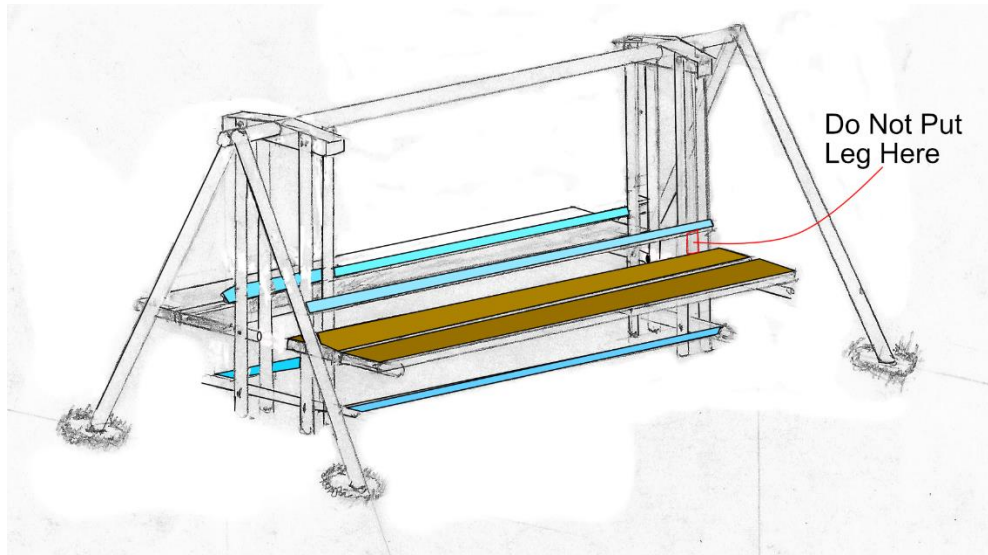
Finished praying, we were going to go back down the hill to the Westwood Ranch where it was still quite chilly. So, when I got in the car I prayed and said, "Lord, it sure would be great if you could make the Sun shine on us during our time of fellowship." It was up to Him. All I wanted was His will to be done.

Yes, by the time we'd all gotten to the main ranch house the circle of light had moved to that location. All around the town, as far as we could see the darkest clouds still encircled us, and lightning could still be seen. The storm was obviously being held at bay. Clouds, but not lightning remained directly over the town of Lodge Grass.

The sunlight stayed directly on us during the entire process of cooking, eating, and visiting. We were enjoying a wonderful time together.

Now, several of the young people from the church in Colorado were playing on a huge swing that eight to ten people could sit on at the same time. It was full of young people having a great time.

It was made of heavy steel pipe about four to six inches in diameter. The largest pipes formed two large "A" frames with one on each end, connected by a strong cross pipe at the top of the A frames. About three feet inside of each A frame were two strong brackets that sat on top of the cross pipe at a 90-degree angle. These extended out from the cross pipe about two feet on each side.



From each end of these brackets long pipes hung down, held in place by very large bolts so they could swing back and forth. These two pipes extending down from each side of the brackets had a pipe joining them together, and those had steel bars connecting them on each side.

The A frames stood about 15 ft. high, with the suspended two-sided swing hanging below. There were two bench seats facing each other. In the drawing above only one set of boards are colored brown to indicate the bench seats on this side of the swing.

There's a cross bar above the seat with space for your legs, it's colored light blue. (Both of the cross bars on both sides of the swing are filled with color.) People hold onto it pushing and pulling on it to help the swing move. Below the seat there is another cross bar, a bit darker blue, on both sides, at people's feet. By putting your feet on it and pushing this provided another bar they can push on using their legs and feet to really make the swing move.

The whole point was for the people on each side to pull and push and pull in unison, thus causing the swing to begin moving back and forth. When this thing gets going the people are about ten feet in the air sitting on the bench seats, holding on, and flying back and forth. The momentum is amazing, especially when the bench seats of both sides are full of young people.

It just so happened that there was a danger point where a person could stick their legs between the pipes connecting the bench seats of each side. Please note the red rectangle on the right side of the bench seat. If the swing went high enough the cross bar for people's hands would leverage against the heavy wooden bench seat and create a stopping point that would not allow the swing to go any higher.

Into that slot a boy that was about 10 to 13 years old stuck his leg. It was only a matter of time until the swing reached its limiting point and the boy's femur bone in his leg snapped loudly. Everyone on the swing got it stopped as quickly as possible. Some men grabbed the boy and carried him over and put him on a lounge chair.

One of the many things I've done over the years was to serve as a law enforcement officer. So, before becoming a detective I'd spent time serving as a Road Patrolman. This was not the first time I'd seen a femur bone broken.

Now I must confess that my mind kicked into damage control mode. My thought was to get the young man in a vehicle securely placed, get a blanket on him, and do what's necessary to prevent or treat him for shock as necessary.

What was clear is his femur bone was bent at an angle that had to indicate a break, but the damage had remained internal to the thigh. It was not a compound fracture. His leg was already swollen with the skin beginning to show extension, and there was obvious dark bruising forming. This was one tough boy because he was obviously in pain while remaining aware of what was happening.

So, I said, "Ok, lets get him into a vehicle, keep him warm, and take precautions for shock. Now let's go."

At that moment, Virginia said, "Wait! Let's pray first." I confess that my immediate thoughts were "we need to get him on his way. We can pray while he's on his way. This is not the time to pause."

After all the closest medical care was 35+ miles away. But when I looked at Virginia, I couldn't say it. I knew she was right. So, we prayed together, and then away he went with plenty of help to ensure he got to the hospital.

As things wound down the sky continued to clear, and the Sun set in the West. Those of us remaining went about our tasks, with prayerful hearts for the proper care and treatment of our injured friend. This all happened on a Saturday, which meant I needed to continue praying concerning the Lord's direction for the Sunday sermon, while prayers for the young man continued. There was no word updating his condition or treatment. (Cell phones didn't exist yet)

Sunday morning arrived and I was off to the early church service. People filled the pews, with many of them being friends from the church in Colorado. Being busy with preparations there was no chance for me to get an update about the boy's condition.

A part of every Sunday service was a time when people had an opportunity for testimonies of what God had been doing in people's lives. No more did I get the request out of my mouth when the young man with the broken leg jumped up from the pew he was sitting on and stuck his hand in the air!

I hadn't even seen him. Probably because he was the last person I expected to be in church that morning. In fact, when he was standing the first thing I looked for was a cast, while wondering how he could stand up already. He said clearly, "I do!!" "Alright", I said, "Go ahead."

He proceeded to tell all of us what happened when he got to the hospital. They carried him in and shifted him to a treatment bed, rolling him back into the emergency treatment area.

They x-rayed the leg, still bruised and swollen, but while being x-rayed the pain had ceased. When the doctor came to look at him the leg was straight, the swelling gone, and no bruising remained. The x-ray showed no break.

As the boy started to tell his story, he began with these words with eyes bright and a smile on his face, "The Lord healed me!!"

The Lord had quieted the storm in more than one way. The powers of evil had been defeated; held back away from Lodge Grass. In fact, there was a quieting of incidents of the tragic things that had been on the increase.

Now, I'm sure they didn't all go away, though as I write there were none that can be remembered. Of course, my memory isn't what it used to be. There is no question, however, that we saw more than one miracle that Saturday and Sunday, and that God did bless our community as a result of partnering with Him in prayer. Certainly, it is not something that will ever be forgotten by me, and others.