

OSCAR'S STORY

(written by Diane as though told by Oscar)

It was nearly midnight, and although the fairgrounds were now deserted, I felt a strong sense of satisfaction as I walked up the midway. Ahead of me was the Lion's Club concession booth, a special trailer I had designed myself. Business had been good that day, and after my shift I had found it easy to accept a friend's invitation to share a fifth of whiskey as we toured the various exhibits, chatting with people we knew. Everybody could see that Oscar Woerner was doing very well.

Only Oscar wasn't doing well. I was one of seventeen children of a hard-working German immigrant, and had been raised to respect God and to honor His ways. But my father was now dead, and in the busy whirl of running one of Pensacola's most successful restaurants, I had let my childhood faith slowly drift into lifelessness. I attended church and paid my tithes, but God and I knew that my spiritual condition was a mockery.

I stopped to make one last check of the trailer before going home. Everything was cleared away and cleaned up, but out of habit I picked up a cloth and wiped down the grill. Yes, this booth had been a good idea, and was making our club a lot of money.

The following afternoon I came back a little before opening time to rake up the trash around the trailer. That done, I decided to get a head start on set-up for that day. Unlocking the trailer, I stepped inside and closed the door. It was hot, so I reached up to turn on the overhead exhaust fan. But the closed door gave it little air to draw. I turned back to open the door, and noticed that someone had left the refrigerator unplugged. I bent down to plug it in, and as the electricity arced inside the socket, the trailer exploded.

When I had wiped the grill the night before, I'd accidentally turned on one of the gas burners. The heavy butane lay in a thick layer on the floor until I ignited it by plugging in the refrigerator. As I fell through the burning gas, I clearly heard a voice say, "Holler, Oscar!" So I hollered. The natural reaction would have been to gasp. As a result of my exhaling, I had no burns in my lungs. I also watched an eight foot florescent light bulb explode in slow motion, but somehow I had time enough to turn my head, so the glass did not enter my eyes.

My clothes were melted off me. My fingernails were burned off. One of my ears was hanging only by a shred of skin. There was no way, medically speaking, that I could live. But after I was told to holler, I heard the same voice say, "Let's get out of here." I thought there was someone in the trailer with me. There was. For some reason, the God whom I'd forgotten the night before chose not to leave me alone to die the death I deserved.

I stayed completely conscious and left the trailer. Some bystanders had seen the explosion and called an ambulance. One woman asked me if I wanted her to call my wife. I said yes and gave her the number. I wondered why she looked so shaken. I had no idea that I had received second and third degree burns on 80% of my body.

The ride to the hospital was the longest I ever took in my life. By the time we arrived I was in shock. I remember them cutting my legs open to put in IV's—the only way they could feed me for weeks. I went in and out of consciousness, and after I was put in the intensive care ward, I grew worse and worse.

By the next afternoon I knew I was going. When my wife came in for the five minute visit she was allowed to have, I told her, “Lillie, you’ll never see me alive again. I can’t make it.” She left in tears. Then I said to the Lord, “Forgive me. I’ve miserably failed you. Cleanse my heart—I want to go home to be with You.” I knew that unless God intervened, Oscar Woerner was dead. I told Him if He spared my life, it would be His. He could do whatever He wanted to with me.

That very hour God touched my body and began to heal it. My doctor had already signed my death warrant before he left for the weekend. When he came in Monday morning, he couldn’t believe what he found. I was fully conscious and told him I was feeling fine. He took me to the operating room, unwrapped the bandages, and shook his head. “I diagnosed you right, Oscar. Second and third degree burns over 80% of your body. You shouldn’t be alive. I don’t understand it.”

They put me in a private room. That day in October, the temperature dropped to an unheard-of 29 degrees. It was God’s special gift for me. They put my bed by an open window, and the cool breezes blowing across me felt wonderful.

When I had gained enough strength, I was taken down to physical therapy. There they lowered me into a whirlpool bath, and then began to unwrap my bandages. My burned skin stuck to the bandages and it caused me so much pain I screamed and went into shock. The next week the same thing happened. The third week my wife was with me in my room when they came to get me. I asked her to pray with me that God would give me strength to stand the pain. We hadn’t prayed together in five years.

When I reached the whirlpool bath, I was still praying, and as I looked at that monster tank I felt God’s peace and knew it would be okay. When the therapist came in, he found to his surprise that I’d already climbed up on the ledge by the tank. I told him I didn’t need to be in the water, that he could cut the bandages off where I was. He began to cut, up one arm, across my chest, down the other arm. To our amazement, the bandages just rolled off. I felt no pain at all! I climbed into the water, singing praises to God.

Back in my room, I lay there waiting for someone to visit me. I wanted to tell the whole world what God had done for me. But for the very first time since I had been burned, there were no visitors.

Except one. Satan sneaked in and started whispering questions. “You heard what the doctor said. The Lord didn’t do that for you. You’re just healing fast.” And I began to doubt.

That evening, when visitors came, I was very casual. “Yes, I had a nice day. No, I didn’t have any pain in therapy. The doctor said I’m doing well and healing fast.” That morning I would

have told the President of the United States or anyone else what Christ had done for me. Now I didn't even tell my friends.

The following week I went back into therapy. And once again, I passed out. The gauze wouldn't come off. Then I knew that I had listened to the wrong voice...and I also knew that God was taking seriously my deathbed commitment to Him. I asked His forgiveness, rededicated my life once more—and from that day on, my health steadily improved.

Five and a half weeks after the fire, I was back in the restaurant. They had told me it would be over five months before I could leave the hospital and that I might never work again. My skin grew back soft as a baby's, with no scars. My ear is normal. Today I spend hours out in my fishing boats under the hot Florida sun, without pain. The God of the universe, out of His infinite mercy, restored me miraculously to life and health.

Diane Woerner
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