

The Only One Standing

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Jim woke up in a world that had crashed down upon him. Now he just had to survive.

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As awareness crept into his consciousness Jim felt the pain in his legs. He opened his eyes and found it difficult to make anything out. His eyesight was blurred and he reached up to his face and found it wet with what he assumed was blood, he couldn't tell for sure it was too dark. He tried to move and found he couldn't move his legs at all so he started to call out for help. After what seemed like hours he finally gave up and just laid there waiting for the sirens he was sure to come soon. Somebody had to have heard his screams for help.

It must have been hours later that he opened his eyes again blinking against the filtered sunlight. He had no idea how long he had been asleep, but the sun was high enough that it must have been a long time. Surveying his surroundings he suddenly remembered some of what had happened, he had been working at the Williams rock quarry. There was a problem with one of the conveyors for the crushed rock. He had been in the work house replacing the gear on one of the drive rollers. It had cracked and slipping, which kept the belt from running with any kind of load on it. It was only going to be an hour or so job, and then he had the rest of the day off. That was when the shaking started. "Oh great," He thought to himself, "Just what I need." His hammer literally bounced off the bench and as he reached for it, his world exploded around him.

Now that it was light he could see around him. His legs were pinned under a set of shelves that had fallen over. The building he was in was rubble now, only one wall was partially standing. It took him over an hour to move enough stuff to get out from under the shelves, and another hour to make it out of the building. Even though the building was not that big, the shelves were full and had fallen over, it was like an obstacle course and he had to constantly move enough things to crawl until he got to the next shelf. He had found an old shirt and bandaged both his legs where the shelving had cut them. The cuts were not that deep but had been bleeding for hours. He was tired and weak; he knew it was from the loss of blood and that he would have to get to a doctor or a hospital soon. "If I can just make it to the truck, I could radio for help." He thought to himself, he had already given up hope for the cell phone to work. It was spotty out here at the quarry, you had to be up on the ridge to get any reception at all and that was if you were lucky enough. When he finally emerged from the building his hopes were smashed. The front end of his truck was crushed beneath the remains of the conveyor he had been working on. He took another twenty minutes half crawling and half dragging his body across the quarry to where his truck was and managed to get the one door that was ajar open enough to crawl into the cab. Grabbing the steering wheel he pulled until he was inside, and then passed out from exhaustion. It was hours later that he woke, and just as he thought, the radio didn't work. He rummaged around and found a first aid kit under the seat. Tearing away the remnants of his pants he bandaged his legs as best he could, and then checked the wound on his face. It wasn't as bad as he thought it was, just a scalp laceration, but it had bled a lot. His clothes were ruined, most of his pants were gone now, the shirt mostly red and turning brown as the blood dried. He reached behind the seat of the truck and pulled out his lunch box and thermos. He drank some cold coffee and ate the sandwich. Sitting there he started to wonder about what had happened and why hadn't anyone come to check on him by now. It crossed his mind that there must have been a lot of damage from the earthquake that hit. Maybe they couldn't get up the road to the quarry.

He woke with a start, it was dark now, he must have dozed off. Why hadn't someone come to find him yet he wondered as once again he drifted off. Then it was light again and raining hard. He rummaged around the back of the cab and pulled out an old tarp and struggled for a long time covering the opening of the cab since the door didn't shut all the way. After a while he noticed a bulge in the tarp where water was gathering and finished his thermos of coffee then started to funnel the water on the tarp into it. This was how he spent the

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next two days. Funneling water from the tarp into his thermos, he drank it down and dozed awhile.

By his account five days had passed and still no one had come to find him, he had to find out what was happening outside of the quarry. Getting out of the truck he found he could stand, although weak and in pain. He steadied himself against the truck looking around the remains of the buildings in the quarry when he caught sight of an old shed that didn't look in too bad of shape. Managing to work his way over to it he opened the door to find an old three wheel bike inside. It was one of those with a basket on the handlebars and another at the back. He remembered the old guy that worked in the quarry years ago. He would ride the bike from the office to the work shack. Jim had always thought it was funny watching a grown man riding what for all intents was a tricycle. He checked it out, finding the tires were flat from sitting for a couple of years. He searched the shack and found the old tire pump for it. It made him laugh a little though, he spent almost thirty minutes going through all of the assorted boxes and shelves in the little shack before noticing it was hanging on a couple of nails above the door. He sprayed some lubricant on the chain which looked rusty and pushed it out the door. The wheels were a little squeaky so he sprayed lubricant on those and pedaled around the quarry for a little while to see how his legs would hold up. Satisfied that although painful his legs were working well, he loaded up the baskets with his lunchbox, thermos, and the tarp he had hung over the door of the truck and headed up out of the quarry to where the office was. Going around and around it seemed to take forever to make the circular journey out of the pit.

The office was like a mobile home, a portable building sitting on cinderblocks with metal stairs to the doors at each end. It was sitting at an angle, obviously having fallen off the blocks when the earthquake had hit. He went up to one door and found it locked. He went back down the stairs and looked for a rock to break the window, then decided to try the other door first. He found that one unlocked and entered the office. He grinned, there against the fallen side of the trailer was a snack machine filled with candy, chips and other snacks. He was about to throw the rock in his hand at it when he noticed it was already open, the fall had broken the lock and the front of the machine was open now. He almost fell getting over to it and then wrenched the door open and propped a chair against it to hold it. It was almost heaven to him, ripping through packages of cookies, snack sausages, even the healthy breakfast bars tasted wonderful at this point, he had always hated those things. There was a pop machine too, but it was face down and he knew there was no way he would be able to get into it. Gathering his strength he got up and worked his way through the mess in the office. Pushing open the door to the back office he froze. There was a woman lying there. Obviously she had been there when the earthquake happened. He quickly checked for a pulse but found none. Then he noticed the pile behind her, cases of water bottles. He stepped carefully around her body and grabbed a bottle. Drinking it down quickly he took another and looked back at the body on the floor, he thought her name was Kathy, he seemed to remember her from one of the other times he had come to the quarry. It struck him suddenly that nobody had come looking for her either, just how bad was this disaster that they would not have sent anybody out here to look for them. Jim spent the next twenty minutes putting cases of water in the basket of the bike and had found an old equipment bag that he loaded up with the contents of the snack machine. He looked around the office and found Kathy's coat which he covered her body with and then left.

As he hopped on the bike a thought struck him and he went back into the trailer. There was a bathroom behind the back office and he went into it, opening the medicine cabinet he thought to himself that he finally caught a little bit of a break. It was well stocked with bandages, aspirin, antiseptic wipes and lotions. He sat down on the toilet and changed the bandages on his legs and the one on his head. Now he was beginning to get a little worried, the cuts on his legs looked like they were getting infected. He had to get out of this place and get some help. He found another bag in the mess and put the contents of the cabinet into it. He went back out and climbing on the bike left the quarry behind.

The trip back to town was thankfully downhill almost all the way; his surroundings were a blur, he had to focus on staying on the road, and that was all he cared about. The pain in his legs was almost more than he could stand; he constantly had to stop for a little while to rest. That was when the reality of his situation struck

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him. He had one more hill to get up and ended up pushing the bike most of the way up the hill. The town lay before him at that point and he just stood there in shock. The whole town was laid to waste. There were no buildings standing, fires still burned all over. Most of the forest around him was also gone, as far as he could see there was nothing. The trees were either burning or lying down, until now he had not noticed them.

“What the hell happened?” He thought to himself.

He had smelled the fires for days but attributed it to his injuries more than anything else. Now it was overwhelming to him. He made the journey into town almost in shock, everything was gone. There was ash covering the road and everywhere that he could see. He stopped at one place where he knew a car dealership used to be, even the cars looked burned, the tires were all melted and some of the vehicles still were smoking. He continued through the town stopping occasionally at some structure trying to remember what had been there. He was going to have to stop soon, his pain was almost unbearable, and checking his bandages, the cuts had started to bleed again. He cleaned and changed the bandages again. After eating another breakfast bar he continued through the town and on to the Interstate a few miles out of the town. He stopped on the overpass and cars in both directions were destroyed as far as he could see. He went under the bridge and camped there overnight. Heading to the south he traveled for two more days and noticed the destruction was diminishing as he went. The third day he came over a rise in the road and just stopped. There in the distance were lights, cars and helicopters. He could barely hear the noises from the people that were there. Barricades had been set up across the road and it took him another twenty minutes for him to reach them. It struck him funny that no one had come out to him and there was now a complete silence as he approached. The crowd watching him parted and a dozen or so people emerged in white suits. He knew what they were; hazmat suits. Barricades were pulled back and the men in the suits walked out slowly towards him. He stopped pedaling and waited for them to reach him. “I come in peace,” he smiled at them when they were close enough to hear him. Raising his hands he waited and then two of them approached him with some kind of instruments with wands. They passed the wands over him a couple of times, and then turned back to the rest of their group.

“He appears to be clean,” the one closest to him said.

“Sir, where are you coming from?” The second one asked him.

“Well, I was going to say up the road a ways, but I think you want a more definite answer don’t you. I was at the Williams quarry about three days up the road for me.” Jim answered with a little smile. The two men rushed to catch him as he collapsed, falling from the bike.

When he woke up he was in a hospital, none of the staff had hazmat suits on, and so he assumed he was ok. A nurse noticed him looking around and came over to him.

“How are you sir?” she asked with a small smile.

“I feel like crap, otherwise not too bad.” He smiled back at her. “How long was I out?”

“It’s been almost a week since you were brought here. There are some people that would like to talk to you now that you’re awake.” She looked up at the monitors for a moment. “I’ll be back in a minute or two.”

A minute later a group of men and women came into the ward and walked over to him. He noticed at that point he was the only patient in the room. The group approaching him wore different types of clothing, a pair dressed in doctor’s coats, and one was in scrubs. The others were either in police or military uniforms and another pair in suits. They all walked up to him and ended up surrounding his bed. They were all just staring at him.

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“Alright, does someone want to tell me what happened? I thought it was an earthquake, but that devastation out there says something different.” He said after a moment.

“If you don’t mind we’ll ask the questions.” One of the men dressed in a military uniform said with a menacing look on his face.

“As long as you don’t mind me not answering them,” Jim replied. He looked past the men and women around him at the nurse that had first spoken to him. “Nurse, could you ask these people to go away until they learn some manners?”

A woman dressed in doctor’s coat laughed. “See I told you it was the wrong approach with someone like this. We’re sorry for being so rude sir, we would really like some explanation as to how you managed to get out of that area, let alone survive.”

Jim smiled up at her, “I rode a bike out. If you want to know more you have to give me a little more too.”

One of the men in suits cracked a little bit of a smile. “Well, to be honest, a meteor strike, over three hundred square miles is gone. The problem we seem to be having with you is simple, no one survived the blast. By that I mean there were no survivors within the blast radius, we haven’t found anyone at all. And now you come riding your little tricycle out over a week afterwards.”

“Fair enough, my name is Jim Thompson; I worked for the Williams Company as a maintenance man. I was up at their quarry repairing a conveyor when what I had thought was an earthquake hit. I was down in the pit at the workhouse when I woke up. I was trapped under some shelving for a day or so. After freeing myself I managed to make it out to my truck and bandaged my wounds. I stayed there for maybe five days in and out of consciousness waiting for someone to rescue me, when no one showed up I rode the bike out. I assumed that the roads were pretty well torn up since no one came to find me or Kathy, she died in the office outside the pit.”

“How deep was this pit?” One of the men in uniform asked.

“Probably eighty feet or more it’s pretty far down.” He replied.

“You said you stayed in your truck, why didn’t you drive it out?” The man asked again.

“Conveyor fell on it, crushed the front end.”

“You mentioned a woman, Kathy, didn’t she have a car?” Another man in a police uniform asked.

“Yes, but it was down in the pit, I assume now that it got blown over the edge in the blast.”

He spent the next two weeks in the hospital answering questions, suffering through endless tests, flirting with the nurses, and basically having a relaxing vacation. It had been years since he had taken any time off. When they finally released him, there was a throng of news reporters waiting outside the hospital. He was bombarded with questions some of which he tried to answer, others he just ignored. The government ended up naming the crater left by the meteor, the Thompson crater, after him. He went back a couple of years later when the government opened the area back up and ended up owning the quarry where he had survived. People had set up an account for him since he had lost everything, and with the donations he received from it, began to rebuild his life. Every one that he had known had died in the meteor strike. He had no one, but felt more alive than he had in years. He was truly the last one standing, a lone survivor in the middle of a sea of

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destruction.

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