

AGAINST ALL ODDS

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I want to tell you an inspirational story about John. Many years ago a group from our church visited one of Nashville's many trailer parks. They knocked on doors offering food and asking if residents needed prayer. In one of the homes visited lived a war veteran named John and his wife Brenda. John was so moved by the kindness shown him that he asked if our church would like a cross that he had carved. He produced the most intricately carved 5ft cross we have ever seen and his only stipulation was that he not be identified as its creator.

John and Brenda started attending our church along with some of the other residents and it wasn't long before everyone was sharing the benefits of John's incredible gifts. He became the church custodian, security man and maintenance person. Not only did he fix everything that broke, but he painted large murals on the church walls, sandblasted a drawing of the last supper around the outside of a huge glass table and carved very ornate signage throughout the church.

Even though this couple didn't have much money they gave themselves – to the extent of cooking a free meal every Wednesday night in their trailer park home to anyone who wanted to come. Everyone loved John and Brenda.

At the end of 2008 our church unfortunately closed its doors and everyone had to find new church homes. John felt that God told him to build a little church in his trailer park, so he sought funding and started building a 20ft by 16ft chapel. His eyes were developing cataracts so he taught Brenda how to use the nail gun and she helped complete the church structure. It even included a steeple. We went to the 'opening day' celebration and dedication, which was a time to pray and encourage John and Brenda in their new mission. Every Sunday morning John arranged a speaker to come and he sounded the bells for the 8 a.m. service. These dear folks really needed to be encouraged and were touched by God as they attended each Sunday. The little church became the symbol of hope in their lives.

Then last Sunday the rains came down and the floods came up in Nashville. The Cumberland River rose about 30ft above its 'flood' level and water ran everywhere in torrents. A huge area of

Nashville flooded. The trailer park was hit hard. All the trailers were destroyed, vehicles were ruined or lost downstream and the whole trailer park was condemned. John and Brenda were evacuated by boat along with other residents. They lost everything. The little church had been wrestled off its foundations and shoved 25ft where it rested, lopsided, against a tree. We were all devastated. John and Brenda's hopes and dreams for making a difference were wrapped up in that dear little building. As I thought about them, I felt God say of them, "Well done, good and faithful servants. You did exactly as I asked you to and now I have more plans for you. Your mission is not over."

We never know when life-altering situations are going to happen to us. Bad things happen to good people. We can choose to throw in the towel and think that God has deserted us or we can think of what He is going to make of it all.

These are life lessons for our kids, too. We, as parents, need to be an example of how to deal with devastating occurrences. We need to gather ourselves together as families and work through our stuff. It has happened to our family and it made us closer as we all pitched in to save our situation. This is a time to either be a supportive friend or allow others to show their love and support to us. When things start to improve we should discuss as a family what we did that made a positive difference, and how we could have acted differently so we learn from the situation. We need to express our thanks to God and to each other.

John and Brenda are resilient and full of faith. They won't let this trauma destroy them. Their foundation is solid in Him. The little church has served a short but vital purpose in the lives of those in the trailer park. It created a bond between all those involved that will not be broken. It has been but a stepping stone to illustrate to these people what they most need in their lives – faith, friends and the need to care for others.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.