

Chapter Five

PERSEVERANCE



James 1: 2-4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

PERSEVERANCE

Scripture doesn't use the phrase "IF YOU FACE TRIALS", but "WHEN YOU FACE TRIALS", signaling it to be an eventuality for every individual on earth. It also offers encouragement for us to use these difficult situations as profitable times of learning; opportunities for developing perseverance. Certainly, one basic truth most people find when reflecting back on an impossible circumstance having just been faced, it becomes clear that the depth of human character has definitely been on trial.

Consequently, as you read about the hardships Dick carried on his shoulders at such a young age; it will become apparent that his Creator was at work in his life offering strength for the laborious journey. Then, later on when his adult years unfold on these pages, there will be no doubt in your mind but that the enormous hardships he endured at age twelve prepared him for the horrific tragedy he would face as a husband and father.

FIRST STITCHES

Still residing in the small house located across the street from the school, Dick was now joined by two younger sisters he nicknamed Teta and Sugar. Also, with another child expected to arrive soon, the family was buzzing as plans were made to maximize every space in the already overcrowded dwelling. Since Dick's father still a professional welder, spent the majority of time on job sites away from home, family responsibility fell completely on his mother's shoulders.

At the same time, due to health issues, it was determined that Dick needed corrective surgery that would require hospitalization. Consequently, his mother brought baby bibs that had stamped designs on them to Dick and encouraged him to pass his time by learning to embroidery. Without realizing the importance of this suggestion, his mother was totally oblivious to the fact she had just started her son's career as a much sought after fashion designer of women's clothing. Thus, falling hopelessly in love with sewing, the next project he completed was to embroidery kimono jackets for the child soon to be born into his family.

Therefore, by the time Dick had regained his health, he had begun cutting patterns out of butcher paper and using material from feed sacks to make additional bibs. At this point, it is important to note that at age twelve, a needle and thread in Dick Du Puis' little hands would be the stimulus for creating a dream responsible for propelling him to reach for the stars. A window to his mind had opened to a broader and brighter view of what it meant to be refreshed, renewed and made whole.

ILLNESS STRIKES

Thus, in good and perfect time, a little sister named Selena O'Neill arrived into this world with loud cries and gurgles. Unfortunately, Dick's mother suffered complications from improper procedures after delivery and was quarantined due to infections. Her condition was so severe she was completely bed ridden; a situation that would last two years.

Therefore, with no other options of assistance available to the family, at age twelve, Dick was removed from school and placed in the role of nurse and parent to every member of the household; a duty that meant he would totally fill his mother's shoes. In addition, since his mother was so contagious, only Dick was allowed in the room to perform all care procedures. He fed and bathed her as if she were a small child. Following the physician's strict sanitary guidelines, he carefully entered and exited his mother's room so as not to harm any member of the family. This twelve year old boy fully recognized that his mother's life was literally in his hands; an enormous responsibility indeed.

Since his mother was considered to be in such a toxic state, the door was barricaded, barring all family members from entering. In addition, the new born Selena had developed an intolerance to milk which meant Dick had to boil rice, place it in a sugar sack and twist it until milk flowed through for his baby sister's bottle. He was also responsible for all cooking, which meant the only advice available would be from his mother's voice if she felt well enough. Then, when his sister was old enough to partake of solid food, Dick would first chew it in his own mouth, mix it with his own digestive enzymes from his saliva, and then pretend to kiss his sister, passing the food into her happy little mouth. Under her big brother's care, baby Selena thrived and appeared to be extremely happy in her little world.

In order to fulfill all responsibilities, both in and outside the home, Dick had to figure out a logical way to have his eyes constantly on his baby sister. Thus, using a cardboard box with material inside for cushioning, he fastened a rope to the front that allowed his sister to be pulled around the house as he took care of his duties.

At night, all the siblings slept in the same room with a cot serving as Dick's bed. Then, two chairs were placed facing each other, with quilts on the cushions forming little Selena's bed. This make shift bed was then placed between Dick's cot and the wall; an arrangement used until his sister learned to walk. At this point, it boggles the mind to think that a little guy only twelve years old was able to function as family care provider during the day, given the sleep deprivation suffered from all Selena's feedings. Also, serving as a care giver for the family meant he made sure his two other sisters were clean and properly dressed for school; including the shampooing and curling of their hair.

Since there was no washing machine, Dick did the laundry in the bath tub which was laborious indeed. He recalls his father arriving home after being on a job for two weeks with greasy filthy clothes and handing them off to Dick. They were so soiled; the bath tub would be almost black which required heavy scrubbing from a little boy's tired arms.

As time passed, Dick noticed rips and tears in his sisters clothing. Fully cognizant of the family's lack of finances, out came his needle and thread for mending purposes. While his sisters attended school, Dick would not only mend their clothes, but also cut the grass outside. This activity meant pulling his baby sister in her cardboard box out into the yard and placing her in a safe harbor while he mowed the lawn. Dick still recalls vividly how embarrassed he felt not being in school with the other children. Thus, living directly across from the school, he carefully planned his outdoor duties at a time when none of his classmates would observe him in the yard.

As one year ran into the next, and his mother started regaining her health, it was determined the barricade to her door could be removed; allowing all family members to resume their usual close relationship. Unfortunately, baby Selena, had not bonded with her mother and felt no draw to run to her when the bedroom door was open once again. Since she had been conditioned not to enter her mother's room, a plan had to be devised to reverse this process. Consequently, this problem was solved by stringing jelly beans in a line that went from the door to her mother's bed. As progress was made, the jelly beans were lessened and placed only in her mother's hand. Dick can remember the soothing sound of his mother's voice softly coaxing his little sister to come toward her. Selena would pry her mother's hand open, quickly remove the jelly beans and then run out of the room like crazy. However, after a while, to the family's great joy, the love that poured from his mother's heart entered the very fiber of Selena's being with such intensity that it would last a lifetime.

ONE AND ONLY OUTING

Reflecting back, Dick had so little free time for his own enjoyment, that he vividly recalls the excitement of hearing the circus come to town one day. This meant not only wonderful circus performers had arrived to Gueydan, but also the opportunity for riding on the Ferris wheel; one of his favorite things to do as a child. After devising a way to transport his siblings on a large bicycle his father had welded for him, he discussed the idea with his mother of taking his sisters with him to the fair to enjoy a ride on the Ferris wheel. Since his father had welded a large basket and seats to the bicycle, there would be room for all to safely make the journey from the house to the fair grounds. Dick remembers peddling his little legs incredibly hard as he transported his sisters down the streets of Gueydan. Then in preparation for the ride on the Ferris wheel, he carefully placed his sisters on either side of him and tightly held little Selena in his arms. Oh, what freedom he felt as the seat was lifted off the ground, high into the air! The pleasure of feeling like he had taken flight into the wild blue yonder served as a healing balm to a tired little boy who had so much responsibility on his twelve year old shoulders. Unfortunately at this moment, he was unaware that two older women from the community were watching them take this ride with disdain in their eyes. In fact, their disapproval was so great they would make a call on his bedridden mother the very next day to let her know clearly of their disapproval regarding the Ferris wheel ride. Surprisingly, Dick's mother, who was so gentle and even tempered, firmly let the ladies know that if people in the town would have reached out to offer the family assistance in this time of need, Dick would have enjoyed a ride on the Ferris wheel without such enormous responsibility wrapped in his caring arms. Thus, the two ladies glaring back with judgmental eyes and pursed lips, departed quickly stomping their angry feet as they marched stoically down the street.

When Dick Du Puis, now in his eighties, reflects back on these two difficult years of life that required him to abruptly jump from a mischievous child into manhood, he harbors no grudge, bitterness or resentment toward anyone in his family. Displaying his ability to compartmentalize, he simply stated, "I did not mind the responsibility. My mama was sick and I needed to help her. That is just how it was at the time." He continued by saying, "I could not think about the lack of free time or dream of frolicking with my friends because of all the household chores waiting to be completed each day."

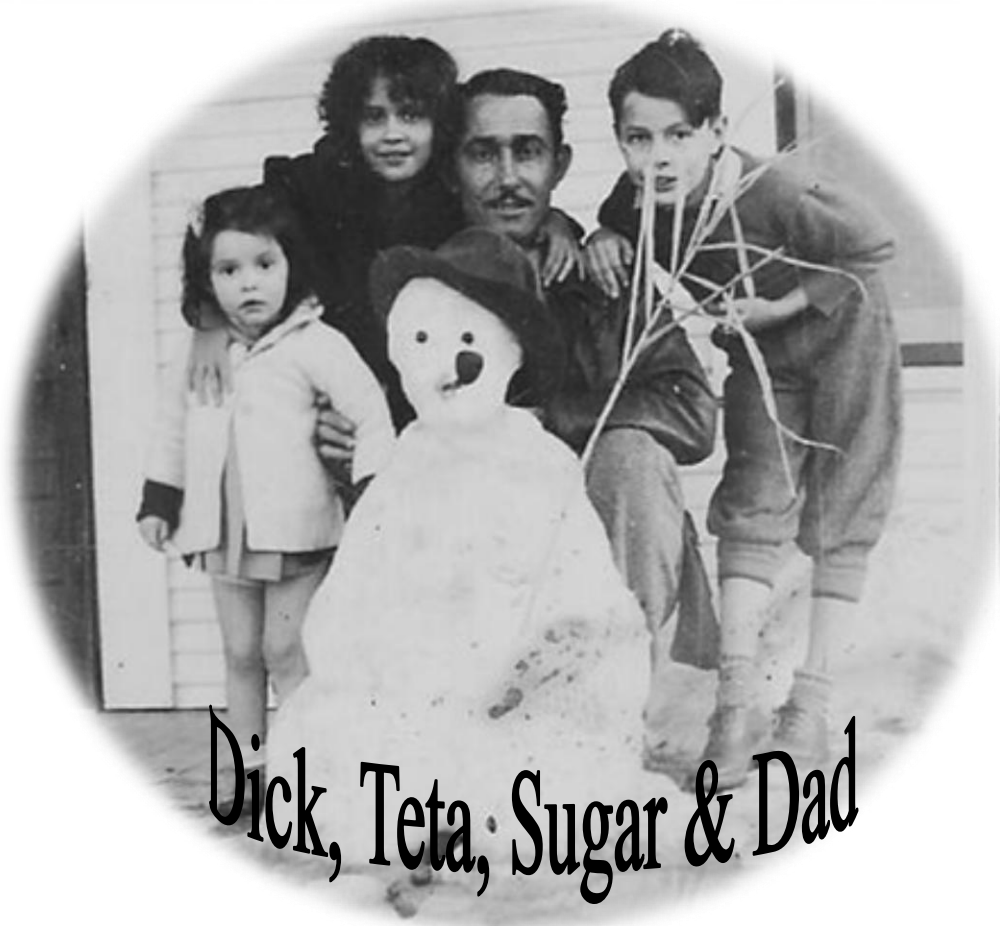
Finally, if Dick ever chooses to dust off the cover of his book called Life and delves deeply into this chapter at age twelve, there will be an array of valuable lessons recorded that demonstrate perseverance. Then, if he decides to test this time of his life for its intrinsic value, one would hope he sees his behavior as a reflection of Jesus' teachings for all mankind.

There is a reminder of this in Galatians 6: 9 that reads, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we don’t give up.”

Certainly, one thing that stands out to all who read about the hardships Dick faced in his young life as the oldest son, it must be acknowledged that he fought the good fight and finished the course that was set before him.



(Dick , his sister Teta, and their father)



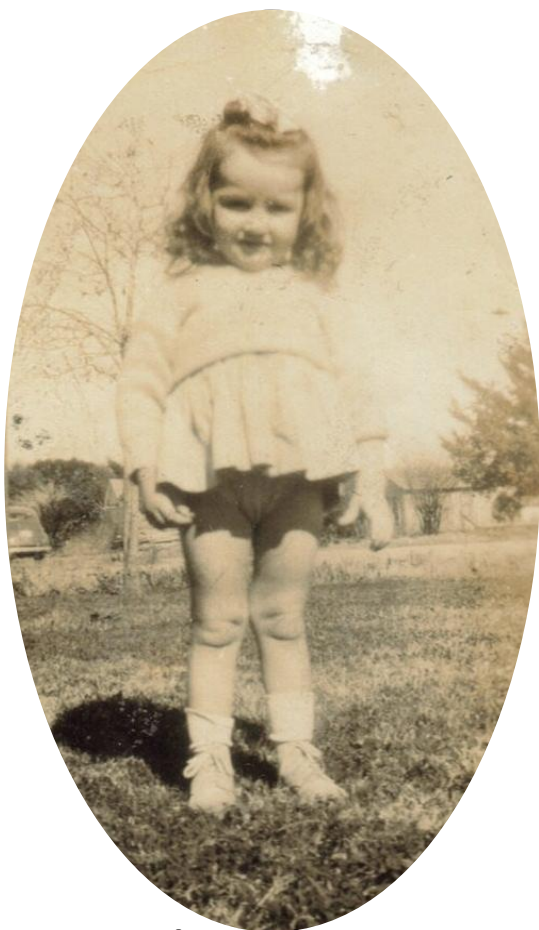
Dick, Teta, Sugar & Dad



Dick, Teta, & Sugar

Dick's
mother, just
before her
illness set in
with Baby Selena

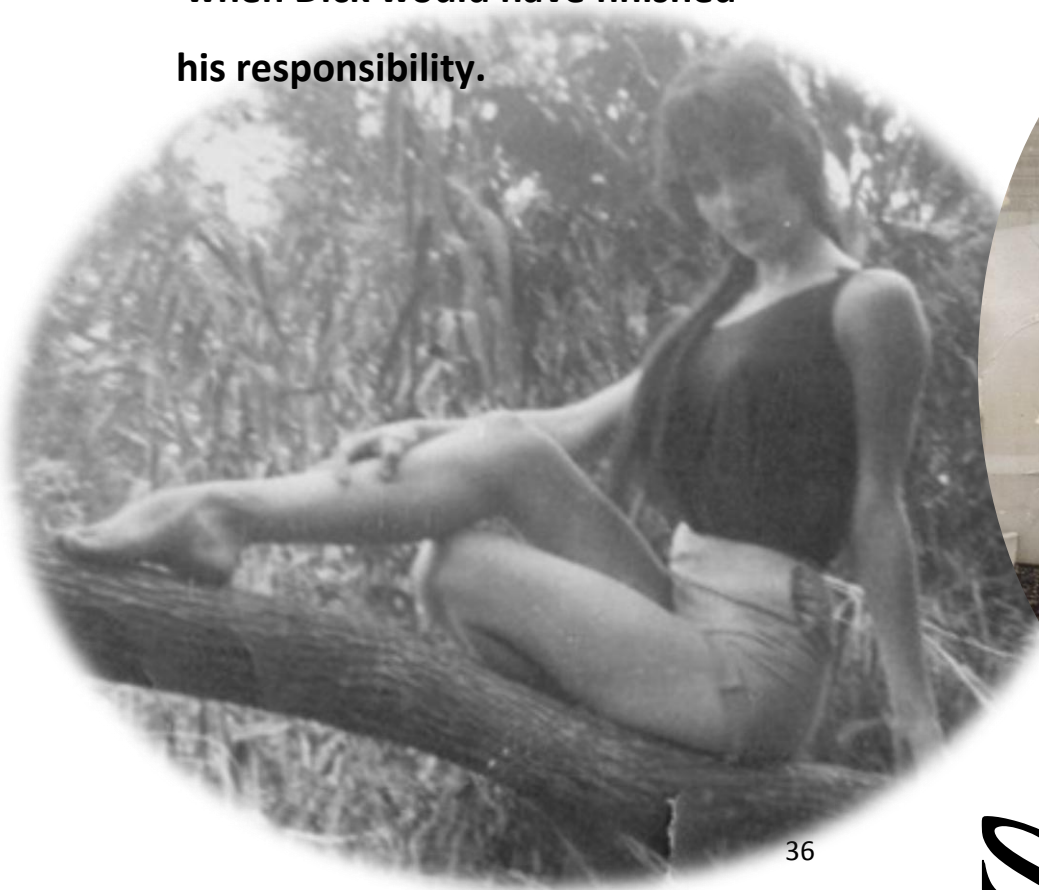




**Selena, almost two, just
when Dick would have finished
his responsibility.**



Selena playing dress up.



Selena