



Chapter Six

JOURNEY TO WHOLENESS



Isaiah 41: 10

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous hand.

JOURNEY TO WHOLENESS

Photography has captured spectacular shots from nature of plants found in places exposed to the most fierce weather conditions on earth. For example, after monsoon rains pour down on the parched smoldering desert sand, unsuspecting changes not visible to the human eye cause the once tired barren floor to abound with arrays of living color as wildflowers smile brightly among the thorny cacti. Another example of this phenomenon can be found on the highest mountains atop their windswept, storm-ravaged peaks. Living in this savage climate are some of the brightest lichens, mosses and flowers humankind has ever discovered.

Thus, these two examples prompt the question, “Isn’t it a puzzle these storms and difficulties bring about such true perfection in nature?” Scripture offers an explanation by stating that even God’s children are purified and perfected through unimaginable human afflictions faced in life; serving as the catalyst for their journey toward wholeness.

BACK TO SCHOOL

The human sacrifices and hardships Dick O’Neill Du Puis had faced for two years in his young life, when only twelve, serve as a poignant example of such circumstances depicted above. After two years of being parent and nurse in the O’Neill household, his bedridden mother finally regained her health and resumed responsibilities. Even though she once again cared for the family, Dick supported her efforts beyond measure. He continued to assist with all the chores in order to lessen the burdens carried on her shoulders. Just recently, Dick’s baby sister Selena reminded him of how he used her little body for drying the wet kitchen floor.

Setting her on a large towel, he would playfully drag her around the room as a creative game for her entertainment while drying the floor at the same time.

However, in spite of his success as a family caregiver, since he had missed two years of school, it would now be necessary for him to repeat sixth grade. Unfortunately, this would mean, at age fourteen, all his classmates would be only twelve; a hard situation, indeed. However, the one advantage Dick had going in his favor was his small stature, which would allow him not to tower over others. Although his small size would later present challenges, perhaps for now, he had finally caught a break.

Thus, one can only try and imagine Dick's restless sleep the evening before his first day back in school. Realizing how the normal peer conversations usually unfold at that age, it must have been a traumatic event for this young boy. Before the school bell rang, he would have been questioned and unmercifully teased by his new and old classmates, as well. Furthermore, since Gueydan was a small town with only one school, there would be no such thing as privacy.

However, his classmates not fully grasping the grave responsibility and hardships Dick had endured for the past twenty four months could not possibly comprehend why their pokes and jabs would be only a bump in the road to this young man. Now possessing maturity beyond his years, he would enter school with his head held high and conquer brilliantly any challenge that arose. Dick O'Neill Du Puis was back on track and would never grieve over his lost youth.

DANCING EYES RETURN

As Dick continued to fulfill the curriculum requirements and enjoyed free time to be a boy once again, the dancing eyes his Aunt Evelyn knew so well, started playfully to surface. Dick's mother observed evidence of this behavior when her son started dodging confession time with the priest and firmly insisted this situation be corrected immediately. This went on until she looked him in the eyes and said, "Today, you are going to confession and I will witness you personally kneeling in front of the priest!" So, Dick with his ears pinned back, had no other alternative but to kneel at the confessional and give a full accounting of his actions.

Thus, stammering a bit, he finally blurted out, "Sorry Father, but I have sinned!" Speaking in a very heavy French accent, the priest asked, "Ok son, how have you sinned?" Still on the dodge, Dick made up what he labeled as boring sins such as, teasing his sisters and telling lies to his mother. Unfortunately, the priest kept prying, letting Dick know his look of guilt was obvious.

Finally realizing it was hopeless to continue this charade, Dick yelled out, "Ok Father, I am sorry but I stole something!" Extremely concerned, the priest quickly wanted to know if it was valuable and continued to press even harder on the young reluctant sinner in front of him. Finally feeling totally hemmed in, Dick exclaimed, "I STOLE SOME PERSIMMONS!" The priest surprised him by asking, "Were they Japanese Persimmons?" Then, observing the affirmative nod of the young boy's head, the priest firmly stated, "Since the only Japanese Persimmon tree in Gueydan grows in my backyard, all you had to do was ask for them. You stole those persimmons from me!"

Recalling this caper at age 80, Dick clapped and roared with laughter as he recounted the priest's final question being, "AND---WHO'S LITTLE BOY ARE YOU?"

RAT DU PUIS

As Dick was progressing smoothly in school, the largest stumbling block was biology. In fact, he was told by his teacher the only way he would pass was through submitting a project for extra credit. So, he bargained with his teacher in the typical Du Puis fashion and was granted permission only if his project was truly spectacular.

That evening when walking by Republic Rice Mill with the biology project on his mind, he discovered the biggest rat he had ever seen in his life. At this moment in time, Dick visualized a message traveling across this old rat's body that read, "BIOLOGY PROJECT"! After transporting it home, he first carefully skinned it outside and then carried it right into his mother's clean shiny kitchen. When the smell of something cooking beckoned his mother, she found that old rat boiling on top the stove in a pan right from her cupboard. Disapproval was not only written all over her face, but expressed verbally as well. In great haste, she rapidly disposed of everything that old rat had touched plus demanded a total sanitizing of the kitchen from her son.

However, undaunted by the scolding, Dick carefully removed the tender rat meat, followed by a delicate disjuncting process; as if he had MD after his name. Then, staining a piece of wood for the base, Dick proceeded to reassemble the rat's skeleton until it was absolutely perfect. In the eyes of this young man, the rat now in a sitting position, needed only to hold a kernel of popcorn to merit wearing the name RAT DU PUIS.

Needles to say, not only was this project labeled by his teacher as spectacular, but allowed him to pass biology in a sensational manner. In fact, years later when Dick's sister returned to Gueydan for a visit, "RAT DU PUIS" was still eating his popcorn while residing in the high school trophy display case, unaffected by all who gazed at him in admiration.

THE RABBIT

Another creative way in which Dick earned credits was to become a rabbit for the athletic teams in school. Although Dick's small stature prevented him from playing sports, he still had the reputation of being the little guy with enormous endurance. Therefore, when the coach approached Dick with the opportunity of using this endurance to earn extra credits, he jumped at the offer.

Consequently, the Gueydan residents would often see Dick as the rabbit running out in front of the sports teams for endurance training. He laughingly recalls the athletes wearing down to the point of sprawling out on the ground in complete exhaustion. At this point, he would sit on a log watching them until they started up again. This being his signal, he would take off in front of them until the chase ended. THIS LITTLE RABBIT HAD JUST EARNED SOMEMORE CREDITS!

DRUM MAJOR

Even though Dick had conquered every challenge presented, those two years he had missed in school continued to shadow his every move, causing him to always be searching for credits. Thus, informed by his teacher more credits were still needed to graduate, he put on his head the much worn thinking cap and came up with a plan. After analyzing the situation, he decided to play a musical instrument, hoping it would put him in the black column. Since the school furnished the tuba, this would be the perfect solution, especially since his family had little finances to spare for renting or buying an instrument. Unfortunately, this not being quite the ticket, Dick then decided becoming the Gueydan Drum Major would solve all the challenges in one fell swoop. After all, the Drum Major wore a fancy uniform and led a large band composed of students from five local schools. However, the band director let Dick clearly know he was too small to fit into the expensive uniform whose last occupant had just graduated. Instead, Dick was told he could wear a plain uniform and walk directly in front of the majorettes in the fall.

No way! Absolutely out of the question! Dick O'Neill Du Puis was not about to walk meekly behind a Drum Major who would be prancing and showing off in all his glory! Thus, Dick proceeded to learn how to twirl a baton over summer and by fall had learned all the routines and could throw it higher than the telephone poles. Additionally, being a natural showman as well as double jointed, he strutted like a peacock and pranced with his knees even with his waist as he marched along. Some in town described him as resembling one of those expensive horses that was seen dancing along all the parade routes.

At this point, a very proud Dick became the Drum Major even though it meant the school had to purchasing another expensive uniform and add an extra red feather on top of the existing

white one on his hat. The extra red feather made it possible for all band members to keep this little guy who possessed such heart within their vision. As they followed this showman performing for the crowds along the parade routes, who would have ever imagined a full scholarship, would have been offered from a major Louisiana University to a little guy who was told he was too small for the task?

POWER OF ENDURANCE EVALUATED

In summary, it is important to apply at this point, James 1: 2-3 that reads, “Reckon it nothing but joy...when you find yourself hedged in by the various trials, be assured that the testing of your faith leads to power of endurance.” Certainly, the tenacity, creativity and endurance Dick applied to the challenge of making up for the two years he was removed from school are, in and into themselves, show stoppers. Time after time, as you read about his quest for gathering credits, there was not even a hint from this young man of succumbing to defeat and throwing in the towel. In fact, it almost appeared that Dick actually enjoyed being challenged by the impossible. He had a goal in his mind and succeeded against all odds. Not only was he given obstacles to overcome, but had to work around the fact he had been born small in stature; a physical condition that had its own built in limitations.

Finally, as the rest of Dick’s high school years unfold in the next chapter, an unimaginable strength will surface from the very soul of this young man that will allow you, the reader, to visualize him as living atop one of the windswept, storm-ravaged peaks of life described in the introduction of this chapter. To date, you have only witnessed a preview of the strength this young man will apply in breaking through society’s barriers in order to follow what appears to be an impossible dream.



(Gueydan High School

1939

where Dick attended)

DRUM MAJOR DU PUIS



(HOUSE DICK LIVED IN DURING HIS HIGH SCHOOL YEARS)