

A Record Setting Year

by Kevin Army

He felt the air approaching, brushing a chill through his body, causing the wound to ache with a deep cold. Just a block home, it seemed like a mile. The open wound from surgery 3 weeks ago. It seemed like a year sometimes, or at least a season.

Somewhere in the area it was flooding. Traffic was standing still, power was out. Somewhere. Here, all things were moving, the busyness of life continued and scoured it's course. The storm, a backdrop to the numbed out auto-pilot of recovery. Another obstacle, and all things considered, not that big a deal. Except for that ache.

Halfway down the block he felt a shift, a relaxing. Up the steps, inside, right for the heater. Warmth and pain pills. Soon he would understand the event as a marker, a guidepost, a beginning of a change. But for now, he could only suspect that something more had happened than the obvious. The ambulance ride, the operation, the recovery, all would become metaphors for something else.

Laying by the window, as the Vicodin kicked in, he listened to the rain. A deluge. The value of water, the importance of these cycles. The flood of healing. The warmth of the heater, reaching across the room, joining with the drug. These miracles of comfort. The strength of getting through another day.

He woke sure of two things. He knew the worst was over and that he'd be OK. He also knew there would be ups and downs, and it would be a while recovering. His guts felt stiff and full this morning, it was a bit of an effort to get up. He'd overdone it the day before. No-one would tell him how far to walk, how much to work. It was a game of trial and error, pushing the limits, testing the waters.

On the morning news he watched a report on the storm which was trailing out of the area. There were reports of other storms in other places that were much worse than past evening. Crippling snow storms in the east, affecting air traffic back here in the west. Floods on other continents, freezing cold, strong winds.

He thought no matter how bad you have it, someone has it worse, and how that really doesn't comfort you. Your storm is yours, it's what you're going through, and your pain is your pain. Your worst is your worst, and the work you do to get past that is important and significant to you, no matter it's place in the history of pain and suffering.

He took the completed form for a temporary handicap placard to the dmV. The wait was only about 30 minutes, not bad. He read Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles* to pass the time. His doctor had forgotten to fill in the medical license number. The clerk called the hospital. Remarkably, she got through in about 15 minutes and got the number. She handed him the papers and said "I'm sorry you had to be a victim". "Oh, it wasn't that bad. Thank you so much".

Walking away, the realization hit him that she thought he'd been shot. The description had said something about a hole in the abdomen. He smiled as he negotiated the windy parking lot. He wondered if it would feel any different. Except if someone had shot him, he'd have someone to blame. He wasn't sure if that would help or not.

He pictured how it could happen. Walking to the 7-11 at night, a car driving by, or caught in a hold up at the store. Or some crazed drunk coming out of the bar on the way.

How long would he have laid on the street waiting for help? Would anyone see? Would the help he received have been any different? Would he recover quicker or slower?

Some things are better left unknown he thought. He realized it's just another version of the comparison game. This was the worst storm since 1956, until another storm a few years down the road blew the new one away. *When you're being rained on, the only thing that matters is how fucking wet you are.*

He sat down. It was cold. Really cold. He breathed in the air. It felt really good. He felt alive. Very vitally alive. And it felt fucking awesome at that moment, in that way only little things can feel huge and life affirming. He closed his eyes and rested awhile. It looked like, at least for some period of time, the worst of the storm was

over. A record setting year. In the past. To talk about in the years to come.

