

When I was quite young, perhaps 6 or 7 years old. My very favorite hymn at church was "A Shelter in the Time of Storm".



Racing the Storm

by: Keith L. Sorrels

We could see the thunderstorm slowly approaching north of the Chico Air Attack base. Because of the reports over CDF's fire radio that Redding was having local flooding, we knew the thunderstorm was a big one. How big was difficult to tell because the whole

valley was completely obscured from one side to the other. The word "massive" seemed to fit. Like the storm, cutoff time, the time the air attack base closes for the evening, was also approaching.

By the looks of the imminent weather, I decided that fire or not, we were not flying anywhere and I advised dispatch that the base and aircraft were down-staffed for the night. Besides our firefighting mission, I had a good reason for being especially concerned about weather conditions, because my transportation for this day and most everyday was a "Harley" (as in Harley Davidson) motorcycle. The thought of riding 22 miles home in the middle of a driving rainstorm didn't seem like great fun to me, so by closing the base early bought a little extra time to beat the storm home.

I quickly said goodnight to my co-workers and hustled to the hanger about 100 yards away where the Harley was parked. As I opened the hanger door and donned my leather jacket and helmet, the wind picked up noticeably and flashes of lightning with accompanying thunder, signaled that the storm's edge was very close. As I pressed the starter button to start my escape machine, instead of the roar of 66 horses awaiting my command, I only heard the starter motor click which told me a couple of things. One, that the usually dependable battery was taking the evening off and, I would be delayed getting home or I was going to get very wet, or both.

As I quickly pondered my next move, scattered large rain drops started to fall reminding me that I didn't have time to ponder. I figured I was dead in the water so I closed the hanger door and started walking back to the base. I had just taken a few steps when one of my firefighters on his way home stopped his pickup and asked if I needed help. "Do you have jumper cables?" I asked, to my surprise he did and we both immediately started the drill. The dead battery jumper cable drill. Anyone who depends on vehicles that are in their "golden years" for transportation, knows this drill by heart. It's a good thing too, because we clearly had no time for a lesson.

In record time, we made the necessary connections and the motorcycle roared to life. After quickly locking up, I straddled the bike and started the ride home. Would I make it? or would it be a literal washout. Riding south on Cohasset Road toward the freeway, I was pelted occasionally by some large raindrops and a bit distracted by the dust being whipped up by the advancing storm's winds, but so far it wasn't too bad. I finally made it to the freeway and knew that now I could get some distance between me and the storm. I would need some extra distance because my ride up the Skyway would be perpendicular to the storm front and no matter how fast I rode, the storm would continue to make steady progress and soon overtake me. With this in mind, I kept the pace up and prayed that I would hit the signal lights just right. Prayer works!

I could feel that the Harley's twin "V" engine loved breathing the moisture laden air as I blasted up the Skyway. At Lookout Point, I looked to the left. What a spectacle! The storm was just crossing the north side of the Butte Creek Canyon. The lightning was incredibly wild and the erratic wind was threatening to push me off the road. Nature's Showtime, was so fantastic that several people parked their cars at Lookout Point to watch. With such aggressive lightning conditions, I thought that those people were crazy for parking in such an exposed place.

So far, so good, I thought as I approached Pearson Road. Now I would be traveling in the same direction as the storm. All right!, I'm going to actually make it! I arrived home and safely parked inside the garage and in less than five minutes the torrential downpour struck. It rained as hard as I've ever seen it rain if I would have been caught on the road I would have been completely drenched and would have had to seek shelter because of the fearful downpour.

To me, there is something special about the weather gone wild and being in the middle of it. I don't think I have ever felt as alive as I have when I was living this adventure, nor so small. Thank the good Lord for the mighty weather and it's awesome power; and the blessings of "shelter in the time of storm".

Like the song goes: "The Lords my rock in Him we hide, a shelter in the time of storm".