

7 - House on Fire - Added by Leonard

The 26th August 1989.

A memorable day to some. South Africa was in the midst of Sanctions by the International Community. Including Sport.

The English Rugby Team was playing South Africa at Ellis Park. We had not seen an international Rugby event here for some time.

Friends and Families around South Africa got together for this Live televised event.

I had been invited to a work colleague's house for a Rugby/Braai social. I say "I" because The Wife and I had been separated for some time. Salome' was living at her Mom in a Free State town.

Many months had gone by and we were only two weeks away from our Divorce in the Bloemfontein High Court.

The braai (BBQ) was HOT, wors (Sausage) and steaks where about to be thrown on.

I must admit. There was another agenda for me being there. My work colleague's wife's had her sister there. They in all their wisdom thought I needed some "special company"

With Salome' being gone (We had been separated for some time and our divorce hearing was due in the next few week) I put all my efforts into my work. "Special Company" was not on my mind at that time.

We sat and chatted, whilst trying to catch some of the game.

"Yeah right" Rugby was the last thing on my mind.

At about 3:20pm the pager went off. (A pager was a communication tool used those days to receive a very brief text message)

The message read. "Contact HQ Urgent...!"

Being a young boss I realised that something in my area at work needs attention.

I asked my work colleague if I could use his home phone (Nope..! Cell-phone technology did not exist yet) "Wonderful days those were"

I called the Office and was given a number I had to call very URGENTLY...! I noticed it was a Free State Area code but I did not recognise it.

I called..! A Lady answered. I told her who I am and that I had been given this number to call. There was silence.... A little while later The Mother-in-law came on the line.

There was a house fire and my youngest Daughter has been burned and is now in Intensive care in the local Hospital.



Salome' & Bronwynne at Welkom Government
Hospital August 1989

I honestly cannot remember all that happened next. All I do know is that I was sitting on the floor crying and the two ladies of the house as well as my work colleague were trying to find out from me what had happened.

I do remember asking to speak to Salome' but The Mother-in-law said she will not speak to me.

My Mother-in-law, could be very cold on some matters. Particularly with my relationship with Salome' and our Children.

As Salome' will testify. When going for counselling leading up to our deciding to get divorced, Salome' was advised to divorce me by a Pentecostal Minister in that Town. Apparently I had rather a strong influence on Salome' and it was decided that it was best that she not communicate or have any contact with me.

I never got to speak to Salome' that day or the rest of that week.

I called the Local Hospital and confirmed that My Youngest Daughter had been admitted with very serious 1st, 2nd & 3rd degree burns to 33% of her body. They are working on her now is all they would say. The prognoses did not look good.

Many attempts to speak to the Doctor on that fateful Saturday and the following Sunday failed.

By Monday, I started looking for a Hospital that specialises in Child burn Victims. South Africa had only two. The Red Cross Children's Hospital in Cape Town and Johannesburg General Hospital.

A few calls were made to our Medical Aid Company. Yes, we can transfer our youngest Daughter to Johannesburg General Special Burns Unit. But, they need doctor's referral and reports and photos 1st.

This was a painstaking event to organise. Again, remember The Internet would not be available for another 6 years. Emails were unheard of. Gosh all we had was telex (ask your Mother or Father what telex was) Fax, telegrams and Snail Mail. (Ask your Mother or Father) and you then have to stick a stamp (Ask your Mother or Father) onto the envelope and then address it to a person located somewhere other than where you are.

The referral, reports and photos were requested.

These were eventually delivered to Johannesburg General who confirmed the degree of injuries to the medical aid company.

A full week passed after the Burning incident. Salome' and our youngest Daughter arrived at Johannesburg Hospital by ambulance. The welfare workers at Johannesburg Hospital had been fully briefed.

“Keep The Mother Away From The Father.....!” Arrangements was even made for Salome' to have her own room at the Hospital.

Interestingly, When the Doctors and Nursing staff examined our youngest Daughter they immediately summoned the Welfare workers. Who quickly hustled Salome' into a room for interrogation?

They claimed our youngest daughter looked as if she had been treated at home for her injuries.

At this point I arrived. I very assertively explained that our youngest daughter had been transferred there by ambulance from the Free State town local Hospital, If anybody had bothered to notice or check.

I then abruptly, to the amazement of the Welfare workers, ushered Salome' out the room and back to our Daughters Side in ICU.

It would not be fare to describe what our youngest Daughter looked like here. Suffice to say. very little was recognisable.

I did however, learn by the Medical records (I use to be a paramedic and I understand these scribblings) that our youngest Daughter had arrested twice on admission to the Free State Town local hospital due to the damage caused to her lungs and the large area of tissue trauma.

Successful resuscitation was achieved on both occasions.

To describe some of the injuries our youngest Daughter sustained.

- 1st, 2nd & 3rd degree burn from her hands to her shoulders on both arms
- 1st, 2nd & 3rd degree burns to her face and ears
- 1st, 2nd & 3rd degree burns to her upper back

Our youngest Daughter could not lie on her stomach. Because the burns on her face would be on the bed. Nor could she lie on her back because of the burns there. Or on either of her sides.

The 1st task by the Surgeon and medical staff was to clean the burn areas and get these sterile.

This was done with our youngest Daughter sitting in a tub of Saline solution whilst all the old damaged skin was removed by the medical staff. Literally scrapped off. Salome' and I had to hold our youngest Daughter whilst this was being done, several times a day, as the old damaged skin peeled away from her body.

The 1st evening after many hours of this procedure our youngest Daughter was administered a large portion of tranquiliser to let her sleep and alleviate some of the pain.

This did not work.

To the disgust of the medical staff for carrying around a sterile baby, I figured out that if I held her in my arms with her body resting against my chest and her head against my shoulder, she was a little more comfortable and would fall asleep.

Anybody who had to carry a two year old will be able to explain how quickly this weight is felt in the arms.

Any attempt to lay her down resulted in her waking up and screaming with pain.

Salome' and I then took turns in carrying her up and down in the ward, which we affectionately named 13steps.

This being how many steps you would take before having to turn around and come back. Eventually exhaustion set in and this task was done with eyes closed whilst counting the steps.

Up until this point nothing was said between Salome' and I.

I was feeling the guilt of what had happened. And I suppose Salome' was heeding instruction given to her.

At some point Salome' was standing staring out of the window when I was doing a 13step pass behind her. I stopped. And lightly brushed her head with my Hand.



Salome' Started sobbing, I could think of nothing else to do than to hug her with our youngest Daughter still in my arms.

That moment of the hand gesture on her head. Unbeknown to me, formed the Start of a New beginning for us. We went home to our house that night. The 1st time in a very long time we spent any time together.

Till today. When-ever a situation becomes a little tough and Salome' doubts my affection for her, I just lightly brush her

head with my hand and she feels the love flowing from me.

Many months and years of physiotherapy and reconstructive surgery followed for our youngest daughter.

Yes, there were many incidents of ridicule and questions asked at the most inappropriate times and places.

Our youngest Daughter had to regularly have extensions done to her fingers which kept growing skew. (One was eventually amputated)

Our youngest Daughter is a wife and mother and has blessed us with 2 wonderful grandsons.

We absolutely love and adore her and are proud of her strength and the beautiful young lady she has become.

Our youngest Daughter has the honorary title of “the child who kept Mom and Dad together”.

At two years old whilst laying in a ICU Ward she was fighting for not only her life but for the love between her Mom and Dad.

There is still a picture that stays in my head. And that was on the day I walked our youngest daughter down the aisle at her wedding in 2008.

No..! Not the minister, or the Guy standing there who was waiting to taking her away from me.

But the pride on her Mom’s face. This is something I will never forget.

All information supplied herein is truthful and fact.

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