

Broken, But Not Crushed

By Ben Peterson

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In issues of this column I am telling the story of how my brother John and I came from a large family in a small town way up north and ended up competing for medals in two Olympics. Many have encouraged me in telling this story and if you are encouraged in some special way by reading it then it will be worth telling. And, of course, I would love to hear your reactions. If you miss an issue, check for them on our website www.campofchamps.org

Various times I have heard Dan Gable speak to wrestlers about the “Markers” in his life. These are events that may not have had any thing to do with wrestling at the time but in the end were critical to making us the men that accomplish extraordinary tasks later in life. Life has various experiences that become markers along the road of living. In Junior High one of those events stopped me in my tracks. There was much pain and disappointment at the time but today it is an event I treasure. Today I see several ways in which the experience benefited John and me later on when we strove to be National and Olympic Champions.

It all began at a yearly highlight for John and me, summer camp. All 6 of us children attended the Chetek, Wisconsin camp. It was forty-five miles from our home. Starting at age 9, for a full week, my sister and brothers and I swam and played ball every day with other kids – something we often couldn’t find time to do, growing up on a farm with unending chores.

Along with all the fun at camp, each day included a Bible lesson. It was at that camp when I was twelve that I considered my relationship with God and became interested in knowing my sin could be forgiven. John, being a year and eight months older than I, had expressed his faith in Christ at a large evangelistic meeting a year earlier. I began to see a change in him and wanted the same in myself.

A man at the camp questioned me about my interest in salvation. I politely listened to him and answered his questions. I am not sure how serious I was, since my mind was mostly on the swimming I was missing. At the time the importance and urgency of a personal relationship with Christ was overshadowed by the pleasure of swimming with new friends.

On the way home from camp, we were in a car accident. Our sister Becky, about to be a freshman in high school, was thrown at the windshield face first. The doctor used 52 stitches. We have all marveled at her complete healing. Becky’s constant smile continues to bring cheer to others wherever she goes. She turned her temporary pain into a very positive view of life.

Sitting in the back seat I was thrown towards the front seat. The impact broke the femur in my right leg. I remember John helping us get out of the car. He was alert and ready to help each of us with his level headed thinking. I was hospitalized and in traction for five weeks. All of our family gathered at my bedside many times during those weeks. Dan was too young to enter my hospital room, so John would keep him company as they stood outside my window. Even back then John showed a levelheaded concern to do whatever was needed.

Dad also did one thing I will never forget. While in the hospital he made it his habit to bring his lunch to my room. He would sit at the end of the bed and we would eat and talk together. I have little recollection of what we talked about, but I will never forget him being there. Years later when I became the critical, cynical teenager and thought Dad uneducated and way

behind the times, I believe the report he built during that time kept me from openly rebelling against him. My family proved they would stand behind each other in easy and hard times. This was so valuable when we later pursued the Olympics with a passion. Our family would alone many times send us off to train and then gather for the big competitions and always be interested.

A plaster cast too heavy to lift kept me at home and in bed for another six weeks. Crutches were used for months after that. My leg had been broken, but God was not crushing me. He was tenderly letting me heal and fully see the depth of His love for us and my family's love for each other.

Obviously, I suddenly had plenty of time to think. God, in all His power, could have kept me from that accident. Yet, today I consider that experience to be one of the most beneficial times of my life. I think God knew I was toying with His Son. I hadn't seen the urgency of salvation prior to that time – life and fun had my attention. He had kindly touched my bone and broken it so that, in the healing process, He could change my heart. The following camp season, I placed my faith in Christ and afterward told the other campers of my decision. Ben Peterson has never been the same since

For a long time I felt set aside and greatly limited. Thoughts of being an Olympic Champion were the farthest thing from my mind. However in time the healing was completed and I was running and playing again.

Two years after the accident and broken leg I started playing football and wrestling. I had recovered with very little limitations from it all. Our early camping days and our Families response to the car accident prepared us for much of what was ahead. John and I learned the intensity of camp life long before we attended a wrestling training camp with our national team. Often we listened to others complain about the rigors of training intently several times each day, but we looked forward to it. I guess that is why we have spent 30 plus years training hundreds of other enthusiastic young men at Camp of Champs. *We were broken for a time – but not crushed by it all - but broken bones and broken hearts can heal.*

Have you been broken in some way recently? Often I hear of others who have broken a major bone and I always tell them, "Don't despair just look deeper and higher while you wait for the healing". Look for the bigger picture and even the eternal perspective in it all?

***Ben & his brother John now run Camp of Champs Wrestling Camps. Contact them at: Camp of Champs, PO Box 222, Watertown, WI 53094; Phone: 800-505-5099; E-mail: info@campofchamps.org; Web: www.campofchamps.org**