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## **The Memories**

“Frank William Two. Frank William Two. Do you hear me?”

Brad looked down at the gas gauge again. Eighth of a tank was all that remained. He purposely didn't look at his wife in the passenger seat for fear she could read the start of panic on his face. Brad looked up at the rearview mirror at their children. Four children ranging from thirteen to six with all of the remaining family's possessions stacked around, behind and on the roof above them. When they run out of gas this time the six of them would be walking, leaving more of their possessions behind. If it hadn't been for that hundred dollar bill he had remembered in his wallet folded behind his gym membership card they would have been walking by now.

The gas station's canopy lights had went off just as he had pulled up to a pump. Brad ran up to the station door to find it lock. He pressed that hundred up against the glass door as he pounded on it. “Please! We need gas! I can pay with cash!” Brad watched as a teenager looked warily around a display before coming to the door. The teenager unlocked the door and opened it just far enough so Brad could slide the hundred dollar bill though to the teenager. “Pump One” was all the teenager said before relocking the door. Brad ran back to the van and drove it to Pump One. The pump's light came on as Brad removed the nozzle from the pump. The satisfying click of the nozzle when the gas tank was full. Brad realized this was his most expensive tank of gas ever when he couldn't get the teenager to return with Brad's change. No

matter. The van could go the remaining distance on this tank of gas, so he had thought at the time. Their Freeway exit had been blocked so he had to take the next exit costing them a good fifty miles. Then both of their smart phone maps went spastic. Fortunately they were close enough to their destination that when they made wrong turns they were eventually able corrected the mistakes by using their memories from an earlier trip, at least that was their prayer. The blocked exit, the wrong turns had cost them them time, miles and more important, gasoline. And now they were down to an eighth of a tank of gas ... so close to safety.

“Are you sure we are on the right channel?”, Brad asked his wife.

“Yes Honey. This laminated note your friend Alex left in box said to use the day of the week for the radio channel. Today is Thursday so the channel the radio should be turned to is Five. At least that’s how I read it. Is that what he told you?”

“Yea that’s what I remember him saying.” Now Brad was wishing he had taken more serious what Alex had told him when he had given him the thirty caliber ammo can that had held the portable radio, power cables and instructions, what was it, three years ago already?

It seems like yesterday he was a Sixth Grader standing in the hallway of a new (to him) Elementary School when he spied Alex who was looking as lost as Brad was feeling. On impulse Brad had made his way through the other students to ask Alex if he wanted to be Brad’s friend. Best of buds ever since. Junior-high sports and then on to High School when they were co-captains of the Varsity football team. Brad went on to graduate from Fort Wayne Bible college, married his High School sweetheart, became a Pastor at a Fort Wayne church where they lived. Alex had graduating from Bethel College before marrying and moving on California, graduated from Fuller Seminary before accepting a Pastor position in Georgia. At first we had managed to get together to renew our friendship and reminisce a few times a year. But as the years passed, families grew and the separation by States our friendship was kept alive by emails, texts and Christmas cards. Was it really already three years since Alex was back home visiting his parents which was close enough for us to visit?

Our children had played together as our wives and Alex's mother (Mrs. Lucas) chatted and watch the kids. Alex had arranged with his dad to take us to the local gun range. I shot up a ton of Mr. Lucas's ammo. When I offered to pay for the ammo Mr. Lucas gave his son a look like a decision had just been made, "If you are coming to my house when the world ends as we know it then you better know how to shoot. The cost of the ammo is on me." I felt like I had just passed a test that I hadn't known I was taking.

It was on that same trip that Alex explained later what a Mutual Aid Group was and they (Alex and Mr. Lucas) was offering me and my family a position in their group. They gave me a spread sheet of expected items that I should acquire as quickly as possible. I scanned the list and when I read ARs in 5.56 caliber, pistols in 9mm my heart sunk a bit. I had a bolt action rifle I used for deer hunting in 7mm Remington Mag. It had taken us years to put enough money aside for me to purchase it. A Pastor's salary and six mouths to feed and care for didn't allow for many "wants and wishes". They (Alex and Mr. Lucas) must of read my mind because they told me they understood and just to do the best I could.

The "DING" from the van's low fuel warning brought me back to the present. We will be walking soon. My wife pointed at the radio setting in the charger that was plugged into the van's power port. I nodded yes.

"Frank William Two. Frank William Two. Can you hear me please?" She called with a plea in her voice.

One of the radio's instructions stated we were to use the police phonetic alphabet (Mr. Lucas was a retired police officer). Since we lived in Fort Wayne, the "F" and "W" became "Frank William". Husbands were "One", Wife "Two", oldest child "Three" and so on. Instructions also stated that if we are under control by hostile forces then we are to use the military alphabet, "Frank William" would be "Foxtrot Whiskey". In return the MAG member responding to our call would do they same if they were compromised in a like fashion. Sounded complicated at first but it was actually simplistic once I thought it through, just like the day of the week was to be the channel number.

The van sputtered to a stop on the single lane country road out of gasoline.

“Honey it says here that the radio range can be decreased by large buildings, hills and trees. The higher the radio antenna the better.”

“Let me try.” Brad takes the radio from her as he opens the Driver’s door. Brad walks around to the front, uses the bumper to step up on the hood. His footsteps leaves dents in the engine hood as he pulls himself unto the roof of the van. Two days ago a dent in the van’s body would have been a great displeasure to him. Today he didn’t even notice. Amazing how a radical upset in one’s life can change a person’s perspective on what really matters. Balancing between luggage strapped to the van’s roof Brad tries again, “Frank William One. This is Frank William One. Can you copy?” No response. “Better feed the kids and then figure out what we can take with us.” Brad notices that he was holding the radio like he saw in the movies, horizontally. A faint memory about the radio antenna should be held vertical. Something about polarization and both the transmitting and receiving antennas should be in the same orientation for better range. Brad pointed the antenna straight up towards Heaven.

“Frank William One. Frank William One. Frank William One.”

*“Frank William One. This is November Papa. Frank William One. This is November Papa. What is you ETA? Over.”*

“THANK GOD! I don’t know how long. We are out of gas and we will be walking.”

*“DO NOT give your position. Repeat. DO NOT give us your position. Do you see any prominent landmarks? Over.”*

“I see a red and white tower. Might be a cell tower? I see another but it’s much further away”

*“Is there a bridge over a small creek close to you? Over.”*

“Yes there is!”

*“Go to the other Channel and wait. Repeat. Go to the other channel and wait.”*

“Honey! What is the other...”.

“ONE!”

*“November Papa calling Frank William One.”*

“Frank William One!”

*“We are bring gasoline to you in ten minutes. Understood?”*

“Yes. YES. We’ll be here and waiting. THANK YOU!”

*“November Papa clear.”*

“Honey they are coming! THANK YOU LORD!”

**The End**