

KEYWORDS: an echo of the old, old stories, Gideon, the fleece, the stories of people of faith

The Echo OF A STORY

BY BRUCE RAFUSE

My father had a very large presence. Naturally. He lived his life with the knowledge that he was living in a very exciting time of history. And while he wouldn't be classified as pious or religious, I believe he understood his God more clearly than many of his "religious" friends.

Like the time he was clearing away some trees from behind his cabin. The axe head came off and flew over to the creek that flowed through his place. Dad shouted (and he could shout) "Elisha! Elisha!", and the axe head landed in the water with a big splash—but did not sink. He wouldn't admit it, but I think he was as surprised as the rest of us. But then again, maybe not.

I think an event like this is an echo of the old, old stories we have that are handed down to us. Many of the stories of people of faith gently remind us of similar challenges and results that we read about in the old stories. My quotidian life seemed devoid of any opportunities to reverberate to an echo of those old, old stories. Until this year. It came quite unexpectedly, but it happened this way.

My lady and I had some land in a rural area and had jumped through the hoops of bureaucracy until we were ready to build a small house to retire in, with a garden and a grape trellis and a fig tree or two. The pandemic was upon us and the building trades, rather than being out of work, were booking their jobs three and four months down the road. Our specific need was to find someone to do our foundation.

Since the land was sloping, the basement wall on the high side was a 10-foot concrete wall with a small section just over 14 feet high. The foundation trades had much easier foundations lined up for months and wouldn't even



The Gideon wall at the Rafuse property

price our job, and not one would look at the project.

My lady and I talked it over together and talked it over with our God—and went to sleep. I woke up thinking of an old, old story—the one about Gideon. So, I got out the book and read it over again (Judges 6:11–16). I re-read the first part, the introduction to the story.

Gideon, and his contemporaries, were in a place of "Bad" with no exit in sight. But Gideon has a visitor who greets him, "The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor" (Judges 6:12 ESV).

Gideon's reply sounds like one of mine, "If the Lord is with us why is all this "Bad" happening to us? We have the old stories—but that was "then." The "Now" is empty!"

Then the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?" (v 14).

Gideon comes back with, "Please, Lord, I am a Nobody!"

The pandemic was upon us and the building trades, rather than being out of work, were booking their jobs three and four months down the road. Our specific need was to find someone to do our foundation.

The Lord replies, “But I will be with you and you shall strike the Midianites as one man.” (v 16).

Two phrases seemed highlighted: “Go in this might of yours . . .” and “But I will be with you . . .”

When the visitor disappears, Gideon realizes this wasn’t just a human being; it must have been a visitor from the Lord—the same Lord as in his old, old stories. So, Gideon prepares to do the impossible, but doubts keep surging through his thoughts. But he had a fleece . . . Once he was fully convinced that, yes, a real messenger from the Lord had visited him, he never slowed down. And the rest is history.

Well, I didn’t have a fleece. And the story of Jesus on the pinnacle of the temple started flashing (the temptation of presumption). But going back over the previous year, and how smoothly the bureaucratic hoops had been passed, convinced us that Gideon’s story was the more relevant. “Go in this might of yours . . .” and “But I will be with you. . .”

And so, we began.

Oh yes, let me introduce myself. I am in my eighth decade of life. I have worked a variety of jobs—including carpentry. I have had to work with concrete, but never with dimensions such as I now faced. And concrete walls present some special challenges—with every vertical foot of wall increasing the bursting pressure on the forms by 145 pounds. This means that the pressure on the bottom of a 10-foot wall is 1,450 pounds per square foot, in both directions, and the short section of 14-foot wall would have a bursting pressure of over 2,000 pounds per square foot at the bottom.

With a sheet of plywood weighing about half as much as I do, the physical challenge was real—and there were about 120 sheets of plywood in the finished forms. The first level wasn’t so tricky, but the higher parts of the wall required a careful approach.

“Go in this might of yours . . .” and “But I will be

with you . . .”

After the footings were poured it took me, working “alone,” two months to be ready to pour the walls. Many times during those two months I would come up against some challenge and mutter, “How now, Lord?”, and ideas would come. And they would work! One of these was how to lift the upper levels of plywood into place; just lift them up gently and put them into place—after placing stops to keep them from crashing over to the other side.

The day of the pour was a day of rejoicing! My lady brought a basketful of goodies including strawberry tarts and whipped cream. Four persons helped me pour, plus the concrete-truck drivers and the concrete-pump operator. In three hours, the pour was completed, and we could relax and rejoice.

With the forms off, the concrete is standing very strong, solid, and good. The people that know concrete say good things about it. But I call it my Gideon wall.

As an echo is a faint reflection of the original sound, so our stories are not exact duplicates of the original stories. When my father walked over to retrieve his axe head, he found a cluster of bushes just under the water where the axe head had landed—but deeper water was just inches away. . .

Gideon’s story is a resounding echo of the story of deliverance from Egypt. My story is a faint echo of Gideon’s story, but it is my story, my echo, and I am encouraged.

“Go in this might of yours . . .” and especially, “But I will be with you . . .”



BRUCE RAFUSE is retired and enjoys the countryside and the family surrounding him.