

## Who Needs a Sofa Anyway?

By Ed Landry

We all have times in our lives that we would describe as extraordinary moments. A day is unwinding as normal and then suddenly something changes it. They are like interruptions from heaven.

To this day I can't tell this story without tears in my eyes. It is interesting that before I trusted Christ as savior over 40 years ago I never cried. My heart was about as warm as Canadian fence post in January. My poor young wife had married a stoic and had been learning that I was detached from emotion. I still remember the night I surrendered to the Lord. The flood gates opened for the first time in my life. God had put a heart of flesh into Old Granite. I still have a softened heart today and tears well up quite easily. I don't mean I break down and weep when I read the price of soup in a supermarket aisle but I am more sensitive now to human suffering and to things of extraordinary beauty.

One of the most difficult things we face as overseas missionaries is that we miss family events that most people take for granted. When our children return home for higher education they are pretty much on their own. We raise them with that in mind knowing they will have to survive on their own but it doesn't make it easy to be 7,000 miles away and living in a country where phone calls are too expensive to make and mail can take a month or more. At least that was what it was like when we raised our kids overseas before internet technology. And as incredible as our children are, they still somehow forget how to communicate when they leave home. Too many distractions I guess.

Our second eldest, Dan, began his journey back home by being accepted at UCLA. Dan was a great athlete and had been accepted to join the world famous UCLA volleyball team. It was historically the top team in the country. Although no scholarships were available when he applied

he was still invited based on a video we had taken of him his senior year at his high school, Faith Academy, in the Philippines. Because the volleyball season was not during the furlough schedule we were never able to see a volleyball game he played in four years. We got an occasional video of a TV broadcast and saw some photos in a monthly magazine but that was it. It was excruciating for us. I asked God to let us see a game one day but that prayer seemed like it would never be answered. Then the end of Dan's collegiate volleyball career was at hand. The team had gone four years without a national championship, the longest in its history. But we could tell by what we read that UCLA was having a great year. Our son had set a kill record for the school which is no small achievement for a school like that. The national championships were to be held at home court, Pauley Pavilion. This was to be their year. And as usual our two-and-one-month short furlough was timed just wrong. We had three children still at home and had to stay on the local school system calendar. We could not afford to go to the USA and then fly back and then one month later fly back again for furlough. It was out of the question. It hurt so much.

During those years I did a lot of training for the Bible League. I had helped set up a large church planting program for them and they sent me all over the world to train pastors. I got a call from them and they wanted me to go to Mexico to help with issues that come up in their Latin American program. They also wanted me to meet with a person in Tijuana. Tijuana! That was the border town next to our home city, San Diego. The trip to San Diego would be two days before the NCAA preliminaries and then NCAA finals would be the following week. I asked if I could stay the extra week in the San Diego area and attend the National Volleyball finals. They didn't care since the ticket price was the same and I could even stay at our home since a renter had just moved out and it was empty. It was perfect. Well, almost. My wife Janet could not go but at least Dad could see his son play for the first time in four years. God had answered my prayer.

UCLA slaughtered everyone at the prelims. They were amazing. My heart was in my stomach all night and the next night. Dan was a great player, even better than what I envisioned

as I read the articles in Volleyball Monthly (we subscribed to just to get news of him). But even better, he was a great person. He never did get a scholarship. He earned his spot all the way while the scholarship players would sit on the bench. He spent his years at UCLA getting up at 3 AM and driving a bread truck to pay the bills. TV announcers, who heard about it, gave him his nickname which stuck with him for those years, the Muffin Man. During his senior year he rented space under a piano in someone's living room and that is where he slept all year. It kept costs down. Maybe spending time on the mission field helped him adapt. When he graduated from UCLA with degrees in history and international economics, he had paid his own way through, had no school debts, owned two cars, money in the bank and was one of the top volleyball players in the country.

Back to our story. I got to be there the night UCLA qualified for the NCAA finals which were one week away. I just had to make one of those expensive phone calls to Janet in Manila and share the event. We cried together on the phone. She was so happy I was there to see it and I was happy but sad at the same time that she had to miss this great event.

The week passed slowly and the big weekend arrived. The day of the finals was on a Friday. I had to make an early morning visit again to that missionary in Tijuana where I stayed until about noon. When I drove back across the border in Mexico, I knew I had to rush. I still had to return to my home and pack up my stuff since I would be flying out of Los Angeles International airport two days later, the day after the finals. So I headed home to pack my bags and then get on the road in my rented car to drive the three hours to UCLA, eat dinner and get to the first semi finals. I pulled up at my house and looked at my watch as I jogged to the front door and ran inside. But something was different in our home.

Janet was standing there. I stood there stunned. I broke down in tears. It was one of our longest hugs on record. For three hours as we drove to UCLA, she told me the story. After my phone call the week before she went to a Bible study that night. She told the group how much she missed being with me and Dan in this great moment of his life. One of the missionaries in our

mission said to her, “Why don’t you just sell something and go.” It was a light that needed to go on. In the next day she managed to sell all our living room furniture. Our sofa set was really nice. We had saved our money for years to have it custom made of rattan. That sold quickly. She booked a flight and was standing in our home when I got there. She had arrived one hour before I walked in the door and had no idea where I was or how she would get to UCLA, and then I walked in.

I had seen Dan the week before but she still hadn’t seen him for two years. We had so much to talk about for three hours. I told her that there was a good reason he was a two-time all American and had set a record at UCLA. I knew the next two days would be really special for her. That alone made my weekend one of the most memorable in my life. We got to UCLA and I took her to her favorite Chinese fast food chain which was on campus and bought her a meal she loves. She couldn’t eat one bite. She was so nervous to see Dan. We left and I tossed the plate of food in the trash can. We had a son to meet. I had called ahead to tell him Mom was here so he wouldn’t be too emotionally shocked. What a night. UCLA annihilated their opponent. Dan introduced us around to players, coaches, sports announcers. Dan was a champion. Dan was a hero. Dan was our son. I had no buttons left on my shirt. We love our kids all the time. They don’t have to excel to earn our love. But I must admit that a night like that is unbelievably special. We were to eventually go to two Olympics and watch this kid compete with the world’s best. But as amazing as those Olympic events were, I still go back to the NCAA finals as the most meaningful. There was so much drama, sacrifice and emotion involved.

The next night the finals took place. Our humble little missionary kid son had over 40 kills and spent most of the night in the air. His 46 inch vertical jump was quite intimidating to his opponents. It was a night of glory. UCLA won it in straight sets, their first NCAA championship in four years. Dan was the standout player. We were the standout parents. At least that is how we felt. When it was over, we mingled around the floor talking to people, and Dan introduced us to a writer with *Sports Illustrated* who interviewed us. An article appeared next month in that

magazine reporting on the championship and focusing on Dan, and it told this amazing story of Dan's crazy Mom who sold her living room furniture to see her son play volleyball on the night of his life. I know it was the night of my life.

On the flight back I still had tears in my eyes. My wife asked if I was alright. I said, "I'm fine. I am just trying to figure out where we will sit in our house for the next month!"