

THE GREAT STORM IN L.A.

KOBE CHEN & HAL AMES

Chapter 1



It was hot sunny day in Los Angeles. We had gone to the beach with our friends. Our families were playing soccer on the beach when the skies suddenly turned dark. The waves in the ocean were getting higher and people were running up the beach to get to higher ground.

A young boy started screaming. He pointed to the sky at the black clouds rolling in off the ocean toward the city.

He yelled out, “There’s a storm coming!”

The wind began to blow the towels, toys, chairs, and umbrellas across the sand. The things we brought with us blew away down the beach. My sister and I tried to run after them, but the wind was too strong.

Our parents pointed to the hotel and waved for us to follow. It was getting so dark, and the blowing sand was in our eyes so that we could not see where we were going. Soon we realized we had lost our parents. We couldn’t see them anymore.

I took my phone and opened the compass map app. I had to turn my back to the wind in order to see it. My sister held onto my arm so we would not get separated. I pointed to the dot on my phone and then started to walk quickly hoping we would not be hit by any of the flying debris. The sand was soft, which made it difficult to walk.

We came to the steps that led to the hotel from the beach. The app was still working. We climbed the steps and headed in the direction of the building. We passed the swimming pool that

was now full of sand. All of the tables and chairs were in piles against the fence or were gone.

When we finally got to the hotel, the glass door was shattered by a table that had been picked up by the wind, and pieces of glass were scattered everywhere. The doorway was blocked by bricks that had fallen from above it. We didn't have shoes on, so trying to enter this doorway was not an option. We needed to find another way in. The wind was getting stronger and the water from the ocean was blowing mixed with the sand. It was hurting our skin and our eyes.

I input another option to go to the other side of the building into my app. I thought if we could get on the other side the building would block the wind. We moved slowly along the wall. We came to a fence. Fortunately, there was gate, but when I opened it, I found a dumpster. We huddled behind it to get out of the wind.

Sand began to pile up against the side of the dumpster creating a large sand drift like in the desert. If we didn't get out of there soon we would be buried.

I kicked a couple of the boards out of the back of the pen holding the dumpster and then we climbed through. And followed the dots on my phone again. My sister was trying to yell something to me, but I could not hear her. She pulled hard on my arm. I looked up to see a large palm tree was laying on its side blocking our way. It had crashed into the side of the hotel leaving a large hole.

I thought we might be able to get into the building where the tree had fallen. I climbed onto the tree and helped my sister up as well. We had to crawl because the wind was so strong it would have blown us off.

When we got to where the tree had broken in, we realized there was too much broken glass and bent steel to get through. We jumped down onto the soft sand and continued to trudge around the building looking for a way in.

Finally, we got to the other side. The wind wasn't as strong, but the sand was still blowing everywhere. The entrance was in the middle of the building. It was easier to walk.

We ran as fast as we could through the debris laying on the ground. Our feet were bleeding, but we continued.

When we got the door, we were shocked to find that a large chunk of concrete had broken and fallen in front of the doorway. It was completely blocked.

I looked over at my sister. She was crying. What were we going to do now? I thought that our family was in the building, and we weren't able to join them.

I came up with an idea. I picked up a piece of the concrete and threw it at one of the windows on the first floor. It bounced off. The window didn't break. I tried again, throwing the rock even harder. It just bounced off again. The glass must have been tempered glass. I tried one more time and this time it shattered. I took leaves that were on the ground and made a kind of shoe. Trying to avoid the glass on the ground, we climbed up into the window and went inside the room. It was dark and it took a minute to see what was there.

There were boxes and things scattered around the place. I surmised it must be a storage room. I found my way to the door and found the light switch. When I switched it on, nothing happened. When I tried the door, it was locked. At least the room was quiet, and we were not being blown around.

I slumped to the floor and leaned up against the wall thinking. How were we going to get out of this room and into the hotel to find our family? The room was dark, and I could hear my sister crying.

"Settle down. We are safe at the moment. We'll figure something out. Don't worry," said not really believing it myself.

It got really quiet. The sound of the wind coming from the window stopped. I got up and went to see why. The sun came out and the wind died down. Everything was a big mess. Trees were blown over, cars were pile on the side of the street, telephone poles were leaning over stretching the wires, sparks were dancing the ground where the wires had broken, and water was dripping from everything.

I thought to myself, "Is the storm over? Can we really go out?"

I decided to wait until I saw people moving around. I had heard that hurricanes have an eye, and that when in the eye, everything goes calm. I wasn't sure if that was the case now.

It wasn't long until my fears were proved correct. The sky turned dark again, and the wind began howl even stronger than before. Something flew past the window almost hitting me in the head. I jumped back and fell to the floor. The shards of glass hurt my bottom. When I screamed out in pain, my sister shouted too.

I could feel the building begin to move and shake. Was it going to collapse? Was the wind blowing it away? I was more afraid than I had ever been in my life.

My sister was curled up in a ball along the wall with her head between her legs sobbing. Even though the room was dark, I decided to search for something that might help us. I really didn't know what, it was just a way to keep busy. On one of the shelves, I found a flashlight. When I turned it on, it worked!

Now I could look for a way to get out of the room. Maybe I could find a key for the door. I searched and searched for a key or something I could use to knock the door down. To my surprise, a key was on a nail next to the door.

"I found a key! I'm going to see if it opens the door," yelled over to my sister.

I tried the key, but it didn't turn. I tried the opposite direction. Still, it did not work.

"Why would they put a key next to the door if it didn't go the door?" I asked myself.

I flashed the light at the hole where the key went, and then I saw a second hole. When I tried that one it worked!

"Let's get out of here!" I yelled over to my sister.

She didn't move. I flashed my light at her, and she looked up at me in tears.

"I'm too afraid. I can't move. I want to stay here. It is safe," she spoke loud enough that I could hear her voice over the raging storm outside.

I went over to her and took her hand, "We need to find mom and dad. I'm sure they are in the hotel. Come on. We don't have a lot of time."

I pulled her to her feet and led her out of the room.

We were in a long hallway that was dark except for the light from the emergency lights that were at the exits. I guessed which direction to go and went to the right back toward where the entrance was.

When we got to the lobby, there was glass everywhere. The windows were gone, and the wind was blowing rain inside. No one was there. I led my sister around the wall until I could see the hallway leading to the dining room. The hallway only had the light of the emergency lights. We came to the elevators, but when I pushed the button nothing happened.

When we got to the dining room, we saw people curled up along the walls. Tables were

turned on their sides to provide protection. The windows along the outside were missing. The waves of the ocean were battering the water break and salt water rushed into the room making people run away to the far side of the hall. I tried to make out the faces to see if my parents were there, but it was too dark and most of the people were covering their heads.

I went slowly around the room flashing my light to see if I could find them. People yelled at me. We didn't have any luck.

"Hey boy, you had better find a place to protect yourself. Wandering around like you are is likely going to get your hurt, or worse dead!" a man who was under a table yelled at me.

Just then I remembered that my sister had brought her phone with her to the beach, even though my parents told her not to.

"Do you still have your phone?" I asked her.

"Yeah, it's in my pocket," she said as she handed it to me.

I turned it on and dialed my parent's number. It didn't connect. I looked at the screen and I had so signal. I tried the Wi-fi and it connected to something, but I didn't have the password. I checked to see if she had any messages. There was one from our mom.

As I opened the text, and read it, it said, 'We are safe in the hotel. We are in the exercise room'.

I had no idea where the exercise room was, but I decided I needed to find it. I went to the main desk to see if I could find a map of the hotel. I was sure it would show me where the exercise room would be. No luck.

"I guess we have to down each hallway to see if we can find them," I said to my sister. "Maybe you should go down one hall and I will go down another. That way we can search twice as much."

"No way!" she responded very quickly. "I am not leaving you. I would be too afraid."

"I get it. Sorry for making such a stupid suggestion," I said apologetically.

My sister's flashlight started to go dim. Her batteries were dying. I had seen some batteries in a drawer when I was looking for a map. I went to get them, but they were the wrong size. We only had one light, and I didn't know how long the batteries were going to last.

"We need to hurry before my flashlight dies too," I said as I took her hand and headed

down the first hallway.

There were people sitting on the floor leaning against the walls, just like we did in school when we had a tornado drill. They were startled by my light. We could hear the roaring wind as it blew through the lobby of the hotel. The storm was returning, and it was a big as ever.

Chapter 2

At the end of the hallway was a door. Before we go to it, the window on it broke when a big piece of metal smashed into it. Glass flew everywhere. The people around us panicked and began to run down the corridor to get safe. We followed them.

When we got to the lobby, water was rushing inside. We wouldn't be able to cross it to get to the other side.

"We need to go up the stairs to the second floor," I yelled.

The water began to fill the floor of the hallway. As soon as I opened the door to the staircase, others ran to join us. We had to move out of the way to avoid being knocked down. As soon as we could, we ran up the stairs. Our feet were wet, which made the stairs very slippery.

We entered the second floor. This hallway was even darker. Except for the light of emergency lights on the wall, it would have been difficult to see anything.

Crossing over and around the lobby, we saw waves of water flowing through the building. The wind was making so much noise we couldn't hear each other speak.

On our left we saw a table. We went over to it and turned it on its side to block the wind. The wind was so strong it began to push the table towards the broken window. We got out from behind it just in time to see it fly out the window and land in the pool below.

I motioned with my hand for my sister to stay low and crawl. I was having second thoughts about trying to get to the other side, but we had to find our family. We crawled slowly. Other things were being blown past us and out the into the pool. I grabbed the railing with one hand and reached over to my sister with the other. I pulled from one rung to the next until I could see the entrance to the hall.

Just as I was about to make a move, a chair went flying by. It almost hit me. Rain was coming in and everything was wet, which made it more difficult to hold onto the railing.

I looked at my sister. She was crying. I pointed at the door, and then pulled her hand. We made a dash for the door fighting the wind. It was hard opening the door, but we finally go inside.

The noise was muffled, but we were safe for the moment.

It was then that I realized that I had lost the flashlight. I didn't say anything at first, but she noticed that it was gone.

"Now what are we going to do? Should we just sit here and wait?" she asked, looking up at me with red eyes.

"We need to find mom and dad. We will just have to go slowly," I replied.

"I think we should stay here, it's safer," she said, begging me to stop.

I ignored her and began to go down the hall. I looked into the doors that had glass on them. The first one was the staircase. The next one was the laundry room. The last one was another stairwell.

"Should we go up or down?" my sister asked.

"If we go down, I'm sure the hall will be full of water like the other side, plus we already searched it," I stopped to think for a moment.

Where might the exercise room be? I remember when we went to Hawaii, the exercise room was on the top floor. Maybe we should go there.

We entered the staircase. There were a lot of people sitting on the steps. I had an idea.

"Do any of you know where the exercise room is?" I asked.

A lady near the top of the stairs pointed up.

"It is on the third floor on the other side of the building," she told me.

I took my sister's hand and led her up to the next level. The door was hard to open, but we managed to squeeze through. It was dark, but I knew which way to go. I bumped into a man who was laying on the floor.

"Hey stupid! What did you do that for!" he yelled at me.

"Sorry sir. I didn't see you in the dark," I replied.

We went slowly, trying to make sure we didn't step on anyone else. The hallway was long. It didn't have an opening to the lobby like the second floor.

Suddenly the building began to shake. We fell down and held onto each other.

"What's happening?" she screamed.

I wasn't sure. I was hoping the building wasn't going to collapse.

The shaking stopped, but we waited a few moments to make sure it didn't start again.

"I think we just had an earthquake. Can this get any worse?" I mumbled.

We stood up and continued down the hallway. A door opened and some guys walked out. We almost ran into them.

"What are you doing out here in the hall? Are you looking for something?" one of them asked.

"We are looking for our family. We think they are in the exercise room. Do you know where it is?" I asked.

"No, but we can try to help you," he answered. "We have a flashlight. I'll get it for you."

"You guys look tired. How long have you been looking?" another asked.

"For two days. We were on the beach when the storm came. We ran for the hotel, and we got separated. We have been looking for them ever since," I replied.

"Why don't you come into our room. You should get some rest. We have an extra bed you can rest on," he offered.

I looked at my sister. She was almost asleep on her feet.

"OK, but we can't stay long," I agreed to go inside.

The room was mess. The window had broken and there was glass and leaves scattered on the floor. They showed us the door to the other room. This room was clean and warm.

"Are you hungry? We have some food we can share with you," the first guy asked.

"Sure! We're starving," we both said.

They had some crackers and a couple of drinks for us to share.

After eating we went to the room and slept for a lot longer than I wanted. We woke up to the sun coming in through the window.

We walked out into the other room, and it was empty. No one was there.

"Where did those guys go?" I asked my sister.

She shrugged her shoulders, "I don't know."

They had left some food, so we ate it.

We went out the door and looked around. It was the same as before, dark and damp.

We went to the right and followed the emergency signs on the walls.

We searched the entire building and never found our family. When we got back to the lobby there were police and firefighters helping people get out. We asked about our parents, but they had no record of talking to them. They asked us our names and where we lived.

“I’m sorry to have to inform you that your neighborhood was one of the worst hit places in the storm, and then the earthquake did even more damage. We will take you to a shelter where you can get clean clothes and some food,” a nice lady told us.

We climbed onto a bus. I sat next to the window. As we drove away from the hotel, all I could see was destruction. Most of the windows on the hotel were broken. All of the trees were laying on the ground. Workers had cut away the trees that had fallen over the road so we could get out. Everywhere I looked, nothing was the same as before.

It took a long time to get to the shelter since many roads had been destroyed by the earthquake. When we got there, we saw a long line of people waiting to be assigned a place inside. We stood in line for about two hours. A woman at a desk asked us our names and who we were looking for. We gave her the information. She gave us paper we pinned to our shirts that had a number on it.

“This is your ID number while you are here. It is also your assigned sleeping area. You will go with the boys and your sister will go with the girls,” she explained.

“NO! I don’t want to leave my brother!” my sister yelled while she hugged me.

“It’s only temporary. Once you find your bed you can sit together in the main room and play games,” she tried to console her.

Then a young man gave us each a blanket, a bag of clothes, and a tray with food on it. He pointed to the door. We went in and saw so many people who were just like us. It was a large basketball court filled with cots. Under each cot was a box. When I got to my bed I put what few things I had into the box. Then I went to find my sister.

She was in a long line waiting to use the toilet.

“I don’t know if I can wait that long,” she said when she saw me.

I stayed with her until it was her turn to go into the bathroom.

We stayed there for three days. We met some nice families and had fun playing games with them. Every day we went to the table to ask if our parents had been found yet. On the third day

they had good news for us. Our parents and brother were in another shelter on the other side of the city. They were fine and very worried about us.

Two days later they told us we could take the bus that delivers food to the different shelters would take us to see them. We packed up our things and got onto the bus.

It took several hours until we finally arrived. We made many stops along the way.

My sister ran off the bus and ran to the door of the building, but it was locked.

“Why is the door locked? I want to see my parents!” she yelled.

“We have to go to the desk over there and register first. They can tell us where to find mom and dad,” I tried to settle her down.

We told the lady at the desk our names and asked her where we could find our parents.

She looked at her sheet and said, “They transferred out of here this morning. They aren’t here any longer. Let me see where they went.”

My sister sat down and cried. I felt like doing the same thing.

A few minutes later she came to us and informed us they were now at the shelter where we had just been.

“That’s crazy! Why would you do that? We were told to come here. Now they are there, and we are here. How are we supposed to find them now? My guess is that if we go back, they will return here looking for us and we will be where we were before,” I complained. “What are we supposed to do now?”

“We have to go back! When can we go back?” my sister yelled at the lady at the desk.

“There won’t be another shuttle until tomorrow. The communication lines are down, and the cell towers have been destroyed by the wind and the earthquake. We have no way to contact them. You’ll just have to wait,” the lady gave the bad news to us.

A nice man showed us to where we were going to sleep. The dinner was not very good, but it was filling. We played games until it was time for the lights to go out.

My sister held my hand all night. She did not want to lose me.

In the morning, a man came up to us and told us that the shuttle from our old shelter would be there soon. If our parents weren’t on it, we should go back.

We packed what little we had and sat on our beds waiting for the news.

They brought us our breakfast, which was eggs and toast with a cup of orange juice.

While we were eating someone called out our names. We stood up to see who it was. It was our parents. They had returned.

We ran up to them as fast as we could and hugged them. My sister would not let go. We sat down and we told them all about how we had been looking for them. They were happy we were finally together again.

My sister asked, “Can we go home now?”

“I’m afraid we can’t. Our house is not there anymore. The hill had a big landslide, and the house went with it,” our dad informed us. “I went there two days ago, but I wasn’t allowed in the house for fear that it might fall even farther.”

“What are we going to do?” I asked.

“The best thing is for us to stay together. When we are able, we will go to your grandparents’ house, but we have to wait until we can get transportation out of the city. This storm has left everything a mess,” our father continued.

We stayed in the shelter for almost two weeks. We met some really nice people who were in a similar situation.

Finally, an army officer came in and asked if anyone needed transportation out of the city. My parents were almost first in line. They told the officer we want to go to Seattle to stay with our grandparents. When they came back they had sad faces.

“Seattle is as bad as L.A. The earthquake was even stronger there. The whole west coast is a disaster, even San Francisco. It was hurt the worst. We can go to Denver or Chicago. We have to decide right away,” mom gave us the bad news.

“Do we know anyone in those cities?” I asked.

“I have an old schoolmate who lives in Chicago. Once we get there I will try to get ahold of him. Maybe they can help us get settled,” our dad responded.

“Then let’s go to Chicago,” my mother said, not really excited to go back to where the winters are so cold.

My dad went to tell the soldier that we would like to go to Chicago. He was told we would leave in the afternoon.

After lunch we got our things together. The shelter gave us extra clothes and bags with food for the trip. We would be on an Air Force transport, so we would not have food service.

A large truck came to the door, and we were one of the first families to get on. As we drove through the city to get to the air field we could not believe how bad everything was. The entire city had been destroyed. The Air Force had built a new air strip with steel panels. The cargo plane was waiting for us. The back was opened so we could just walk up and into the body of the plane. The seats were along the walls. They were not very comfortable looking. We had to sit down and strap ourselves into our seats. A woman came by to check to see if we were strapped in properly and gave us each a bottle of water. The trip would take about six hours.

The plane took off and we were on our way. There were no windows. All we could see were the people on the other side who were looking at us.

Dad began to sing a song, “One hundred bottles on the wall, one hundred bottles of beer. You take one down pass it around, ninety-nine bottles of beer on the wall...”

Everyone joined in. It was a fun way to pass the time.

I fell asleep when we got to forty-one bottles on the wall. I don’t know if they ever finished the song.

A loud voice came over the speakers, “Prepare for landing. We will be in Chicago in about fifteen minutes. I hope your trip was comfortable. Once we land, wait until you are instructed before you leave your seat. You will be taken by a bus to a lounge where you can take a shower and rest until your assigned location is given to you.”

We got off the plane the same way we boarded. The weather outside was terrible. It was cold, windy and it was snowing. I had never seen snow before. We ran to the bus as fast as we could, but the ground was slippery, so it was hard to keep our balance.

The bus crossed the tarmac and took us to the terminal. We were met by some nice people who gave us blankets to keep warm.

Once inside, we followed the group to the lounge. It was really nice. There were tables with food, a large TV in the corner and comfortable chairs to sit in. On another table were clothes that we could take. I saw a nice blue jacket I knew I would need since the weather was so cold. The lady let me try it on, and it was a perfect fit.

My sister and parents found clothes too. I took a shower and washed my hair. It felt good to be really clean for the first time since the storm.

We stayed two days in the airport. My family walked around the stores and ate in the restaurants. We had vouchers for food, so we didn't have to pay from our own money.

We got a message on my dad's phone that we needed to go back to the lounge. Someone was there to meet us.

We ran back, and when we got there, Dad recognized his friend from college. He told us to get our things. We were going to go to his house.

The trip his city took a little more than two hours. The snow on the ground was as white as it could be. I was glad to be in a warm car. The lights and decorations on the houses told us that Christmas was coming. This would be the worst Christmas ever. Usually I would be very excited, but not now.

We pulled up to his house in his driveway, and his wife and daughter came out to meet us. His daughter was one of the prettiest girls I had ever seen. They were happy to meet us and took us into the house. A big black dog came out of the kitchen and almost jumped on me. It scared me at first.

"He's okay. He's just a little friendly," the lady said.

The family introduced themselves.

"I'm Betty and this is Angela our daughter. The dog's name is Shamus," Betty said.

I replied, "I'm Billy."

My sister said, "I'm Virginia."

My mother said, "I'm Ruth."

My father continued, "I'm Bill."

They showed us where we would be sleeping. My sister and I were to share a room on the top floor. We had two mattresses on the floor and closet. I looked out the window to see more snow falling.

"Does it snow every day here?" I asked.

"No, but we like it when it does," said Angela.

Angela got out a board game and asked us if we wanted to play. It was fun. We played

until it was dinner time.

We stayed with the family for three weeks. We spent Christmas with them, which ended up being a lot of fun. We didn't get much in the way of gifts, but we did go sledding and ate some wonderful food.

My father got a job, and we were able to buy a house. It wasn't as nice as our home back in California, but it was ours.

It took two years before we could buy a house. When we did, we invited our friends who took us in to join us for dinner. We had a fun time talking about our experience. Angela told me we should write a story about it. That is why you have this story to read.

I finished high school and went on to university. After graduation I got a good job in Chicago. The best part is that I married Angela and we have a family of our own.

THE END