

Life After Tragedy

It's August 10, 2038, one of the hottest days on record. The Weather Channel said that it was 112 degrees Fahrenheit outside, but it felt much hotter. Living in Massachusetts, you know the weather can be unpredictable and severe. Still, you don't see many days this hot, even in the summer. My name is Kyle. I have a brother Sam, a mom named Karen, and a dad named John. I look up at the clock and see that it is 3:30 pm. Suddenly, the show I was watching switches to an emergency announcement.

"Ugh!" I groan, thinking that I would miss the rest of my show. "This is great. Another announcement that won't even affect me." I couldn't have been more wrong.

"The National Weather Service has just issued a flood warning for the Northern United States. The affected area goes as far south as New York, Wisconsin, Michigan, South Dakota, Northern Idaho, Montana, and Washington.", says the announcer on the TV. I look outside and see a blue sky with a few white clouds in the air.

I think to myself, "That's stupid. There's no sign of rain."

Then the President comes on. "My fellow Americans," he addresses us, "we have a grave situation that requires immediate reaction. The polar ice cap in the north has just fallen off. A massive tidal wave is heading for America and will be here within the hour. Emergency aircraft and local military bases are aiding citizens out of the area. In this time, we need cooperation from everyone. I will be holding another conference later to go into more detail on the situation."

"Kyle let's go! We have to get to the base! Don't bring anything, just get into the car!" my dad barks. At this time, there's no way I am going to question him. We all pile into the car and drive to the base. The closest one is Westover Air Force Base. It is ten miles away. About three miles along the way, the traffic gets heavy. "Screw this." My dad says as he drives off the side of the road. The Ford Explorer we have easily goes over the curb as we make our way to the base off-road. We are two miles away and we hit a blockade. The police won't let our vehicle through. My dad instructs us to get out and run. I look at the clock in the car and it says 4:13. My mom, brother, and I run toward the base as my dad argues with the cop. "I'll see you soon!" he yells. We reach the base and board a nearby plane. Five minutes later, we take off and head south. More planes get off the ground and all of a sudden, I see a massive tidal wave sweep over the land where I stood seven minutes ago.

"Is dad ok?" my brother asks.

"I don't know. I hope so." I tell him.

“Of course he is.” my mother snaps. “He must have gotten on a later plane.” I look down on the city I called home as water rushed below engulfing where my home used to be. My brother begins to cry. He’s eight, so it is understandable. Even though I am seventeen, I want to cry. My friends, my father, my home. I don’t know if I will ever see any of them again.

We land in Western Virginia, nearly 2 hours later. There are security and emergency personnel all over the airport. The news is waiting outside. My family desperately looks for my father. As we scour the airport, I think I see my father’s face. I run toward it, but I find out that it isn’t him. My mom calls my dad’s brother on her cell phone. After she finishes her conversation, she comes over to me and tells me, “Your uncle Tony is on his way to pick us up. He should be here in about an hour and a half.”

“Did you find dad yet?” I ask her.

“I haven’t seen him, but I’m sure he’s on his way. Don’t worry, he’ll be fine.” she says in a reassuring manner. An hour and a half pass and still no sign of my uncle. My mom calls him again. “He says he is in traffic and will be another fifteen minutes. Have either of you two seen your father yet?”

“Not yet mom.” I say

“Nope.”, says my brother.

My uncle shows up and brings us to his house in Western North Carolina. He drives a Chevy powered by hydrogen fuel cells. He believes in using alternative energy. We didn’t want to leave the airport, but we figured that when he landed, he would call. When we get to his house, we see that he has solar panels in his back yard.

“Those solar panels give me all of my electricity for free. They heat my water and run my appliances. You see, there’s no need to pay for oil when the sun provides all of the energy that we need. People are just too dumb to realize it.”

That night, we are all watching the news to try to understand what was happening. At 10 o’clock, the news comes on. All of us listen intently to what the reporter says.

“At 3:15pm today, the arctic icecap fell into the ocean causing a massive tidal wave which flooded most of Canada and the Northern United States. This has been the worst natural disaster since the meteor impact that caused the ice age. Millions are dead and many more are missing. Much of the water has made its way to the ocean. However, low areas of the Northern U. S. are still flooded, and the ocean levels have increased by 11 feet so far. Our coastal land has been submerged. The ocean has reached in about ten miles. Those who have escaped are now homeless. This is a terrible time in our world’s history. ‘What caused this?’ you might ask. We turn to our weather expert Bill Richardson for an answer, Bill.”

“Well as you may know, the burning of fossil fuels releases a great amount of carbon into our atmosphere. The carbon reacts in our atmosphere and carbon dioxide is made. This carbon dioxide traps heat in the earth causing the increasingly hot days and warmer summers. This is known as the greenhouse effect. Over the years, a lot of carbon dioxide has built up in the air. As the planet warms up, the polar ice caps in the north and south of our planet begin to melt. Finally, we have reached the point where the northern ice cap melted enough to slide off into the ocean. The ice cap that fell in today caused a massive displacement of water resulting in a tidal wave that was able to travel thousands of miles. At one point, the water was over 120 feet high. Unfortunately, it fell toward us instead of toward the Atlantic Ocean. Had it fallen into the Atlantic, the damage would have been far less severe. The ice cap is now located on the islands of Northern Canada.

Now, this will have a greater impact than we have seen today. All of the fresh water from the ice cap is now in the salt water ocean. The aquatic life in the ocean needs a certain level of salt in order to survive. As the ice cap that is in the ocean melts, the salt concentration of the ocean will decrease. How much it will decrease, we can not say for certain. Also, the massive rush of water caused erosion of the land it passed over. As the water runs off into the ocean, it will take the soil with it. The added soil in the ocean will also have a hand in killing some aquatic life. We estimate that the combination of added salt and soil will kill at least 35 percent of ocean life in the ocean during the next 20 years.

We must become more reliant on alternative renewable energy. If we do not, the same thing will happen to the ice cap in the south. If that ice cap falls into the ocean, it will raise ocean levels an additional 30 feet and cause a tidal wave so large, it will reach as far north as Brazil and Central Africa as well as Australia depending on the direction the ice cap falls. Back to you Kate.”

“Thank you Bill. We will report more details as they become available.”

“Well that sucks,” My uncle says. “You guys can stay here as long as you need.”

“Thanks Tony,” My mom tells him. “Oh, hi Linda.” My aunt walks in.

“Sorry, I just got back from work. How are you guys holding up?” my aunt asks.

“We’re alright; I just wish I knew my dad was ok.” I say.

“I’m sure he is.” She says.

Five Years Later

Now I’m a senior at The University of North Carolina. It’s February 17th, 2043, ten days after my birthday. We never heard from my dad. After a year, we accepted the fact that he didn’t make it. My mom and brother moved into a house near my uncle. The world has

changed a lot in the last five years. You see, even before “The Great Wave”, alternative energy was being researched and developed. There are a few wind farms one of the largest being off of Cape Cod in Massachusetts. It had to be rebuilt after “The Great Wave” having been destroyed by the rushing waters. Hydroelectric power plants had been running for over a hundred years. Major ones in Canada and the Northern United States had to be rebuilt or repaired. Photovoltaic cells had been developed to an extent.

The president was re-elected on a campaign based on the production of alternative energy. Programs were put into effect similar to those during the 1973 oil embargo. Grants were issued to those who had promising ideas; many more cars were produced that ran on electricity and hydrogen fuel cells, and oil consumption in the United States dropped by 40 percent. This was possible mostly due to the warmer winters needing less oil to provide heat and the manufacturing of cars run on alternative energy. Wind farms have been constructed offshore in more than ten countries including the United States, Japan, Spain, France, and China. More are on the way. New hydroelectric power plants have been constructed to replace the irreparably damaged ones in Canada and the United States. A lot more effort has been made to improve the efficiency of solar cells and panels. The process to purify the silicon had been greatly improved. Now it is cheaper to manufacture the solar cells, making them cheaper for the public and therefore, more commonly used. The cells themselves have become more efficient. They are now three times as effective as they were five years ago.

In order to have the funds to research alternative energy, the United Nations passed a law limiting the funds that could be used for research in offensive technology and nuclear research. In the United States, taxes were raised to generate further funds, but nobody minded too much given what had happened. Independent companies, such as Exxon-Mobil, have been responsible for some of the furthest advancements in alternative energy technology. They were able to finance many improvements in transportation technology. They have developed efficient hydrogen fuel cells for cars and recharge stations for those cells.

Where my day began five years ago, I woke up, took a shower and got dressed. Then I eat breakfast and drive to school in my gas powered Chevy. I learn in my oil heated school and go to my job as a member of the rides operation crew at an amusement park. After work, I got to go my home, which was heated by oil, eat dinner, and sleep. Now, I get to wake up, take my shower and get dressed, and eat breakfast like normal. However, now I drive a hydrogen fuel cell Chevy to college. The college is a little cooler than high school since it is powered by solar energy. I take four classes a week and work part-time at an energy development company. Right now I am working with a team to make the purification of silicon even more efficient. I plan to run the company in about twelve years. After about five hours of work, I go back to my dorm which is powered by solar energy as well as hydroelectric power. My roommate usually is there, and we usually go out for a while. On occasion we go visit Florida since it isn't that far.

There are four maglev lines that run across the country. They travel at about 400 miles per hour. They run through the big cities like San Francisco, Las Angeles, Dallas, and Miami. The northern half of the U. S. was drained out of water. There are a few new lakes named after cities that couldn't be restored. Boston is still being worked on as well as Chicago, New York City, and Buffalo. I want to return to where I lived someday, but for now, I have to concentrate on what I have going for me now. Every time a political debate comes on, one of the major topics is the development of alternative energy and transportation. Everyone at my college pays close attention to them because they will directly affect us in the near future.

Now, there are certain things that we can and cannot eat anymore. Due to the fresh water that has been dumped into the oceans, certain aquatic life has died out. The latest study has shown that the aquatic population has already dropped by seven percent. This has caused new laws to be enacted to preserve species of fish that live in the ocean. Needless to say, not many people eat a lot of seafood right now. Also, for a year after "The Great Wave", almost all food was in very short supply. The flooding destroyed many crops and killed a lot of livestock. In the last five years, the U. S. has recovered 85 percent of the land that was covered by water. The other fifteen was coastline that was submerged and deep valley land that could not be drained. Although the land was recovered, it doesn't mean that the land was right for growing food. Some of the salt from the ocean was left in the land. What was determined to be the best land had the top layer scraped off so that crops could grow. It would be two years before the food supply was able to sustain the population comfortably.

There are new classes that have been made to help this generation continue the transition to alternative energy. I have looked at other colleges offering engineering programs that focus on alternative energy, but I decided to stay here for the business and management classes. History teaches about the 20th century when we began the rapid process that led to "The Great Wave", and about how our dependence on oil and other fossil fuels destroyed our atmosphere causing the ice cap to fall. They are drilling this into our heads to make sure that we do not fall back into the trap of convenient energy. They try to help survivors the best they can. I was able to go to college for free. When I applied for my job at the energy development company, they accepted me because of the fact I was a survivor and that I was a person who wanted these changes more than anyone. I figured it would be a good way to make my dad's sacrifice worth while.

My girlfriend is the same way. Her name is Karen and she's from New York. She actually lost her whole family. She told me that she was at her friend's house when she got the news about the wave. We met in college in our alternative energy research class. I found it ironic when she told me that her dad was one of the scientists that was telling everyone about the effects of our prolonged use of fossil fuel, and he died as a result. We helped each other through that ordeal. She works with me in the company and now we're making a difference. One day, our company will be responsible for the next great advancement in alternative energy technology.

Afterward

The main idea of the tragedy that took place came from an article that I read in Time Magazine. I read that the ice caps could fall off of the poles and into the ocean. I took that idea and ran with it. I felt that introducing the problem with a natural disaster would be a good hook. I may have exaggerated with the effects of the ice cap, but I needed to in order to progress my story and have it make sense. While the story zeros in on the life of one character, it addresses problems on a national and possibly global scale. The government wouldn't address this issue so swiftly without such an event taking place and possibly another on the horizon. The food shortages and flooding were issues that had to be dealt with, but they had to take a back seat to the need to develop alternative forms of energy. Without energy, it would be difficult to address the other problems caused by the ice cap falling off. I thought of the title for the story from the guidelines for this contest. The story had to show life afterward so I reflected that idea in the title.