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### A Stormy Memory

WHACK!

“What was that?” she asked in a startled voice.

I answered my wife saying, “I’ll get it babe, it’s just the door that swung open.”

The little patio on the side of the house isn’t anything impressive. It’s only about eight by twelve feet. It has two wrought iron doors, one to the front of the house, and the other to the backyard. Sometimes I wonder why we even still have the back door on it since we keep it open all the time. However, if the chain that holds it open gets knocked off, the wind slams it back and forth. The house sits up on the eastern slope of the Franklin Mountains; there is a narrow but nice view of the city from the patio, yet most of the time it goes unnoticed.

It could very well be a day in late July, the date doesn’t really matter though. The important thing is what happens as clouds start to build on those hot summer afternoons. They seem to puff up and clump together and look like cotton balls dropped onto a glass table. At that point things still go on as normal and chores continue to be done around the house. The moment things being to change is when the first faint rumble is heard from off in the distance. That takes me back to when I was a child and storms would roll in. I used to call out to my mom, “Mom, I think it’s gonna rain!” That sound of the soft rolling thunder still draws my attention and my curiosity pulls me over to the flower bed. I like to stand on the edge on my tippy toes,

as this seems to help enhance my vision. I enjoy studying the transformations in the sky. What were once drifting puffs of white start to turn into swirling, churning towers of grey with cauliflower tops. Then staring right back at me at that moment is a desert thunderstorm.

As anyone who's grown up in a desert knows, the telltale sign that a storm is close by is the wonderful scent it brings. The smell is only that of wet dirt, but the sensation it evokes is much more complex. When I get the first whiff of rain, I always take a moment to breathe deeply and savor the calming and refreshing the experience. For some reason, it seems to open up my lungs and leave me with a subtle smile.

That patio on the side of the house is simple and not anything very impressive, but during thunderstorms it becomes so much more. Its small size is perfect because, when standing in the middle, we have the perfect vantage point. To the west and south are the mountains, and to the east, looking down into the Hueco Bolson, is the view of the city. Around the three sides of the patio are wrought iron bars, and screwed onto those is a metal mesh like a kitchen strainer is made from. To many, the mesh might not seem important, but it is to me because even during a storm when the wind starts to blow the rain sideways, inside that little patio we are protected and able to watch the whole theatrics of a thunderstorm while staying dry.

Those memories of standing on the patio with my mom and saying to each other, "Wow! Look at how much rain is coming down! I can't even see the end of the street!" are ones I will always remember when it rains. My mom's support for my enthusiasm for weather is what helped me learn so much about atmospheric science. It's only a hobby, but my mom was always amazed to hear the details I would tell her about storms and how they form and

develop. Now my mom remarried and moved to San Diego with my stepdad, and the house belongs to me. My wife and two dogs now live in that house and that perfect, little thunderstorm look-out patio is still a part of my life.

Even though I have grown up I still enjoy watching storms. I get excited when I'm able to see the lightning shows that flash like giant strobe lights throughout the desert. There is also a thrill of knowing that when a bolt of lightning is especially bright it means it's very close. It's like a suspense movie; we'll see the bright flash then brace ourselves for the powerful and monstrous boom that shortly follows. The joy I used to share with my mother when we would get hit in the chest with the thunderous shockwave is a joy I am now able to share with my wife. She too jumps up and down when we get one of the exceptionally loud sonic-booms go off nearby, as if we just scored tickets to the best show in town. My wife also likes to count the seconds between seeing the lightning and hearing the thunder then letting me know how far away that one was (5 seconds equals 1 mile).

Even though it's just a patio, that is where the childhood wonder was nourished into an adulthood understanding and appreciation of the marvels of mother nature. It's also where I once hugged my mom and smiled as we were sprinkled with the cool mist from the life-giving rain and dazzled by nature's firework display. I now hug my wife and share the same awe as I did when I was a kid. I hope that one day I am able to hug my child under that same patio and pass onto them the special feeling of a desert thunderstorm.