

Musings on the Wind

By [Bill Corden](#) (April 2024)



Wind Beaten Tree, Vincent van Gogh, 1883

The Dust Devil

We were driving back from Moab to Vancouver through the desert landscape. The freeway cuts through it just past Provo, Utah.

Blue sky, a little bit blustery, with that Dodge Grand Caravan we were in getting rocked and buffeted quite heavily in the more open sections.

Mountains as a shimmering backdrop and red, red sandy fields as far as the eye could see. How they could grow crops or feed cattle on this rocky arid plateau I don't know, but there they

were, doing it.

Off at a distance of a couple of hundred yards there were a few dust devils forming and dissipating as we drove along, but one suddenly appeared about 200 feet off the roadside and it was quite a bit bigger than all of the others.

We're all watching it in fascination as it snaked its way across the field and began to look more powerful, almost like a miniature tornado although it was only about 15 feet high and maybe 10 feet across.

It was like a malevolent spirit as it danced towards us but it didn't really give us any cause for concern, we were travelling at 55 mph going away from it, so the chances of us coming face to face were just not there.

Then, as if it was locked on to our van by some magnetic force, it made a beeline for the freeway and aimed itself right at us. Again we weren't too bothered, "It's just a dust devil" said Les, our partner in crime.

Then it hit us on the front right side of the vehicle, it hit us with such a force that it almost blew us off the road, a mighty bang and rocks and stones hammering and peppering along the side.

In a second it was gone.

Not too much damage, some pebbledash dents in the side but no broken glass or windshield.

A minor incident you might think, but it gave us all an idea of what might happen if you got into a full scale tornado. Just a little bit more intensity in the one we encountered would have lifted the vehicle in the air at that aforementioned 55 mph and I wouldn't be here to tell you the story.

Floating on the Breeze

My friend had passed away some months previous and it so happened that I was visiting Montreal on a convention with my daughter, we were a long way from Vancouver.

Coming to terms with his early death was still a work in progress, my daughter knew him well and he had helped her move apartments a few times.

He was a wizard with woodwork and had made her quite a few household items. He made things like picture frames and shelving units and desks, so she had very affectionate memories of him, not the least of which was the fact that he fabricated a small coffin for the cat she had loved so dearly and recently lost.

During a break in the convention we decided to take a walk, just the two of us, into a wooded area, there was not another soul around. The trees that arched overhead of us were losing their leaves like falling rain and there was a brisk breeze blowing, swirling them up in a beehive shape.

We had been walking about twenty minutes along a gravel path when we came to a short and sharp hill. The breeze died down for a moment and then, suddenly, it kicked up a pile of leaves, about 50 feet away, that rolled down the slope towards us. The skipping leaves and twigs came right at us shaped like a living entity and then, with about a foot to go before it hit us, it stopped, did a ninety degree turn and scuttled down the rest of the slope.

The very moment it stopped and headed away, we both said the exact same word at the exact same time.

“Les!”.

Les was our recently deceased friend and the very same Les who was in the van with us when we got hit by the dust devil.

Wind Assisted

We were training for the Vancouver Marathon, the year of the great Expo 86 when the world found out who we were.

Marathon training is a very, very hard discipline and you can't take a day off just because it's cold or it's raining or even snowing. You just get bundled up and do what you have to do.

The weather in Vancouver in late February or early March isn't anywhere near as vicious as the weather in the East but it can get wet and cold and windy, very windy indeed at times.

The opening scene is the change room at the local YMCA, we've all got layered up, toques, scarves, double socks, gortex everything and a hell of a long run in front of us. In fact it's one of the longest training runs we will do before the main event. We're all in pretty good shape and nothing's going to stop us, nothing man-made that is.

It's a clear blue sky with high white clouds racing across, these racing clouds being something we should have taken notice of.

Our route-master had measured out the route we were to take, some 20 miles round trip or about 3 hours of running for most. But our route-master had just had oversized tires installed on his truck, tires that threw off the odometer. That mistake will come into play later in our story.

His name was Tony and he was the spitting image of Crocodile Dundee with a smile and a personality to match.

We all start out at a healthy clip, there's about twenty of us, everybody loping along easily through the streets of the city and out into the more open suburbs, nobody was suffering and we ate up the miles at an astounding pace. Occasionally we

would notice that pieces of paper and litter were being blown in front of us as we ran but nobody gave a second thought as to what was driving it.

We had a couple of spotters on bikes riding along to make sure there was help if anybody got injured and one of them came up and told us, the lead group, we were making astonishing time, something like 5 minute miles for mile after mile. Still, none of us were feeling any pain and we just put it down to the fantasy that we were all finely trained athletes.

This is where I tell you that it was an out-and-back-route, this is where I tell you that our mad route-master had undermeasured the distance by a full 5 miles, this is where I tell you that we turned homeward into the teeth of the gale force wind that had been blowing us along at National Championship pace. We had $12\frac{1}{2}$ miles to get back home!

The pain, the anguish, the absolute exhaustion! We fell like ninepins running against what seemed like a solid wall of wind and rain (for the sky had turned thunderous black by this time). The support wagon, driven by our devil-may-care Tony, had gone straight back to the start after seeing how his protectorate was faring so well on the outward leg.

It was so difficult that I actually cried at the roadside for allowing myself to get in such a miserable, wet, cold and completely spent condition. No drivers stopped to see what was wrong with runner after runner sitting helpless, wet and forlorn at intervals along the route.

“Just crazy runners,” they must have thought.

Somehow or other word got back to the YMCA and somehow or other help was sent out to pick us all up like so much flotsam and jetsam. I will remember for the rest of my being, the ecstasy of dipping into that hot tub in the Y.

No recriminations for our prince-of-a-guy Tony, it was an

unwitting mistake and could have happened to any of us. And anyways he was the type of guy you just couldn't help but adore.

Six weeks later we lined up at the start of the Vancouver Marathon, each and every one of us finished the job and the afterparty was an event that bound us together for a lifetime..

Remember, the wind is your friend as long as you're running with it.

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