

THE STORAGE WARRIOR

A FEW YEARS AGO I ACQUIRED A LARGE AMOUNT OF MONEY OFF OF SOME RARE ITEMS I SOLD FROM A LOCKER I BOUGHT AT MY FIRST AUCTION. IT WAS THE BIGGEST RETURN ANYONE IN OUR SPORT HAS EVER SAW BY SOMEONE ON THERE FIRST DAY. ALTHOUGH TODAY WITH THE TRAVELLING COSTS AND MY NEWLY OBTAINED LAVISH LIFESTYLE, I'VE SPENT MOST OF IT.

IT TAKES BUYING MORE UNITS IN ORDER TO MAKE MONEY IN THIS INDUSTRY. I'M AS LOUD AS THE REST OF THE CROWD BUT IT SEEMS I GET OUTBID BY AT LEAST ONE DOLLAR ON EVERY UNIT I REALLY WANT NOWADAYS. THE WORST PERSON TO DO THIS TO ME WAS GERARD, HE HAD TO MAKE SURE I DIDN'T GET ANY LOCKERS. HE BECAME MY NEMESIS EVER SINCE THAT VERY FIRST AUCTION BECAUSE IT WAS HIS RECORD THAT I BROKE AND HE NEVER LIKED IT. EVEN THOUGH I LOVE THIS PLACE I HATED HIM AND IT MADE ME ALMOST HATE THIS PLACE.

HE DIDN'T CARE IF HE SPENT HIS ENTIRE LIFE'S FORTUNE ON OUTBIDDING ME AND SOMETIMES I'D USE THAT TO MY ADVANTAGE. I'D BID ON WHAT I THOUGHT WAS GARBAGE SO HE ENDED UP GETTING WORTHLESS JUNK FOR BIG MONEY. HE JUST DIDN'T WANT ME TO SCORE A LOCKER LIKE THE ONE I WAS DESCRIBING EARLIER. BACK THEN I WAS JUST ANOTHER FACE IN THE CROWD SO IT WAS EASY TO GET A UNIT AND STAY BELOW THE RADAR BUT NOT ANYMORE, EVERYONE KNOWS ME.

GERARD HAS SPENT TENS OF THOUSANDS TRYING TO OUTSMART ME, SO IN A WAY HAVEN'T I WON ALREADY? I THINK SO.

I WOKE UP ON THE MORNING OF THE WILLIAMSON AUCTION IN A MOOD LIKE I WAS GOING TO NOT ONLY UPSET GERARD, BUT SCORE ANOTHER UNIT THAT WOULD CHANGE MY LIFE FOREVER. I WAS EITHER GOING TO SCORE BIG OR BID THE LAST OF MY MONEY IN HOPES TO GIVE GERARD ONE LAST UPSET BEFORE I WAS TOO BROKE TO BID. IF ONLY WE KNEW THAT THINGS WOULD NOT GO AS PLANNED... NOT AT ALL.

WHEN I SHOWED UP TO THE YARD I SAW THE FAMILIAR CROWD OF PEOPLE. EVEN THOUGH I WAS SAYING HELLO, INSIDE I HAD A BAD FEELING IT WOULD BE MY LAST TIME SAYING IT TO THEM. WHEN THE AUCTIONEER STARTED YELLING THE RULES AND DECLARING THE UNITS UP FOR GRABS, I DIDN'T SEE GERARD ANYWHERE AND WONDERED IF HE WAS GOING TO SHOW UP AT ALL. I THOUGHT HE WAS A NO SHOW UNTIL I HEARD THE RAMBLING OF GERARD COMPLAINING ABOUT TRAFFIC. HE SAID THAT I WAS GOING DOWN BECAUSE OF HIS SECRET WEAPON AND PATTED HIS CHEST POCKET. HE HAD THE GRINCHIEST GRIN ON HIS FACE WHEN HE SAID THIS. I'VE HAD ENOUGH EXPERIENCE WITH HIM TO KNOW THAT'S HIS MONEY POCKET, EVEN BEFORE HE PULLED OUT THE HALF FOLDED STACK OF CASH.

IT WAS AT LEAST TRIPLE WHAT I HAD BUT MINE WAS THE LAST OF MY MONEY SO IT FELT A LITTLE MORE IMPORTANT. I WAS A LITTLE WORRIED THAT HE WAS GOING TO SQUASH ME AND MY STACK INTO THE GROUND, THEN MY LEGACY IN THIS STORAGE WARRIORS COMPETITION WOULD'VE BEEN DONE. ALL I'D HAVE TO SHOW FOR IT WAS ONE REALLY GOOD SCORE AND THE STORIES GERARD WILL TELL OF HIM NOT LETTING ME WIN EVER SINCE.

I COULDN'T LET HIM SHOW ME UP SO I WAS GOING TO BET SMART AND ONLY ON PROFITABLE UNITS. WHEN WE GOT TO THE FIRST UNIT THE AUCTIONEER SAID IT BELONGED TO A SCHOOL TEACHER, I SAW IT ONLY HAD SOME OLD DESKS AND CHALKBOARDS SO I DIDN'T BID ON IT BUT NEITHER DID GERARD. THE SECOND BELONGED TO A COACH OR FOOTBALL FAN BECAUSE IT HAD A LOT OF GYM EQUIPMENT. I TRIED TO BID ON IT BUT GERARD WAS RIGHT THERE AND BID A THOUSAND OVER WHAT I DID RIGHT AWAY SO I DIDN'T EVEN TRY. THE THIRD LOCKER OF THE DAY I DID WANT, IT HAD A WHOLE BUNCH OF BOXES AND BAGS, AND IN THIS INDUSTRY, BAGS AND BOXES ARE ALWAYS GOOD BECAUSE OF THE MYSTERIOUSNESS OF THEIR CONTENTS.

I TRIED TO BID BUT IT SEEMED THAT GERARD WANTED TO MAKE SURE I DIDN'T GET IT, HE WAS SO BUSY FOCUSING ON ME AND GLOATING HE DIDN'T NOTICE A WOMAN BEHIND HIM BID ON IT. WHEN THE AUCTIONEER YELLED SOLD HE THOUGHT IT WAS TO HIM BUT QUICKLY REALIZED WHAT HAPPENED AND GOT A LITTLE MAD. WHEN WE GOT TO THE SECOND LAST UNIT OF THE DAY AND I

WENT TO LOOK, IN GERARD TOLD ME HE'D SPEND THE WHOLE STACK JUST TO MAKE SURE I DIDN'T GET THIS UNIT. I KNEW THAT BIDDING ON THIS ONE WAS USELESS BUT I FIGURED HE WAS GOING TO OUTBID ME ANYWAYS SO I MIGHT AS WELL HAVE MADE HIM PAY A LOT MORE FOR THIS VICTORY.

GERARD STARTED WITH A HUGE OPENING BID SO I MATCHED IT AND WE WENT INTO A LITTLE BIDDING WAR BACK AND FORTH, EVERY TIME I SAID A NUMBER HE WENT JUST A LITTLE HIGHER. WHEN ALMOST ALL OF MY MONEY WAS INVESTED HE STOPPED BIDDING AND STARTED LAUGHING AT ME, NOW ALL OF A SUDDEN I WAS SIX THOUSAND DOLLARS DEEP INTO A UNIT THAT LOOKED LIKE IT WAS FULL OF OLD BLANKETS AND SHEETS.

I WAS TICKED OFF BUT I DIDN'T LET IT SHOW I JUST MADE HIM THINK THAT I REALLY WANTED THIS UNIT BUT HIS LITTLE GRINCHY SMILE DROVE ME INSANE. HE STOOD RIGHT IN MY FACE AND STARTED YELLING AND HIS VOICE ALONE MADE ME IRRITATED BUT NOW I HAD SPIT ALL OVER MY FACE, I WAS IRATE. HE PUSHED ME SO I JUMPED FORWARD AND TACKLED HIM BEFORE THE LARGE CROWD PULLED US OFF EACH OTHER. WE WOULD'VE BEEN KICKED OUT IF IT WASN'T ALREADY THE LAST LOCKER OF THE DAY. IF WE AGREED TO STAY SEPARATED WE COULD BID ON THE LAST UNIT.

HE OPENED THE DOOR TO THE UNIT AND I COULD SEE A LOT OF THINGS THAT I REALLY WANTED, LIKE COLLECTABLE SIGNS AND SOME GADGETS THAT LOOKED TO BE WORTH A FORTUNE. I ALMOST WISHED I HADN'T BID ON THE LAST UNIT NOW. GERARD COULD TELL I WANTED IT AND KEPT OUTBIDDING ME. I WENT ALL IN, JUST AS THE AUCTIONEER SAID LAST CALL GERARD BET ONE DOLLAR MORE THAN I HAD. I HATED HIM ALREADY BUT WHEN I TURNED AROUND AND SAW THE VICTORY DANCE HE WAS DOING, I VOWED ONCE I CLEANED OUT MY UNIT OUT I'D NEVER SEE HIS FACE AGAIN BECAUSE I WAS DONE AUCTIONING.

WHEN I WENT TO MY LOCKER AND OPENED THE DOOR A LOT OF THINGS HAPPENED ALL AT ONCE. I HEARD A REALLY LOUD BANG INFUSED WITH THE SOUND OF SCREAMING AND SUDDENLY I WAS THROWN FORWARD ONTO MY STOMACH. WHEN I LOOKED BACK ALL I SAW WAS SMOKE AND CHAOS. I DIDN'T LOOK IN MY UNIT INSTEAD I STARTED STAGGERING THROUGH THE SMOKE AND I COULD SEE PEOPLE RUSHING AROUND. THE FIRST THING I SAW WAS SOMEONE

LYING MOTIONLESS ON THE GROUND AND SOMEONE ELSE HOLDING THEIR ARM, OR WHAT WAS LEFT OF IT... THAT'S WHEN I KNEW SOMETHING SERIOUS HAD JUST HAPPENED.

WHEN I SAW JACK, WHO WAS THE AUCTIONEER THAT DAY, HE SAID THERE MUST HAVE BEEN SOME KIND OF SECURITY SYSTEM ON THE UNIT. AS SOON AS HE SAW GERARD MOVE THE FIRST TARP, IT WAS JUST BLINDING LIGHT AND A LOUD BANG... THAT'S WHEN I SAW GERARD LYING ON THE GROUND AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO ME BUT I RUSHED OVER TO HIM BUT I COULDN'T TELL WHETHER HE WAS ALIVE OR DEAD. I TRIED TO HELP BUT HE JUST WOULDN'T RESPOND AND I COULDN'T BELIEVE HOW SADDENED I WAS FOR A MAN I HATED ONLY MINUTES BEFOREHAND, I FELT DEVASTATED.

WHEN ALL THE CHAOS STARTED TO SUBSIDE AND THE INJURED WERE BEING TAKEN TO THE HOSPITAL THAT'S WHEN I LOOKED IN THE UNIT THAT GERARD BEAT ME TO BUYING; THE ONE I REALLY WANTED. THERE WAS NOTHING LEFT BUT A BIG PILE OF RUBBLE AND THAT'S THE FIRST TIME I WONDERED WHAT WOULD'VE HAPPENED IF I HAD WON THAT UNIT, IT WOULD'VE BEEN ME WHO MOVED THE TARP. IT WAS AN UNSETTLING THOUGHT BUT ONE I COULDN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT.

I WANTED TO MAKE SURE GERARD WAS ALRIGHT BECAUSE WHEN SOMETHING LIKE THIS HAPPENS TO ANYONE, ENEMY OR FRIEND, IT MAY CHANGE HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT THINGS. WHEN I ARRIVED AT THE HOSPITAL I FOUND OUT THAT HE HAD PASSED AWAY BACK AT THE STORAGE LOT ALMOST INSTANTLY AFTER THE EXPLOSION. MY HEART SUNK BECAUSE I HATED THE GUY BUT I NEVER WANTED SOMETHING LIKE THIS TO HAPPEN TO HIM. I THINK IN SOME SMALL WAY HE HAD SAVED MY LIFE THAT DAY BY OUT BIDDING ME.

AT THE NEXT AUCTION I BID ON THE FIRST UNIT AND A SKINNY GUY TO MY RIGHT ADDED AN EXTRA TEN BUVKS, I ADDED TWENTY AND NO ONE CALLED BACK. I HAD BOUGHT A FULL UNIT FOR ONLY \$175.

I DIDN'T EVEN FEEL LIKE BIDDING HALF THE TIME BECAUSE EVERY TIME I WOULD NO ONE WOULD BE THERE TELLING ME THAT I WAS GOING TO LOSE, I HAD NO REAL COMPETITION SO IT BECAME TOO BORING. I HAD NEVER

UNDERSTOOD WHAT GERARD MEANT TO ME UNTIL HE WAS GONE AND AUCTIONING WAS NEVER THE SAME AGAIN.

I THOUGHT I LOVED BIDDING ON UNITS AND HATED HIM BUT I THINK I LOVED COMING TO COMPETE AGAINST GERARD MORE THAN OBTAINING UNITS.

I DIDN'T BID ON A SINGLE UNIT AFTER I WON THE FIRST ONE, IT WASN'T ABOUT THE QUALITY BUT I THINK I WANTED TO ARGUE WITH GERARD. I EVEN LEFT HALF WAY THROUGH THE AUCTION. WHEN I WAS APPROACHING THE EXIT JACK CALLED OVER TO ME. I SAID MY GOODBYES AND HE UNDERSTOOD WHY I WANTED TO LEAVE BUT HE REMINDED ME OF THE UNIT I BOUGHT THE OTHER DAY, IT WAS STILL FULL. USUALLY I'D HAVE TO EMPTY IT BY THE END OF THE DAY BUT BECAUSE OF THE EXPLOSION THINGS HAVE BEEN A LITTLE MORE RELAXED IN TERMS OF THE REGULATIONS.

I DIDN'T WANT TO SEE IT BUT BECAUSE I WAS LEGALLY RESPONSIBLE TO CLEAN IT, AND THE FACT THAT I SPENT THOUSANDS ON IT, I THOUGHT I MIGHT AS WELL CHECK IT OUT. THE UNIT WAS FULL OF JUNK AND WITH EVERY NEW PIECE OF GARBAGE I THREW OUT I FELT LIKE I HEARD GERARD TAUNTING ME. USUALLY THAT WOULD ANNOY ME BUT TODAY IT ACTUALLY FELT BETTER BECAUSE IF IT WASN'T FOR THIS LOUSY UNIT OR GERARD TRYING TO BEAT ME I WOULDN'T BE ALIVE TODAY.

INSIDE THE UNIT THERE ENDED UP BEING A COUPLE PAIRS OF SHOES AND AN OLD BOOK I COULDN'T SELL, I DIDN'T EVEN MAKE FIVE PERCENT OF MY INVESTMENT. IT DIDN'T MATTER BECAUSE I WAS ALIVE TODAY AND IN A WAY IT WAS BECAUSE OF GERARD SO I SAID A SILENT THANK YOU TO HIM AS I CONTINUED TO EMPTY OUT THE LAST OF THE UNIT. I THOUGHT I WAS FINISHED BUT THERE WAS ONE MORE LITTLE BLANKET IN THE CORNER AND IT HAD SOMETHING UNDER IT.

TODAY IT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT OBJECT IN MY LIFE AND IT SITS ON THE WALL OF MY HOUSE NEXT TO MY LUCKY HAT, AND A PICTURE OF GERRY. I LOOK AT IT EVERY DAY AS A REMINDER OF HOW PRECIOUS OUR LIVES ARE. IT WAS A PAINTING THAT SHOWED FOUR SQUARES SIDE BY SIDE WITH TWO FIGURES STANDING IN ALL OF THEM. YOU COULDN'T TELL WHETHER THEY WERE MALE OR FEMALE, THEY WERE JUST SHADOWS. THEY WERE STANDING SIDE BY

SIDE LOOKING UP AT A WALL THAT ROSE ABOVE THEM AS IF THEY WERE STANDING IN A HOLE. THE PICTURE IN THE SECOND SQUARE SHOWED ONE OF THE SHADOWS HOLDING THE OTHERS FOOT AND HELPING HIM CLIMB THE WALL. THE THIRD PICTURE SHOWS THE SAME SHADOW REACHING DOWN AND GRABBING THE HAND OF THE OTHER AND LIFTING HIM UP.

THE LAST PICTURE SHOWED THE SAME TWO FIGURES STANDING ON TOP OF THE WALL AND DISPLAYED THE CAPTION "WHEN A MUTUAL HARDSHIP IS PRESENTED IT CAN FORCE FRIENDS TO EMERGE FROM ENEMIES".

THIS SENTENCE HIT ME HARD BECAUSE A FEW DAYS AGO I WAS MORE THAN HAPPY TO GET RID OF MY ENEMY BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY BUT NOW THAT IT'S HAPPENED I FEEL AS IF I LOST A DEAR FRIEND INSTEAD. I PAID SIX THOUSAND DOLLARS AND ONLY KEPT THAT PAINTING AND TO ME IT WAS WORTH EVERY PENNY BECAUSE IT REMINDS ME EVERYDAY HOW LUCKY I AM TO BE ALIVE. I THANK GERARD FOR THE SACRIFICE HE MADE WHETHER HE WANTED TO OR NOT, I'M ALIVE TODAY BECAUSE OF HIS ACTIONS. I NEVER KNEW HOW MUCH HE MEANT TO ME UNTIL HE DIED AND I WILL NEVER FORGET GERARD...
THE STORAGE WARRIOR.