

## Many of our Lions are Kitty Cats, but the Peril Remains

Loving music promotes a fringe benefit that is sometimes greater than the listening enjoyment. Wonderful things happen when the memories so easily wrap themselves around a fragment of a composition, the melody, the lyrics, or both.

When I recall short phrases of songs, sacred and secular, I start singing a verse or refrain much to Sandy's chagrin. The church and my faith have been constant factors in my life, and many of these musical memories are from VBS songs. Some I seem to have known forever, but in other instances I can recall a particular time and place where the song blessed me in some unforgettable way.

That's the way it is with an old hymn "Dare to be a Daniel," by Phillip Bliss, one of the most popular hymnists of the nineteenth century. You know how occasionally a song or just the "hook" that you sang years before comes back to you when a word or sound reminds you of the song. You can't get it out of your head.

Somewhere in the first few words I transport myself back to pleasant June mornings in Kingsmill Community Church when I was nine years old. I can feel the texture and smells of the morning air on those first days of summer.

If you had seen our church building, you would wonder why I cherish the memory. The old converted one room school house transformed to the sanctuary. It was painfully simple. Windows along the East wall went from chair level to fifteen feet above the floor. Walls adorned with a picture of a Swedish Jesus knocking at a door, and a board reporting Sunday school statistics and hymn page numbers for the previous and current weeks. Nothing spectacular to say the least.

Vacation Bible School participants were taught the words, given instruments, and told we were "Daniels Band." All seven of us sang to the top of our voice...David was best, Priscilla, Shirley, Gary, Jimmy followed David's lead...then there was Teddy.

I knew all about Daniel. I knew King Nebuchadnezzar, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego...and that terrible fiery furnace. Gerald Robinson would have us "imagineer" the impact of the furnace before focusing on Daniel in the Lion's den.

When Daniel was only a boy, he was carried captive to a strange land. The Babylonians were wise enough to see that some of the young Jewish men had notable potential. Daniel and others were selected for special government service training.

Daniel was appointed to be a leading figure in the Babylonian government. The king had selected three presidents to oversee the kingdom, and Daniel was one of them. In time he became the leader and the most trusted in the group.

Enemies of Daniel crafted a plan to appeal to the king's pride and vanity. They intended to rid him from leadership with a decree for all captives and natives to pray as Darius commanded. Hebrew Scripture tells us Daniel continued to go to his house, get down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God.

With the King's reluctant approval Daniel was thrown into the lions' den. His enemies sealed the entrance with the king's signet ring. King Darius spent a miserable, sleepless night. He was sad about losing his friend and most able public servant.

Early the next morning, at the dawning of the day, Darius rushed to what he thought had been the place of execution. Peering into the den, he found Daniel safe in the midst of the hungry creatures.

Vigor and certainty from all seven VBS participants led to a loud and invigorating rendition of "Dare to be a Daniel," but all of us were naive and had no idea the difficulty of "being a Daniel." Our question, "How difficult would it be to rank among the elite? How frightening seeing ourselves shoved into the Lion's den as punishment for failing to pray as ordered?"

None of the magnificent seven knew how following prayer traditions would be tested. Nor could we know how confusing it would be to determine when and how firm stands should be taken.

The late Rev. Peter Marshall was chaplain of the United States Senate. He once prayed, "*Lord, help us to stand for something lest we fall for anything.*" Let us all stand for loving our neighbors, loving all human beings, as we love ourselves.

Dare to be a Daniel,  
Dare to stand alone! Dare to have a purpose firm!  
Dare to make it known!

For the full story read Daniel 6:1-28

Peace always,  
Ted