BOOM! CRASH! ROAR! The deafening sounds of thunder rolling overhead made our car windows shake as if in fright. I was in the safety of our grey Ford Taurus on the top of Spencer’s Butte, nestled in between the warmth of my mom and dad. That evening had started out like any other night, but unexpectedly turned into a night I would never forget.

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I was just dozing off into a deep deep sleep, when I was awoken to the gentle shaking of my dad. “Wake up sweetie!” he said excitedly. “We have to hurry, or we will miss it.”

“What’s happening? Is it morning?” I asked. But looking out my window I could see the street lamp shining onto the dark sidewalk.

“Grab your blanket, and follow me,” he said.

I was half asleep as he pulled me out of my soft warm bed. I was in my polka dot footie pajamas, except the “footie” part of my pjs were cut off. I was still rubbing my eyes when I glanced up and noticed my mom cradling my baby brother. She had a slight mischievous smile as she walked up to me. “Marla, you are going to love what your dad has planned,” she whispered, as she slipped on her shoes. I noticed that she was also in her pajamas. *Where are we going?* At that moment there was a low rumble above our house.

We all eagerly climbed into the car and started driving toward our unknown destination. The giddiness I felt was exhilarating. I was up past my bedtime! I felt like a grown up! I felt like I could conquer the world!

We winded up the short road to Spencer’s Butte and parked the car. Dad helped me unbuckle myself out of my car seat, and hoisted me up into his strong arms. The rear door was wide open, and we piled into the back seat like sardines and waited. *What were we waiting for?*

That’s when the sky lit up with bright zigzags of light. My heart skipped a beat as I watched the city of Eugene appear and then disappear as if someone had clicked a flashlight on and off. We were so high up! As I gazed into the black night sky clutching my faded yellow blankie, I counted to myself, *One-Mississippi, two-Mississippi, three-Mississip –*. Thunder erupted from every direction. The windows of our car shook.

“That was a big one,” my dad exclaimed. “Did you remember to count?”

“Yep! Not even 3!” I cried out.

“So, the storm is about a half a mile away,” my dad explained. “Let’s see if it’s moving away, or getting closer.”

As I tilted my head up, I saw a childish excitement in my dad’s eyes. It was as if we were sharing a secret, something that just the two of us knew. His enthusiasm was contagious, and I couldn’t wait until another lightning strike hit. That night, we sat shoulder to shoulder peering into the night sky, counting “Mississippis”.

Even now, as an adult, when I hear the rumble of thunder overhead, I think of my dad and our “secret”, and silently count to myself, *One-Mississippi, two-Mississippi*… I wonder if my dad is doing the same thing?