

No Hollywood Ending

by Leon Quan.

As originally published in the Arizona Republic on December 16, 2006

35 year-old James Kim, his wife and two daughters were stranded in the snow for 11 days when they were driving near the Oregon coast on vacation. His family was found safely in their car by rescuers. Kim's body was found 4 days after he set out on foot to find help.

You can't swallow it away; the lump in your throat doesn't just dissolve when you turn your attention elsewhere. There's no double clicking the discomfort away on this one. That's the feeling we're left with upon hearing the news of heroic father James Kim and his tragic surrender to rugged Oregon terrain trying to save his stranded family.

It's almost too resonant. What person can't feel the impending peril of watching your wife and two small children endure nine days of waiting in freezing conditions hoping for rescuers to arrive? His was the only realistic option, brave the weather, and try to find help. The reports have called him a "Hero" and characterized his tenacity as "Superhuman", but that lump in my throat still won't go away.

It's the outcome that's so hard to get over. No matter how we honor Mr. Kim's courage, we're still heart broken by what's left behind. Images of his bravery are shattered by the thought of his children. The brilliance of his actions is dimmed by the reality of his widow. No matter how you spin it, his tale isn't neat and happy like a movie of the week. James Kim's story forces us to dig deeper for a palatable answer. As a father, I can unequivocally say I would do the same thing. All good fathers would. Then it snaps into clarity, *that's* the lesson.

The message that James' life speaks is illuminated by how it galvanizes the everyday lessons we try to impart to our kids. It's hard to strengthen the character of a child when our mundane suburban lives stand in such stark contrast to the action sequences of pop culture's virtueless reality.

The clarion call of today's parents is being drowned out by a culture of media white noise comprised of first person shooters, internet predators, and Super (yet unrealistic) Sweet 16 parties. Ideals like family devotion and sacrifice aren't explored on shows like *Cribs* or *Pimp My Ride*. Kids are becoming "Sims" in a world of high speed, consumerism, and hero-less adventure. James Kim's first step into the snow freezes us, a hero emerges, *enter the dragon*.

James Kim just trumped every kid's complaint about the rules or the curfew or selfish discontent for what they didn't get for Christmas.

It's his sort of nerdy job as an editor of technology web sites, his regular guy pictures of proud dad moments in the delivery room and goofy faces for candid snapshots that endow us with his personal challenge as parents. It's the vulnerability of his station wagon and the quirkiness of his eye glasses that connects us to the inner strength we all hope we possess. It's his steely trek into the snow armed with only health club muscles and Silicon Valley savvy that calls us to search ourselves for those traits we want to project into our children. To embrace these perspectives for this young family's sake is the only way to temper what must be inescapable, unrelenting grief.

Mr. Kim's final statement should be one we all affirm. Not in our minds, I mean literally. Pick up the Kim article in the paper or print it from the computer and make your kid read it. Then tell them "I would do this for you".

Never mind the sarcastic roll of their eyes, the blank "I don't get it" stare, or even the unbearable overcompensating wise crack. James Kim just trumped every kid's complaint about the rules or the curfew or selfish discontent for what they didn't get for Christmas.

He demonstrates the kind of parenthood we all hope to engender. The simplicity of laying his life down for his family helps to crystallize why as parents, we are their final authorities. So with this in mind, take a moment, look at your kids, and think of James Kim. The lump still there?

National motivational specialist and author, Leon Quan has a daily presence on school campuses and in conferences. In 2006, he will speak to more than 70,000 students in Arizona, California, Georgia, Florida, Maryland, North Dakota, Tennessee, Washington and Wyoming. Quan Presentations challenges students to define their lives with clarity and authenticity and is dedicated to helping schools create supportive learning environments.

