



A test of character

It was the last day of 5th grade.

A few students and I were helping some of the teachers collect and shelf books in a storage room where they would sit, quickly forgotten, and swelter through summer vacation until they would be distributed to a new class in the fall.

That's when the warning bells went off. Like most kids, my initial reaction was "not another drill, especially on the last day of school." But our teachers' reactions immediately informed us this was no drill — a tornado was on its way.

We were ushered into an inner hallway where we assumed the position. For those of you who live outside Tornado Alley and have never had the pleasure, let me explain. The tornado position involved crouching with your legs tucked under your body with your head resting between your knees and your hands laced over the back of your neck.

It was extremely uncomfortable, and looking back, had the tornado struck our school, I think the only thing that position would have protected us from was actually seeing the cinder blocks fall on top of us.

But spending an hour or more doing our best impressions of a turtle really took a great deal of joy out of the best day of school.

Our teachers' reactions immediately informed us this was no drill —
a tornado was on its way.

When the storm passed and the danger subsided, we were allowed to go back to our classrooms, gather our things and finally, head home.

Over the years, a few tornado warnings have forced our family to head to the basement. And just last year at GIE+EXPO, the warning bell went off in our hotel room just after we arrived. We were sent to the basement of our hotel for about 20 minutes until the dangerous storms passed through Louisville.

I've been lucky. I've never suffered any damage from one of Mother Nature's most violent creations.

That can't be said for a few of the people we talked with for this month's cover story, "When disaster strikes" (beginning on page 10). We talk with the top executives at four companies that have lived through some of the worst disasters our country has seen.

These companies survived tornadoes, floods and a hurricane and did so with remarkably positive attitudes. The damage inflicted on them varied, but they all faced disruption of services.

It's easy for company owners to treat their employees well during the good times. It shows an extraordinary character to treat them as well as these companies did in times of crisis. Let's just say, were I to ever find myself in need of a job, theirs would be the first doors I would knock on.

In this month of Thanksgiving, these business owners have a little something extra to give thanks for. And, I suspect, they have a much better appreciation for all the things that go into keeping their livelihoods alive.

I hope I never have to go through a tornado or hurricane or flood to appreciate what it is that makes my life complete. Let me start by thanking you for continuing to read this publication. Without you, I wouldn't have a job. Thank you. Now, if you'll permit me, I think I'll go home and hug my family.