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## **CHILDREN'S PAGE STORIES -- 1983**

**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

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Story 1  
HEADSTART ON THE NEW YEAR

Todd swung his feet over the boat dock and tossed his fishing line out into the beautiful blue-green water, keeping an eye on the bright orange and white bobber. He remembered the enormous fish Mr. McDonal had caught. Todd never saw anything like it. Neither did his dad. It had been called a sword fish, or something like that. Mr. McDonal said he caught it deep sea fishing.

Todd grew excited. Just suppose...

"Hi, Todd. I was wondering where you got to." Susie's voice sliced right down the middle of Todd's big daydream fish adventure.

"Aw, Susie," he lamented, "you would have to spoil everything!"

Susie sat down on the little boat dock and dangled her legs over the edge, saying softly, "I'm sorry if I spoiled something nice for you, Todd, but I get so lonesome without Heather and Holly. Don't you miss Burt and Randy and Wayne?"

Todd took his eyes off the gently floating bobber long enough to say, "Don't I miss them? Oh, Susie, what a foolish, stupid and dumb question! Of course, I miss them. That's why I come down here and fish so much... I get so homesick for them that I can hardly stand it. Just think of it; they're having fun in the snow, and., and . . . you and I are sitting out here on the dock in this hot sun it . . . it doesn't!"

Susie sighed. Lifting her head and tilting it slightly, she said, "I guess you shouldn't say that, Todd."

"Say what; that it isn't fair?" "Yes. 'Cause I'm sure the blessed Lord Jesus doesn't want us to feel this way, even though I do miss my friends dreadfully."

Todd kicked the back of his heel against the dock. "I know you're right, Susie. But... well, I GET SO homesick for home that..."

"Home, Todd? This is our home now. At least until all those visas come through; then we'll be going away altogether, to a big, strange land. Does it ever frighten you, Todd?"

"Sort of. Especially when I think about the lions and tigers."

"But God will be right there with us. I know He will. He delivered Daniel and I know He'll take care of us, too." Susie sighed again. Then, switching the subject entirely, she said, "I wonder how the watchnight service will be tonight. I . . . I can hardly bear to think about it without Heather and Holly. They always sat in the same pew with us."

"Yes, I know. And there won't be snow on the ground, either; nor any coats and hats and boots. It just won't seem like a watchnight service, Susie."

"I almost feel like crying," Susie admitted quickly.

"So do I," Todd added, forgetting all about the pretty orange and white bobber and his fishing line.

"Now that's too bad!" a voice exclaimed softly.

"Daddy!" the children cried happily. "When did you get home?"

"A few minutes ago. I missed you so decided to find you. But imagine my surprise at hearing your conversation! My, my! So you think God is dead; that He doesn't come to bless His people in other parts of the country except where you grew up! That's too bad. Too bad, indeed!"

"No! No!" the children cried simultaneously. "God isn't dead; He's alive! We didn't mean that at all."

"But you think God won't be here at all in the New Year's service," Father declared sadly. "Does it take snow and ice and boots and heavy coats to make a God-owned church service and to bring God down among us, Todd?"

"No, Dad; of course, it doesn't. I . . . I didn't mean that."

"Do you suppose God has forsaken us just because we changed climates, Susie?"

"Oh, no, Daddy. Never!"

"I can understand how each of you feels," Father said as he sat down on the dock between the children. "Leaving those we love is indeed painful, and being separated from the ones with whom we've associated all our lives isn't easy. But all of this is a part of life and of growing up. With us, however, there's something far greater and important, and that's the call of God upon your mother's and my hearts. You see, Jesus said that anyone who wasn't willing to forsake houses and lands and relatives and friends for Him and for His cause, just was not worthy of Him."

Susie and Todd nodded knowingly; their Sunday School teacher had made that so clear and plain in her class.

"We are called to go abroad and do missionary work for Jesus," Father continued. "We need brave children to help us, children who know how to pray and to trust God, children who won't feel like they left God back in Pennville, with the beautiful snow and the glitter of winter's ice. Keep those precious memories always; they will help you on the field. But ask God to help you to make a better adjustment than that which you have just displayed."

"Oh, Daddy, I'm sorry!" Susie cried.

"Me, too!" Todd added quickly. "Susie and I will help you and Mother all we can. We'll be good missionaries for Jesus."

"Thank you, Todd, I know you will. Always keep in mind that God is everywhere. He'll come to our watchnight service tonight if you will bring Him with you when you come . . .

"Oh!" Susie exclaimed brightly. "I see what you mean, Daddy; God comes to church when we pray and if we invite Him to come."

Susie jumped to her feet. "I'm going to the house to pray," she announced. "I'm going to tell Jesus that I want to take Him to church with me tonight. He didn't stay back at Pennville; I brought Him to Florida with me . . . in my heart. And He'll go with us to the mission field, too, Todd."

"Say, you're right Susie!" Todd exclaimed, getting to his feet. "And I want to talk to Him, too . . . right now. No need waiting till church time to pray. I'm going to get a head-start on the New Year so I'll be brave and God-like when those visas come through."

Bright tears sparkled in Father's eyes as he watched the children hurry to the house to pray. They'd make good missionaries. Yes, indeed!

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February 1983

Story 2

MINDY WORKS FOR JESUS

Gaff stood inside the window and pressed her tiny nose against the pane. It felt frosty-cold. She liked the feel of it. It made her want to go outside and play. But Grandma had said no, it was too cold. Windy, too. But she did have a pretty red plaid coat, and it kept her warm, she reasoned silently, tracing a picture on the steamed-up window.

She heard children playing in the fast-falling snow outside. Oh, how she did want to join them! "Mindy," she called to her sister, "where are you?, Ask Grandma if we may go "You know Grandma said we can't play outside," Mindy said, coming into the room and answering her little sister's question before she had finished the sentence even.

"Come with me to Grandpa's study; I'm playing school. I'll be the teacher and..."

"And you can teach me how to count to one hundred, Mindy!" Gaff exclaimed, laughing and leaving the window to follow her sister. For a long, long time, the two forgot about the snow and the merry little voices outside. Over and over, again and again, Mindy said, "Pay attention, Gaff; you're not thinking. Now, try it again ... thirty-eight, thirty-nine, forty. "Thirty-eight, thirty-nine, forty," Gaff parroted gleefully. "Are we almost at one hundred, Mindy?" she asked quickly.

"Cause I'm getting tired sitting on this wastebasket. It hurts me."

"Here," Mindy exclaimed brightly. "I'll get a pillow to put on top of it so it will be more comfortable." And away she dashed to the sofa after a soft, brightly-colored pillow. Gaff sighed with relief.

"There!" Mindy said triumphantly, placing the soft throw pillow on top of the ridged, upside-down wastebasket. "Better?" she asked of her once-more-seated pupil. Gaff wiggled around on the pillow; then, giving it a gentle pat, she declared, "It's better. Are we almost to one hundred now?"

Positioning her hands on her slender, tiny hips, Mindy chided, "You'll never learn, Gaff! I am the teacher and, no, we're not almost to one hundred. In fact, we're not even quite half way there. Now pay attention, please. Forty-one, forty-two . . ."

"I'm not playing school anymore," Gaff announced positively and firmly as she jumped to her feet and left the room in search of some new venture.

Mindy followed her sister. Reaching her side, she took her arm and tried to lead her back to the play classroom. "You'll never learn," she said softly.

"Leave me alone!" Gaff stormed, her face pulled into a dreadful frown.

"But you won't learn!" Mindy emphasized. "Now come."

"I don't want to learn," Gaff declared flatly, trying to free herself of the hold Mindy had on her arm. "Let me go!" she screamed, stomping her feet and shouting at her sister

"You'll get a spanking from Mother," Mindy warned sweetly. "You know she doesn't allow us to stomp our feet."

"I don't care!" Gail retorted. "Let me go. Let me go!"

"All right, I will, Gaff. But you'll go down to hell unless you stop stomping your feet."

"I will not!" came Gail's loud reply.

"But you will, Gaff. You have something real bad down in your heart. This is why you stomp your feet when you can't have your way. I know; I used to do this too before Jesus saved and sanctified me wholly."

Gail's stomping and shouting stopped abruptly. Mindy was different since she asked Jesus to save her and to forgive her for all her sins, Gaff thought. And she didn't ever fight anymore. No, she didn't.

"Why don't you ask Jesus to come into your heart, Gaff?" Mindy asked with tears in her eyes. "He'll make you happy. And when He sanctifies you, He'll take the stomper out of your heart. It shows up in your feet because it's in your heart," she explained patiently. "There's something bad and sinful and wicked in your heart which makes you stomp your feet."

Gaff sniffled and reached for a kleenex. Then she sat down in a chair.

"Jesus took the 'stomper' out of my heart," Mindy continued. "I knew I didn't dare to stomp my feet around Father and Mother but stin, in my heart I was stomping when I didn't get my way. This is what Jesus took out. Now I just don't want to stomp, and I'm ever so happy all the time. I know I'm going to Heaven when I die, Gaff. Do you know you're ready to die? Will you go to Heaven, too..., with Father and Mother and me?"

"I... I want to go there, I do. But I . I... well... Oh, Mindy, I don't want to go to hell. I don't! I don't!" Gaff cried. "I want to go to Heaven, too, when I die. I want to get saved. NOW!"

Mindy could scarcely contain her joy as she knelt beside her little sister and helped her to find Jesus. Now there would be two happy children in the home . . . two happy girls made all new through Jesus' precious blood.

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March 1983

Story 3  
THE KITE

It was a perfect day for kite flying. Grandpa knew it was and Buddy knew it, too. The not-too-cold, nottoo-warm March wind played in the greening grass, making it tremble with

excitement from the tip of its tender roots to the very top of its long, dark green stem and the long, slender willow withs, in brand new green-yellow dresses, danced around the trunk of the willow tree like children on a merry go round.

Buddy took it all in as he skipped along beside Grandpa on their way to the Hobby Shop at the edge of the village. "We're almost there!" the blue-eyed boy exclaimed, doing a hopscotch step on the sidewalk.

Grandpa cleared his throat and chuckled. "We certainly are," he declared, with a merry twinkle in his eyes. "And, like I told you earlier this morning, if we don't find what we want, we'll make a kite of our own."

"But I don't want a home-made kite, Grandpa! I want one from the Hobby Shop; one like Kenny and Jay and Keith have. Something bright, and big and beautiful."

"We'll see what's inside, Buddy," Grandpa said kindly, opening the door to Hal's Hobby Shop.

Buddy was sure he had never seen so many beautiful and wonderful kites in all his life. There were bright greens, scarlet-reds, beautiful deep, dark indigo blues, oranges, yellows, and some even in black designs. "Here's what I want, Grandpa," he called in excitement.

Grandpa smiled over to his grandson. Taking the boxed kite in his hands, he checked the price. "Too much money," he answered softly, placing the kite back on the shelf.

"But Grandpa, I want it! It... it's beautiful and . . . and it's just like Kenny's."

"Thirty-five dollars for a kite! Nothing doing! It would be sinful for me to pay that amount of money for something which the wind will tear to pieces. There are too many mission fields that could use this money, and too many poor people in America for whom this would buy a good amount of groceries."

"Just once, Grandpa. Please!" "No way, Buddy. No way." Surrounded by an octopus with tentacle tails and a variety of supersonic delta wedges, Grandpa found the prices too high. His happy childhood had coincided with the depression so, smiling his cat-that-ate-the, canary kind of smile, he bought a ball of string, then shooed the crestfallen Buddy out of the store. Bewildered and disappointed, the boy trudged home behind him and followed him into the workshop.

"I'll make you a kite that you'll be proud of," Grandpa promised, shuffling through the woodpile for the perfect sticks. "One that I know will fly."

Buddy pouted. "But I want a bought kite; one just like Kenny's."

For a brief instant Grandpa seemed shocked. Then he faced the lad, "You'll have to learn that you can't always have everything you want," he said kindly. "Getting everything one wants breeds selfishness and unappreciation. Now wipe that pout off your face then find a corner where

you can pray, and tell Jesus how sorry you are for your wrong attitude and bad spirit. The Lord Jesus won't live in a heart that's full of rebellion. If rebellion is there, Jesus takes His departure; if the sweet Holy Spirit abides, rebellion is gone. All gone! I'm wondering if maybe my dear little grandson never really has been sanctified wholly ....

Grandpa's words trailed meaningfully over Buddy's head in the shop. The boy gulped. Tears sprang to his eyes.

"I . . . I guess I'm not sanctified wholly, Grandpa," he confessed contritely. "But I want to be. Honest, I do. I don't like this thing that's down inside my heart. I know it's there..., something bad and wicked. Could... could you . . . stop long enough to pray with me? First, I want to ask Jesus to forgive me for being pouty and selfish and..., and rebellious. I know He'll forgive me. Then I'm going to pray until I know I'm sanctified ....."

Sometime later, smiling as he selected the brightest colored pages from some newspapers he had collected from neighbors and friends for selling, a wholly sanctified Buddy whistled as he helped Grandpa construct the kite. Making his kite was so much fun, he thought, as he tore an old shirt into strips for a tail.

"She's ready for flying now!" Grandpa declared with a gleam of triumph in his eyes as he led the way to the vacant lot adjacent to the lawn. Outside, Buddy ran fast, coaxing the kite into the air. Soaring, spinning, diving, swooping and looping, the kite defied gravity to ride the wind, The young face, looking skyward, shone with the glory of God and the pride of accomplishment and the joy of living.

"This is the most wonderful kite in all the world, Grandpa!" he called. "Just look at it fly! Kenny's doesn't go nearly so high as this one. I'm sure glad you didn't buy me one like that."

At the edge of the lot, watching intently, Grandpa's face was shining: Buddy had learned a lesson in thrift, to be sure, but the greatest thing of all was that he was ready now to go up in the Rapture. Yes, that was the greatest thing of all .... Buddy had gotten the Wedding Garment on... the garment of entire sanctification.

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April 1983

Story 4

I AM THE RESURRECTION

Maria ran across the porch and down the four steps to the sweet gum tree at the back of the lawn. Grabbing the nearest limb, she climbed into the tree and was soon hidden away from peering eyes, concealed by the dense, leafy new foliage of leaves.

She climbed to her favorite hideaway limb and sobbed. Why did God take Mother away from Father and her? she wondered again. Nothing seemed the same anymore. Nothing! Daddy was

always sad, and she was always sad. Lonely, too. "Oh, Mother! Mother!" she moaned against the tree. "I miss you so I love you, Mother..."

"Maria, where are you, honey?" Maria choked back a sob. Why did Aunt Marie have to disturb her? She wanted to be alone. Alone, where she could think about Mother.

"Please come down, Marla." Slowly and reluctantly, the little girl made her way down the tree, her red eyes and tear-stained cheeks a give-away as to what she had been doing.

"Your mother wouldn't want us to cry, dear," Aunt Marie said, wrapping the child in her arms.

"But I can't help it, Aunt Marie. O-o-oh, I miss her so! Why did Jesus take her away from Daddy and me?"

Aunt Marie stooped down to Marla's level Laying an index finger gently over the trembling lips, she said softly, "There are many things in life we'll never understand, Maria. This is one of those things. But we know that our God is doing everything for our good and His glory. You still love Jesus, don't you?"

Lifting blue eyes wet with tears to look into the bluer ones of her aunt, Maria answered quickly, "Oh, yes, Auntie, I do love Jesus. I do. But.. ...but...why...?"

"See that lily growing over there by the fence, Maria? The one with that cluster of beautiful blooms on it."

"Yes."

"All winter long, through the ice and the snow and the blizzards, it lay buried beneath the earth, a dull, dark, drab-looking thing. If it hadn't come up this spring, we wouldn't have known it was down there even: it was buried. But springtime is here, and God, Who sees and knows where each and every plant and bulb and root is, has resurrected everything. The dull, dark, drablooking lily is no longer hidden beneath the earth, but is a thing of real beauty and rare fragrance. Why? Because it has been resurrected. Like your mother will be some day. Her little, wasted-away body is sleeping in the earth now, awaiting the day when body and soul will be reunited again. But her soul is with Jesus and she is ever so happy. And she is free from pain, too, Maria. Isn't that wonderful!"

Maria wiped a hand across her eyes. "Yes, it is wonderful, Aunt Marie, and I'm so glad Mother doesn't have pain anymore. But I miss her so."

Aunt Marie quoted softly, " 'I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.' "

"Mother loved Jesus, Auntie, and still she died."

"Jesus is speaking about eternal life, honey Your mother died, yes; but she is really very much alive. This very instant, she is shouting and praising Jesus for saving and sanctifying her soul. She is healed from the cancer that ravished her body and she will never, never again feel any pain. When you see her again, if you stay close to Jesus and love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and body and strength, you will see a shining, happy face glowing with perfect health and soundness."

"Will she remember me, and will she be waiting for me, do you think, Aunt Marie?"

"I believe I can say yes to each of those questions, dear. The Bible says .... but then shall I know even as also I am known.' Yes, we'll know each other in Heaven. If your dear mother could speak to you right now, she would tell you to read your Bible and pray every day, and to be sure to meet her in Heaven. This is the Easter season, Maria... resurrection time! Resurrection, and life. Paul the Apostle wrote, 'We shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.' Isn't that wonderful!"

A smile came over the child's face. "I'll try to be brave," she said softly. "And I'll ask Jesus to help me to not cry so much anymore, since I know I'll see Mother again."

"It isn't wrong to cry, honey; Jesus wept at Lazarus' grave. Only we must never cry and sorrow as those who have no hope of seeing their loved ones again. We know we'll see your mother again. Now come, we have cookies to bake for that brother of mine; your daddy always did like my thick, soft, sugar cookies, and I need a little girl to help me."

Marla tucked her tiny hand trustingly and lovingly in that of her aunt's and started toward the house. Her mother was not dead . . . her soul, that is . . . she was just away . . . in Heaven . . . and she was watching her little girl from God's Home. It was a comforting thought and Marla smiled again.

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May 1983

Story 5

JONITA'S NEW MOTHER

Jonita Hope Cranston pulled her sweater more tightly around her shoulders and squeezed her small frame closer into the corner of the back porch. She would not go back into the house. No, she would not! She couldn't stand the sight of Phyllis. And she would not . . . positively, would not! . . . call her 'Mother.'

A knot (seeming and feeling like an apple) popped up in her throat. She was sure it would choke the very life out of her. She swallowed . . . hard. It wouldn't go away. "Stubborn thing!" she thought.

"Not any more stubborn than you are," a voice deep inside her reprimanded.

"But she's not my mother! She's not!" Jonita cried into her sweater sleeve. "She doesn't belong here. This was Mother's house; her kitchen, her living room, her ....."

"You're dreadfully selfish, Jonita!" the calm little voice exclaimed. "So very selfish. Phyllis loves you. She wants to take you into her heart, but you just won't allow her to do so."

"No! No! I want my own mother!" Jonita cried aloud as tears spilled down her pretty cheeks.

"Your mother's in Heaven, Jonita. You know that. What did she tell you before she died? Have you forgotten so soon?"

Jonita swallowed again. "She... she said I was to meet her in Heaven, and... and... if God ever sent me a new Mommie that I was to love her the . . . the way Daddy would love her. But I... I can't!" the little girl wailed into her sweater sleeve.

"Jonita Hope, where are you, dear?" Phyllis called from the doorway.

Jonita made no reply. She squeezed herself more tightly into the corner. She was glad the moon had thought to hang its up-sideways lantern in the sky. It wasn't quite so dark, with a silver-yellow lantern hanging from the indigo blue curtains of the night.

"Jonita, where are you?" Phyllis called again, softly, looking through the house for the flaxen-haired girl.

Jonita felt a sneeze coming on. Quickly she pinched her nose. Phyllis must never know where she was, she decided. She would stay on the porch till the sun came up in the morning, then she would run away. But where would she go? she wondered suddenly.

Without warning, a healthy, hearty sneeze gave her and her hiding place away.

"Come, dear," Phyllis said, wrapping an arm around the trembling shoulders and leading Jonita inside. "I'm afraid you're taking a cold," she added, making a cup of hot, delicious mint tea for the silent little girl.

For the first time, Jonita noticed that her head did feel funny, kind of like it was swimming; and her eyes burned, too. She had a headache and ....

"You're ill," Phyllis said kindly and with real motherly concern and love. "Come, I'll help you to your bed. This cool night air was too much for you. It's still too early in the spring for you to stay outside for very long at night, honey," she added, kissing Jonita on the tip of her tiny-little nose as she tucked the covers around her, then prayed that God would touch the fevered body and make her well.

For three days and nights the fever raged, and for three days and nights Phyllis remained constantly by Jonita's side, eating little and sleeping less. Once, when she was oh, so sick, Jonita was sure she heard Phyllis cry out, "Oh dear God, please.., please.., heal my dear little girl! And dear Lord, please heal her poor little broken heart, too. Help her to take me into her heart as I have taken her into mine; not as her real blood mother, but as a godly substitute mother whose love is real and genuine for this brokenhearted, grieving child ...."

A warm feeling came over Jonita. It was a good feeling; kind of like she used to have when her mother cared for her when she was sick.

On the fourth morning, when she opened her eyes, Jonita saw her father's anxious face hovering above her bed. Beside him stood Phyllis, her face pale and tired looking.

"I love you both," she said in a weak little voice. "I... I want you to forgive me for being so . . . so selfish. I m sorry. Will you please pray for me; I want to know that Jesus has forgiven my sins. I . . . I've had a bad attitude ..."

From the moment she got saved, Jonita Hope improved rapidly. Calling her father aside the following night, she said, "Daddy, Sunday is Mother s Day. I must get a gift."

With tears brimming out of his blue eyes, father replied, "We II go to the store tomorrow, the Lord willing. Phyllis will be so happy."

"And I'm a lot happier this way. Like my new mother said, she's not trying to take Mother's place; all she wants is for me to love her the way she loves me. And, Daddy, this is easy to do since Jesus came into my heart. WE must do something very special for Phyllis this first Mother's Day at our house. Mother would want us to do so."

Brushing tears from his eyes, Mr. Cranston said reverently, "You're sounding more like your mother every day. Yes, we'll do something special for Phyllis, and as we do, and give, the Lord will help to heal the hurt in each of our hearts. But come, we must not keep your new mother waiting supper on us; she'll suspect that we have a secret between us."

Jonita giggled as she followed her father into the kitchen. It was so good to have a woman in the kitchen again . . . a woman who would be there when she came in from play and a woman to kiss her goodnight and to pray with her and for her. But the best part of all was that now she had someone whom she could call "Mother" again. And Jesus was going to help her to do this, and to say it, from way down deep in her heart!

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June 1983

Story 6  
BORROWED FATHER

Tim closed the book he'd been reading and settled back against the soft chair, his mind not one little bit on the book. Whatever would he do on Father's Day? he wondered. Mrs. Parkinson had told her class of Sunday school boys to each bring his father and to sit beside him. Worse still, she was having the first two rows of seats across the front reserved for the fellows and their dads. Where did that put him, since he had no father to bring? He could sit beside his mother, like he always did, but Mrs. Parkinson said she wanted her entire class of boys on those special, up-front pews.

Tim sighed. How very much he missed his dear father! The first few months after Jesus had taken his dad to Heaven he felt as if his entire world had come to a sudden and complete standstill. His mother and he had begun to adjust to the change, to be sure, but life would never be exactly the same as it had been when his dad lived and was with them. They were searching for the 'rainbow through the cloud.' Like this, with Mrs. Parkinson's request.

Tim got to his feet and walked to the window. Soon he was out on the lawn, his brain racing like an adding machine, wondering just what he could do and how. Everything he thought about doing came out to a perfect zero. A nothing. He could sit with Ryan and his dad, he knew; Ryan had told him he could. But that wasn't what Mrs. Parkinson had in mind. No, he must think of something else. But what?

Bowing his head, Tim prayed for guidance. Suddenly he thought about old Mr. Flaugherty. Something clicked inside his brain. Yes, this would be a grand opportunity to do what it seemed everybody was afraid of doing . . . inviting Mr. Flaugherty to church!

Tim almost gasped at the sudden thought. The aged man seemed to hate churches and all who were connected with a church. Any church. He had even heard stories about the man chasing people off his property who had come to talk to him about his soul. Still, he had asked the Lord what to do and the Lord had shown him Mr. Flaugherty's face ....

Tim's feet and legs almost flew along the garden path and down the alley to the back of the man's property. All the way there, he was praying silently. When he saw Mr. Flaugherty, bent over a row of young cabbages and hoeing for all he was worth, Tim called a cheery, "Hello-o, Mr. Flaugherty."

The man straightened up and leaned on the end of the hoe. "Hello yourself, Tim," he answered. "What brings you here?"

Tim smiled. "I want to ask a favor of you," he said, facing the old man squarely and honestly. "It's a very special favor. But first, I'll finish hoeing this garden. You go and sit in the shade. It's hot today."

"Summer, my lad. Summer! Thanks," the man said, mopping his face and gladly relinquishing the hoe to younger hands and arms.

Tim worked hard, being careful not to miss a single weed. When he was finished, Mr. Flaugherty asked, "And now, what's that special favor you were talking about?"

Tim took a long, deep breath and let it out quick-like. "It's simply that I need a father for Father's Day, Mr. Flaugherty." There, it was out!

"So-o ....?"

"Well, you know my dad's dead and is in Heaven; so he can't sit beside me in church anymore. I wondered if you'd pretend you're my father and go with me to church on Father's Day. Mrs. Parkinson wants all of us boys to sit beside our dads that day. You can understand my predicament, can't you? All the other boys have fathers ...."

Mr. Flaugherty cleared his throat. Then he said, "I guess you know I'm not much of a church man, Tim. One time was. But bitterness came into my life. Deep, deep bitterness. But I'll come, Tim. For your sake, I'll come. Be there early, too. And right proud I'll be to sit beside a boy as fine as you. You never have made fun of me, and you've always found the time to stop and chat with me and to help me when I was working."

"Thanks, Mr. Flaugherty. Thanks much!" Tim exclaimed joyously. "I'll see you Sunday morning, the Lord willing."

"Sunday morning," the man repeated in a hoarse whisper.

Tim was at the church early. So was Mr. Flaugherty. Proudly, Tim led his "borrowed" father down the aisle to the very first seat from the front. "You can hear the preacher better on the front seat," he explained. "Sure can," Mr. Flaugherty agreed, almost seeming pleased with the arrangement.

The sermon was powerful, preached to fathers, and when the preacher asked if anyone wanted to pray, Mr. Flaugherty reached for Tim's hand.

Come with me, Tim, he said. "You got me this far, now I want to go to that altar and return to Christ. You're a smart lad. A real soulwinner. Come ...."

Holding on to the old man's hand, Tim led the way to the altar. It was the path Home for the prodigal; a return to Father's forgiveness and pardon. And a Father's Day Mr. Flaugherty would never forget.

"He that winneth souls is wise."

\* \* \* \* \*

July 1983

Story 7

## THE BIG BLAST

"You sure it's all right, Deran?" Trenton asked his friend as Deran struck a match and threw it at the tin can.

" 'Course it's all right..., if you don't get caught." He laughed a bit nervously.

"Then it seems sneaky to me, Deran. Guess I'll go home. Dad says! should always give God the benefit of the doubt if I'm not sure of a thing."

"That's goofy, isn't it? What do you mean by that?"

"Well, you said it was all right to light those cannon salutes . . . I believe that's what you called them . . . if you didn't get caught. That last part makes me wonder if it is all right, Deran. That's where my doubts come in. So I'll be heading home. I'm afraid it's not all right. I'd sure hate to be here if you get your head blown off. Are they legal? I mean, well., some things aren't allowed here in our state. Where'd you get those things?"

Deran laughed. "That's my secret, Trent. Dad and Morn and I were on a vacation, remember? I had some money of my own. I was saving it for these. Rodney says they're real boomers when they go off. Come on, stay. You're chicken, that's what you are."

"I'd rather be safe than sorry," Trent said, starting through the woods toward home.

"Hey, I thought you were my friend!"

"I am, Derail. But until Dad says those things you're fooling with are okay, I'll steer clear of them. See you later," he called across his shoulder as he cut through the path in the woods.

"Some friend he is!" Deran muttered, striking another match and giving it a toss toward the can. With a powerful noise, the powder exploded, sending the can on a far-away journey into the sky.

Deran jumped to his feet and danced around the woods for pure joy and gladness. The sound was heard a long way, he knew but nobody . . . absolutely nobody . . . would know that it was he who had ignited the big blast.

Dizzy with joy over the 4th of July salute he had sent skyward, he combined the powder from several of his outlawed but secretlyobtained cannon salutes. If one had given him such gratifyingly-satisfying results, two would be even better. The world would know . . . and hear . . . that today, America was celebrating its Independence Day! Yes, indeed. And this time, he was no mere onlooker, standing along Main Street's curb and watching the parade as it marched militantly by. No, Sir! Today, he was a participant in all the excitement.

He dumped the powders into an empty baking powder can he had extracted from the trash, then he tossed a lighted match in the direction of the open can. Nothing happened. The match fell aground of its mark.

Striking another match, he gave it a toss. No results. He waited. He was sure the match had made its mark and fallen into the can. But had it???

Inching his way forward, he lit another match. Then he stood directly over the can and dropped it. BOOM!! BOOM!! BOOM!! The blast knocked Deran off his feet. He dropped to the cool earth a short distance away. His ears rang as if giant bells were hammering an incessantly maddening sound somewhere inside his head, and when he tried to open his eyes, they refused to open. Panic churned inside him. Was he dead? he wondered suddenly, trying to move his aching body. "HELP! HELP! HELP!" he shouted and screamed. "TRENT, HELP ME PLEASE! Please!"

He moaned. He was dead, he was sure, and he was only imagining that he was shouting and calling for help. "HE--L-P!" he shouted again. "Coming, Deran," Trent shouted back. "Just as soon as I can get your folks and my dad. They'll know what to do..."

In no time at all, Deran was being lifted onto a stretcher and rushed to the nearest hospital.

"I sure feel sorry for Deran's folks," Trent told his dad as they walked home together through the woods. "Did you see how worried they looked."

"I sure did, Trent. And little wonder; Deran's head could have been blown off. If it hadn't been for God's goodness, it would have been. Those cannon salutes aren't allowed here in our state. I wonder where he got them."

"I asked him that, Dad; he said it was his little secret, that he got them while he was on vacation with his folks. What if he dies!"

"The paramedics in the ambulance said he seems to be in pretty good shape for what he came through. His eyebrows and eyelashes are gone and his hair is singed, but the men seem to think everything else is pretty much okay. I hope he learns a lesson from this."

"I'm sure glad I didn't stay, Dad."

"I'm proud of you, Trent. Proud of you! Deran's dangerous experience reminds me of people who see how close they can get to something evil and wicked without actually taking part in it. Sin is such an insidious and deceitful thing! It looks so alluring and inviting and pleasurable, but at the last, it stings like a viper and poisons like the venom of a serpent, bringing with it, ultimately, death and hell. Your dear little friend tried to see how close he could get to the can without being hurt and he was almost killed . . . blown to bits. That's a true picture of man's heart as he plays around with sin."

"I'm glad I love Jesus, Dad. With Him in my heart, I hate sin, and I'm able to be an overcomer."

Trent's dad reached down and patted his head. Then they hurried home side by side.

\* \* \* \* \*

August 1983

Story 8

### DELIVERANCE FOR JACK

The sun beat down mercilessly upon Jack's sandy-colored hair. Sweat drops almost the size of small peas formed on his ruddy, suntanned cheeks and fell warmly onto his pants legs, leaving little speckles of wet spots. He stretched his legs out straight and long toward the sun's bright rays, hoping the spots would all be dry before his mother would see them. He didn't want her to know he was crying! Only yesterday, he had felt so big and grownup, and now, here he was crying like his tiny sister, Patricia, did!

He swatted at a fly that settled on his nose, but missed it. It went buzzing around his head in dizzy, little circles. He hit at it again and missed the second time. Oh how he hated flies! Especially when they tried to make his nose their resting place.

He jumped to his feet, much like a soldier coming to attention, then marched across the lawn to the cool shade of the grape arbor. Leaning his head against the trellised vines, he closed his eyes. He wasn't happy. No, he was not! He should have allowed Jared to take his new red wagon and ride Janelle in it.

How he wished he had been more unselfish and kind. Always, he was totally happy when he was kind and loving and unselfish. Why he had acted like he did toward Jared he couldn't quite understand. Or could he? Could it be that he was carnal, just like Mother had told him?

Tears squeezed out of the corners of his eyes and bounced down his ruddy cheeks. Carnal, was he? He knew Jesus had come into his heart in saving grace. Yes, this he knew. But . . . could Mother be right again, as usual; did he need a second definite work of grace in his heart--something to hold him steady in his Christian walk?

He sat beneath the vine and hugged his knees to his chest, not bothering to brush the fast-falling tears from his face. His selfishness had shocked him. Terribly so! This wasn't like him at all. No, indeed, it wasn't.

"Why did I refuse him my wagon?" he asked Jesus aloud as he looked heavenward. "Please show me why. If I'm carnal, as Mother told me I was, You show me. I guess I thought little people only needed to be saved. But . . . but . . ."

"Be ye holy, for I am holy," a Voice declared with no uncertain sound somewhere inside his heart.

Jack sat up straight. Where had he heard that Scripture? Suddenly, he knew; it was while Father was reading around the family altar one night not too long ago.

"Charity suffereth long and is kind." The words floated around his head like a soft, warm breeze going over him. "... without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

Charity... perfect love . . . was kind! That's what the Bible said, And he, Jack, had been anything but kind. He'd been selfish. So-o selfish! This must mean that he did need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. If he was selfish, and not kind, he was carnal, just like Mother told him.

A lump jumped into his throat and his lips felt dry. The Bible said something about someone wanting to do good but evil being present, so that when you wanted to do good you couldn't. That was the perfect description of his heart today when Jared had asked him could he please use the new, red wagon. The new, saved Jack wanted to give Jared that red wagon to play with, but the selfish, carnal thing inside him said no, and won.

A shudder escaped Jack's lips. If this horrible nature had won once, and gained the mastery over him, what would it do to him in the days ahead?

He shivered with fright and alarm. Suddenly, he saw what it was Mother was talking about when she told him he must now seek to be cleansed from all inbred sin..., that he needed to be sanctified wholly and be filled with God's Holy Spirit so he could live a victorious Christian life; a life free from all sin.

Getting to his knees, Jack cried, "Thank You for showing me, dear Jesus. And please forgive me for being so selfish with Jared. I want to be like You; please sanctify me and take every bit of carnality out of my heart. Please... please, I need You. I want You in Your fulness..."

Jack's prayer was sincere and from the heart. Never, in all his life, had he prayed more earnestly. Carnality must go. It must!

On and on Jack prayed, and soon he was rewarded. The blessed Holy Spirit came in and sanctified him wholly. Jumping to his feet, laughing for pure joy, he hurried away to find Jared and loan him his new wagon. He was delivered from carnality; the selfishness was gone. All gone! Oh, it was wonderful, this new freedom in Christ!

\* \* \* \* \*

September 1983

Story 9

THE SPELLING CONTEST

"But you can't do it!" MarLea exclaimed indignantly. "I won't have that silly Elizabeth Bailey on my spelling team. She's plain ugly. Just look at her, will you? Sleeves to her wrists..."

almost . . . two long braids, and dresses that came out of someone's rag-bag! I won't have her, Ruth Ann, no matter what you say!" MarLea stomped her foot in anger.

Ruth Ann sighed. "Well," she said softly, "then I guess you can count me out, too. If Elizabeth can't be on our side, neither will I. Just 'cause Elizabeth's poor doesn't mean she's dumb, MarLea."

With hands perched daintily on her hips, MarLea declared firmly, "I won't have her on my side, so there! I'd be ashamed of her."

Once again, Ruth Ann sighed. "I thought this was a Christian school," she said, half to herself, half to MarLea. "Since you feel this way, I'll ask Herman if he'll have Elizabeth and me on his side. The Bible says we're to treat everyone the way we would like to be treated."

"I can't see where that has anything to do with this," MarLea answered angrily. "I'm just not having anyone on my side who would embarrass me. Our parents are coming, and.., and.., ever so many people. And if you think I'll have anyone like Elizabeth on my side, you're wrong. "

Ruth Ann looked at MarLea, then turned and walked away, feeling sad. Elizabeth was a straight A student. She was an excellent speller, too. Herman Brown would be tickled to have Elizabeth and her on his team, she was sure. She hurried across the playground to where Herman was.

"Watch that ball!" Herman shouted to Ruth Ann as she darted across the ballfield and barely missed being hit by the ball which Arthur Keeley had batted over the pitcher's head.

"I.. I'm sorry, Herman," Ruth Ann apologized. "I had so much on my mind that I forgot all about you boys playing ball during the recess time."

"What's on your mind?" Herman asked quickly.

"Wo . . . would you like . . . I mean, do you need any more girls on your side for the spelling bee that's coming up in October?"

Herman gave Ruth Ann a long, inquiring look. "It depends who the girls are," he answered kindly. "If MarLea hadn't picked you first, I'd have picked you."

"Would you really have?" Ruth Ann asked, clasping her hands together joyously. "And.. and what about Elizabeth Bailey?"

Herman's eyes lit up. "Hey, what is this? Do you mean MarLea doesn't want you nor Elizabeth?"

"She said she won't have Elizabeth on her side because of the way Elizabeth dresses and looks."

Herman let out with a long, loud whistle. "That's great!" he exclaimed happily. "Because I'll take Elizabeth. She's one super girl. And a terrific speller. And so are you."

"Then . . . then you mean that both Elizabeth and I may be on your side, Herman?"  
"Doesn't MarLea want you?"

"I told her that if she didn't take Elizabeth, I just couldn't possibly be on her side, either. You see, Herman, Elizabeth's shy and . . . and timid and poor, and I'm the only friend she has. I can't let her down. She's all good and beautiful and kind on the inside, and she's perfectly clean, too. I only wish MarLea and some of the other girls would look at the tea/ Elizabeth! She's a wonderful person. I love her very much. "

Herman clapped his hands together joyously. "Both of you are on my side!" he exclaimed. "Thanks, Ruth Ann," he added. "Thanks much! I feel honored."

"You'll tell Elizabeth, Herman? Tell her you want her?"

" 'Course I will, Ruth Ann. I'll be proud to tell her. MarLea has a lot of learning to do... the Bible says pride goes before a fall. I'll tell Elizabeth; you can count on it!"

Overjoyed, Ruth Ann skipped away. She hated to disappoint MarLea, but she couldn't let Elizabeth be hurt, either. No, she could not!

The schoolroom was filled to capacity for the spelling contest. Both teams stood up front, facing each other, their captains . . . Herman and MarLea... at the head.

Ruth Ann, looking at MarLea from Herman's side, felt sorry for her friend. But when she saw Elizabeth's radiant and shy face, she knew she had done the right thing. MarLea had kept Elizabeth out of ever so many games on the playground that it hurt Ruth Ann terribly. Jesus would never have done a thing like that, she knew. He loved everybody. So did she.

Mrs. Marsing's voice brought Ruth Ann quickly back to the fact that there was a spelling contest going on and that she must concentrate. She sighed deeply and paid close attention to the words being called out, asking Jesus to help everybody, MarLea included.

In a very short time, all but two on MarLea's side were spelled down. Soon she had only one. Then she was by herself and, shortly thereafter, she misspelled a word. Almost in tears, she sat down.

With eight still standing on Herman's side, Mrs. Marsing decided it would be good spelling exercise to continue on with the words. Fortyfive minutes later, Elizabeth spelled Herman down. The visitors all clapped their hands loudly. Herman beamed. His side was the winning side, of course, and Elizabeth Bailey was declared the best speller.

Immediately upon dismissal, seeing that for once, Elizabeth was receiving her just due of praise, Ruth Ann hurried over to where MarLea sat huddled in her seat. "I'm sorry, MarLea," she said sincerely. "I prayed for you."

MarLea lifted her tear-filled eyes to meet the honest ones of her friend. "The Bible is true," she confessed humbly. "I was too proud to want Elizabeth on my side and . . . and . . . I fell. I learned the meaning of last week's Sunday school lesson . . . 'Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.' Forgive me," she cried. "As soon as I can get to Elizabeth, I'm going to ask her for her forgiveness,,then I'm going home to pray..."

Ruth Ann was too choked up to answer. But she knew MarLea was going to be different after this night Happy tears cascaded down her cheeks. She loved MarLea. And she loved Elizabeth, too. Very, very much!

\* \* \* \* \*

October 1983

Story 10

THINKETH NO EVIL

Ellene Rose skipped down the sidewalk, every now and then dragging her feet through the scarlet leaves that lay scattered on the pavement in a beautiful thick carpet. She guessed school wouldn't be too bad after all, not with Christine there. Christine's father had been transferred to Middleville almost a year ago, and now her dad had been transferred there, too. Having Christine there would help take away some of the strangeness and much of the fear which she had felt when her father told her they would be moving and she would have to change schools.

For a brief moment, Ellene stopped. She looked down the street toward the red brick building which would now be her new school. Sudden fear hammered inside her chest. She was frightened. But no, she reminded her heart, she wouldn't be a total stranger to everybody; not with Christine there: Christine was her special friend!

She straightened her shoulders and asked Jesus to help her, then she marched down the street. Suddenly she saw Christine. She was surrounded by a group of excited girls. They were laughing and whispering and looking towards her. "Sh-h, be quiet everybody. Here comes Ellene."

Ellene waved at her friend and hurried into the big building. Tears stung her pretty blue eyes and an enormous lump in her throat seemed to be choking the very life out of her. Christine had been talking about her! Yes, she had! Else, why did she tell the girls to be quiet, that she was coming?

Ellene found her way to the restroom where she allowed her tears to fall freely. Had Christine forgotten the many good times they shared together, playing house beneath the apple tree in Ellene's back yard? And didn't she remember the fun they'd had sledding down Graham's hill in the winter time? Oh why did she have to change schools? Why? Why? Why didn't Christine love

her anymore? What had happened to change Christine? Questions, questions; would they never end?

A bell sounded somewhere in the hallway. Ellene dried her tears. Almost frantic lest she be late to her classroom, she all but ran down the hallway. She felt utterly alone and forsaken, until she remembered that Jesus had promised her He'd be with her always. Everywhere! A warm feeling came over her, knowing that Jesus was a true friend.

Mrs. Bradshaw introduced her to the class and told her they were happy to have her there. Ellene smiled and thanked the teacher. She was relieved when class finally began and the students' eyes were glued on the books instead of on her.

She tried hard to keep her mind on what Mrs. Bradshaw was saying but, try as she may, her thoughts kept roaming to Christine and her softly-spoken words to the girls. It didn't seem real, Christine talking about her!

The more Ellene thought about Christine's words, the more she wanted to cry. She felt dreadful; almost like she was a tiny island floating alone in a great sea. How she did wish she had at least one friend here in this new and frightening school. Her teacher was sweet and nice, to be sure, but she needed someone her own age to be her special friend. She had been so happy, thinking that Christine would still love her and be her closest friend, and now ....

Mrs. Bradshaw's voice sliced into Ellene's sober thoughts and brought her quickly out of her silent wonderings. "Ellene will read pages thirty and thirty-one," the teacher said, settling back against her desk chair.

With trembling fingers, Ellene leafed through the book till she found the pages. Shaking visibly, she stood to her feet and began to read. She was thankful that she had always enjoyed reading and that she had made straight A+'s in the subject. This took away some of the fear.

"Excellent!" the teacher commented when she had finished and sat down. "Very excellent!" Her face wore a pleased smile.

When the buzzer sounded for dismissal that afternoon, Ellene hurried from the building. She felt she had to get alone..., to think. Trying to avoid seeing anyone from the new school, she walked down back alleys and around by the little park, and when she entered the front door of her home a chorus of happy voices greeted her.

"Welcome to Middieville, Ellene!" the happy girls shouted.

And then Christine ran to her. "Oh, I'm so glad you're here, Ellene!" she exclaimed with shining eyes. I was ever so worried you'd hear what we were planning, this morning at school. I told the girls to be quiet; I wanted it all to be a great big surprise for you."

Ellene bowed her head. "Oh Christine," she cried, "I'm so happy to see you and to know we'll be having fun together again. But I... I... well, I want you to forgive me; I thought you were

talking about me t,hi's morning. I see how wrong I was. I m sorry. It's wrong to think evil thoughts. Please forgive me. I'm going to tell Jesus how very sorry I am for imagining these things and then I'll ask Him to help me to never do it again."

"You'll always be my very special friend, Ellene, and of course you're forgiven. Now come, you must meet all the girls in our class," and taking Ellene's hand, Christine led her into the center of the roomful of girls.

\* \* \* \* \*

November 1983

Story 11

THANKFUL

Eric buried his face in the palms of his hands and tried to think. But, try as he may, he just couldn't think of a single thing to write down on the paper in front of him on the desk.

"Are you writing?" Miss Parsons asked from her desk at the front of the classroom. "Each one of us has something to be thankful for," she added. "In fact, we have a great many 'somethings' to be grateful for. So get busy. I'll read each composition aloud when you're finished, and I'll post them along the wall for all to see and to read. The best composition, with the neatest writing and most properly punctuated sentences, will receive special merit.

Eric raised his head and looked toward the front of the room. Why was it always so difficult to think what to write and how to begin when one really began thinking about what he was to do? he wondered, chewing on the end of his eraser and feeling positively and absolutely dull. Numb almost! In his mind, that is. If he'd have gotten a skateboard for his birthday or even have had his old bike repainted he could say he was thankful for the new skateboard his morn and dad had gotten him. But he didn't have a skateboard., his folks had said it was too-too dangerous . . . and his old bike was still as rusty and beatup looking as ever. So, what did he have to be thankful for?

A muffled groan escaped his lips as he tried hard to concentrate on the required composition. Then he thought about his dog. He could say truthfully that he was thankful for Socks. The faithful little beagle and he were almost inseparable after school and on weekends. Socks was every bit as devoted to him as he was to Socks.

Taking up his pencil, he wrote, "I m thankful for Socks... he's my beagle dog. He follows me everywhere. He even plays ball with me. His teeth make a fine catcher's mitt."

Now where? he wondered, finishing the short eulogy of his dog. Again his mind went blank., blank and dull. He seemed to have gotten another sudden mental block. This was sad, especially since Miss Parsons said everybody had ever so many 'somethings' to be thankful for. If only his folks would have bought that skateboard for him, he mused. Or, at the least, if his old bike had only gotten that coat of new paint.

Eric came to a sure-enough dead-end. He didn't have the skateboard, he told himself quite sternly, so he'd better think of something else for which to be thankful for.

Suddenly he knew why Miss Parsons had said what she did; it was almost like a big, bright light had been turned on somewhere inside his head. He did have something to be thankful for. Not just one thing either, but he had ever so many things to say "thank you" for. His pencil fairly raced across the sheet of paper now. "I'm thankful for my wonderful dad and mother," he wrote. "They teach me about God and His, ways. They remind me of Jesus. I m thankful for our Christian Day School, and I'm thankful for Miss Parsons. She not only teaches us about God and explains our lessons to us but she lives like Jesus lived when He was on earth, and she is kind. "I'm thankful now that I didn't get that skateboard. I see that there are so many nicer and better blessings than getting everything I want. So I m thankful just to be thankful for the things I do have:

"I have a warm bedroom to sleep in... my dad said his bedroom was cold, when he was a boy growing up. He said ice and frost covered the windows and snow often came through the cracks around the window frames. I can stand and look through my windows when it's zero outside and feel all cozy and toasty warm.

"I'm thankful for the carrots Mother makes me eat. I don't like carrots too well, but Mother says they're good for me, for my eyes especially. So I eat my carrots ...."

Eric now could think of ever so many wonderful things to be thankful for, and when Miss Parsons asked that all the papers be passed up to the front to her desk, he was chock full and brimming over with true thankfulness. Why, he was one of the richest boys in school, he was sure. Not in money, perhaps, but in dozens and dozens of other ways and other things.

Miss Parsons read each composition aloud then tacked them up along the wall for everyone to see and read. Then the class voted on the best composition and when Eric learned that his was declared the best, he discovered tears running down his cheeks. Why had he thought he had nothing to be thankful for? he wondered with shame. True thankfulness didn't come because of a new skateboard nor a paint job on one's old battered bike. No indeed! True thankfulness was a condition of one's heart.

Suddenly Eric felt like whistling and singing and jumping at the same time. He made a wonderful discovery -- the discovery of being thankful for little things and hidden blessings. Not just for one day either, but for each and every day of the rest of his life.

\* \* \* \* \*

December 1983

Story 12  
SHARING

The stars hung like diamonds in the deep blue sky. Twinkling and dancing in the clear, frigid night air, they seemed to be winking and blinking at him, Joel was sure. How he wished Elizabeth would not have needed to go to that stupid old school practice tonight. There were so many things he had wanted to tell her. But no, Mr. Kellar had said everybody had to be at practice. Everybody! Well, he was glad he wasn't in that Christmas pageant. Miss Barker had done the sensible thing and had their program a week ago. No week-and-a-half before-Christmas practices for her pupils!

Joel crept farther behind the thick folds of the drapes and winked back at the stars, watching the road for Elizabeth. The Moundfords would bring her home, just as they had taken her. Jeannie Moundford and Elizabeth were best friends.

He saw Shep the collie come from the barn toward the house. Shep jumped and romped playfully in the snow, acting as excited and happy and as frisky as he and Elizabeth did when they played in the pretty, sparkly-white snow. He wanted to run outside and romp with the dog but knew that was quite impossible . . . he was ready for bed.

Joel's mind raced from one thing to another., the wonderful story of Christmas; the beautiful lights that twinkled in the stores in town; the brightly-wrapped presents in the closets; the cookies, candies and strudels, and oh, so many other pleasant and lovely things., but always his thoughts came right back to the Pickett family. Dustin Pickett, especially.

At thought of Dustin, Joel felt the old familiar lump pop straight up in his esophagus . . . or was it his epiglottis? The lump stationed itself boldly and brazenly in the path of his swallowing, stubbornly refusing to leave so long as his thoughts remained on crippled little Dustin. Oh how he did want to help Dustin and make him happy. He was sure, after much praying, that Jesus had shown him something he could do; some way he could help Dustin a little bit. Oh, why was Elizabeth so long at getting home? He could hardly wait to tell her his secret; the thing he felt Jesus had whispered in his ear that he could do to help!

He wiggled and squirmed, watching the twinkly-bright stars and the road. He printed his name in the steam on the window. Then he printed Dustin's name, then Shep's. And then he saw the bright lights of the car turning into their lane. Elizabeth was home! Goody! Goody!

In a flash, Joel was out from behind the heavy drapes and heading for the door. "Elizabeth! Elizabeth!" he called excitedly. ' I have a secret. We're going to help to make Dustin very happy for Christmas."

"Really, Joel! Elizabeth exclaimed, equally happy and overjoyed. "I only wish we could get him one of those nice new wheel chairs so he could get outside by himself when the weather's nice and it's sunny and warm."

"We are, Elizabeth. We're going to get Duatin a wheel chair. At least we're going to help to get it."

"But how, Joel? You and I are little; we don't have much money."

"I have fourteen dollars in my piggy bank. I know, 'cause I counted it today.'

"But fourteen dollars, Joel . . . That won't buy Dustin a wheel chair. Mother said they cost lots and lots of money."

Joel's zeal remained undaunted. "I know," he said matter-of-factly. "I told Jesus all about that, Elizabeth, and He said you and I could give all we had and then see how many others will empty their piggy banks to help Dustin."

Elizabeth's arms encircled her brother. "Oh Joel," she cried, "you always think of the nicest things to do! I know Becky and Bobby will want to help."

"And Shawn and Shawna," Joel added. "Many more, too. I know they will; I asked Jesus to help them to want to give. Mrs. McBride always says in Sunday School that it's more blessed to give than to receive. Already, I feel all happy and good inside."

"That's the best idea in all the world!" Elizabeth declared, beaming down on her brother. "The Lord willing, tomorrow in school, I'm going to see all the boys and girls in my class and ask them how much they'll give. I'll even ask Mr. Kellar and the janitor."

"I'll tell Miss Barker what we're going to do," Joel said. "She'll tell the class and that way everybody will have a part in making Dustin happy. But do let's keep it a secret."

\* \* \*

Excitement ran high in the school classrooms for the next few days. The night of the pageant when Dustin was brought to the front and presented with a shiny new wheelchair, Joel felt like his heart was going to burst with happiness and joy. His piggy bank was empty, to be sure, but the fulness in his heart over an act of sharing and caring about someone else was worth more than any amount of money he may ever have been able to accumulate or save.

Going home, after all the happy excitement, Elizabeth said, "It really is more blessed to give than to receive, Joel. I think everybody felt this way tonight."

Joel smiled and nodded his head. The big lump was back in his throat again, but this time it was there because of an overflowing heart.

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THE END