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CHILDREN'S PAGE STORIES -- 1987

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Story 1
A NEW BEGINNING

Robbie looked through the kitchen window to the yard. How beautiful and clean and white the earth looked, he thought as he was watching the falling snow blanket the lawn and drape the trees and bushes in white. Even the birdbath was covered; it looked like a great big mushroom in the middle of the yard.

He hurried from the kitchen to the living room and paced back and forth across the carpet. How he wished he could get rid of this strange feeling inside his heart.

"Robbie! Please!" Renee exclaimed as her brother started across the living room carpet for the umpteenth time. "Go outside and play with your friends. They're having a wonderful time in the snow. Can't you hear them laughing? It's utterly impossible for me to concentrate on what I'm writing with you parading back and forth across the room like a caged tiger."

"What are you writing?" Robbie asked gently.

"New year's resolutions, of course!"

"Oh!" Robbie replied, turning and heading upstairs.

"Not you again!" Ronald, an older brother, exclaimed as Robbie stuck his head around the partially-opened door.

"Uh... oh"

"Sorry, Robbie; that wasn't even nice of me. Forgive me, Pal. You know I think you're tops. But honestly, Rob, you give me the fidgets when you prance back and forth, like you're doing

today. I can't concentrate at all; not with you barging in on me like a jack-in-the-box. What's the matter? Something bothering you?"

Robbie countered with a question of his own. "You writing new year's resolutions, too?" he asked.

"I sure am. Why don't you run along and make out a list of your own?"

"It won't help," Robbie replied sadly, hurrying down the stairs and finding the spelling book which his father had brought home for him a few days earlier.

Robbie loved spelling. Next to reading, spelling was his favorite subject in school. With each new word he learned how to spell--and learned the meaning of that word--Robbie felt like he had made a brand new friend. His mother often told him that reading and spelling were like sisters; one helped the other. And it was true, for the more he read, the easier his spelling words were for him; and the better he learned his spelling words and their meanings, the clearer was the meaning of what he was reading.

The boy opened the book and tried to concentrate, but the words stood dark and cold and meaningless on the pages. It was no use trying, he decided; the words were like elusive shadows to him right now. "Oh-h!" he moaned, putting the book on the table and getting into his coat and boots and cap.

Once outside, he ran down the garden path to his father's tool shed. It was dark inside but Robbie didn't mind. He must find peace and rest for his soul, he decided, hurrying over to the corner in which his father often prayed.

Tears sprang to Robbie's eyes when he realized that the strange feeling which he'd been having was God's tender Spirit dealing with his soul. Without hesitating, he began to pray and call upon God for mercy. It was wonderful and marvelous, he thought, that he, Robbie Ashbrook, should have received God's "whosoever-will-may-come" message and invitation.

His prayer was to the point and from his heart, and when he got to his feet a short time later, with a deep settled peace and rest in his heart, he wanted to shout it from the housetops.

Robbie's feet felt like they had wings as he hurried up the garden path to the house. He must tell Ron and Renee that he had a new beginning, and it wasn't found in writing any new year's resolutions, either!

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February 1987

Story 2

THE SHARP SWORD

Larry felt perspiration, cold and clammy, pop out on his face as Mrs. Harris continued teaching. Who had told her about him, he wondered as he lifted his eyes long enough to cast a furtive glance in Steve's direction.

He wiggled in his seat, wishing for all the world that he hadn't let Doug influence him to come to Sunday School. He liked the music and the choruses, he admitted grudgingly, and he even liked Mrs. Harris. She had a softly-sweet voice and a pleasant looking face, but he didn't like what she was saying. Not at all! It made him feel funny and uncomfortable and... and miserable, he thought silently.

Nudging Steve, he whispered, "Let's get out of here."

Steve gave a casual glance and shook his head no.

Disgusted, Larry settled back against the seat and tried not to listen. But Mrs. Harris' words fastened themselves like leeches onto his heart. Somebody had told her all about him! They had! She had never seen him before today, yet she was telling everyone in the class about his life... like she was reading it from a book!

He propped his elbows on his knees and dropped his face into the open palms of his hands, feeling hot and miserable and angry. Wait until he found out who told the teacher! he mused in seething anger. Yes, just wait! Woe be unto the informer!

On a sudden impulse, Larry got to his feet and stormed out of the class. Let Steve stay, he thought bitterly. No one was going to tell him that he couldn't leave.

Mopping perspiration from his face and heaving a sigh of great relief, he headed for Terry's tree house hideaway. The gang would be there, he knew. Except for the razzing that he knew he'd receive from them for going to Sunday School, he knew he would still be their leader.

The morning sunshine felt good and warm on Larry's head and face as he walked. He had almost forgotten that he had ever been inside a church when, like a great clap of thunder, Mrs. Harris' words shot across his brain. "God sees everything we do!" she had declared emphatically in class. "He saw those candy bars you stole and hid in your pocket; and He saw when you smashed that window then ran away and hid. Yes, God can take you to the very spot where you found that piece of concrete block with which you broke the window. You see, God sees everything we do, boys and girls; nothing is hidden from His All-seeing eye."

Larry felt terrified. God saw him. Instead of going to Terry's tree house, Larry ran toward the river at the edge of town. He had to be alone to think, he decided, dropping on the damply-cool earth beneath a willow tree. His legs felt wobbly and funny, more like rubber than sinew and bone. Why should what Mrs. Harris said trouble him so, he wondered, trying to get control of himself.

"If you're sick and tired of your sin," the teacher had added, "come to Jesus in true repentance. Confess your sins to Him and tell Him you'll make everything right that can possibly be made right..."

Make everything right! Larry gulped. He couldn't do that. He couldn't! The gang would disown him. They... they'd

"If you're sick of sin, come to Jesus."

The words cut through Larry's heart like sharp-pointed swords. Without realizing it, almost, he discovered that he was crying. Then he was praying. Really and truly, praying! He was coming to Jesus. Just like Mrs. Harris had told her class to do. With all his sins, and his wickedness, he was coming. And he was promising that he would pay for the stolen candy bars, and the window, too . . . no matter what the gang thought of him.

On and on Larry prayed, confessing and repenting and forsaking. Instantly, the heavy load of sin and guilt and condemnation left him, and his heart was flooded with a peace like he had never known before. He didn't need Mrs. Harris, nor Doug, to tell him what happened; he knew that he was saved! It was wonderful. Wonderful!

Getting quickly to his feet, Larry hurried back toward the church. He must tell the class what happened to him; how the words which he heard were like sharp swords in his soul, but by obeying them he had found peace.

The boy hurried on. He had a message to tell.., the same one that Mrs. Harris had told him!

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March 1987

Story 3

HER LITTLE LIGHT

"So that's where you are!" Kendall exclaimed in an explosive sort of tone of voice to his sister. "Loitering again! Wait till I tell Dad!"

With tear-stained eyes, Sherla said softly, "I wasn't loitering, Kendall; I was praying."

"Oh sure! Sure! Always praying. You were sent out to gather the eggs, not to pray, little Miss Religious. I get so tired of your praying that I can scarcely take any more. Now get to work! Wait till I tell Dad!" Again, Kendall used the threat, angrily and wickedly.

Still in her soft, sweet-spoken manner, Sherla said, "The eggs are all gathered, Kendall, and I even fed the chickens and filled their water containers with fresh water."

"Then take the eggs to the kitchen to Mother."

"Mother has plenty of eggs," came Sherla's kind-spoken reply. "She told me so herself."

A lump was forming inside Sherla's throat. Why was Kendall so hateful to her? she wondered. Ever since the night when she had gotten converted, her brother's attitude toward her was different. Oh, so different. Instead of treating her kindly and brotherly, he became hateful. Almost like a stranger, she sometimes thought. And the more she prayed for him, and for her father and mother, too, so much more hateful and angry Kendall seemed to get.

She wiped the tears from her eyes and brushed the dust off her little skirt, from where she had knelt in the straw to pray.

"Get going!" Kendall ordered.

Fresh tears sprang to Sherla's eyes.

"Stop that crying!" Kendall all but shouted the command, raising a hand as if to strike his sister.

"What's going on in here?" Mr. Turlock's big voice echoed through the doorway of the barn. Then, stepping inside, he faced his son. "What do you think you're doing, Kendall Turlock?" he asked.

"I'm fed up with Sherla's prayers, that's what. And I just told her to stop crying. Mother sent her to gather eggs, and what does she do? Pray! That's what!"

Mr. Turlock was silent for a long while. His eyes never left Kendall's face. They seemed to bore a hole through him. "So!" the father remarked. Again, "So!"

Kendall's head dropped. Then, in a gesture of defiance, he raised it again and, straightening his shoulders, he said, "But it's disgusting, Dad; all this praying and crying. Why, she:.. she's disturbing our home."

Again Mr. Turlock's eyes probed his son's face. Is she, Kendall? Now really, is she? I think, if anything, you are creating the disturbance. Sherla's sweeter than ever since she had this heart change by God. I've been observing her. Very, very closely. I have seen nothing but beauty and love and kindness demonstrated in her life since Jesus saved her. She's different, Kendall. A difference which both your mother and I like. And which, I must add, each of us is planning to follow. It's too bad that I never took the lead and gave my heart to God years ago, as the head of my home. But since I didn't, and my little daughter has, I plan to follow in her footsteps and become converted. Her light has been shining brightly ever since her born-again experience. So brightly, in fact, that it has brought conviction and condemnation to both your mother's heart and mine."

"But Dad, what will the neighbors think? And Uncle Charley and Aunt Katrina?" Kendall asked quickly.

"You know what they said about Josh Wickers and..."

"We are past what the neighbors and our relatives think, Son," Mr. Turlock answered, without waiting for Kendall to finish speaking. "Sherla's right; she said we would be living on forever and ever someday, in either heaven or hell. Your mother and I discussed this at length. And, since we know we're not ready for Heaven, well, that leaves us only one other place to go. And we're not planning on going there! You may join us, Kendall, and give your heart to God, like we're going to do. The minister's coming to the farm later on this afternoon to pray with us and for us regarding our soul's salvation."

"But Dad, what will my school friends say? What will they think?"

"Sherla had this to face, Kendall. It doesn't seem to have been too big a problem for her," Mr. Turlock remarked. "Her one-time, so-called friends just automatically dropped off when she told them how Jesus had saved her soul and forgiven her of all her sins."

"I have true friends now, Daddy," Sherla declared. "Jesus gave me many friends, where I go to church since I got saved."

"I want you to think about your soul, Kendall," the father said soberly, "and where you will spend eternity. As your father, and as the head of my home, I ask you to forgive me for not leading the way in this most serious of all affairs; the matter of your soul and where you will spend eternity. Come, join your mother and me today, Son. Let's make this day one of a new beginning in Christ."

Tears brimmed in Kendall's eyes. Looking Sherla full in the face, he said, "Forgive me, please, for the hateful things I've said and done to you. I admire you, little Sis." Turning quickly to his father, he said, "I will, Dad. I'll do it; I'll give Jesus my heart and my life, too. Today!"

Sherla's tears began flowing again. This time they were tears of pure joy and thankfulness. A light! Her father had said she had been a light and that it was shining brightly. She smiled through her tears; she hadn't known she had a light. It must be Jesus shining His light in her and through her, she thought happily. Yes, that was it: Jesus.

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April 1987

Story 4
LITTLE FOXES

Scratch! Scratch! Scratch! went Danny's rake as he raked the twigs and leaves out of Mrs. Wiersma's yard. The sun was shining hot and bright and the perspiration dripped off Danny's chin and fell to the ground beneath his feet.

"Hi!" a voice called.

Danny looked up to see Brick coming down the sidewalk, walking Cheshire, the black French poodle.

"How about going for a walk with me?" Brick asked, as Cheshire minced daintily on his well-groomed and freshly-manicured feet. "Sorry, Brick, I can't."

"Why not, Danny? This is a really hot day; a good day for a walk in the park. Come on; go with me."

Danny looked at Brick. "I know it's hot," he said, "and the park would be nice and cool. But I can't go. I promised Mrs. Wiersma, I'd rake her lawn and mow it, too."

"That's too bad," Brick replied. "Cheshire and I are going over to Rainbow Park to swing and just be lazy today. It's too hot to do anything else." Turning to go, he called over his shoulder, "What are you going to do with your money, anyhow?"

Danny smiled. "First," he said, "I'll pay my tithe. Then I'm going to send money to some of our missionaries."

"You won't have anything left for comics and the show by then!" Brick exclaimed loudly.

"I don't buy comic books nor go to shows," Danny answered. "I'm trying to lay up treasures in Heaven, as the Bible says."

"You're sure a funny boy!" Brick exclaimed again, this time in mocking derision. "I don't have to work; my dad has lots of money. I can get anything I want." And he turned and walked away, feeling superior to the boy working on the lawn.

As Danny began mowing the lawn, he heard other voices: "Dan-ny! Ho, Danny! Come and play with us!" they chorused.

Glancing up from his work, he saw Tommy, David and Debbie perched like crows on a limb of the big maple tree.

"Sorry," he called, "I can't play just now. I'm busy mowing Mrs. Wiersma's lawn."

"Stop and rest awhile," Tommy suggested. "She won't know you played a little bit with us. And I don't believe she'd care, Danny."

"Thanks, Tommy, but I can't. You see, she pays me by the hour, and I'd be cheating on her time if I stopped and played with you while I'm supposed to be working."

Seeing that Danny couldn't be swayed by their reasoning, the four left.

As he worked, Danny said to no one in particular, "Maybe I am a funny boy, as Brick said, but I'm having a wonderful time. I'm really a very fortunate boy, being able to mow lawns at my age!"

"You talkin' to me?" drawled a feminine voice from the other side of the fence.

"No, no," Danny answered quickly, feeling embarrassed. "I was just talking to myself. Sort of counting my blessings, I guess you could say."

"I've observed your honesty and your conscientiousness," the soft feminine voice continued, "and I'd be proud to have you for my regular yard boy."

Danny was overwhelmed with gratitude. "O thank you, Ma'am!" he exclaimed quickly. "I'll be happy to take care of your lawn. I'll be over as soon as I've finished Mrs. Wiersma's."

The sun beat down mercilessly upon Danny as he worked. It was the hottest day of the summer; he was sure. His face dripped perspiration and his shirt was soaked. As he trimmed the lawn by the cobblestone walk, the devil perched on his shoulder and whispered in his ear.

"Sit under the weeping birch and rest a while. After all, the lady doesn't expect you to kill yourself. Then, too, what's a fifteen minute rest? That's such a little thing! Yes, such a very, very little thing. Why, Mrs. Wiersma will never know! Come on, rest! Rest... rest..."

Speaking out loud again, Danny said, "In the name of the Lord Jesus, Whom I love and serve, get thee behind me, Satan. For your information, it's the 'little foxes that spoil the vines.' I don't intend to do one thing you told me to do. No, Sir!" And with that, Danny worked feverishly away, happy that the Lord had given him the strength to work. Yes, even on a very hot day!

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May 1987

Story 5

JOYLINDA'S GIFT

The song of the robin, coming in through Joylinda's bedroom window, caused the little girl to sit suddenly up in bed. How beautiful, she thought. How very beautiful was the song of the robin!

Easing herself quietly out of bed, she stood framed inside the open window. The trees, not yet fully dressed in their densest and heaviest leaf-foliage, made it easy for her to find the happy singer. He was perched high on a limb not too far from her window.

"Get up! Get up!" he seemed to be saying.

Joylinda laughed. Calling through the screen, she answered, "I'm up, Mister Robin; I'm up!"

She dressed quickly and brushed the tangles out of her long hair; next she made her bed and hung her clothes inside the clothes closet; then she hurried outside to find the nest she was sure the robin was building

Each and every spring, for so long as she could remember, robins had built nests in the trees on the lawn and, always, her father and mother and she had had a little game of seeing who could find the nest first. The one who did was rewarded with a packet of flower seeds to plant in the flower garden.

Last spring Joylinda had been the first to discover the beautiful nest. Her gift packet of straw-flowers yielded a bountiful harvest of every color.

Her heart skipped several beats at the thought of the straw-flowers now ... they were going into a special gift for Mother for Mother's Day. But this was a big surprise for Mother!

Mrs. Woods, her Sunday School teacher, had suggested to her class of twenty-two girls, that they make their Mother's Day gift. No mother would then be excluded from receiving a love gift from her daughter. All she wanted from them was dried flowers, dried weeds, corn husks taken from the inside of the husk, pumpkin and squash seeds, acorns and yards and yards of bright ribbon and brightly-colored ball fringe.

For five weeks in a row, they gathered in the Wood's basement on Friday night and worked on the special gifts. It was so much fun and all so exciting; Joylinda thought, smiling to herself now.

Mr. Woods had built the picture frames himself and Mrs. Woods had allowed each girl to choose the color of burlap that she wanted and glue it to the board which went inside the pretty frame. On the burlap went the carefully selected and artistically arranged flowers, weeds, acorns and seeds with the balls from the fringe serving as bright centers for the soft-beige corn husk flowers. The ribbons, fashioned prettily into bows with flowing streamers, had been added last of all; Joylinda remembered happily.

Tonight the special gifts were to be wrapped and taken home! She shivered with excitement as she went inside, singing, "It's bubbling, it's bubbling; it's bubbling in my soul."

"You're as happy as the robin, I do believe!" Mother exclaimed, giving her little daughter a big hug.

"Oh, I am. I am, Mother! I have so many things to be happy over. First, I'm happy because I know I love Jesus with all my heart; next I'm happy that I belong to Father and you; then I'm happy because . . . because... O Mother, I can't tell! You'll see it on Sunday, the Lord willing.., my special Mother's Day gift! I'm so excited."

"Joylinda," Mother said softly, "I know I'll love your special gift; but you gave your father and me the greatest gift ever when you went to the altar and gave Jesus your heart, then went on

and got sanctified wholly. You have been a joy to our hearts. A real joy. This is the greatest gift any girl can give her mother."

Bright tears shimmered in Joylinda's eyes. "Thank you, Mother," she said. "I will ask Jesus to help me to bring you the gift of happiness... all year long. And Mother, I can hardly wait till Sunday; I know you'll like my special gift!" she added, skip, ping away, singing, "It's bubbling ... it's bubbling; it's bubbling in my soul."

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June 1987

Story 6

JASON'S CONFESSION

The sun shone down from the sky in all its glory and power. It warmed the earth and Jason's head, and it kissed the flowers, drying up the shimmery, shiny, diamond-sparkling dewdrops that had accumulated during the night while Jason slept. Its long golden shafts of light found the butterflies and made their colorful wings shine like polished copper and burnished brass. It was a beautiful day; and Jason decided that it was one of the most delightful days that he had ever seen.

He skipped off the porch and hopscotched down the sidewalk to the schoolhouse and the now-empty, totally deserted playground, bouncing his ball as he went.

A busy, bushy-tailed gray squirrel scolded him as he bounced the ball across the playground. Jason laughed out loud at the furry little creature and at his nervous-twitching long tuft. "I won't hurt you," he promised the squirrel, "so you don't have a thing to be nervous about."

The squirrel, hearing Jason's voice, scolded even more loudly and twitched his full, gray tuft more violently mad fiercely than before, then he scampered up the side of the oak tree and disappeared in the branches.

Jason watched and waited and when the squirrel didn't return, he resumed his ball playing.

Running across the playground, he bounced the ball up and down. Back and forth he went; back and forth. Then he decided to see how far he could throw it. Spinning around on his heel, he swung full force with his pitching arm. Whizz. Whizz. The ball hissed as it sailed through the air across the playground. Bang! Clash! Clatter... deathly silence!

Watching, Jason turned suddenly pale with fear and fright. The pitch was farthest ever. The ball had sailed all the way across the playground right through one of the school windows! Jason gasped.

"Run! Run away as fast as you can!" a tempting' voice urged and prodded. Quick. it added.

On impulse, Jason turned to obey. Then another voice spoke gently to him. It was a voice from the Bible. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper:" the gentle, kind voice declared, "but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

Jason spun around quickly. He knew that verse. It was found in Proverbs 28:13. In a moment's time, he made his decision, he would not obey that evil voice! James the apostle had written that if he, Jason Galloway, resisted the devil, the devil would flee from him.

Quickly he headed down the street toward Mr. Crismond's house. He must tell the school principal what had happened and just what he had done.

"Don't do it!" the devil seemed to shout as he ran. "You're a fool, Jason. A fool! No one saw you do it; why squeal on yourself? What if you had to go to jail...?"

Jail. Jason stopped dead still in his tracks. Jail! Why... why..., he may just have to go to jail!

Jason's heart pounded like a giant hammer inside his chest. He felt like he couldn't breathe..., almost like the whole world was crushing in on his little heart.

"Don't do it," the tempter repeated again, now that Jason had stopped to listen. "You don't want to go to jail, do you? Think of your father and mother; you'll disgrace them."

Hot tears stung Jason's eyes and trickled down his sun-browned cheeks in little rivers. He brushed them away quickly. If he expected to have mercy shown to him, he reasoned sensibly, he must confess, not conceal or hide. Yes, confession was the only right thing to do. It was God's formula, and His prescription, for obtaining mercy.

Squaring his shoulder like a soldier, he set his feet in motion and ran ... as fast as he could go... down the street toward the principal's house. Replacing that window may take all the money that he had saved to buy Dad a gift for Father's Day, but Jason knew that his honesty, his uprightness and his confessing to Mr. Crismond would be the most cherished and precious gift he could ever give to his father, who had taught him to be truthful and upright in all circumstances.

With resolute heart, and knowing that Jesus was smiling upon him and that He would help him, Jason pushed the doorbell to Mr. Crismond's house.

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July 1987

Story 7

LOVE IS A FLAG FLOWN

"This is a great day!" Jimmy exclaimed to his sisters, Beth and Ann, and to Ricky, his brother. "Let's pretend we're signers of the Declaration of Independence. I'll find my little flag and I'll be"

"No, no!" Ricky protested loudly as he interrupted his brother. "I don't want to do that. I want to play church. I'll be the preacher."

"You will not!" Jimmy declared in no uncertain tone of voice. "I'm older than you, so I'll be the preacher. Beth and Ann can be the congregation, and you, Ricky Don, can be my usher. But what will we use for a pulpit? A preacher needs a pulpit to stand behind so he can hide his notes."

"That's not the reason for pulpits," Beth said softly "At least, Brother Kettters doesn't need a pulpit for hiding his notes, because he doesn't even seem to use notes at all that much."

"How do you know he doesn't?" Jimmy wanted to know.

"Because he preaches up and down the aisle."

"Oh!" Jimmy replied. "Maybe it's just because a pulpit looks nice up front then."

"Well, whatever the reason may be," Ann said, chiming in, "I found the perfect pulpit--Mama's old music book stand. And here it is," she added, smiling sweetly as she stood it up in front of her brother.

Jimmy beamed. "Say, that's perfect!" he exclaimed. "Now I'll scoot this old hassock over here for my platform while Ricky gets us a pie pan for our offering plate."

"But I thought I was an usher!" Ricky cried. "Ushers lead people to their pews."

"You are an usher," Jimmy said, pushing the hassock in place, "and ushers take up offerings, too."

The smile on Ricky's face revealed the fact that he got the message, and that he liked the idea.

The girls pushed chairs in a row, and just as Beth and Ann seated themselves in their chair pews, Jimmy announced his text. "Be ye kind one to another," he intoned in a deep-sounding, sanctimonious sort of way.

Ann jumped to her feet. "You can't preach on that, Jimmy," she declared, "'cause you pushed little Donnie Higgins off his wagon yesterday. I saw you, and that wasn't being one bit kind. I'm sure Jesus felt terribly grieved when He saw you do it."

Jimmy blushed scarlet. He thought no one had seen him when he pushed Donnie. "Well, I guess you never did anything bad!" he exclaimed tartly.

"She doesn't," Ricky quickly defended. "You know as well as I that Beth and Ann are different since Jesus came into their hearts."

"I'll choose a different text then," Jimmy said, changing the subject quickly, and quoting, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Ricky laughed long and hard. "You can't preach from that," he stated emphatically, "because you took my yellow hat and stomped on it. And I know you wouldn't have liked it one bit if I had done that to your hat. That wasn't doing unto others the way you'd like them to do unto you."

"You're all picking on me," Jimmy shouted angrily. "And I'm not playing any more. So there!" He jumped down off the hassock platform and headed for the porch.

"We're not picking on you, Jimmy; honest we're not," Ricky said placatingly. "It... it's just that..., well ... the flag you're flying isn't a flag of love."

"Nor salvation and holiness," Beth added softly.

"What a silly bunch you are!" Jimmy exclaimed. "I'm not even flying a flag."

"Yes, you are," Ann added. "Everything you say and do is like a flag waving above your head. It shows what you are, and the people whom you like or dislike. My Sunday school teacher said we're flying our flag every single day, showing whether we love the Lord or are serving the devil."

Jimmy swallowed hard. He knew which flag he had been flying, and for whom. "I . . . I guess I hadn't thought of it that way," he said humbly. "How about playing church with me? Only this time I'll be the seeker. This is for real; I want to ask the Lord Jesus to please come into my heart and to save my soul."

Beth and Ann cried for joy. Ricky, thinking the hassock would make an excellent altar, pushed it gently toward his brother.

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August 1987

Story 8

LOVE IS KIND

Melissa settled herself beneath the umbrella-like limbs of the big weeping willow tree near the brook. The earth felt damply-cool. She liked the feel of it. Especially since the sun was so very, very hot outside the shade of the tree. She wished that Tyler and Suzette would come over to play. It was so much more exciting and fun to have friends with whom to play, she thought, as she wrapped the blanket around Molly's soft little doll body and set Brown Eyes the bear up against the trunk of the tree where he could keep a faithful vigil over the cuddly little blanketed and now sleeping Molly.

"Take good care of Molly," she instructed Brown Eyes, "while I get some dinner. I'm going fishing. I'll be back soon, then I'll fry some fresh fish. Now do be good. Good-bye. I love you.', And slipping quickly out through her willow-branches door, Melissa headed for the brook, her pretend fishing pole in her hand.

The little stream gurgled and laughed pleasantly as she drew near its bank. Oh, how she loved the brook! Always, its pleasant little notes soothed and calmed her entire being. It was almost like the little stream was singing a merry, happy song for her, she thought, as she dropped to the bank and plunged her bare feet into the cold water and swished them back and forth.

"Oh, I do wish Suzette and Tyler were here!" she exclaimed aloud to the happy brook. "It's so much fun to play together with friends."

The little brook seemed to laugh and gurgle in agreement.

"I wonder why Tyler grabbed Suzette by the arm yesterday and left so suddenly," she said, again to the little brook. "And when I called good-bye, he didn't answer me."

Suddenly, Melissa was worried. Had she said something, or done something, to hurt her two friends? she wondered.

She sat very, very still on the bank, only her toes in the water wiggled and moved a tiny bit. Her thoughts were serious thoughts. Then she remembered that she could talk to Jesus and tell Him everything. Yes, everything! He was always ready to listen. And ready to answer, too.

"Dear Jesus," she prayed, "please show me if I did something or said anything to hurt Tyler and Suzette. I want to know so I can fix it up with them, dear Jesus"

She waited quietly for an answer. Nothing but peace flooded her soul. Then she made a decision; she would run over to her friends' house and ask them why they had left so suddenly and not said good-bye to her. Racing up the hill toward the house, Melissa paused in the doorway long enough to ask Mother's permission to run over to their near neighbor's house, then she hurried away. Tyler was playing with his red wagon in the yard, pulling Pudgy the puppy around.

"Oh Tyler, Tyler!" Melissa exclaimed. "I've missed you and Suzette so very much. What happened? Why did you leave so suddenly yesterday and never tell me good-bye?"

"Because he's jealous of you!" Suzette exclaimed, coming around the side of the house cuddling a kitten in her arms. Tyler raced away. "Jealous? Of me!" Melissa was shocked. "But why? Why, Suzette? I didn't do anything to make anybody jealous. I love Jesus and...."

"I know you do. Tyler knows it, too. That's why he's jealous of you. You stay sweet and kind and never fuss nor argue with him when he wants to argue. This makes him jealous. He has a bad temper...."

"But he doesn't need to keep his bad temper, Suzette; Jesus can change his heart."

"I know He can, Melissa. I've tried to tell Tyler this, but he gets angry when I tell him. Jesus changed my heart. It's all because of you that I found Jesus and that He saved me. I guess Tyler feels left out of things when you and I get to talking about Jesus and how much we love him."

Melissa felt like she was going to cry. Calling to Tyler, she said, "Why don't you and Suzette come over? I'm playing beneath the weeping willow tree. It's breezy and cool by the brook. Let's go wading..."

Tyler came around the house. "You mean..., you mean you . . . don't mind, Melissa? I'd love to go wading."

"Please come. I am your friend. I miss Suzette and you," Melissa said softly. Kindly.

"If you're sure you don't mind" Tyler looked sheepishly at Melissa.
" 'Course I don't mind, Tyler." "You're sure different, you and Suzette, since Jesus saved and sanctified you," Tyler confessed and admitted, adding, "Melissa, I'm ready to change, too."

"Then Suzette and I will pray for you. Come," Melissa said, leading the way to the willow tree.

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September 1987

Story 9

WORKING TOGETHER

Esther Ruth got out of bed and dressed quickly. Already the sun was hot and the bugs were bothersome. Ever so carefully she lifted her shoes and shook them, turning them upside down. Scorpions could sting hard and make one dreadfully sick, she knew. The habit of shaking her shoes each morning was as normal and as routine as combing her hair and brushing her teeth. When they first arrived in Brazil as missionaries her mother and father had told her this must be done every time she took her shoes off and then wanted to put them on again.

She heard her mother as she worked in the kitchen and she felt good and happy on the inside. As usual, Mother was singing softly while she worked. Soon she would be exceedingly busy, Esther Ruth knew. There were so many very sick people in Brazil. And her own dear mother would treat them and dispense medicine to them and try to help them to get well.

Her mother was a nurse whose heart seemed to be made up of kindness and gentleness and love and pity for all the people. The Brazilians especially. And this love had been transmitted to Esther Ruth; she, too, loved their Brazilian congregation. Rosita was her best friend. Her very, very best friend. Yes, in all the world, no one was dearer to her than the dark-haired, dark-eyed Rosita. Not even Lisa her cousin, who lived far, far away in the United States.

Esther Ruth smoothed the covers out on her bed the way Mother had taught her to do. Then she put her nightgown away and made sure the little room looked neat and tidy before running through the narrow passageway into the kitchen.

"Oh Mother," she cried happily and joyously, "the day is so beautiful again! The birds have never been happier; listen to their songs! Oh, I'm happy to be here. I'm glad that Jesus called you and Daddy to Brazil. This is my home. I like to see Lisa, but! love Brazil and I love Rosita."

Mother laughed and set a bowl of steaming-hot rice on the table for Esther Ruth. "That's because you were born here in Brazil, honey," she said, kissing Esther Ruth's tiny nose. "Lisa likes the United States because she was born there. Mrs. Luiz is coming to the clinic today, so that means you can help me by taking care of her little girl. She responds to my treatments better if she doesn't have to worry over the baby."

"Oh Mother, really! She's the dearest little girl: her eyes are like great, dark shining pools and her smile goes all the way to the bottom of my heart. I'm glad Mrs. Luiz is coming. She's beginning to smile now instead of always looking so sad. I like happy people, Mother."

"I think most of us like happy people, honey. But Jesus wants us to be ever so kind and loving to the unhappy people. We must show them what God can do, and how His love can change them and make them happy also. We are missionaries in our daffy living as much or more than by what you and your father and I say-and tell our dear Brazilian people. They are watching our lives and the way we live and act and walk more than anything else. And God is opening their hearts to His Word here in this new city.., this brand new area to us."

Esther Ruth ate her rice cereal and helped Mother with the breakfast dishes, drying them carefully and putting them up into the cupboard; then she hurried outside to watch for Mrs. Luiz and her little baby.

She sat on the ground with her face looking toward the clinic, being extra careful that she wasn't near a fire ants' nest. Those little things seemed to exist only to crawl up one's legs and give a nasty, fiery nip, she thought. Oh how their bite could burn! Like fire.

She looked around her and saw a tribe of tiny, tiny ants struggling with a heavy load. Whatever could they be trying to move? she wondered as she moved closer and bent over to watch.

She gasped in awe and astonishment. Those little ants were trying to move a large, heavy cockroach across the ground to their anthill! Again she gasped. It was a big cockroach, or barata as the Brazilians called them, and the ants were so very, very tiny.

Esther Ruth forgot about Mrs. Luiz and her baby. Those tiny little ants, she thought, moving such a heavy load! How was it possible? How?

She watched closely as the tiny ants struggled with their enormous load. Then the secret of their strength and their success was revealed to her. She clapped her hands for joy. They worked

together; every one of those tiny ants did! Her heart felt all light and good and happy inside. The tiny ants were working together just like her father and mother and she were doing. And they were moving that big old barata too. Yes, closer and closer to their anthill they were getting.

Esther Ruth got to her feet, her eyes shining brightly. If Rosita and she would work together and invite every little girl and boy whom they knew to church, the area would become evangelized a lot faster than it was. Wasn't it because she had invited Rosita to her father's church that the entire family had come and gotten converted?

She skipped down the dusty road toward Rosita's house to tell her the good news about working together like the tiny ants. Only they wouldn't be worrying with any big old baratas; they would work together to bring boys and girls to Jesus.

She felt good and happy all over. Today, by keeping Mrs. Luiz' baby happy and quiet, she was helping out as a missionary, too. A little missionary..., like the tiny but mighty ants.

* * * * *

October 1987

Story 10 STOCKINGS

Mindy ran down the back porch steps, her heart racing like a motor inside her chest. She was worried; Stockings was nowhere in sight. Where could her dear little kitten be? she wondered, hurrying across the lawn to Buttons' tiny dog house.

"Have you seen Stockings?" she asked the sleepy-eyed dog, who greeted her only half-playfully before settling his tiny body back on the comfortable piece of carpet on the doghouse floor.

Mindy peeked inside, but no Stockings could she see. She called and called, but no sound could she hear. Stockings had vanished. Totally and completely so!

A tear slid out of Mindy's eye. Then a beautiful thought entered her mind..., she could pray! Jesus knew where her kitten was. He knew, too, that Stockings was white all over, except for her black-stockinged feet.

Right there on the lawn, Mindy knelt and told the blessed Lord Jesus all about her problems, thanking Him for the answer she was sure she was going to have from Him.

Leaving the lawn and garden, Mindy hurried back into the house.

"Did you find Stockings?" Grandma asked.

"Not yet, Grandma. But I'm going to find her; I asked Jesus to help me."

Grandma patted Mindy's silky wheat-colored hair and said, "God bless you, dear child," then she went into the kitchen to get some supper.

Mindy went into the living room. She looked beneath the big sofa, behind the piano, and inside the closet at the end of the room, calling as she went, Stockings, where are you. Here kitty; here kitty."

A muffled but unmistakable "meow" came from Grandma's sunny bedroom which sent Mindy scurrying down the hall as fast as her little legs would take her. Pausing inside the doorway, she listened. From behind the bed came the sad little cry for help..."Meow. Meow."

Kneeling by the bed, Mindy peeked under it. What she saw made her heart ache with pain. "Stockings!" she exclaimed. "You're a mess! Now what'll I do with you? You're all tangled up in Grandma's pretty yarn. O dear! O dear! What am I going to do? How will I ever get you untangled?"

"Meow. Meow," the little kitten cried in distress as Mindy's gentle hands drew her carefully from beneath the bed and held her in her arms.

Mindy started out of the bedroom, the ball of yarn unraveling as she went and Stockings meowing for all she was worth.

"Dear, dear child!" Grandma exclaimed, seeing the yarn-encased kitten and the bright strand of yarn trailing the floor. "We do have a problem!" she added calmly. "Yes, quite a problem."

"O, Grandma," Mindy said, "Stockings is a mess. Can we free her? Will she five? O she must! She must! I love her so!"

Grandma smiled reassuringly. "Yes, Stockings will five," she said softly. "I'll unwind the yarn and free her. Stockings is like most people whom I know."

"People, Grandma? What do you mean?"

"Just this; my ball of yarn looked bright and beautiful and harmless to Stockings. She began playing with it. Soon strand number one was wrapped around her body. She continued playing with it until another strand was wrapped around her, then another, and another..."

"O Grandma, I see what you mean. It's like sin. You do one wicked and naughty thing and it fastens itself around your heart like the yarn did around poor little Stockings' body. Then you do another wicked and sinful thing and you're bound more tightly, and then, unless you ask Jesus to save you and to forgive you, soon you're so bound by sin and sinful habits that you can't get free."

"That's right, honey. That's why it is so important for boys and girls to give their hearts to Jesus while they are young."

Mindy's eyes were bright and her heart was happy. "I'm so glad Jesus lives in my heart," she said smiling. "I love Him very, very much and I don't ever want to get tangled up in sin . . . like Stockings has done in your pretty yarn."

Grandma stroked the silken head and smiled.

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November 1987

Story 11

A SPECIAL KIND OF THANKSGIVING

"I'm going to my grandparents' house, Glenn," Ron told his best friend as they walked away from the schoolhouse toward the bus that would take Glenn home. "What are you going to be doing for Thanksgiving?" he asked quickly.

Glenn made a snowball. Taking careful aim at a nearby tree, he threw and hit his mark. "I guess all my aunts and uncles, the cousins and nephews and nieces, are coming out to our farm this year," he answered, smiling broadly. "Mother's been baking her special fruit cakes since back in September. It'll seem almost like being at camp meeting, there's so many of our relatives"

Ron laughed and reached out and caught a falling snowflake. It melted on his glove. Stooping down, he got a fistful of snow and shaped it carefully in the palms of his mittened hands. "Sounds like you'll be having fun!" he ejaculated

"I'm sure we will," Glenn admitted, "and I'm as excited as I can be. But I'm bothered, too."

Ron gave his well-shaped snowball a hard pitch and hit a telephone pole some distance away. "Why should you be bothered about anything, Glenn?" he asked. Glenn stood still. Suddenly he began plowing the snows with his boots. "I wish Heather and Heath had some place special to go for Thanksgiving," he confided in a voice so filled with pity that Ron felt like crying.

"They'll be with their folks, Glenn."

"Sure. Sure. But the Murphys had it hard this year. First, Mrs. Murphy was in the hospital for a month, then a car hit Bobby and he died..."

Ron swallowed. He felt shame wash over him that he hadn't thought about the Murphys, nor even prayed for them. He dug the toe of his boot into a small drift of snow. "Maybe..., maybe..."

"Maybe what, Ron?"

"Well, I'll have to ask Father and Mother first, but maybe we could help the Murphys, Glenn. My grandparents could come to our house and I'd help Mother all I could with the work...."

Glenn's eyes were shining: He stood very, very straight and tall. "Say, I just thought of something great!" he said,

"What is it?"

"Your grandparents live on a farm."

"Yeah, I know they do," Ron answered philosophically.

"Why not have Heather and Heath and their parents go out there with you? They'd love it, Ron, I know they would."

"That's a great idea, for sure Glenn; and I'm going to ask Father and Mother just as soon as I'm in the door. I'm sure glad i have a grandfather who owns a farm."

"And I'm the lucky boy.., to be living on a farm!" Glenn said, hurrying toward the waiting bus.

"Thanks for mentioning the Murphys," Ron said in a low whisper. "It sure was thoughtful of you, Glenn. I will ask Mother the big question as soon as I get home." And Ron hurried away, through the drifting snow.

"Why the big rush?" his mother teased, as he burst into the kitchen, panting and almost breathless with excitement.

"Can the Murphys go with us to Grandpa's house for Thanksgiving, Mom? Please? Glenn said they're awfully poor; they won't have much to eat and..."

"First, it's may the Murphys go? Not can. Next, we always leave all snow-covered boots on the closed-in back porch; and third, yes, the Murphys will be going with us for Thanksgiving. Your father and I asked them some time ago; it was to have been a surprise for you, as well as for Heath and Heather."

Ron's eyes got big and round and all shiny-bright. "O Mother," he said happily, "I feel so ... so good on the inside! This will be a very special kind of Thanksgiving Day, a never-forget-the-poor reminder that will last all year long. Like Glenn, I'm going to begin thinking more of others."

Thanksgiving is a wonderful time to share with others, Ron," his mother said. "Especially is this blessed when those with whom we are sharing cannot repay. However, we must not limit our sharing and our doing to special days only; it should be a year-round part of our life, when and if someone has a need."

Ron shrugged out of his coat and hurried out to the closed-in back porch where he Deposited his boots on a plastic liner. His heart was singing, singing, singing. He had learned

something wonderful today; by making others happy, his heart was happy! It was a good kind of feeling, and there on the porch he lifted his face upward. "I'll remember, Lord Jesus," he promised, "Yes, I'll always remember that You bless those who put You first, others second, and self last."

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December 1987

Story 12

THE CHRISTMAS ANGEL

Heidi walked down the sidewalk with her few school books nestled in her arm. She was so excited that she could scarcely contain herself. She was selected by Miss Brooks to be one of the angels in the school play. It was wonderful! she thought happily, looking up at the fast falling snow and blowing it a kiss.

She was so excited and so deep in thought over the good news that she almost stumbled over a protruding tree root. She looked down, just in the nick of time, to see it and do a quick sidestep and avoid the tumble she was sure to have had.

"Something on your mind?" a voice asked behind her. "You almost took a tumble!"

Heidi laughed pleasantly. "I did, didn't I, Lois Ann!" Heidi said to her best friend. "And yes, I do have something on my mind. I'm going to be one of the angels in the school play. I'm so excited that I wasn't paying attention where I was walking."

Lois Ann heaved a great sigh. "I wish Miss Brooks would have given me some other part... I'm an angel, too," she explained, dragging her feet through the snow and plowing a narrow path as she walked.

Heidi stopped so suddenly that she almost fell backwards in the snow. She gasped "You can't mean it, Lois Ann! Why, the nicest thing anyone could wish to be is an angel. Brother Black said angels are ministering spirits, that God sends them on very important errands. I remember reading in the Bible that He sent an angel to Gideon and one to Samson's mother. And Daniel, in the lion's den, shouted up to the king that God had sent His angel and shut the mouths of the lions so they couldn't hurt him."

"He sent an angel to the virgin Mary, too," Lois Ann added quickly, still plowing the snow with her boots "But to be an angel, even in a play! O Heidi, can't you see what I mean? Angels are Heavenly beings! They're close to God. They... they're holy! I... I don't feel.., worthy."

Heidi gulped. She hadn't thought of that. "I... I'm not worthy either, Lois Ann," she answered quickly "But you and I have experienced something that the angels have never felt or experienced," she said brightly.

"What do you mean?"

"You and I have been saved. We know how wonderful it is to have our sins forgiven. This is something the angels in heaven can't say."

"I never thought of that!" Lois Ann exclaimed, feeling happy and good inside "What are you going to put in the Christmas box For missions?" she asked quickly, changing the subject.

Heidi threw her hand in the air in utter exasperation. "O dear," she said, "I forgot all about that. What are you giving, Lois Ann?"

"It's given already. I took Judi Lynn over to Mrs. Parker's house last night and told her to put her in the box that's going to be sent to Brazil."

"You... mean you gave your very favorite doll away?"

"Yes."

"Ho... how could you, Lois Ann? Don . . . don't you miss her . . . terribly?"

"Ye... yes." Lois Ann was almost in tears now.

"Then why did you give her away?"

"Because I felt Jesus wanted me to do it. And... and Mrs. Parker said we should give only our best; that anything we did for Jesus and His cause should always be only our very best. She said we were doing it as unto the Lord. Remember?"

Heidi's face flushed a scarlet-red. How could she have forgotten anything so important?" she wondered suddenly. With bowed head, she said, "I . . . forgot all about the missionary box."

"But you will give, Heidi, won't you? It's going to little children who don't ever receive gifts. I know whoever gets Judi Lynn will love her!"

Heidi felt like crying. She should give her beloved Sally, she knew. Sally was the loveliest doll she had. But how could she do like Lois Ann and give her to... to... some dirty, ragged heathen child? she wondered, feeling more miserable by the moment.

"Give only your best..." Mrs. Parker's words rang suddenly in her ears.

Oh, she couldn't do it. She couldn't! It hurt her too much to think of giving Sally away; how could she bear the actual parting!

"Don't give, unless you do it willingly...."

Again she heard Mrs. Parker's voice and her words "God loves the cheerful giver."

Heidi sighed. "I . . . do want to but give," she said positively. "But... O Lois Ann, I.. I guess I don't deserve that angel part. You'll make a far better angel than I. It . . . it's so hard to . . . give Sally away."

"Do like I did, Heidi; ask Jesus to help you. He helped me; I have the happiest kind of feeling inside since I gave Judi Lynn away. I felt I had to give her, when I remembered that God gave His only Son Jesus to die for my sins."

"Mine, too," Heidi said softly; sadly. Then, lifting her eyes to meet her little friend's, she said, "I'll do it, Lois Ann. I'll give Sally for the missionary Christmas box. I'll give as unto the Lord like Mrs. Parker said. And I'll give her willingly and cheerfully, too."

"See what I mean about that happy feeling, Heidi!"

Heidi nodded. She looked at Lois Ann's happy face; it was shining with an inner light. She looked like an angel.

* * * * *

THE END