

Copyright 2001 By Lucille King  
All Rights Reserved and Duplication  
Of This Publication Is Forbidden,  
Except For Personal Use

\* \* \* \* \*

Digital Edition 08/13/2001  
By Holiness Data Ministry

\* \* \* \* \*

## The Crazy Signs

By Mrs. Paul E. King

From the March 18, 1973 Sunday School Beacon

Hi! I'm William Heil, son of Franklin and Mary Heil and a junior in Bayberry High. We're common, ordinary people . . . my Dad, Mom, and I . . . who live on the side of town where the rich, the elite, and those of social prestige don't. You get the point? In other words, my folks aren't listed... ever! . . . in the society page of our daily newspaper and, for that matter, our faces are never displayed or portrayed in same said paper, namely, "The Bayberry Gazette."



"You bug me!" Howard said, falling in step beside me. I smiled at him.

Our name is common even, and unimportant-sounding, and according to some in the school I was born under a dangerous and ill-forboding sign. By the way, did you ever think you'd live to see the day when so many seemingly smart and highly intelligent people would lose their equilibrium and turn to the Zodiac and astrology for the answers to their mixed-up everyday problems and for a sort of preview of the future of their lives?

It baffles me, this kind of reasoning, and not infrequently at all do I find myself chuckling over the stupidity of it. It's ridiculous! Why certain of my friends, on certain days, can't do this thing or that thing; or must be extra cautious along one line or the other due to the fact that their zodiac sign is favorable or unfavorable, whichever the case may be.

Me? I ignore their warnings about my supposedly bad days. According to their reasoning, I'm supposed to have many days that need careful observation and watching. It's amusing, their concern over me, but pathetic too.

"Hey, Bill!" Howard Sidler called me one day as I left the school for home. "You bug me!" he said bluntly.

"Huh?" I laughed.

"You bug me," Howard repeated, falling in step beside me. "Today was to have been one of those days you'd have to be extra cautious. It would have been easy . . . easy, Pal! for you to have 'lost your head.' But what do you do? Stay as calm and natural and relaxed as ever! And you were supposed to have 'lost your head!' " he repeated with emphasis, gesturing frantically with his hands.

"But I didn't!"

"I know you didn't, Bill! This is what bugs me. You, who have more bad signs than good, stay the same..., **always!**"

I smiled. Turning, I put my hand on Howard's six-foot-four frame. "Want to know why I don't 'lose my head', as you phrased it?" I asked. "And why I remain calm and joyful, even under trying circumstances?"

Howard nodded. "Indeed I do!" he asserted with a positive note. "You go contrary to the signs, man!"

That statement struck me funny. I threw my head back and laughed. "Those old signs don't faze me," I said. "I don't believe in them. Not at all. I'm a born again, blood-washed Christian. Since my heart is saved and I'm sanctified wholly, God controls every part of my life. He's the center of my heart and life. He keeps me, Howard. Being a Christian is wonderful. You just begin to live after you get converted and sanctified."

"But you..., you go contrary to the Zodiac sign, Bill. It affects you this way. Your religion, I mean. It makes you go contrary."

"No, Howard; the signs go contrary to what's within me and contrary to God's Word. All that any of us need to know regarding the past, the present and the future, is written in the Bible, God's Word to us. Not the Zodiac! Why don't you try reading the Word of God, Howard? It has all the answers for your mixed up life and it will set your spirit free."

Howard's face fell. His gaze swept the sidewalk in a kind of frightened way. He toyed thoughtfully, if a bit nervously, with the pen he extracted from his shirt pocket then he raised his eyes to mine again. "Bill," he said, his voice so low I had to strain to hear, "Bill, you're my best buddy but, well, with the mess my home is in I... well... I'll stick to the business for a while yet. With dad and mom both sitting on a keg of dynamite, so

speaking, which explodes without the least bit of provocation and at the awfulest times, I need to know when to keep especially calm and quiet and stay out of their way, which seems to be all the time anymore. You don't have this kind of problem."

And it was true, what Howard said. I had no such problems to face. My parents were Christians.

I gave Howard a sympathetic slap on the shoulder. "You're welcome at the house anytime," I said. "My folks will do all they can to help you."

"You and your folks are wonderful, Bill!" he exclaimed ere we parted on the corner of Oak and Ash Streets that day.

[Here the story jumps to a later time. -- DVM]

I dug my hands deep into my pockets now as I stood inside the school window in our home room and looked through it to the outside. It was a beautiful day. One of those rare fall days so bright and gold with sunshine that you felt you could reach out, and with no effort at all, take handful of it for yourself.

In spite of the glory of the day, a pall of gloom hung over the school. Our room especially. The whole student body felt it. Mr. Shelton, our home-room teacher, sensed the mingled emotions. Some few, like myself, suffered guilty consciences; some felt genuine regret that one of their crowd had actually gone AWOL, while others seemed totally unconcerned about it all.

"Why so glum!" It was Shelly Minter. She stepped up beside me ever so quietly. Shelly was a Christian too.

"Huh? Oh!" I turned reluctantly from the window. "Not glum, Shelly; sad!"

"I... know how you feel, Bill," she said softly as tears spilled out of her beautiful blue eyes. "But what more could you have done? I mean," she went on quickly, "you couldn't help it. And I... I... oh, Bill, I couldn't date Howard. It's unscriptural. I'm a Christian; he isn't."

Shelly's reasoning was right. It was Biblical too. Howard was fond of Shelly. Fond, in a courting sort of way. He had wanted to date Shelly. She had refused.., sweetly but firmly and positively so.

"I . . . did the right thing, Bill, didn't I?"

"Of course you did the right thing, Shelly!" I said, wheeling around so fast I nearly knocked her over. "Oops! Excuse me!" I apologized. "Don't worry about that anymore," I admonished. "But, if . . ."

"You mean, if you had dated Howard things might be different? He may not have disappeared? Is this what you mean?"

Shelly buried her face in her hands, "I . . . I'm not to blame, Bill, am I? By refusing Howard dates, I mean?" She raised her head, her blue eyes, filled with pain, searched mine eagerly.

"Indeed you're not to blame, Shelly! Why, you'd have been disobeying God and His Word by going out with him. Chances are you'd have backslidden over it if you had dated him."

Shelly nodded, her long blonde hair dancing fluffily down her back as she did so. "Poor Howard!" she sighed.

Yes, poor Howard indeed! I thought, feeling utterly helpless and like I too was a miserable failure where my friend was concerned.

"Where do you suppose he's gone? To New York or San Francisco?" Shelly wondered. "Why, Bill, he's liable to wind up a dope addict and a hippie and a... a human derelict! And lost forever! I feel like we have failed him!"

Shelly's words hit their mark. They cut home. . . to the core of my heart. My pulse rate accelerated considerably as that "failure feeling" overwhelmed me again. As I had done so many other times since learning of Howard's disappearance this morning, I groaned within myself. "Oh, God, where have I failed?" my heart cried out.

"Whatever would have made Howard do such a thing, Bill?"

I tried to swallow the lump that seemed to have stuck right in the center of my esophagus. "Huh? O there were many reasons, I'm sure," I answered.

Shelly's face was pale and drawn looking. She twisted a Kleenex until it began dropping to the floor in tiny messy, crumpled bits. Seeing the mess she made she stooped and quickly retrieved the twisted shreds from the floor and stuffed them into her jumper pocket. Turning to face me, she implored tearfully, "Let's pray harder than ever, Bill. Howard could do something drastic!" With those words, she turned and fled out of the room, her face buried in her hands.

I felt a wave of nausea hit me at thought of what Howard might do... a wave of nausea and a sudden compelling, impelling drive to do something.

I dug my hands deeper into my pants pockets. Always, I seemed better able to think in this position. It was then that Howard's words of another day hammered their way into my thinking. "There's nothing for me to live for," he had confessed miserably one

night as he came over to our house after his parents had ordered him to leave during one of their drunken brawls.

I remembered the look of utter desolation and dejection on Howard's face, I remembered too how my parents had insisted that he spend the night with us and how we had prayed with him that night.

Then I remembered other things -- dark troublesome things -- one, in particular. It was a scene in Howard's home. "Hey, Bill," he had called, one afternoon after school, "how about coming home with me? I want to show you something I'm working on."

"Be glad to, Howard," I answered. "I'll call my folks from your house and let them know where I am and that I'll not be long."

And I **had** gone with Howard. Poor fellow! What he had planned would be a pleasant half-hour for both of us had turned into a nightmare. His mother screamed (and I mean screamed!) at him from the moment we entered the door until I left. The house was filthy and smelly and in such a cluttered mess that I hardly knew where to step to get through to Howard's room which was, incidentally, neatness and perfect orderliness.

"I. . . I'm sorry you had to find things in... such a mess!" Howard apologized in embarrassment. "I... didn't realize mother'd be home. She must not have gone to work today. Looks as if . . . father and she.., were fighting again. The house is always in shambles after one of their brawls and fights. I .... I'm sorry, Bill!"

"Look, Howard," I answered, putting my hands on his shoulders, "I understand. You don't need to feel badly. If your folks were Christians they'd . . ."

Howard brushed my hands off his shoulders roughly. "Don't feel sorry for me, Bill," he exclaimed. "I... I'm just unlucky; that's all. I was born under the wrong sign! My parents, too! Maybe you . . . you'd better leave, Bill . . ."

I felt defeated as I left the house that day. From then on Howard became extremely introverted and shy.

Where could he have gone? I asked myself now as I paced up and down the school corridors. And then I remembered! The cabin on dad's back-forty acres! The cabin! What better place for a hide-out!

I could scarcely wait till school was dismissed for the day and I was in dad's old jalopy headed out to the country and the farm dad had bought and was slowly but amazingly bringing it back into its own by laborious but loving and satisfying work. Someday, the Lord willing, after the house was completely remodeled, dad was planning to move us out there. We loved the place, run down though it was when father first

bought it. We spent many long evenings out there working . . . dad and mom and Howard and I.

I accelerated heavily now as I thought of Howard. The dust swirled around the car in great billows of gray clouds, swallowing up everything behind me and finally settling thick and brown-gray on the sassafras and sumac along the lane. Even the goldenrod and purple gentian got a generous powdering with it.

I braked to an abrupt halt in front of the house by the gate then I jumped out of the car and raced past the house through the once tangled unkempt-looking orchard but which was now, because of loving care and hard labor, all clean and neat looking and whose well, pruned trees hung heavy with luscious fruit.

Hastily, I stuffed some of the apples into my pockets then started through the corn field at a brisk pace until I came to the back-forty, hidden snugly away in a hollow and surrounded completely by the woods and corn field. It was concealed completely and entirely from the lane and hidden equally securely from the peeking eyes of the windows in the farmhouse.

Built up tight against the woods on the northwest side of the back-forty was the cabin that went with the farm. It was far from elegant, this cabin, but what young man cares for elegance! It was built from stout, thick lumber . . . pine logs . . . pitched within and without and kept all kinds of weather out. It stood near a cold, clear mountain stream where the trout ran thick. The inside of the cabin was furnished with old pieces of 'odds and ends'. Howard and dad and I had often spent the night there after working late and hard in the fields or on the house. We had even fished early mornings and some evenings and fried the delicious trout on the stove in the cabin.

I hurried across the clearing of the back-forty to where the cabin stood. "Howard!" I called anxiously as I ran up the two steps on the porch. "Howard! It's Bill!"

I placed my hand on the door-knob to open it just as Howard stuck his head through the now open door. "Hi, Bill," he greeted pleasantly. I hope you don't mind . . ."

"Mind? Why, man, you know we don't mind!" I exclaimed, grabbing the extended hand and pumping it vigorously. "Am I ever glad to see you, Howard!" I added hoarsely, too broken almost to talk. "You . . . scared.., us.."

"I... I'm sorry, Bill. I really am. I didn't mean to cause anyone concern but I . . . well, I **had** to get away.., to... think."

"Yeah. I understand," I asserted. "I understand how it is; and, Howard, we . . . we've been praying for you -- **really** praying for you... Shelly, Dianne, Chuck, and my

folks and I. Come back to school, boy. You're missed You see, Howard, you're terribly important to all of us who know the Lord and love Him. We love you and care about you!"

Before I could say more, Howard nearly dragged me inside. He was sobbing like I used to do when I was a child and stubbed my toe or got hit hard with a ball. "You . . . can't imagine . . . what that does for a fellow," he stuttered and stammered, "knowing someone loves him and cares what he does or doesn't do. Bill, I've been doing a lot of thinking since coming out here -- a **lot** of thinking!"

"Sure, Howard. Sure! Sometimes it's good to think; . . . especially in the right direction."

"That's what I did, Bill; thought in the right direction. Last night, after I fixed supper... I hope you don't mind that I used some of the canned goods in the cupboard . . . well, after supper I walked along the stream. While I was there, I thought of something your father and you told me on one of our fishing trips out here.

"You said, 'If you ever get in a tight and you don't know which way to turn, nor to whom, turn to God.' Well, I got there; in a tight, I mean. I felt I was in a corner. I was tempted awfully, Bill... to take my life. To end it all. But then something else you had said shook me. You said I wouldn't be 'ending it all', that I would merely begin my endless stay in a devil's hell and a Christless eternity. I couldn't stand the thoughts of going to hell for all eternity."

My breath came in short, excited gasps as I listened to Howard. The moment was far too sacred to interrupt him.

Howard's face was radiant as he continued. "I ran back to the cabin and prayed, Bill. I really prayed. On the same spot where your dear father and you had prayed for me during your family altars here. Did you hear me, Bill?" Howard's face was shining and I was crying for joy!

"I heard you, buddy of mine," I said in a hoarse whisper.

"I got saved, Bill! **Saved!** Can you imagine it! Howard Sidler converted and made new!"

"I knew it! I knew it! The minute I saw you I knew something wonderful happened to you, Howard. Thank God Thank God!"

"Talk about joy and peace and satisfaction! I have it!" Howard exclaimed happily "I have never really lived..., until last night!"

"It's just like the Lord!"

"Well, Bill, I'm ready to go home and back to school now. With God's help, I feel I can face anything. No matter which road my parents choose to take I mean to go God's way. Someday, after I'm sanctified like you and have been able to prove myself worthy of Shelly, I mean to have her for my wife if she'll have me. I want a Christian home and want to raise a Christian family of my own."

"My folks and I'll do all we can to help you, Howard."

"I know you will. You've been a true friend to me all along, Bill. Your prayers have helped me so many times." A heavenly smile brightened Howard's face and a twinkle stole into his eyes. "Know something else, Bill? My Zodiac sign's gone all crazy since I got converted. I don't believe a bit of it. God has control of my life now, just like you said."

I looked into Howard's shining face and surveyed his broad, athletic-type shoulders. What a true specimen of a Christian soldier he was already!

"That crazy Zodiac!" Howard said again. "And what a foolish, deceived man I was."

Our mingled laughter filled the cabin. Then, turning the key in the lock on the door and depositing it in its hiding place, we headed across the field to dad's old jalopy. With gratitude and praise, we eased our frames into the beat up old car and started homeward, the dust swirling about us in great billowy clouds. I felt as if they were clouds of praise.

\* \* \* \* \*

**THE END**