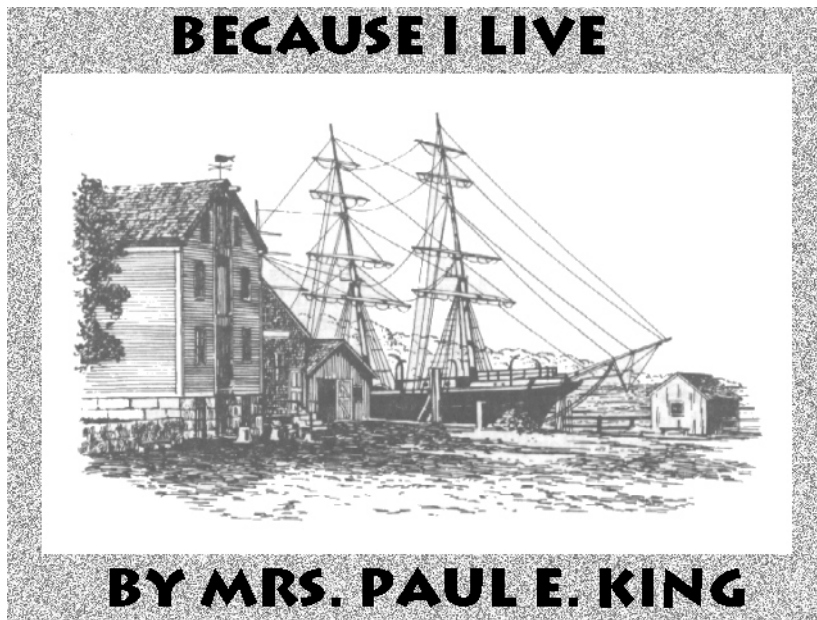


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Digital Edition 10/22/2001
By Holiness Data Ministry

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BECAUSE I LIVE

By Mrs. Paul E. King

From the March 27, 1983 Sunday School Beacon

The eastern sky lightened steadily. Its color shifted from deep blue to pale violet to rich orange and, finally, to a burst of red as the sun rose above the watery horizon. As if the ocean were being sucked down an imaginary drain from which the sun had just risen, the tide receded steadily from the shore.

This, Justin realized with justifiable pride and excitement, was one of two unique days of the year when spring tides were greatest because of the

cosmic forces which set them in motion. He wouldn't have missed the spectacles for anything, early-early though he had to roll out of bed. This day the earth, moon, and sun formed a straight line in space, with the moon at the closest point in its elliptical orbit of the earth.

Justin Moore's pulse rate increased over the knowledge that he had been privileged to actually see and witness the rapid changes taking place in the sky as it was affected by the water.

He stood, almost breathless with awe, viewing the scene. Then he filled his lungs, deep and full, with the fresh, brisk seabreeze and exhaled the breath rapidly. Sighing in sheer contentment, he hurried across the exposed seabed, eager and anxious to dig up an abundant supply of clams for his mother. Already a small wave of ambitious clam diggers were working the exposed area while others waded far out into the shallow water in search of the fresh, succulent sea creatures.

Methodically, Justin prodded the exposed sand with the butt-end of his shovel in a relentless search of hen clams. His perseverance and success was rewarded with a slight gurgle from his quarry, buried beneath the sand. Without missing a beat, he shoveled away the sand and scooped up the prize. Tossing it into a bucket which he'd brought, he resumed his prodding search for more.

The bucket filled rapidly and, reluctantly, the young man set out for home, a walk of well over a mile. But it didn't bother him; he'd kept his body in top physical shape working the eighty some odd acres of land on the old home place.

A quiet serenity pervaded the atmosphere as he walked. It was as though God Himself were there walking by his side. And why not? he thought. Hadn't He drawn near to two distraught and utterly forlorn men as they journeyed the road toward the village of Emmaus? Better still, since he and his mother had begun going to the small church a short distance away from their home and had gotten saved and sanctified wholly, he knew without the least shadow of a doubt that now Christ was not only with him, but in him, too. And with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God was indeed always there by his side.

Justin switched the filled pail to his other hand, carrying the spade in fishing pole style across his shoulder, the outline of the house . . . a converted barn, really., coming into view.

He smiled, recalling the myriad stares and trite remarks he'd received when he first had the old but well-constructed and more than a century old barn moved from a neighboring farm to its present site, nestled snugly and cozily in among the countless numbers of fir and pine and spruce trees.

It had seemed silly to the neighbors and friends that he should attempt something so radical and difficult. But he had seen the advantages and his persistence had paid off.

Bereft of his father when he was fourteen, Justin learned quickly the meaning of hard work, long hours and the beauty and joy of personal skills and private trades, all of which he learned as he grew up God had bestowed in abundance upon him.

"I don't know how we'll get through another winter, Justin," his mother remarked to him one early autumn day. "The house is done for. We've patched and patched until there's very little left to patch on. Your father meant for this small lean-to to last only until he could get a bigger, better, more substantial house built. And he'd have done it, too, if..."

Always, her sentence trailed when she came to that part. Justin knew why. His father had been killed felling trees for the very home he planned to build. Much of the lumber had already been brought from the sawmill before his untimely death and was stacked neatly and carefully in a shed his father had built, all well-protected from the weather and now mellow with age by the time Justin's idea took roots.

"Mom," he said one night, coming home from high school, "I've found our house."

"Found our house! Why Justin, I couldn't think of moving away from here. Your father and I sort of homesteaded these eighty-eight and three-fourths acres. No, we'll make do another winter. The Lord will help us, I'm sure. He always has. And we didn't freeze last winter..."

"Not quite." the young man remembered having answered. "But almost. And your arthritis is so much worse since last winter. But I found our new

house. New only to us; old by all other standards. Tom Holligan wants to have the old barn torn down. He asked me to do it; said he has no need of it since they no longer keep cattle nor do any minting. Maude wants a new house to set exactly where the barn's located... on that gently sloping hill, you know.

"I asked Tom would he sell me the barn and he looked at me as if I offended him. Sell it! he bellowed. To you and your mother! Never! You may have it; I'll give it to you. Just get it off the place."

Justin remembered his excitement over God's leadership for his mother and himself. The barn, built somewhere between 1840 and 1850, was a small affair, by ordinary, modern barns.

Going to a library, he checked into the epoch of barn building during the 1840's and 1850's and discovered, to his great excitement and pleasure, that they were built out of handhewn timbers for framing, with their sides covered with boards gotten at the local mills, many of them having been ripped from the log with an up-and-down saw.

The handhewn timbers--for framing--were generally eight by eights, the book said, of native spruce, all put together in sections or "bents" on the ground, and then raised into place on the foundations. The timbers were fastened together by mortises and tenons, pegged with hardwood pegs, and were profusely braced.

Justin had left the library in the nearby village town excited, elated and jubilant. His mother and he would have one of the strongest constructed buildings around, he knew.

The hardest part had been moving the barn from Tom's site to where he had cleared the timber off for their "new" house, not far from the old lean-to. But they did it and, in spite of the many who wondered if he had gone crazy or whatever, the "new" house gradually took shape and became reality, with nary a winter blast sneaking in through the cracks. He worked long, hard hours converting the barn into the beautiful house he now saw as he approached the orchard which lay in front of the house and took in the ground upon which the lean-to had once stood.

Justin saw his mother leaning from an upstairs bedroom window shaking the dustcloth out of the opened window. He smiled, remembering that the upstairs, all beautifully finished now with hardwood floors and complimentary-quaint, wallpapered walls, had once been an overhead scaffolding affair which served as a hay mow and a place to store golden wheat straw or soft gray-green oat straw for bedding of the animals in the stalls below.

The house had been a miracle. Both his mother and he had agreed to this fact. A miracle in myriad ways, not the least of which had been the little input or output of money. There had been hardware and such kind of things, to be sure. But the lumber was there, snuggled dryly beneath the mammoth tarpaulin covering laid so carefully by his father, awaiting, it seemed, the conversion of Tom's barn.

He hurried through the orchard to the cobblestone walk leading to the front door, anxious and eager to be relieved of his load of clams. Standing the spade up against the house until he could take it out to the shed, he hurried inside.

"Aunt Josie just passed away," Mrs. Moore announced sadly, coming down the stairs, drying her eyes with one hand and holding the dustcloth in the other.

Setting the heavy bucket down, Justin asked, "How do you know?"

Though they had had no telephone, Justin never ceased to be amazed how news of importance reached them ~ seeming record time. He was sure that the rugged Easterners had much in common with many of the mission fields abroad when it came to getting word around of someone's death, marriage, or anything tragic.

"Are you sure it's true, Mother? Not Aunt Josie!"

"It's true, Justin. I was upstairs getting the bedrooms ready for the relatives who'll be coming but have no place to stay. Tom brought me the news a half hour ago. Said he and Maude'll be able to sleep at least ten in their big house."

"Wh . . . what took her?" Justin asked. "She seemed well enough in church on Sunday. Told me that to her dying day she would thank God that I invited her out to our last revival and she got saved."

"Heart, Justin. Aunt Josie died in her sleep. Maude found her."

"Heart! Why . . . she never said anything about it."

"No. No, she wouldn't," Mrs. Moore replied. "Now take the clams out and shuck them. I'll need all the food we can scrape together. Those are fine clams you got this morning. Some hen clams, I see."

"I was trying to get mostly those kind, Mother. But they are fine clams. So large and fresh, too. A lot of good eating in this bucket."

"A tasty, delicious pot of fresh clam chowder will be a treat for Josie's children who left our simple way of life and of living for the apartments of the smogfilled cities. I'm sure they'll relish a taste of yesteryear."

Aunt Josie dead! It didn't seem real; nor possible. She was as much a part of Justin's world., of his life ... as were the age-old, ever-present evergreen trees all around him. She had coddled him as an infant, taught him his first ABC's before he was much past two, shown him the velvet-beauty and softness of a pansy, encouraged him when he felt defeated and bragged on him when he had done a job well.

A tear slid out of Justin's eye as he took care of the clams. He had planned on carrying a big bowl of cleaned clams over to Aunt Josie, sitting and visiting with her for a while, the way he always did.

She was neither aunt nor kin, but was in the truest meaning of the word as close., or closer... as if she had been. Aunt Josie was past 90, a sort of link of the past and one to the future. She had never become "beholden to the state," poor though she was, for a single thing. She was ruggedly hearty and puritanical, eeking out a mere existence on the stony five-acre plot surrounding her house- and maintaining the same standards and attire of dress as when she was a girl. Loved and respected by everyone for miles around, she was a much sought-out person . . . for a blackberry preserve recipe, herbal cough syrup remedy, home-drawn quilt patterns and new embroidery ideas.

The full impact of her going.., her dying.., hit him suddenly. Forcibly. Dropping on a nearby log, his pent-up emotions flooded and he wept bitterly. Then he remembered the glory and the brilliance and beauty of the morning and he was blest. Aunt Josie wasn't dead. Not at all. She had just begun to live.

Lifting his tear-stained eyes upward, the young man made a vow. "I'll meet you again, Aunt Josie, I promise. Inside the Eastern gates."

He meant it. From the bottom of his heart, he did. Aunt Josie wasn't dead. Not really. The physical was, to be sure; but not the spiritual. Just as sure as daylight followed darkness, so sure was Justin that Aunt Josie was alive. That he would see her again, in her glorified, resurrected body.

Turning quickly, he began working on the clams. His mother would need them soon, he realized, to make up into tasty, mouth-watering dishes.

Recalling the words of Jesus, "Because I live, ye shall live also," Justin worked with a happy heart.