"SO MUCH TO LEARN"
By Mrs. Paul E. King

"So that's how things stand?" Holly said into the mouthpiece of the phone. "You're sure you won't change your mind, Esther? I've had this wiener roast planned for a long time, you know, and these summer months glide by like the Silver Streak that comes into town twice a day for passengers. Almost before you know it, summer's going to be ended "
She paused, waiting to hear Esther's final answer. Then, in true-to-pattern fashion, she said disappointedly, "Okay, if that's the way you want it. But if you change your mind, call me."

She sat for a long time after she had put the phone back in place. All summer, it seemed, everything she had planned or wanted to do had gone awry. Everything. First it was the slumber party which she had suggested to her friends. Ginny had protested, saying that her mother wasn't in favor of slumber parties. Esther the same. Then Jodie said almost as much. So the slumber party was out. Next she had mentioned a beach party. Once again Ginny protested. Sweetly, of course . . . Ginny was always sweet and wonderful. So was Esther. And Jodie too. Ginny had laughed in her bubbly-soft way as she said, "Oh, Holly dear, why should you want a beach party? None of us girls would think of wearing a bathing suit. God's people are modest people. Bathing suits are anything but modest."

Holly remembered having said simply, "Oh!" Nothing more, nothing less. Simply an astonished, "Oh!"

And now, the wiener roast . . .

She walked into the kitchen.

"What's wrong, Holly?" her mother asked, seeing the serious, pensive look on her daughter's face.

"I . . . I guess it's disappointment, Mother. Nothing I can't hurdle or get over though."

"Why should you be disappointed? I mean, what happened?"

"The big wiener roast I planned; remember?"

Mrs. Brooke nodded. She eyed Holly curiously.

"I guess that fell through, too. Like the slumber party and the beach party," Holly stated.

"When had you wanted to have the wiener roast, Holly?"
"At night, I thought it would be fun to have it out on the beach, and invite a few of my old friends. This way they could meet some of the young people of the church."

"I'm sure you had proper motives, honey; but can't you see how this would be laying yourself open for temptation? Without a doubt, those old friends would want to bring some kind of alcoholic beverages along. That is the custom for most of them when they have a party or are invited to one. Your friends are doing you a big favor by telling you what is wrong with that kind of thing. We have so much to learn. And I want to know what is right and what is wrong, so I can be 'well-pleasing' to God. I'm so thankful the Lord got to our hearts. I want to please Him, because I love Him."

"O Mother, I do, too. I didn't mean to sound like I was complaining; it's just that I was disappointed. Esther's coming over to talk to me. She said Ginny and Jodie and she have something else planned."

Mrs. Brooke smiled. She looked relieved. "You know, Holly," she said, "since you are going around with the young people from the church, your father and I don't ever worry about you and Doug anymore. We know your love for God will keep you from doing something sinful and evil, and your association with the young people from church acts as a strong anchor towards keeping your 'ship' going in the right direction. This is such a relief to us."

"Did Doug and I cause you worry, Mother; when we were out in sin, I mean?"

"Many and many a night, Yes. And what worry!"

"But neither you nor Daddy were saved . . . "

Mrs. Brooke, reading the meaning of her daughter's trailing sentence, said, "Just because we weren't Christians didn't mean we weren't concerned about you and your brother and what you were doing and with whom you were associating. Even good moral parents, though unsaved, still have a deep concern for their offspring. We worried a great deal about you, Holly. Yes, a great deal. But that's all in the past, thank God. All four of us have had a radical heart change and now we're new in Christ. The past is all forgiven."
Holly fell silent, recalling the first time she had chanced to meet Ginny and Esther. It was in school. Oh, she had seen them on numerous occasions, to be sure. But they were little more than "a passing fancy" to her. They merely helped to comprise Waterford High's better than four hundred students, many of them only vaguely familiar to her.

She had been hurrying (as usual) to get from her math class to Home Ec when, for some silly reason, she had seemed to stumble over her own feet. The sudden . . . and humiliating . . . fall sent her books flying in all directions down the shiny-waxed hallway floor. Among the many students who saw her fall were Ginny and Esther, who, besides helping to retrieve her scattered books and papers, escorted her, one on either side, into the restroom where they allayed her embarrassment and burning chagrin with words of kindness and compassion and understanding.

They tried to arrange her papers in orderly form again and asked her if she was hurt or injured, volunteering to help her to the nurse's office. When she assured them that aside from the humiliating aspect of the fall she was quite all right, Ginny spoke up. She introduced both Esther and herself. Then she asked Holly where she attended church and was she a Christian and ready for Heaven.

Holly remembered how she had stammered, searching for something to say, something to answer. Finally she admitted that she didn't go anywhere to church. And as to being a Christian, she replied she guessed she was one since she certainly was not a heathen. In answer to Ginny's last question Holly recalled having posed one of her own in return: "Can anyone know that?" she had asked sincerely, since it seemed almost too profound a question and something which she had never even given thought to.

That was the beginning of things. Beautiful things. That last question of hers had opened up an area heretofore unknown and unexplored. Ginny, like a beautiful opening flower, had expounded the Word of God in such an unbelievably plain but convincing-clear manner to her until she had to know more -- to hear more. So it was a Bible study-lunch time duo the following day. And the next, and the next. And soon she had been soundly converted. Then, shortly after, Ginny and Esther and Jodie had talked to her about the
need of heart cleansing. She had walked in every ray of light and was soon filled with the Holy Spirit -- sanctified wholly. And, quite naturally, the four of them had become close friends. Her former friends dropped her almost immediately.

"Esther's here, Holly." Mrs. Brooke's words brought Holly instantly out of her reverie of the past.

"I'll let her in, Mother," she said, hurrying to the door and greeting the smiling Esther.

"Hello, Mrs. Brooke," Esther said with warmth and pleasantness. "It's good to see you again. Mother sent some cookies over for your family. We've been baking for several poor families and made some for the Pashurs too. The poor folks can barely get around anymore. Mother and I send edibles over to them at least twice a week. We tried several new recipes out this morning. I think they're super. So does Mother. She thought you and your family may enjoy sampling them."

"Thank you so kindly, Esther. I know we're going to enjoy them. They look delicious, and rich!" Mrs. Brooke said, adding the last with a smile.

"They're that!" the lovely blonde haired girl declared emphatically. "And now, Holly, I'd like to see you get involved."

"OK. With what?"

Esther sat on one of the kitchen stools and looked Holly full in the face. "They say 'an idle mind is the devil's workshop.' So Ginny and Jodie and I would like to see you become involved with our visitation program."

"You mean go out calling on those old people in the Magnolia Manor?" Holly asked incredulously.

Esther nodded.

Exasperated, Holly gesticulated fiercely and furiously. "But I couldn't, Esther. I just couldn't! I'm not the outgoing, extroverted type. And to old people! Whatever would I say to someone in a wheelchair? And how would I
communicate with a bedfast person? Why the mere smell of a hospital makes me all queasy and sick on the inside."

Esther was silent for a while. Then she said softly, "I'm not the outgoing type either, Holly. But seeing the light come on in a pair of dull, listless, faded eyes compels one to witness for Jesus and to talk about Him. And it is its own reward. Believe me, I know. Many of those dear old souls need nothing more than someone's good listening ear. In such a case, all one needs to do is smile and nod and just stay tuned in to what is being said. You're a perfect listener. Honestly, Holly, you'd be a real blessing if you'd try it."

'I wish I were sure of this, Esther. Is this what you had in mind when you told me over the phone that you had something far more exciting and worthwhile for me than having wiener roasts ever could be?"

"Yes, it is. This visiting and praying with the aged in nursing homes is one of the most rewarding facets of my spiritual life. We girls . . . Jodie and Ginny and I . . . find out a patient's birth date then take him or her a small token of birthday happiness and remembrance. The same goes for Christmas and Easter and Thanksgiving. We sing for them too. Oh, how most of them do love the singing. Some of them even join in the songs, shaking and cracking their unsteady way through the old hymns verse after verse."

"I'd like to help, Esther, but I'm scared. What if I do the wrong thing? Say the wrong thing? Everything about me, and this radical heart-change, is so new and different from my past. I feel almost like a baby just learning to walk."

"That's a rather good comparison," Esther said with a smile and a pat of encouragement. "We all came through this stage, Holly dear. And when I 'tabooed' your latest request for a wiener roast it wasn't that we young people are against getting together at one of our homes, it was simply because of the fact that you wanted it out on the beach at night and with some of the 'old crowd' invited. As Christians, we are to separate ourselves from our former way of living and of doing things. You meant well, I know; and you're growing spiritually, too. We want this beautiful growth to continue."

"I have so much to learn, don't I, Esther? And believe me when I tell you, I don't want to do one thing that would hinder and stunt my growth or pull me back toward my old way of life and of living. So, by God's help and
with His grace, I'll go with you and Ginny and Jodie to the nursing homes, and if I collapse from fright I'll have three good, faithful stand-bye there to pick me up."

The statement was pronounced with such earnestness and such seriousness that it took Esther by surprise. Then, realizing the humor in the last part of the clause, she burst out laughing, exclaiming as she did so, "Your knees may wobble and shake, Holly, but you won't collapse; I promise. We'll buoy you up. And God's eternal arms will support you. The ultimate end of this is that you will grow by leaps and bounds spiritually and your reward will be great in Heaven. We also visit in the homes of shut-ins, singing and praying for them and running errands if they request it.

"And, to top everything off, every so often we meet in one of our Christian church people's homes for a time of fellowship. We have Bible quiz times, a sing fess, testimony times -- things like that. All spiritual and spiritually beneficial and uplifting. We usually have something to eat, too. Sometimes it's a wiener roast by a farm pond, or a pizza bake with everyone participating in preparing the pizzas. We have homemade ice cream many times, and everyone of us takes our turn at turning the handles on the three freezers loaded with the creamy goodness of chocolate in one, vanilla in another and either butter pecan or peach or strawberry in the third. The flavor of the contents of the third freezer is always contingent on the highest vote for either strawberry, peach or pecan. It varies from time to time. The vanilla and chocolate are constants. We have wonderful times together, Holly-times of true Christian fellowship. And each of us goes to our home after the gathering with a heart full of thanks and gratitude to God for being a part of His holy family and being able to enjoy something so wholesome and refreshing. Christian young people don't lead a dull life, as some may think. Ours is a full rewarding kind of life."

Holly's eyes were moist with tears when Esther finished speaking. "It's the most wonderful thing in all the world!" she exclaimed softly. "I'm anxious to begin working. When do I start?"

"Tomorrow evening, the Lord willing," Esther answered, showering Holly with one of her radiantly happy smiles.

Something inside Holly did a happy little flip-flop. She knew she was ready to begin. Yes, she knew; her heart told her so. It told her, too, that
God's grace would enable her to be a witness on a one-to-one basis to her old friends without doing things according to their pattern and life style.

Suddenly, she felt a new surge of spiritual strength flow through her. She lifted her eyes upward and thanked God, realizing instinctively that she was a part of the greatest thing in all the world: a part of God's invincible, unshakeable, all-conquering army. And then she shouted; a healthy, soul-thrilling, heavenly shout. And why not? She had something to shout about!