THE GAP
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Brian sat along the edge of the mountain stream watching the minnows as they darted in and out among the gray-white water-washed stones. He knew if he sat still long enough he was bound to see at least a couple mountain trout. Maybe a deer or more, too. The secret of seeing these beautiful creatures, he knew, was in one being perfectly silent and still.
Unless the wind carried his scent to the many deer roaming the mountains, he was pretty sure he'd see some.

He squeezed his back against the trunk of a beech and watched the crystal-clear, rushing water, his eyes scanning the opposite side for any sign of wild life coming to drink. He saw none. Then his mind focused on other things. One thing mainly: his father. The lines of communication had been down for so long that it troubled him greatly, especially since his father and he were once bosom pals. Buddies. Real Buddies. But that was in the far-distant past, it seemed, even though the gap had developed only within the past six months. And what a gap! It seemed like a chasm with no bridge to span it, like a towering granite wall with nothing to scale it.

Brian felt something warm trickle down his cheeks. He took his hand and brushed the tears away. No need to get sentimental, he rationalized. If tears could have brought back the rapport he and his father had once experienced when they were together, things would long ago have been back to normal. Oh, how he missed the times of fellowship, the times when he could "talk his heart out" to his dad, ask him about the things that were troubling him, seek his advice and plumb his good and always-wise counsel.

From the forest floor he picked up a beautifully shaped cone, a gift from a nearby spruce tree. He toyed with it, turning over the events that led to the breakdown of the once-close relationship between his parent and himself.

He had wanted to go camping with Mason and Todd. Nothing wrong so far, he remembered. The big blow came when his father learned they'd be gone for one week. Sure, he knew neither of the fellows was a Christian. And yes, he had to admit that Mason had had a pretty bad name . . . even a record of some sort slapped on him for something he'd done. What hurt, Brian remembered, was the fact that his father didn't seem to trust him when he was in the company of sinners, sort of like he was afraid he, Brian, would conform to their ways and take on their sinful and evil habits.

He remembered how, for the first time in his life, he had "stood up" to his dad and talked back to him telling him he was no longer a child, that a young fellow of seventeen should be allowed some outside privileges other than those times spent solely with his family.
He fingered the pine cone now, recalling the look on his father's face, a look that almost shouted of the wound his words had inflicted. He had stalked sullenly out of the room after that, hearing his father's soft-spoken words of refusal following him as he went.

He had called Mason and Todd and told them it was "thumbs down" all the way, where he was concerned; they'd either have to go by themselves or find someone else.

"What's the matter with you, Brian?" Mason had asked provocatively and enticingly. "Don't you ever stand up for your rights? You're not a kid; why can't you decide what you want to do for yourself?"

Brian remembered he almost told Mason how that at the Fennell house his parents told the children where they could or could not go, what they could or could not do, that theirs was a law as old as the Bible itself. But he didn't; instead, he merely said, "You'd better count me out, and this is final."

"Aw Brian," Mason had cajoled, "you don't know what you'll be missing. Todd and I planned to introduce you to a brand new world. We want you to live, man. Live! You're deader than a fossil -- the way you live, I mean."

"My word's final," he had said, hanging up the phone and trembling with fear over Mason's clever insinuations.

After that conversation with Mason, he was thankful that his father had forbidden him to go thankful too that he, had had enough confidence in his dad to obey his "thou canst do's" and his "thou canst not do's." Where might he be this very day, he wondered suddenly, if he had rebelled against parental authority and, like Gregg had done, sneaked away and gone with Mason and Todd in spite of his orders not to go? He nearly trembled at the thought, having recently heard that both the boys had been into drugs. Bad! Much talk had been going around that Mason was a pusher even.

Brian sat bolt upright against the tree. Pusher. Mason a pusher. It added up now. Yes, suddenly it all added up. Mason and Todd had planned to introduce him to a "brand new world" (Mason's exact words). So that was it! It wasn't so much the life of camping out in the wilds that they were going to introduce him to, he saw with sudden clarity, as it was the drugs they were using. And pushing ... their lifeline for their own needs.
Brian felt suddenly sick in the pit of his stomach. It was as though someone had turned a bright, high-powered light on somewhere inside his brain. He trembled with fear. Suppose he had gone . . . taken his own willful way . . . where might he be today? What may he be doing . . . or taking,.? Not that he had any desire to try drugs; he didn't. Not ever. But what if Mason and Todd had forced him into trying something when they had him with them camping in the wilds of nowhere; then what?

The longer he sat and thought, the more the pieces fell into place and came together. Brian remembered his father having tried to heal the "break" which, he saw clearly now, he had caused and made. From the time he had "stood up" to his father and talked back to him, the gap was created . . . by him. His attitude had produced it and kept it there, wide open and unapproachable.

He saw with clarity now that only he, and he alone, could heal the break. By admitting his error and acknowledging the evil of his ways, both to God and to his father, the gaping chasm would be immediately and instantly healed and closed. Fellowship would be restored; the lines of communication would be opened again. He would have to eat a big portion of "Humble pie," he knew. But it was worth it to have peace with God and the old time fellowship with his father again.

He turned over and knelt on the cool forest floor. His tears, like dew, wet the tiny mosses beneath his prostrate form. His voice, like the true penitent he was, filled the woods with prayer. He confessed, repented and forsook the sins which had dragged him down and back and away from God, remaining on his knees until he felt the Blood applied, the joy and peace restored.

He knew the gap was gone. The feeling inside his heart was all new and bright and different. There was no room there for bad and wrong attitudes. Now he could go to his father with confidence and look him squarely in his face instead of mumbling what he wanted to say with downcast eyes. The barrier was gone. Gone completely. The communication gap was closed. He felt the sweet desire possess him again, that formerly motivated him toward his father and his Godlike counsel. It was such a good feeling, a feeling that all was indeed well . . . with both God and with man.
Getting to his feet, he started homeward, realizing that the gift which he would give his father this year for Father's Day was of far greater value and worth than any which the most exclusive department store could wrap up and give him. He had a gift inside his closet, to be sure, but what had just taken place in his heart was by far the more valuable of the two and could in no way be measured or compared with earth's mere trinkets.

A deer bounded through the brush in front of him. His heart, like the deer's swift feet, felt like it had wings.