I stared at the heading in the paper, reread the article a second time, then stared into space. It couldn't be! I thought with a shudder and uncontrollable fear. No, it couldn't be!

I got to my feet and began pacing the floor while hot tears bathed my equally hot cheeks.
"Something wrong, Len?" It was Beverly, my wife.

"The paper," I said simply, pointing toward the neatly folded paper lying on the floor beside the chair which I had just vacated.

"You read it then?" Beverly asked sadly. "I wish I could have kept it from you, Len. I knew it would cause you grief."

"One can't well conceal news, Beverly. Oh, if only ...." And my voice trailed in a sob.

Beverly's soft voice and kind words sliced through my misery. "You were a good teacher, Len. I'm sure you did all you could have done for him. You gave your best."

But did I do all I should have done for him? The question nagged me; hounded me. It stalked me like a shadow. Beverly went back to her work in the kitchen and I continued my troubled pacing. Back and forth, back and forth. "Kip! Kip!" I cried into my hands as memory took me down a once-pleasant lane to our vacant lot where Kip played ball with my two sons and several other neighborhood boys.

He was a 100-percent rollicking sure-of-himself boy, his face alight with anticipation and his eyes bright. "You be the umpire, Mr. Morris," he called from the pitcher's mound.

"With pleasure, Kip," I responded as I took my place behind the catcher, my oldest son, Kevin.

Each evening I tried my best to devote some time for play and recreation with my growing sons, feeling this was as much my duty as correcting them was when and if they had done wrong.

"Okay, Mr. Morris!" Kip's voice reached through time to the present moment. "Ready? Here goes." And Kip's pitching arm sent a fast ball past the batter, who swung but missed.

"Strike 1, Mr. Morris!" he shouted from his pitcher's mound.
"Okay, strike 1!" I parroted, and the boys all laughed. It was obvious to all that I was certainly not a ball player, but my presence was all they cared for. And, too, it gave me an opportunity to listen to the conversation and language of the boys with whom my own sons were associating and playing.

"Okay, Mr. Morris, here I come -- the ball, I mean." Again, Kip's voice floated to me on his usual vibrant and musical note. I guess I just never knew another boy quite like him. Freckles, tow-headed, a mischievous smile. Honest. Candid.

Kip was a terrific pitcher for a boy. Even now, I can see him standing calmly on that mound with bases loaded (mainly because of infield errors). He'd glance at me and grin. There wasn't a raw nerve ending in Kip's body, I do believe. He'd grin at me again, then rear back and throw three straight fast balls right past the batter for a strikeout, yelling with glee, "Strike 3, Mr. Morris. He's out!"

Again, I parroted Kip's words, and again the boys laughed and said how glad they were that I was there.

"It wouldn't be nearly so much fun if Mr. Morris weren't here," Kip said, sprinting for the bat after the strikeout.

I patted him on his tow-head, telling him what a great soul-winner he'd make for Jesus when he was converted. He grinned up at me with the bluest blue eyes I believe I've ever seen and in a serious tone of voice said, "But Mr. Morris, I'm going to be a ball player -- one of the best the world has ever known."

Irrepressible. Unpredictable. An emerging man-child one moment; a little boy the next. That was Kip.

"There's nothing greater than having your sins forgiven," I had told him that day," and knowing that you are ready to meet God and go to Heaven, Kip. When are you going to get converted? Now is the time -- while you're young."

"Thanks, Mr. Morris," he said politely. "You're a great Sunday school teacher, and I'm glad Kevin and Keith invited me to church. I've sure learned a lot of things I never knew. Some of them are scary."
"But they're all in the Bible, Kip. It's not something that anyone has made up."

"Oh, I know that. I guess that's what makes some things seem scary . . . because I know they're true. And someday, I'm going to get saved, too, Mr. Morris, just the way Kevin and Keith are saved. See if I don't. I like your boys and you. You're different -- nice different."

"Why not now, Kip? There's not a better time than right now," I told him as I prayed silently.

"When I get older, Mr. Morris . . ."

I shuddered now, recalling the sincere voice and the words. Why hadn't I pressed Kip harder? Oh, why? Why?

Kip's father was transferred to another town, and Kip, naturally, had to move with his parents. Someone told me that he had made the team in the new town and I began praying extra hard for him and for his salvation. What an influence he'd be for Christ, I thought. He was a go-getter. A real go-getter. He was a competitor, too. He took defeat seriously. Most boys his age shrugged it off 12 1/2 minutes after it happened, but Kip wore defeat like an open wound. "I don't want to be a good loser," he once told me with that impish grin. "It can lead to bad habits."

"Oh, Kip! Kip!" I moaned softly into my hands now. "Were you ready to meet God? Where is your soul? You were so competitive. This time it was your doom."

The newspaper account of the accident flashed vividly across my mind: "Two youth were killed last night while racing and driving under the influence of alcohol. Kip Edward Marsten, 19, and Dale Allen Boyne, also 19, were racing on a stretch of old route 37 when Boyne's car went out of control and hit the bridge over Little Creek. Marsten, tailing Boyne's car, crashed into the over-turned Boyne car, flipped over twice, then landed beneath the bridge. The youths were killed instantly . . ."
"Len, there's nothing you can do." Beverly's voice reached through to my troubled mind. "You did all you could do for him when you had him in your Sunday school class."

"I wish I had pressed him harder. About getting saved, I mean. How different the story may have been had Kip gotten saved as a boy! Oh, Beverly!" I moaned.

"Len, you really must get hold of yourself. Kip's gone. There's not another thing any of us can do for him. You have a class of fine boys to teach. Concentrate on them -- the living ones."

Again, Beverly went back to the kitchen and I dropped on my knees, asking God to give me every boy in my class for Him and His cause. I had a task to do -- a serious, sobering task. Someday, I would stand before an Almighty God and be asked for a reckoning of the souls which were entrusted into my hands for those Sunday morning teaching sessions.

In that hour, I knew that I would never again be the same. A heavy burden settled in upon me for my Sunday school boys. I hurried to the bedroom, shut the door, and fell on my knees beside the bed, broken and weeping.