LIKE NED
By Mrs. Paul E. King

I put my books in the locker, got the trumpet from its dark corner, then hurried down the hall toward Mr. Claussen’s music room. Of all my school studies and classes, I liked music best. Maybe it was because I respected and admired Mr. Claussen so deeply; maybe it was because I had always wanted to play the trumpet; or maybe it was just a grand combination of both.
Little matter the reason, my heart did its usual little flip-flop flutters as I hurried eagerly down the hall to the music room.

Before I got there even, I could hear the dear . . . and not so clear . . . tones of the fellows and girls "warming up," some running up and down the scales in dear, bell-like tones, others doodling around on anything that came to mind in a great crescendo of noise and confusion. These latter-mentioned noise-makers were beginners, I knew.

I chuckled, remembering my introduction into Mr. Claussen's music class. Talk about scared! I was. My stomach seemed to swim with fluttery butterflies! And looking back now, I know that all my fears and my apprehensions were totally unfounded and unnecessary. Mr. Clausen is kindness and patience personified. This is not to deceive you and allow you to think he has an easy get-by-the-best-you-can sort of way and personality. He doesn't! This sort of thing is not tolerated; he expects the best . . . the very best . . . out of his students. The maximum. And he usually gets it. Oh, there are a few, occasionally, who dub him "too exacting" and "too demanding" and drop out of class as casually as if they had never been in it even. They are the losers.

For all his "exactness" and strictness, our music teacher has patience and perseverance unlimited. And like Dad and Mom say, why do a thing at all if you don't expect to give it your beat? Guess that's just another way of saying, "What's worth doing is worth doing right." Mom and Dad's version is a sort of paraphrase of the original proverb, I'd say. At any rate, Mr. Claussen himself is a sticker for the proverb-masim. And I'm glad. It's not hard nor difficult for me to follow the principle since the same is laid down for me by my parents in our home.

"'Morning, Dave," Mr. Claussen called, coming toward me with long, easy strides from the opposite end of the hallway. "How's the lip for those high notes?" he asked as we met at the doorway of the music room.

"I'll let you be the voice of authority . . . the judge . . . after you hear me," I replied, smiling as I fell in step with him and entered the room. "I've done my share of practicing," I admitted candidly. "Mom's poor ears! Ugh! I'm sure it's hard on her eardrums. But she's sweet as she can be. Tells me to keep right on practicing."
Mr. Claussen slapped me kindly on the shoulders. "You have great parents, Dave," he said, "the best. Follow their advice. Their footsteps, too. I couldn't say this to all my students, you know."

A lump popped into my throat as he finished. I had a rich heritage, I realized. Both my father and mother were devout Christians. I was born in love, nurtured in love, and reared with love. Not the mushy, gushy, sickening kind of love; but a deep, stable, ever-present, abiding kind of love, manifested and demonstrated daily -- a love flowing out of the fountainhead of its source, that of divine love.

My heart melted as I thought of those my age whose homes were dens of cursing and drinking and hatred. What a contrast! I thought sadly, longing desperately to shout from the housetops that Jesus could save from all sin and bring peace and joy and happiness into each and every life and change unhappy homes into happy homes.

"Hey, Dave, c'mon. We're waiting for you."

Greg Aaron brought me quickly out of my sad thoughts.

"Coming," I called, taking my place beside Ned Stonebarger. Ned was in first chair; I was in second.

Mr. Claussen arranged his music on the stand, then raised his arm in a starting command and we were off on "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." It was a rousing, good beginning and, as usual, Ned's playing was flawless and perfect. He was a natural on the trumpet.

Mr. Claussen stopped us midway through the second chorus, correcting Shari Jones' timing on the clarinet and Bruce Bailey's flatted note when it should not have been flatted. Then, smiling his encouragement and raising his arm again, we started at the beginning of the chorus and this time, we played it through perfectly.

Mr. Claussen was generous with his praise . . . another of his many wonderful characteristics.

Tears brimmed in my eyes as we finished. Something about that chorus always did have a stirring, moving effect upon me: "Glory, glory,
Hallelujah! His truth is marching on." It made me feel more than a conqueror, realizing Who my Captain was. He was invincible! Unconquerable! Almighty! And, indeed, His truth is marching on.

I felt blest in my soul. My eyes were moist with tears; my lip trembled with emotion. I could scarcely shape my lips to the trumpet mouthpiece. Taking my shirt sleeve, I brushed the tears away, turned the page of my music book and readied myself for the second selection.

"We'll have Ned lead out on this," Mr. Claussen announced. "Dave, you take the lead in the refrain."

As usual, Ned's playing was perfect and perfectly flawless. His tone was bell clear. I felt proud of him. I was glad he was one of my best and closest buddies. For all his excellent grades, unusually good looks and his skill on the trumpet, Ned was extremely humble and even rather shy. He was totally unpretentious, completely himself, and he was utterly transparent. There was neither sham nor hypocrisy about Ned Stonebarger.

I took the lead in the refrain, as per instructions, and when we were finished, Ned's hand came down hard on my shoulder. "You're great, Dave! Great!" he exclaimed jubilantly, with sincerity ringing in his voice and showing in his eyes. "Some day you'll be in first chair, see if I'm not right."

"I'll do my best, Ned, but I'm not vying for your position. I want to be like you as much as possible, but to unseat you is not one of my ambitions. My desire for doing my best stems from both God's Word and my home training."

"How's that?" Greg Aaron asked. Greg sat in the chair behind me.

"Ecclesiastes 9:10 tells us, 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.' " I quoted the Scripture verse, then added my parents' ages-old proverb-saying about a thing worth doing being worth doing right.

"Too time-consuming," was Greg's flat rejoinder as he began leafing through his music book, a way of silently telling me that the conversation was over. Finished.

Ned smiled at me encouragingly. Then seeing Mr. Claussen's upraised arms, he led out in a fast-moving march with each of the other band
members either following or coming in with their instrument at the right place and on time.

Mr. Claussen voiced his praise, lingering on the improvements he saw evidenced in each of us; then he dismissed us.

I had just snapped the lid shut on my case when his hand touched my shoulder lightly. "A few minutes with you, Dave, please," he said, motioning me back to my chair.

In my earlier association with him, this staying behind would have frightened me dreadfully. But not any more. Long ago, I had learned that whenever my music teacher felt the necessity of talking to me and with me, it was always for my own good -- always to my benefit. Mr. Claussen didn't mince words, not ever. Always, he was candid and frank, coming straight to the point and to the crux of the matter. Once it was told and said, you had an even deeper appreciation for the man, a sort of he-wan/a-to-help-me feeling-sensation. At least, I always did. And having been taught obedience to my parents from infancy, well, it was neither difficult nor trying for me to obey my elders.

The last student had filed out of the room when Mr. Claussen came over and sat down beside me. "You really enjoy your music, don't you, Dave!" he said in a sort of exclamatory way.

Fingering the trumpet case lovingly, I gave back an emphatic, "You can't imagine how much!"

Mr. Claussen's ever-ready smile beamed down on me. "I wouldn't be too sure about that!" he countered pleasantly. "A teacher knows when his students enjoy what they're doing. He also knows when they're only marking time. You? You're sincere in everything you do. I like that. It's an incentive for me. Now to the point: be yourself, David."

That took me by surprise -- totally, completely and entirely by surprise. "I . . . I guess I don't understand," I stammered. "Can you explain, please?"

"I can, and I will, Dave. Ned's good -- very good. In everything he does. But so are you -- in a different way. Now, here's why I asked you to remain behind: be yourself, David. God didn't make two Neds; He made one. Neither
did He make two David Killeary's exactly alike. He made one . . . you. To God . . . and to those of us who know you and like you . . . you are unique and special. Wonderful, too. So be yourself. Don't feel that you must be like Ned in everything you do. Sure, Ned’s a super trumpet player. But so are you. And a few others whom I know. Your style of playing is far freer than Ned's, when you're playing David Killeary style. And your adeptness and ability at memorization far exceed Ned's. Ned labors to get his lessons, and get them he does -- to perfection. You go over a thing once, and for the most part, it sticks. See what I mean? Let go of wanting to be like Ned in everything you do, and let God mold you into the young man of His designing. Do you follow me, Dave?"

"Explicitly," was my one-word reply.

"No offense meant . . ."

"And none felt," I answered quickly. "In fact, I have you to thank for awaking me to what I was doing toward thwarting God's plan. I wasn't actually aware of how much I was trying to emulate and be like Ned, Mr. Claussen. I've always admired him and, due to his steadiness and diligence, I tried to pattern my life after him. But I see now that God didn't make two Neds. Nor two David Killearys either. Thanks much, Mr. Claussen. You've scored again. It's quite obvious that you understand your students. I appreciate your help."

"When a man has half a dozen children of his own, plus two adopted retarded's, well, it's a sad day if he doesn't have some insight into their problems and struggles."

Getting to his feet and slapping me on my shoulder, he said, "I'm counting on you, David -- counting on you being yourself and doing everything God's way. Only God's way."

"I give you my promise!" I exclaimed, standing to my feet and walking beside him to the hallway where I went to the right and he to the left.

It was as though a gate had swung suddenly open wide and I was entering its vast, yet unexplored, beauty. I would be myself. I would . . . from this time and forever . . . emulate Christ and allow Him to do the molding and designing of my life. And, while I could say honestly and truthfully that I had
never once vied for first chair, if God should see fit to place me there, I would accept it humbly as His promotion. And Ned would be equally as happy for me as I have been over him having first chair. You see, holiness of heart and life is real. There is no jealousy nor envy and anger to seethe up inside; it's been purged by the mighty power of the Holy Ghost, cleansed by the fire of Pentecost. Holiness works! Yes, it works. I know; I have had my personal Pentecost. I am sanctified wholly.

Whistling, I stepped outside and all but ran down the steps and started homeward. The world was ablaze with leaves the color of glorious sunsets and burnished copper-golds. And gold with promises, too, I thought silently, feeling a wave of God's glory wash over my happy soul.