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Digital Edition 10/22/2001
By Holiness Data Ministry

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The Sunday School Beacon
July 6, 1986

"THE LIVING TESTIMONY"



by Mrs. Paul E. King

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Carlene closed the door of the car and waited for her father to come. She checked the dial of her petite watch for time then looked anxiously toward the house and the kitchen door, through which her parent would emerge. For two weeks . . . two long weeks . . . she had waited for this day to arrive, and now that it had finally become reality, she was impatient and anxious to get to the airport. Her favorite cousin, almost a birthday twin

(minus one little day), was coming to the farm to spend a month. It was so exciting. Kayla, who was city born and city bred, always had so much to tell her. There seemed to be ever so many things to do in a big city and always there was some place to go or something to see.

Carlene leaned back against the seat, recalling her onetime only vacation to Kayla's house. Never would she forget that week. It seemed to have gotten away from her like quicksilver, so fast had it sped by. There was the pleasant little park with its pond of blue-green water across the street from her uncle and aunt's apartment where Kayla and she ate their lunch each week day at one of the picnic tables. Never had tuna salad sandwiches and chips tasted so ambrosial. (Kayla had this thing about tuna salad, her "favorite sandwich," she had told her cousin. So they had tuna salad sandwiches every noon day while she visited). Then there was the zoo. What a zoo! Three times, Kayla and she rode a city bus to the sprawling zoo and each time there she, Carlene, saw things she hadn't seen before.

She sighed happily now, remembering. For her, that one week in the city was a whirlwind of activity and busyness. The city noises, however, and its never-ending hustle and bustle were just not for her, she decided, and she was glad when she was once more home with her parents and brothers and sisters on the farm. There, when night drew her deep-purple curtains and the stars danced and twinkled in an inky-blue-black sky, one could fall asleep to the gentle sighing of the pines outside the windows and the soft murmur of the merry little brook that seemed never to cease its laughter and music. What a contrast to the ceaseless city noises!

Carlene thought about Kayla now and wondered if she had changed since they had last seen each other two years ago. Kayla was a beautiful young woman and so very sweet and kind, too; but she wasn't a Christian. This troubled Carlene greatly. She had made it a practice to pray daily for her cousin, asking God to make her "wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove" in her daily deportment and speech and conduct so her life would shine out before Kayla as a living testimony and she would see Jesus in and through her. Her one great and burning desire was to reach through to Kayla and lead her to Christ.

"Why the serious expression?" her father asked, sliding behind the steering wheel and startling Carlene, who was so engrossed in her own thoughts that she hadn't heard her father coming.

"I was thinking about Kayla's soul," she answered. "Somehow I feel responsible for her spiritual welfare. This is strange, isn't it, Daddy?"

Turning the key in the ignition, Mr. Lankley said, "Not at all, my dear. No, not at all. Continue praying for her, and let your light shine brightly for Jesus."

Carlene sighed. Then she said, "It's a painful thing to me -- that Kayla's parents aren't Christians, I mean." Giving her father's hand a gentle squeeze, she exclaimed, "O I'm so thankful that God gave me a wonderful Christian father and mother! How can two brothers be so totally different? I mean, you're a Christian, and there's your brother . . . my uncle . . . and he's anything but a Christian. Poor Kayla . . ." Carlene's sentence trailed sadly.

"This is where the matter of choice comes into the picture honey," Mr. Lankley stated. "God has been every bit as faithful in dealing with my brother as He was with me. I turned about-face, broke with sin and the world and was gloriously converted; Howard, on the other hand, resisted the gentle proddings and wooings of the Spirit and is still taking his own way and is unconverted, I'm sorry to say. They need our prayers," he added.

Carlene fell silent. She saw the black ribbon of road ahead as her father drove out of their lane onto the state road, heading toward the nearest airport, eighty some odd miles away. Her mind, however, was not on the road and the beautiful countryside through which they were driving; it was on her father's unconverted brother and his lovely wife . . . her aunt and her uncle. Didn't they know that they had a deep spiritual obligation to their only child? she wondered. How could they be so unconcerned and callused where Kayla's spiritual welfare and well-being was at stake? Didn't they realize that as her father and mother they were responsible for her spiritual up-bringing every bit as much as they were for her physical and material care? What answer would they give to God when He asked why they had done nothing to prepare Kayla's soul for the hereafter? Why, they had given her the best education, the finest musical training, and the top of the line in clothing and household furnishings, but had made no provision for her spiritual training.

Tears sprang to Carlene's eyes and washed over her cheeks. Her cousin had been deprived of the one necessary and all-important thing in her young life. She had never known the richness and the satisfaction of going to

Sunday school and to church and learning about God and His Holy Word. Kayla's world consisted of just that . . . worldly things, things that had no enduring substance in them, but which would, with time, all be consumed and pass away. A heaviness lay upon Carlene's heart for her cousin.

When they reached the airport, her father pulled into the Short Term parking lot then together they walked into the busy terminal.

Kayla's flight was on time, and within a short while the three of them were driving through the quiet countryside back to the farm, the cousins chatting like magpies in the back seat.

"How's the stringy-haired Maura making it these days?" Kayla asked Carlene. "I suppose she'll be paying a visit to the farm, now that I'll be there. And honestly Carlene, I can't stand that girl. Doesn't she know the points of good grooming?"

Carlene gasped. "Maura's a sweet person," she replied quickly. "They're terribly poor, but she's clean with her body. And in their house, too."

"You don't find her stringy hair a bit obnoxious?" Kayla almost squealed. "Ugh!"

"Some people have hair that just isn't too manageable," Carlene said in quick defense of her friend. "And really, Maura's so kind and so sweet and patient that I guess I don't notice too many things about her external appearance. Her inner person is beautiful, however, and this I do notice."

Kayla waved her hands in exasperated fashion. "Honestly, Carlene," she squealed again, "I don't see how you tolerate Maura's stringy-looking hair. Can't you teach her a few things on grooming? Hair, especially."

Carlene looked at her cousin. "Like I said, Kayla, Maura's a beautiful person. Both inside and outside. And I think very highly of her. She's a very special friend to me."

Kayla laughed nervously. "I suppose that old axiom of beauty being in the eye of the beholder is true in your case. But what about Kevin? Markley, was it? About all I can remember is that he seemed like he wasn't with it. Such a bore. A perfect bore! And he tried to be so nice to me. Guess he

thought he was entertaining me. How can you ever be so polite and sweet to those boring, uninteresting church friends of yours? I'd die of boredom."

Carlene gasped. Then, in her quiet, soft voice, she said, "Please! Karla! don't! Don't talk like that about my wonderful friends. They're genuine. There's nothing superfluous or phony about either Kevin or Maura. They're brilliant, both of them; each is on the honor roll at school. They're highly respected by the faculty and student body. I feel honored to have them as my friends."

"Such bores, Carlene! So uninteresting!"

"That's because you don't know them," Carlene replied softly. "And because you're not spiritually minded. Yes, I suppose most of your feelings stem from the fact that you're not a Christian and they are."

"You still buy that religious stuff?" Kayla asked incredulously.

"I haven't changed," came the sweet, unwavering reply. "From the night when I was converted, and then sanctified wholly a short time later on, Christ means everything to me. I couldn't live without Him. In fact, I'd be afraid to live even one moment without His sweet presence and leadership and guidance. He is my dearest and best Friend and constant Companion, Kayla."

Again, Kayla gesticulated with her hands. "Honestly, Carlene," she exclaimed seriously, "I can't for the life of me see what you get out of going to church all the time. And . . . and of being so religious. You never do anything interesting, and you're opposed to television and movies, too. I'd be bored to death, literally and actually."

"No, you wouldn't," Carlene replied. "Not if you were truly born again. You see, Christ makes all the difference, Kayla. The reason that you can't see why I enjoy going to church is simple; the Bible says that the natural man -- the unconverted person -- cannot discern the things of the Spirit because he or she is not spiritually minded. The spiritual things can only be discerned, or understood, then, by one who knows God and is spiritual."

"O well, let's forget all about this spiritual and non-spiritual talk and let's get caught up on things we agree upon, like music and geometry. I made the

top rung on the honor roll. Geometry's my forte. I really love math. I think this is what I'll major in when I go away to college. I enjoy working with figures, and I feel totally fulfilled when I am able to solve the problems."

"I guess much of the same blood runs in our veins, Kayla; I made the honor roll also. Second highest. But I feel I owe all of my good grades to God and His goodness to me."

"O forevermore, Carlene; that's ridiculous! Anybody with a brain in his or her head knows it's study and diligence that helps one to make the honor roll. I can't see how, nor where, God enters the picture at all. You're still the same peculiarly-strange person as always. And I was sure, now that each of us is getting older, that you'd be changing, and going in more for the social whirl of things."

Carlene felt tears sting her eyes. "And turn against my blessed Lord and Savior?" she replied softly. "O Kayla, never. Never! Not so long as I live, will I change. I entered the race to run it to its finish line. I don't think you realize just how very real Christ is to me, nor what He means to me. I have taken this way by choice, dear cousin. I am fully and completely satisfied with Christ and in Christ. What's more, my heart has a beautiful inner peace and calm. I love the Lord, honey. Does one forsake and forget the one he loves?"

Kayla stared through the window to the patchwork pattern of fields and woods. For a long while, she said nothing. Then, suddenly, she turned tear-wet eyes toward Carlene, saying brokenly, "Forgive me, Carr. I do know how much the Lord means to you. It's just that I have been perfectly miserable since getting your last six or seven letters. God's Spirit has dealt mightily with me and my soul. I purposed to test you -- to see if you were really real and genuine. You pass the test -- with flying colors, as the old cliché goes. I'm ready to do whatever I must do to become a new creature in Christ and become converted. My way of living doesn't satisfy my heart. I have a horrible empty feeling."

Carlene's tears shimmered like jewels on her face. "Jesus has created you and your heart for His habitation," she replied softly. "This is why nothing you do nor have tried satisfies, Kayla. But I promise you full and complete satisfaction in Christ; with the beautiful and ever-present companions of joy and rest and peace. What's more, this wonderful way of salvation and entire sanctification is the only thing that prepares one for Heaven."

"O I know that," Kayla admitted brokenly. "And the thought that you are ready for Heaven and I'm not has given me days and nights of mental torture and agony of soul. I could scarcely wait until the plane got here. And Carlene, please forgive me for saying those unkind things about Kevin and Maura. I have found them boring, to be very truthful with you; but I'm sure it's because of me, and not on their part. They are always so friendly to me."

"They're genuinely Christ-like, Kayla. I can testify for each of them."

"I'm sure you can. But you are my living testimony. You're always the same. Always. And I admire and appreciate you more than ever for not being critical of your friends, when I was."

"Jesus said for us to love one another, and I find it easy to love people since Christ rules in my heart."

"Like I said, you are a living, walking testimony, Carlene. I came here with a purpose in mind, and regardless of the cost or the cross, I mean to go home knowing that I am new in Christ."

With tears in her eyes, Carlene reached over and squeezed her cousin's hand. Kayla was not far from the kingdom of God, she knew. Finally, her prayers were being answered. With a tender heart she led out in prayer.

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THE END