IN EVERYTHING GIVE THANKS
By Mrs. Paul E. King

A raw wind raked the dust and sent it swirling in the air like swarms of bees, whipping at my grim-faced Papa in cowboy boots and hat and a heavy hooded jacket, turning his eyes red and streaking his face.

The bellowing voice of Amos Randolph cut through the wind and Papa, rubbing his eyes, declared solemnly and firmly, "But I'll not do it, Amos. My
heart shall do no evil thing. 'The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.'"

"You mean you're going to stand back and let that . . . that crook . . . that thief Whitsall take your farm away from you? You're crazy, Ben! Crazy! Fight back! Exercise your rights!"

Papa shook his head. "What rights, Amos?" he asked. "When a man's flat broke he's flat broke. It's that simple. I don't have the money to pay Whitsall -- not even enough for the interest -- and he's foreclosing. If the drought hadn't come along it would have been a different story. But God is in His heaven and He knows what He's doing. There's bound to be a reason for all this."

"How foolishly you talk, Ben Keithly. Be a man; fight back!"

I hadn't known Mandy was anywhere near to Pap, Amos and me so it surprised me when I heard her say softly, "Don't you do it, Ben. Don't ever fight back. Remember 'the pit' from whence you were digged and redeemed."

A smile creased Papa's mouth, and the somber look disappeared from his face as Mandy's words hung suspended in mid-air.

Mandy Hillis was as permanent a personality fixture in the valley as were the two mountains that towered high above the ordinarily fertile fields of grain and pasture land and stooped low at their base. There wasn't a soul in the entire valley whose life Mandy had not touched in one way or another. She was ruggedly stout and wonderful, having been born of pioneer parentage. She was doctor, nurse, psychiatrist, veterinarian, midwife, arbiter and a general well-rounded Samaritan. She nursed two of my sisters and me over a bout of pneumonia, staying by Mama and us day and night. She had applied the hot onion poultices to our chest and back until the stubborn fever broke, the congestion loosened and we were well on the road to recovery.

Mandy lived with Jeb, her devoted husband, in one of the last remaining two-room log cabins in the valley. Shortly after Jeb's death, a fire ravaged the hand-hewn logs Of the humble cabin and Mama invited Mandy to our house to live. Papa complained a bit when Mama told him what she'd done -- said it would be "just one more mouth to feed" -- but since Mandy's
reputation as a saint softened Papa's mood and she came to live at our house.

It was largely through Mandy's and Mama's godlikeness that Papa got converted and sanctified wholly. They not only prayed and fasted for his salvation, but each life had its own special way of living conviction upon my father's soul.

Papa was a proud man. Well-bred and learned, he accepted little or no advice from anyone. He felt his own superiority and capabilities until the Lord reached down and snatched baby Benjamin home to Himself.

Papa's first reaction to this tragedy was one of extreme bitterness and hardness of heart. But Mandy -- bless her -- exerted her power of healing in a way other than through the medicinal medium of herbs and roots and onion poultices. She spoke to Papa, softly, gently, consolingly (like a mother crooning to her offing, wounded child), telling him that the Lord sometimes found it necessary to take a lamb so the ewes and rams would follow. Papa got the point. Meekly he made his way to the mourner's bench in our church and got gloriously converted. Shortly thereafter, he had his personal Pentecost. Our home was marvelously changed. It became a literal heaven on earth. "You're soft. Soft!"

I heard our irate neighbor's accusing words directed at Papa, and I was brought rudely and instantly out of my mood of pleasant and beautiful reminiscing to the immediate present.

"Whitsall's a crook!" Amos shouted, his mouth twitching nervously and his eyes registering the fighting spirit for which he was noted. "It's no secret, his crooked deals I mean. Everybody hereabouts knows it; yet you mean to let him foreclose on you and . . . and . . . to take you for every dime you're worth!"

Papa managed a small, hollow kind of laugh. "When a man's broke," he said sadly, "he's at the mercy of his creditors"

I thought of the widow in Elisha's day and of the wicked creditor who came to take her two sons to be bondmen because she had no money with which to pay the debt. She had had nothing in the house but a pot of oil, yet God, through Elisha's instruction and the widow's obedience, had multiplied
that oil manifold until by selling it she was able to pay the exacting and wicked man, whom I pictured just like Herman Whitsail. Surely, God would make a way for my wonderful father too, I was confident.

"If you hadn't given so much to the church you'd be a lot better off, Ben," I heard Amos say.

"That's where you're all wrong, neighbor Yes, all wrong! I have saved only that which I have invested in God's kingdom and His cause. These things no man can take away from me."

"Foolish talk! Foolish talk! Preachers these days are out for every dime they can get. It's a racket, this church business. A racket!"

"Wrong again, Amos. Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. Can I do less than support that for which He died -- with my tithes, offerings and faithful attendance? Ah, no. Never. Never! Jesus Himself said, 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

"'But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal:

"'For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.' You see, Amos, Herman Whitsall can never lay hand upon the monies I've invested in foreign and home missions, in Bible schools and in helping the widows, the poor and the fatherless. But come, let's go inside, Marie made a pot of fresh coffee, and the wind's too cold to stand out here and talk."

"I didn't come over for coffee, Ben; I came to tell you that the neighbors -- myself and those within a twelve mile radius -- are ready and willing to do anything we can to bring Whitsall to justice. He's a sharpie, I must admit, but there are ways we figured out to 'cut his throat'"

"Count me out, Amos. Jesus said, 'If thine enemy hunger, feed him.' I'll have no part in anything evil. 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want' for any good thing. I believe this as surely as I'm talking to you. God will plead my cause. Whitsall's having his day now: mine is yet to come. Blessed be the name of the Lord! He freely pardoned my transgressions."
Instantly Amos flew into a fit of anger and rage. Storming to his pickup truck, he started the motor and went screeching out of the driveway.

Mandy, standing somewhat apace from Papa and me, shouted lustily, "'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits' I'm proud of you, Ben Keithly," she said. "You're anchor's holding. God's going to fight your battle. As sure as I'm Mandy Hillis, He is. Only as we 'let go,' and relinquish our seeming rights, can God work. That's the trouble with too many people," she said sadly. "They ask the Lord to fight their battles, or to solve their problems, but all the time they hold on to them and try to work the thing out in their way instead of putting it completely into His hands." Papa smiled and nodded his head in agreement.

The wind was getting more raw by the minute and the sky became a leaden gray. I drew the fur collar of my jacket more tightly around my neck, at the same time securing the strap of my wool cap more snugly beneath my chin. Stomping my feet to keep them warm, I plunged my mittened hands farther into the warmth of the jacket pockets.

"Better come inside for a cup of that coffee," Mandy insisted, looking at Papa. "Marie took a streusel, piping hot, from the oven just as I came out to give you moral support, should you have needed it, Ben."

We followed Mandy inside, Papa and I, and it was good to feel not only the warmth and comfort provided by the fire from the big black wood stove, but the overflowing warmth that flowed affectionately, lovingly and boundlessly from Mama.

The house was fragrantly perfumed from corner to corner with the spicy goodness of Mama's streusel, and Papa and I did justice to the delectable, melt-in-your-mouth coffee cake before going outside to finish cutting the winter's supply of wood into stove lengths, a job we were busily engaged in when Amos arrived on the scene.

By nightfall snowflakes sifted from the clouds overhead and in short order the cold, dark ground was blanketed in a thick, powdery-soft, glittery covering of purest white. Thanksgiving weather! I thought, as a thrill of excitement surged through my whole being. Thanksgiving! Why, we would not have a Thanksgiving this year. . . .
"Mama," I said quickly, voicing what I thought, "we . . . won't . . . have a Thanksgiving day this year, will we?" Tears were in my eyes, and a lump so big, hard and stubborn as to almost choke me popped up inside my throat until I could scarcely get the words out.

Smiling like nothing had happened, Mama's loving arms encircled my body. "Why, Peter, you're not losing faith, are you?" she asked suddenly. "Of course we'll have Thanksgiving. There'll be turkey and goose, pumpkin, apple and mincemeat pies, and . . . ."

"Oh, Mama, I'm so happy!" I exclaimed as I interrupted her sentence. Suddenly I was too overjoyed for more words. I wept my happiness out into Mama's apron.

Thanksgiving day dawned, gray and overcast and snowing. I pressed my face tight against the cold window pane and looked across the fields to the lane where aunts and uncles and cousins were coming, ere running to the woodshed and carrying armload and armload into the big woodbox near the stove, never stopping until the cavernous hollow was filled and its hinged lid refused to be closed. Mama's goose and turkey would have a superabundance of dry wood handy for the fire to roast them to a juicy, golden-brown tenderness and goodness.

Not once, in the course of that delicious and delightfully wonderful meal (or entire day) was a murmur or complaint uttered over my parents' impending loss. Nor was there an unkind word spoken about Herman Whitsall and his wickedness. Rather, praise after praise was wafted heavenward to the Heavenly Father who cared so tenderly for us and gave us all things to enjoy: the blessings of food and clothing, a warm house, and the joys of family and relatives and friends.

Before leaving for their respective homes late that evening, each of our guests pressed a money gift into Papa's hand, none of them really large gifts, but a "getting started in your new home" gift of encouragement and cheer. "This way you won't be entirely broke," my Uncle Will said, speaking for the others. "We're a family; we'll help you in any way we can," he added, pumping Papa's hand in sincere brotherly fashion.

I crawled beneath the warm comforters that night and slept as peacefully as though Hiram Whitsall's foreclosing sale would never take
place, my young heart confident in the fact that Papa had placed the farm and his dire financial circumstances entirely into God's hands and His care. When the sun's warm rays awakened me the following morning and I looked through the window, I saw the yard filling up with cars gathering in for the after-Thanksgiving day sale. My faith never once wavered. Papa, Mama and Mandy had said that God was looking after us -- that He would provide and take care of us -- and I believed it.

In spite of her noble smile, I saw unguarded tears spill down Mama's cheeks as piece after piece of her humble but cherished furniture was sold -- the rocking chair in which she had held us, sung to us and rocked us from infancy to school days and beyond; the hand-crafted, sturdy cradle in which each of us slept beside hers and Papa's bed as babies; the dough trough in which our bread was made; the fat butter churn, whose paddles whipped the cream into the softest, sweetest, most delectable butter in the world. On and on the sale went, and on and on barked the auctioneer The things which were as close and dear to us as were the household members themselves were departing one by one with the nod of a head or the show of a quickly upraised hand.

In the midst of the procedure, I heard Mandy's voice coming from one of the upstairs bedrooms, now emptied of all the furnishings: "A tent or a cottage," she was singing, "Why should I care; They're building a mansion for me over there. Tho' exiled from home, yet still I can sing, All glory to God, I'm a child of the King."

A lump caught in my throat and I stepped quickly behind a group of tall men and allowed the tears to fall, all the while telling my foolish heart to behave. I was rich, though poor -- earthly poor. I too was the child of a King.

Mandy's song was sort of electrifying; I heard the auctioneer's sing-song voice raise the prices higher . . . higher . . . and higher. As though rising with the escalating prices of the items he was selling, his voice almost screeched with excitement and emotion.

I dried my tears quickly with my coat sleeve, then stepped out from my place of concealment to where I could see what was taking place.

"I'm a child of the King, A child of the King. . . ." Mandy's voice, old, but sweet as any angel's, continued to praise in heavenly song.
The crowd recognized that voice: Mandy, the saint, praising, as always, in the midst of adversity. Mandy, who had had little of earth's goods but who was an heir to all of God's riches! Mandy Hillis, "doctor" of the valley, nurse of the ailing, healer of broken hearts and broken homes, supporter of the weak but feeble, hater of sin, wickedness and evil but lover of people; once almost homeless widowed Mandy (had it not been for the Ben Keithly family) praising God!

Women sobbed. Stout men choked up and, blowing their noses noisily, shouted loudly, "Up the price! I'll make it $200.00!"

The bewildered auctioneer, looking over the crowd around him as though they were about to stampede, bellowed more loudly than ever and pirouetted round and round like a frustrated old man with a squalling baby that could not be quieted or comforted: "Two hundred! Who'll make it two-twenty-five? Two fifty! Three! . . ."

I felt I heard angel wings over my head all the rest of that day. When evening came and the crowd for the most part had dispersed and gone home, I walked into the beloved, familiar house which was no longer ours and I heard joyful shouts of praise to God.

I stood inside the doorway and wept for joy. Mama was sitting in the dear familiar rocking chair and my wood box was full of wood and running over. The kitchen table and chairs stood ready and waiting for us to "sit and partake" in their same place as always.

"Di . . . didn't . . . the people want . . . to take the things with them . . . tonight?" I asked, my heart thumping so loudly I could hardly talk.

"God gave it all back to us, Peter!" one of my older sisters exclaimed between spills of tears of joy. I stood, open mouthed in awe.

"They bought everything back -- for us, Peter!" she said in what was little more than a broken whisper. "Said it was a love-gift to Papa and Mama from them for taking Mandy in when they were too selfish to do so. And . . . and . . . Peter. . . ."

"Yes, Evelyn? Yes?" I gasped. "What?"
"Amos bought the farm! He wants Papa to farm it for him -- rent free!"

I felt faint with the excitement of the day so dropped quickly into the nearest chair. Evelyn took one of my hands in hers. In a whisper, she confided, "I over heard Amos tell Papa that when he's able, if he wants to buy the farm from him, he'll allow him to buy it back like rent -- and interest free! Imagine! Amos!"

"It's God, Evelyn!" I exclaimed, crying and rushing upstairs to my bedroom, where everything had been put neatly back in place just like there had been no foreclosing sale. Dropping to my knees beside the bed on the strip of hand-woven rag carpet, I wept and shouted aloud for joy over answered prayer.

Papa had entrusted every part of his dilemma into God's care and He had worked everything out to the very last detail, without Papa's touching any part of it even! Through Amos Randolph, of all people. And the neighbors.

I began to pray in earnest now -- for Amos!