Doug was ever so much fun to be with. He was a constant and persistently stubborn optimist. Added to this, he was one of those rare, dry-humor fellows. Almost everything he said came out humorously funny. So, naturally, you laughed almost all the time you were around him or with him. He had a host of friends; I was one of them.
Doug's parents and mine were lifelong friends, so, quite naturally, that made Doug and me lifelong friends. We all went to the same church, too, for so long as either Doug and I can remember, and while we experienced several changes of pastors the congregation remained very stable and pretty much the same, except for the new converts that were added on a steady basis.

Doug was in no way tall, dark and handsome, nor did he drive a Mercedes or a Cadillac; he was just Doug: medium build, ruddy complexion, laughing eyes and laughing face, five-feet nine and a-half inches tall, chestnut brown hair, and a couple of dimples which were anything but hidden and concealed when he smiled, which was mostly all the time.

Doug and my brother Jonathan were best friends until Jonathan went away to Bible school to study for the ministry. Doug seemed lost for a while without my brother, but soon he let it be known that if he couldn't have Jonathan in the car with him I'd make an ideal second choice. "C'mon, Kit," he'd say to me. "Go with me to the drug store for ether. I got it cleared with your parents: you may go. . . ." Or, "Hey, Kit, Dad needs some parts for the lawn mower; come with me to the hardware. It's okay if she rides along, isn't it, Mrs. Carr?"

Like I said, Doug was fun to be with and, always, he was a perfect gentleman around me and every other girl. But Doug had a fault; a very serious fault. And no matter how hard I tried to break him of his fault-habit, my efforts were futile. You see, Doug was a chance taker. Ever hear of it? Wonder what it is? Let me tell you. . . .

We were on our way to a youth meeting, Doug and Susie Aaron and Peggy Potter and Sam and Dan Ketner and I. Susie and Peggy and I were to sing a girls' trio that night; Sam and Dan and Doug were to play their saxophones. (They produce music that sounds absolutely heavenly when the three of them play together. I could sit all night and listen, as they play songs like "The Healer," "What A Friend We Have In Jesus" and "A Name I Highly Treasure." Talk about harmony! It's beautiful.)

Like I said, we were on our way to the meeting. We left in plenty of time, so what Doug did was absolutely and positively needless. We came up to a railroad crossing. The bell was ringing and the red light was flashing: The train was already in close view. And would you believe it! Doug took off
across those tracks like his very life depended upon seeing how fast he could beat that train getting there!

Susie and Peggy and I screamed and, for a fact, I thought my stomach was riding up in my throat. Sam and Dan looked a sickly white. Especially so since we were barely across when the train came roaring down the crossing over which we had escaped, but barely.

"What's wrong?" Doug asked dryly. "We made it, didn't we?"

"Don't do that again," Sam said through lips that trembled. "You'll never get me to ride with you another time if you do. That's like playing with fire and pretending you won't be burned. Doug," he added seriously, "do you realize you're challenging death?"

Doug made some sort of funny answer, which I was absolutely too shaken up to find either humorous or funny. I wanted to go home; Peggy and Susie did too. We went on to the meeting, however, and after the service a kind lady came up to us and told us how much she appreciated our song, adding that we had such "beautiful vibrato."

We thanked her kindly, then stood looking at each other, Peggy and Susie and I, thinking, If you only knew! If you only knew the reason for that "vibrato"! We were, even then, still shaking from our horrible scare! And, too, because we knew we'd be going back over that same crossing on our way home again. Vibrato? I'm sure that kind lady was right!

Another time I had gone with him to the country for strawberries; a crate for his mother and one for mine. It was a gorgeous early June morning, bright with sunshine and beautiful blooming flowers with colorful butterflies flitting gracefully from one fragrant plant to another. The earth had been washed clean and fresh by a torrential rain the night before. The trees waved freshly-bathed clean-leafed branches to us as we passed and the birds sang sweetly from their overhead perches. I was ecstatic with joy and rapture; my heart was a sparkling clean fountain overflowing with praise and thanksgiving to the Lord for His gifts of such exquisite and wondrous beauty to us, when I was brought roughly and quickly out of my session of praise.

"Hold on tight, Kit!" Doug yelled.
His loud exclamation of warning jolted me instantly out of my tranquil mood and the peaceful thoughts I'd been reveling in and enjoying to their fullest. Instantly, I sat bolt upright in my seat, no longer relaxed and calm, but looking more like a soldier in search of the enemy. And then I saw it! "Doug, No. No!" I screamed.

My scream and verbal cry of alarm were both too late. Already Doug's old car was part way on the narrow bridge, moving across ever so slowly while the water from the rain-swollen creek swirled around us, shaking the car like it was trying to shake some sense into the head of its chance-taking driver.

I thought I was going to faint from fright; I really did: I felt weak and nauseous and my body trembled visibly. I wanted to jump out of the car and run. But I knew I didn't dare: the current was too swift; I'd have been carried away with it.

Tears trickled ceaselessly down my cheeks. I was numb as I felt the push of the water against the side of the car. It was frightening; petrifyingly so. Bowing my head, I prayed, calling on God to deliver us just one more time. And then I made a vow; a vow which I kept: I would never ride with Doug again -- not ever! -- until he stopped taking chances. Or, as Sam Ketner phrased it, not until he stopped "challenging death."

Doug did take me home a different route that morning -- the way we should have come to the strawberry farm -- but only after I told him that, once safely home, I would never again go with him in his car until he drove without taking chances. It hurt him, I knew, but I knew too that I had no right to expect God to protect me so long as I knowingly was riding in a car with a chance-taker.

The call from Doug's mother, now, alerted me to the fact that she felt I should come to the hospital. "Doug's awake," she said, sounding tired and sad. "He'd like to see you, Kitty. Can you come, please?"

"I'll be there, God willing, just as soon as Mother can get me there," I replied. "Thanks for calling."

"Kitty," Mom said as she drove, "you should have told me before of Doug's chance-taking obsession."
"Obsession!" I exclaimed. "I . . . I never thought of it as an obsession, Mother."

"If your father and I had known about his driving behavior and dangerous habit, we'd not have allowed you to get into his car even, friend or not. Had you been with him today," Mother continued sadly, "you'd have been crushed to death. The passenger's side of the car was crushed together like a piece of machine crushed metal, your father told me. He stopped to view the wreckage on his way to work. Doug is a miracle. His being alive, I mean. I hope he's learned his lesson well."

Mother and I were sober as we took the elevator up to Doug's floor in the hospital. Silently, I was praising the Lord for having given me enough good sense and wisdom to say a final no to riding with him again until he changed, if ever. God had not only given Doug another chance at living He had given him an opportunity to change his way of chance-taking driving, as well.

I thought I was prepared to see Doug; but I wasn't. Not the way he looked, I mean. I felt I couldn't breathe as I looked upon the swathed-in-bandages form of the friend we all knew as Doug. I felt like the room was closing in on me; like I was suffocating. Or going to pass out.

"Kit . . .?" His voice calling my name sounded muffled and unreal; like some stranger was calling for me.

"Kit . . . I . . . I'm . . . sorry . . . for what . . . I . . . put . . . you through." Were there tears mingled in with the stammering, broken statement? I was sure there were.

Gaining my composure and taking a long, deep breath, I walked over to the bed. The one unbandaged eye that looked up at me was full of tears.

"Forgive me . . . please. Can . . . can you? Will . . . will you?" he asked in a sob.

"Oh, Doug, you silly goose," I said, feeling I was about to break out in a flood of tears of my own, "you know I forgive you. Just pull yourself together and get well. There's been a lot of praying going on for you."
"I know. And Kit," he said, sounding stronger, I thought, "I made a vow to the Lord, after I . . . asked Him to forgive me: You'll . . . never have to . . . be afraid . . . of . . . of driving with me again. Not you . . . nor . . . anybody else. God 'worked' me over, but good. I . . . needed it. What a costly lesson! But He is so precious to me now. So very precious. . . ."

We stood around his bed, watching him as he slept, his parents, my mother and I; and then the story of the unruly sheep and the loving shepherd who had to break the wanderer's leg and nurse it gently and lovingly back to health and healing under his hourly care, came to mind. Already, Doug had benefited and prospered by the tender Heavenly Shepherd's "breaking" of his leg, figuratively speaking. And suddenly I knew that, after the last bandage was removed and taken off his broken body, a new and different Doug would be seen and heard in our church and in our town and our surrounding community.

Feeling tears falling, I excused myself for a moment and stepped outside the door until I could regain a measure of my composure, realizing afresh and anew that even in this serious accident God was working things together for good -- Doug's good.