

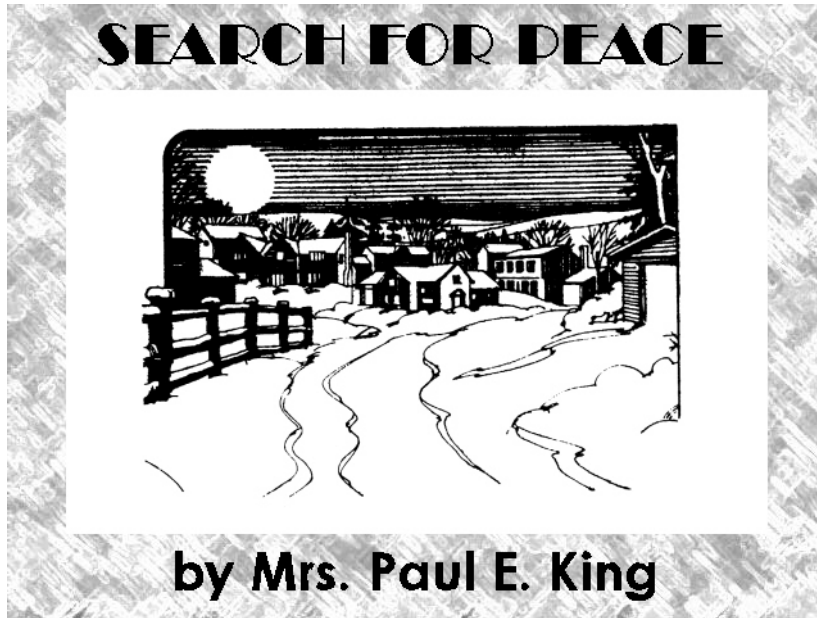
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SEARCH FOR PEACE
By Mrs. Paul E. King

I suppose everybody sometime in life feels a bit unfulfilled and empty, but mine was of such radical proportions until it put me on a crash course downward.

Hi, I'm Roger Tillby. I was twelve when my father died of a heart attack. Shock number one. I never did understand -- and still don't, for that matter --

why a loving Father in Heaven would allow a 12-year-old boy's father to be cut down at such a young age: Dad was a mere 36. He was a sure enough real pal to me. We went fishing together, played ball together, put puzzles together and . . . well, you get the picture, I'm sure: we did almost everything together.

I became moody and depressed after Dad died. The luster of my life was gone. Days were boring; nights were long and worse than boring; they seemed intolerable and unbearable. Especially since I no longer had the big, strong, muscular arms to tussle playfully with me before he'd turn out the light and say, "Goodnight, Son, I love you. Sleep well."

I never thought the time would come when I'd hate bedtime, but it came after my father's death. Worse still, I began having nightmares and frightful dreams, which eventually left me. But the loneliness for my father seemed almost more than I could bear: I felt I was going to die.

Mother was as devastated as I. She tried nobly to cover her hurt and pain by smiling and doing extra things for me but I knew she was suffering as much or more than I. Often, I would come in from outside and find her at the table, sobbing like her heart would break. Her courage, for my sake, won out, however, and soon she managed to conceal her own heartache and heartbreak that I might be "healed" the faster.

After long months I became accustomed to only the two of us at the breakfast and dinner and supper table -- Mother and I. In the back of my mind, however, was a seething pot of resentment. And when it became evident that Mother had to go to work to keep the bills paid, I had shock number two. Coming home from school into an empty house was anything but fun. I resented it. At the least, I thought, a fellow's mother should be there to welcome him home from school. I missed the good smells of Mother's cooking and baking and the special little snacks she always had waiting for me, to tide me over till supper.

"If I don't work, Roger," she told me one day after a dreadful outburst from me, "we won't eat. It's that simple. I wish I didn't have to work: but necessity demands that I do."

I went to my room and sulked; I hated myself for the unkind words I'd unleashed on Mother.

I graduated from high school and enlisted immediately into the Air Force. I wanted to get away from everything familiar -- my town, home, church, community and, especially, the cemetery where Dad was buried and which I could see from our house. New friends and different surroundings were the answer, I thought, wearing my uniform with pride. And hope.

The climate at the Air Force base in Texas was as unlike where I was raised as daylight is from darkness. The weather was hot. H-O-T. And dry. I thought I'd die from the heat. Especially on the days of vigorously-hard and strenuous training. I hated the place with a passion. And, strange as it may seem, I was homesick: I wished I were home again. I missed Mother; missed my uncles and aunts and cousins and my friends. I longed for just a glimpse of Mom's face, tired looking though it had become since she had had to go to work.

I was shipped abroad with my company and decided to live it up. At home, under the watchful eyes of my mother and my uncles, I felt I must maintain that "good moral" image by which our family was known and recognized and for which it was respected and held in high esteem. Now, however, there was no one to watch me; no one to see what I did nor where I went.

I began tasting of sin's pleasures and drinking from its cisterns. Still I remained empty; nor did I feel fulfilled. Rather, sin's iniquitous pleasures left me with a morning -- after splitting headache and an empty billfold. Flat empty. And an emptier than ever feeling.

I was dressing for a night out one cold, blustery winter night when Rich Hallam came into our base headquarters.

"Hey Roger," he said, just as I slipped an arm into my freshly-cleaned, sharply-pressed Air Force coat. "You're going with Buck and me tonight."

"I am? Who says?" I asked, continuing with my dressing.

Rich's long legs brought him swiftly to my side. In a more subdued tone of voice, he said, "Don't make a fool of yourself again, Roger. You could have frozen to death in that snow last night. I was watching for you -- waiting for

you, really. If I hadn't carried you in here and put you to bed, you'd have frozen to death. Go with Buck and me; we care about you."

"Where are you going?"

"To a little church in town. They're having a revival meeting."

"But I am a Christian," I protested. "I was baptized when I was young."

"You're still young," Rich stated with a smile.

"Were you ever born again, Roger?"

"Born again? What's that?"

"You'll soon know," Rich said, taking me by the arm and leading me outside.

"Hey. I'm not going," I declared in protest. "I have plans."

"So do I," Rich stated firmly. "And so does God. You're going. You may freeze to death tonight: I can't be watching for you to come home: I must work tonight after nine. Come, please."

Like an obedient son, I followed Rich, whose stature and build was much like my father's had been.

"You're heading down the wrong road, Roger," he said as we walked toward the car. "There's nothing but heartache and pain and remorse and sorrow down that road. Tonight I'm going to do everything in my power to help get you started on the right road -- the road to Heaven. I've been praying for you for many weeks."

"But I was baptized, I tell you."

"That's not enough. Jesus said, 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God' St. John 3:3. Jesus was telling this to Nicodemus, a wealthy man who came to see Him. The only way to Heaven is to be born again of God, or converted, as it is also called!"

It was bitter cold; so cold until the snow squeaked and crunched beneath our boots as we walked; but I felt hot after hearing what Rich said.

Buck was waiting inside the rented car. He greeted me warmly and said he was thankful I'd come with Rich, that they -- he and Rich -- had been praying earnestly for my salvation for many weeks.

I was speechless. My heart had a strangely warm sensation inside it, however, as I realized that these two men actually cared about me. Me! It seemed incredulously unreal but oh, so amazing and wonderful. Someone actually cared!

The "little church" we entered that night was nothing more than a dimly-lit hall. It was warm inside. And warmer still for me when I saw the forms of kneeling men up front and heard them praying and groaning in agony for souls. I had never seen or heard anything like this in all my life. A strangely warm feeling tugged at my heart.

Rich and Buck hung their heavy overcoats on hangers in a little recessed alcove place to the left side of the door we'd just entered then joined the kneeling ones at the front.

I hung my coat next to Bucks then found a seat midway down the aisle to the right. I felt tears swimming in my eyes. Strange, I thought, as I realized that I hadn't cried since my father's funeral. Whatever was happening to me? I wondered.

I bowed my head, feeling a reverential awe over what I was hearing coming from the front of that little hall-church. These men weren't playing church: They were dead serious and in earnest. They cared about the souls of their fellow air force men; cared enough to pray for them and to weep over them! It seemed unreal. But my ears attested to the fact that it was, indeed, very real, as did my heart.

Don't ask me what happened nor what made me do what I did, for I have no answer to give you other than that I felt a power moving me to get to my feet. I obeyed. And then this same mighty power put motion to my feet: in no time at all, I had wiggled my way between the kneeling forms of Buck and Rich and I was begging them to pray for me. I felt I was lost; doomed, and on my way to the lake of fire.

Ignorant though I'd been about most of the things contained in the Bible, I began confessing my wickedness and my sins to Almighty God, crying out for Him to have mercy on my soul and to forgive me and save me. And He did! It happened instantly. I knew I was born of God, and neither Rich nor Buck had to tell me.

I was on my feet, shouting and crying and praising God for giving me a peace and joy like I never knew before. At last, at long last, my hungering, thirsting soul was satisfied. The things of the world lost their charm and allurements for me. I found the fountain of living water. Christ was now all in all to me. The storm in my soul was over. My search for peace was ended -- in Christ, my wonderful Lord and my Savior.