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LAURIE'S HEALING
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Fresh out of college, with her diploma and her hard-earned degree, Laurie Enders sang joyously as she carried the last few pieces of clothing in from the back seat of the car and hung them in the dear, familiar closet of her room inside the homeplace that was the dearest of all places to her, then she hurried out to the kitchen and hugged her mother for the umpteenth time.

"Oh, Mom," she cried happily, "it's so good to be home again!"

Mrs. Enders dropped the potato which she had been peeling and placed her hands on her daughter's slender shoulders as she exclaimed, "We're ever so glad you're home, my dear. This big old house seemed as lonesome without you as we were." She kissed Laurie on the tip of her nose.

"It's great to have my degree and to know I won't need to leave you and Dad and Jodie and Jori and Jonathan in the fall, God willing. Oh, Mom," she cried, "it's wonderful to know I'm finished and that I'll be teaching only twelve miles from here, the Lord willing. I stand amazed when I think how God opened this position up for me."

"Speaking of teaching, Laurie, Brother Souder wants you to teach the handicapped children at the new camp he's starting. He tried to get you on the phone, and when he received no answer he knew you were on the road home. He put you down as the teacher for these very special children and young people."

Laurie gasped; fear gripped her heart; cold chills raced up and down her spine. "I . . . I can't," she declared, as she fell limply on to the nearest kitchen chair. "I . . . I'm sorry; but I can't do it, Mother."

"It's only for five days, honey."

Laurie felt weak, like she was going to faint. "I . . . I'm sorry, Mom. I . . . I can't."

Mary Enders looked at her daughter with something akin to shock. Then, in a kind voice, she said, "I'm sorry too, Laurie: our pastor feels like you're God's answer to his many fervent prayers and his much fasting for this brand new outreach. He can get all the teachers he needs for the normal children's classes." Her sentence trailed in silence.

Laurie brushed a hand across her eyes. If only she could get over her long-buried fear! Oh, if only. . . .

"It's a shame," Mrs. Enders said softly, speaking, it seemed, more to herself than to her daughter. "Such a shame! These precious, handicapped

children will now have a camp where they can attend, and mingle, in their limited way and ability, but no one who will teach them and work with them."

Laurie looked up at her mother and saw tears shimmer in her eyes. Taking a deep breath, she said, "Do you remember when I was six or eight years old; when we lived next door to the Skimmers?" Mrs. Enders nodded in affirmation.

Laurie dropped her face in the palms of her hands; shivers of fear raced through her. Raising her head quickly, she said, "Missy Skimmer nearly frightened me to death -- literally."

"Why, Laurie, Missy wouldn't have hurt a soul. She was bubbling over with love and. . . ."

"That's just it, Mother; in one of her attempts to hug me, she grabbed me by the neck and dragged me partway across the lawn. She was the strongest little girl on our block. She terrified me. From that day to this, I've had this hidden fear of . . . of. . . ."

Mrs. Enders put her arms around Laurie. "Why didn't you tell me this long ago?" she asked kindly.

"Because everybody kept saying that Missy was 'different.' I guess I thought people who were 'different' were allowed to do what she did."

"Most Downs syndrome children are extremely affectionate, Laurie: I'm sure you are aware of this, now that you are older and are a mature young woman. But honey, if you still feel you can't teach this class, please call our pastor and tell him why you feel you can't."

Tears flowed from Laurie's eyes. "I want to help; I really do. But . . . but . . . what if I fail? what if I am overcome with this deeply buried fear of so long, long ago?"

Smiling, Mary Enders said softly, "I'll be holding you up in prayer. This is a sincere promise. David, in the Psalms, declared that what time he was afraid he would trust in the Lord (Psalm 56:3). Personally, I feel you can do it -- with God's help. May I tell you something that happened to me when I was a little girl?" she asked.

"Oh Mother, you may always tell me anything you want to. I feel honored to have a mother like you."

"Thank you, Laurie. Sometimes the healing we need comes by doing the thing that caused our fear in the first place. We lived in the country, my parents, my brothers and sisters and I. I had quite a walk to go to high school and back. One day my father came home from work with a much-used but still very usable girl's bicycle for me. 'It's yours, Mary,' he told me proudly, but you must learn to ride it. Since neither your mother nor I ever had a bicycle, we can't teach you how to ride it.'

"I was overwhelmed with my dear father's kindness and love: That bicycle spelled sacrifice for my father no matter which way you viewed it, and I realized this. Oh, how I loved him for his sacrificial gift. And I let him know it, you can be sure of this.

"Now to learn how to ride my very special personal gift. I took it up to the highest hill on our farm, got on the seat, and away it started -- on its own - - down that hill. My feet groped for the pedals. I clung to the handle-bars like my life depended on them. I felt like I was flying. Before I realized it, the bicycle and I were at the bottom of that long, steep hill. It began to wobble; I was pedaling it and trying to steady it at the same time. Suddenly, I sailed off that seat, not gloriously, I want you to know, and wound up on my knees in the middle of that part-shale, part-stone 'paved' dirt road. I looked like I had come out of a war-torn battle; blood was running from my legs and my arms; and my nose, as well. The bicycle, looking perfectly 'innocent' and unscathed, was on its side near me.

"For weeks, after I was totally healed over from my first and only try at riding it, I ignored the bicycle. Daddy hinted numerous times that he thought I should try again; but then he'd drop the subject completely for days. Mother, however, approached me outright with a statement from which I couldn't escape:

"'Mary,' she told me kindly, 'the only way to overcome fear is to meet it head on and tackle it until we master it and put it beneath our feet.

"'But Mother,' I cried, 'what if I have an accident again?'

"You won't have another one, Mary: this time you will know better what to do and how to do it. Steady that unwieldy two-wheeler with balance, honey. I've been trying it out myself, and it's quite fun to sail down that hill with the wind kissing your cheeks and brushing your hair. Now get out there: Conquer your fear by doing the thing that gave you fear. . . ."

"I looked at my mother for a long time. Then I rushed over to her open arms. We hugged each other and danced around the stove in our kitchen like a couple of little girls as I exclaimed joyously, in real surprise, 'Mother, you mean it; you tried the bicycle? Really?'

"Not just tried, Mary Sue; I'm riding it. And you can do the same thing. Now go out and conquer that terror and that fear by riding again.'

"I obeyed, Laurie; I took her advice. And wonder of wonders, I didn't have another accident like that first one. Not ever. More wonderful, even, I conquered the monster of fear by 'tackling' it head on at the place of its inception. That bicycle and I became fast 'friends.' It was my mode of transportation for all of my high school years."

Laurie was silent for a long time. Then she raised her eyes and looked full in her mother's face. "If you could do that," she said in a voice that shook with emotion, "with God's help, I'll try. But, oh, Mother, you'll really have to pray for me."

"You have my word, dear girl! In fact, I'm going to begin praying right now -- this very day -- for the Lord to remove this unnatural fear from you and to make it easy for you to teach when you stand before your class of brand new learners. Brother Souder is overjoyed that, finally, there will be a youth camp and that there will be a place for the handicapped as well as those who aren't handicapped. He feels the handicapped have been neglected, where spiritual things are concerned."

Laurie prayed much, and earnestly, for Divine help for the new assignment. Five days. Five hours; one hour each day. "Please, Lord, remove my fear. Make me a blessing," she cried.

Her heart jumped wildly as the "special learners" were either wheeled or led into the large dining room which was to serve as her classroom for the five-day camp. They came, assisted by a relative, a friend or an aide, who

remained with their charges constantly. Laurie felt the old fear twist and wring her heart. Panic boiled up inside and churned in the pit of her stomach. Quickly and silently she sought the Lord's help, quoting several promises from the Bible and laying claim to them for her special need.

Turning quickly, she faced her incoming class with tears and a smile, feeling the strength of the holy promises and of her mother's prayers, as well. She knew beyond any shadow of doubt that her mother was on her knees at that very moment interceding for her. And there before her were the "Missys" of her nightmares and her fears -- the ones she had been running from for years and years. Many of them were smiling at her; reaching out to touch her. Some had deformities: elongated faces, heads too large, drooping mouths. But smiles. And eyes that lighted up like candles when she smiled back. A cerebral palsy victim, a boy so twisted he could barely sit in his wheelchair and whose mouth was almost continuously being wiped by a pretty young woman with wheat colored hair and the kindest looking eyes Laurie felt she had ever seen. They were there before her, nineteen in all. They were ready for class to begin: their eyes were upon her.

Stepping closer to them, she felt her fears dissolve into love and compassion for them. These were God's special gifts; she had a very special assignment to fulfill -- for Jesus' sake.

"Hi," she said cheerfully, "and welcome to our class. I'm Laurie Enders, your teacher. This week is going to be a very special week for all of us. We'll be singing choruses and songs and I'll be telling you ever so many wonderful things about Jesus and how much He loves us. We'll have visuals and flannelgraph stories and. . . ."

Suddenly, Laurie felt right at home. The week was going to be wonderful, she knew. Some new names would be written in the Lamb's Book of Life, she was sure; Her "special" students seemed eager to learn. And those relatives, friends and aides who were with her students. . . ?

Laurie felt challenged: She had a double duty. By God's grace, she would lift up Jesus; He would give the harvest.