

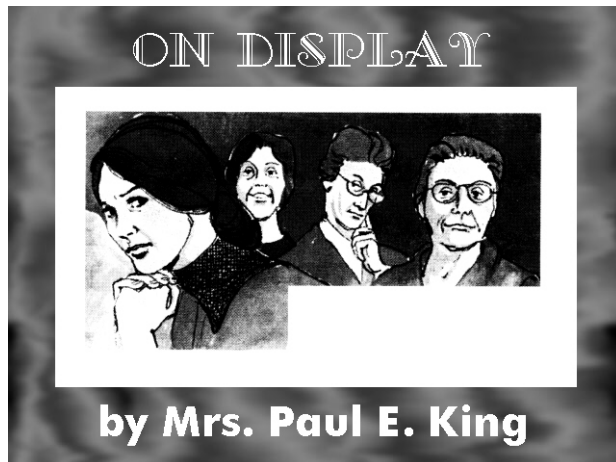
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**ON DISPLAY**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

(Part 1)

I never realized when I married Dave that I'd be going through the things I did. And it's a good thing that I didn't know. I'm sure, had I known, I would never have become Mrs. David Sorensen.

We met at college, Dave and I. We were attracted to each other almost instantly, each knowing by some secret, silent inner influence (which always reflects and shows up outwardly) that the other was a Christian. This very definitely attracted us to each other for, as I'm sure you know, there aren't

very many Christians in the secular colleges. Or, if they profess to be a Christian, they certainly remain silent about it. Not so with Dave and me: we believed in letting our light shine for the Lord. And we did it, every opportunity we had. Ridiculed? What an understatement! Mocked? You have no idea! Made sport of?. Were we ever! Despised and hated? Indeed so! But it was all for Jesus' sake -- with joy. We grew spiritually by leaps and bounds, it seemed.

Like I said, from the moment we met, we knew each was a truly born again Christian. And, as the college days progressed, we had ample opportunity to stand up for and speak out for the God we loved and worshipped and served. I had no idea how utterly decadent and vilely-defiled and depraved our society actually was until I began my studies in college. I had been "sheltered beyond belief," some of my classmates declared boldly. They told me to get with it and enjoy life, that the once-taught theory of absolutes and morality had long since been ousted and was dead. I kindly refuted their stout attestations with a statement of my own, generally from the Bible, and ending with my own testimony of heart change - conversion and sanctification. This very definitely defined the line of demarcation, and then the ridicule and mockery and hatred began. Through it all, and like stated before, Dave and I grew spiritually and were like the Biblical "well watered trees," as we prayed and read God's Word.

But back to where I started, that I didn't know I'd be going through the things I did when I married Dave. Oh, Dave told me about his mother, Hildegarde, and his two aunts, Bess and Beulah, to be sure; told me that they would, without any doubt whatever, scrutinize, analyze and criticize me.

"But why?" I asked innocently as my groom smiled down into my eyes. "I mean, why will they do such a thing?"

Dave tweaked my chin, kissed me on the tip of my nose, and said boyishly, "Because that's my mother's and her two sisters' nature. Aunt Bess is more gentle, to be sure. But don't pay them one bit of attention, Shari. I love you. You're my wife and that is all that matters."

I pondered Dave's response for awhile then I countered with a few questions "Bu . . . but . . . to scrutinize and analyze and . . . and criticize . . . is that being Christ-like? I mean, well, aren't they . . . well . . . don't they love the Lord? Aren't they Christians?"

Dave looked sad. Very sad. Then he sat down in a chair and said softly, "I wish they were, Oh, how I wish they were!"

I was sorry then that I had asked the questions. We flew out the following morning to meet (for me) and see (for Dave) his mother and her two sisters in Sweden. It was our honeymoon trip; a two-month long honeymoon with the Sorensens -- Mom Sorensen and her two sisters, all three of them widows and all three of them having married brothers and now living together in the old Sorensen home place.

Dave noticed my pensive mood as we traveled, and a time or two he told me not to let what he had said worry me. "And don't be afraid of my relatives," he had said, with his dear boyish-looking grin spreading clear across his face. "They're really very nice people, Shari. Nice, but irreligious. My father and my uncles were prosperous business men; they fared sumptuously and did well. They felt they needed no assistance from anybody; not even God. Said they made it fabulously well on their own. The feeling carried over into my mother and my two aunts."

"But Dave," I cried as I clutched his arm, "weren't they moved and . . . and touched when you got converted and made all the restitutions you told me about? Didn't that soften their hearts and get them to thinking about God?"

"It got them thinking all right!" he replied positively. "They were so angry and upset with me until I thought they would make me leave home. They're proud, Shari. Very, very proud. Making all those restitutions and repenting of my sins like I did sliced right into the heart of their carnal pride. Plus the fact that I told them I couldn't go into business with my late father's partners, since I felt the Lord calling me to be a teacher in a religious college or Bible school.

"This infuriated them. They told me I was a disgrace to the family; to my father's name especially I told them simply that I had to mind God, that He was directing my life and all of its affairs, now that I belonged to Him completely and entirely. They couldn't understand, of course, so I said no more."

It seemed most unusual to me for one not to have any inclination toward or desire for God and spiritual things, so I prodded further with, "Did they never go to church? Not any of them?"

"Never; so far back as I can remember. I was reared in a totally irreligious home. It's a miracle that I got saved. To my dying day, I will thank the Lord for that unknown stranger who thrust the little gospel tract into my hand as I hurried to the subway that busy Thursday evening, and eagerly admonished me to read it. From it, I learned things I had never known before. Something inside my being was strangely stirred as I read about Jesus and His suffering and ultimate death for my sins. I couldn't resist the feeling to pray, and though I had never prayed before and didn't know how to pray nor what to say, I cried out, as simply as I knew how, 'God, if You're really real, forgive me of all my sins and save my soul, as this little paper says You can and You will do. I confess that I'm a sinner, and a heathen, Lord. Change me, please; from the inside out.' And He did it, Shari! In an instant of time, I passed from the old life of sin into a born again child of God. I had a radical heart change and I've never been the same. Talk about joy and peace and satisfaction! It's all mine, now that the Lord Jesus Christ lives in my heart in saving grace and sanctifying power."

Dave really lived what he professed and I was truly proud of him. I was overjoyed to be his wife and I gladly relinquished my own last name -- Clifton -- to carry his on and to be known as Mrs. David Sorensen.

We were met at the airport in Sweden by all three Sorensen widows I spied them before Dave. At least I felt sure that the three unsmiling, rather austere looking women standing some distance away from where we were entering were they. And I was right. Seeing them, suddenly, for himself and sensing my fear and tension, Dave grabbed my hand and held it tightly, whispering softly in my ear, "I love you, Mrs. Sorensen and I feel honored to know you belong to me." Then he led me to his mother and to his two aunts and introduced me to each of them before hugging his mother, even.

Mother Sorensen studied me for a while then she said, "How do you do?" Her voice was cold sounding and stiff

"I'm very well, thank you," I replied, adding, "I'm pleased to meet you, Mother Sorensen."

Her body went rigid. I sensed resentment. "How brash of you calling me mother! You have your own mother, don't you?" Her eyes looked like cold, blue-gray steel; her words were like a sharp double-edge sword.

Ye . . . yes, Ma'am, I do," I replied in little more than a whisper.

"I am Hildegarde Sorensen. Call me Hildegarde after this, please."

"Yes Ma'am; I will," I answered quickly, feeling Dave's grip on my hand tighten.

Bess and Beulah stood apart from their sister, studying me too, I was sure, but with less resentment, I felt. After all, I was only a niece to them, and this only by way of marriage. But a daughter-in-law. . . !

Dave tried repeatedly to get his mother's attention by asking questions but she refused to enter into any prolonged conversations with him. I was the center of her attention I knew without any doubts whatever that I was positively and absolutely going through phase one--I was being scrutinized. Critically so. And without any further thought whatever, I burst out laughing.

Dave looked at me then joined in my laughter, stating kindly, "Shari laughs a great deal, Mother and Aunt Bess and Aunt Beulah. It becomes contagious after a while. And if I had my guess as to why she's laughing, I'd say it's because of something I said to her some time ago. My wife often has what I call delayed laughter. By that I mean that many times a thing said in humor to her doesn't sink in until later, and when it finally registers on her brain and she begins to laugh, well, with Shari, we often have a second laugh. Do you care to hear what I told her, Mother? I said that she would be scr. . . ."

Hildegarde cut Dave off sharply, saying icily, "I'm not interested in the least to know her reason for this uncouth outburst. Collect your pieces of luggage so we can get on our way."

Dave turned to his mother and said kindly, "Perhaps it would be better if Shari and I rented a small apartment while we are here. I'm sorry if this is causing trouble for you. We'll get a little efficiency apartment somewhere and rent a car and come by to see you often. This way there will be no strain or added work on any of you."

"Don't be ridiculous, David! Of course you won't rent an apartment; not when the Sorensen house has rooms to spare. Now get your luggage I'll bring the car to the front of the terminal; meet me there," and Mrs. Hildegarde Sorensen marched away like a general who had given explicit orders and expected those orders to be carried out implicitly.

Aunt Beulah and Aunt Bess stood looking at Dave and me and, also, toward Hildegarde's rapidly disappearing, straight-as-a-soldier's frame. Then, quickly, Aunt Beulah trotted away toward her sister. Aunt Bess came toward me; she was smiling. Taking my hand in hers, she said softly, "I'm glad to meet you, Shari."

I felt a warm feeling envelop me. Throwing my arms around her neck, I said, "And I'm glad to meet you, Aunt Bess. Is it all right if I call you Aunt?"

Aunt Bess laughed then; a warm, hearty laugh it was. "All right, you ask! Why Shari Sorensen, of course it's all right to address me as aunt. That's what I am to you, and I'm right proud to be called aunt. Now don't you pay Hildegarde too much mind -- about what she said, I mean, nor how she treated you. She's stubborn as a mule, she is; and prouder than a peacock. Swedes we are by marriage; Germans by birth. This information for what it's worth to you. Just don't you let my sister get you down. Dave, you protect your wife. I like her. Like her much"

"Why Aunt Bess, thank you," Dave said, throwing his arms around the woman's neck and hugging her soundly as he added, "I'll protect her; you may be sure of it. But it would be nice if you could help to look out for her when I'm not around."

Aunt Bess pulled Dave's face down to hers and said softly, "I will, Dave; it's a promise. And... and Dave, I want you to know that I've been doing a lot of thinking about what you told us happened to you. I've been doing some thinking. Some serious thinking. And . . . and I've even tried to pray, David. Maybe, now that you and Shari are here, you can help me to . . . to get ready for Heaven."

Tears swam in Dave's and my eyes.

(Part 2)

All the way from the airport to the Sorensen home place, my heart was singing. Just knowing that Aunt Bess' heart was tender toward the Lord and that she very definitely was feeling her need of a change and, more importantly even, that she wanted to be changed, made me realize just how God ordered our visit must be.

Dave and I sat in the back seat of his mother's car with Aunt Bess, who smiled frequently but covertly at me, much like a child who fears a parent, I thought. Since I sat in the middle of the seat, I reached over and linked her long, slender fingers in mine. She seemed pleased with the gesture, and we rode all the way to the house that way. I got the impression that Aunt Bess was the most timid of the three and that she was starving for good, clean, wholesome female companionship and affection. Sitting beside her in the car, I purposed inwardly that I would give her all the companionship and affection that she would allow me to give.

Dave chatted like an excited child. Since his mother refused to allow him the privilege of driving everyone home, he was free to watch the passing scenes and scenery to his fill. And watch it he did, exclaiming over and over at the beautiful scenery which, he said, he had almost forgotten about in his busyness and diligence over his studies and his grades.

His mother, who had said nothing on the ride home thus far, now bristled perceptibly and stated caustically, "You made a fool of yourself, going to America for an education when you could have gotten everything you needed right here in your native Sweden. And you wouldn't have become a fanatic either--a religious fanatic!"

"Mother," Dave said, speaking kindly, "I'm not a religious fanatic: I'm a born again, saved and sanctified child of God. I never knew life could be so wonderful until I found the Lord."

"Fanaticism! Fanaticism!" she cried angrily as she settled back to driving.

Silence reigned in the car. Instinctively, I realized how great the gulf could be between the believer in Christ and the unbeliever; between the follower of the meek and lowly Nazarene and the despiser-rejecter of Him. It was fearful and awesome.

The Sorensen place was what I expected it to be -- old but in super-wonderful repair and care. It was meticulously neat and clean and flowers were in bloom everywhere, it seemed. Window flower boxes spilled myriads of brightly-colored flowers over their sides and well-landscaped flower beds were a kaleidoscope of colors. Hummingbirds seemed to be everywhere in the flower gardens.

I complimented my mother-in-law and her sisters but only Aunt Bess had the grace and the common courtesy to thank me for the compliment. I only wished the attitudes and the feelings of hostility were as beautiful as the lovely flowers. But such was not the case.

We were barely inside the house when my mother-in-law turned and faced me squarely, saying, "I want you to know that my son married you against my will, and to me you will always be an outsider. You are too plain, and you certainly don't know how to dress. You know nothing about how people in high society look and act and dress."

"That's right," I admitted softly and kindly. "But I know how God's children act and dress and behave, Mrs. Sorensen: They do everything to please their King, the Lord Jesus. They dress modestly and in accordance with scripture."

"Quiet! Quiet!" she exclaimed. "I want none of this nonsense. You have no right to be in this house. You are an outsider; Dave is Swede. Through and through Swede."

"And German, I believe," I said softly.

Dave, coming in with the luggage just then and having heard part of his mother's comments, said quickly, "Shari is the wife of my choosing, Mother. I love her with all the love God gave a man to love his wife. You must not talk to her this way again. Never! This is my wife; your lovely daughter-in-law."

Mother and son faced each other for a brief moment. Finally Dave said, "I feel that Shari and I should perhaps get a small efficiency apartment, Mother, like I stated previously."

"You heard me once, David. Now take your things up to the guest room at the far end of the hallway then wash and come down for dinner. Everything is well under way in the oven."

She walked briskly, carrying herself like a commander-in-chief. Aunt Beulah followed closely behind. Only Aunt Bess lingered. I saw tears in her eyes. "Pay her no mind, Shari," she said softly. "My sister can be so harsh and cutting at times."

Dave and I hugged and kissed Aunt Bess; then we hurried up the stairs to the guest room with its private bath. Once inside, Dave set the luggage pieces down and gathered me close in his arms, saying tenderly, "I'm sorry, Shari. So sorry. Just say the word and we'll find that little apartment today yet. We won't even unpack our things here."

"Do you think the Lord would still smile on us if we did such a thing?" I asked.

"But Shari, she . . . she's downright hateful and mean to you. This isn't right either."

"It's not like it's going to be forever, my dear," I said quickly. "Two months isn't all that long; and I'm sure God's grace will be sufficient to see me through. We're to be lights, remember? And a light is made to shine in the storms and through the blackest night."

Dave was silent for a long while. Then he said, "I'm proud of you, Mrs. Sorensen, and I'm glad I married you. We'll stay here then, and remember, if it gets too unbearable I'll willingly and gladly take you away."

"God brought us together, Dave, and I believe He wants us here: Aunt Bess isn't far from becoming a Christian."

Dave held me at arm's length for a while; then he said quickly, "You know, Shari, I believe you're right."

"She told you some wonderful things at the airport, Dave. Your testimony and your changed life has influenced her greatly. I believe, if we are patient and sweet and kind, you will be seeing the fruit of your prayers and fastings and tears -- in your Aunt Bess."

"Oh, Shari, you can't imagine what this means to me. It has hurt me so deeply to think that I wasn't saved before my father died. I often think how different things could have been and may have been if I had known the Lord when I was younger. Before Daddy died, I mean. And my two uncles. Since I was unsaved myself, I had nothing better to offer them. We lived like heathens -- without Christ, I mean. But say, let's get unpacked then go downstairs; my mother is extremely punctual with her dinner hour. . . ."

Not only was Mrs. Hildegarde Sorensen punctual with her dinner hour, she was punctual with everything. Everything! Her word was law. I strove diligently to keep friction at a minimum by abiding by her code of punctuality in everything and every way. That I was an unwelcome "visitor" in her home was obvious. She snubbed me constantly, especially when and if Dave wasn't around, and she refused to allow me to do anything in the kitchen. Aunt Beulah wasn't quite as merciless and harsh and unsociable, but almost. Only Aunt Bess treated me with courtesy and kindness and love. More than once, I came unexpectedly into a room, or was within earshot, when I heard Hildegarde Sorensen criticizing me and castigating her meek mannered sister for her kindness and courtesy to me and it made me love Aunt Bess all the more.

Dave's prediction came true all right, for I was indeed scrutinized, analyzed and criticized. Repeatedly, I overheard my mother-in-law in harsh criticism of me to Beulah, who said little but clucked her tongue in approval of what was being said. Only Aunt Bess protested and came to the defense of my name, and always, Hildegarde's verbal sword cut her to pieces.

One night, long after the ever-punctual bedtime hour of nine o'clock, Dave and I heard a timid knock on our bedroom door, and almost before we had bidden entrance to whomever had knocked, Aunt Bess came softly into the room. She was crying. I rushed to her and threw my arms around her, saying, "Oh, Aunt Bess, don't cry. please, don't cry. Are you ill? What's wrong?"

She looked at Dave and me then said frankly, "I'm ready to change. My heart feels so heavy. Please pray for me. All my life I have known something was missing and lacking and now that I know what it is -- Who it is -- I want Him. You and David have an indescribably beautiful something about you which has even my hard-hearted sister confounded. In spite of all her efforts

to anger you, something keeps you both calm and peaceful and sweet. I know the source of this hidden peace must be the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to know Him, please. . . ."

And so it was, that our honeymoon turned into a thing of glory and blessing for Aunt Bess for sure. She was gloriously converted, and so radically changed until both David's mother and Aunt Beulah stood in awe of her. The power of the Holy Ghost in her life, after she was entirely and wholly sanctified, made her a fearless witness in the home and among her friends and neighbors. Aunt Beulah declared she had never seen her sister like that before; not ever, in all of her life! And Hildegarde feared her like she had the plague, or some such thing. She told Aunt Bess she needed to see a psychiatrist for psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. Aunt Bess smiled, and declared with heavenly radiance shining all over her face that she had never before had a mind more sound and well than since she found the Savior, who gave her an undying and unending peace and soul rest and a mind that now had no more troublesome thoughts plaguing it about death and dying.

Before leaving for our return trip to America, I hugged both my mother-in-law, who stood rigidly adamant and much like a piece of steel but who didn't resist my token-expression of love, and Aunt Beulah, who whispered in my ear that she liked me and that she was sorry for the treatment she and her sister -- Hildegarde -- had given to me.

I whispered back that I loved her and that both Dave and I had her and my mother-in-law on our prayer list. "You'll change one of these days, too," I added as I hugged her to me. "I want you to get ready for Heaven, Aunt Beulah, and the only way you can do this is to become converted -- born again -- like Aunt Bess is."

Tears swam in her eyes as we passed through the gates to our plane at the airport. And, oh yes, I saw my mother-in-law pull some tissues from her purse and wipe her eyes too. Aunt Bess's face was radiant; with her right index finger she pointed upward. Dave and I smiled and nodded in agreement -- we would meet her again where we would never part.

Fastening myself in the seat with the seat belt, Dave said, "Are you happy, Mrs. Sorensen?"

"Very happy, my dearest husband. By eyes of faith, I see not only one, but three Sorensen names recorded in Heaven's Blood-washed Book of Life."

"You were really on display, Shari. What an ordeal!"

"What a rewarding experience, Dave!"

For answer, David took my hand and held it gently in his own as we were airborne.