

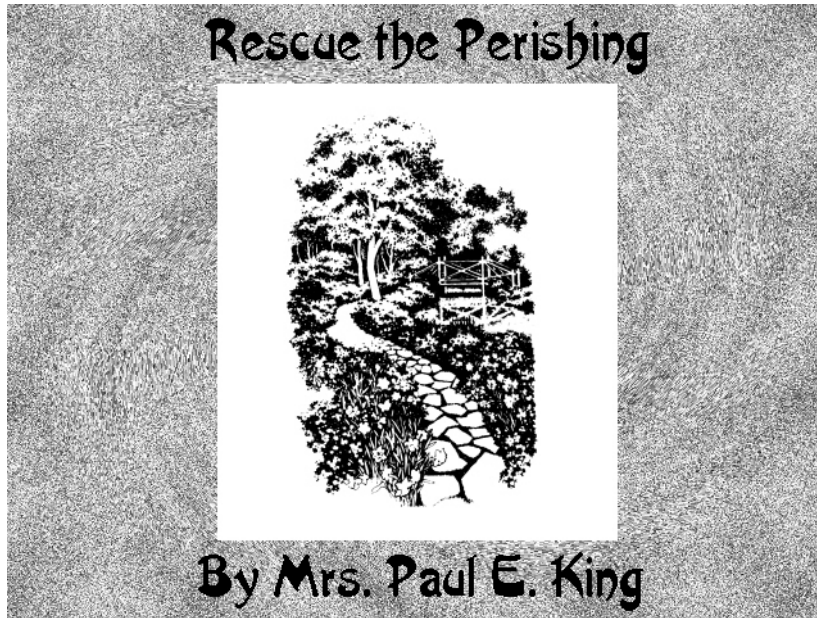
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RESCUE THE PERISHING
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Randy listened intently to what the evangelist was saying; he felt the impact of his message hit him in the center of his being. He needed it, he realized with a sudden fearful wakefulness of soul. Four times, at least, maybe more, he had passed the house on his way home from his part time job and four times, at least -- maybe more -- he had seen the same sad

looking young man sitting on the top porch step. He always looked the same -- sad, and like he was totally unmotivated. And lonely.

"What are you doing to reach the lost?" the evangelist asked as he stepped off the rostrum and stood in front of the pulpit. "Why aren't you rescuing the perishing? They're all around us; everywhere you look. What are you doing to rescue them?"

Randy's conscience seemed to slap him from all sides as he thought about the heavy-set, lonely looking young man over on Meredith Street. Bowing his head, he promised the Lord that he'd do everything he could to win him to Christ. A great burden lifted from his heart after he had prayed.

"Hey Randy, how about joining us for a burger and some fries over at Haley's," Andy Small called from the porch steps when church was dismissed. "A bunch of us are going."

"Yeah, Randy," Jon Hollis said. "We want you. Our bunch is never complete without you. Say, you looked dreadfully serious a few moments ago. What's bothering you?"

"The message, Jon. God used it to smack me right where I needed it. I've been passing a certain house every so often on my way home from this part time job I got and, always, I mean always, I see this same sad looking, lonely boy sitting on the top porch step."

"Over on Meredith Street," Jon replied. "That's Stewart somebody or other."

"You know him?" Randy asked brightly. "This fellow I'm talking about lives on Meredith Street! Tell me about him if you know him, please."

"Tell you about him! Oh, Randy, you don't want to hob nob around with him. He's fat, and does nothing but eat, eat, eat; all the time, eat. He's nothing but a glutton."

"Wait a minute," Randy said. "He's also lost, I'm afraid. And he's lonely. It's as plain as the nose on one's face, his loneliness."

"Let him lose some of that blubber and maybe he'll manage to pick up a few friends. After all, who wants to invite him to anything? He just wants to eat, I tell you."

Randy stood in deep shock, looking at his friends. "It's plain to see the message didn't make an impact on you fellows. Not even a dint, I'm afraid. And, frankly, this bothers me. How will we win a person unless we go after him and go where he is? Well, enjoy your burgers and fries; I'm going home to pray. God has placed a soul in my pathway and I'm going to do everything I can to win him to the Lord," and Randy hurried toward the parking lot where his old car was.

The following day, immediately after he was finished working in the store, he hurried to Meredith Street. Sure enough, there on the top porch step sat the young man. Randy parked the car and stepped up on the sidewalk, calling a cheerful, "Hi!" up to the one on the porch step.

The boy sat still, almost like he hadn't heard. His eyes searched Randy's face but he remained expressionless and immobile.

"Hi," Randy called a second time as he mounted the steps and sat down beside the young man. "I'm Randy Blowers," he added pleasantly. "I've noticed you a few times while passing your house on my way home from a part time job I have. I live over on Wood Street. Know where that is?"

The young man nodded, almost grudgingly, Randy thought.

"I wondered if you could come over to my house some evening and we could make a few baskets, Lord willing. Dad put a new basketball hoop up for me a year ago, and it's so much more fun having someone play with you than to play alone."

"You wouldn't want me. I'm clumsy as an ox. No good at all in basketball. Nor baseball."

"Let me decide if I would or wouldn't want you, OK? I know my answer without a second thought, even; and it's simply that I do want you. Er... what is your name? I didn't ask you before. . . ."

"I'm Stewart Lindley. Forgive me for being so rude as to not have given you my name sooner. And, too, for not having acknowledged your kind introduction. I'm sorry, Randy. I guess, when you're made fun of all the time, and when you're anything but popular, and you don't have a single true-blue, stand-by-you friend, you have your defenses wrapped pretty solidly and tightly around you. You get tired of being the butt of everyone's jokes and the laughing stock of your peers. It cuts, I tell you. Really deep."

Were there tears in Stewart's eyes? Randy was sure there were.

Laying his hand on Stewart's shoulder, Randy said, "Look, Stewart, I'm here to be a true-blue, standby-you friend. I'm sure you're hurting. I think it's cruel to poke fun at anyone. Not a single one of us has anything of self to boast in. Nothing. God created us all; we have been created in His image, so this pretty well sets us all on the same plateau. There's no high me and little you."

Turning, Stewart looked Randy full in the face. "Are you a preacher?" he asked. "Because if you are, I know I won't be coming over to shoot baskets with you. I was labeled Fatso by a group of young people in a church where I tried going some months back. I've never been back. I don't need their brand of whatever it is they call themselves, or think they are. I went there a full month, and then one evening I heard a couple of fellows talking. They didn't know I was anywhere near, and they were making fun of me. Instead of using my real name, they spoke of me as Fatso. That cut, Randy! After all, even those of us who have a weight problem have feelings. Deep feelings. We're not inhuman."

"That's for sure, Stewart; and believe me when I tell you that a real Christian doesn't treat his fellow brothers like that. Now, how about tomorrow evening, the Lord willing? Can you come over? I live at 422. I'll come and get you if you'd rather. And, no, I'm not a preacher; just another young fellow like yourself."

"I have a car of my own, Randy, thanks. Dad got it for me before he had to leave on a business trip out to the coast."

"Are your folks here?" Randy asked quickly. "I'd like to meet them if they are," he added brightly.

"Dad's gone on another business trip, and Mother's down at the Thrift Shop. She does volunteer work down there when Dad's gone. She said it makes the time fly faster for her, when he's away like this. They're crazy about each other. I'm thankful to be able to say this. At least I have a wonderful home life and parents who love me and treat me like a real human being."

"That's great news, Stewart. I mean, really great news. And you're a fortunate young man to have parents like this. But say, how about coming over for supper too? Mom would be so happy to have another boy for supper. And both she and Dad would be delighted to meet you. I believe the Thrift Shop stays open till nine tomorrow night."

"That's right. It's the night when a lot of the rural folks get into town."

"Ask your mother, Stewart and. . . ."

"Oh, I know it'll be OK with her. Especially since she'll be working late. I'll be sure to tell her, though. We're real close to each other, my parents and I."

"Tomorrow evening then, around four, God willing, OK?"

"422 Wood Street. Right, Randy?"

"Right on, Stewart."

"Just call me Stu, please. That's all Dad and Morn call me and I like it."

"Will do, Stu. About 4:00 tomorrow then, the Lord willing."

Randy could hardly see for tears as he drove away. "Poor Stu," he said out loud, feeling pity and sympathy wash over him and take possession of him for the friendless and lonely young man. How many others like him were there in his neighborhood? he wondered, as he prayed silently on the drive home.

To say that Stewart was clumsy around the basketball hoop was putting it mildly. Randy, however, was patience and kindness in tennis shoes, and it was sheer enjoyment to watch Stu's noble attempts to make a basket

and even more pleasure and enjoyment when he made one. Randy felt as excited over the few baskets his friend made as Stewart himself did. Each basket victory was reflected in Stu's eyes and on his face. True, he huffed and puffed feverishly; but Randy congratulated him on his "sticktuity" and his determination to achieve.

It was great fun. Never in all his life could Stewart recall having such a good time. And what was greater even than shooting baskets and dribbling the ball was the camaraderie he felt with Randy. It was a great feeling: He could be himself. He didn't have that inferior, I-want-to-crawl-in-a-hole-and-never-show-my-face-again feeling. Randy gave him a feeling of being equal with him: a feeling that he, Stewart, was important and did, after all, have a place in the world; that he was a somebody too.

With profound admiration and respect, Stu looked at Randy as he dribbled the ball along the driveway then shot for the basket and missed, collapsing on the lawn in a joyous explosion of laughter. And then it suddenly dawned on Stewart that this was the first time since he couldn't remember when, that he had laughed so much. Tears swam in his beautiful blue eyes as he thought about it. And suddenly, he realized that life was worthwhile.

They sprawled out on the lawn in the lengthening shade of a magnificent tree and talked about many things Stu marveled at the ease with which he could converse and communicate with Randy, and Randy marveled at the wealth of knowledge that was contained inside his friend's head. He was brilliant.

"Stu, your mind's like a library!" Randy exclaimed. "You're brilliant. Most of the fellows I know wouldn't know anything regarding some of the topics you and I have discussed. I'm proud of you. You'd make a wonderful worker for the Lord."

"A Fatso worker," Stu said, laughing dryly. Randy sat up straight and gently tapped Stewart's broad shoulder, saying meaningfully, "Do me a favor, OK?"

"Like what?"

"Never, and I mean never, say that word again in my presence. To God and me, you are a noble and a fine young man: You are Stewart Lindley -- a

solid name -- not Fatso. And I mean it when I say you are brilliant. I feel I am honored to have made your friendship. I mean this. And now, no more Fatso."

"Thanks, Randy, I promise. And as for being knowledgeable, well, who wouldn't have a measure of head knowledge when he spends most of his time with books! They've been my friends."

"Shake, Stu; that makes two of us."

Stewart sat up and groaned, then he laughed. "Rebellion," he stated, swinging his arms. "In my muscles," he added laughing again.

"They'll cooperate better after a while," Randy affirmed. "Even mine 'rebel' when I haven't exercised them or used them for some time. Do you like to hike and swim? If you do, I know where there's an icy-cold, well-concealed swimming hole. My grandparents would be delighted to have a visit from you: it's on their farm. And the mountain's rim kisses the edge of Grandfather's land. Talk about a wonderful place to be and to see; it's magnificent. Like my grandparents are."

Stu's face beamed with anticipation. "That sounds really great, Randy. Sure, I'd love it. Even if I sink like a lead sinker in the water. I used to swim a lot. But that was years ago; before I became so obsessed with doughnuts and french fries."

"I have a couple days off -- two weeks from Monday. So Dad and Mom were planning for us all to go visit Grandpa and Grandma, the Lord willing. It will be great to have you along."

"Randy, mind if I ask you something?"

"Not at all, Stu. What is it?"

"What makes you 'tick'? I mean, well, you're different from anybody I've ever met. I mean different! And it's such a wonderful difference until I . . . well . . . I don't know how to say what I'd like to say about how I feel, but I never saw you until yesterday, so naturally, I never knew you until yesterday. And yet, somehow, I feel like I've always known you. You're not like the fellows I know. What is it?"

"I'm a child of God's, Stu; a Christian. And no, I'm not a preacher. I told you this a while ago, but I'm not sure it registered in when I said it."

"A Christian, huh? What does this have to do, though, with making you so different -- good different, kind different -- from the others I told you about where I went to church for awhile? Weren't they Christians? I mean . . . well . . . don't church people call themselves Christians, Randy?"

"I suppose they do, for the most part, Stu. But a Christian -- I'm talking now about a man or woman who is like Christ, this is what the word Christian means -- Christ-likeness -- well, the one who is like Christ is kind and full of compassion and pity. He has a heart that loves people and cares about, and for, them. He finds ways to be helpful and kind and always tries to lift up the fallen and to encourage the crestfallen, the burdened, and the down-trodden. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ did when He lived on the earth. So, when one asks the Lord's forgiveness for his sins and invites Jesus to come into his heart to live and to reside, well, he becomes like Jesus, when he is forgiven; or, as Jesus Himself called it, he is born again, from above."

Stewart was silent for a while. Then he said plainly, "I understand now. By your definition of what a true Christian is, I would say there are many who know nothing at all about being born from above. Be that as it may, I like your brand. It's what I want if I ever decide to try church again."

"It's the Lord, Stu; the Savior. No church name; no 'brand'; the Lord Jesus Christ and Him alone."

"I'll remember, Randy." It sounded like a solemn promise.

Four weeks later, on a brilliantly bright Sunday morning, Andy and Jon, while doing their weekly "inspection" of seeing who was and who was not in church by craning their necks this way and that way, saw Randy, and a new boy, sitting in the pew with Randy's parents

"Who is he?" Andy asked as he nudged Jon.

"I haven't the foggiest idea," Jon answered. "In a way, he looks like that fellow over on Meredith St., only this guy's not nearly so heavy as that

Stewart fellow. Hey, Andy, coming to think of it, I haven't seen him out on his 'roost' for ever so long. By roost, I mean the porch step."

They laughed together. And then, suddenly, they heard the Sunday school superintendent say, "Before I begin the opening exercises this morning, I want a certain fine young man to give his testimony. He was converted three days ago. Stewart Lindley, welcome to our church. Tell us what the Lord did for you."

Stewart got to his feet. Motioning for Randy to stand beside him, he said, "Thanks be to God, I am a Christian. A born again, from above, Christian. The Savior had Randy Blowers to come searching for me. Through Randy, I am in the Good Shepherd's fold. His reflection of Christ, in kindness and tenderness and compassion and true Christian love, has been so real, so genuine that I couldn't resist or put off the One he represented and worshipped and adored any longer. So I fell to my knees and confessed my sins and asked Randy's Savior to come into my heart and to be my Savior. And He did. He saved me! Oh, I am so happy and free. Randy's been telling me now about my need of a holy and a cleansed heart and I mean to get sanctified wholly, as he calls it.

"The Lord has used Randy to help me in a wonderful way to lose weight, and I praise Him for this. At first the hiking and exercising was hard and difficult and painful for me. But with Randy's prayers and his words of encouragement and praise, I began to make progress. And now that I am born again, from above, of God, well, my life has new meaning and a brand new purpose: I feel I must do for others what my God-given, true-blue friend Randy did for me: I must seek the lost and rescue the perishing. I need your prayers. Thank you."

Andy and Jon were silenced by the testimony. Conviction gripped their hearts. Tearfully, Andy got to his feet and hurried to the altar. Jon followed. Then others . . . and still others. It was a never to be forgotten service.