

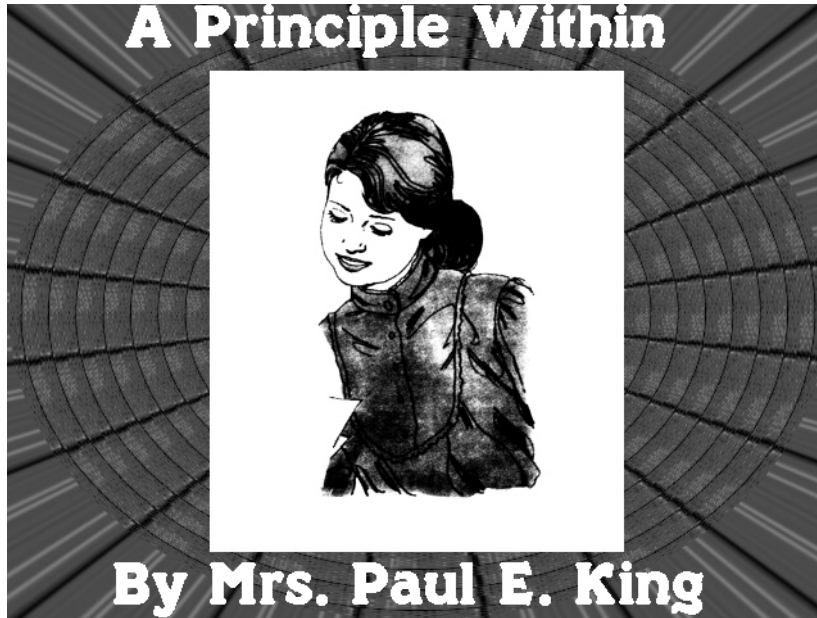
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**A PRINCIPLE WITHIN**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

I was standing against the wall in an alcove outside the girls' room of Stanton High when I heard voices coming from inside the room. I was the center of discussion.

"She's definitely not from Gilead Heights," one voice declared emphatically. "I know all the young people in our addition. By that I mean, I

know who's new and such like things. She's definitely not from the Heights. Our kids have class! She's perhaps from across the tracks; the Holly addition or the Four-Acres. You know, that kind."

"She's pretty," voice number two asserted sweetly. "Her hair is absolutely beautiful and I think she's sweet."

"What's wrong with you, Bev; can't you tell she's not of our caliber?"

"Caliber? I guess I didn't realize I was in a caliber. I'm me. Just me," voice number two stated with a hint of laughter in it. "Calibers and molds are not for me, Kim."

"You need your head examined, Bev. One look at her clothes and you can tell that she's from the other side of the tracks. No big names clothing on her, I'm sure: thrift store cast offs if I know anything."

"So what? She's neat and clean and pretty, and her hair is positively beautiful and gorgeous. Did you notice how it was shining, almost like gold, when the sun shone on her head in class?"

"No, I didn't notice, and, honestly, you're positively disgusting and frustrating sometimes. I don't know why I think you're such a great friend, but I do."

Still with the hint of laughter in her voice, the girl named Bev answered merrily, "Maybe it's because you know I won't talk about you behind your back. Like I said many times before, 'She who talketh about her friends behind their back, talketh about thee also when thy back is turned.'"

"Come on; let's go," came the quick rejoinder. "I can't afford to be late to class a second time today. My hair's positively a mess. But I refuse to be late a second time because of it."

"Relax, Kim. Your hair's not a mess: it's neat. Be yourself and stop trying to impress people. Gilead Heights or no Gilead Heights, we're still only people. People like the new, sweet-looking girl is with the gorgeous golden hair. Now stop primping and let's go or you will be late."

I waited until they were gone, then I hurried to the classroom, hoping I could slide into my seat without too much notice; especially from the girl named Kim.

I looked down at my skirt and the blouse I was wearing and remembered the hours I had worked to get my school clothing together. True, they were all from thrift stores and discount stores, but I was ever so thankful and grateful for each and every single item the Lord had helped me to buy. Mrs. Rayfel, with whom I had lived, had two daughters for whose children I babysat and earned money to buy my needs.

I was, and am, a foster child. So is my brother Jack. No fault of our own; just two of those many sad, unfortunate children whose parents are in dire need of help but who, all too frequently, either don't want help or outright refuse it. Both my parents are alcoholics. For almost so long as I can remember, the god of alcohol ruled and reigned in our home. At one time, Daddy had a good paying job; we had a lovely home in the suburbs and we were faring sumptuously until the "god" took complete and full control of my parents and their lives. Then it was a quick, wild slide downward.

I was in the fifth grade at school when I realized something was happening to my parents. They drank more than usual and they were seldom home. Jack, two years younger than I, frequently went looking for them. Seldom did he find them, however, and when he did, he was punished severely by our father. It was during this time that someone reported our many stays at home alone and we became wards of the State.

At first, Jack and I were kept together -- placed in the same home. Then we were separated; he was put in one home, I went to another. Fortunately for me, I was only ever in three different foster homes, and each time I had to change it was because of illness on the part of my foster mother. The changes left me feeling utterly devastated, however, and when Mrs. Rayfel's home opened up and both Jack and I were together again after being separated for four and a half years, I didn't know how to act. One part of me wanted to shout for joy; the other part wanted to crawl away and hide, lest we be "transplanted" again.

Mrs. Rayfel was -- and is -- everything I had ever hoped for in my own mother. With her I feel secure and loved. Jack and I have been with her for three years, and while he "tested" her and threatened to run away, her love

and prayers, along with her unswerving and changeless demands that we obey her and abide by her God-given Biblical rules, have won out. Jack is no longer a rebellious, incorrigible young man: he, like I, has given his heart and life to the Lord and the change in both of us is unbelievably wonderful and beautiful. We found in Christ the wellspring of joy and peace and an unending love. We found something worth living for.

Mrs. Rayfel, a widow of more than four years and the mother of five biological children and five grandchildren, not only opened her home to Jack and me but she opened her heart, as well. In so doing, she gained our love for life.

I eased into my seat now and overheard someone whisper about me being in a foster home. So it was no secret! In a way I was glad that it was not, even though I had thought it was. It saved me the trauma and embarrassment of trying to explain: especially about my parents' pitiful condition. I wondered, though, how the news had gotten out, since Mrs. Rayfel and Jack and I had only moved into Stanton one month before school began. Her large house in Greenville had finally sold and she had moved us all to Stanton to be closer to several of her children who lived there with their families.

Mrs. Perkins' voice suddenly sliced into my thinking; I sat up and listened closely to what the teacher was saying.

"Welcome to Stanton High." Her voice had a mixture of laughter and warmth in it. I liked her immediately.

Smiling, she looked us over. "To get better acquainted, I want each of you to come up front and, for a few minutes, share a bit of your life with us. Nothing profound or lengthy, just a few things you feel may be of interest to each of us. Relax, please, and as I call your name, please come to the front. Thank you." Again she smiled.

I wished I could have vanished when I heard what she said. My shy, timid nature came to the fore. My face felt hot and my hands got clammy. What, I wondered, would be of interest to anybody? I wasn't from Gilead Heights -- wherever that was and may be -- and I didn't wear expensive name-brand clothing either. So, what did I have to tell, other than that I was a

foster child and that my parents didn't care a thing about Jack and me and that they hadn't seen us in years'?

Lights flashed on somewhere inside my head and suddenly I knew what I would say. Bowing my head, I thanked my kind Heavenly Father for helping me. Truly, when my father and my mother had forsaken me, He had taken me in and loved me. Daily and hourly, I was conscious of His constant love and tender care for me. Tears swam in my eyes. I loved Him so deeply. So greatly.

Mrs. Perkins called the first name. Maryann Ansko.

Blushing furiously, the girl got up from her seat and stood beside the teacher. She was every bit as scared as I, I realized with pity and compassion. I knew how she felt. I knew, too, that I must go to her after class and introduce myself to her personally. She very definitely was not from Gilead Heights, I was certain. I would be her friend.

One after another the students came forward. "Angelina Marie Young. . ."

It hardly seemed possible that Mrs. Perkins was down to the Y's already, but she was. With a silent prayer on my lips, I got to my feet. My legs felt almost like rubber. But I managed to get to the front. Mrs. Perkins' sweet smile gave me both the courage and the strength I needed.

"Hi," I said. "I'm Angle . . . Angelina Marie Young. My brother Jack and I live with Mrs. Caroline Rayfel. Yes, we are commonly known as foster children. Mrs. Rayfel is, therefore, our foster mother. But not for much longer, we hope: the adoption papers are almost complete. Both Jack and I will then become her children.

"By no fault of our own did we become wards of the State. Our parents abandoned us years ago when they became alcoholics. Jack and I will always be thankful and grateful to God for this wonderful woman--our now foster mother--who took us into her home and into her heart and her arms. She taught us the value of truth and integrity and honesty, the satisfaction of work and of doing a job well, the joy and delight of earning our own clothes and the worth of our soul. She took us to Sunday school and church with her.

Today Jack and I are Christians because of her and her godly life and example.

"Because I have been a foster child, I feel I can relate to those who also are foster children. We have battles and struggles and questions that are totally foreign and alien to children in a stable and solid environment -- their home."

I took my seat and sighed a soft sigh of relief, knowing Mrs. Rayfel would have been proud of me: I had applied one of the principles she had often spoken to Jack and me about -- the principle of truth and honesty; of not only facing our "giant" but of "slaughtering" him with the weapon of truth and honesty in the name of the Lord and through the power of His might.

As soon as class was dismissed, I headed for Maryann, who was hurrying out into the hallway.

"Hi," a voice said, stopping me in my rush. "I'm Beverly Mason. Bev for short; like Angie is for Angelina. That took courage, Angie, to say what you said. I don't know if I could have done it."

"Sure you could have, Bev. And by the way, I'm glad to meet you. Now, back to that courage part: if you are a born again Christian and know the Lord, He gives you the courage and the strength to do all things. Before I was sanctified wholly, though, and dead to self, I would have been too proud to have said what I did."

"You stand tall in my eyes," Bev stated. "I think you have the most beautiful head of hair I have ever seen and I . . ."

"Come on, Bev," a voice interrupted from somewhere nearby. I recognized it as that of Kim.

"Just a minute," Bev replied. "I'm talking to Angie."

"Suit yourself," came the tart, terse reply as Kim disappeared down the hallway.

"Let's find Maryann," I said softly. "I know how it feels to be shy and . . ."

"Not from the right side of the tracks," Beverly answered knowingly.

Smiling, we linked arms and started out in search of Maryann Ansko.