

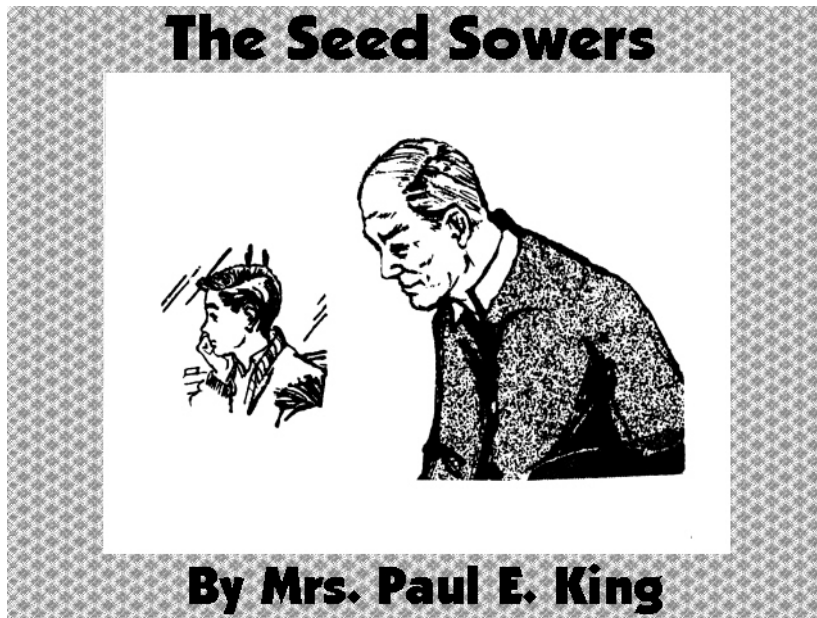
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THE SEED SOWERS
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Uncle Charley was my favorite uncle. He was also the fisherman in the family, taking me with him as often as was possible. I loved my uncle; loved him deeply and dearly. One thing alone bothered me about him: in fact, it frightened me; my uncle seemed to have no desire or inclination toward God. All talk about God and church, or anything related to spiritual and eternal things, shut Uncle Charley's jaws tighter than a clam. He was totally

irreligious. Aunt Cora, however, was completely opposite: her deep devotion to the Lord and her moment-by-moment godly living and righteous example made her worthy of the title Christian. So why had my uncle never given his heart and life to Jesus? This is one thing I will never understand. Never.

Uncle Charley's patience with me and my sometimes clumsiness (especially when I was a little tyke) will be a never-forgotten thing, however. Even now, I marvel at it as I reminisce and tears fall. I recall one incident in particular. There were many others, to be sure, but this one stands out in bold and classic design and fashion. I was maybe 10 or 11 at the time. My uncle and I were in their little cabin at Lake Pines. Nothing fancy or modern, that cabin, yet it afforded and provided all the "amenities" one needed for "roughing it," a thing Uncle and I enjoyed doing; Uncle Charley more, even, than I.

My one and only drawback with "roughing it" was the bone-penetrating chill and icy-cold floor of an early spring or fall and winter morning when the old cast-iron stove had long hours ago breathed its final breath and given up the last of its once-hot heat and its once-glowing-red embers lay gray and dead in the ashes in the grate.

Snug as a bug in a rug that particular morning, I buried my nose deep into the pile of blankets and quilts that were on my bed and was soon lost in sleep again, knowing Uncle Charley would call me when it was time to get up. (Always, the excitement of going fishing with him, caused me to sleep, then awaken; sleep, then get awake. All night long the pattern continued.) I was in a deep sleep when I heard him.

"Time to get up, Mark. The fish are waiting."

Uncle's voice reached through to me. His footsteps were loud and a squeak of the old cabin floor announced his arrival inside my bedroom.

"Huh?" I buried my face deeper into the toasty-warm covers.

"The fish are biting, I'm sure. I mean, they will be." Uncle had a crooked half-smile on his face as he made the declarative statement and held the kerosene lantern in front of him.

"OK! Coming!" I said. Tossing the cozy comfort of the blanket to one side of the bed, I emerged from my warm cocoon half-awake and vaguely aware of a nagging thought trying to escape the fog of sleep. Putting my sockless feet on the icy-cold linoleum floor, I quickly realized what the thought was and, then and there, shivering from the cold, I resolved to try one more time to talk to Uncle Charley about his soul and where he would spend eternity. Maybe this time he would listen with his heart!

The electric cold of the easy morning shot upwards from the soles of my feet and penetrated my brain. It shocked both my senses and me to a wide-awake state and into full and complete alertness. Needless to say, dressing was done in record time. Donning my life jacket and grabbing my fishing gear near the door, I fell in step with my uncle as he stepped off the porch and headed for the lake, less than thirty yards away.

Hurrying toward the dock and very much wide awake now, the easy morning darkness added to my excitement and joy. Overhead, the sky was a deep velvet black sprinkled with innumerable confetti stars that danced and glistened and twinkled like rare gems. To the last, hanging like a silver lantern, a crescent moon reflected its softly-quiet light on the water in the lake, seeming to make a path on its quietly-still, dark surface.

Overwhelmed with God's mighty handiwork and over-joyed with His peace in my soul, I forgot about the cold linoleum floor in the cabin and the warmth of the covers on my bed, as well. What I was seeing and feeling and experiencing was worth any and all inconvenience that I may have endured moments ago, I decided quickly, with a sense of breathless awe and excitement as we reached the dock..

We removed the cold, frosty-white tarp from the boat and I stowed it safely in the bow of the much-used vessel, my adrenaline running high, scarcely able to wait for the first catch of the morning.

"Heave ho!" Uncle called softly as, freeing the boat from the dock, we each gave a mighty shove and the boat was out in the open water. Uncle Charley started the outboard motor; its loud putt-putt-putt shattered the silence of the morning and, I feared, of every fish in the lake.

Gliding smoothly across the lake, I became almost mesmerized by the patterns which the speeding boat made on the flat, still water. It was

positively beautiful The crescent moon's soft glow righted the propeller's churn into a boiling foam of white and the hull of the boat opened the surface of the lake like a zipper, leaving graceful "v" patterns behind.

We arrived at our favorite and many-times-successful fishing spot on the opposite side of the lake and Uncle, with skilled and practiced dexterity, maneuvered our craft into the small cove, lining up the bow of the boat with a tree branch in the shallow water and his shoulders with an old cabin not far from the shore Then silence -- sweet, sweet silence -- again surrounded us as he shut off the motor. Immediately, I was lost in its beauty; its almost sacred solitude, loath to break it; to disturb it yet again, but knowing that I must.

Carefully, I let the anchor slide into the moonlit water hoping it would not shatter the silence for long. It dropped, and dropped, and dropped. Forever, it seemed. I gasped, knowing it was lost forever to the bottom of the lake I felt all choked up.

"Uncle Charley?"

"Yes, Mark."

"The anchor . . . it's gone I'm . . . sorry."

"Gone? What do you mean, Mark?"

Between sobs, the story unfolded. "It's my fault," I confessed. "I forgot to tie the rope to the bow, like you taught me to do. Now the rope and the anchor are . . . gone. I'm sorry. I have a little money saved in the boat bank you gave me for my birthday. You may have it, Uncle Charley. The bank's on the dresser in my bedroom. It will help you a little on the rope and . . .

Quickly, my uncle cut into my unfinished statement, saying, "Everybody makes a mistake now and then, Mark You'll probably lose more than an anchor and a rope in your lifetime, so forget about it and dolt worry over it: We're here to catch fish, remember? That big bass we missed a week ago, especially: remember him? The water's calm and smooth as glass this morning we can get by nicely with one anchor"

Greatly relieved, and knowing that I would never be reminded for my error, I thanked my uncle. I wanted to rush over to the stern and hug him but I didn't: with Uncle Charley this would have been totally out of line, since he never was one for hugging nor being hugged. I gave him due honor by refraining. His words of forgiveness and comfort, however, were like the greatest, biggest and warmest hug he could ever have given me. Tears of love and pity swam in my eyes for this man.

I watched as he deftly tied the rope to the stern then gently lowered his anchor into the water. The boat rocked to and fro for a few seconds then settled calmly down as the anchor found its lodging place at the bottom of the lake. Immediately the exquisite silence and darkness of the easy morning wrapped us warty in its breathtaking solitude and beauty and my early morning resolution in the cabin was translated into words:

"Uncle Charley," I ventured softly, "God is here I can feel Him. Can't you?"

Silence. Total and complete silence.

"I pray every day for you, Uncle Charley. I love you and I want to take you to Heaven with me. I'm going there," I declared positively.

Silence. Except for the spin of the reel on his casting rod.

"Why don't you love the Lord, Uncle Charley? He's a wonderful Friend; the best Friend I've ever had. He loves you. . . ."

"Mark, I've managed my life this long without Him; don't try to change me now."

Uncle's tone of voice was sharp; sharper than I had ever heard. Always, he spoke softly and kindly to me.

"For women and children," he added on a somewhat modified and softer note, "religion may be all right. I'm a man, Mark. A man."

"But men need God too!" I exclaimed on a sob. "Jesus died for men, Uncle Charley. For you. 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Jesus said those words."

Uncle reeled his line in with fury. "Do you want to fish with me?" His question had a lash to it, like that of a whip over my head. "If you do, you must stop preaching to me. You've done your job well of sowing the seed -- so has my wife, your Aunt Cora -- but the soil must be right for the seed to germinate. Mine isn't ready yet. Now, get back to fishing. I'm not such a bad guy, Mark: I've kept my bills all paid and I've made a good living for your aunt and myself and I've been as faithful as a man can be to his marriage vow."

"But your soul, Uncle Charley; what did you do about it? Where will you spend eternity, I mean?"

"Do you want to fish?" The question came with anger. My uncle was on his feet now.

"Oh, yes. Yes."

"All right then. Questions ended! Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir. I love you, Uncle Charley."

"I love you too, Mark" Uncle Charley settled down on the seat in the boat.

Silence reigned except for the occasional bass leaping to the surface of the water after an insect and the "singing" of Uncle's reel as he made cast after cast into the moonlit water.

It was mid-morning when we drew anchor and glided across the lake to the cabin with a stringer of pan fish and two fine bass, one caught by my uncle, the other by me. No one could filet and fry fish like Uncle Charley. No one. We had a veritable feast that morning and, feeling nearly starved, we did justice to our meal of fried fish and potatoes. Uncle Charley was his good-natured self again and made no more verbally cutting remarks to me. It was as though I had not spoken to him about his soul. My mind was troubled much over his apparent unconcern over something so valuable and priceless as his soul, however.

I went to the woods to pray as soon as the dishes were washed and were put away inside the cupboard, nor was it the last time I prayed for him or talked to him. Ah, no. Numerous other times I talked to him as I grew older and as opportunity afforded and presented itself and, always, Uncle Charley's attitude and mind set was the same. And now . . . now. . . .

"Mark it's time to go. The service begins in a little over an hour"

I spun around from my place on the porch. I felt older somehow than I actually was. Mother had Aunt Cora by the arm guiding and leading her gently to the car where Dad sat, waiting for us.

"Sit with your father, Mark; Aunt Cora and I'll sit in the back seat," Mother said softly, dabbing at her eyes with a tissue and steadying my aunt as she got into the car.

We rode for a while in silence, then I asked, "Why did Uncle Charley never give his heart to God? Why? He knew the way, same as we all did. What was he thinking of when he turned the Lord Jesus Christ away and never gave Him entrance to his soul? He was a great uncle. I loved him."

Dad looked my way for only a second. Concentrating on his driving he said, "We were brothers, Mark, it's true. Each of us heard the same Biblical truths from the pulpit in our growing-up years, as well as around the family altar. Three times in his youth, Charles was under real Holy Ghost conviction and three times he rejected, spurned and said no to the voice of God's Spirit. After the third time of rejection, he seemed to never again be uneasy about his soul.

"Our heart is like soil, Mark; it can become so hardened until no amount of seed sown can penetrate or get through to it. You tried, Mark; I know you tried. Prayed too, and shed tears over my beloved brother. So have I; and so has your mother and your Aunt Cora. We all were faithful seed sowers, each of us. We were faithful to his soul; his blood will not be on our hands. Ezekiel stated, '. . . if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy sour (Ezekiel 33:9). One must want God, son."

Viewing him for the last and very final time in the church, at the conclusion of the funeral service, I leaned over him and, with tears streaming

down my face, I whispered hoarsely, "I tried, Uncle Charley. I tried. I love you. Good-bye, Uncle Charley. Good-bye."

I watched as the lid of the casket closed, recalling Aunt Cora's words, "I had just finished saying grace for our supper and when I opened my eyes, Charles said, 'Kids' stuff! I, not God, provided this food.' And then he fell from his chair, a corpse."

Taking my place among the other five pallbearers, I knew it was a final good-bye to my beloved uncle.

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THE END