

Mom-Mom's Rocker
By Rosemary R Gain

Dedication

I humbly dedicate this book and all it means, to the one who deserves all the credit and all the glory, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Without God, there would not be a need to write books such as this, and without the Bible to guide us, would there be a guideline of morals by which we could define our lives?

I personally came to saving grace, because a wonderful man named Dr. William Hughlett, had the grace and grit to call me on the phone and tell me that I was away from God and that I needed to change my direction. Thank God, I listened and we became good friends. My dear friend is certainly now in Heaven with our dear Lord, for he had served Him for many years as a missionary doctor. With all my love to God and this wonderful man, I dedicate this book and I pray that it reaches many people with the same love and purpose that Dr. Hughlett, through God, offered to me.

May God's richest blessings in Christ Jesus His Son touch you and bless you abundantly now and all your life. Because, I, as the author have faith in the books message, I pray you are touched by the life of our Melinda.

Acknowledgement

Many thanks to so many people that had faith that this little book had a big message and by their words of love and encouragement kept me praying, working and thinking.

One who deserves multitudes of credit, the one who stuck by me through the reams of paper, lots of ink for the printer and re-writes and corrections that boggle the mind, is my husband Bob. He typed, re-typed and corrected and re-corrected until I thought he would give it all up. Instead he told me that it was worth all the time, trouble and expense because he thought that the books heroine was cute and the message great. Who would not want to work with such a man?

Another that deserves credit is Swanee Ballman who was my teacher for the writing class that I attended in St. Cloud, Florida, when my sweet girl Melinda became so real to me. Swanee put some pictures on the table, told us to choose one and go with it. I chose a picture with a fireplace, a weaved rocker, a small vase of wild flowers on a small round table,(bet you know where I am going with this.) The story just formed in my mind and I did go with it. Thanks Swanee.

Next credit goes to Rev. Chris Maxwell, who asked me to start a writing class in his church and then asked me to write a story a month for his church newsletter that went all over the country. As I wrote each month the people at church would ask me when a new story was coming and what on earth was Melinda up to lately. Writing about my little family was such fun and gave me an outlet for my deep faith

in the God that the story tells of so well, through the people that are so real to so many. Some even asked me if the story was about me, and I was a bit concerned about how old I look, because I am 78 years old, but I certainly hoped I did not appear to be just post Civil War age. I must admit, as my husband brought out, that a bit of myself did get into Melinda. Some of the things that happened to her actually happened to me. I will allow you to guess which ones. Thanks Chris for the opportunity you gave me. I shall be forever grateful.

Thanks to my friend Fran Long, such faith and prayers have you given and offered up for me to see me through. Thank you so very much.

Thanks and love to my family, who are too numerous to mention personally, but you guys were ever there to encourage me, as well as my seven in-laws. If I can just get my family to each buy a book I am on my way.

Special thanks to Kathy who would not allow me to think for one minute that I would not see this through. Her prayers were the spiritual glue that kept me focused and going like the energizer bunny. But then again, I have had so many that had faith in Mom-Moms' Rocker, even when I felt that I was just being prideful and really had little to say that would make a difference. Then again, here I am letting you all know that I hope that this little book really melts your heart, brings you close to God and makes a sizeable difference in you spiritual life. Want some good reading? Start turning pages now.

ENDORSEMENT

"It was a pleasure to review this book. In fact, I read it twice, with rich reward.

"Mom-Mom's Rocker" has heart in it, which finds a lodging place in the mind. It makes you feel you are there, sharing in the events of loving family. True to life,

there are happy times, sad times and times in between. Supposedly based on a well-kept journal, authenticity makes it come alive.

Author, Rosemary, has the gift of drawing word pictures. It's like looking at a beautiful painting and having flashbacks of what you have seen in print.

One of my appreciations of the author is the weaving in of many Bible truths that relate to whatever happenings may be taking place. I have read that in the British Navy, a scarlet thread runs through the center of every piece of rope. Cut it anywhere and you know whose it is. True or not, I do not know; I do know her story is like that with God's word.

Using mountain dialect is telling it like it was, endearing the family to the heart. (Being of Mountain Descent, it's almost like listening to my kinfolk talk).

The use of touches of humor adds to the enjoyment of reading the book. Humor is an open window through which fresh breezes flow. It has a tenderizing effect on the heart.

Reading this delightful book makes you want "To be having some set-down in Mom-Mom's Rocker do some deep meditatiin'."

I be predictin' a wide readership for this-here book with a soul."

Pastor Crate Jones (Retired)

Author of "Dips of Water from the Wells of Life" and "Out of the Crate"

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1 Mom-Mom's Rocker

My Mom-Mom has been gone quite a while, but to me she still lives in my heart. She had been my guiding light for many years. She lived with us all my life and when God called her home, the emptiness was almost unbearable. For a long time after she died, I could not even look at her rocker, it looked so forlorn and empty. I sat in it several times, hoping to bring her back if even for a few moments, but tears filled my eyes and I finally gave up any thought of feeling her presence and I stayed out of her room for quite awhile. I was able to realize then that all I really had to do was remember her, and the thoughts and memories would fill the awful void in my heart and spirit.

The reason the rocker is so important to me, is not only because she sat in it many times with me and my siblings on her lap, but because she would tell us stories about her chair when she was young and newly married. She would pull the chair very close to the fire on cold and blustery nights. My Da would build a roaring fire in the fireplace he built especially for her and once she got too close and the chair got hot from an ember regurgitated by the fire which almost set the brittle weaving of the chair on fire. Her skirt almost caught fire also and always declared that the near tragedy was only averted by the quick actions of Da. I always saw it as a powerful lesson about safety precautions. I believe that we are to learn from events in our lives and others. Mom-Mom told me that when you get caught up in events sometimes you don't always use your head about practical things, like staying alive. So you can bet that I am always careful around fireplaces or anything that can cause a fire.

I go into her room and change the wild flowers on her little round table that sits right by the chair. Even with her gone, that simple act keeps her close. I know

she loved them, and we have so many around our dwelling. She told me that they were there for beauty's sake and I believe her.

She kept a candle on the table and she always said. "Keep the matches handy." I learned early to pay close attention to Mom-Mom, because she seemed to know so much. She reminded me all the time that her best teacher has always been the mistakes she made, and why should I have to learn the hard way like she did. In respect for her, I decided one person should make the major mistakes, and other should learn the lesson well. I have always been happy that I was the latter. But I must be honest as you read my journal; you will see that even with a good teacher, I went through my own school of mistakes and hard decisions. No one in life is exempt from trials and miss-fortune.

Mom-Mom said nothing soothed the soul like a rocker and quiet time meditating on God's word, silently singing a few old hymns to God, with melody in your heart. It's purely and simply, a season of peace amidst the hustle and bustle of life. I have a rocker of my own now, one that was Mom-Mom's before Da got her a new one. I shall keep it as long as I can use it, and if it stays intact, I shall pass it on to my daughter. Some things are heritage and meaningful beyond words or understanding, but there is a feeling that consoles the heart, unexplainable, but vibrant and certain.

There are four children in our family and each one of us had our turn sitting on Mom-Mom's lap and being gently consoled by her, through each of our heartache and pain. Of course this was before our advancing size threatened to throw us backwards on the floor, with our feet straight up in the air. Fortunately it only happened twice when Mom-Mom was younger, but as she got older we feared for her bones. We were careful not to sit on her lap after we reached a certain age and size, unless Mom-Mom herself asked us to do so. We learned at a young age to sit at her feet and allow her to reach out her beautiful hands and place them on our heads and cheeks, as she caressed us and lovingly gave us her personal blessings, as she prayed for us. As she grew older, age became her. She was so very beautiful. Her hair became white and curly cute. She always wore her hair in a bun, neat and tidy, so she was prepared for any emergency, not being prideful about her appearance, but putting more energy into her person instead of how she appeared to others. But there came the day she allowed me to trim her long hair, and when it was cut, it fell into white swirls of soft corn silk curls, as if it were happy to be set free of its weight and burden. Mom-Mom's eyes became dim in time and her already small body seemed to fold into itself. She looked so frail, yet she continued to rock with her handmade afghan spread across her knees.

One day she tilted her head back, as she often did when she napped, and as she drifted off to sleep, she met her Savior face to face, and now lives in the house

He prepared especially for her. I like to think of her full of glory and grace, living in the beautiful home with God. I also like to think that she has a fireplace, a rocker, a small round table, wild flowers setting upon it, and a candle. I have to admit; I also wonder how many children sit on her knees and are now being rocked by her? Bunches I bet.

1Fair'n' Square

Thinking about Mom-Mom got me remembering my kin and siblings and the adventures we had which were our life experiences. I decided to share them with you. And here is one of my stories out of my journal.....

I couldn't be certain who started the ruckus or why they were arguing but when the voices got louder, I was getting decidedly more annoyed. As I was approaching the two of them, I learned all the fuss was being over a new whistle, one of my brothers had whittled and the other had taken. It seemed to be a rather large argument over such a small item, but then I was realizing I wasn't the one who had gone to the woods for the tree branch and spent hours whittling and sanding it to smooth perfection.

I can remember a competitive spirit between my brothers, Big Tom and Small Jeff. Now Tom has a fleetness of foot and can outrun a deer, while Jeff's hands are always procuring wood pieces, many of which adorn our purely plain cabin.

We lived largely separated by many miles from our kin and neighbors, our homestead being so new. Our days are largely filled with chores, reading the word of God, some book learning and, if time be permitting, doing things youngsters like to be doing.

Big Tom loves to be embarking on snooping and looking ventures, losing himself for hours in the woods and often fishing, both for pleasure and through necessity, many times supplying supper. Jeff, on the other hand, whittles, sings some, accompanying himself on the geetar which he taught himself to play. He loves his geetar because of it being given down to him by Da, the name we gave our Grandfather.

I, being the only girl, was prone to do girl things. I learned needlepoint, sewing, cooking and general housekeeping. I did myself a good turn, though, when I asked Jeff to help me learn to play the "geetar", which we fondly called it. I often sang while Jeff played, much to the delight of the rest of the family.

Now the day I am speaking of here was quiet and beautiful, until the voices got so loud they truly disturbed my serenity. I might as well be honest, when my serenity goes, so goes my patience.

“Okay, Big and Small (my favorite names for them) tell me what’s wrong because you’re disturbing my serenity.” They knew when I called them by their pet names I meant business.

“He wants my whistle,” said Small Jeff, grabbing frantically and running in circles.

“Well he don’t need no whistle, ‘because he’s got a geetar and I ain’t got nothing to make music on.” Big Tom spouts at us, not running so fast now, for I believe he’s wearing out some.

Seeing my face change and feeling that I was going to favor Big, Small said, “I made it, it’s mine and I’m a going to keep it.”

“Now let’s be thinking this over real careful” I said, pulling myself up to my five foot two height and trying to look in charge, I kept talking, now that I had their attention.

“Big, what do you do when you run about catching deer, fish and rabbit?”

“Well shucks, I share what I get for vittles,” he says somewhat proudly, for I think he knows we depend on him quite a bit.

“Small, do you hunt or fish or be providing food for the larder” I ask looking at him real hard.

“Well, no,” says Small looking a little perplexed. But suddenly, as if a light goes on, he adds, “But I do purty up the house some, don’t I?”

“Mercy yes, Small, but that’s being’ my point,” I say, hoping to keep their attention and also hoping to be resolving’ this problem once and for all.

“Now, you Big, provide food, because that’s what you do well, while you Small, provide pretties and music, because that’s what you do well.” I stopped, pondering what I would say next, while both sets of eyes were hard upon me. “Small, wouldn’t a whistle help Big not be so lonely when he went fishing and hunting”, seeking food for us”

Small said, “Golly, I could let him have one for company I guess, because it seems like the right thing to do.”

Looking mighty pleased, Big said, “That sure is a mighty nice thing you be doing because I know how long it took to make that there whistle.”

I now felt the time had come to be imparting my special wisdom. To tie all this together, I said, “Our special abilities are givin’ to us to share and never to keep just for our selves so as not to be selfish.”

Feeling pretty good about all this, I turned to go and was surprised to hear Big say, “Small, that was a big thing you did and I’m thinking’ you shouldn’t be called Small no more, but be called Big Jr.” We all laughed at this, decided Big was right and as I walked away, I was thinking I was the biggest winner of all. You ask, what did I get from all this? Shucks, don’t you know? I got back my serenity.

1Friend

Alone in the woods, not far from our cabin, feeling mighty rejected, my tears fell. I felt so alone and weighed down; I thought I'd never get up again. My best friend had taken all our years of friendship and tossed it aside, giving all her attention to a newcomer in town. I, who did not make friends as easily, felt at age 13, that this meant my life was over. My best friend had deserted me and now who could I confide in, laugh with and share my dreams with?

My family thought I was over reacting, although they did say they knew my feelings were real; just a mite too intense. But, I thought, they hadn't lost their dearest friend, so how could they know how I felt.

All I could hear set apart from the lively noise and comforting sounds of the homestead, was my own wailing and painful jabbering. With all my tears and complaining, somehow I still felt not one inch better, what with the rejection and loss swelling over me again and again. I think I must have fallen asleep, because I suddenly was hearing a beautiful and lilting melody off in the distance.

Forgetting my self, I pulled my body up from the leafy pile I had thrown myself on, and tilted my head in the direction of the glorious sound. Sitting on a branch, not too far above my head, I saw a small bird; head erect, chest out, eyes raised, singing sweetly, and somehow I knew he sang just for me.

Not too far from the tree, a large cat stood poised to jump, thinking he be overtaking that small sweet bird. I could see the bird was aware of the danger the cat presented, because its eyes darted from me to the cat and back again. This went on for several minutes before I realized the bird was defying danger to help me, because never once did it stop singing. Suddenly it dawned on me, that because I was becoming more concerned with the fate of the bird than my own problems, I felt better and had actually stopped my infernal blubbering and ended my pity-party right there.

I actually laughed out loud, and began to thank God for the little bird who had set it's own fears aside to minister to a silly young girl, who foolishly felt her friend's rejection could so deeply affect her entire life. When I realized the full peril the bird was putting itself in, so it could help me, I remembered Mom-Mom's words to me a few years before.

"My child, our wonderful and wise Heavenly Father be given each of us so many years to live upon this earth. God, in His wisdom, knew there be times we be needin' help and so we were made to be lookin' after each other. God uses all His creatures to be ministerin' in time of need. Be alert to how and who God uses to minister to His beloved ones, for many will be surprised at God's ingenuity. There are times when some may be in life threatenin' positions, and even then see the handiwork of God. Be alert child, for God's love and carin' thoughts are always

there, if you have the heart and soul to see Him in all the small and large events that make up your daily life..."

I saw her words come to life by the behavior and caring of that little bird. I came to realize we need to forget ourselves and be sensitive to others. Only then can we resolve our own problems. I felt new hope, wisdom and resolve filling my heart and the lesson was burned within my soul and spirit that very day, changing my commitment to God and others.

Often, I remember Mom-Mom's words, and I can still hear the beautiful trill of that little bird when life's problems lay heavy upon me. I feel God's presence in the words she spoke and in the bird and its self-sacrifice.

Yes, my friend returned in due time to tell me she was sorry. We hugged, cried and laughed, all at the same time, because you know how silly teenagers can be, and after all, we were best friends. The cat, by the way, finally saw me and I believe it then saw the bird as unattainable in my presence, so he stalked off, leaving the singing bird and me alone.

I stayed awhile in the woods, listening and reflecting upon my behavior and decided Mom-Mom's words made so much sense. I thanked God for the wisdom He imparts to His people so we may see Him in our time of need.

Psalm 46:1 *"God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."*

1Burt's Sacrifice

The air was crisp, the snow had started to fall about daybreak and Mama and I had been up long before. The turkey was freshly dressed and the pies had been cooked and cooled the day before. Our kin were coming by at noon, and when the sawhorses were set up, the planks in place and the large sheet set upon them, the table was ready. The men folks brought in the long benches which served as seats and our trees there about gave us leaves for the center piece, adorned purty with acorns.

As we sat to eating after Da offered grace to our Loving God, I said, "Mama, I'm thinking this is the best turkey ever."

Mamas' face radiated her pleasure, and I thought that all was well with my world, when Brother Tom said, "Well, it should be, it's your own pet turkey Burt you are eating."

My mouth was full of mashed potatoes, which we called "squished taters," and I was most embarrassed because I had to swallow mighty hard to get them down, so as not to splatter the folks sitting close by.

I cried, "Oh!, Not my Burt the Turk." At this outburst, all eyes were upon me, to see what I would do next. I do not know if I was disappointing them, but I jumped up, sprawling my chair on the floor, and flew up to my room and sobbed.

I could hear the voices of my kin, of Mama serving my very favorite dessert, (which I helped to make, thank you very much) and the annual fiddling on the violin and geetar playing, while the women folk cleared up. But I can tell you, I didn't care a wit, cause my Burt was gone, some of him in my stomach! I felt terrible sad.

I suppose I must have prayed a very long time, weeping and wailing before God, but God being like He is, calmed me down in short order. He had me see that all folks make mistakes at times, and sure as shooting, it's purty hard to tell one turkey from another at first glance. I thought I felt God smile because I decided to forgive my brother and be at peace with him, knowing he'd sure feel better, and so would I. I remember the last thing I saw when I jumped up and made my ungraceful departure, was the stricken look on Tom's face. I came to realize he did not mean to hurt me personal.

1Well, the fact of it all is that I got my dessert after all, yummy Pumpkin pie. I felt led to apologize to my kin for my unmannerly behavior and all. I also began to think about old Burt and decided that he would have been happy to have provided my best turkey dinner ever, even if he had to suffer an untimely death to do it! I did have one problem though, I didn't know who to thank the most for the great dinner, Mama or Burt!

1Christian

When Papa told us Mamma was going to add another to our already sizeable parcel of youngins', I felt happy. He told us the baby was due just before Jesus' birthday and I thought, what a wonderful time to be born. Most people call Christmas a holiday, but because of all the fuss and noise at our house, Papa calls it a holler day. I love it most, because all the folks are visiting, we get presents, hand made and most welcome, and we think a lot about Jesus and why He came. This year set to be being more special, because of the expected wee one.

I was upset when Papa told me I could not be at the actual birthing. I thought 14 years of age was pretty grown, but Papa said no, not yet, and when Papa speaks we all know better than to argue. My Papa's not mean, just mighty definite.

When Christmas Eve came and Mama went into her birthing, I went into pouting. I felt so left out. So I proceeded to my pouting place, the part of the barn

way up out of sight, and my straw filled corner. There I could be sad and sorrowful, just as I personally saw fit.

I must have gone to sleep because I thought I was in Bethlehem. I saw a very bright star overhead and from my perch I saw Mary, Joseph and a new baby boy. Shepherds came by and spoke quietly to the beaming couple and I saw the most beautiful smile on the infant's face.

I suddenly heard what I thought were Angels, but came to realizing that I was hearing folks singing in my own yard, just below where I lay. I got up, started down the ladder to join them, when I heard my Papa call to me. I was called in to see my new baby brother, Christian. He was given this name because he was born on Christ's birthday. It also tells folks about who we are.

I did pretty well in the getting end of things. I felt blessed to be given gifts, but my greatest gift was my dream, feeling like I had been at the Christ's Child's birthing and then the new feller in our family, both coming on the same day. I felt blessed then and still do at the memory. God is indeed good.

1Naming Melinda

Mom-Mom had been busy getting the clothes clean and purty, as usual, and I had been sitting nearby, shelling peas and humming a tune I made up.

She looked at me real hard and said, "Mel child, I am thinkin' you be needin' your brother, Big Jeff, to be helpin' you to get ready to be singin' this here song at the church fer meetin'."

I looked at her, unbelieving my ears were hearing right, for I was never one to be good with music, like Big Jeff. I sang more of my song, and realized that it was a purty tune right enough, so I asked Mom-Mom if I could be excused. I ran to Big Jeff so I could be asking his help, and finding him in a good mood, he told me he would be helping me in time for the next Sunday Meeting.

I sat for a time reflecting on my good fortune, being that my God was allowing me to be singing for Him special and for a good brother that was helping me to be learning this new and wonderful talent.

I was hearing the family getting dinner and I heard Da call the name Melinda, and thinking he was calling me, I was answering "I'm coming Da", when suddenly I was aware he was not calling me, but Mom-Mom. I suppose I was aware in my mind's back room that Mom-Mom and I both be called Melinda, for I heard that all my life. But I was a wondering now with a new awareness and felt I be needing to know more.

After we ate all the fine vittles our sweet God gave us, I was thankful for a God that sends sun and rain that always provided good crops for us to eat and

sell. I then went seeking Mom-Mom to be asking her about why we are named the same.

Now my Mom-Mom is one to love telling a story, and this is the one she told me that day.

“Child, your Ma was nearin’ her time to be birthin’ you and I was a bit on the jittery side, fer Doc Biddle was not bein’ around much, ‘cause of the epidemic of Whoopin’ Cough that was all over the territory. First he be here, then he be there, and the closer to the date you be arrivin’ the more I was getting a twitter. Well, Mel Darlin’, the morning arrived when your Ma was a havin’ the pains come quick and hard and still no Doc Biddle. Your Ma was not a fearin’ fer I had mid-wifed before, but your Ma had run into some trouble mid-way and I not bein’ sure how to proceed, did a mighty large prayin’. I be askin’ our Lord to be guidin’ my hands and mind, so He be gettin’ you safely out of your dear Ma and into this world God gave to all of us. He is so merciful and kind, considerin’ how we be so disappointin’ to Him so much. But as He always be doin’, He did as I asked and you be comin’ into the world, purty and healthy, in spite of the large scare we be havin’.

Now, Mel, your Ma was a prayin’ with me, in spite of her distractions, with the pain and all, and she be so happy and pleased by your arrivin’ safe and sound, and bein’ grateful I be playin’ such a part in this wonderful happenin’, she told me she be namin’ you after me. I always be likin’ the name for me, but when I saw you that first minute, fresh out of God’s hand and your Ma’s womb, my heart near split asunder with love and joy. Mel, now I had double reason to be happy and full of pleasure, fer I helped birthin’ you and you would be carryin’ my name on in our family.”

At this Mom-Mom took a hold of my hand and looking into my eyes, with tears sliding down her pink, wrinkled cheeks, she said, “Mel, precious girl, I be prayin’ everyday that because you be given my name, that you be careful you not be ever insultin’ it. But even more than that, you be takin’ a name that be far more important than mine, the name of a Christian. ‘Cause you be believin’ in Jesus Christ you be bearin’ His name, for Christian means follower of Christ. Be rememberin’ that you are in a position at all times to either be honorin’ both God and me by your doin’ good, or you be hurtin’ and disgracin’ our names by doin’ bad.”

I was making my mind up then to try real hard to honor the ones who helped my Ma when she be needin’ it so much. And I decided then I would do my very best to make my Lord and Mom-Mom not sorry that they trust me with their names.

When Melinda came running up the hill with the puppy in her arms yelling at the top of her lungs, she was going so fast she actually fell into the house, puppy spilling on the floor. When it yelped from the impact of falling from her arms, she tenderly picked it up, kissed its tiny head and looked up to see her family with a familiar expression on each face. It was an expression that spoke volumes, when actually nothing was said. It asked the same question always asked when Melinda was concerned. "What is she up to now and why?"

"I've been helping Mr. Brody's wife Wilma with her chores, as I always do after her birthing and I noticed her dog birthing too. When they asked me what could they be giving me for helping? I first said I need nothing, but when I looked real close to these sweet puppies, this ornery little pup got into my heart. I could not leave without him for sure. So here he is. Can I be keeping him? Pleeeeassssee!"

Now, when Melinda draws her please long and slow, sounding sad and needy, her family found it hard to say no. And thus, Ruffles became a part of the family. Mel and Ruffles spend a great deal of time together, for Ruffles would not let Melinda out of his sight for long. If you see one you would be seeing the other. And the family smiled, for Melinda, being moody of late and getting to be at life changing time, because they felt the pup was good medicine. Mom-Mom told the family many times the Proverb in the word of God, that "*A merry heart doeth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit dryeth the bones*" (Proverbs 17:22). Anyone with eyes could see that she loved and cherished this new pup from the bottom of her heart. Anytime she and pup were separated, Mel put Ruffles in a large pen, safe and secure, for there were many dangers afoot for a small pup, as Mel would say.

One day, when Mel and her friend were running and having a great time, Pup was penned, because he had hurt his small and tender leg a day or so before, and Mel wanted to rest it by keeping Pup (its pet name) quiet and safe. Mel had to go indoors to her Ma, and her friend went to the pen to see Pup and when Mel called to her she left the gate ajar. Pup saw Mel and seeing the gate open, ran to her, not aware that Da. and Pa were entering the yard with horse and wagon, and within seconds the horse had trod on Pup's body, killing him instantly.

Mel ran to her dog, took his broken body in her arms and burst into tears, hugging his little body closely until Da took the pup. Tenderly removing him from her arms, he prepared to set him in a grave in their pet cemetery, praying that Mel would get over her hurt quickly.

Mel found that she had grief for the missing Pup, but her bigger problem was her heart attitude towards her friend who so carelessly left the gate open.

Mom-Mom watched her for days, and noting that her grief was not as overwhelming as her anger, she took her tenderly by the hand, led her to the rocker, and set her upon her knees.

"Mel, my darlin', I be knowin' how you be missin' Pup, fer you were friends better than human capacity to be makin' you happy, but you be knowin' that Pup be gone and we are not be able to bring him back. But sweet child, we be seein' a bigger pain and hurt and that be in yer friend. She be knowin' yer hurt and is grievin' fer her actions that were careless and be bringin' this pain to you. Mel, the word is clear that you need to forgive and comfort her, so she will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 2 Corinthians 2:7-8 tells you therefore to reaffirm your love fer her." Mel lay in Mom-Mom's arms for quite a while, rocking and being consoled, and the Holy Spirit did his gentle work in her heart.

One day, with a gentle breeze blowing, Mel started down the path to her friend's house. Without Pup it seemed as if she was alone, but she knew in her heart that she was not alone. She walked along singing and praising God, for her heart was again in perfect peace and harmony with her best friend of all, Jesus.

1Prior to the Fire

"Now Melinda, you go apart and be collectin' up the kindlin'."

"Oh, Ma, why must I always be called upon to get the kindling?" I'm always getting it, and I am busy swinging on this here swing Da made for me. For a fact why can't Big Tom or Big Jeff be getting it for you?" I had been sitting and a swinging away, enjoying myself, when Ma called. When I showed no real interest in responding quick like, as I should, her Mel-linda became more definite and I jumped off my swing and ran to her like a bolt of lighting, for sure.

Now, my Mom-Mom heard how I had spoken to my Ma, and being one to speak her piece and hearing good for someone her years, she called me apart, and quiet like set me straight about the entire matter in one big hurry. "Lindy," she said, and I perked to listen, because for her to call me Lindy was special between Mom-Mom and me.

"Yes, Mom-Mom." She then told me an important lesson, one I'm thinking is worth repeating.

"Lindy, darlin, the weather is chillin' our bones and we be needin' a fire to be hot and roarin', don't you be thinkin' child?" Knowing I personally liked to be snugly and warm and not cold and miserable, I told her she was sure right about that. She then said, "Lindy, let me tell you about the kindlin' and nestin'."

"Nesting, Mom-Mom?"

"Yes, Lindy, nestin', for you see child, a log can hardly catch fire lessen its bed in a nest of kindlin'. See, the small wood catches the fire first and then as it

gets hotter, the big log catches and begins a burnin'. It's kinda like a new Christian just comin' to the Lord, Lindy. They need to be a nestin' with an older Christian, to keep their flame from a dyin' and causin' them to grow cold toward God. God's Holy Spirit ignites the flame in a new believer's heart, but our enemy Satan, by doubt and confusion, tries to put that there fire out. So if there's a new believin' feller or gal, then someone in Christian love needs to be nestin' them in their heart and spirit. They then are makin' certain the fire keeps a roarin' by being their spiritual kindlin'. Do you see, Lindy, why this can be important? What do you think will happen to these here babies in the Lord without their a helpin'."

Feeling real sad about the matter by now, I told Mom-Mom, "I'm a thinking their fire would die without spiritual kindling and that's a terrible happening."

Seeing that I was starting to get the point to her teaching, Mom-Mom told me that prior to any fire, natural or spiritual, there sure needed to be a nest for the log before the fire can be expected to get a roaring. She was telling me how the one doing the nesting felt mighty good about listening to God. She said our spiritual kindling was reading the bible, praying all the time, keeping the faith, giving thanks for all things, and caring about others. We should support and encourage folks during hard times and be loving them, even the bad and unruly. These are the things that keep fires going for sure and ways to keep the ole devil away. He can't stand to be about when folks are doing good things for one another.

I'm here to tell you, by this time I'm sure knowing about this kindling and how powerful it is, if it's for fireplaces or Christians. I ran to my Ma and told her how sorry I was about being mean and stubborn.

She smiled and said, "Mom-Mom told you about the nesting didn't she child?" I nodded and because I felt a bit amount better about my fetching I ran to search for the scraps of wood, knowing I was helping my family to keep warm. I knew then that I was going to be looking for someone I could personally be nesting right soon.

1Closer Than a Brother

I was running quick as my legs could be moving because I heard with my very own ears that my friend Aggie's Pa was giving her and her Ma away. I was barely missing trees and brambles, I was running so fast, but I knew my Mom-Mom would be telling me why he would be doing such a sorrowful and mean thing. I was thinking that she could to be attending to her and Aggie's needs, because she was bearing and raising youngins' since she was not more that a child herself now 19 years past. I sure would be hating for my Pa to give me away.

As I turned round the corner to our dwelling place, I almost knocked Mom-Mom down and she started to be laughing, when she saw my most sad look and said, "Gracious, child what in the good Lord's earth is the matter?" Mom-Mom seemed to bring the Lord into everything, and when she was saying it, it never sounded unkind or unfitting to God somehow. Being purely out of breath, I gasped, crying and fussing like I was, and I managed to tell her my terrible news. She grabbed me fast like in what I call her "love hold," and set me down so I could tell her all the facts about my hurting.

"Mom-Mom, Aggie's Pa is giving her and her Ma to Mr. Hunter, the feller with the big spread out side of town, and I won't be seeing her much any more. Why must she be given away, and why must they be moving so far apart from me? Can't they be staying here and minding after themselves, right enough?"

Now, my Mom-Mom being close to God and knowing Him so well, even thinking like Him a lot, proceeded to remove her worn Bible out of her apron pocket. She went to John's gospel, Chapter 19, Verses 26 and 27, and read me these words of God:

*"When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, **Woman, behold thy son!** Then saith he to the disciple, **Behold thy mother!** And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home."*

"Child let us go to the cross of Jesus Christ for our answer. You be knowing that Aggie's Pa be dyin' and he lovin' then so much, he be needin' to die peaceable like. Now, to be certain that his beloved family be tended to, cause all their kin is far apart, he be given them to a feller Christian to be tended to proper. Remember what I just be readin'? Jesus, when he be dyin' fer the world, bein' a good son and attendin' to carin' for His Ma-Ma just moments before He left to be with His heavenly Pa, gave her to someone He trusted. Ifin its good fer Jesus, its good fer His people to be doin'."

I could understand this in my heart, sure enough and even my spirit, but my self part still did not know how I will be standing to be missing Aggie and hurting so much.

Years later, Aggie came visiting. She asked me to call her by her Christian name Agatha, because she was grown and getting married, and it seemed proper and right, so I agreed. She proceeded to tell me how she and her Ma were grateful to her Pa, for being so unselfish and kind. Living with the Hunter family and receiving such loving care and Christian instruction had set the groundwork for their lives and ministry unto God. This set me to thinking "*A man that hath friends*

must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

Jesus had not given His Ma-Ma to kin, but a brother in the spirit, and Aggie's Pa was a man of pure wisdom, to know who to trust with his family. This surely proved him to be kind and Christ like. Don't you agree?

1Sweet Thing

"Mom-Mom, tell us again, pleasssee," we all begged, and Mom-Mom told us that although she had told the story many times before, but because the story was so pleasing to her heart, she would tell it one more time.

"Now, youngins quit your fidgetin'. When you be settlin' down I be tellin' you again about our meetin', courtin' and weddin' to each other.

You remember how I told you before that all our needin' were made mostly by my Ma-Ma, because bein' short fixed fer money, most thing got made at home. But, sometimes our needin's couldn't be done by my Ma and so she sent me to the store to be gettin' the necessities. We were a growin' town by now, and we had us a fine General Store a short gallop away.

Well one fine spring day, as I entered the door of the Mercantile, what should my eyes behold, but the new young man, who helped at the store. I took quick notice that he was a mite handsome. As I picked out my boughtens, I looked at him, makin' sure he did not see me eyein' him. When I paid for my goods he looked right into my eyes, and land sakes, I knew that I had just met eyeball to eyeball with my future feller to wed. He smiled, and my heart frolicked around in my chest. It seemed to be dancin' this way and that, and all I could think to do was run out the door and catch my breath.

One day, a short time later, I went to the Mercantile to buy me a candy. When I told him I wanted this sweet thing, he looked me in the eye again and said, "The sweet thing here is you." I tell you youngins, I felt like faintin', but managed to smile back and say, thank you. I did not run for the door, but just sashayed out the door, knowin' in my heart that we would be a courtin' and mighty soon at that.

We talked more each time we met after that, attendin' the same church and all, and because I was only 14 to his 16, we were told that we had to wait two long years to be a weddin' to each other.

This grand feller's name was John Abraham Manley. The John for John the Baptist, being strong and not needin' much to survive, and the Abraham for God's chosen obedient and not fearin' to go elsewhere, and not needin' a reason. This made me mighty proud to be weddin' such a God fearin' man.

In due season, my 16th birthin' day found us wedded by the big tree and lake where I got me baptized into Jesus Christ, with all our kin seein' us joined together by God Almighty. We spoke words to each other that you youngins should tuck into the chamber of your hearts memory, for livin' by God's word can be the way to be sealed together when the world wants to pull ya apart.

"I, John Abraham Manley, take you as my dear wife, to love while on this earth, and then when death finds us parted, we shall be bound and loved by a greater love, the One who's bride we both shall be forever."

"I, Melinda Sara Bramley, am wedded to thee this day, and I shall be a lovin' you with my deepest love, until God separates us and calls us to a deeper and grander love, eternally with Him."

We knew that Mom-Mom called him J.A., but we chose Da, and he never did mind, I can tell you that for certain. As we left the room, I heard Mom-Mom say quietly, "Thank you God for my J.A. and all the years you gave me to be his sweet thing."

1Naomi Ruth

The day was cold and blustery, and a great day for a story, so we tucked Mom-Mom's legs tightly in her afghan, lit a fire in the stone fireplace near her chair and settled ourselves by her feet. She looked down at us, a smile on her face, and all we could do was look at her, our faces lit with anticipation and joy.

"Well," she said, "I suppose I could be tellin' about the day I met a sweet Indian girl." "Indian girl?" we all said in unison. "Yes, a real Indian, and a beautiful one to boot. Now, children settle down and I will be tellin' you about the day we met and what God did for us." The story took on a new meaning now because we always wanted to hear about God and what He would do for those that love him.

"The day was beautiful, quiet and warm, when I decided to go beyond the confines of "The Hollow," as our neighbors called it, and search for the lake, I be hearin' about but never seein'. We lived a sheltered life in the hollow, because our acreage was completely surrounded by trees and foothills. We loved it there because the trees offered us firewood, wood for furniture, trees at Christmas and a bountiful number of pine cones. I have to be tellin' you, we felt purely rich and taken care of by our wonderful God.

"I took vittles, wrapped in my napkin, and reached the lake after walkin' for a long time. I sat eatin' a midday meal when I heard a rustle nearby and looked up to see a purty chestnut skinned girl standing at the edge of my sittin' blanket. Not even knowin' if she understood my language, I said, "you scared me right enough,"

and was mighty pleased when she answered softly but sincerely, "I am sorry." Wanting to do the proper Christian thing, I asked her to sit a spell and share my vittles, and on acceptance, she sat on the blanket I had spread on the ground. We soon felt like old friends.

She stirred my curiosity more than a little, so I asked many questions and found out she and most of her tribe were Christians because Missionaries formed a settlement there some years ago. The one thing we had in common at the very moment of meetin' was the desire in both of us to get water baptized. Because we both believed in prayer, we set about to ask our lovin' God to be helpin' us to do this and to convict our folks to do it too. As our fingers touched when we held hands, it occurred to me there is not dividin' line between those that truly love God and believe His word.

She asked me my name, and I said, "My name is Melinda. What is yours?" She told me her Indian name had been Whispering Star because she was so quiet and bright, but the Missionaries had renamed her Naomi Ruth because she loved the Book of Ruth in the Bible. I told her the name was beautiful, just like her.

We be partin' then, for the hour was late. But we went back to the lake where we be meetin' two weeks later. Both our families were with us and we had a glorious day singin' praises to God and showin' settlers nearby where we be standin' with God. The whole parcel of us goes water dunked. She and I remained friends until we moved away."

Mom-Mom was tired, so we left the room quietly and I looked back to see the usual smile that always rested on her lovely face when she told us about her Precious Lord. Her stories made us feel so very rich, and I'm sure you know why.

1God Knows Best

The day began as usual for Melinda. Up early, tend the chickens, bring in the milk, clean the barn, and collect the eggs and first but most important, converse with God. Melinda had long ago made it a point to talk to God about the new day, knowing that without God and His instructions, things could be very muddled and contrary. But once she had her daily talk with her Lord, she knew her day was set to be a good one. All things did not always go the way she thought they might, but she knew God knew better and she learned early on to respect His decisions.

Now she had a mind to go fishing, and when she had finished all her daily chores and received Ma's permission, she started down the path to the near by lake and was distressed to find that someone had proceeded her. Lying at her favorite spot was a man, scruffy and bearded, not out of the ordinary for those

days, but his was different than Pa's beard, because it was not trimmed neat and clean. As she drew near to him an odor hit her forcibly and she stepped back, repulsed, and almost ran away in disgust, when the sweet inner voice of God quietly asked her to stay and show mercy.

Melinda moved closer to him, holding her breath to the best of her ability, and asked him who he was and why he was laying here at her favorite place. The man told her, "Missy, I be not even sure about where I be, much less who I be." At this declaration, Melinda stepped very close, praying for God to keep her Angel fast on duty, and said, "I am Melinda, and I see you are in a fine fix, not knowing who you are, or where. I am thinking you be needing someone to help you find yourself. I will help you, so I will be taking you to my Pa, for he be good at fixing things up." Melinda had no way of knowing that she had encountered her first drunken man, for drinking was unknown to her.

She helped him to his feet and had him put his arm around her neck, a trial of great proportion, for the odor almost strangled her. At the time all she could think about was how she could help him when she could barely breathe. As they walked slowly toward the dwelling place, she silently prayed that God would graciously prepare the family for this wreck of a man she was taking home.

Her Pa saw her coming down the lane, and ran to help her by assisting the man and allowing Melinda to run into the house. She told the women folk what was going on, and dutifully cleaned her self up some, knowing that she reeked of the vile odor the man emitted. The family was not taken back too much, for it was not unusual for Melinda to bring home something wounded, but this was absolutely the first time she brought home a drunken man.

As was typical of their generous and hospitable spirits, they gave him opportunity to clean up, gave him a good meal and then sitting around the large and ample table, they shared the gospel. When he was sober, he remembered his name, John Dodge, and told them that he had recently lost his family with the plague. Feeling life was worthless, he resorted to the vile act of drunkenness, hoping to wipe out all memory of the disaster.

They all gently told him that God alone can heal all hurt and pain, for He knew pain and hurt first-hand and after such love and caring he began to see God Himself in these kind people.

Melinda told him that as young as she was, that she already knew that God was the answer to all of life, good and bad, and that God surely had His Hand on John Dodge that very day, for, as she amply put it, "What if I had not prayed and obeyed God, and what if I had run away from you and not be listening to my Lord and bringing you to Ma and Pa for help? You can be seeing God is watching out for you, can't you? "Mr. John Dodge then was seeing that God used people to reveal Himself. When he had heard the full message of the gospel from these

good folks, he decided that a God that had people like these on His side, he wanted to be on His side too. He quietly surrendered his life to God, blessing himself and all concerned.

Melinda entreated her Pa to help Mr. Dodge to get a new start, and so Pa hired him to help bring in the new crop. This was the beginning of a life long friendship and Mr. John Dodge gave up his old habits, adopting new ones that fit a proper man of God.

1Home Again

I was right pleased to be getting on the train, but after a short while, the fun wore off and I felt mighty scared and down right miserable. When my Aunt Pris sent my fare by mail and was begging my Pa to be letting me go to see Prudie, I was too excited to be scared. Here on the train, with just me and strangers sitting by, I felt it my right to be scared as I was really feeling. We were going fast like the wind. It was hot, as I believed hell would be like, if I was going, but I'm not. I was hungry and my lunch was long gone and I was a wishing I had said no to the asking, but, here I was, and I could not be going back.

Aunt Pris met me at the station, and Prudie was by her side as I lit from the train. All of a sudden the trip seemed to be worth all the misery, because her face shown brighter than a copper coin, and I knew with all the disturbing traveling, I had done the proper thing.

I suppose I should have been ready to see the startling home they had, but my eyes never could have dreamed the beauty I beheld. Oh my! Such luxury, and I was to be among it for an entire week. Prudie was getting married and they had a new dress for me, one I could take home and wear to meeting. I was grateful and embarrassed, and had a hard time telling them of my feeling, so I did my best and ran to the room I was staying in and cried a tiny bit, wiped my eyes and went back to thank them proper.

As the time went on, I could see that they were having most of the things I only saw in the catalog, but I be knowing that Mom-Mom told me to be content with what God gave, and envy is a sin. I was struggling to be a good Christian all that week, and wasn't real sure of my feelings, until one day I be sitting on the porch, just resting and thinking about bunches of stuff, when I heard discord from within the house. I was hearing words I did not want to hear. It was appearing to me that Aunt Pris and Uncle Matt were going to be separating and ending their marriage after 19 years. They had decided on this a few years back, and waited till Prudie be getting married.

If I had my way, I would be sure on the next train, but the wedding was a few days away. I resolved, with her parents parting, that I was not about to add to my cousin Prudies' misery.

The wedding was something to see and Prudie a delight to the eyes, and I knew my staying was right. She threw the bouquet, and I caught it, knowing in my heart she meant it that way.

I packed my bag feeling sad and happy at the same time, happy because deep down I knew that a part of me had seen young and beautiful love between two people and sad for the broken love bond between two I love and had looked up to as an example.

Mom-Mom and my family met me at the train station, and I knew I had to be sharing all the news, sad and happy. I told them about the way I was truly feeling on the ride home, asking them to go slow, because I had never really appreciated Ole Goldie's trot and careful gait till that train ride. Slow now seemed mighty good.

I was mighty tired and said so to my family, and after our evening praying I kissed them all in turn, telling them how much I loved every one of them. I went to my loft room, pulled the comforter, put together by Mom-Mom, up to my chin. As my eyes shut in sleep, all I could be saying to God, with a grateful and happy heart was, "Thank you God, I'm home again."

1Christian the Pest

"Ma, why must this here pest be hanging onto my skirt?" Melinda bellowed out loud and clear. This was not the first time today she had protested her little brother's hanging onto her and it would not be the last time either. Her little brother Christian loved her and hung onto her every chance he got. This was very annoying to Melinda, and she was very vocal about her obvious objections to her brother's way of showing that he cared for her. After all, he was just a little tyke at this point and his adoration of his sister was real and well deserved as far as he was concerned. Melinda, though, felt put upon and had no qualms making her brother feel poorly about all this devotion, deserved or not.

Mom-Mom heard Melinda yell and fuss, and decided to do something about the whole bothersome problem by calling Mel aside and giving her some much needed correction, pure and simple. Mom-Mom went direct to her source book, the Bible, and showed Mel that she was, according to the word of God, to show the Fruit of the Spirit, even when she wasn't in the "*mood*" to do so, and that was that!

"Mel, darlin' you be knowin' the word of God, but the way you be actin' toward Christian, who be seein' it in your life?" This coming from Mom-Mom was getting Mel's attention quick enough, but she then was quick to tell Mom-Mom that

she needed some freedom from his constant hanging upon her person. Mom-Mom began to read Galatians 5-22 and share them with Melinda, and this is what she heard:

“But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against such things there is no law.”

“Melinda suddenly heard the word *longsuffering*, and it seemed to pierce her heart. She looked at Mom-Mom with tears in her eyes, and asked her if she thought that God wanted her to be developing some fruit of *longsuffering*.

“Mom-Mom said “iffen the Holy Spirit is speakin’ to your heart with that word, you would be wise to be hearin’ it.”

When Melinda was alone, sitting in the barn in her quiet place, she was reflecting about her attitude and feeling sad in her heart for being so mean and ornery. She was reliving the very night that her brother Christian was born and arriving at their dwelling. She remembered how full of joy they felt, especially Melinda, who saw him as a special gift from God. She was thinking a great deal of the heavenly vision God had given her, allowing her to see the birth of the Christ Child, just as if it was happening in her very own barn. When these memories were flooding her heart, she felt a release of irritability. Her heart was full of peace and she determined to allow Christian to be hanging on her skirt all he wanted. After all he wouldn’t be staying little forever and if God gave her this time to show him God’s fruit, she was well satisfied to do it His way.

Melinda was deciding that she needed to be seeing Christian, so she looked in his sleeping place and found him napping. She quietly went to his side and gently touched his dear little face and spoke these words.

“Blessed Savior, Jesus, you are looking in our hearts to be seeing if we are right with you. I know you are telling me by your Holy Spirit that I can sometimes be mean and unkind to my sweet Christian. Please help me show this fruit you are speaking into my heart, to others. I need your help in a mighty way, for I am sinning with my mean and nasty ways, and hurting you. I am hurting this sweet child, my loving folks and any that see me. If you be willing to help, I be willing to change. Please give me the grace to be loving this annoying child with all my heart and give me this fruit of longsuffering that you be speaking of. I’ll be mighty grateful and I will pray that I will act more like your child every day and be setting a good example for all to see. I love you God, mightily, and am hankering to serve you well. I thank you Lord, for I am needing to pay more attention to your word and making it my walking way.”

When her prayer was finished, she kissed Christian, tucked his quilt close around his neck and stepped out the door. As she walked to her room, she determined in her heart that when Christian came to be knowing God and His Son Jesus, she hoped he would see their presence in her.

1God Be Carin'

When I saw Big Tom coming across the far meadow, running like someone who sat on a hot griddle, I knew to be rightly concerned. He was breathing mighty hard by the time he be getting to me. He then processed to tell me about Pa, trying to tell me and get moving again at the same time. I went running along side of him, trying to keep up and dropped my seeds in my haste. It seemed my Pa had gotten himself hurt mighty bad when he was doing some work in the barn. Because he was alone, no one saw what was happening, but Mom-Mom had gone to call him for vittles and found him on the barn floor, injured and unconscious. He be taken to our dwelling for caring. Big Tom was sent to fetch me, for he had a fleetness of foot like no one else I know.

I ran quickly past all the family members, not even knowing who I passed. I had only one thing on my mind, being with my Pa. Pa was looking mighty pale under his usual ruddy skin and that made me mighty scared. I dropped to my knees by his bed and proceeded to ask my Caring God to be watching out for my Pa, not letting him die. I was quick to tell God that I love Pa, not just for providing our vittles, but because he was a good man to his family in so many ways. He was also always showing his neighbors here about what a true man of God he is, for any man's hurting was his hurting, any man's need his need and any man's joy his joy. I was crying softly and had just dropped my head to his chest, when I heard a soft voice say "What happened to me?" I then felt better in my heart, for his speaking gave me hope for his recovering.

We found out later that he be doing some work in the loft part of the barn, when he was startled by a bat flying past his head. He fell to the ground below and was knocked unconscious, hitting his head on the ladder as he fell and breaking his leg as he hit the floor.

When the Doctor finally arrived, Ma and Mom-Mom had already set his leg in a makeshift splint and had done most of the doctoring needed. They had called Dr. Nelson, also a family friend, just to be sure, in case medicine or further doctoring was needed. After telling the folks that they did a great job, he told all of us that a fall like Pa took was very serious. He said his head would be hurting for quite awhile and we would be needing to be picking up Pa's part of the chores around the homestead for at least a month or so while his head and leg would be mending.

Big Tom, bless his heart, was quick on telling Dr. Nelson not to worry, for he was full grown and would be taking Pa's place until he was well, good and proper like. I looked at Tom and saw a boy becoming a man right in front of my eyes. I

was bursting in my chest with pride and love for him, for realizing his place in our family at this distressing time, because he was meeting a deep need in our dwelling place; by becoming our provider and helper, till Pa be well again.

Our family was learning a lot that day my Pa took his fall, because we learned how God is kind and merciful to all His children, not caring about age, but giving to all. He was healing my Pa and we were learning more about pulling together as a family. My Pa was never one to be letting time be wasted for any reason, so while recovering he made sure he was reading and teaching us more of God's word. He helped neighbors that came by to offer help, by giving Godly wisdom to those that needed or asked for it.

A few years later I was realizing how God had graced our family by not taking my Pa that day to be with Him in Heaven but leaving my Pa to be with us for sometime longer. I could see clearly how fragile life hereabout really is. I resolved through that learning to teat folks and all my relating to them with the same love and caring God gave to us when we were needing it so much. If only everybody could be seeing that, "Please God" Amen.

1Cabin Fever

My Pa was healing fast and would be working again soon. Personally, I had cabin fever and was itchy to get back to my roaming, wanting to be satisfying my natural curiosity. When I told Mom-Mom about my feeling she told me she was just like me. She would go roaming and searching about where she lived to see how other folks would be doing. This particular day was beautiful, cool but sunny, with the sky full of soft puffy clouds and a great day to be sitting. We both looked at our rockers on the porch and decided to sit a spell and be jawing about folks there about.

"Mel, did I ever be tellin' you about the Kincaid family?" I told Mom-Mom I did not know the Kincaid family or any story about them, so she proceeded to tell me this:

"There was a mighty awful disease goin' round about in that one year, and as I was searchin' fer berries, I be havin' to go some distance from where I be livin', fer I had exhausted all the near by bushes. I be comin' to a cabin I be knowin' belonged to folk there about known as the Kincaid family. I decided to find out why they not be around the place fer it was so awful quiet. I went to the cabin door and seein' it ajar, pushed it open. As I walked in the sight that be meetin' my eyes was frightful. I pray I never be seein' anything like it again. The entire family, Mama, Papa and baby were all layin' in the big bed, and Mel darlin', they be not moving as they lay there. I ran out the door like a shot, ran back, not really

believin' what I saw, and then knowin' in my heart it was true, ran quick as a gazelle to be tellin' my folks. They be lookin' so peaceful and perfect. Needles to say, Mel, I was purely upset and findin' it hard to accept.

At my leadin', the local folks gave this fine Kincaid family a decent Christian burial, proper and fittin' fer children of God. We heard later they all be taken by the disease that came through our town, pickin' and choosin' at will the families it wanted to claim. I thanked God it was not touchin' our dwellin', but prayed to our good Lord fer the folks who has loved one's taken from them. My own heart was in turmoil fer findin' them that way. It sure was taken some time to be feelin' peaceable in my heart again. I was not blamin' God fer the tragedy, Mel, but was terrible mad at the Devil fer takin' so many families, along with this sweet one, and 'causin' my own heart to hurt so much.

I finally be decidin' in my heart to just rest in my Lord, and be lettin' my own healin' begin. I be comin' to really be understandin' that God's ways be not our ways. His understandin' of things bein' so far above ours. We can not always be understandin' Him like we be hopin' and wishin' to. Seems like once I be givin' it to Jesus to be carryin' fer me, the pain and hurt be leavin' me with just a quiet memory of a sweet family. This is why I be tellin' you about this Mel. You will be seein' many things in life as you be searchin' the highways and byways, some bein' good and some hurtful, but none will be beatin' you down iffen you know where to be goin' fer help. Always turn to God, fer He can calm all ragin' seas of life and give peace as no one else can."

Melinda sat very quiet, giving Mom-Mom time to get her feelings under control because telling the story brought tears to her eyes as well as to Mel's. Looking at Mom-Mom's face and seeing the tears wetting her beautiful eyes made Melinda know in her heart that she still held deep feelings for that lovely family lost so long ago.

As Mel prepared for bed and knelt down on her knees to speak to her loving God that night, she could not help but think of the joy in Heaven when Mom-Mom would enter the door to God's house and meet all those that she had loved, helped and prayed for while here on earth. It gave Mel a view of Heaven that she needed to see, to know in her heart that God has a place for all that truly believe. She was led to take out her bible and read the chapter where Jesus told His followers that His Father and ours had homes prepared for all who had trust and faith in God. As she drifted off to sleep, she was grateful to Mom-Mom for the story of the Kincaid family, because it made her dwell on the beauty of Heaven and the wonder of her heritage there.

As Mel drifted off to sleep, her Lord heard her say, "Thank you Lord for loving us so much, that you made a place for us with you." The last word she spoke before sleep claimed her was, "forever." God smiled. (John 14: 1, 2 & 3)

“Let not your heart be troubled, you believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”

1 Mom-Mom’s Mantel

When Melinda left her dwelling place and returned again, her heart felt full of love for her home. It expressed all the longing in her heart for a place of comfort and rest. She especially loved visiting Mom-Mom’s room and asking for her story about the things that graced Mom-Mom’s mantel over the fireplace. Now let it be known this was no ordinary fireplace. Not by a long shot. This one was put in a special room, for a special lady; build years ago by Da, because of his deep love for her.

Some years before, Mom-Mom became very ill. Da decided then to build her a room for both of them, combining a bedroom and sitting room. This room radiated so much love and sweetness, the very essence of Jesus Christ that the grandchildren would come here and hear stories and be prayed for. They often would keep Mom-Mom company when Da had to go out of town on business. Melinda would tell her friends that Mom-Mom’s room was her favorite place in the world, next to church of course, because in the winter the windows were beautiful with the crystal beauty of God’s hand when the frost was on them. Then in the spring, the smell of the flowers that grew under her window would permeate her room with the odor of potpourri essence that Melinda said must be the smell of Heaven itself. Mom-Mom kept these very flowers on the little table by the huge fireplace that Da had hand built and set himself, telling everyone that each rock that was set was a beautiful memory of their life together. Theirs must have been a joyful journey, for the fireplace took the space of one entire wall. The mantel was a beautiful work of Big Jeff, he being the wood artist in the home, and the day it was laid upon the top of the fireplace all the family said its beauty took their breath away.

Mom-Mom then took some things out of her chest, and put them upon the top surface of this fine piece of wood and as she laid them down, she proceeded to tell this little story.

“I had been just walkin’ a good piece away from our cabin, when I came upon a deserted one that was lookin’ as if the family had gone berry pickin’ and just forgot to be comin’ home again. I was bein’ careful while a lookin’, thinkin’ all the time that the family would be appearin’ and thinkin’ I was buttin’ in. I was visitin’ this cabin many more times after that first time. After awhile I knew in my

heart they were not returnin' and I never found out where they went and why they were not comin' again to their darlin' home.

I had been seein' these things that are now restin' upon my mantel, and was fearin' that I would be hurtin' God if I took them. I knew after many months that they could be mine without my sinnin' for I knew the family would not be appearin' to get them. I then put them in my hope chest, knowin' in my heart that these sweet memories of that darlin' family would be restin' in a place in my home some day. I knew that the family must have been fine folks, because I saw love in the things I took and you see here. The daddy must have loved music, fer this violin could have provided lovely music after dinner. The mommy must have come from a family of good up bringin' for the delicate cup and saucer speaks of that, and the hand-made toy tells me the Pa took time to whittle a piece of wood into a sweet play thing for his little one."

All of us were near to tears as Mom-Mom told the story of that family with such feeling. We all agreed that the day was very special due to the love that was in that room, We all separated after kissing our precious grandparents, and everyone knew that each had been touched by God's Spirit, for where else would such love and joy abound as it did here, except God be the center of it all?

1Deception

The storm that raged outside the dwelling was nothing compared to the turbulence that erupted in the heart of Melinda. She knew that she had to talk to Mom-Mom, but she wasn't certain that she wanted to do it right now. She began to think it best for her to be thinking this out real careful, and her best thinking was always being done in the barn. With the storm doing some mighty strong damage hereabout, she bundled up mighty good for her short run to the safety of her thinking place.

Melinda was always ahead of her school mates, simply because she was a firm believer in setting her mind to do things right, if you are going to do them at all. This was at home, in school or wherever you are regardless of what you are doing. She had a reputation for fairness, integrity and honesty.

"If I don't speak to Mom-Mom and tell her I am confused in my mind and heart, I just be knowing I will be hurting her, for she trusts me. If I tell my friend that I can't be helping her I know I will be lettin' my friend down." Melinda felt at that moment that she didn't know which way to be turning. Suddenly she thought she be hearing Christian calling and knew that she needed to go in the cabin and be asking Mom-Mom to be giving her some sound advice. She was knowing in

her heart that friendship can be very hard on a girl at times, as this was sure as shooting one of those perplexing times.

To be sitting at the table with her folks was very comforting to Melinda, but she sat more quiet than usual. Her antics at the table were something her family expected and when they were not obvious they knew her heart was troubled. They took turns looking at her because no one wanted to speak, hoping to give her time to be willing to open up and share what it was that kept her looking so sad and downcast.

Suddenly she could not keep her feelings to herself and beginning to cry, she said with deep-rooted sorrow, "My friend wants me to lie for her." The entire family looked up and all started to speak at once, until no one knew what any one else was saying.

Mom-Mom finally said, with a great deal of compassion and authority, "All be quiet and give this little girl room to be breathin' and time to be tellin' us what this be about. This family be knowin' in yer heart that Mel must be hurtin' and confused to be not knowin' what to do." She got up, stood by Mel with her hand on her shoulder and added, "Am I correct girl, about what yer feelin'?"

Mel then blew her nose, wiped her eyes, and stood up facing her family and told them what made her heart hurt so much. "My friend Jenny was telling me this very morning that she would be heading to run away, for she has gotten herself with child. She be feeling ashamed, and she is fearful her family will find out her terrible secret. She asked me to lie and tell her family she is going to another place to be finding work, and she should be returning in a week or two, when she not be planning to come home for a long time, if ever." Mel knew Jenny's Pa was cruel and feared for him to find out, and knew that her Ma's heart would break if her girl child left in such a grievous manner.

Mom-Mom took Mel's hand in hers and looking directly into her eyes, told her this. "Mel, my darlin' you be knowin' already that you can not be lyin' fer another, even if it seems to be right. Your friend be needin' to go to her folks and be confessin' her sin before God and family and be lookin' fer God's mercy to prevail in this here circumstance. You can not help by addin' to the wrong already bein done. Child you be needin' to be tellin' your friend that you will not lie, but that you be prayin' and standin' by her in her shame, fer you will not judge her but remain her friend. Child, that's what friends be to one another, an anchor in the storms of life, but no good friend will lie to cover a sin. Her family will be wounded by this, but know how your dear Lord and Savior will be wounded and hurt by your lyin' to cover one sin by another. Do you be understandin' what I be sayin' Mel?"

"Mom-Mom, I understand that what you be saying is true, and after Jenny tells her folks, I will be taking myself to Jenny's dwelling and be telling her and her folks that all of us be standing by, loving, trusting and helping them get through this

storm that hit them so hard. I will also be praying that her Pa will have a forgiving heart and be facing all this with her.”

The next day, after Jenny came to see her, Mel opened the cabin door and looking outside saw rising over the trees the most glorious rainbow they ever set their eyes upon. With a kiss sent skyward to her Loving God, she and Jenny went out the door. She was ready to accompany her friend to tell her family that God's love and forgiveness was enough to see anyone through the storms of life, for He is and always will be the promise of better things to come.

1Melinda's Dilemma

Slam! Went the door to the dwelling, and Melinda came running in, happy as she could be, carrying her basket of walnuts. She put the basket proudly on the table for she knew that her family loved walnut pie, walnut cake and walnut fudge. Her family was endowed with a “sweet tooth” for sure. Mom-Mom thanked her for her hard work picking them and bringing them home. She told her to wash her hands proper for dinner, for vittles were ready as soon as she was.

Putting the last bowl on the table, Mom-Mom and Ma heard a scream closely followed by crying and foot steps running from the necessary room, hands flying and tears flowing. “For goodness sake child, whatever is the matter?” asked Mom-Mom and Ma at the same time as they grabbed Melinda to see if she was in one piece.

“My hands are brown, my hands are brown, and they are supposed to be white,” screamed Melinda. “They won't get clean, not matter how I scrub them. What shall I do to get them white?” Melinda asked, crying harder and getting down right inconsolable.

Mom-Mom knew that she needed to be getting Mel under control, dinner getting cold and all, so she told her that as they were eating, she would be telling Mel all about stains and what to do about them. She had not told Mel about walnut staining for she had gone on her own and no one knew where she was going until she came bearing the walnuts in her basket.

“Mel darlin', it looks like you be wearin' gloves on your hands while church goin' fer a time, but don't be frettin' child all of us be havin' brown stains on our hands many times. You must be rememberin' that they be stainin' furniture and things with walnuts, and the stains are liken to stains on our souls that be needin' time to be worked out by the Holy Spirit. Many folks have things that they carry around with them, that be part of their past, and it's liken to these stains. Only time will erase them. In due season, with washin' and daily chores wearin' the brown residue off, some day sooner than you be thinkin' yer hands will be white again,

just like people's hearts and attitudes will no longer be stainin' their souls. Iffen you will trust God and time, yer hands will return to normal, and you may even be laughin' about yer weepin' and waillin' some day.

Melinda looked at her hands, smiled and told her family that she sure was sorry to be such a blubbering baby about all the stains. But she sure was glad that she knew that God was going to be helping. She was also happy that God was in the soul cleaning business for she would rather go around with stains on her hands than on her heart or soul.

When the walnut cakes were still in the oven, she looked at her hands. Savoring the smell coming from the stove, she admitted that having to wear gloves to church for a few weeks was a small price to pay for the wonderful joy of the walnuts and all they offered her and her family.

The Ring

"Mom-Mom, come see what I found." shouted Melinda as she ran through the door of the dwelling. Mom-Mom came running as fast as her legs would carry her, for she was, as she told her granddaughter, breathing like a steam engine going up hill. She was quick to ask Mel what the fuss was about, for she was bellowing so loud all the local folks for be hearing her for sure. With this, Melinda put her hand out and said, "See what I am wearing on my finger, Mom-Mom? Isn't it the purtiest thing you ever saw in your whole life?" Mom-Mom took to putting on her spectacles so as not to be missing anything, and looking at Mel's outstretched hand, saw a ring, shiny and bright. Now knowing no one in their entire family ever had a ring for their fingers, she was quick to be asking where she found such a beautiful thing.

"Mom-Mom, you know I am always going to the deserted cabin and I went today to be finding me some peaceful time sitting on the rocker on the porch. Well, today, I was walking in the bed space when my eye saw where the sun was touching the floor and there in a crack, this ring was sitting. Ain't it purity?" Mom-Mom had to agree and after telling Mel to be mighty careful she did not lose such a costly item, she returned to her work.

The ring became the topic of family conversation for some days, and Mel was enjoying the attention her find brought to her. She kept looking for new places to be hiding it, not wanting it to be handy should thieves come in, and she was beginning to think that having it was getting troublesome.

One day Melinda was looking at this object of her total devotion, and was quick to decide that her life was so absorbed in this thing, that she was missing her peace.

The day came when Mel was standing watching her Ma baking and looking at her hands. They were sturdy and dependable ones. Thinking of all the times they soothed and caressed and helped, it suddenly occurred to Mel that she never in her life can remember seeing a wedding ring sitting upon her Ma's hand.

Later she asked, "Mom-Mom, how it was that I never saw a ring upon my Ma's wedding finger?"

Mom-Mom took Mel aside and putting her arm around her waist and drawing her close to her side, she said, "When they be gettin' married there be no money for ringin' her finger, and then with babies comin' and daily providin', a ring was seen as such a luxury thing." Now this got to Mel to thinking and after much soul searching she was of a mind to be sharing her good fortune.

One day, soon after her conversing with Mom-Mom, Mel went to the barn to collect eggs and seeing her Pa, she told him her plan.

A week after all this planning took place, while they be eating the good vittles that Mom-Mom and Ma had put together to celebrate the anniversary of her wonderful parents, Mel handed the ring quietly to her Pa. He then took those precious hands in his and with all the love in his heart he held for his wife, he put the shiny ring upon her marrying finger. All the family was being deeply moved in the heart and spirit at this moment, but no more than Mel. She learned a lesson that was to stay with her all her life. She learned that to be giving is even nicer than to be getting. She wasn't totally certain why this was so, but she knew somehow it had to be from God, and for her that was always enough.

1All God's Children

Mel was busy singing, something she loved to do, especially at church, and when praising the Lord. She caught the woman coming down the aisle out of the corner of her eye, and she automatically moved to make room for her, not thinking that perhaps the woman preferred another seat. The woman, walking slowing down the isle, looking tattered and worn, saw the gesture and immediately responded, by sliding awkwardly into the seat.

All eyes were now on the woman and Mel, as Mel smiled and handed the woman her worn hymnal. There was a rush of whispers and the Pastor hearing all the flurry of voices in the middle of the worship, went "Ahem," clearing his throat and hoping to bring order back to the service quickly.

The woman accepted the hymnal and proceeded to sing in a lovely voice, steady and lyrical for an elderly person. It tickled Mel, because the woman's voice and attire did not seem to go together. She seemed to be wearing clothes that had not seen water and soap for a long time and Mel being meticulous about her

attire was taken back by the way the woman looked. She had been taught by Mom-Mom that we are all God's children and how we dressed is not important in God's eyes as it is in ours.

The woman smiled at Mel and proceeded to look sheepishly at the rest of the congregation, but she kept singing and finally the stir among the people ceased and the service went on as usual.

Mom-Mom went directly to the woman after service and asked her who she was, did she have a place to stay and would she care to come to their dwellin' for mid day supper. The woman was startled by the hand of hospitality offered. She timidly responded with a yes, if it would not be any trouble for the family.

All the family jumped into the buggy and after the older woman was seated, the horse responded with a jaunty gait as if he knew that he was carrying someone special.

As they approached the dwellin' she told them she thought their place was lovely, noticing the flowers and small trees that Mel had planted. Mom-Mom, one to always give credit where it was due, told her that Mel had decided to fix the yard up and had done a mighty pleasin' job fer sure.

The meal was quickly put on the table, for they had been up early, as was the custom in their home, and to put another place at the more than ample table was no effort. The entire family made every effort to make the woman feel at home, and she soon began to tell them her story.

"She told them she came from a well to do family, but had married not the man chosen by her family, but the one she loved. Her life was graced by deep affection, and several children, before the plague took her precious husband to God's bosom. She was a hearty person and she managed to run the homestead with the help of her children. The years sped by, the children married and the homestead was eventually sold. She came by wagon train these many miles to find a place to rest until she went to be with God and her husband Matthew. Her money was running out and she still had not found a home. She had come these many miles to full fill a vision she and her husband shared many years before and she wanted to do this in her husband's memory. Her children had been up set by her choice of destination but she having a strong willed natured went anyway against their better judgment. She had been fine in all her travels until she had been a victim of some dishonest people that took advantage of her kindness and took all the money she had left leaving her destitute' That was when she decided to go into the little church seeking refuge."

Now let me tell you, all the family started to speak at once to give their opinion of how to solve this great dilemma, but Mel was the one who gave the clear-cut answer to the whole problem.

"I am thinking that this woman be needing not just a home, but she will be needing good friends and I am feeling in my heart we are the ones she be needing." At this the woman smiled, but kept silent, for she knew Mel had more to add, and she did. "If you can remember the place where I found the ring that graces Ma's finger, you'd also can remember the place is in good shape, but needing cleaning and some small repairing. Now our men folks are good at fixing things and we women just as good at fixing things purty. All she needs are simple things for the place and we can be getting them easy enough by appealing to the folks at church."

All the family agreed that the cabin she referred to was a wonderful choice and a wonderful way to meet the woman's needs.

Everyone was up bright and early Monday morning and it was a mighty eye pleasing thing to see how the people met and put things right for the needs of the stranger that came to their church only the day before.

By nightfall the dear sweet woman was in her own home and as she dropped to her knees she asked God in Heaven to bless all the folks that helped her to find a safe haven.

Mel lay in her bed, thinking about the day and all the happenings. Before she feel asleep, she made sure that she thanked God for the opportunity to know the woman, help her and to be serving a great and wonderful God.

1 Cheat!

Although her back and fingers were tired, Melinda sighed with relief and joy when she had sewed the last stitch on her first homemade quilt. Mom-Mom had been more than an adequate teacher, instilling in Mel not only the desire to do good work, but to feel personal satisfaction in doing whatever she did, for the glory of God. Mom-Mom was quick to remind Mel that all good things come from God and He should always be the first to receive not only the thanks, but also the glory.

She folded it carefully, putting it in the chest Da had made for her, because she always put her best things in there. One reason, for safe keeping and secondly, because it pleased her so much to have something to call her very own. This chest was her's alone and the whole family knew it and honored it.

She went rapidly down the steps to tell Mom-Mom and Ma, and she was quick to remind them of the big State Fair that was being organized the very moment that they were speaking about it. One of the reasons she was so concerned was the fact that her quilt was an entry this year. Sore fingers or not, she was determined to enter and if she had anything to do about it, win hands down, for sure.

The day of the fair was God's gift. The wind was blowing quietly, and the rain had quit a few hours ago. The grass and trees were a glowing green, and soft clouds covered the sky, looking like puffs of cotton hung there. Such a day! Such an event! Certainly enough to thrill the heart of every man, woman and child for miles around.

When the quilt competition had ended and judges had awarded the ribbon to Melinda, she had mixed emotions, for even though she had hoped she would win; she still was surprised when her name was called.

Within a few days of the competition, Mrs. Muldoon came to the dwelling and after sitting her self down, proceeded to ask Melinda how she had the nerve to enter someone else's work as her own. When Mom-Mom, Ma and Melinda had caught their breath after such a sudden unfair accusation, they all started to speak at once. Mrs. Muldoon looked annoyed and Mom-Mom knew she needed to take charge of this high voltage situation.

"Everyone please be quiet, fer I need to be speakin' and you need to be listenin' real careful, and you Mrs. Muldoon, especially. You be comin' into our dwellin' and accusin' our Melinda of lyin' about the quilt she entered bein' her own work. I want you to be knowin' that every square, every stitch, even the design was the work of her own hands. Iffin' you be thinkin' my Mel be cheatin', you need to be tellin' her you are sorry, fer this child is not seekin' praise fer her self, but wantin' to show other girls like her that to work fer God and to do yer best work is fer everyone. Just because a child wins over an older person, does not mean that child be cheatin'. Anybody can excel at anythin' iffing they give God the glory and work, aimin' to do their best. You should be ashamed Mrs. Muldoon to come in our dwellin' and be hurtin' an honest and hard workin' girl like our Mel.

Mrs. Muldoon, rising from her chair, looking embarrassed and flustered beyond recovery, cleared her throat and going toward Melinda, told her that the work was in her eyes too fine to be the work of a child. Many of her friends after many years had only perfected their work lately and she really felt justified in making her complaint. She told them that she felt badly about what she said, because she felt that her judgment was harsh and uncalled for, and now that was settled in her mind, would they forgive her?

Melinda, getting up from the chair, went to Mrs. Muldoon and warmly wrapped her arms around her neck, kissed her gently, and said, "Mrs. Muldoon, my Mom-Mom is my teacher and her being so good at quilting made sure that I did it the right way. I know that many could be seeing my work as adult work, but I be telling you Mom-Mom would not be putting up with shoddy and clumsy quilting from her kin, not matter what. So I learned early on to do my best work, to show Mom-Mom I respect her and to be listening real good to her instructing me. I won the ribbon, because I deserve it in truth. God Himself blessed me because I set to

be blessing Him, by my work and attitude. I hope you be feeling better about all this. We want you to be peaceful in your heart before you be leaving our dwelling.”

With tears in her eyes Mrs. Muldoon told them all that she felt peaceful, by all means, and that she learned a big lesson in jumping to conclusions before you get all the facts. She told them she admired the family for their honesty and directness and she would tell other women that felt as she did, that all had been unfair and she was glad Melinda had won and that she hoped she would enter again, but wondered with her beautiful work if anyone else would have opportunity to ever see a blue ribbon again.

With this comment all laughed, Mrs. Muldoon, the hardest, and with good byes being said by all, Mrs. Muldoon left smiling as she went down the path toward town.

Melinda climbed to the loft and tenderly put her ribbon on top of the controversial quilt, and looking to Heaven, blessed God, blew Him a soft kiss, and went to feed her horse, happy to put all behind her, and get on with whatever she would do next, in her interesting life.

1God's Ways

Because the morning was so cold and frost covered the windows, Melinda decided to pull the quilt tight against her face, stay in bed and daydream. Thanksgiving was now a week behind her and with Christmas coming so soon, she felt she needed to get serious about her wishful thinking for the holidays.

She had just settled back on her pillow, when Mom-Mom came in the room and asked her how long would she be staying in her bed. All healthy and mindful folks were up, dressed and getting about their chores. Melinda, feeling put upon decided to ask Mom-Mom why could she not stay bed bound and still be considered well? All she wanted to be doing was daydreaming about the coming holidays and why was that being lazy?

Mom-Mom did not want to be putting a pall over her thinking good things, but she was quick to be telling Melinda that too much daydreaming was bad for the soul. Many times our wanting and getting were far apart.

“Mom-Mom, do you think I will be getting the sled I be hungering fer?” Melinda asked as she threw the quilt aside and got to putting on her under things, and reaching for her dress and long stockings.

Mom-Mom looked her carefully in the face and told her “Mel, darlin' this is what I be tryin' to impart to ya, that times be bad about now, and money bein' short, Christmas for our house be mainly good cookin' and fellowshippin'.” To Mel,

this was not good news and she was being hard put to keep the tears from running down her sweet cheeks, but she was one to be trying to understand all Mom-Mom told her and this was no exception.

"Mom-Mom are we poor?" she asked. At her question, Mom-Mom who was heading out the door, spun around, and knowing Mel needed a proper answer asked her to sit on the bed with her and she shared these thoughts.

"Many people be thinkin' money be makin' folks rich, and because there be no money, there be no riches. Mel, precious girl, this be not God's way of thinkin'. Money is a tool, used to provide, but riches be things of the heart and soul. Would you be wantin' a sled or would be wantin' strength of the Lord, or perhaps courage in a trial or wisdom fer makin' decisions, or love fer others, or hope when all seems lost? You are needin' to be knowin' that the gifts of our wonderful God can't be gotten with money, but are riches greater than any earthly king's treasury. Money has never, nor will ever give inner peace to a troubled and hurtin' heart, dear girl, like the presence of God will."

Melinda had to be mulling these words carefully, for they now shattered any hope she had of seeing her desired sled on Christmas morning.

After her chores were fully done and she asked to go outside so she could be thinking upon Mom-Mom's words, she bundled herself against the cold. Shutting the door she went to her thinking place in the barn and sat a long spell pondering. It was easy in the humble surrounding of the barn with the simple stalls and no trappings of the world to distract her, to dwell on the humble circumstances of the Christ Child and His family. Somewhere in her heart, she opened herself to God and allowed His grace to be showing her that Mom-Mom did speak the truth. She vowed to remember these words spoken to her in love.

Christmas after that time never was associated with money and possessions, but was always being thought about as family, peace, harmony, joy, hope and love. Melinda was seeing through the eyes of God, that many rich were indeed poor, and many poor were rich.

The yearned for sled came the next year, when the crops were more bountiful, and Mel knew why God had her wait for that extra year. She had learned a lesson, a standard of life that stayed with her all her years and which she passed down to her family. She realized the gift of the teaching and she knew now the riches of the gift of love and wisdom Mom-Mom had passed down to her as a legacy.

"I don't care how much you be mad at me; I won't be leaving my tree." With this being said Melinda stormed out of the room and went to her quiet place. She was so angry at first that all she could do was fold her hands across her chest and say, "Oh, oh, oh, I'm so angry I could spit." Tears of mixed emotions surfaced some for her helplessness in the situation and some for her regret that she allowed herself to be so angry at the ones she loves so much. "But they know I love that tree, for didn't I plant it myself, and didn't I put my first swing on it myself?" The questions somehow did not help her grief at the news that they were all moving into town in a few days, and she would have to leave her beloved tree for someone else to enjoy.

"Well, I'm getting mighty hungry, so I'm thinking I better be getting back to the dwelling and feeding myself." With this she left and ran across the yard, stopping only once to pet the newest puppy their favorite she dog had just produced barely a month ago.

Ma and Pa were sitting at the table with Mom-Mom and Da, brothers Jeff, Tom and Christian, and they all looked up when she entered, smiling at their rebel sister, daughter and granddaughter. They quietly told her to sit and eat, for her attitude did not change the decision to move to town. They tried to impress upon Melinda that her Pa could provide better for the entire family with the new job at the mill. They also wanted her to have better schooling at the new schoolhouse built just a few short blocks from their new home. Then they told her there were many trees on the property. Of course she would have known this if she had gone to see the house when the entire family had gone, but, no, she was too angry to venture to see it for herself, so all she could do was have them tell her.

By this time, Melinda was fit to be tied, for they could not see that all the trees in the world, even if an entire forest of trees were there, they still would not be her tree.

Melinda could barely eat, and so when she left the table so abruptly, her Pa told her to go to her room and vent her bad feelings there, but not to do it in front of the family and make their wonderful move blighted by her cantankerous attitude.

Mom-Mom had been quiet through all the weeping, correcting and general upheaval, but she felt led to speak her piece, which if you asked any family member she was never hesitant to do before, so why not now. One thing though, they respected her knowledge of the word and her wisdom, gleaned from years of being upon this earth and facing many trials, with faith and dignity. So, they all looked at her and said, in unison, "Tell us what you think, Mom-Mom."

'We are all thinkin' of what the move will mean to us personally, for we all know that good will come from this here move for each of us, but Melinda is not seein' the good, but that she must leave her favorite tree and she's hurtin' with the

partin'. I have a suggestion that my help her to be willin' to leave but I need your help. Will you do it?" With this said she shared with them what she thought might do to lessen the hurt to Melinda. And this is what they did.

The next morning, the day before the move to town, they all sat at breakfast. Mom-Mom had called Melinda to come and be partaking of the fine vittles, for their last breakfast in the old homestead, so endearing called the "Dwelling." When our sorrowful little gal entered the room, she saw everyone with wide smiles, and wondered how they could feel so happy, when her heart was purely breaking.

"Yes, Mom-Mom, here I am, just like you be asking me to, but I'm not happy like your are, to be going. I am telling you all though, I was praying up a storm to my wonderful God, and I feel He is telling me good is going to be happening to me."

Mom-Mom then proceeded to tell Melinda that they had a mighty fine surprise for her and to shut her eyes and wait.

When Melinda opened her eyes again, in front of her was a fine, healthy and abundantly budding tree. But not any ole tree, but a shoot from the tree that she loves so much. Her Pa had gone out and looked that grand tree backwards and forwards until he found a sturdy sapling growing from the very tree itself.

Melinda looked around the room, and all she could see were smiling faces, and with great joy in her heart, she surrendered to the move, knowing that God had found a way for her to move without having to leave all behind. He had found a way to take that time of her life and the joys it held for her, along with her. With tears of gratitude, she kissed every one of her family and the very last thing she did before leaving the room, was hug the tree and send her Heavenly Father a kiss.

1Brooding Place

Melinda's life was a startling revelation of contrast. It did not take her long to realize in her new home, with her temperament, that she lacked a *brooding place* and decided that this would never do. No sir, not for a very long time. Now anyone must know that everyone needs a place to let off steam. A place to talk to Almighty God and be able to say how you honestly feel, not being heard by every Tom, Jeff and Christian. Well, she thought, I shall go to Mom-Mom and fix this oversight in a very big hurry.

"Mom-Mom, where can I go to speak to my heavenly Daddy, and not being heard or interrupted by all the prattle and rattle of the world?" She felt confident that Mom-Mom would help her for she always did have the "Wisdom of Solomon." ‘

Mom-Mom, who had been peeling those great, fresh out of the ground potatoes, carefully rinsing dirt off first, turned around and looked at her Melinda and said, "Lindy, let me tell you what I been a thinkin' of late. I be knowin' that you be missin' a great deal of things you be used to. I feel sad that you be sad. Knowin' your great need fer broodin' space and realizin' that you are a tryin' to be gettin' closer to the Almighty lately, I been speakin' to yer Ma and Pa. We come to an agreement that you should be usin' the small room in the attic. You be realizin' child that it be cold in winter and hot in the summer, but it will be yours fer the askin'."

Melinda grabbed her Mom-Mom by the neck and giving her a real tight squeeze, she ran to the attic to stake her claim.

"Dear Lord," Melinda prayed as she started up the steps to the attic, "You are listening to the prayers of a little girl again, aren't you? You are hearing that I need a place to be speaking of the things of my heart, things I can't be telling everyone. Dear, sweet, Heavenly Daddy, how can I tell you how much I be grateful for your thinking of me., I know it's hard for you be tolerating me sometimes for I can be a trial to everyone at one time or another. You are so good at bearing our faults, and be helping when we are needing and hurting. I am so glad we met when we did while I was young and having time to really be getting acquainted good. Thank you again for your loving me." With this said, she went down the steps and told Mom-Mom that she chose the southeast part of the attic, for her new sapling sat just below the window and she could see the church steeple near by and it made her feel that her place was almost a part of the church itself.

During the next couple of weeks she acquired furniture for her "home church" as she named it, and before long it was a place to be envied. It held Mom-Mom's old rocker (for last Christmas, the family gave Mom-Mom a beautiful new one, padded and so comfortable, for one so deserving) and a small table, a desk for her writing in her journal, a chest for her private collection of "things" and a bookcase for her library, containing books that elevated her mind above the mediocre. There should be first the Bible, always, then those books that kept her mind on "*whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think of these things.*" (Phil. 4:8)

With her new "home church" all set up, Melinda began to realize that change may vex the soul, but the spirit could always find a home, no matter where, because God traveled with you, moved with you and dwelled not only with you, but in you. Now, how could it be mattering what house you live in, if your Lord God is wherever you are, and what more could you ask for?

1 Growing Up Is Hard To Do

When the sun first moved across Melinda's eyes, she awoke, pulled the covers over her head and had just about decided to stay-a bed when she remembered her day was already spoken for. She had promised her very good friend Melanie that she would take a walk with her and she was not one to go back on her promise.

The weather was chilled but held the hope of a warm, delightful day because it was now mid-May in the mountains and although the nights were still cool, the days were warm and lovely. Melinda put her feet on the floor and with a brief brrrr; she jumped out of bed ready to face the day. She quickly dressed and hurried downstairs to get her chores done, have an ample breakfast fortifying herself for what ever the day would bring. When she was ready to go, she went to each family member, said her good-byes, kissed them and grabbing her shawl, left to meet her friend. As she went down the path, she always looked back, thanking God for her home and family.

When Melinda saw Melanie, she was surprised to see how much she had changed since the last time they saw each other. Melanie was eight months with child and looked every day of it, which made Melinda smile, for Melanie was always so small and thin. But she had to admit the prospect of motherhood did make her friend more beautiful, if that was at all possible. Melanie was trying to run to her friend, but was hindered greatly which caused Melinda to laugh. They both were doing just that when they met head on and wrapping their arms around each other hugged and kissed and nearly threw themselves on the ground. Melinda told her friend that she better be careful lest she drop her youngin' right where she was. Melanie laughed at the suggestion and still kidding and joking, full of fun as they usually were with each other, they began their walk. They had decided a few weeks before, when they made their plans that they would go to the large covered bridge that crossed Miracle Creek. They already knew that the budding trees and vast array of flowers that adorned the meadows was very beautiful this time of year. This, to them made the long trek worth the time and trouble. Because the two girls enjoyed each other so much and the scenery was so beautiful, neither was aware that they had gone so far. Suddenly Melanie had a very sharp pain and wisdom told her that the little one had decided to come now and there was no turning back.

Melinda had to do some quick thinking and her memory served her well. She remembered a cabin nearby and she knew they had to go there and quickly. Melanie was already barely able to walk because of the pain. Putting her arm

carefully around her friend she held her up just long enough to gently place her on a chair when they arrived at the cabin. Melinda began to frantically search the trunk at the bottom of the bed for something to put on the bed. It had been unused for a long time and it was not clean enough to put an expectant mother on. She found a large, clean beautiful comforter which she decided to use only because of the immediate necessity. When she had placed Melanie tenderly on the bed she made every effort to make her as comfortable as she could. It was only a short time later that she delivered a robust baby boy, one that announced his arrival with a loud yell, causing Melanie and Melinda to laugh and cry at the same time. Just moments before Melinda had looked into her friend's eyes and had seen fear, and she was wise enough to realize Melanie needed her husband, mother and Dr. Reed in attendance, not a frightened teenager. Melinda had the foresight though to look for something to put the new baby in, so she looked in the trunk and found some flannel, which she then placed around the squirming baby. Because of her joy, the new mother decided to name the baby right then and there and she told Melinda that she chose the name John Matthew from the Bible. This pleases Melinda greatly and she told her friend that the name was mighty fine, mighty fine indeed.

With the birth over and Melanie looking and feeling well, Melinda was so grateful to God that she knelt by her friend's bed and told God that she was glad that He heard her fervent prayer. Before the birth she asked Him for strength, faith and wisdom and would He please hold her hand and make certain that she did all the right things so she would not hurt Melanie or the new one. When Melanie heard Melinda's prayer all she could add was Amen.

It was now in Melinda's heart to get news quickly to Dr. Reed and the Prentiss family, so she asked Melanie if she could stay alone long enough for her to get the Doctor and a buckboard so they could get the family home to their loved ones. The last thing Melinda did just before she left was to put the flannel wrapped son of her friend on his mother's chest to sleep and be comforted. Just as she laid him down, they watched as John's little mouth went on a searching expedition and he gave a precious sigh as his little mouth found his mother's breast and he began to suckle. As Melinda went out the door, she saw Melanie draw the baby close and close her eyes, now filled with grateful tears.

When Melinda arrived back at the cabin, they found the baby and mother fast asleep, snug and warm, and perfectly fine. Even though the doctor and Melinda spoke quietly, Melanie woke and thanked the doctor for coming to get her and John. Melinda decided to share some news she had heard only a few weeks before. It seems that the family that owned the cabin had been expecting their third child and the mother was preparing for the arrival by sewing all the clothes and things necessary for a small baby. Just before the baby was due an unknown

sickness hit the mountains which quickly took the mother and her baby before it could be born. The bereaved husband took the other two children and left the cabin just the way it was and went to parts unknown.

Melinda opened the trunk and lifted out some beautiful hand made clothes that she had seen when she took the comforter for Melanie, when they had first arrived. Melanie took the clothing and quickly dressed little John. She was so moved, that she knew if she spent too much time to think about it, she would break down. She now wanted to hurry home to her husband and family with her new son.

1Here's Pie in Your Eye

As always, when Melinda was making pies for the family, she managed to get flour and lard all over the kitchen. Her Ma never could seem to understand that she do not choose to be messy, she just was. This particular day, the pies had been put to cooking and she was starting to get to the cleaning, when Ma called to her.

"Mel, come in here please and help with Christian." Land sakes, being partial like she was to Christian, her youngest brother, she made a bee line for the door, wiping her flour covered hands on her smock as she walked to where Ma and Feller, (the nickname she lovingly gave Christian), were.

Now, it must be clear that her Ma was dead set on neatness and she knew better than to leave a shower of fallen flour on their freshly clean floors. Her Ma says neatness is no accident, but diligent work by those set in their minds to be purposeful. Melinda's Ma was not only neat but very smart besides. .

Mom-Mom, her Ma's Mama sure was a good one for neat, and I can still hear her say, "Melinda, see that you set your mind, heart and attitude on important things like neatness, hard work, being kind to people's feelin', speakin' truthful, walking honest and always actin' trustworthy, so you'll never be ashamed for yourself and never be shamin' our God Almighty. If you're these things, some things in life won't seem so fangled important and your head can be kept up."

I'm sure thinking her Mom-Mom and Ma got it right. Life is kinda like a pie;. It don't hurt to have a little crust, cause nobody wants to be stepped on, but it's a lot more important to be full of fruit. I guess what Mom-Mom was really meaning, was keep your whole life neat and ready for inspection at all times, then God be blessed and so will you..

It's now years later and Melinda could not for the life of her set to making a pie but that she's not hearing Mom-Mom's sweet voice calling her and saying, "Gracious sakes, Mel, be neat child." She still gets flour all over everything in her kitchen, and she knows for a fact, flour has a mind of its own. She has gotten much fruit in her life now, and lots of crust too, and Melinda is sure as she can be that Ma and Mom-Mom would be happy that she is saying the same things to her youngins that they said to her. Goes without saying, good advice is worth preserving, for every generation.

1Lindy's Decision

Hard as she would try, Melinda could not get little John out of her mind. She felt as though she had entered a new season of her life. She went to Mom-Mom, talked to her about her feelings and was told to follow her heart. Melinda went to see Doctor Reed and asked him if she could enter school under his guidance and responsibility to become a nurse specializing in mid-wifery. He was thrilled to do this favor for her because he had noted how she had handled the entire situation with Melanie and her child. He felt she definitely had a future in medicine. Melinda was very excited about this turn of events in her life and decided to use her education to good advantage and take English as part of her curriculum. Her family felt happy about her decisions. They were quick to tell her of their approval.

Melinda had recently met a young man who put a twinkle in her eye. She began to think of her becoming of marriageable age and wanted to be certain she would not shame herself or a new husband with improper English. Of course it did not hurt her situation any that the young man who put the twinkle there was a young Doctor she met through Doctor Reed.

Melinda went through school with great ease, for she had a heart for the matter and also a good mind, helping her to excel in all her subjects. It wasn't long before Doctor Reed called upon her to assist at births. He found Melinda not only well schooled but he saw her heart was very tender. She put the expectant mother's at such ease, the births went quicker than when he attended alone. The thing that blessed Melinda the most was the way the young Doctor would assist Doctor Reed with his family practice. All the town people learned to love him and looked forward to him coming to their homes. The children would run to him if they met him on the street showing loving displays of affection for the one they informally called "Doc". Because of his age and position in the town, no one ever called Doctor Reed anything but Doctor Reed as their way to honor him and his long service with them. "Doc" in the mean time became very important to the town and a special person in the life of Melinda.

Melinda had attended many births, each one a joy to her. But one day an unexpected and frightening experience happened and it shook her to the bone. It upset her so much that she began to doubt her calling as a mid-wife. Lily Muldoon, who lived quite a distance from the homestead, had a sudden and violent birth, not anticipated by her husband or Doctor Reed. When it came time for her to deliver, suddenly the dreaded and unexpected happened while Melinda was attending her. The baby, because of the quickness of her arrival, took a turn for the worse and died before anything could be done to save her. Melinda quickly fell to her knees and cried out in grief for the loss of the baby and for the pain it caused the parents. Although she felt the loss so much, she knew the baby had gone to be with God. She asked God to give the parents peace in their hearts and to console them. Doctor Reed attended to the mother and asked Melinda to stay with her until he could speak to the father. He knew what a difficult time it would be for Mr. Muldoon for they had lost another child just a few years before. Doctor Reed knew how upset Melinda was but he trusted her inner instincts. He knew the one thing that would help Melinda now was for her to see Doc, so he sent him to be by her side during the trying time. When Doc came into the room the first thing he did was put his arm around Melinda, held her to his chest and reached his other hand to Mrs. Muldoon, so he might comfort both of them. It wasn't until much later the he fully realized how much he had helped these two grieving women, one for the loss of her child, the other the possible loss of her dream.

Doc decided to take Melinda back to her homestead, which delighted Melinda, in spite of her turbulence of feelings at the moment. When they arrived she thanked him for being there for her. She jumped out of the carriage for fear of showing her true feelings for him, for up to now he had shown no signs that there was anything between them. Melinda ran in Mom-Mom's room to tell her of the terrible event and told her how she felt about her mistake in becoming a mid-wife.

"Mom-Mom" she said. "I don't know if I can ever be a good mid-wife if I cannot face the unexpected things that can happen at a birthing." By this time the tears were rolling down Melinda's cheeks and all Mom-Mom could do was to sit on her rocker and pull Melinda on to her lap and console her as she did when Mel was just a child. After awhile Melinda wiped her eyes and looked directly into Mom-Mom's eyes and asked her if she should give up and not face such a heart wrenching situation again.

Mom-Mom quietly spoke these words into her ear and heart. "Melinda child you are not bein' a mid-wife because it comes easy to ya, or because it pays a good bit of money, or even gives you a big reputation hereabouts, but because you felt a callin' from God. You are there to minister help and to be encouragin' to women at a difficult time in their lives. You felt a need to be expectin' it to be all joy. Well it ain't so, my girl, it ain't so! Sometimes it be a hurtin' time, but that goes

with the job you be doin'. You can't be escapin' the hard times because they be part and parcel with the good ones. Always remember, the Good Lord doesn't tell ya things be good all the time, but He be with ya through good and bad. Now tell me Lindy, had God ever let you down?" Looking up to Mom-Mom, Lindy wiped her nose and told her she could not recall one single time God let her down or she did not realize His presence. Mom-Mom knew that Lindy needed time to sort out her feelings, so she got up from her chair, patted Lindy on the head and quietly closed the door.

Lindy loved being in Mom-Mom's room, especially since she loved sitting in her rocker by the fireplace and thinking about all the things that perplexed her. When they moved the one thing the house had to have was a fireplace in a special room for Mom-Mom and Da. She felt God's presence here like she did in Church, because she knew Mom-Mom's faith was so strong that it filled the room and settled on everyone that entered the door. Today as much as anytime she felt that she needed to hear from God. And so she patiently waited. She must have dozed off, because the next thing she heard was Tom calling her to dinner.

She awoke, feeling peace descend upon her like a warm cloak on a cold day and as she rose to go out the door, something made her hesitate and when she did what she heard took her breath away. *"Child stay where you are, continue what you are doing. I have blessed your hands, heart and spirit to minister to others. Many will be disappointed if you do not continue on the path you are now walking. Your life is about to change. You will reach out to many needy folks and you will not be alone on your journey. I am about to bless you with a husband who will take over for Doctor Reed, who is retiring. I will bless both you beyond your wildest dreams, if you will stay and bless others in My Name."*

Melinda was in such awe that all she could do was weep for joy and thank God by promising to be His faithful servant. She went to the dinner table and shared what had just happened. They were all excited by the event, knowing that they had witnessed a beautiful moment in the life of Melinda. They suddenly realized the dinner had grown cold, but they did not care because they knew God watched over the homestead and them. In their joy they left the table and went to the family piano, and as a united family, they sang praises to God long after the sun had gone down.

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Melinda's Joy (The Wedding)

Life took on a new meaning for Melinda after she realized she truly loved "Doc". He in the meantime came to the same awareness and could not wait until he had told Melinda. He thought the whole thing through and decided to take her

on a picnic on the lake because he wanted to declare his deep love for her at such a beautiful spot.

The day was unusually bright and sunny and the trees beautiful to behold, when they jumped into the surrey and took off to the lake. Melinda knew that the Melinda that returned would not be the one who left. She knew that she was willing and ready to commit her life to a life of obedience and love to the man that sat next to her. As they rode, he slipped his hand in hers and turned and gave her a smile that made her knees go weak. She in turn, pressed his hand to tell him without words being necessary that she completely understood the meaning of the day.

When they were seated on the blanket that she had lain on the ground, they totally ignored the wonderful repast set before them, and with wild excitement in their eyes and hearts they declared their undying love and commitment to each other. They then kissed each other with a kiss that shook them both. Melinda knew that she had met and accepted her lifetime helpmate. She determined at that moment that she would love and keep him in her heart and soul forever, beyond this life into the next. "Doc," offered her his complete love and loyalty, now and forever, asking her to receive his given name Nathaniel Luke Bartram, as her own and for their hopefully expected children, ones that would bless their marriage and life.

When she got home, she ran to tell her folks and the first one she met as she came to the dwelling was Mom-Mom. She ran and scooping the sweet frail woman into her arms, she cried with tears of complete joy. "God gave me my heart's desire, Mom-Mom, ever greater than I could ask for. Oh, how I love my merciful and kind Lord, for His gift of Nathaniel. I am so very happy, I feel as if I may burst for the joy of it." Mom-Mom told her to go tell her parents in the kitchen where her mother was preparing supper.

Melinda ran to her parents and told them with the same joy and enthusiasm, how she was grateful to God and how much she loved this wonderful Doctor Nathaniel. The parents were overjoyed because they knew of his reputation and knew God had indeed blessed not only Melinda, but also the family.

The couple wanted to get married as soon as possible, for they felt a calling to minister to the very poor, knowing that this group of people were sadly neglected and needed help more than others that they knew.

They found a small but ample home about 10 miles out of town, and acquired it just prior to the wedding, so Melinda, with the help of the entire family, would prepare it ahead of time. After the wedding they wanted to spend a day or two to know each other better, and then started on their mission for God to this wonderful but needy group of others they hoped would become friends.

The day of the wedding was a true gift from God. The sky was a deep blue, the clouds that hung there were white, fluffy and transparent, so that the sun rays shone like soft gold on top of the trees and although the air was cool, the warmth from the sun was like a benediction covering that they knew came from God, making everyone there smile, and causing others to re-think their commitment to their spouses. That day, by the grace of God, more than a few decided to make their marriages better, with the help of the same God they knew blessed this young couple.

When Mel and Nat (the nickname she now called him instead of Doc) had driven to their dwelling, they closed the door to the world and started a new relationship with God and each other that transcended anything that they could have imagined, but one that left them breathless and bound forever, soul, body and spirit. The only sound that was heard as they fell asleep was the small quiet voice of Melinda, as she lay in her husband's gentle arms, knowing she could not sleep before she told God, "Thank you precious Lord for everything you have blessed us with this day. Please be with us always, in all we do in your name, Amen.

Baby for Melinda

Melinda checked the date and was surprised that the year had gone so quickly. Here it was just a week before the first anniversary and she could not think of what to give to Nat as a gift. She loved him so much and knew in her heart that each day gave her more reason to love and cherish him, for as a husband he was as wonderful as he was a doctor. She could see more and more why everyone that entered their small clinic, left shaking Doc's hand and many women and children would even give him a huge hug of thanks. She allowed herself to not be envious of their blatant preference for Doc, because he was so knowledgeable and kind. She knew that when they acted that way about him, it was not to leave her out, but he just generated people's affection this way. It even made her love him more and feel such pride to be his wife and work by his side. She also remembered that many knew her all their lives and she already knew how they felt about her. Anyone who met Melinda had to love her.

Her perplexity as to what wonderful gift to give Nathaniel was dispelled as soon as she awakened from her faint. She had quietly slipped to the floor when they were suturing a young child's torn arm, and her husband, being a very smart doctor and reading all the obvious signs that he saw in Melinda of late, was the

first to confirm that her weird and wild behavior and symptoms were without a doubt a sign of her impending motherhood. Doc took her gently aside and within a few moments confirmed they were to be parents some 6 ½ months later.

When the child was back with his mother, the door had shut behind them and the two were alone, Nat grabbed Melinda, gently, but with deep fervor of heart. He kissed her, pressing her to his more than ample chest and told her again how deep his love for her was and how happy and proud he was that they would soon be parents. He cut her office hours back some, so she would not tax her small body, now that she began to be great with child.

The day that Melinda was to deliver her first born, she was coming down the stairs from their small but very snug and beautiful apartment on the top floor of the clinic, when she was startled by the bell to let them know someone had entered the clinic. Nat was outside feeding the few animals they kept for food and did not hear the bell. Melinda was never known to be slow of movement and as she ran to the door, she lost her footing, tripping and falling down the last step. Her body moved in an awkward position and she immediately felt the jabbing pain that started her labor. Nat came in and heard her in her obvious distress and asked the patient and parent if they could wait until he had attended to Melinda. They said her need was much more immediate and yes they would wait.

Nathaniel put her tenderly on the bed and had someone he knew run and get Mom-Mom to midwife. He knew that although he would want to be there himself, his duty to his patients came first and both he and Melinda knew that. He tenderly kissed her and left when Mom-Mom entered the room. She told him not to worry but just wait for her call, for she would let him know when the baby was ready to appear. He left, confident that Mel was in good hands.

When office hours were over and Mel had not had the baby yet, Doctor Nat, became very concerned. He and Mom-Mom did all they could to make Melinda comfortable, but her obvious distress made them certain that she had a serious problem. After much prayer and vigil, she delivered the baby in the wee hours of the morning, and to their horror, the baby was still born. Melinda knew immediately at the look on the face of Nat and Mom-Mom that something was terribly wrong and she asked them to tell her what was wrong and please tell her now! Nat took her in his arms and told her God had chosen to keep their child for His own good reason, but this was not what Mel wanted to hear. She wanted the baby to hold and cuddle and to nurse as her friend had that day a few years back when she attended at her son's birth. She let out a scream that sent shivers down the spine of her grandmother and husband and collapsed in his arms. Nat gave her a sedative and leaving her with Mom-Mom left the room, to do his own grieving in a quiet place.

Melinda went back to work after a few weeks, against the better judgment of Nat, but she said she had to keep busy. Because he knew better than to argue, for she was a red-head and very determined, he allowed her to work half days to start and in a month she began full days.

Nat, the family and all the people she knew saw the light had gone out of her eyes and she seemed melancholy, but she did her duty by the patients and soon her cheerful countenance returned, but Nat was not fooled one bit, for he was the one who heard her try to suppress her cries night after night.

One spring day, our Melinda fainted again, and the smile burst out on her face as she realized that she was to be a mother again. She put all her love and devotion to good use, by taking obvious care of herself. This second child was determined to be a Christmas baby and she delighted in that, remembering the wonderful day she believed she witnessed the actual birth of Christ in her barn the day her own brother Christian was born. Her baby was a girl and it took but a few moments to know that the child's name would be Christine Noel. All the family loved the name and was much relieved that mother and baby were both fine and healthy this time.

Melinda was very busy as a new mother and loved her child with a devotion that was wonderful to behold. The family hoped the child would ease her pain, but only God and Mel knew it would not be over so readily. She hid her grief from Nat, because he worried for her well-being. She did not want to have anything take away his joy over his new and beautiful girl baby. It would be a few more years before God would help Mel deal with her grief.

Something happened in her life that proved beyond a doubt that God never forgets anything and that He had a plan all along to help her to come to terms with the very thing that she never thought that she could.

It all happened one day when she and Nat went to an auction given by a neighbor. But that is another story.

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5b)

1 1
Melinda Finds Peace

Melinda was having a difficult time recovering from the loss of her first child, even though she delighted in her new daughter with a love and devotion that defied words. She tried to keep her sadness to herself, but her family knew, because when she allowed her guard to be down, they could read the pain in her eyes and they often saw tears come to the corner of her eyes, even when she may not have been acutely aware of them.

One day she and Nat saw a paper posted on the board of the Mercantile pertaining to an auction that would be held that coming Saturday. Because Nat had recently acquired an intern doctor to help with his practice since the birth of their second child, giving Mel freedom to just be a Mommy, he felt free to go with her. He knew that he could be reached for an emergency, because he never went too far that he would not be available if his patients needed him. The little they knew of the people holding the auction was that they were children of a Civil War veteran and the family had come on bad times and had to sell the homestead and all their belongings. Because the family lived so far away they instructed the company that was auctioneering the homestead and personal goods to sell everything sight unseen by them. It always amazed sensitive Melinda when they called it a Civil War, because she always said there was nothing civil about brothers' killings brothers. Nat had to, on many occasions, calm her down when she got in her soap-box frame of mind.

There were many things that were offered, for the couple had quite a nice home and belongings, but because Mel and Nat had such an adequate practice, they lacked none of the essentials of life therefore they did not see a need to purchase anything. They were about to leave when Melinda heard the auctioneer offer a beautiful carved chest about the size of a large jewelry box. She felt drawn to it immediately, not knowing why, but when Nat noticed her keen interest he bid on it and acquired it for her. Nat allowed her to carry it to the wagon and she held it close to her all the way home.

She had to prepare supper when they got home, so she put it in their bedroom on the bed. As she left the room she took a last look before closing the door and felt a breath of air rush across her body and joy filled her heart. Because she did not totally understand the significance of the encounter, she shrugged it off and went to fix supper for her and Nat.

Sometime later, when the house was dark and Nat full asleep, she went to the chest and inserted the key that was given to her when it was purchased. She quietly opened it, wondering what mystery this beautifully decorated chest would contain.

There were a few pieces of jewelry, not good to many, but perfect to Melinda, for she had little of her own, choosing to put her and Nat's money in their home and cherished child. Her eyes fell upon a stack of letters tied with a ribbon, and she took them out reverently, for anything written was much to be cherished.

She was delighted to see that they were letters written in a man's obvious hand, and as she began to read, she felt she was imposing on something very personal. She almost decided to put them back unread, when she felt a distinct tug at her heart and the same feeling prevailed that was in the room when she put the delicate chest on the bed.

As she read on, it became obvious that the letter was written by a soldier that had been away from his darling wife when she carried his child. She delivered the baby and sadly it was still born. He tried to tell her of his grief at the loss of the child, but his greater grief was the fact of his not being in attendance when she carried their child and ultimately losing it.

She read two more letters that spoke of his love and sadness at being apart from the one he so dearly loved. But the fourth one was the one that really caught Melinda's attention, although she did weep through the first three letters and did not feel shame in doing so. Of course it intensified her own grief, but she lost herself in the letters so much that she wanted to keep reading. The fourth letter was to answer all her questions as to why she felt so keen about acquiring them.

Shiloh, 1862

"My Darling Wife,

This letter is being written with all the love I have for you dear sweet woman of my heart, I have tried to tell you of my deep love and sorrow to ease your abundant pain at the loss of our dear son, but I have felt my words have fallen on deaf ears as I have read your letters that recently arrived. There were five that came at the same time, and I opened them in order so I might hopefully see your sorrow dissipate as I read them, but alas, they only show me that you are deep in grieving and my heart aches for you, my darling wife, for our loss. I pray this letter will convey a message that I truly believe came from our Precious Lord Himself, directly to my aching heart. I now pass it on to you with the hope that the healing may begin for you as it did me. I am hoping to come home shortly, but there should be time for several letter exchanges between us before then, so please my darling, allow me to know what you think of these words I so lovingly pass on to you.

I was in a deep sleep when I felt my name was called, but knew that the voice was not a mortal. Keeping my eyes closed, I fell into a very deep sleep again and saw a beautiful wildflower covered hill and pastures. At a short distance I saw a beautiful child about 3 or 4 and he held the hand of a kind appearing gentleman dressed in a white robe which fell to his sandaled feet. He was ruddy and well built as though he had done hard labor, and yet was gentle in countenance. The child looked at him lovingly and trustfully, and I knew the child was happy. The child looked at me and letting go of the man's hand he ran toward me, stopped a short distance away, ran to the man, grabbed his hand, looked at him full in the face and smiled the most wonderful smile. This was to happen three more times, and each time I hoped the child would come to me, because I knew in my heart the child was

our son and I wanted him to run into my arms so much it made my chest ache with longing. But this was not to be. It suddenly dawned on me, dear heart, why I was allowed to see this wonderful scene and what is really meant to me. I knew it was our God allowing me to see the pure delight and happiness of our son with God's Son, Jesus, and I knew he was happy, well and cared for, being healthy and joyful, as my eyes could tell. As he grabbed the man's hand the last time and they walked away from me, our son turned and gave a smile that said it all. I am happy, healthy and free from all harm. I knew we would meet again, and dear wife I gave him freely to this wonderful God that cared for him and also cared enough for us to give us this divine message. I am free of grief and pain and I pray dear wife you shall be also.

I must sign my name now, for I am called to duty. I pray these words are healing and strength to you.

Your loving and concerned husband, Tom"

Needless to say, our Melinda was crying heavily by the time the letter was finished, but a wonderful thing happened she had not expected when she started the letter. She knew God had put the chest and letters in her hands for such a time at this. She ran to Nat and showed him the letter and as he read it she silently cried as she prayed. After the letter was read, Nat took her gently in his arms. As she looked at him she saw no signs of pain and grief. They both realized their child was with all the little ones that left Pa and Ma on earth, to find joy and peace with God who created them.

A while later Melinda was to read a letter in the stack that had been sent to the husband that spoke of the peace she received from his letter and the dream he shared. Soon after, she learned of his death on the battlefield.

Melinda kept all of them in her heart. She thought about the woman's loss of her husband, but drew comfort in knowing that perhaps the woman was comforted knowing that the child and father now awaited for her in Heaven.

There came the day when Melinda knew she should surrender the cherished letters. She was able to obtain the family name and address and sent them to the children, knowing that they were a heritage that belonged to them and to their children.

Melinda was to have another child the next year and she named him Tom.