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The Pot Bellied Stove

In an almost hypnotizing way, the little windows would randomly flicker with the soft light behind them. The stately old pot bellied stove sat in the middle of grampa's living room. Its glow from the many 2" by 2" windows gave flickering glimpses of old pictures and antiques on the wall shelves. I learned from grampa when I was very young the strange little windows were made of material called Mica.

The cast iron stove didn't care if you asked it to share the beginning of your day to drive out the morning chill or warm your weary bones at the end of a busy day. Its message understood by young and old was always welcomed, "Spend time close to me and we'll see the wonders of God together."

As a grandpa myself, I enjoy so much reading God's precious word each day. I'm not sure whether it's to take away the chill of the day's uncertainty, or comfort this carcass after a long day's labor. One thing I have learned so often, is that I enjoy glimpses of God's wondrous written word in spoonfuls not found in sermons.

I don't believe there have been very many (if any) messages preached about the important use of dogs in the Passover plague (Ex. 11:7), what every kitty cat knows (Deut. 23:13), and why God provides for us little by little (Ex. 23:29). Then there is Micah. Micah is an Old Testament book that many fast living folks just tuck in the corner and figure it's contents are only for chastising Israel for their backsliding, years ago.

Well, reading in Micah, about God's plans for my Savior and King to come would have been enough to put MY stamp of approval on Micah. But yesterday evening another little window of truth about my God came in a small phrase as the book closes. The phrase of warmth is, "...*he delighteth in mercy.*"

Long ago, I'd learned that Grace is God giving us gifts, that is, He gives us things we DO NOT DESERVE; things we haven't earned. In contrast, God's mercy is somewhat like the courtroom judge not giving the full sentence to the offender he DOES DESERVE. Over and over I read in the Old Testament of God's disappointment and then judgment against His nation of Israel He loves so dearly.

All throughout the scripture I read of God's desire to restore Israel to its place of honor in the eyes of the world. He desires to show her mercy. But that isn't what the phrase in chapter seven says. It says, "*he delighteth.*" Joy comes to God in mercy. He loves to show mercy to us AND I believe it warms His heart to see little windows of mercy we reflect toward those around us. Tell me friend, do you see the mercy that delights God in the Shed Blood of His Son for you? Can you be a little mica window of comfort to someone around you that's cold, confused, and hurting?

(end of story)

“No Burger” Blastoff

[Theme: Details can be very important.]

Kathi was a mission specialist for satellite deployment one experiment for high school students in Iowa to track solar wind on opposing sides of the earth.

A mental collage went through Kathi’s mind as she unbuckled from her launch configuration. Trying to visualize the expectant Iowa students, the shuttle walls offering countless switches and controls Kathi has spent the last 2 solid years learning, just for this one launch. A quiet smile shows as she recalls those long ago days at home learning what seemed like endless commands on her PC to create school reports and the warm fuzzy feeling in sharing the new things with friends.

The voice of Ground Control’s Mission Director shocked Kathi back to the here and now... even though Kathi’s “here” was 160 miles over his head. Both of them rehearsing tomorrow’s deployment and primary contingency plans. When Kathi had the opportunities back on Earth, she relished emphasizing to the media, all the rehearsing and practicing that goes into astronaut training.

But then something seemed wrong. The shuttle commander started opening compartments in the food storage bulkhead and quickly returned to her seat and began hushed dialog with the pilot.

Kathi’s agenda for the day demanded she’d better get started... and quickly. She knew it was crucial that all her tasks be done today... but in the proper sequence too!

The commander came on the intercom to all the crew and announced, “I’ve just notified Ground Control that in loading the satellites, and all the tools, plus the new condiments for testing, drinking water, etc....we’ve overlooked loading any food. Control suggests we experiment trying the new catsups etc on paper.”

What a great time it would be to find a Hamburger Fly-in.

Kathi last remembers trying to visualize catsup and relish on paper when she was startled awake from her sleep by her mother’s voice, “Come on honey! Get up you’ll be late for school ! Breakfast will be ready in a second.... We’re having blueberry pancakes!”

Kathi mumbled to herself, “And no catsup... a detail that might be important someday”, then grinned and dressed.

(end of story)

No Good to Nobody

The clock was winding down fast with no solution in sight! Or at least in Pastor Debbins' mind, anyhow. He had committed with great pride, to scheduling his church with it's new addition, to be the location for the fall Pastor's Seminar. This also required him to provide the program for the event. That's all well and good, BUT PASTOR COULDN'T THINK OF A GOOD THEME!! A cloudy idea having to do with a symphony orchestra kept swimming around in his head but nothing to build on.

That new addition Pastor Debbins liked to show off , featured several things that evidenced the good planning by the church building committee. One was a wheelchair ramp making the services of love and forgiveness through the shed Blood of Jesus Christ, accessible to everyone. One such ramp-user was Ricky Jepps. How Ricky ached inside. No, not from his birth defects caused from his mother taking Thalidomide. Ricky ached from feeling like a burden, but more importantly, the sickening continual attitude of being ***no good to nobody***.

It was like rubbing salt in an open wound every time Ricky would hear Pastor say, "...people should be involved... make this your church...there's something here for everyone to do." Rick would silently add, "Yep! Except if you're in a wheelchair with arms and legs that don't fit any store-bought shirts and pants."

Now Ricky was good at one thing, for sure. He was a good listener. Thank God the Thalidomide hadn't affected his hearing. Actually, for a 13 year old he had a fairly good memory. You'll agree Rick's range of games and entertainment was quite narrow. Probably his favorite was sitting in front of his computer and without looking at the screen, seeing how many of the church member's names he could type. This was a good game 'cause it used up a lot of time; something Ricky had tons of. The progress was very slow, you know, the defects and all.

Not like yours and mine, his computer keyboard had the "S" key missing and a monitor that said, "POWER TOOLS ON SALE" even when the thing wasn't turned on. But he couldn't complain. The hardware store said the thing was just junk, ***no good to nobody***, and asked Ricky's father if Ricky'd want to fool with it; probably a 'God-Send' since the family's finances were more than drained by hospital bills and the like.

Ricky was getting pretty good with his list. One time he even started adding a couple words after each name that reminded him of what that person was good at. How Ricky wished he could have added his name to the list with some important couple words of what he was good at. But see, ***no good to nobody*** equals a blank space.

What happened just before the Pastor's Seminar isn't clear, even now. But the results are still spoken of by the pastors that attended what was the most purposeful seminar they'd been to in years.

The seminar program progressed through all the expected introductory things, then Pastor Debbins walked to the podium. He was clearly not in a comfortable state of mind. You got the feeling there was a mental war going on inside... a war between wanting to bust out with a bone-deep smile of joy or reach for his handkerchief to hide the tears that were about to show.

Sure his message touched on the new addition. Not so much on the wood and plaster, but on the people, their willingness, and their God-given talents. Boy... It's a good thing Ricky wasn't there to hear all this. Pastor likened the whole process to a symphony of different instruments. His text concentrated on the last portion of I Cor 12:18.. "as it hath pleased him."

In giving a little background into the choice for the seminar theme, Pastor Debbins related, "I found a crumpled up piece of paper on the floor near one of the Sunday school rooms. Opening it up I found the following list." Pastor walked to the overhead projector and switched it on.

After a final focusing everyone saw the list that was found. He further stated emphatically that God who makes no mistakes, (some people say He doesn't make no junk either!) provided that list. A list that became an answer to the theme needed for the seminar.

Now the fruit of that seminar of several years ago is still seen today in church planning seminars. I guess no one will ever figure out why the list Pastor Debbins showed on the overhead didn't have any s's in it. Now tell me, is there a Ricky in your church? Is there a Ricky in your shoes?

(end of story)

Normal Ned

"Oh-oh! Here comes 'Normal' Ned !" one cautioned another. The clicking of the tapping stick used by the blind, like Ned, could be heard even around corners. Besides his stick, he also carried his Bible, with a grasp like unto a soldier's sword. But that's where the 'normal' of Ned ended.

The Bible Ned gripped wasn't a Braille Bible but one just like yours and mine. When asked one day, Ned grinned back, "... don't own a Braille Bible and don't need one!"

The caution continued, "Now Ned will ask you to read a verse or two." Just do it the best you can but don't add any comments, or you'll be sorry." True to form 'Normal' Ned walked in the direction of the whispering voices, then stopped. He opened his Bible to a page and asked one of the two whisperers to read any verse.

That was another strange thing about 'Normal'... He thought of his Bible as a sort-of hymnal. In his mind's eye he believed the greatest music ever voiced, was someone reading God's Holy Word out loud; especially if there were others to hear also... yes it was music to his ears.

Then, as every time before, Ned would run his fingers along the edge of the pages and find the piece of tape. He'd open to that page and again locate the piece of tape on the page and with a caring smile, "Read the verse above the tape, will you?" The reader did as he was told and Ned ended the encounter with, "Now do you see ?"

The caution carried a description, "Though 'Normal' Ned has been totally blind all ten years of his life, he'll insist that you, or whoever is reading the verses at the time, is more blind than he is..."

Tap, tap, tap, tap Ned continued on his mission, to the next cubicle in the small managed healthcare facility.

Turning to another unknown Bible page, Ned held his Bible out to Bates and stated the usual request, "Bates, read me a verse will ya?" "Now, Ned !, hold it a little to your right! you know I can't reach out or come to it!" Ned remembered something about a spinal something or other.

Bates' deep voice finished the verse and watched the blind fingers find the taped edge and then the taped page. "Read the verse above the tape, will you?" The deep voiced verse could be heard by most everyone in the room...ahhh what music... ahhh what a hymnal.

Tap, tap, tap 'Normal' Ned approached the location of Marcy's speaking. Marcy has never been blessed with being able to hear God's Word or any other for that matter. 'Normal' knew things'd be a little slower with Marcy... but so what, ... music's music.

Tap, tap, tap, tap. God's hymnal was held out to Mr. Fenting. Surgery had left him with speech done only with pencil or finger language. "Read a verse for me, will ya?" Shortly the tight squeeze on Ned's hand said, "OK, what's next?" You just had to be there, two holding onto God's Word; one can't see and the other can't speak... oh, what a choir they are.

The fingers found the tape, "Read the verse above the tape, will you?" A moment later, 'Normal' felt Mr. Fenting raise the hand that held the tapping stick high in the air with a stance never possible on Ellis Island.

You'll want to know when the whisperer read the verse above the tape you heard, "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

Marcy was the only one in the room that couldn't hear her own halting words that appeared above the tape, "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

God's Word, beyond vocal cords, was Fenting's heart scream, "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

He always finished with, "Now do you see?"

Ned's 'visits' are slowing these days, a condition of the AIDS virus he was born with...and a reminder to the ten year old, that time is running out fast.....

Normal Ned's question for you ...

"Want some tape?"

(end of story)

Only Small Potatoes

He was only small potatoes. No – you don't understand. Wally was about the same height as most of his fellow teens. But it really bugged him that he was really just small potatoes. Wally had often pictured himself as sort of a big baker potato, preaching sermons every Sunday and making super important church decisions. He would even have liked to fit in as Shoestring potatoes, leading the choir or teaching a class. But no chance, he was just small potatoes. Why, he wasn't even worth getting' skinned for whipped potatoes.

And things were not very good at home either. Wally was faced every day with fussing parents. He couldn't count the number of times he had to get his own supper from the freezer. Pop those tater tots in the microwave and push button 3 – no muss no fuss.

One of the few things that really took his mind off being small potatoes was seeing them through the glass door holding hands. No. Not potatoes holding hands but the people. It was almost captivating. Wally was sure there had to be at least a few couples that pulled into the church parking lot still fuming and fussing then quickly switching on their 'hi pastor' smiles. But how he loved seeing so many couples walking to the door hand in hand. The truth be known,

Wally pretended that his mom and dad were one of those couples walking up the sidewalk like they once walked down the aisle. He would hold the door open and give them his best sweet potato welcome.

Now, one time pastor gave a sermon entitled Discipleship In All Things. The sermon got lots of starch with his 'there's a job for everyone at church to do.' Wally decided that sermon was for everyone except the church's 'small potatoes.'

There was some kind of inner joy Wally got opening the church door for folks. Oh sure it helped the older folks, but it was even more fun opening the car door for the people that came to hear God's life-changing Word. It made the ladies feel pampered when he gave them a big smile. He always got a smile and thank you in return. You'll find none of those at Wally's house. Is it strange that Wally felt he was making them think of themselves as hot potatoes?

He thought, "I guess I can be 'contented small potatoes' making others set their hearts toward God as they come through the church doors." And no he'd never be a fancy French fries Sunday school teacher but Wally began pinning Bible verses to his lapel and had folks thinking scripture even before they got their coats off. My, how Wally had a baker potato love for verses being uncovered and shared.

He felt a tug at his coat one day. The little fellow asked, "Hey mister. Can I help you make the people smile coming in?" Small Potatoes Wally gave a half-hearted nod. Another tug on Wally's coat came with, "What's your name mister? My name's Chip. My buddies nicknamed me 'Potato Chip.'"

The next Sunday morning before worshipers began arriving, Wally pinned a verse on the shirt of Potato Chip. Moments later a lady was walking up the sidewalk. Potato Chip shot out the door and stopped right in front of her. "See my verse, lady? Do you see it? It includes 'faithful over a few things'. Can you find it in the Bible?" He didn't wait for an answer but took her hand and led her to the door like they were king and queen.

Holding the door open, Wally smiled and started his sweet potato welcome. But the only thing that came out were tears. Tears from eyes of 'Small Potatoes.'

(end of story)

Painting Tears

IT WASN'T LIKE HE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE, AT ALL. Many of us would feel safe in saying that painting walls is a thankless job suited only for those who are bored to death.

Jerry was the only person in the church, that Tuesday morning. He had on his painting clothes, and carried a caulking gun, paintbrush, and roller. He was all primed for the task and ready to go.

Walking down the hallway, he could see the wall where all the paint had been worn thin by all the traffic. The corners needed to be recaulked and a couple nails were missing from the trim boards. But his heart really wasn't in the project. His reasoning was, "Well I might as well paint these walls, no one else seems to care about getting it done."

As he stood straight and massaged his sore back muscles, his eyes caught sight of the pastor's office door. Jerry wondered how many tears were shed behind that door, by the pastor giving his best in his ministry but somehow couldn't motivate folks to the needful, but less glamorous, tasks.

The night before, Jerry looked in his Bible for any directions about doing good painting. He thought, "After all, 2nd Timothy 3:17 does say scripture is for 'all good works'; that certainly has to include painting walls in the church." Jerry, the silver haired gentleman, began wiping down the wall with a rag. He smiled as he visualized the Lord really chewing out the Pharisees in Matthew 23:25-28.

The Lord's lesson to them was that of being corrupt on the inside, yet seeming to be 'church approved' on the outside. Jerry finished wiping the wall down and with a grin decided cobweb cleaning was definitely scriptural. "Don't paint over crud," had to be a Divine directive.

Jerry added a couple missing nails to the trim boards and then began taping them for protection from the wall paint. He tried to imagine what it must have been like for the Jewish fathers painting their door trim that horrible NIGHT OF DEATH, in Egypt. Jerry got a lump in his throat as he tried to picture that man, in Exodus 12:21,22, painting his door trim with blood. No, that's not right. He was painting his trim with the blood of an innocent lamb.

The Jewish father probably rehearsed his directives well. 'I am to take the blood of an innocent perfect lamb.' 'I am to paint it on the door trim' and then 'keep my whole family inside', or else they will die. How can you ever explain to folks, that painting not done had once spelled death to loved ones?

Jerry picked up his sandwich and tomato juice and seated himself in one of the Sunday school rooms for lunch. His table grace thanked God deeply for all the Heaven-sent goodness to himself and his wife, Marcy. As he took a first bite, his eyes saw over the sandwich a mural on large cardboard against the wall. It first appeared that four young children each had a section of the mural for their own creation.

The first portion of the mural was painted with a delicate stroke. It showed a bright yellow sun against a vivid blue sky, beneath them stood a house, a tree, and a curly haired girl holding a kite. The next section of the wall painting was a boy with a strikingly sad face. The lines were bold hard ones with mostly darker colors. The boy was missing a shoe and had a rip in his blue jeans. Around the boy there was nothing. There were no clouds, birds, bicycles, or anything to bring a smile.

Jerry thought of all the clothes that people discard, most of which were in better condition than the ones the boy in the wall painting showed. "How can children, here in this land of plenty, hunger for decent clothes?" thought Jerry. His examination almost skipped the tiny bit of paint that looked at first like a blemish in the cardboard. A closer inspection made it clear to Jerry that it was

a tear. "What is it like to paint a tear, especially for a child? How big would the tear be, if the tear were one of mine?" he asked himself.

The retired gentleman on his lunch break should have stopped right there and gone back to painting. But he didn't. He took another bite of sandwich. In one quick glance at the next section of the wall mural, he realized he wouldn't be able to finish. That portion of the mural was just a bit difficult to recognize as a refrigerator. It was painted with the door wide open and nothing inside it but one can of pop, or something that only grownups drink.

Jerry dropped his head. He didn't have the strength to look any more, at a picture of a hungry child's thoughts amidst this land of food within every reach – or so he thought. Only after he left the Sunday school room was he able to swallow that last time.

Jerry's paint roller was put back into action, but with a renewed vigor. As he painted, he imagined himself working on the wall around Jerusalem, with Nehemiah encouraging him on, like in Nehemiah 2:17,18. "I had better do the best on my wall because the fate of my loved ones hang in the balance," were his thoughts. He looked up the hallway and down the hallway to make sure no one saw him wipe away another tear as he worked on his Jerusalem wall.

Friend, treat yourself to a juicy blessing, by doing a task nobody will probably notice. And then see what happens when God notices.

(end of story)

Pair Of Bulls

“IT’S SO WEIRD. SOME MIGHT SAY IT BORDERS ON SCREWY,” thought Ron Baker as he walked toward the condemned building. His preteen son had told him that old Mr. Davis was going to have a pair of bulls in the old store. Ron arrived at the old building to see silver haired Grady Davis in a chair outside. It was tilted back against the wall of what had been a small clothing store of many years before.

As Ron walked up, Mr. Davis made a couple more cuts on his piece of wood he was whittling. His eyes stayed on the wood, but his face started a smile. “I bet you’re another neighborhood parent that thinks I’m putting a pair of bulls in this old building. Is that it?” Ron offered his handshake to the silver haired gentleman still seated before him. “I suppose you can have bulls or goats about any place you want. My name is Ron Baker. I care a whole lot what interests my 12 year old son, Mark. And you are on that list.”

Grady ended his carving and pocketed his well-worn knife. Like short commands being printed from a computer came, “My name’s Grady Davis, but I much prefer ‘Gramps’. Take a look in that little store window. Tell me if you see any animals, bulls, straw, or grain buckets.” Gramps still didn’t make eye contact with Mark’s dad.

Ron did as he was told, and replied, “Other than a couple boxes, it looks empty.” Gramps lifted his gaze to the clouds and stroked his gray beard, thinking hard about what he was about to say. “I seem to recall a story about a loving father – probably a lot like you and your concern for your son. The story says this father had a pair of bullheaded sons. They didn’t want to listen and they didn’t want to learn.”

The wrinkled-skin Gramps continued Ron’s lesson. “The story of this loving father is written in the Bible and was told by Jesus Christ, Himself. This story He told, is referred to as the ‘Parable of the Prodigal Son.’ Mr. Baker, I want you to continue staring into my old store. What do YOU see? When I look in there, I see boys and girls learning all sorts of parables – short stories that help them to learn how much they are loved! Each child deserves to learn about that love of Jesus and the incredible Gift of Salvation on the Cross for all to see.”

“Ron, I want to use little stories – parables – the youngin’s can share with their friends. I use broken parts of computers with the parables.” The light came on in Ron and lit up his smile. He pointed at Gramps and exclaimed, “You’re gonna teach Mark and his friends COMPUTER PARABLES, aren’t you?”

“Well-I-I-I-I sort-of. Rather than raising bullheaded boys and girls, I want to show them how much their hearts and lives mean to God. They need to know their potential, even without fancy clothes or fancy computers. And I want to see this old building alive with a heartbeat for showing the danger of computers too. Since we’ll be using broken and homemade stuff, my silver haired friends will want to be involved too.”

Ron clearly became excited. “Gramps, this is going to be fantastic! I’ll make sure my son, Mark, tells me every computer parable.”

WOW! No time for whittlin’ now! Here comes Gigabyte Gramps and the Computer Parables!

(end of story)

Pancake Syrup Cleaner

I WAS SQUIRMING IN MY SEAT LIKE I HAD ANTS IN MY DRAWERS! Not much past my tenth birthday, I listened to the preacher of my small country church in lower Michigan. I leaned farther forward each time he told more about the God of all Creation scooping out the oceans, wider than a man can see and deeper than he can fathom.

His description of Creation's stars flung farther than dreams can reach, almost took my breath away. On top of that, I learned that God remembers every star and the name He has given each of them. For a moment I sat back in my seat thinking that God would never be able to remember my name, on top of all the star's names. Boy, was this little boy wrong.

The preacher started describing the God-made mountains standing tall and proud throughout all the ages. I almost yelled at the preacher to start the music. I wanted to get down to the altar and get saved. I was ten-plus years old and I didn't care what people thought. I was smart enough though, to know there's a God that loves me and I wanted to do what He wanted me to do.

That Sunday afternoon I was baptized in the muddy-bottom lake not far from our railroad tie house that had a wood shingle roof and limestone fireplace. I was pretty sure none of the angels ever got baptized, but I did! Jesus got baptized and I did! That puts me in pretty good company, wouldn't you say?

On a hot July Saturday, the windows of the little church were wide open. Two piano players alternately played old sing-along hymns all the workers enjoyed as they scraped and painted the outside of the church that sported hard wooden pews on the inside. I couldn't do much, 'cause I was just a kid. But this was my church and I wanted to have fun and do my part.

My job was to help stir the oil-based paint that would become a new coat for the little church of love. Several times I saw the man I was helping, put some stuff that looked like pancake syrup, on a rag he used to wipe the paint off his hands. Little Jimmy (that's me) was smart enough to use the pancake syrup stuff and a rag to clean the paint off my hands and legs. I always wore short pants when it was hot.

That afternoon the church had a linger-longer (potluck dinner) for all the workers. I would take a few bites of melt-in-your-mouth bake beans and noticed my legs start to tingle. After a few bites of ham that tasted better'n candy, my legs were started to burn. After some Graham Cracker Cherry Jubilee, I had to get up and walk around. Mom and dad suspected something was wrong as I started pacing around the church like a father-to-be.

My dad tried to explain that the pancake syrup stuff was 'linseed ...' something or other. It was hard for me to listen while I was burning up.

Half a century later, I still remember that foolish way I tried to clean myself up. Yet today I see people all around me foolishly trying to clean themselves up before giving their lives to God. If you could take a flashlight seven and a half MILES down to the deepest part of any ocean, you would not find it there. Or if you took a spaceship out past the planets and looked behind every star, it won't be found there, either. God has put your cleaning agent on the pew beside you, in the book of love-tears.

In words simple enough for all the little Jimmy's and Janey's to understand, we see it's the Shed Blood of the perfect Lamb of God that cleanses every stain. From our Bible, with its mountain-sized truths that span the ages, we can daily learn courage amid chaos and love beyond loss.

Oh yes, He remembers my name. Joy of joys, He has it written down!
Has He written down yours?

(end of story)

Parade of Parts

The newspaper said, “COME SEE THE ‘PARADE OF PARTS’ SPONSORED BY THE ROCKING CHAIR ROCKETS.” The place would be at the local nursing home next Saturday. The time was stated. And then the article went on to describe some of the many ways the facility worked hard to enhance dignity and hospitality toward its residents.

Saturday brought a really great turnout of visitors. Most of them had visited some of the residents before, but came out of curiosity to see what ‘parts’ would be displayed by the Rocking Chair Rockets. In the center of the activity room were two tables.

At one table sat 7-year-old Dorothy and silver-haired Beulah. Each had a spoon in their hand. First the little girl would use her spoon to pop a key cap off the junk computer keyboard they had between them. Then her friend Beulah would do the same. There were little cupcake papers to put the keycaps in.

More than once, a keycap would pop off and go into the air. Before Dorothy would run after it, she’d see her friend slap her leg and laugh big. After a few times the 7-year-old would do the same leg slapping and laughing. The little one never did figure out why you’re supposed to slap your leg, but it was great fun and that was why she loved being with her silver haired friend.

At the other table Jimmy and Pete were taking the screws out of the big box portion of another junk computer. When the news team arrived a little after lunch, Pete was showing little Jimmy that some screws need a screwdriver that looks like a plus sign (+) and others use a ‘minus sign’ screwdriver.

With a grin Pete said some troublemaker named, “Allen” invented a screwdriver that really looked goofy. Jimmy was taught by the old gentleman to put each kind of screw in its own cupcake wrapper with the caution, “It’s a good idea to save stuff for later use, but only if you keep them in order.”

The cameraman turned on his bright light and began photographing the two table displays in the center of the room. Slowly the camera panned around to record each exhibit along the two walls. One display showed all the different cables and wires found in computers. There was no detailed naming or description of the twisted pair power cables, the data ribbon cable, or any of the other stuff. But each was lined up with great care. It was like the cable display was to say different things to different people.

The next exhibit had two fans, one big and one small. In jerky lettering and also like a small child uses, the words were written, “To keep cool, dogs pant, computers have fans, and elephants wave their ears. But as always, God has saved the best method for mankind, that He loves so dearly.”

Another display had in big letters, ELECTRIC BUGS. The display showed several of the little square black parts with tiny wires coming out of them. To a child, they probably looked a little like centipedes. Continuing on, the camera recorded displays using about every type of part found in a computer. It was actually kind of fun to see so much activity and enjoyment from computers without electricity, confusing words that involved everyone.

Trudy and her silver haired friend, Martha had a problem. They wanted to be a part of the Parade of Parts but everyone else had used all of the computer parts. Martha and Trudy thought of an exhibit that would be the frosting on the cake; the exhibit that would capitalize on every other display. A cardboard poster stood behind an open Bible. A soft pink ribbon touched the Bible reference, John1:3, ended on the poster near the words, “God made computers. Use them for Him and with Him.”

The camera light was switched off and the equipment lowered to a restful position. The cameraman’s eyes scanned the whole room and quickly walked up to the newsperson making notes on her little tablet. “Heidi! Heidi! These parts are not the story! We’ve been recording these exhibits of junk computer parts, but they’re not the story. The news duo viewed each display again, but took renewed interest in a photograph in each and every display.

Every photograph showed two people. One person with silver hair or none at all. That person’s eyes told you of their joy in being able to now use all those left over hugs from the ‘left over’ generation. The other person was always a young person. The expression on the youth showed a boatload of questions with no one having the time to listen, let alone answer.

The next day’s newspaper carried a front-page lead-in to an article of some detail, that basically said, “At the nursing home, that was no Parade of Parts, but a Parade of Partners. Visit them to see how the very old and the very young are bonded, by junk – computer junk.” (end of story)

Person Present

It was the saddest face on a little girl you've ever seen. Maybe she had good reason... There really wasn't anything pretty about her, except her name. "Momma calls me Lotus. She wants me to be her little flower." The little girl continued with, "The problem is – there ain't nothin' pretty about me."

Being little she couldn't do much to help the other preteens in cleaning up the old condemned clubhouse. Silver haired "gramps" noticed that little Lotus was often seen getting a dustpan for someone or putting a dirty rag in the trash. Several times the little lady, just out of the blue, would give a clubber a hug or even an "I love you."

Gramps snapped his fingers with a big smile, like he just got a colossal idea. He went out to his old car and brought in one of those colorful bows like you sometimes see stuck on the top of gift boxes. He fixed the clean white bow on the top of Lotus' head. With a big smile he looked straight into her eyes and said, "There. Now, you look just like a little flower."

The little flower continued her small sincere acts of encouragement to the clubbers.

Not more than an hour later Jamal the African-American boy walked up to Gramps, the club leader. He said, "Gramps, I think Lotus, with her bow on top, looks just like a present or a gift." He went on, "I've seen presents of shirts, shoes, skates, and other stuff. But this is the first time I've ever seen a present that was a person."

Before Gramps could get a word in, Jamal added, "I'm tellin' ya for sure, Little Flower is showing me that person presents are the best kind." Just a few minutes later, Gramps asked all the clubbers to gather around the old barrel and be seated on the floor indian fashion. The old gentleman stood behind the barrel with one arm around Jamal and the other around Lotus.

Gramps had Jamal tell all the listeners what he had just said about Lotus and her little gifts of kindness and how she has become a person present to the club. Jamal and Lotus were directed to be seated with the other clubbers. With his best grandfather voice, Gramps said, "Clubbers, do you know that God is the best at giving gifts – especially person presents. That's right. He loves each one of you so very much He searched all of heaven's treasures for the best gift for you. With no delay, He decided the best gift for you would be a person present. More than that; the person present had to be none other than His only son Jesus Christ."

The silver haired club leader tried to swallow the lump in his throat as he went on. "God knew this person present – His only son Jesus – would require that Jesus be nailed to a cruel cross. Jesus – our person present would pay for our sins so we can spend eternity praising Him."

The question is – do you like to receive presents? Accept this person present and you'll get a mansion and a new body too!

How could anyone reject?

(end of story)

Piano Tuning – God’s Way.

“**Be ready for the totally unexpected**” is what this story should be named.

It was one of those Saturdays that Pastor Jennings almost dreaded. A glance over his shoulder easily showed the church cleaning had been left undone by a member that had emphasized she’d get it done, for sure. Well, you know, things happen.

The mowing hadn’t been done, let alone the trimming, song books still laid where they were last Sunday. Pastor fought hard to keep back the feelings that the people expected to attend services but not participate in the upkeep of God’s House.

The small church house was quiet as a grave yard except for the stiff breeze whistling under the door. He knew from other pastors that the calling God gave to him would certainly be a continual struggle against the powers of Satan. But Pastor Jennings was sure that struggling was certainly doable if you knew you are on the right path.

There on his knees he analyzed his sermons for the umpteenth time. He scrutinized them more ways than a brain surgeon could. It would be a humongous weight off his shoulders if someone in the congregation would tell him, “It hurts here. Can you fix this?” Or if a bolt from the blue would be written by the finger of God on the wall and tell him what to do different, he’d change in a flash. But no answers. The self accusations just kept flooding his mind and breaking his heart.

Oh how he felt so alone and wandering like a ship in a storm with no rudder. He was sure he knew exactly how Job felt with no guiding pillar of light to lead him. If he thought he could get God’s direction by lying prostrate on the floor near the altar he’d gladly do it and stay there till he got God’s answers.

Still in his kneeling position at that country church altar, pastor heard what sounded like someone coming in the door without any greeting. He knew it had to be the wind because his church folks don’t come to the church when there’s no service. A few moments later someone quietly came into the sanctuary and knelt next to Pastor Jennings. In only a few seconds it was clear that a small child wearing soiled torn clothes was there.

Pastor took a quick peek at his neighbor at the altar and saw it was one of the kids across the field that most folks would scorn as unfit for the church. A few more moments went by as the pastor struggled to find words to say to this unexpected single visitor.

Then the little boy tapped the downtrodden adult on the shoulder and whispered, “Mister Reverend. If I pick up all the books and put them where they go, would you give me a hug?”

Pastor Jennings knew the church didn’t have an organ and the piano sure wasn’t in tune. But sure as anything, he could hear Handel’s Messiah played on a deep-throated pipe organ backing up a 40 member choir - all in the shiniest robes. Needless to say, heartfelt squeezin’s came before any books were picked up.

Now you don’t have to believe this if you don’t want to, but the next Saturday young Benny again knelt next to Pastor at the altar. AND kneeling on his other side little Deidra got some pastor-hugs by picking up all the crayons and papers in the Sunday school rooms. As if this wasn’t enough, Sunday morning Deidra had a pretty ribbon in her hair that just happened to match the ribbon on the piano player’s dress. With a proud look on her face as Deidra sat real straight on the piano bench and turned the pages for the piano player. Now that’s a page turner !

God as our witness, that piano never sounded better – even Ol’ “Cranky” Deets with a brand new smile will tell you that for sure.

The question is, how do you tune your piano? Do you do it with trimmin’, taking out the trash, or hugs and ribbons for those who so desperately need them?
(end of story)

Pies 'n Puddles

The monstrous map covered most of a wall in Lisa's bedroom. A nearby bulletin board held several colorful brochures and flyers of every description and many continents. The shelf on the opposite wall held ribbons of merit in food preparation and other school events. A picture frame displayed a newspaper clipping showing Lisa accepting a letter of commendation from a city official. It was for humanitarian efforts in a nearby storm-damaged rural area.

Lisa couldn't count the number of times she'd stood in front of that map and with her finger traced the shoreline of each continent visualizing herself in that area building schools or teaching in them. She asked herself if there was some very special talent inside just busting to make itself known in really important ways. Would her work be so crucial that her every waking hour was spent in some quest that no one else dare to attempt?

During those dark bedroom moments when only God could see, the blanket became a handkerchief for blotting away an ocean of tears. Those are the fearful tears that may tell us God has already shelved us right next to long-ago ribbons and trophies. Is this what is to become of the bright-eyed baby girl that took her first breath 21 years and a month ago? In Lisa's heart of hearts she felt her destiny was to stake her claim on the future in one of those far away lands doing any of a number of things.

She realized she'd made a mistake going to the library that day. The library maps and pictures showed people that needed to be taught how to prepare and safely store food. Others begged for someone to come and dig a water well for their village. Every time Lisa would search out where she could do the most good for the planet, her blanket had to blot another ocean of tears.

Only 3 blocks away from the library on her way home she spied a little girl with matted hair and a soiled dress that looked like it had tangled with a cranky cat. Miss Matted Hair sat on the curb by herself with no shoes or socks anywhere to be seen. The little ragamuffin propped her chin on her knees and stared at the puddle just a few steps in front of her.

Lisa wasn't sure why she did it, but she took a seat on the curb by the little girl and began staring at the puddle too. A few short moments later, Lisa said, "My name's Lisa. Have you ever danced in a water puddle before?" She waited for a little girl answer but got none. The little ragamuffin took her hand and touched some frilly trim on Lisa's dress with such tenderness she must have thought it was a glass cloud. Her hands returned to her soiled lap as her stare returned to the puddle.

Without warning Lisa stood to her feet. She pulled the powder blue ribbon from her own hair and tied it in the little ragamuffin's hair. Not waiting for any comment or such, she took both of the little girl's hands and lifted her to her feet. "Come on. I'll show you how to puddle dance. It's loads more fun when you dance with a friend." With her right hand the little one felt the new ribbon in her hair and then sprouted a cautious smile. The two girls waded in the puddle, then splashed in the puddle, and even danced.

The little one asked Lisa, "Do you know how to cook? I mean, do you know how to make a pie?" Lisa thought about all the different fruit pies she'd made and the one that got her a second place ribbon. "Miss Lisa, I'd sure love it if you'd make a mud pie with me. Would ya? Huh?"

As the two cooks each made their own chocolate looking mud pies there were smiles shared and even a hug or two. Lisa looked close at the little one's pie and saw the letters LISA written on the pie. Lisa asked, "Why have you written my name on your pie?" In a little girl's sweet tone was heard, "Oh. My name is Lisa too. This pie with my name on it is for Jesus. He gets my pie 'cuz he sent you to me and taught me how to puddle dance and cook pies."

That night Lisa turned out the light and pulled up that blanket full of tears, blotting some more. In God's infinite wisdom and the leading of a little child, Lisa learned that puddles come before oceans. But more important is that before puddles come tears.

(end of story)

End of Bundle #07