

Cookie Mountain Missions

The police officer spied a light burning in the back room window of the Candi Curlers Beauty Shop hours after the shop had closed for the day. 'Badge' Jackson took a swipe across his uniform's badge with a coat sleeve and smiled. If it was any day but Thursday, he'd radio his dispatcher for backup before he started to investigate. But Thursday had been Candi's cookie day for as long as he could remember.

Badge gave the scene one more smile and continued on down the sidewalk remembering the long-ago taste of one of those cookies that'd make a grown man forget where his house was. He knew without a doubt what was going on in that back room each Thursday. In the center of the table was a mountain of fresh-baked cookies brightly decorated with about anything that silver-haired Candi could find in her rather understocked pantry above the beauty shop.

It would help to know that Candi Stiner thought of herself, as Badge did; a missionary with cookies and a curling iron. Even when her husband finally went home to be with the Lord three years ago, she never missed her Thursday night cookie days.

Though the beauty shop and Candi's upstairs apartment had door locks, the back room that was fondly referred to as the 'cookie corner' was never locked. About two weeks ago, Candi was making her final preparation for a well-earned night's sleep when she heard a young girl crying in the room beneath; in the cookie corner. Candi had learned long ago that missionaries have no time clock; you respond when God calls... even in a little girl's voice.

She grabbed her housecoat and prayed with every careful step around the curving staircase to the girl's sobbing heart. She'd learned from Badge to always scan the youngsters for any bruises or bodily harm. She saw none. Candy easily produced two medium-sized cups of milk, one in front of Tipper with wet red eyes and one in front of herself. As Candi pulled her chair over close to Tipper she uncovered the cookies and offered the sobbing girl one.

Candi jerked a paper napkin off the stack, grabbed a cookie for Tipper and placed it next to the girl's cup of milk. Tipper reached for the heart-shaped cookie, looked at it through the tears and broke it in two and laid it back down. She pointed at the broken heart cookie and told Candi, "That's me. Just as sure as that cookie can never be put back together, neither can my heart. It's ruined for good. And I'm sure it's my fault, too." Between sobs the bad situations at home ached to be gotten out, onto the table.

The cookie missionary placed a napkin near her own milk glass and said, "watch carefully." Making sure Tipper's attention was clearly on her, she slowly moved the broken heart cookie pieces to her own napkin. She then reached into the cookie mountain and pulled out a brand new heart cookie and gently placed it on Tipper's napkin exactly where the broken cookie had been, seconds earlier.

Then Candi cupped her chin in her hands while resting her elbows on the table. With eyes of love she peered through those tired old glasses at the red swollen eyes in front of her for a few seconds and then questioned, "What did you just see?" "Well...you took my broken heart cookie for yourself and replaced it with a brand new heart for me. Is that what you did?" The cookie missionary put on her best 'yes' smile followed by a world-changin' huggin' session that turned on the sunshine in a little heart that proved to be just the first of many times around that cookie mountain.

To this day, Candi doesn't know how it got started, but a while back, one of the teen girls from church brought in a cardboard box with a bag of flour in it. In large bright letters the words, "Cookie Mountain Missions". It was put in a place not far from the beauty shop window where all could see. Two days later, another teen girl brought in one of those assorted container of sugar sprinkles.

"I CAN'T STAND IT ANYMORE!" was Beulah's shout from under the hair dryer. She stood up and walked over to Candi and demanded in no uncertain terms what that Cookie Mountain box business was all about. Now anyone that knows Beulah 'the Broadcaster' knows that she does more blabbing faster and farther than any radio station could dream of.

Not many days later, Toots the newspaper reporter had gotten so many telephone calls wanting

to learn about the mountain that started in a box, he had to do a full report that even started on Tuesday's front page.

Even before the newspaper mountain box article was published, the box continued to fill up while Tipper began inviting her school friends over to visit the cookie mountain.

The newspaper article, that Toots thought was his greatest work, explained how you build a cookie mountain. It really has more to do with two main ingredients more than anything. The cookies must be shaped like hearts, crosses, churches, and bibles. The boy and girl cookies must have a little cross inscribed right where their cookie heart would be. Some special cross cookies had red sugar sprinkles on its four corners. Those were Candi's favorite missionary tools. She made sure she always had a good supply of them to teach young ladies the real meaning of love; love that only comes from God.

But the most important ingredient each and every cookie contained was love prayers, from the aching tired hands and a heart that ached even more for little ladies who'd someday become maybe a cookie missionary in their own way; to their own children, spouse, or community.

Then there was that Saturday that changed everything.

Candi was washing Beulah's hair that had to have come from a wire brush, when in the shop burst Tipper and her handicapped best friend, Daphne, code-named "Daph". The girls rushed up to Candi's hair washing task, they bumped her and showered a good part of Beulah's favorite dress. Wanna guess what 'the broadcaster' had to say across town about that? No you definitely don't!

The big rush ended with both girls excitedly telling Candi they wanted to help make a Cookie Mountain. Tipper and Daph weren't too clear about their wanting to make the mountain for a church event, or having to do with the nearby orphanage.

Then came a big surprise in a little brown bag.

Because of the event just described, Candi didn't expect to ever see the broadcaster in her shop again... I mean... Beulah's favorite dress ruined; a broken relationship down the drain... forever. Candi had her back to the shop door, dusting the beauty products shelves when the door opened with the familiar little bell jingling to announce the entrance.

Her first appointment wasn't for another 45 minutes. In the mirror's reflection she saw the broadcaster walk in the door with the same determination as Toots on a hot story lead. Beulah walked straight to Candi and placed a small brown bag in front of her. A matter-of-fact index finger moved to her lips, "Shhhhh". And then she was gone.

The unexpected little brown bag was cautiously opened and a surprise you'd not guess with a computer. Only one small object was inside. The cookie missionary pulled out what seemed to be a simple cookie cutter. But an even bigger surprise awaited. Close examination proved the cutter to produce cookie shapes of a baby in a manger!

Do you want to be somebody? Do you want to do something important? Would you like to build a mountain? Or maybe be God's broadcaster with a burden? It doesn't take too much. Some prayer, plenty of ready hugs, and cookie-cutting Christians; young and old. But don't wait; Thursday is coming!

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