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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 'bout me."

Being little she couldn't do much to help the other preteens in cleaning up the old condemned clubhouse. Silver-haired "G ramps" 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?

[~]

Gramps

Smiling Fingers

With so many watching, little Didi was ever so careful to hold the hymnal pages in place but was captivated with the other pair of hands that moved so gracefully over the keys. Little Didi also had for her month of hymn-helping; the "responsibility" to count all the "blood" and "Bible" words, as they'd appear in the hymns that were played.

But those captivating fingers.... Didi decided an appropriate name for them would be Smiling Fingers. Yes, it had to be Smiling Fingers because every time they played, and Didi looked up, the worshipers in the little country church wore big smiles and seemed to forget their troubles for a time; joining in praises to the Lord. Little Didi felt kind-of important in doing her part because the pastor would start his message with all the people smiling.

Before service, one Sunday, Mrs. "Smiling Fingers" used some phrases from an old-favorite gospel hymn to help explain to her little helper that Jesus loves little hands, especially ones that have trusted Him as their Savior. The word counting responsibility was just a bit of reinforcement of foundational pieces of the Gospel message.

Didi's desire more than anything, was to acquire her own smiling fingers and be able to use them at home. How smiles were lacking at home. Daddy just splits wood all day long in the back yard with stooped shoulders and a "what's-the-use" long face. That started just after the coal mine her daddy worked at, closed

down. The ribbon in mamma's hair disappeared about the same time the smiles did.

The next month's hymn-helper was Shawna... A camcorder was definitely needed a few weeks after Shawna began her month tour with Mrs. "Smiling Fingers." At an after service "Linger-Longer" (down-home name for a pot luck dinner) it was easy to hear someone playing the piano in a way only small children trying to imitate an adult, can do.

The scene to be forever cherished was Shawna holding a hymnal open with one little hand, and pretending she had smiling fingers with the other hand. "Benny! You get up here this instant and start counting the bloods and Bible's like you're supposed to," she chided.

Now her little brother Benny, still in three-cornered pants having just mastered crawling figured he'd concentrate on the pedals for now. Why not? No bloods and Bibles to count down here!

Pastor Jeff was taken back a bit seeing the Shawna-Benny duet. His lessons on 'discipleship in all things' was manifested by a brother and sister not even knowing the meaning of discipleship, plus... dedicated Smiling Fingers.

Does your church have any Smiling Fingers?

Do they hold the Bible you read?

Gramps [~]

Granny Sims – Email Riveter

She didn't know what she must have been thinking when one of her chums at her Silver Headers Seniors club talked her into buying one of those email machines. Granny understood just enough about this new fangled gadget that it really was not a real computer but just the email part of it. It was about the size of one of her small purses.

Talker Tillie had come over and helped her get the thing running. Whew! That woman could talk the paint off the side of a battleship. But Granny promised she'd give it a try. For fear she'd press the wrong button and it'd shock her, she would type messages with two wooden pencils. Well, at least you have to give her credit for trying.

Talker hadn't told her so, but Granny Sims decided she'd only use it on Thursdays. She figured no sense in wearing the thing out before the garden was up. All day Thursdays she'd sit in front of the fool thing and wait for it to do something. But nothing. The creepy thing just sat there like an old shoe with no laces. **“WELL THIS IS GONNA STOP!”**

Something you need to know about Granny. In her prime she was the leader of a team of women riveters on war ships. If Granny thought you were a slacker, she'd flip you a hot rivet – at least that's what all her team thought. Sunday night's missionary meeting shook the whole church building. When Granny Sims slammed her hand on the table, you thought there was a red-hot rivet in the air, the way everyone took notice.

“WELL I'M A WAITIN'! I bought this email thing and it's not getting used.” With the same enthusiasm as in

her prime, she took her Bible in hand and pointed at Velma, and demanded, “You got one of these email things! By next Thursday I want you to email me a message! If you aren’t smart enough to think of something, type in a Bible verse!”

She swung around and looked Barney Paver straight in the eye. He held his breath like looking down a gun barrel. “Barney your grandson got you one of these email things. I remember you puttin’ on airs, telling us about it. When I log in next Thursday, I want to see a message from you. I know you like numbers. I want a list of the different light bulb sizes and how many of each are used here in church! If I don’t get it, I’ll be over on your front yard yellin’ you are a no-a-count goof-off so’s all your neighbors can hear me! As for me, I’m gonna email our missionaries with some notes from our pastor’s great sermon last Sunday. He works hard on those messages and I mean for him to be heard all the way to Venezuela!” “Let’s quit committein’ and get doing!” She left with the same determination you’d have getting back to putting red-hot rivets in a gun turret.

Beulah didn’t know anything that would top that, so she asked Ben to close in prayer. He did and they all quickly left hoping not to see Granny before they got home.

A short story made shorter, Granny Sims the Riveter whipped together a team of 14 silver haired emailers that were just about to start getting after the little missions-lovin’ church about 30 miles down the road. Oh. You’ll be happy to know that as of yet, there has been no yellin’ on Barney’s front lawn.

Does your church need someone to rivet some emailers together? [~]

Little Hopeless

Gramps sat all alone in the old condemned building staring at all the walls and corners, with a troubled heart. He had so many times, thought of tearing down the old structure. His heart told him the old building was no more needed than he and his gray hair were.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the door open just a bit with a slow mysterious creak. In a moment a clump of long dirty hair began to appear. Next 2 dark brown eyes of a little preschooler cautiously peered around the door, spied Gramps and disappeared. A few minutes later the little girl peered in again. Without a word, she shyly entered the old building with her back against the wall, opposite Gramps.

Her dirty face, ripped clothes, and matted hair easily stereotyped her as a castaway in anyone's book. The old gentleman and the little ragamuffin carefully watched the other wondering who would move first. Not really knowing why, Gramps slid out of the old rickety chair and sat on the floor Indian fashion, as best as his stiff joints would allow. He slowly picked up a short piece of string lying nearby and started winding it around his fingers like weaving a rug. The little lady watched with increasing interest.

Gramps started tying a little knot in one end of the string and she moved next to him to get a closer look. In tender tones, Gramps said, "They call me Gramps. What's your name?" "Hopeless" came the matter of fact answer. "No. No. I mean what is your name?" he asked while risking a touch on her shoulder. "Mama says I'm hopeless. The lady that sleeps behind the bus station says I'm hopeless. Well, I guess I'm Hopeless. Mr. Gramps, is Hopeless my name or a disease I got?"

Out came a big bandanna from the well worn bib overalls just in time to catch the first tears on the old gentleman's face. In careful movements the little girl laid her head against Gramp's leg and let out a long deep sigh. The weary pained fingers took the bandanna and wiped some of the dirt off the face of little Hopeless.

The old building was so quiet he could hear the restful breathing of a little one searching for someone to care. The stare of

the old gentleman returned to the walls and corners of the old building whose future of purpose seemed hopeless. Maybe the name of the building should be Hopeless too.

The old gentleman's knee was killing him, but what a way to go... sharing restful moments with someone that hurts too. He didn't dare move a muscle.

Maybe an hour later, little Hopeless woke up but was in no hurry to leave the calm caring corner of the condemned building. Occasionally the neighborhood computer club brought junk pieces of computers to the old building that had no electricity. They tried to discover things about a computer's insides. Gramps found an old keyboard. The keycaps were removed, sitting in a pile nearby.

He worked quickly hoping that little Hopeless didn't wander off. Seating himself on the floor near Hopeless, he spread out the letter keycaps and started lining up the alphabet. His heart raced with the thrill of teaching the little ragamuffin, with her messy hair and dark brown eyes starved for signs of unconditional love.

The orange colored sun that forced its rays through the dirty cracked windows was moving low in the sky. With upturned eyes that would melt the heart of any football player, she asked, "Mr. Gramps. If I promise to bring them back tomorrow, can I borrow your computer keys?" The reply, "Sure. No problem." His heart said, "I'll give you my heart too, if you ask." They hugged and each went their own way.

The next afternoon, Gramps was sitting on the rickety chair and little Hopeless came in and gave him a hug that grandpas love, the world over. She didn't have the computer keys with her, so Gramps reminded her of yesterday's promise to return them. She pointed toward the door she had come in. "The bus station lady is here." A middle aged lady with about the same appearance of little Hopeless, cautiously came through the door. In her hand was a discarded bread wrapper with the keycaps inside. She walked up to Gramps and asked, "Will you teach me, mister?"

You can learn all sorts of things with computers, or even parts of them. Try it.

Gramps [~]

Broadcasting a Dream

This has got to be a dream, Verna breathed, while looking high in the night sky. A red light atop the broadcasting antenna faithfully flashed its continual “Stay Away” warning to passing airplanes and maybe a star.

Chills ran up her spine, not from the 10pm dampness, but telling herself that in 37 minutes she’d be sitting in front of a computer and microphone within the broadcasting studio not far from where she now stood. This would be her first of many broadcasts from such a powerful radio station.

Verna tried to picture a little girl maybe a thousand miles away listening to Verna’s words being received through her parent’s barely running radio. Verna decided she’d name this fictitious little lady, Neenah. Maybe this Neenah lived on some remote Pacific island where the electrical generator only ran for 1 hour a day to Neenah’s house.

Verna spent the better part of the 37 minutes reviewing in her mind, all the events God allowed in shaping her life and talents from that afternoon youth rally in Colorado. The rally changed her heart and future immeasurably.

She could still picture herself holding her fist in front of her face. With the glow of the stars in her eyes, Verna spoke at her fist like it was a make-believe microphone. She wanted to flip a make-believe switch and speak words of Heaven’s hope and peace into her microphone (fist) to the whole world. Verna knew she wanted to broadcast God’s simple saving truths across the oceans and mountains. Her heart ached to give Heavenly direction, with carefully chosen words, to simple folks and their shattered dreams.

Over the next couple weeks long ago, Verna’s mom noticed the stuffed animals began disappearing into boxes in the closet and basement. But the teenager’s mom couldn’t figure out what the cardboard box with an old hairbrush shoved in the front of it was for. A junk alarm clock from the attic was inserted into the face of the box. Her mom soon learned that it was a teenager’s broadcasting studio that transmitted dreams made in Heaven. On the wall behind the hairbrush (I mean microphone) were pasted

magazine pictures of boys and girls; big and little, moms and dads; some old and some young. Even a few of them appeared to be from foreign countries.

All those following months of writing down thoughts, stories, and favorite Bible verses on every scrap piece of paper, brought a smile to her face. Verna decided God knew exactly what He was doing, when a school assignment required an oral report of what each student would like to be. Her teacher gave her an A- and told her she had a very mature attitude about wanting to help teach others in simple ways.

Verna took one more hard look at the dependable blinking light atop that antenna tower. She then turned and briskly walked into the real life studio. She quickly glanced to see all her notes were tightly in hand as a fire cracker spirit was about to go off inside her. She took her place in the broadcaster's chair, carefully laid out her notes, and took a deep breath followed by a prayer of thanksgiving to Her God that loves to be bragged about.

The second hand on the large wall clock quickly climbed toward the top of the hour as Verna flipped the "open mike" switch on. This also made the bright 'On the Air' sign begin to slowly flash a warning to spectators to whisper or leave.

As she looked at her notes, her first words, not written but spoken with every bit of intent, were, "Neenah, this is for you, 'cuz God told me to."

About 2 weeks later, Verna was opening some mail when a letter revealed the picture of a little curly haired girl drawn with a blue crayon showing a big smile. The words written with a child's hand said, "Jesus loves me, this I know, 'cuz Verna's Bible tells me so. I'm Neena. My dog's name is Mickey-Mike." Two nickels fell out of the envelope onto the studio floor. They might as well have been the Bible's two mites.

Thinking about Verna, I ask myself, "What does a missionary do? I mean, can anyone learn to be a missionary with... say... an old hairbrush and a cardboard box?"

Gramps [~]

Jungle Hospital Computing

With heart-pounding excitement Neenah walked past the workers. A missionary field hospital was being built right where she stood.

This modest African hospital near the jungle's edge was bustling with all sorts of activity in every direction she looked. It was contagious, the excitement, I mean. One group of workers, putting the final touches on a thatched roof, were singing as they worked. Neenah saw hospital staff already stacking medical supplies in neat rows with great care – and the walls hadn't even been put up yet.

Like each of the Thursdays before, she quietly seated herself under the tree at the back of the group learning how some magical thing called a computer was going to be used to keep track of all sorts of medicines, native patients, and all sorts of things.

Learning how computers help organize things reminded Neenah of the happy staffers organizing the bandages she had just passed not long before. She listened intently and made the best notes she could on the scraps of paper she had found on her every-Thursday walk from her home a day and a half away.

Miss Thompson, the computer teacher from America began noticing a strange habit of Neenah's every time the group broke for lunch. While the others were eating their lunch, talking, and laughing, Neenah stayed by herself and occasionally put one hand in front

of her mouth and took a nibble of something in her other hand.

After some casual questions here and there, Miss Thompson learned what was being nibbled were the total of what Neenah had to eat from the time she left home on Tuesdays till she got back home. Oh yes, her mother dutifully always packed three oranges and a few assorted nuts; these provisions were always consumed in the same way.

On the one and a half day's journey each way, Neenah had to cross a deep raging river. The boatman always took as his fare, all her nuts and the three oranges. That covered the return trip too. As the boatman peeled the oranges and crudely ate them in front of Neenah, she would carefully pick up the orange peels, dust them off and deposit them in her pocket; her only food till she got back home.

That night, in her personal devotions, Miss Thompson reflected upon her own dedication to missions and using her teaching skills in the far away land, but freely admitted to the God that she loved, her dedication and heart for the work, was very small compared to that of Neenah. In all of the teaching she did, in this mission hospital or back home in America, she would never learn how precious a thing it is to some people that they dedicate their computing efforts to God's great commission.

And how did she learn this monumental lesson?
From orange peels.

Gramps [~]

I'm Trapped! - I'm In A Cage!

I'm trapped! I'm in a cage and can't get out Lois sat in front of her machine in high school sewing class. For two weeks now, she and her class were learning to sew pockets on pants, dresses, and shirts. They learned to use all types of thread and material and which was best for what kinds of uses. But she thought she would go mad.

Lois ached within herself to do something important. Though her hands would position the material, and carefully guide it through the sewing machine, she felt so useless, so insignificant. Her mind would continually place her in important jobs like writing speeches for famous people, helping a scientist invent a new medicine, or create a gown to be worn by some movie star.

But the last couple nights were worse yet. After bedtime prayer she had wept hoping to get some relief from the feelings of “I’m a nobody that can sew pockets.” On Saturday, at her mom’s request, Lois took her younger brother Timmy to the science museum to see some new exhibits he needed to look at for a school report.

The most popular exhibit was a person wearing one of the actual space suits worn on one of Apollo moon landings. His helper explained the purpose of all the many hoses, fixtures, and valves to the children as Lois stood back and watched all the attention. The children got down on their knees to better see something the helper was describing about the suit that was below the backpack. Lois moved in closer to listen.

The helper said, “See that little pocket? It isn’t used for anything anymore but it is still attached to every new suit that is crafted. And children, know what? If that

pocket isn't sewn on with the greatest of care, the suit will loose pressure during a space walk and kill the astronaut. That astronaut's life depends on the best efforts of someone with a sewing machine he or she has never seen, or the work that was done." Lois pulled out a handkerchief and headed for a dark corner before anyone saw her tears. In sewing class could she ever have imagined that a pocket could save a life?

The whole matter of insignificance was reinforced two weeks later when Lois' youth pastor shared a message from Matthew 25. The message included the parable of the talents. The weight in Lois' heart was lifted when she heard the pastor read, "thou has been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

Two verses later, the same statement was made to another faithful steward. Even at that moment she thanked God for the comfort that comes from knowing she is saved and from scripture showing us how we can have joy.

Just after bedtime prayer that night, she pictured herself sewing a pocket on the robe of her Savior, Jesus Christ. How important that would be. Serving God with her talents. But she knew the job was not finished. In this picture, Lois took her heart and placed it in the pocket of the Lord's robe.

Will your sewing machine make pockets?

Gramps [~]

Water, Water

“**ARE YA STUCK DOWN THAT HOLE, MISTER?**” came the little girl’s voice. The pain from aching knuckles and 71 year old knees was almost audible as he pushed himself back up out of the hole. The little girl took a quick scan of the modest mission property and didn’t see any helpers with this silver haired man.

It took a moment for his eyes to adjust to the sunlight after staring at those grubby water meter fittings in the hole. His eyes met the most becoming eyes of a little girl standing in front of him with a bouquet of fresh picked dandelions for her mama’s supper table. The sun’s rays filtered through curly hair and for a second made the man think he was looking at an angel... albeit a little angel with a torn dress.

“My name’s Mimi. What’s yours, mister?” “I’m Pastor Ray,” he said while rubbing his hands together to remove some of the mud. He was slightly grateful for the young visitor but was rather disappointed that other helpers, who knew more about plumbing, hadn’t honored their offers to help start the little mission church not far from a big lake.

With all the questions of a news reporter, Mimi asked, “Well, whatcha doin in that hole upside down?” As she finished her question, she remembered her dress tear and tried to cover it up with her dandelions. Pastor Ray noticed the attempted cover up and it melted his discouraged heart. The angel with the torn dress sat on the grass across from the weary pastor.

With a weathered smile he said, “Mimi. In that little white church building with the colored windows I want to teach boys and girls, and their moms and dads, how much God deeply loves them. In fact He loves them just the way they are. That means He loves them even when they have muddy hands, or ripped dresses. Do you understand, Mimi?” Her quick reply was, “Sure I understand what you said. But what I don’t understand is WHY?” In 41 years of proclaiming God’s matchless love, Pastor had never found

himself being asked by an angel “why should He love me... me and my rags?”

The sermon on the grass explained to the little angel how water and soap could wash our outsides clean, but only God can make our inside clean. A mother’s lunchtime call, and Mimi was up and making her dandelion delivery.

The warm bright sun had just begun its downward trip to the horizon as the plumbing pastor was still trying to fix the water problem. He heard someone walking across the small gravel parking lot toward him and immediately heard that little angel’s happy voice, “Hi ya pastor!” He turned to face Mimi and was startled to see something not at all expected.

Mimi stood in front of him not with a bouquet in her hands, but a cup... a cup of water. But that wasn’t all. Behind Mimi was Fred. He had a cup of water too. His smile of expectation kept you from noticing the broken handle. A little older and he could preach a sermon like “It ain’t important if your handle’s broke, it’s what’s inside that’s important.” Behind Fred were three more children in clothes with stains, tears, and missing shoelaces. Donna was the last in the precession. She asked, “Mister Pastor, I couldn’t find no cup. But I brung this soap. Can ya use it anyhow? Huh?”

Mimi got a real serious look on her face and said, “If these cups of water ain’t enough, I betcha God’d give you some of His water over there, don’t cha think?” Most all the children pointed to the big lake.

That evening Pastor Ray sat in his office chair and stared at his study books that covered the whole wall. Shelf after shelf held powerful majestic sermons that detailed God’s indescribable power to use water to destroy and preserve drawn from rocks or even heaven itself. His knees met the floor in thankful prayer for learning today that God’s simple saving love can even draw water from hearts... often little hearts.

The real sermon is to see that His eternal love and provision can come as a big lake... or sometimes... one cup at a time.

I bet you could find a cup.. [~]

I Can't Stand It Anymore!

"**I can't stand it anymore!**" I hear the voice say in the phone receiver. I say, "Hi Nancy, it's nice you called. What can't you stand anymore?"

"**Barb, the suspense is killing me.** Tuesday when I was leaving your house, I happened to glance in the direction of your laundry room and, honest injun, I wasn't being nosey, but through the open door I saw the weirdest thing I ever expect to see....

A TRACT RACK IN YOUR LAUNDRY ROOM!!!

Honestly Barb, how many people do you have go through your laundry room anyhow?" "Nancy.... now Nancy, if you'll listen for a minute I can explain.

You see, Timmy was showing me how he could use his computer's word processor to easily print brochures and things. He set it up and I added the words to our very own tract.

If you could have seen the look on his face the first time he opened his closet and realized I had put our custom made tract in each shirt, he figured I had really flipped. He might think to leave it in the restroom at school, or he could fold it up and slip it through one of those air vent holes in the student lockers going down the hallway.

Well I'll tell you Nancy, I really think when Tim sticks his hand in that shirt pocket several times a day, he's just got to be reminded of his responsibility to witness. And maybe he might even share with fellow computer owners how he did it.

I've also been packing Leo's dinner pail with a memory verse card right on top of his sandwich. Using store-bought business card paper to print them on. Occasionally I would put one of our salvation tracts in his dinner pail. One night at our supper sharing time, Leo told us how he dropped one of the gospel tracts in another guy's open dinner bucket during their lunch hour, and then watched from across the room, praying that the guy would read it. HE DID! The guy also left the tract in his lunch box so no doubt his wife will read it when she repacks his lunch.

Nancy, I can still hear Pastor Robins saying Sunday that every saved person ought to be using their computers and resources for missions. But I didn't hear him say, 'Barb Reynolds, since you're in and around the house all day long, you're excused.... you don't have to do anything.'"

"Barb, I was just thinking while you were talking, that my Trina always has so much homework. I'll bet I could slip a few in her books and she might use them as bookmarks, or for writing assignments or notes to her pals. She could even stick some in the library books she takes back. I'm telling you Barb; I'd like to have a memory verse card for Christian drivers about speeding. I'd tape it to Jerry's rearview mirror." "Nancy, can't you just imagine the look on Pastor's face if we told him we have to refill our tract racks more often than he does the ones in the church foyer?"

Gramps

[~]

this page is for your notes.