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Chapter One

SOME PEOPLE THINK PREACHERS do not need vacations, but my dad's a preacher, and boy, we sure need a vacation! Well, I'm not too sure about Dad and Mom, but Roy, my twin brother, and I sure need one. With going to school and everything else, we told Dad we had to get away for a rest. He didn't seem to pay too much attention to us though.

But pretty soon things changed, because the deacons and the elders and all the other big officials in the church voted to give Dad a "well-deserved vacation." So we started making all kinds of plans.

I guess Roy and I would have been halfway to wherever we were going, if Mom and Dad had not stopped us. I don't know why they got so excited. We were only planning what we would do, that's all.

Of course, it's true that Roy ran right down to the basement and checked all of Dad's fishing equipment, and that I went upstairs and put some of my skirts and blouses and dresses in my suitcase. I think I would have been completely packed, but Mother came up and spoiled it.

"How many suitcases can I take?" I asked Mother as she came up the stairs. When she saw what I was doing, her mouth dropped open like a pelican being fed its dinner. Then she made me go and hang up every dress and skirt again.

"Land sakes, child!" she said in a voice that seemed to mean, How stupid can you be? "We haven't even decided where we're going yet, and you're almost all packed."

"Well, I wanted to be ready," I said. But when she just stood there shaking her head back and forth, I went and hung up all my things again. I guess I was a little over-anxious, 'cause it probably would be at least a couple of weeks before we could go, but I wanted to be sure to be ready.

For the next two or three days, all that Mother and Dad talked about was the different places where we could go.

"We could go to the mountains," Mother said, "that's always so relaxing and refreshing."

I couldn't see anything very relaxed about climbing a big mountain, but since I had never been to the mountains, I thought I'd better not say anything.

Dad talked about going to a Bible camp, but Mother put her foot down right away.

"Sure," she said, "you're supposed to get away for a rest. If we went to a Bible camp, you would be preaching a half-dozen times a day and attending just as many committee meetings!"

For awhile Dad just stared at the table and didn't say anything. Then finally he said, "I guess you're right, Mother. I guess you're right."

Daddy really looked awfully tired when he said that, and Roy and I were almost afraid he would decide to stay right at Parsonage Hill and sleep. But we were pretty sure Mother would not stand for that, so we had her on our side.

But Mr. Elders, from our church, is the one who helped us decide the whole thing. He came to our house one day and told Dad that he had

a little cabin far out in the woods. There was only one other cabin in that whole area.

"You will really be isolated," Mr. Elders said. "If you want to get away by yourselves, my cabin is just the place for you."

I wasn't sure what "isolated" was, but I didn't think I'd like it. It didn't sound like it would be so very much fun for kids. But somehow Dad must have liked "isolated," because from that day on he started talking about going to the cabin in the woods.

Mr. Elders told us all about the funny little mud road that led to the cabin, and how, if we turned in the wrong direction, we would just go in a circle and come right back where we started.

He told us about the two hunters who lived in the only other cabin around there, and about the little old town where we could stop and buy our groceries.

"Oh, yes!" he said, and then he looked at Roy and me and winked. "You children will like the town. There's a root-beer stand and an ice-cream store there, too."

Then Mr. Elders laughed like everything, as if he had told a good joke. Mother and Daddy

laughed too, but Roy and I just sort of licked our lips and rolled our eyes.

But even with the root-beer stand and the ice-cream store, Roy and I didn't care too much about going to an old cabin in the woods. But it didn't seem to make any difference to Dad and Mother.

One day, just a few days after Mr. Elders had been here, Dad brought out a map. He put it on the table and started counting all kinds of numbers and things between cities and places.

"13, 27, 38, 62," Dad was counting. Just then Roy came running into the room and yelled real loud, "It's a touchdown!" Dad looked up at him, but he didn't smile as I thought he would. He looked right back at the map and started counting again.

"Let's see, where was I? 62, 78," Dad started again.

"Daddy," I interrupted.

"What? 78, 78. Oh!" he said. Then he put the pencil down. "Now you made me lose my place."

"It was 78," I said, thinking I was really helping him.

“Sure, it was 78, but where was it?” He talked to me so loud-like, that it made me think he was not too happy.

“Right there on the map,” I answered. Then, real quietlike Dad took the map, folded it up and put it back on the desk. He didn’t even seem to appreciate that I gave him the number 78.

The day that Deacon Elders told Daddy about the cabin, Roy and I had stood and listened. We thought it might be some fun-place where we could find lots of kids who would swim and play with us. But instead it seemed to be a place that was so terribly far away I thought it would take about a year to get there. The cabin was supposed to be stuck up on a small hill all by itself. We sure were disappointed when Daddy had said, “That sounds like just the place for me.”

It wasn’t long after that both Daddy and Mother decided that Mr. Elders’ old cabin in the woods would be the best place for us. Roy and I kind of wondered what we would be doing there all alone with no kids or nothing, but Dad and Mother were so convinced that we thought we’d better not say anything. But it didn’t

sound like such a wonderful place to us. Roy and I talked about it from that day right up to the morning we were supposed to leave, thinking we could figure out some excuse, but we couldn't think of any way to get out of it.

So, here it was the morning of our trip. As I lay in bed, I heard Mother scooting around all over the house, getting last-minute things done.

After Mother called, "Get up, Joy!" for about the fifth time, I decided maybe I should mind her. I didn't really feel like it though. In a way I felt sort of sick, but I was pretty sure it was just because I didn't want to go to that lonely old cabin in the woods. What would we do there for two whole weeks?

Usually I jumped out of bed in the morning, but this time I didn't. I crawled out of bed slowly and peeked out of the window. Daddy was just packing the last big suitcase in the trunk. He slammed the trunk of the car down and locked it. Everything was ready—everything and everybody but me. So I decided I'd better get ready, and fast, or Daddy would come up and see to it that I got started.

All at once I swallowed hard. I really didn't feel very good, I decided. I sat down on the bed

and put my chin in my hands, when suddenly I felt a sort of lump near my ear.

When I went to wash my face, I looked in the mirror. I thought I looked sort of funny. One side of me looked fatter than the other. At first I thought it was the mirror, but then I remembered we didn't have a mirror like they had at the fair last year. And anyway, my face hadn't been that fat the night before. Maybe I had a toothache and didn't know it, I thought. But that was pretty dumb! Who wouldn't know if he had a toothache? I used to cry and cry when I had those aches. I looked in the mirror again, and I wasn't crying, so I knew it could not be a toothache.

I'll say I wasn't crying! Why, when I really got my eyes open and took a good look, I had to laugh. Talk about a fat face—I sure looked funny!

I guess I never had been good-looking. In fact, I think I was even sort of homely, but I was sure I had never looked this bad before.

That was when I remembered my last day in school two weeks ago. Lots of kids had been out because of mumps. Some were absent because of measles. I heard Mother and Daddy talk about

Roy and me being exposed or something, but I guess they must have forgotten all about it, because they hadn't said anything more about it since that day.

I put my hand around the fat lump on my face. Now that I thought of it, it did hurt a little. Not a whole lot, but just a little.

"Joy," Daddy called, "we're waiting breakfast for you." He didn't sound "mad" or anything, but he didn't exactly sound happy either. Mother had put my clothes out on a chair the night before, so I got into my new pink and white dress as fast as I could, almost ripped my bobby socks getting into them, and scooted into my shoes. I stepped down on the back part of the shoe and started walking down the stairs, when all at once I remembered the times I had been scolded for trampling down the back part of my shoes.

"Put your foot all the way down before you start to walk," Mother would scream. Well, not exactly scream, but sometimes I thought it was pretty close to a scream. Of course, I got so I would hardly listen unless she did scream at me, so I guess the whole thing was really my fault anyway.

After I managed to get my shoes on right, I finished going downstairs. I walked into the kitchen slowly and sat down at the table.

“Good morn —,” Daddy stopped short, “Honey, what’s wrong with you?” he asked. He kept looking back and forth from my face to Mother.

Roy just sat there with a sort of silly grin on his face.

“Mumps!” Mother screamed as if it was the worst thing in the whole world. “Oh, no!” she said and then dropped into a chair.

I got to wondering why they were so worked up over it. After all, I was the person who had it. All they had to do was look at me.

“Does that mean we can’t go on vacation?” Roy asked hopefully.

“It means exactly that,” Daddy said. “It means that after I’ve taken a full hour to get the luggage packed so that everything would go in, I’ll have to pull it all out again.”

Mother looked unhappy too. “Well, what do you think it means for me?” she asked. “Unpacking and pressing all those clothes; getting the food unpacked and back into the cupboard; stocking up on groceries. Oh, dear!”

For a minute I almost got angry. Wow, here I was the one who had the mumps, and they were all complaining something terrible about what it was doing for them.

"And no fishing in the stream," Daddy was still mumbling.

When it had gone about as far as I thought it should, I finally said, "Doesn't anybody care about me? I'm the one who's got it, ain't I?"

Mother corrected me for using bad English, and then put her arm around me.

"Sure, honey," she said, "I'm sorry, real sorry. Daddy and I forget ourselves sometimes."

Daddy looked up at Mother as if she had really said the right thing, and he dropped his face into his hands. He sat there praying for a long time. Finally, he took his Bible out and began to work up a sermon for the next Sunday.

"I don't know why," he said, "but the Lord must have something very special for us to do this week before we leave."

"I'm sure He has," Mother said quietly.

With that she swished me back upstairs, helped me take off my pink and white dress, and put me back in bed.

After sticking a thermometer in my mouth

and running her fingers over my forehead, Mom walked slowly down the stairs, about as slow as I've ever seen her walk down those stairs.

"We might just as well start unpacking," I heard her tell Daddy. "We'll be here for at least another week; maybe more."

I heard her go to the telephone to ask the doctor what to do for me, and then she and Daddy went out to the car to get the suitcases.

Roy came into my room right after Mother went down. He looked at me for a long, long time as if he didn't know whether to be glad or sad that I had the mumps. Finally, he said, "Thanks, Joy, I knew you'd figure out something so we wouldn't have to go to that old cabin."

I looked at Roy sort of funny-like. He was so serious about it that I got to wondering if I had really done this to get out of the trip. But how did I do it? How could I manage to get the mumps like this?

Roy walked over to the dresser and got a mirror. "Boy," he said, giving the mirror to me, "you sure do look funny."

I looked at myself for awhile and all I could

do was laugh. Roy was right. I sure did look funny. But somehow, I didn't feel very funny; not at all.