

# *Stories of Inspiration*

*A collection of real-life stories*

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## The timely hot water bottle

**“The Lord directs the steps of the Godly. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble they will never fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand.” (Psalm 37:23-24 NLT).**

**'Before they call, I will answer.'** (Isaiah 65:24)

This is a story written by a doctor who worked in Africa.

One night I had worked hard to help a mother in the labor ward; but in spite of all we could do, she died, leaving us with a tiny, premature baby and a crying two-year-old daughter. We would have difficulty keeping the baby alive; as we had no incubator (we had no electricity to run an incubator).

We also had no special feeding facilities. Although we lived on the equator, nights were often chilly with treacherous drafts. One student midwife went for the box we had for such babies and the cotton wool that the baby would be wrapped in.

Another went to stoke up the fire and fill a hot water bottle. She came back shortly in distress to tell me that in filling the bottle, it had burst (rubber perishes easily in tropical climates).

'And it is our last hot water bottle!' she exclaimed. As in the West, it is no good crying over spilled milk, so in Central Africa it might be considered no good crying over burst water bottles.

They do not grow on trees, and there are no drugstores down forest pathways.

'All right,' I said, 'put the baby as near the fire as you safely can, and sleep between the baby and the door to keep it free from drafts Your job is to keep the baby warm.'

The following noon, as I did most days, I went to have prayers with any of the orphanage children who chose to gather with me. I gave the youngsters various suggestions of things to pray about and told them about the tiny baby. I explained our problem about keeping the baby warm enough, mentioning the hot water bottle, and that the baby could so easily die if it got chills. I also told them of the two-year-old sister, crying because her mother had died.

During prayer time, one ten -year-old girl, Ruth, prayed with the usual blunt conciseness of our African children. 'Please, God!' she prayed, 'Send us a hot water bottle today It'll be no good tomorrow, God, as the baby will be dead, so please send it this afternoon.'

While I gasped inwardly at the audacity of the prayer, she added, 'And while You are about it, would You please send a dolly for the little girl so she'll know You really love her?'

As often with children's prayers, I was put on the spot. Could I honestly say 'Amen?' I just did not believe that God could do this.

Oh, yes, I know that He can do everything; the Bible says so. But there are limits, aren't there? The only way God could answer this particular prayer would be by sending me a parcel from the homeland. I had been in Africa for almost four years at that time, and I had never, ever, received a parcel from home.

Anyway, if anyone did send me a parcel, who would put in a hot water bottle? I lived on the equator!

Halfway through the afternoon, while I was teaching in the nurses' training school, a message was sent that there was a car at my front door. By the time I reached home, the car had gone, but there on the verandah was a large 22-pound parcel. I felt tears pricking my eyes. I could not open the parcel alone, so I sent for the orphanage children. Together we pulled off the string, carefully undoing each knot. We folded the paper, taking care not to tear it unduly. Excitement was mounting. Some thirty or forty pairs of eyes were focused on the large cardboard box. From the top, I lifted out brightly-colored, knitted jerseys. Eyes sparkled as I gave them out. Then there were the knitted bandages for the leprosy patients, and the children looked a little bored. Then came a box of mixed raisins and sultanas - that would make a batch of buns for the weekend.

Then, as I put my hand in again, I felt the.....could it really be?  
I grasped it and pulled it out. Yes, a brand new, rubber hot water bottle. I cried. I had not asked God to send it; I had not truly believed that He could.

Ruth was in the front row of the children. She rushed forward, crying out, 'If God has sent the bottle, He must have sent the dolly, too!'

Rummaging down to the bottom of the box, she pulled out the small, beautifully-dressed dolly. Her eyes shone! She had never doubted!

Looking up at me, she asked, 'Can I go over with you and give this dolly to that little girl, so she'll know that Jesus really loves her?'

'Of course,' I replied!

That parcel had been on the way for five whole months, packed up by my former Sunday school class, whose leader had heard and obeyed God's prompting to send a hot water bottle, even to the equator.

And one of the girls had put in a dolly for an African child - five months before, in answer to the believing prayer of a ten-year-old to bring it 'that afternoon.'

'Before they call, I will answer.' (Isaiah 65:24)

# Sophie Scholl and the White Rose

Margie Burns

At the age of 21, Sophie Scholl was executed by the People's Court in Germany on Feb. 22, 1943, during the Holocaust, for her involvement in The White Rose, an organization that was secretly writing pamphlets calling for the end of the war and strongly denouncing the inhuman acts of the Nazis.

In May, 1942 German troops were on the battlefields of Russia and North Africa, while students at the University of Munich attended salons sharing their love of medicine, Theology, and philosophy and their aversion to the Nazi regime. Hans Scholl, Alexander Schmorell, and Sophie Scholl were at the center of this group of friends.

Attending the same university were two medical students, Willi Graf and Jurgen Wittgenstein, who had served in a military hospital in 1939, with Hans, Sophie's older brother. Along with Christoph Probst, a married soldier and father of three, they eventually joined The White Rose.

Sophie Scholl was born on May 9, 1921, in Forchtenberg am Kocher, where her father Robert Scholl, was mayor. At 12 Sophie joined the Hitler Youth, but became disillusioned. The arrest of her father for referring to Hitler as " God's Scourge," to an employee, left a strong impression on her.

To the Scholl family loyalty meant obeying the dictates of the heart. "What I want for you is to live in uprightness and freedom of spirit, no matter how difficult that proves to be," her father told the family.

When the mass deportation of Jews began in 1942, Sophie, Hans, Alexander and Jurgen realized it was time for action. They bought a typewriter and a duplicating machine and Hans and Alex wrote the first leaflet with the heading: Leaflets of The White Rose, which said:

"Nothing is so unworthy of a nation as allowing itself to be governed without opposition by a clique that has yielded to base instinct...Western civilization must defend itself against fascism and offer passive resistance, before the nation's last young man has given his blood on some battlefield."

Members of The White Rose worked day and night in secrecy, producing thousands of leaflets, mailed from undetectable locations in Germany, to scholars and medics. Sophie bought stamps and paper at different places, to divert attention from their activities.

In 1933 Hitler was elected chancellor of Germany. Many Germans who were uncomfortable with the anti-Semitic ranting of the Nazi party, appreciated Hitler's ability to bolster pride in a shamed nation.

The second White Rose leaflet stated: "Since the conquest of Poland 300,000 Jews have been murdered, a crime against human dignity...Germans encourage fascist criminals if no chord within them cries out at the sight of such deeds. An end in terror is preferable to terror without end."

Sophie's brother Hans spent two years in the military, studied medicine at the University of Munich, and was a medic at the Eastern front with Alex, Willi and Jurgen in 1942.

Jurgen transported stacks of pamphlets to Berlin. The journey was dangerous," Trains were crawling with military police. If you were a civilian and couldn't prove you'd been deferred, you were taken away immediately," he recalled.

No one in the United States can comprehend what it is to live under absolute dictatorship. The party controlled the news media, police, armed forces, judiciary system, communications, education, cultural and religious institutions.

The third leaflet demanded:" Sabotage in armament plants, newspapers, public ceremonies, and of the National Socialist Party...Convince the lower classes of the senselessness of continuing the war; where we face spiritual enslavement at the hands of National Socialists."

The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 had demanded expulsion of anyone who was not Aryan, declaring Jews as non-citizens. The international press had begun to report beatings in the streets, so Hitler moved the arena of cruelty away from cities to concentration camps.

On November 9, 1938, 30,000 Jews were beaten and arrested, and Storm Troops burned 191 synagogues on Kristallnacht," the night for the broken windows," causing 200,000 Jews to flee to the countryside.

When Alexander Schmorell was asked to swear an oath to Hitler, he asked to be discharged from the army. Willi Graf turned to passive resistance like the rest, after serving as a medical orderly in Yugoslavia. He was assigned to the Second Student's Company in Munich, where he met Sophie, Hans, Alexander, Christoph, and Jurgen.

Christoph Probst was the only member of the White Rose who was married with children, so the others tried to protect him. In the fourth leaflet they wrote: "I ask you as a Christian whether you hesitate in hope that someone else will raise his arm in your defense?...For Hitler and his followers no punishment is commensurate with their crimes."

After the German defeat at Stalingrad, in 1943, and Roosevelt's demand for unconditional surrender for the Axis powers, an Allied invasion was weeks away. That night, Hans, Willi, and Alex painted" Freedom" and" Down with Hitler," and drew crossed-out swastikas on buildings in Munich.

Their philosophy professor, Kurt Huber, was shocked when he learned of the state-organized atrocities committed in Germany, and he worked on the final White Rose leaflets. He was also motivated to lecture on forbidden subjects, such as the writings of the Jewish philosopher Spinoza.

Each leaflet was more critical of Hitler and the German people than the last. The fifth mentioned: "Hitler is leading the German people into the abyss. Blindly they follow their seducers into ruin...Are we to be forever a nation which is hated and rejected by all mankind?"

The Gestapo had been looking for the pamphlets' authors as soon as the first ones appeared. As the language in the leaflets became more inflammatory, they stepped up their efforts. They arrested people at the slightest hint of suspicion.

Sophie and Hans brought a suitcase of the final leaflets, written by Professor Huber, to the University, and left them in corridors for the students to discover and read.

Jakob Schmidt, University handyman and Nazi party member, saw Hans and Sophie with the leaflets and reported them. They were taken into Gestapo custody. Sophie's 'interrogation' was so cruel, she appeared in court with a broken leg.

On Feb 22, 1943, Sophie, Hans and Christoph were condemned to death by the 'People's' Court, which had been created by the National Socialist Party to eliminate Hitler's enemies.

Hans Scholl's last words shouted from the guillotine were, "Long live freedom!" In an unprecedented action by the guards, Christoph Probst was allowed a few moments alone with Hans and Sophie before they went to their deaths. After months of Gestapo interrogations to obtain the names of his co-conspirators, Willi was executed. His final thoughts were: "They shall continue what we have begun."

Alexander Schmorell was arrested in an air raid shelter and executed at Munich Stadelheim. Kurt Huber became one of the defendants at the trial of the People's Court against the White Rose. Survivors remember Huber's last words, an affirmation of humaneness.

Jurgen Wittenstein was interrogated by the Gestapo, but they couldn't prove his involvement so they let him go. He got himself transferred to the front, beyond Nazi control and was the only one to survive. After the war, he relocated to the United States, became a doctor and received an award from the Government of West Germany for his bravery.

"How can we expect righteousness to prevail when there is hardly anyone willing to give himself up individually to a righteous cause," Sophie said. "Such a fine, sunny day, and I have to go," she continued, "but what does my death matter, if through us thousands of people are awakened and stirred to action?"

The White Rose is a radiant page in the annals of the 20th Century. The courage to swim against the stream of public opinion, even when doing so was equated with

treason, and the conviction that death is not too great a price to pay for following the whisperings of the conscience,” writes Chris Zimmerman in *The White Rose: Its Legacy and Challenge*.

Two hundred German schools are named for the Scholls, and politicians such as former New York Mayor David Dinkins invoke their names, and visit their graves. With the rise of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and violence against foreigners in Germany, the anniversary of the executions is a powerful reminder.

Sophie Scholls sister Inge Aicher-Scoll wrote: “Perhaps genuine heroism lies in deciding to stubbornly defend the everyday things, the mundane and the immediate.”

The final leaflet, though undelivered by the White Rose, found its way to the resistance, and was carried to Sweden. From there it was placed into the hands of the British, who made thousands and thousands of copies. As their bombers flew over Germany, the letters were dropped all over the country. The truth could not be hidden.

### **Reflection**

How willing are we to stand up for truth, even if it means sacrifice? What are some of the issues in today’s society that require Christians to stand up for the truth?

## The sinking of the Empress of Ireland

The sinking of the British liner, *the Empress of Ireland*, was one of the worst ship disasters in history.

The ship, carrying 1,477 passengers and crew left Canada bound for Liverpool, England. As it travelled down the St. Lawrence River on its way to the ocean, a heavy fog descended. At 1.30 pm, on the morning of May 29, 1914, The Empress of Ireland collided with the Norwegian freighter Storstad in the gulf of Canada's St. Lawrence River. The Storstad penetrated 15 feet into the Empress of Ireland's starboard side, and the vessel sunk within 14 minutes, drowning 1,012 of its passengers and crew.

The tragedy came two years after the Titanic sank after colliding with an iceberg in the North Atlantic, leaving more than 1,500 people dead. The Titanic disaster brought about public pressure to increase safety standards on ships, so crews were trained in emergency procedures and more than enough lifejackets and lifeboats were supplied.

On collision, the water rushed into the boat. From such stories as could be gathered from survivors and from members of the crew, it appears that Captain Kendall and his officers did all that was humanly possible in the fourteen minutes that the Empress hung on the river.

Many people went down with the ship, but some managed to jump into the river, clinging to bits of wreckage and praying for help.

Some passengers managed to get into the life-boats. 120 of these were young Christian people from the Salvation Army, who had been on mission in Canada and were returning to England.

Each one of them put on a life vest stored in the life-boat. But seeing the desperate people around them struggling in the freezing water, they gave up their own safety of the life-boats as they pulled people in. They gave up their places to others and jumped into the cold water, wearing life jackets. But as they saw the people around them with no life jackets, one by one, the Salvation Army youths took off their life jackets and threw them to the people around them.

One middle-aged gentleman was thrown a life jacket by a young girl of 18. "No," he shouted, "You must have it." After all, this girl had her whole life ahead of her. Why should she die instead of him?

"No," replied the girl, throwing the lifejacket back. "You must have it. I will die better than you."

The young people chose to do this because they all knew where they were going. Around them were people who probably did not know Jesus. The young people were giving the other people a second chance to die, hopefully one day, to die knowing with Jesus rather than without Him.



The Crewmembers of The Storstad (which collided with the Empress of Ireland and left with only a broken bow) picked up survivors along with two other rescue ships. But none of the 120 Salvation Army youth survived.

Just two years before this event, the founder and leader of the Salvation Army, William Booth, had gone to be with the Lord. Before he died, he was scheduled to travel and deliver a sermon. However, due to illness he could not go. Instead, he sent a telegram of his sermon. The sermon consisted of just one word, "others".

## Army of Angels

[http://www.thoughts-about-god.com/stories/eb\\_angels.htm](http://www.thoughts-about-god.com/stories/eb_angels.htm)

Author unknown

A missionary on furlough told the following true story while visiting his home church in Michigan:

"While serving at a small field hospital in Africa, every two weeks I traveled by bicycle through the jungle to a nearby city for supplies. This was a journey of two days and required camping overnight at the halfway point. On one of these journeys, I arrived in the city where I planned to collect money from a bank, purchase medicine, and supplies, and then begin my two-day journey back to the field hospital.

Upon arrival in the city, I observed two men fighting, one of whom had been seriously injured. I treated him for his injuries and at the same time talked to him about the Lord. I then traveled two days, camping overnight, and arrived home without incident...

Two weeks later I repeated my journey. Upon arriving in the city, I was approached by the young man I had treated. He told me that he had known I carried money and medicines. He said, "Some friends and I followed you into the jungle, knowing you would camp overnight. We planned to kill you and take your money and the drugs. But just as we were about to move into your camp, we saw that 26 armed guards surrounded you." At this, I laughed and said that I was certainly all alone in that jungle campsite.

The young man pressed the point, however, and said, "No, sir, I was not the only person to see the guards, my friends also saw them and we all counted them. It was because of those guards that we were afraid and left you alone."

At this point in the sermon, one of the men in the congregation jumped to his feet and interrupted the missionary and asked if he could tell him the exact day this happened. The missionary told the congregation the date, and the man who interrupted told him this story.

"On the night of your incident in Africa, it was morning here and I was preparing to go play golf. I was about to putt when I felt the urge to pray for you. In fact, the urging of the Lord was so strong; I called some men in this church to meet with me here in the sanctuary to pray for you. (Would all of those men who met with me on that day stand up?)"

The men who had met together to pray that day stood up. The missionary wasn't concerned with who they were; he was too busy counting how many men he saw. There were 26 men.

This story is an incredible example of how the Spirit of the Lord moves in mysterious ways. If you ever hear such prodding, go along with it. As the above true story clearly illustrates, "with God all things are possible." More importantly, God hears and answers the prayers of the faithful! God works in mysterious ways!