

# *Stories of Inspiration*

*A collection of real-life stories*

The timely hot water bottle	2
Sophie Scholl and the White Rose	5
The sinking of the Empress of Ireland	9
Army of Angels	11
An eye for a life	13
The Tablecloth	15
The girl with an apple	17



## 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)

## **Activities**

1. What is a hot water bottle? Describe and draw one.
2. How did the mother of the premature baby die?
3. What did the medical staff do to care for the baby?
4. The doctor gasped at the audacity of Ruth's prayer. What does this mean?
5. What does this true story show us about the faith of children?
6. Write out these Bible verse that tells us to have the faith of little children: Luke 18:17 and Matthew 18:4
7. Make a comment on the timing of God's provision in this case.

# 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 a friendship group 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 they called "The White Rose".

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, Germany, 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 enemy," 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, 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:

" There is nothing is so unworthy of a nation then allowing itself to be governed without opposition by an evil regime. Western civilization must defend itself against extreme authoritarian oppression 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 actions of the Nazi party, appreciated Hitler's ability to promote pride in the nation.

The second White Rose leaflet stated: " Since the conquest of Poland 300,000 Jews have been murdered, a crime against human dignity. Germans, we must fight against these terrible deeds."

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.

Germany was ruled by an absolute dictatorship. The party controlled the news media, police, armed forces, judiciary system, communications, education, cultural and religious institutions.

The third leaflet read: " We must sabotage in armament plants, newspapers, public ceremonies, and convince the lower classes of the senselessness of continuing the war."

The Nazi laws of 1935 had demanded expulsion of anyone who was not Aryan, (from a Caucasian ancestry), declaring Jews as non-citizens. The international press had begun to report beatings of Jews in the streets, so Hitler moved the Jews out of the sight of the general population, at first to "ghettos" and then 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.

Their philosophy professor, Kurt Huber, was shocked when he learned of the state-organized atrocities against the Jews committed in Germany, and he worked on the final White Rose leaflets.

Each leaflet was more critical of Hitler and the German people who supported him. 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 (Hitler's police), 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 Hitler's party to eliminate his 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."

" 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 Scholl's sister Inge Aicher-Scholl 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.

## **Activities**

1. Write the meaning of the underlined words
2. What did Sophie think about Hitler at the age of 12? What influenced her to change her mind?
3. What was her father's advice to the family?
4. What was "the White Rose"?
5. What was the essential message of the leaflets they produced and distributed?
6. Not all Germans thought badly of Hitler. Why?

7. What was behind the movement to expel “non-Aryans”? Where did they go?
8. Why do you think one of the leaflets asked the German people, “Are we to be forever a nation which is hated and rejected by all mankind?”
9. What was Sophie’s final message to all people?
10. 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 life jacket back. "You must have it. I will die better than you."

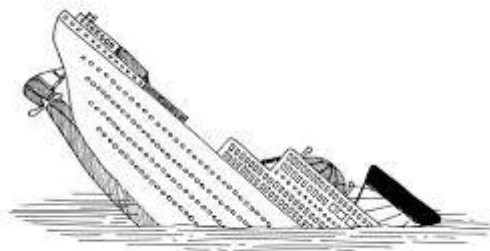
The young people chose to do this because they all knew where they were going. Around them were people who probably did not know Jesus. The young people were giving the other people a second chance to die, hopefully one day, to die knowing with Jesus rather than without Him.

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".

## Activities

1. What caused the sinking of the Empress of Ireland?
2. What valuable lessons had been learned from the sinking of the Titanic?
3. How do we know that the captain was praiseworthy?
4. What was the reason that the Salvation Army youth gave up their life jackets?
5. Who was William Booth?
6. What did he mean by his final message, "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!

## **Activities**

1. How did the missionary help the young man who had been injured in a fight?
2. What did the young man and his friends plan on doing to the missionary?
3. What saved the missionary from the plans of the young men?
4. What is the connection between the army of angels and the prayer meeting that was help for the missionary?

## An eye for a life

Some years ago, in a park in the city of Nagasaki, Japan, a young white woman began to speak with the people passing by about the good news of Jesus and His love for them. She had not been long in Japan, but she had worked hard at the language school and knew enough Japanese to be able to share the Christian message simply.

As she was speaking, she was suddenly aware of a blinding pain in her eye. A young man had maliciously hurled a large stone at her from his hiding place in some nearby bushes.

The missionary was given medical attention and the police were informed of the incident. "We'll find that young hooligan and punish him, Miss Imhoff," they promised. "Your eye is badly damaged. He deserves punishment." The police judged from the injury that the woman would never see again with that eye.

"Please don't punish him," pleaded Miss Imhoff. "I forgive him, and Jesus died for his sins as well as mine and yours. Please let him go free."

The police officers were amazed at this woman who had such a loving and forgiving attitude, even to someone who had done her serious injury. Miss Imhoff's eye never recovered from the incident, but this did not deter her from continuing in Nagasaki as a Christian missionary.

Years passed. One day, there sailed into Nagasaki harbour a large Japanese man of war. The local Christians arranged a reception for the officers and men of the crew.

The ship's captain stood to reply to the speech of welcome before the banquet began, and surprised everyone with this story.

"I grew up in the city of Nagasaki," he began, "so I am very pleased to return to this place. I am a Christian now, but my youth I was very rebellious and lived a wild life in the city. One day I threw a big stone at a missionary lady who was speaking about Jesus to people in the park. I'm ashamed to say that the stone damaged the lady's eye. I was so scared that I ran and hid in the mountains. I was afraid the police would find me and punish me. But a friend found me and brought me amazing news that the missionary had forgiven me and didn't want them to punish me. I couldn't believe that anyone could be so kind as to forgive someone who had injured me, but my friend assured me it was true.

"I couldn't get this out of my mind. What was this Christianity; that it would make a person act in such a loving, forgiving manner? I began to search out all the books I could find about it. I read the bible. The more I read, the more I knew this was the way of life I wanted to live. I visited Christian church and after talking with the pastor, I became a Christian. That was many years ago now. But I am so grateful that the missionary lady forgave me, and that Jesus has forgiven me all my sins. I have often wished I could meet her and tell her what Jesus has done in my life."

A middle-age lady in the gathering was seen to quietly weep, but the tears were tears of joy, not grief. Miss Imhoff was present at the reception and heard the captain's testimony and was able to rejoice with him that God answered the prayers she had prayed for him years before.

Adapted from "Safety Last" by Rita Snowden, Epworth Press

1. Express in your own words the meaning of the title of this story.
2. . A young man had maliciously hurled a large stone at her. What is the meaning of maliciously?
3. One day, there sailed into Nagasaki harbour a large Japanese man 'o war. What is a man o' war?
4. Find words in the story that have these meanings:
  - Prevent
  - with wicked intentions
  - begged
  - declare the truth of
5. Find out about Nagasaki. Write a short paragraph about the city and its people. What important event occurred there in 1945?

Epworth Press, 25-35 City Road, London, E.C.1

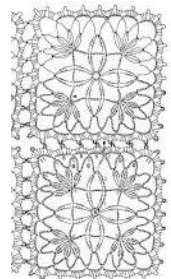
# The Tablecloth

*This story makes you understand things happen for a reason*

The pastor and his wife had been newly assigned to their first ministry, to reopen a church in suburban Brooklyn, U.S.A. They arrived in early October, 1982, excited about their opportunities. When they saw their church, it was very run down and needed much work. They set a goal to have everything done in time to have their first service on Christmas Eve.

They worked hard, repairing pews, plastering and painting walls, and on December 18th were ahead of schedule and just about finished. On December 19th a terrible tempest - a driving rainstorm - hit the area and lasted for two days. On the 21st, the pastor went over to the church. His heart sank when he saw that the roof had leaked, causing a large area of plaster had fallen off the front wall of the sanctuary just behind the pulpit, beginning about head high.

The pastor cleaned up the mess on the floor, and not knowing what else to do but postpone the Christmas Eve service, headed home. On the way he noticed that a local business was running a market sale for charity so he stopped in. One of the items was a beautiful, handmade, ivory colored, crocheted tablecloth with exquisite work, fine colors and a Cross embroidered right in the center. (Crochet is a kind of lace that would appear around the edge of a tablecloth.) It was just the right size to cover up the hole in the front wall. He bought it and headed back to the church.



By this time, it had started to snow. An older woman running from the opposite direction was trying to catch the bus. She missed it. The pastor invited her to wait in the warm church for the next bus 45 minutes later.

She sat down and paid no attention to the pastor while he got a ladder and hangers to put up the tablecloth as a wall tapestry. The pastor could hardly believe how beautiful it looked and it covered up the entire problem area.

Then he noticed the woman walking down the center aisle. Her face was like a sheet. 'Pastor,' she asked, 'where did you get that tablecloth?'

The pastor explained. The woman asked him to check the lower right corner to see if the initials, EBG were crocheted into it there. They were. These were the initials of the woman, and she had made this tablecloth 35 years before, in Austria.

The woman could hardly believe it as the pastor told how he had just gotten the Tablecloth. The woman explained that before the war she and her husband were well-to-do people in Austria.

When the Nazis came, she was forced to leave. Her husband was going to follow her the next week. He was captured, sent to prison and never saw her husband or her home again.

The pastor wanted to give her the tablecloth; but she made the pastor keep it for the church. The pastor insisted on driving her home ... that was the least he could do. She lived on the other side of Staten Island and was only in Brooklyn for the day for a housecleaning job.

What a wonderful service they had on Christmas Eve. The church was almost full. The music and the spirit were great. At the end of the service, the pastor and his wife greeted everyone at the door and many said that they would return.

One older man, whom the pastor recognized from the neighborhood continued to sit in one of the pews and stare, and the pastor wondered why he wasn't leaving. The man asked him where he got the tablecloth on the front wall because it was identical to one that his wife had made years ago when they lived in Austria before the war and how could there be two tablecloths so much alike.

He told the pastor how the Nazis came, how he forced his wife to flee for her safety and he was supposed to follow her, but he was arrested and put in a prison. He never saw his wife or his home again all the 35 years in between.

The pastor asked him if he would allow him to take him for a little ride. They drove to Staten Island and to the same house where the pastor had taken the woman three days earlier.

He helped the man climb the three flights of stairs to the woman's apartment, knocked on the door and he saw the greatest Christmas reunion he could ever imagine.

*A true story - submitted by Pastor Rob Reid*

## **Activities**

1. Draw a picture of the tablecloth. Include the crochet and embroidery.
2. Approximately how old do you think the tablecloth was? Give reason for your answer.
3. The tablecloth was used as a wall tapestry. What is a tapestry and where might you see them?
4. Who were the Nazis, and why might they have captured the lady's husband during World War 2?
5. Why do you think the lady and her husband had been separated for so long?
6. What difficulties might Jewish people have faced, having escaped Europe in World War 2, arriving in a new country?

# The girl with an apple

*(This is a true story and you can find out more by Googling Herman Rosenblat.*

## **August 1942. Piotrkow, Poland**

The sky was gloomy that morning as we waited anxiously. All the men, women and children of Piotrkow's Jewish ghetto had been herded into a square.

Word had gotten around that we were being moved. My father had only recently died from typhus, which had run rampant through the crowded ghetto. My greatest fear was that our family would be separated.

"Whatever you do," Isidore, my eldest brother, whispered to me, "don't tell them your age. Say you're sixteen.

"I was tall for a boy of 11, so I could pull it off. That way I might be deemed valuable as a worker.

An SS man approached me, boots clicking against the cobblestones. He looked me up and down, and then asked my age.

"Sixteen," I said. He directed me to the left, where my three brothers and other healthy young men already stood.

My mother was motioned to the right with the other women, children, sick and elderly people.

I whispered to Isidore, "Why?"

He didn't answer.

I ran to Mama's side and said I wanted to stay with her.

"No," she said sternly.

"Get away. Don't be a nuisance. Go with your brothers."

She had never spoken so harshly before. But I understood: She was protecting me. She loved me so much that, just this once, she pretended not to. It was the last I ever saw of her. My brothers and I were transported in a cattle car to Germany.

We arrived at the Buchenwald concentration camp one night, weeks later, and were led into a crowded barrack. The next day, we were issued uniforms and identification numbers.

"Don't call me Herman anymore." I said to my brothers. "Call me 94983."

I was put to work in the camp's crematorium, loading the dead into a hand-cranked elevator. I, too, felt dead. Hardened, I had become a number.

Soon, my brothers and I were sent to Schlieben, one of Buchenwald's sub-camps near Berlin.

One morning I thought I heard my mother's voice.. "Son," she said softly but clearly, I am going to send you an angel."

Then I woke up. Just a dream. A beautiful dream.  
But in this place there could be no angels. There was only work. And hunger. And fear.

A couple of days later, I was walking around the camp, around the barracks, near the barbed-wire fence where the guards could not easily see. I was alone. On the other side of the fence, I spotted someone: a little girl with light, almost luminous curls. She was half-hidden behind a birch tree.

I glanced around to make sure no one saw me. I called to her softly in German "Do you have something to eat?"

She didn't understand. I inched closer to the fence and repeated the question in Polish. She stepped forward. I was thin and gaunt, with rags wrapped around my feet, but the girl looked unafraid. In her eyes, I saw life.

She pulled an apple from her woolen jacket and threw it over the fence.

I grabbed the fruit and, as I started to run away, I heard her say faintly, "I'll see you tomorrow."

I returned to the same spot by the fence at the same time every day. She was always there with something for me to eat - a hunk of bread or, better yet, an apple. We didn't dare speak or linger. To be caught would mean death for us both.

I didn't know anything about her, just a kind farm girl, except that she understood Polish. What was her name? Why was she risking her life for me?

Hope was in such short supply, and this girl on the other side of the fence gave me some, as nourishing in its way as the bread and apples.

Nearly seven months later, my brothers and I were crammed into a coal car and shipped to Theresienstadt camp in Czechoslovakia.

"Don't return," I told the girl that day. "We're leaving..."

I turned toward the barracks and didn't look back, didn't even say good-bye to the little girl whose name I'd never learned, the girl with the apples.

We were in Theresienstadt for three months. The war was winding down and Allied forces were closing in, yet my fate seemed sealed.

On May 10, 1945, I was scheduled to die in the gas chamber at 10:00 AM.

In the quiet of dawn, I tried to prepare myself. So many times, death seemed ready to claim me, but somehow I'd survived. Now, it was over. I thought of my parents. At least, I thought, we will be reunited.

But at 8 A.M there was a commotion. I heard shouts, and saw people running every which way through camp. I caught up with my brothers.

Russian troops had liberated the camp! The gates swung open. Everyone was running, so I did too. Amazingly, all of my brothers had survived; I'm not sure how. But I knew that the girl with the apples had been the key to my survival.

In a place where evil seemed triumphant, one person's goodness had saved my life, had given me hope in a place where there was none.

My mother had promised to send me an angel, and the angel had come.

Eventually I made my way to England where I was sponsored by a Jewish charity, put up in a hostel with other boys who had survived the Holocaust and trained in electronics. Then I came to America, where my brother Sam had already moved, I served in the U. S. Army during the Korean War, and returned to New York City after two years.

By August 1957 I'd opened my own electronics repair shop. I was starting to settle in. One day, my friend Sid who I knew from England called me.

"I've got a date. She's got a Polish friend. Let's double date."

A blind date? Nah, that wasn't for me.

But Sid kept pestering me, and a few days later we headed up to the Bronx to pick up his date and her friend Roma.

I had to admit, for a blind date this wasn't so bad. Roma was a nurse at a Bronx hospital. She was kind and smart. Beautiful, too, with swirling brown curls and green, almond-shaped eyes that sparkled with life.

The four of us drove out to Coney Island. Roma was easy to talk to, easy to be with.

Turned out she was wary of blind dates too! We were both just doing our friends a favor. We took a stroll on the boardwalk, enjoying the salty Atlantic breeze, and then had dinner by the shore. I couldn't remember having a better time.

We piled back into Sid's car, Roma and I sharing the backseat.

As European Jews who had survived the war, we were aware that much had been left unsaid between us. She broached the subject, "Where were you," she asked softly, "during the war?"

"The camps," I said. The terrible memories still vivid, the irreparable loss. I had tried to forget. But you can never forget.

She nodded. "My family was hiding on a farm in Germany, not far from Berlin," she told me.

"My father knew a priest, and he got us Aryan papers."

I imagined how she must have suffered too, fear, a constant companion. And yet here we were both survivors, in a new world.

"There was a camp next to the farm." Roma continued. "I saw a boy there and I would throw him apples every day."

What an amazing coincidence that she had helped some other boy. "What did he look like? I asked.

"He was tall, skinny, and hungry. I must have seen him every day for six months."

My heart was racing. I couldn't believe it. This couldn't be.

"Did he tell you one day not to come back because he was leaving Schlieben?"

Roma looked at me in amazement. "Yes!"

"That was me!"

I was ready to burst with joy and awe, flooded with emotions. I couldn't believe it! My angel.

"I'm not letting you go." I said to Roma. And in the back of the car on that blind date, I proposed to her. I didn't want to wait.

"You're crazy!" she said. But she invited me to meet her parents for Shabbat dinner the following week.

There was so much I looked forward to learning about Roma, but the most important things I always knew: her steadfastness, her goodness. For many months, in the worst of circumstances, she had come to the fence and given me hope. Now that I'd found her again, I could never let her go.

That day, she said yes. And I kept my word. After nearly 50 years of marriage, two children and three grandchildren, I have never let her go.

*Herman Rosenblat of Miami Beach, Florida*