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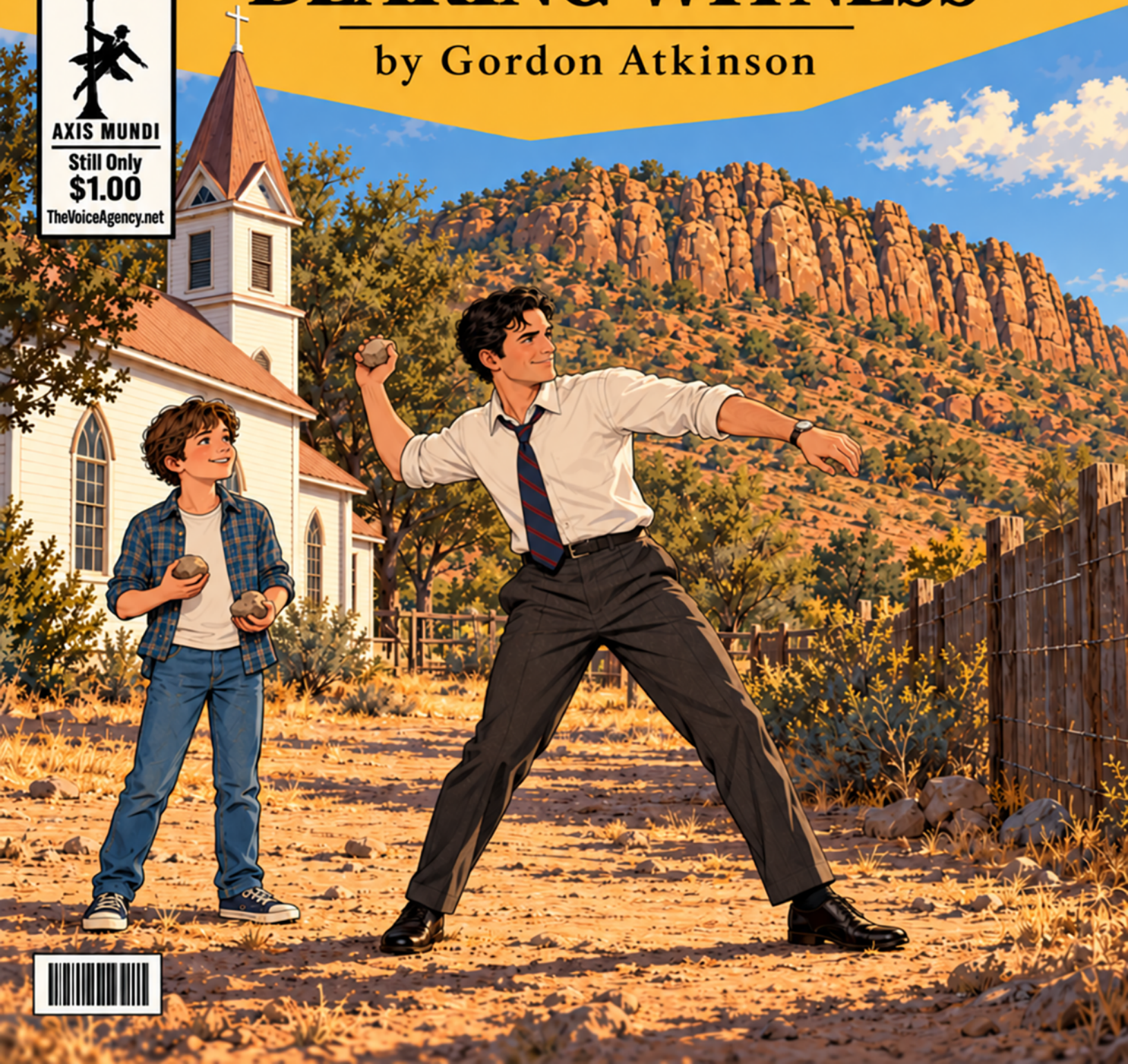
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FOY DAVIS



BEARING WITNESS

by Gordon Atkinson



Fort Davis, Texas. 1969

Mom, you don't think Mickey and his family are going to hell, are they? Or do you think they're probably going to heaven?

His mother turned away from her dinner preparations and stared at him.

Foy, you're in the fourth grade. You and Mickey. You young boys don't need to be worrying about that.

Yeah, but do you think Mickey is going to heaven?

Goodness gracious, I don't know.

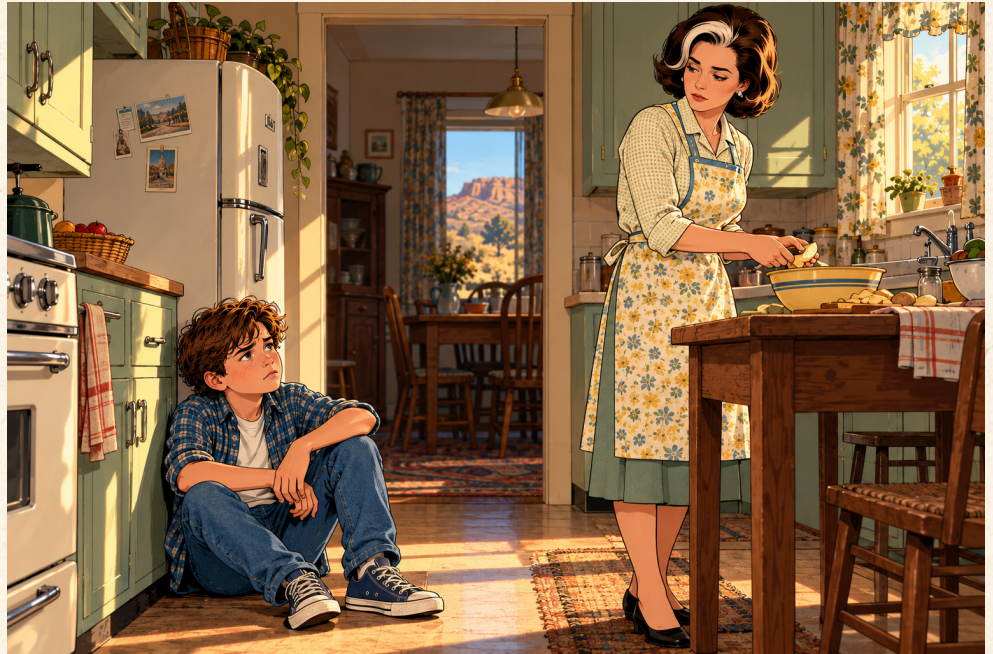
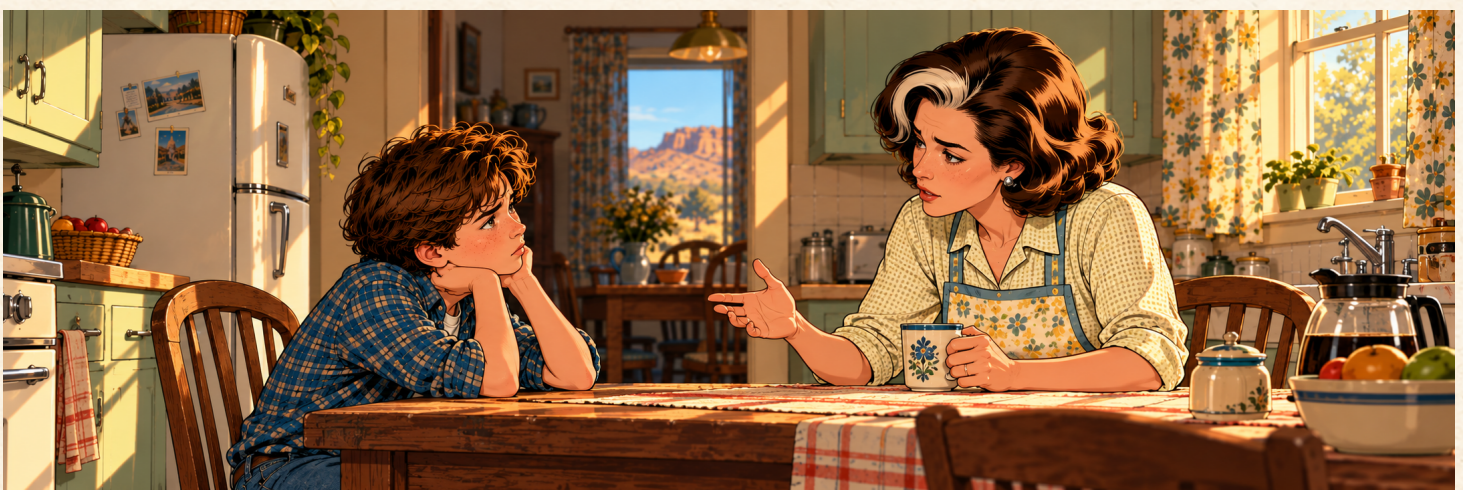
Well what do you THINK then. Just tell me what you think because what you think is almost always right.

Foy's mother exhaled loudly and turned, wiping her hands on her apron. She gestured to the kitchen table. Foy dropped into a seat. He put his elbows on the table and rested his head in his hands with one palm cupping each cheek. His mother poured herself a cup of coffee and sat across from him.

Foy, there's things in this world that no man or woman can...What you've got to keep in mind is that we try our best to understand, but...

She sipped her coffee and looked at him. You should talk to your father about this. He's the preacher. He'll tell you. She took another drink of coffee.

He'll tell you what you need to know. For now.



Foy jumped out of his seat.

Can I have a nickel to get a Grape Nehi?

Get one out of my purse. Just one. Supper'll be ready soon.

Foy dug through his mother's purse by the back door and found her coin holder in the bottom. He put a nickel in his pocket and pushed open the screen door. It banged behind him as he jumped off the back porch.



He opened the gate to the chain link fence and ran fifty yards to the back door of the First Baptist Church of Fort Davis Texas. He went through the back door into the church kitchen. In an alcove by the stairs that descended into the fellowship hall was a soft drink machine. Foy dropped his nickel in and punched a button. There was a rumbling sound and a bottle of grape soda punched the small door open and fell into the tray. Foy popped the cap off and took a drink. He set the bottle on the table in the kitchen and ran down the

hall toward the offices. The church secretary was a woman named Martin. Foy had known her all of his life, so he didn't know that Martin was an unusual name for a woman.



Afternoon Foy, she said while sliding a bowl of candy forward. Foy looked into the bowl. This week she had Hershey's Kisses and Butter Mints.

Neat-o, he said, taking two of each. He walked down the hall into his father's office.

Van Davis lifted his chin sharply when he saw Foy. He spoke into his phone. Paul, hang on a second, okay.

What's going on, son?

I came to walk home with you.

Good. Did you get a grape soda?

Yes sir.

Okay. I'm talking to Mr. Williams. I'll be about 15 minutes.



Foy went to a supply room, got a key from a drawer, and opened a large set of cabinets. He took some Sunday school supplies and went back to the kitchen, where he sat at the table. He stapled sheets of paper into a booklet and filled the pages with drawings and gold stars that he licked and stuck on the pages. Then he pulled the staples out of the booklet with a staple remover, which he thought looked like a saber-toothed lion he had seen in a library book.



After half an hour he wandered back into his father's office. Martin had gone home. Foy's father had turned his desk chair around and was facing the back wall, still on the phone.

Foy walked softly to his father's desk and opened the top right drawer. There was some change in a baby food jar. He got a nickel and went back to the kitchen. He bought a second grape soda and drank it while he opened drawers and looked into them. He heard his father hang up the phone and move around in his office. He put his empty bottles in the wooden rack near the soda machine and stood by the back door.



His father appeared a few moments later and they walked down the steps together. His father loosened his tie and collar and rolled up his sleeves. Foy ran to a rocky patch of ground near the back fence. Thirty yards beyond the fence was the base of Sleeping Lion Mountain, the first in the chain of the Davis Mountains. Foy picked up five stones. His father clenched his right fist, laid his left hand on his right shoulder, and worked his arm in slow circles. Foy handed him the rocks. He bobbed them in his left hand, feeling their weight. He tossed one aside.



That one's a little heavy to start with.

His father threw the rocks over the fence one at a time with a smooth, quick motion. He had been an athlete once. He picked up more rocks and threw them as well. When he felt his arm was warm, he began to throw in earnest. Rocks zipped through the air and bounced off boulders with high-pitched clicks that sounded like balls on a billiard table. Foy alternated between watching his father and throwing rocks himself.

Throw one really far, Foy said.

His father looked around and found a stone that he liked. He rolled it in his hand until he found a balanced way to hold it. He took several steps toward the fence, unwinding at the end and throwing the rock as hard as he could. They both watched in silence as the rock soared beyond the boulders at the base of the mountain and landed with a thud in some scrubby brush.





They looked at each other. His father made a motion with his head toward the place where the rock landed. Foy's smile grew larger and he laughed. They turned away from the fence and headed home.

As they reached their back yard Foy said, There's something I want to ask you about. Mom said I should ask you about it.

Okay.

They sat down in rocking metal lawn chairs that bobbed up and down. The chairs faced the chain link fence at the back of the yard. They both began rocking the chairs gently while they looked over the fence at

the mountainous landscape rising sharply from behind the Davis house.

His father said, Shoot.

Do you think Mickey is going to heaven? I don't want him to go to hell. I asked mom but she said I should talk to you.

His father nodded solemnly.

Revival preacher got you thinking about this?

Yes sir.

It's a hard thing to talk about, but I guess it's time we did. Now you know you're going to heaven, don't you? Because you made a public profession of faith and asked Jesus to come into your heart last summer. And I know you understand what you did when you did that, because we talked about it at great length for months.





Yes sir. I'm a sinner, but Jesus died for my sins and rose again on the third day. I've asked him into my heart and been baptized, so I am justified by faith and not of works, lest any...

Foy's father cut him off. Yeah, you got it. You got the words of it anyway. The deeper parts will come to you in time. You understand it enough for your age. I'm proud of you, son. He bent down and moved his hand around in the dirt, looking for a rock. He didn't find one that satisfied him and straightened back up.

So you don't ever have to worry about going to hell. Once saved, always saved. You're obliged to live a good Christian life, but your salvation is assured. Don't let anyone scare you about going to hell, because Jesus saved you. You're going to heaven all right.

Foy nodded solemnly. Yes sir.

Now Mickey, well, Mickey hasn't reached the age of accountability.

What's that?

It's the age when a person becomes accountable for his sins. You know the story of Adam and Eve in the garden.

Foy didn't reply. It wasn't a question.

Well, they ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their eyes were opened and they knew they were sinners. Small children don't understand what any of that is about. So they're not accountable. And if they die, they go to be with Jesus in heaven.

But Mickey and me are the same age. And I got saved.

Well Foy, when you asked Jesus into your heart, you became like a man in the eyes of God. You've been saved. So you understand





some things that Mickey doesn't. And your family took you to church properly, so you know about these things. But Mickey is still kind of an innocent child.

Foy nodded with great seriousness, happy to be included in such important talk.

So Foy, you should pray for Mickey and for his family. Mickey is safe for now, but perhaps you'll share Jesus with him and be used by God to help secure his salvation. You're never too young to do the Lord's work. I pray for the Wallace family all the time. Maybe one day Buddy will see the light. A real man takes care of his family, financially

of course, but also spiritually. A man's got to be a spiritual leader too.

Foy, this is the hard truth that we can't avoid. If Mickey grows up and doesn't accept Jesus as his savior, yes, he will go to hell when he dies. I don't like the idea of that. I wish it wasn't true. But that's what the Bible says. And the Bible is the word of God.

Foy stared out at the mountains and thought of Buddy, laughing and drinking beer while he and Mickey crawled around inside the broken down limousine that sat in their yard. He thought about Mickey laughing and pretending to drive. Mickey had no idea such an ominous question was bearing down upon his small life.

How long before Mickey becomes countable?

Accountable. You can't say. The age at which a person becomes aware of his sin is different for everyone. Do you understand?

Yes sir.

Van smiled and rubbed Foy's hair with his hand. He stood up and began to move toward the house.



Dad, you don't really like Mr. Wallace that much, do you? On account of him drinking beer and his yard is a mess and him not being a spiritual leader of their family. When you asked him over to watch the Cowboys that Sunday that Mickey and Mr. Wallace came over, that was just you hoping to get him to ask Jesus into his heart, wasn't it?

Foy's father stopped and turned around. He stood looking at Foy for a few seconds. Then he turned his chair so that it faced Foy's chair and sat down. Foy scrabbled his feet on the ground and bounced up and down in his chair, turning it as well so that it faced his father's chair.

Foy, listen to me carefully. First of all, having junked cars in his yard doesn't mean anything. Jesus doesn't have any opinion on how a man keeps his yard, from what I read in the scriptures. And Buddy drinking beer is just fine too. There's no real sin in it, especially for someone who doesn't know any better. No, I like Buddy Wallace just fine. We're all sinners saved by the grace of Christ and not one man better than another. I would never feign friendship to win a sinner to Christ. That's a sloppy way of doing the Lord's work. It's a shortcut. It might get you results, but ultimately that kind of thing comes to no good.

Yes sir.



Foy's father stood and stretched. Then he bent over and picked up a rock. He looked back toward Sleeping Lion Mountain. He lifted his chin sharply in the direction of a massive boulder. He lifted his left foot in the air and turned his shoulders. He dropped his right hand with the rock in it toward the ground. For a moment he balanced there, then he unwound slowly, turning his hips and then his shoulders, and finally snapping his arm forward. The rock flew in a straight line and hit the boulder with a loud crack.



He turned and looked at Foy with a smile on his face. Foy excitedly snatched up a rock of his own and hurled it toward the boulder. It fell short. The two of them stood in silence, looking at the mountain. After a few moments, Foy's mother appeared at the back door and called them in to dinner.

Foy, who do the Cowboys play this week?

The Redskins.

Why don't you check with your mother and see if it's okay to invite Buddy and Mickey over to watch the game.

Foy grinned and ran up the stairs to the back porch and in through the screen door.



Bearing Witness

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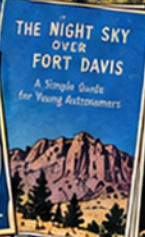
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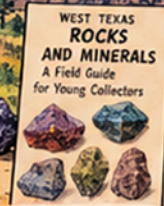
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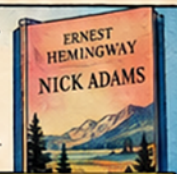
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