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FOY DAVIS

PERSONAL SAVIOR

by Gordon Atkinson





Fort Davis, Texas. 1969

On Monday morning, Foy cut across his block, through the neighbors' yards, past Fort Street, to Davis Street, where Mickey Wallace lived in a sagging home on a double lot. Buddy Wallace had erected a ramshackle metal building that served as his workshop and garage. Two small sheds about the size of outhouses were attached like hermitages to one side of the workshop. Indeed, they may at one time have been outhouses.

Cars in various states of disrepair filled the workshop and spilled out into the yard, where their rust was slowly bringing them into harmony with the colors of the rocks, earth, washtubs, and the old tractor engine that also lay in the yard. On the Wallace property, things sat in the yard until they became part of the landscape, sinking into the ground and changing colors slowly over the years.

Above these things flew the colorful flags of the Wallace laundry, flapping in the West Texas wind on two parallel lines that ran from the side of the workshop to a laundry pole set into concrete near a scrubby juniper that Alice Wallace watered and cared for as if it were the only thing of beauty in her life.





A caliche driveway ran from Buddy's workshop to the street. On it sat Buddy's pride and joy, a 1965 stretch limousine with a blown engine that he had acquired at an auction in Van Horn. The interior is perfect, Buddy often said. Like no one ever rode in it. When he had it running again, there was talk of starting a limousine service. What kills the

limousine business is the car payments, Buddy told his friends who hung around the shop. That's what they call overhead, and without overhead there's no limit to what a man can make. It's all profit.

Foy knocked on the front door. He never rang the bell in the morning before school because once he rang the bell and awakened Buddy, who roared his displeasure so loudly from his bedroom that Foy heard it on the front porch. One of Mickey's older brothers came and looked through the screen. When he saw Foy, he opened the door without a word and headed back into the dark interior of the Wallace home. Foy turned left instead of following him and went through two rooms crammed with furniture and debris into the kitchen, where he found Mickey sitting at the table finishing a bowl of Cap'n Crunch.



Hey, Foy said.

Mickey nodded.

Foy looked at the back of the cereal box while Mickey finished eating and put his bowl by the sink.

Was there a prize in it?

Nope. Sugar Pops has a parachute army man. Did you get that one?

No, Foy said sadly. My mother doesn't allow us to eat sugar cereals.

But you put sugar on your Rice Krispies, don't you?

Yeah. Five spoonfuls if she's not looking.

Mickey grabbed a paper bag off the counter, looked around, and opened the pantry door. He put several items in the bag and rolled down the top. They went out the front door and headed down the street toward Dirk's Anderson Elementary School.



Watcha got for lunch?
Foy asked.

A ketchup sandwich
and five candy bars.

Mickey Wallace had
been making his own
lunch since he was in
kindergarten.

You wanna trade one
of your candy bars for
some fruit cocktail?

Yuck. No. But I'll give
you one. I packed one
for you cause your
mom's desserts are
crummy.

Foy smiled. Thanks.



They walked the block in silence. Mickey was absorbed in his attempts to avoid stepping on the cracks in the parched dirt road. Foy noticed this and fell in step with him. After a few minutes he worked up his courage to speak.

Mickey, do you think you're going to heaven?

Mickey didn't respond, so Foy continued.

My dad says you're going to heaven, so I thought I would tell you that. You don't have to worry or anything.

I'm going to heaven? Your dad says so?

Yes. And he's the preacher. So he knows about this stuff.

Neat-o. I'm going to heaven.

They walked a block in silence. Mickey picked up a stick and began whacking it on a chain-link fence as they walked by. He wore the bark off it. He looked closely at the frayed end and began picking at it.



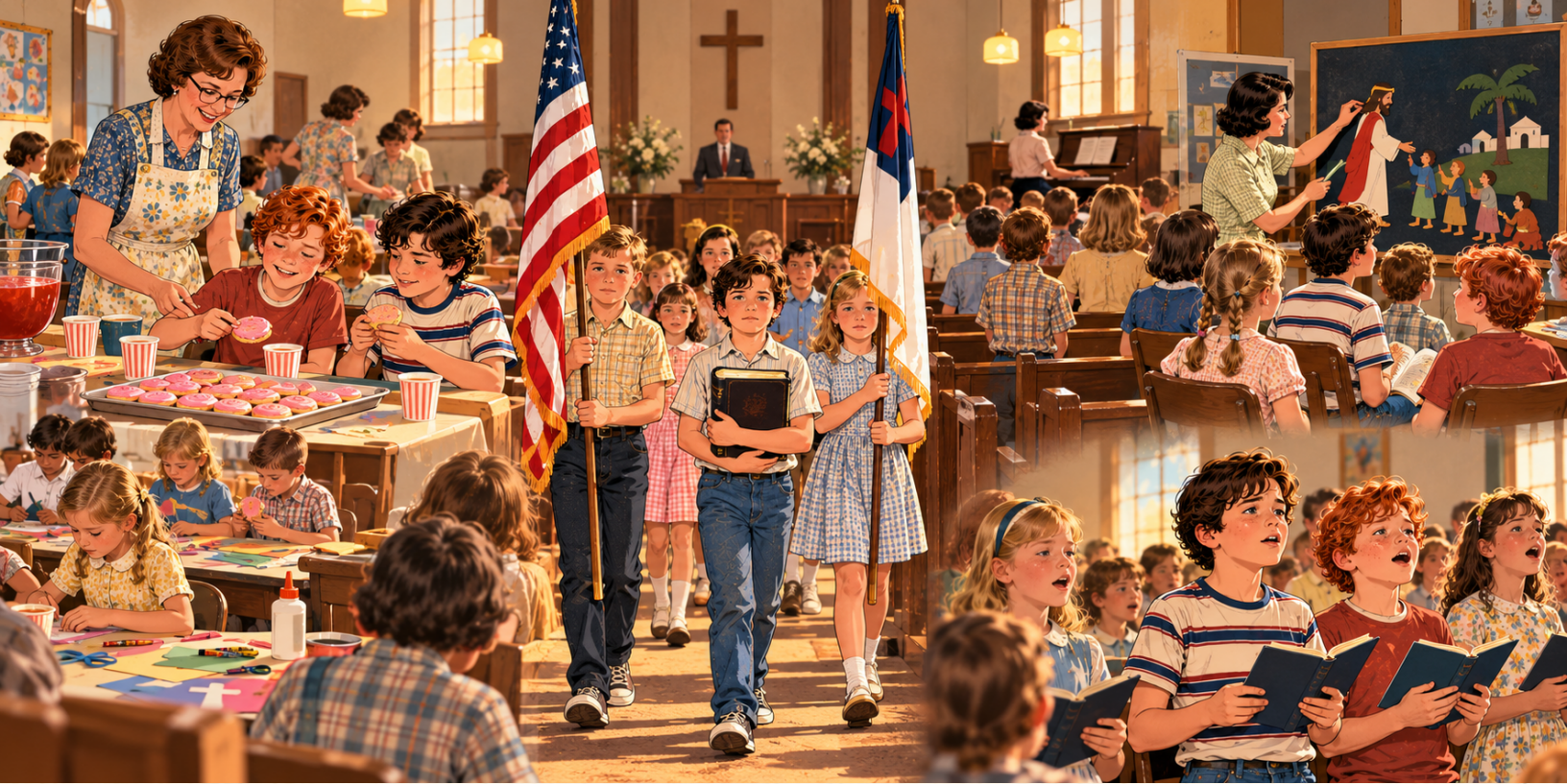
You're going to heaven for now anyway. If you die as a kid. Have you heard about the age of countability?

No.

I hadn't heard of it either. But my dad told me about it. There's this age that you get to. And if you get to that age, everything is countable against you after that. So you should probably definitely ask Jesus into your heart pretty soon.

How old is this age?

My dad says it's different for different people, but probably 14 or maybe something like that.



Mickey, before you get to that age, you need to ask Jesus into your heart and get saved. You're safe now, but you can't take any chances. It's so easy and you just do it. Once you get to 14 or whatever it is - remember it could be even earlier - once you cross that age you're not going to heaven at ALL unless you've asked Jesus into your heart.

You know about that, right? About asking Jesus into your heart and getting saved? They talked about it at Vacation Bible School last summer when you went with me, remember? They talked about it the whole time, practically. You remember that, right?

Mickey scrunched up his face. I remember we had those cookies with pink icing. I remember we had



fun. I don't remember all that much about the Jesus stuff I guess. So I'm going to heaven if I die right now, but when I get older I have to do all that Jesus stuff? That's weird-o.

Well you just gotta do it. You just have to say the sinner's prayer, and you're saved forever. Don't you see? And then you and me can just play catch and ride bikes and all the stuff we like to do and stop worrying about this all the time. Don't you just maybe want to do it? Just say the prayer? I know it by heart on account of I've heard it a million times.

Foy saw a stick and picked it up. He wanted to bang it on the fence the way Mickey did. He stepped in front of Mickey and whacked his stick along the fence three times as hard as he could.

Mickey said, Your family goes to church a lot. Do you hate going but you have to so you just go and sit there bored? Or is there anything fun about it? I guess as long as you're quiet you can read or do homework, right?

Foy grimaced slightly. The only thing I'm allowed to read in church is the Bible.



Mickey looked horrified.

But they have these new bibles with neat-o pictures in them, so it's not so bad. I kind of like reading the stories in the Bible.

Really?

Yes, but listen Mickey, you gotta get saved. You need to say the sinner's prayer. You know you're a sinner, right? You know that, don't you?

Yeah, I guess, but what is a sinner? That part I don't...

What? You don't know what a sinner is? Everyone is a sinner. We all are.

Sinning is when you do bad stuff you're not supposed to do but you do it anyway. And you've done bad things, right? Sometimes? Everybody has.

Well, yeah.

Okay then, so you're a sinner. That's all that means. And Jesus died for you, right? You just have to believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins.

Yeah, I know that part.

Okay then. Now you just say the sinner's prayer. I'll help you.





Foy looked around. There was a small shed at the back of a yard they were passing. Foy pointed to a space behind the shed.

Let's just go back there and you can pray and get saved.

Okay.

They went behind the shed and Foy knelt. Mickey knelt beside him.

Just say what I say. I'll lead you just like the revival preachers do it. Only you have to really mean it, okay? You do, right? Cause otherwise it won't count.

No, I mean it.

Good. Here we go.

Foy put his hands together and bowed his head. Mickey did the same. Foy looked at him and was satisfied Mickey had assumed an appropriate posture.

Dear God, I know I'm a sinner.

Mickey didn't say anything. Foy whispered, Say what I say, only you gotta mean it.

Oh. *Dear God, I'm a sinner.*

I know Jesus died for my sins. *I know Jesus died for my sins.*

So . . . wait, I gotta remember the next part.

Foy looked at the ground around his knees, frantically, as if the next line of the prayer might be found there.



Uh . . . so Jesus, I just want you to come into my heart and live there and be my personal savior. *Jesus, I just want you to come into my heart . . . this one's long. Break it into littler pieces.*

Yeah, right. Sorry. Uh, so Jesus come live in my heart. *Jesus, come live in my heart.*

And be my personal savior. *And be my personal savior.*

Foy paused, trying to remember if he had left anything out.

I want to be a Christian and go to heaven, and I believe everything I'm supposed to. *I want to be a Christian and go to heaven. I believe all the stuff I'm supposed to.*

Cross my heart. *Cross my heart and hope to die.*

Amen. Amen.

The two boys rose and stood looking at each other.

Well, Foy said. You did it.

Mickey stood quietly for a moment, then broke into a smile. Yeah, that was easy!

So, you're saved now. You're going to heaven. Don't let anyone tell you you're not saved, cause you are now. And once saved, always saved, so... wait, I forgot to tell you about that part. Once you're saved, there's no take-backs. You're going to heaven, no matter what.

Even if I do bad stuff?

Well, you're not supposed to do bad stuff. And you won't want to, on account of now you're saved. But yes, even if you do bad stuff you still go to heaven.

Mickey frowned and nodded slowly, recognizing, at least at some boyish level, the depth of the covenant he had just cut with Foy's God.

The two boys emerged from behind the shed and resumed walking to school. Foy skipped with excitement for a block and then fell back into step with Mickey.



Do you feel any different now that you're saved?

No. Am I supposed to?

Some grownups say you're supposed to feel different. My Sunday school teacher told me after you're saved, the roses look redder and the sky looks bluer.

Did they look that way after you were saved?

No. Nothing felt different or looked different, but that doesn't mean anything. I asked my dad about it, and he was kind of mad. He said she shouldn't have said that to me.

Mickey looked up.

The sky looks the same for me too, I guess.

Foy put his arm around Mickey's shoulders.

It's okay. It's different for everyone. But you and me are saved. We're going to heaven now for sure.



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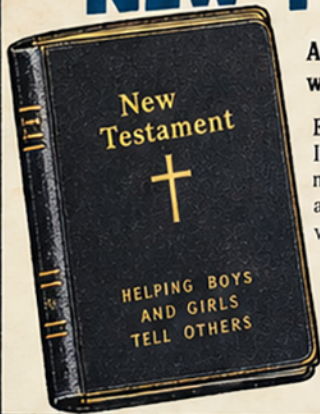
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