

# Helpings for the Heart



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## Introduction

My mother was the best cook in the world. Maybe we all say that about our mothers, but I *know* mine was the very best. She was particularly known for all varieties of homemade soups—from lentil to split pea to navy bean to creamy potato to savory vegetable. Every Friday afternoon the aromatic blend of legumes, vegetables, and seasonings could be found simmering in a large pot on the stove. Supper on Friday night consisted of endless helpings of soup and homemade bread. Homemade soup was always my father’s favorite food, and it’s still my favorite comfort food, fifty-plus years later. Not only was Mom’s cooking nourishing and just downright tasty, it fed something more than our physical appetites. Her soup was a symbol of togetherness, comfort, belonging, and ultimately, love.

My father was not a cook. Later in life, he bought a bread machine and tried his hand at homemade bread. His bread was pretty good. But while Mom was the homemaker and cook, Dad was the preacher. George Vandeman was a television evangelist and founded the *It Is Written* ministry in 1956—the year I was born. His ministry spanned six decades. For two thousand consecutive Sundays Dad could be seen on the *It Is Written* telecast. He was an author, a teacher, a preacher, and a wonderful storyteller. While Mom’s food fed our physical hunger, Dad’s inspiring stories and sermon illustrations fed our hearts and souls.

I was fortunate to belong to a family that was uniquely Seventh-day Adventist. Not only did I grow up an Adventist—I grew up a Vandeman. It didn't get much more *Adventist* than that! For me, Adventism was, and still is, the framework of my faith. It provides a community of support and a belief system that continues to serve me well to this day. All of us, whatever our faith background, need giant helpings of healing, encouragement, and inspiration to feed our hearts and to help us grow and be spiritually healthy on our journeys. That's what I hope this collection of my father's most inspiring stories and sermon illustrations does for you.

Just as my mother's homemade soups were a blend of vegetables and seasonings, so this collection of *Helpings for the Heart* is a blend of my dad's most powerful stories as well as some short, sweet vignettes. And all of these stories are *uniquely Adventist*. For me, to be *uniquely Adventist* means that I keep my faith while being open, honest, complicated at times, compassionate, searching, full of joy, able to cry, and confident of the amazing grace of Jesus Christ. It means I hold to my faith no matter what. And most importantly, it means I need to love others just as Christ loved me. Do I live up to all that? Not by a long shot. But when we are *uniquely Adventist*, we are surrounded by people who lift us up when we fall, who dust us off and point us to the only perfect One. I like that about us. So did my father.

I'll never be the cook by mother was or the storyteller my dad was, but I'd like to invite you over for Friday night supper to share a helping or two of soup and to talk about what God continues to do in our lives—yours and mine. Whether you are a long time Adventist like me or a young or old Adventist or one who left long ago and wonders if there's a way back; whether you are unsure of your own faith and want another *helping for your heart*. . . remember this: You are family, the table is set, and soup's on.

Enjoy!

Connie Vandeman Jeffery  
January 2008

*It Is Written*  
Founder George Vandeman's  
Favorite Stories



## *S*andy and the Angel

Nine-year-old Tommy, wet and bedraggled in his angel costume and yellow wig, sat in a tree not far from the bridge that might collapse at any moment. He had been at the school, practicing for the Easter pageant. He hadn't wanted to be in the pageant. After all, what nine-year-old boy wants to be cast as an angel with wings and yellow curls? But his mother had insisted.

On the way home from rehearsal, a violent storm had come up. Tommy knew that the bridge could not be trusted in a storm. It was one that a group of neighbors had built to save going ten miles around the lake. His father had told him in a situation like this just to climb a tree and wait for Dad to come after him. So, Tommy was waiting.

Through the dense fog he saw lights approaching. As the car came into view, he saw that it was old Sandy McPherson. None of the neighbors had ever seen Sandy sober. If he had been drinking now, and he almost certainly had, he might not use good judgment. He might drive onto the precarious bridge.

So, Tommy called out as loud as he could, "Sandy, don't take the bridge! Go around the lake!"

Tommy started to climb down from the tree, for surely Sandy would take him home. But Sandy took off as if he had seen a ghost!

A few minutes later, Tommy's father, on his way to pick up his son,

met Sandy on the road. Sandy got out of his car—pale, his lips quivering, his hands shaking. For the first time in anyone’s memory, he was cold sober. “You won’t believe me,” he gasped, “but I just saw a vision! God hasn’t forgotten me! The good God—He hasn’t forgotten me!”

Tommy’s father tried to calm him. “Take a deep breath and tell me slowly. You must get ahold of yourself.”

“Well, I’d had a few drops of whiskey, to keep the chill off, you understand. It was getting dark, and the visibility was zero. I was about to turn onto the bridge when I heard a voice say, ‘Sandy, don’t take the bridge! Go around the lake!’

“I looked up,” Sandy continued, still out of breath, “and there, floating between the trees, was an angel! Dressed in white, he was, with wings on his shoulders and yellow curls on his head!”

“What did you do?”

“I threw my bottle out of the car with all my force. If the good God thinks enough of old Sandy McPherson to send an angel to warn him, I won’t be a party to destroying myself!”

And Sandy was never known to take another drink as long as he lived!

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## *F*earfully and Wonderfully Made

A small boy was asked to write an essay about anatomy. This is what he wrote:

Your head is kind of round and hard, and your brains are in it, and your hair is on it. Your face is in front of your head, where you eat. Your neck is what keeps your head, off your shoulders, which are sort of shelves where you hook your overall’s suspenders.

Your arms you got to have to pitch baseballs with and so you can reach the biscuits. Your fingers stick out of your hand so you can scratch, throw a curveball, and add arithmetic. Your legs is what you got to have to get to first base, your feet is what you run on, and your toes are what gets stubbed.



And that's all there is of you except what's inside, and I ain't seen that!

There's been some disagreement about what's inside us and how we are put together. Are we just a body with a brain and nothing else? Is there a spiritual component that is as much "us" as is our body and our mind?

Jesus knew how human beings were made. He knew we were made in one piece—body, mind, and spirit. And so He healed the bodies of men and women so that they would have clear minds to accept Him and to follow Him with all their hearts and with all their minds.

## *A*n Honest Farmer

A city attorney wanted to buy a horse. So, he went out into the country and found a fine-looking horse he wanted to purchase. The farmer agreed to sell the horse if the city man could catch him.

That didn't seem too unreasonable. The lawyer took his two sons out into the pasture. But it took them three hours to corral the horse and put a bridle on him.

And then the farmer, being a meticulously honest man, said to the prospective buyer, "There are two things I have to tell you about this horse before I take your money. In the first place, he is awful hard to catch."

Well, the lawyer knew that.

"The second thing," said the farmer, "is this. He's not worth a hill of beans when you've caught him."

We're all selling ourselves to other people all the time—or trying to. And we're very particular about the display counter. We want to look right and sound right and seem right. And if we're a little hard to catch—well, that's all right too.

But if we were as honest as that farmer, would we have to warn any prospective "buyer" that we aren't worth very much once we've been caught? The truth is that we go to great lengths to hide our flaws. We don't want anyone to guess that we have a temper that is apt to explode

at any moment if someone says the wrong thing. We don't want anyone to know that we aren't as calm and composed and gracious on the inside as we are on the outside.

A lot of advice is making the rounds today. "Just be yourself. Act natural." But is that a good idea? How do we act when we act natural? What are we like when we let go the restraints?

A person may go to church every week and carry a Bible. But someone has reminded us that a chimpanzee can be trained to carry a Bible.

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### Calling Sin by Its Right Name

During the energy crisis of 1973, when drivers were lined up at gas stations, trying to get enough gas to keep their cars running, someone got the idea to ask a number of school children for ideas about how to solve the energy problem. A newspaper published the kids' ideas. Here are some of the more creative suggestions:

"Help out around filling stations so the owners will have more time to go out and drill for oil."

"Everyone who visits a foreign country that has a lot of oil should bring back a quart with them."

"Keep a dog in the car that is trained to bark if the car goes faster than fifty miles an hour."

But the best suggestion came from one little girl. "Find out if there is another name for oil," she said, "and look for it under that name."

That's what a lot of us have been doing with sin. We've been trying to find other names for it and trying to deal with it under those names. We like to think of our sins as simply innocent mistakes or errors in judgment or the result of a deficiency in our personality. We like to call sin anything but its right name. We will never make progress in the Christian life until we come to terms with our own sinful condition and learn to call sin by its right name.

Jesus said He came to call sinners to repentance. He called sin by its right name. He also forgave sins. He said, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

He said, "Go, and sin no more" (see Luke 5:20; John 8:11).

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## *I*'s Not Easy to Let Go!

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A man was chasing a rabbit through the woods. He was almost on the rabbit, the story goes, when suddenly they came to the edge of a cliff. The rabbit, of course, had the advantage. It was small and agile and able to make a quick turn and avoid going over the precipice. But the man couldn't turn as quickly, and went over.

As he was falling, he was able to reach out and grab a small bush growing out of the side of the cliff. It stopped his fall and held his weight. Now the man was hanging on for dear life.

He began to scream for help. He shouted, "Can anyone hear me?" There was no answer. He yelled again, louder this time, "Is anyone up there?"

Finally he heard a deep voice from somewhere up above, "To whom do you wish to speak?"

And the man, desperately clinging to the bush, managed to shout, "Anyone who will help me."

Then, according to the story, the voice from above asked, "Do you have faith?"

And the man replied, "Yes." He hoped it was true.

"All right," the voice continued, "if you have faith, let go of that bush!"

The man hesitated. He looked down. It was a *long* way down! All that stood between him and certain death, it seemed, was that little bush. Finally, after a long silence, the man shouted, "Is there anyone *else* up there?"

We think we have faith in God. We talk about it. We boast about it. And we get along fine—as long as our faith isn't challenged. But when it is—when we get into a tight spot where we have to throw our full weight on our faith, where we have to demonstrate it or deny it—that's a different story. It isn't easy to let go of the bush we're holding on to—no matter how insecure it may be—and just trust God. Many a person, when God has asked him or her for a full surrender, has looked around for a faith that didn't require that kind of commitment. It isn't easy to let go!

## A Chain Reaction

May 21, 1946. The place: Los Alamos, New Mexico, at the dawning of the nuclear age.

Louis Slotin, a daring young Canadian scientist, was carrying out delicate experiments with uranium. He was helping prepare for the second atomic bomb test that was to be carried out in the waters of Bikini Atoll in the South Pacific. Slotin needed to determine exactly the amount of U-235 necessary for a chain reaction. Scientists called it the *critical mass*.

Slowly he pushed together two hemispheres of uranium. Then, just as the material became critical, he pushed them apart with an ordinary screwdriver, thus instantly stopping the chain reaction. He did this many times.

But on this day, just as the mass became critical, Slotin's screwdriver slipped! Instantly the room was filled with a dazzling bluish haze. Other scientists present jumped back in horror. But instead of ducking and perhaps saving himself, Slotin tore the two hemispheres apart with his bare hands. The chain reaction was interrupted.

By this instant, self-forgetful act of courage, Slotin saved the lives of the seven other persons in the room. He realized that he himself had been exposed to a lethal dose of radiation, but he retained his presence of mind. He shouted to his colleagues to stand exactly where they had been at the moment of the accident. He then drew on a blackboard a sketch of everyone's relative position. This would enable doctors later to discover the degree of radiation each man had absorbed.

A few moments later Slotin stood by a roadside, waiting with another scientist for the car that was to rush them both to a hospital.

Quietly, Slotin assured his companion, "You'll come through all right, but I haven't the faintest chance myself." That proved only too true. Nine days later, Louis Slotin died in agony.

Some two thousand years ago, the Son of the living God walked directly into sin's deadliest radiation. He allowed Himself to be touched by

its curse. The accumulated guilt of the ages released its deadly contamination over Calvary. The Savior died in agony, but by His sacrifice He broke the chain reaction and destroyed the curse of sin.

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## A Fortunate Fall

A number of years ago a lighthouse was being built on the rockbound coast of Wales. With the building nearly completed, one of the workmen stumbled and fell from the scaffolding far down to the rocks below.

The other workmen, shocked at what had taken place, didn't dare look down for fear of being unnerved by the sight and then falling themselves. Heavyhearted, they backed slowly down the ladders, but to their surprise and happy relief, they saw their companion lying on a mound of grass, shaken and dazed. Bruised, to be sure, but not seriously harmed. Beside him lay a dead lamb. A flock of sheep had been grazing near the work site, and a lamb had broken his fall!

A Lamb has broken your fall. A Lamb has broken mine—the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

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## Blaming the Barometer

On September 21, 1938, a hurricane of monstrous proportions struck the East Coast of the United States. At the height of the storm, an immense wall of ocean water came crashing ashore between Babylon and Patchogue, Long Island, New York. That initial storm wave was so powerful that a seismograph in Sitka, Alaska, recorded the impact! The spray from that huge wave raced northward at more than a hundred miles an hour and whitened windows in Montpelier, Vermont, with brine!

For some reason, the meteorologists, who should have known what was coming and should have warned the public, seemed strangely blind to the impending disaster. Either they ignored their instruments or simply

wouldn't believe what they were telling them. And, of course, if the forecasters were blind, the public was as well.

Among the more unusual occurrences in this most unusual storm was the experience of a Long Island man who just a few days earlier had ordered a barometer from a store in New York City. The instrument arrived in the mail on the morning of September 21, just hours before the storm and the freak wave that would strike Long Island in the early afternoon. The man was irritated to see that the needle of the barometer registered below twenty-nine, where the dial indicated "hurricanes and tornadoes." Something was obviously wrong with the instrument. He shook it. The needle didn't move. He thumped it; he banged it carefully against the wall. Still, the needle remained fixed, pointing to "hurricanes and tornadoes." The man put the barometer back into its box, drove to the post office, and mailed it back to the store for a refund.

While he was at the post office, his house blew away in the storm!

That's the way we are sometimes. If we can't cope with the forecast, we blame the barometer. Or ignore it. Or throw it away.

## Forty Wrestlers

The story is told of a unit of the Roman legion encamped by a lake in Armenia in the dead of winter. At this time in Rome's history, it was a capital offense to turn away from the pagan gods and proclaim Christ. Forty of the commander's best soldiers had been found to be followers of the Lord Jesus and refused to renounce their faith in spite of everything that had been brought against them to make them recant. So, they were sentenced to die, banished out on the frozen lake.

Huddled together in the numbing cold, the little group of men began to sing. Their stern, pagan commander, watching from his comfortable tent, heard the words: "Forty wrestlers, wrestling for Thee, O Christ. Claim for Thee the victory and ask from Thee the crown."

Strangely moved, that hardened general, so used to cursing and frantic pleas for mercy, listened intently. These were men of his own company,

men who had angered the authorities by their faith. These were his forty heroes, distinguished soldiers. Must they die?

He moved out into the cold, gathered driftwood from the shore, and built a huge fire with flames leaping high into the night. Perhaps this would lead them to reconsider their refusal and save themselves by giving up their faith in Christ.

But no. Again the sound of the refrain came to his ears, weaker now: "Forty wrestlers, wrestling for Thee, O Christ."

Then suddenly the song changed. "Thirty-nine wrestlers, wrestling for Thee, O Christ—"

As the song floated in across the ice, one of the prisoners climbed up on the bank and dropped by the fire, a shivering mass. The song of the forty was no more. One of the heroes had disavowed his faith.

On the shore, clearly visible against the fire, stood the commander. Strange thoughts surged in his heart. Suddenly, he took one brief look at the pitiful traitor before him and threw off his cloak. Before his soldiers could stop him, he raced down the bank and out across the ice to the freezing men, casting back the words, "As I live, I'll have your place!"

In a few moments the song, with a fresh note of triumph, came wafting back to the soldiers who had gathered now, fearful and awestruck, on the silent shore: "Forty wrestlers, wrestling for Thee, O Christ. Claim for Thee the victory and ask from Thee the crown."

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## The Ship That Wouldn't Burn

Have you heard of the wooden ship that wouldn't burn?

It was World War II. The place: the Marovo Lagoon in the Solomon Islands of the South Pacific where a British major had commandeered three mission schooners for war duty. When word came that the Japanese were approaching, the major gave orders for the three ships to make their escape. But the engine of the *Portal*, temperamental at any time, simply refused to start.

## Helpings for the Heart

To prevent its capture and use by the enemy, the British major reluctantly ordered that the *Portal* be set afire. Immediately, a sheet of flame reached to the masthead, and the major, satisfied, left the scene.

What did the Christian islanders do? A hopeless situation? Not to them. They prayed that God would save their ship.

The flames were licking at the cabin and the rigging with fiendish glee when the fire went out just as if an invisible hand had snuffed out the flames enveloping the ship!

The local people, in their pidgin English, said, “*Portal* ’im ’e boat belong God ’im ’e no burn.” And here was the proof.

As darkness approached, they maneuvered the ship into the mouth of a small creek and disguised it with foliage. But this was not all. To be sure the enemy could never use the ship, those local Christians took the engine to pieces bit by bit. They passed the pieces around to various individuals with the injunction that they guard them with care.

And they did—the kind of ingenious care that only they could contrive.

Some of the pieces of that motor were hung in trees. Some were hidden in the ground. Others became part of some native’s wearing apparel. One boy was proud of a belt that he wore—composed of the nuts from the engine bolts. And one of the young women used several springs to hold her hair in place.

When the war was over, the *Portal* was again made sound and seaworthy.

And the engine? The word went out, “Marsta, ’im ’e want engine belong *Portal* one time quick!”

Almost immediately the bits and pieces began to arrive. Three weeks later, there was not so much as a half-inch screw missing from that engine assembly. The tank was filled with fuel, the engine boy gave the order, and almost as with a sigh of contentment, that temperamental engine sprang to life.

The ship that wouldn’t burn. Life is full of surprises. But some of them have a reason.