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Weekly Devotional

SPECIAL EDITION

"The Preacher's Kid"

by Mark A. Segraves

My dad might have reconsidered his calling as a preacher if he had known what kind of kids preachers have. I can't count how many times I've heard the statement: "Preachers' kids are the worst kids on the block." Much of the time, I proved the phrase correct. Take, for instance, the day I almost blew up our town!

We moved to a small, railroad town in Illinois when my dad took his first pastorate. At one time, that small village was the largest railroad routing yard in the nation. One of my favorite things to do was to play by the tracks. When my parents weren't looking, of course. What a time! The massive engines would pull their heavy loads behind them effortlessly, and I longed for the day when I would wear the blue-striped hat and handle the controls.

On one of my many trips to the tracks, I found several railroad flares. I felt pretty important as I carted them back to the small church, where we lived in an attached parsonage. I had something no one else on the block had. Fire power! I hurried around the church to the jagged, concrete slab in the back. This would be a great place to rip the cap off the flare and strike it. The rough cement would have it blazing brightly in no time. There was only one problem. The slab was connected to a large propane tank the size of a small submarine. But did I think of that? Not even.

I found out just how helpful neighbors can be when the sirens of the approaching police car jerked me out of the hypnotic stare into the pretty blue and red flame. When my parents rushed out of the parsonage, there I was in the back seat of the police car, about to be booked for threatening the safety of the entire village. Not bad for a nine-year-old.

Of course, that wouldn't be the only time I came into contact with the nice police department of our town. I was really disappointed when they confiscated those illegal fireworks a friend of mine was carrying when we were stopped in the middle of the street.

I think those officers felt like they finally taught me a lesson when our Boy Scout group took a trip to the police station. I had never heard of mace before and they asked if I wanted to experience what happened to real criminals. They didn't use much, but I cried fiery tears for the next three hours!

Not everything I did, however, required the intervention of the local law enforcement. After all, they can't put you in jail for throwing lady cigars at the local representatives of the girl's club. We built the tree house in a large tree that produced cigar-like plants. They were perfect projectiles. I went before the board

of correction for that one and it stung.

When my parents realized I was destroying any hope of them winning the lost in the area they decided to move. Actually, God opened the door for them. I had nothing to do with it. I promise.

We moved two thousand miles and life changed in a hurry. I went from being a big duck in a small pond to being a small minnow in an ocean, but there were still plenty of opportunities to cause trouble.

I started off well. Five months after we moved there, I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and my dad probably hoped his time of tribulation was over. The first few years were full of excitement as I met new friends and attempted to influence new people. But time passed and my old carnal nature reared its ugly head!

I grew bored one hot, Saturday afternoon in the middle of the summer and a friend and I felt like getting close to God. How do you do that when you're bored? Ascend to the highest elevation possible without killing yourself, obviously. We hopped on our ten-speeds and rode to the church.

The doors to the sanctuary are always open, and I knew of a secret trap door that would lead us to the roof of the church. The trap door was opened and the ladder ascended before the Holy Spirit could get our attention and we were on our way to trouble.

The large auditorium boasted a nice, drop ceiling, with the roof some six or seven feet above it. Between these surfaces, an intricate web of sprinkler pipes wove its way from the back of the auditorium to the front. Above the platform, convenient catwalks abounded, but there were none over the auditorium itself.

As we stood on a shaky catwalk, we used our fifteen years of wisdom to decide we needed to travel hand over hand to the back of the auditorium. It would be easy. The pipes made a perfect jungle gym. We forgot, of course, there would be nowhere to rest our feet. Drop ceilings are not known for their stability. I started off, hand over hand. A left here, and right there, straight for about thirty feet and I was over the balcony. My friend started behind me and stopped halfway.

"I'll just kick the ceiling tiles out and drop onto the balcony. I'm too tired to come back." I wonder now if I had any brains at all. I kicked, the ceiling tiles dropped and there was no way I was going to jump. The backs of those pews looked hard indeed and I wasn't sure how happy Jesus was with me at the moment.

I told Carl we needed to go back the way we came. Since he was in front of me, he started back toward the catwalk and as I moved I could see him. As he neared his destination, right above the altar area, he slipped. Sixty feet above a cement floor, he lost his grip on the dusty pipe and almost plunged to his death. Two fingers saved him. He dangled uncertainly for what seemed like a year, but was probably two seconds, then had his grip again. He hurried to the catwalk and breathed deeply.

During that brief slip he had accidentally kicked several ceiling tiles out. I had to go over that area as well. When I passed over the hole in the ceiling I kicked

several tiles out to see how long it would take for them to reach the ground. Deciding that was the wrong way down, I too made it to the catwalk.

We had been up there for over an hour, hanging by our arms. I was exhausted, but at least I had a chance now of making it to the altar that night at youth service!

On the way to my house, Carl and I decided to tell no one. We walked in the door of the house, I opened my big mouth, and there it was. I will never forget the self-control my dad exhibited. He listened. He stared. He walked to his room. He shut the door. And he whistled. I don't recall the tune, but I was certainly glad it wasn't the air of a whistling paddle I was hearing.

After Sunday school the next morning, I had to accompany my dad to the office of a very intimidating fellow.

"Yes, sir."

"I'll do whatever I need to do, sir."

"Yes, I did learn my lesson."

"No, I will never do anything like that again, sir."

Two years later, I called my dad to my bedroom and asked if I could talk with him.

"Dad, I feel like God has called me to preach."

I watched tears well up in his eyes.

"Son. I have never asked you to consider the ministry. I never wanted to pressure you into this." He hesitated. "But I want you to know that for the last seventeen years I have asked God everyday to call you. I can't tell you how happy I am that you answered."

I never thought I would be like my dad. But here I am...a preacher, a pastor, a teacher and a writer. Just like him. And like he prayed for me, I continue to pray for my soon-to-be-seventeen son. The content is a little different for now. Much of it is giving thanks.

"Thanks, God. Thanks for never letting Luke find out what a railroad flare is!"

Prayer: Father, when I look back on my life I clearly see Your hand. You have protected me and directed me even when I was unaware. I place my life and my future and my family into Your hands because I trust You! In Jesus' name, Amen!

Point to Ponder: So what's your story?



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