

CHAPTER 8

Guardian Takes Away Religious Freedom

Life Buoy, Lux and Ivory—I tried them all!

I ate yeast cakes and drank carrot juice—still no success!

I read all the advertisements on complexion care and carefully followed everybody's advice on home remedies. But in spite of constant medical care my bad skin condition failed to improve.

Beyond that my problems were few. Like most teen-agers I was a sound sleeper and a slow riser. My supervisor averted a major crisis in our house by buying me an alarm clock. I set it on an overturned dishpan so that I would be sure to hear it in the morning.

At dishwashing-time my mind wandered in a dream-world of books. Suddenly, in the midst of scrubbing the kitchen floor Saturday morning, I would leap on my bicycle and take a quick spin around the block. Except for minor irritations, such as arise in any household where someone is growing up, we got along famously. The happiest days of my young life were spent with the Lindahl family.

At the high school my academic standing was good. At church I entered whole heartedly into the activities of the young people. Our church was not large but it was growing. Through my activities on

the editorial board of the high school paper I was inspired to write our church news in a local weekly.

My supervisor now was a young social worker not long out of college. Regularly she called at our house. In later years she confessed she was almost afraid to come because of the barrage of questions with which she was greeted. What my guardian thought was all important to me. The supervisor knew her wishes and passed them on. As a counsellor and friend, this young social worker had completely gained my confidence.

Just before Christmas, during my second year in high school, she broke the news concerning plans which my guardian had for me. "It has been arranged for you to spend the Christmas vacation in Vancouver. You are to have a complete medical check-up," she announced. That was good news! It would be a wonderful day when the unsightly blemishes on my skin disappeared.

Just one thing bothered me, so I queried my supervisor, "Are you sure I'll be back by the time school starts again?" In the Lindahl house I was firmly planted and had no desire to be dug up by the roots again.

In the eyes of my pals at school I was plain lucky. After all, who wouldn't like to take a trip to Vancouver during the Christmas vacation? Excitedly I discussed it with the young people at the church. The trip was to pay big dividends. While in Vancouver I would visit the large churches and find out how they did things, then we would put their ideas to work in our group.

We had a wonderful Christmas and then on the twenty-sixth, I bade the Lindahls "Goodbye." They prayed with me before I left. Later they told me that as I walked out the door, Mr. Lindahl said, "I have a strange feeling that Bernice is not coming back." His wife dismissed the thought as a mere notion.

RECEIVING HOME

After enjoying family life where there was the sense of belonging, the receiving home in Vancouver was a dreary proposition. The woman who ran the place was good-natured and well liked by the children. The Children's Aid Society maintained the receiving home and used it as a clearing house. Children stayed there while awaiting placement in foster homes. Some of the children had been in and out of the receiving home many times. Either they could not adjust to the foster homes because of their own personality problems or they were unfortunate enough to be placed in unsuitable homes. They were everybody's children—nobody's child. Some of the teen-age girls were on the verge of earning for themselves a term in a correction institution. For each one the normal picture of living was distorted. What we all needed and wanted most was lacking—to be loved and wanted by someone. But I had in the back of my mind the assurance that I was wanted in the Lindahl home. The sooner I got back there the better!

The Vancouver visit had been arranged so that I could have special medical care. Immediately on arrival I began a tour taking in one doctor's office after another. One doctor said I should wear a different

type of shoe, another said that I needed glasses and still another said that I must have my tonsils removed. The doctors had not begun to solve my complexion problem, when I took an attack of acute bronchitis.

Impatiently, I lay ill in the receiving home for three weeks. The fog horns blew incessantly. Lonely as could be I dreamed every hour of my return to Kelowna. My guardian sent flowers and my supervisor called regularly yet the days dragged terribly. I thought of little else but the return to Lindahls.

One night after I was well enough to be out of bed, the Mother of the receiving home entertained her brother at dinner. The older girls were well acquainted with him as he often visited his sister. He talked freely of his business plans. He had just rented a suite of offices and was making plans to move his business from eastern Canada.

After dinner they asked me to join them in a game of cards. At Gerard's I had learned to play bridge, rummy, cribbage and solitaire. Nevertheless, I had left off card-playing when I began the new life with Christ. I begged to be excused and apologized for holding up the game. The conversation had been going along nicely and we were all quite happy with each other so some explanation had to be given. I told them of my conversion and dedication to God. My attitude wasn't too surprising to them. The gentleman said, "I have met people who believed this way before." He commended me for sticking to my conviction and then I excused myself and went upstairs to bed.

Late that night, when the card game had been in

progress a long time the guest felt sick and came upstairs to the bathroom. A dull thud and groans awakened me. The house Mother hurried up the stairs, calling her brother's name. By the time the physician came the man was dead. The whole house had been aroused and was in hysteria. Nervous and scared, I lay trembling in bed. Then a few lines of scripture came to me. Over and over I repeated, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Soon I drifted off into a deep sleep. In the morning one of the girls said to me, "What kind of a person are you? A man dies in the room right next to you and you turn over and go to sleep. Not one of us slept a wink all night." I told her that it was the Bible verses that put me to sleep.

Every day away from Kelowna seemed an age. As soon as I was well I went expectantly to my guardian's office. Surely there could be no more delays—after a talk with her I would be on the train to Kelowna. It was a privilege to talk with her. She had great authority over my life and most good things came through her hand, yet I had seen her only a few times.

DISAPPOINTING NEWS

She enquired about my health. Then she quizzed me on how things were at the receiving home. I thanked her for the flowers she had sent. It had been an honour to receive flowers from her. The other children had looked on enviously.

Then I popped the question, "What day am I going back to Kelowna?"

"You are not going back."

I was aghast. She surely wouldn't move me from Lindahl's now! I dreaded the thought of a change. Surprisingly enough I had the audacity to argue with her, but not the sense to know it would do no good.

To leave the Kelowna High School, where a competition had developed between another girl and me as we vied for first place in our class, was unthinkable. The whole school had taken an interest in the friendly competition. "Haven't you heard that I am doing very well at school?" I asked her.

Her reply was, "If you do well there, you'll do better here. I want you to go to the very finest schools where you'll get the best education. I'm expecting you to go far. The Doctor says your tonsils must come out, so wouldn't it be best for you to stay in Vancouver where the hospitals and medical care are the finest?"

Cleverly she convinced me that I wanted to do what she wanted me to do. Having gained that point she then dropped the real bomb, "While you are here in Vancouver I do not want you going to the Pentecostal church or any church like it!" Her words left me stunned.

Then she asked, "Are you still in touch with that woman who preached in the school house?"

"Yes, we correspond regularly."

"You are not to have anything to do with her either, or go to any of their meetings."

My much-respected guardian was taking on a new look. She was bent on tearing me from my religious

moorings. But if I went down under each of her edicts I never failed to come up arguing.

I stammered a protest, "The church means so much to me. If it hadn't been that I stood up for Christ in those meetings in the country. I don't know where I'd be now. That woman preacher is the best friend I have."

With that my guardian began to ridicule the letter that she had opened which was written by the preacher to me. She laughed at the affectionate opening and closing. To her it was mere piffle, so trivial and worthless. Defiantly I thought, it may be twaddle to her but it means everything to me. Purposefully, my guardian had set about to explode my dream and tear down my idol.

She continued, "If you defy me, I'll put you in a Roman Catholic convent. There you'll do what you are told." Whether she really would have I don't know. She had won every round so far.

I had one more question to ask, "If I am not permitted to go to the Pentecostal church, to what church shall I go?"

She named it.

"Why they don't even believe in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ!" I exclaimed in amazement.

With that she lost her temper and commanded me not to criticize other churches. Later I learned that it was her church I had criticized. The interview was brought to an abrupt conclusion.

The visit had proved enlightening. I now knew that I was not going back to Kelowna, that my guardian thought I was developing into a religious fanatic.

and that she thought I was about to ruin my life by sticking to the narrow-minded ideas I got in the country. If I didn't have sense enough to save myself from failure—she was going to do it for me.