

CHAPTER 9

Standing Alone

The imperial edict had been delivered. I was perplexed and bewildered yet hoped something would happen to make my guardian change her mind. It was soon evident that she had no intention of relenting.

Only through his persistence did my pastor from Kelowna get to see me in the hospital when I had my tonsils removed. Haughtily, my guardian referred to him as "that little Italián" and reluctantly granted him permission to see me for a few minutes only. When he told her that he felt it was most unfair to cut me off from the church and friends of my choice, she said she was doing it for my own good. He declared that she had no right to do it and that she could be proved wrong in court. In face of his threat she said that if the matter of my religious freedom went to court she would prove, on the testimony of her Doctors, that it was bad for my health to attend a Pentecostal church.

After discussing the problem with other ministers, the pastor decided that it was right for me to submit to my guardian's wishes, even though we questioned her judgment. God was giving me an opportunity to stand up for my convictions in the face of opposition.

GUARDIAN AND NEW FAMILY COLLABORATE

During the next four years I felt the pressure of my guardian's interest in my religious life. Through the people I lived with, she pressed for changes in my life and thinking.

My new home was located in one of Vancouver's fine residential areas. The new family was composed of Mr. and Mrs. H. and their son. The boy who attended a private school eyed me with frank curiosity. He was five years younger than I. In the years that followed there developed between us a tie of genuine affection.

Lord Byng High School was the largest I had ever seen. My first day there I felt like a country girl lost in the big city. When I got home that night, Mrs. H. said, "How did you get along in school today?"

"Just wonderful, thank you."

"Did you get to know anyone?"

"Yes," I said, "I met three of the nicest girls I have ever seen."

"Did they ask you anywhere?"

"Yes, they asked me to their house and the Mother served us cake and milk."

Mrs. H. nodded approvingly, "Did they invite you anywhere else?"

"Yes," I said, "they invited me to go to the theatre tonight."

"And," said she, "what did you say?"

"I said, 'It is nice of you to ask me but I don't go to the theatre. I was converted when I lived in the country. Of course, I don't blame you for going

because I know you don't have anything better to do.' ”

Mrs. H. was wide-eyed in amazement, “You told them that!”

I said, “Yes, that's the truth—I did get *converted in the country*. If I had not been converted I wouldn't be here now.”

Then she warned me never to talk to anyone that way again. “That idea may be alright out in the sticks where nobody knows anything but you are now living in one of the most aristocratic sections of this city. Here people have education and culture. That idea will never go over around here. If that is the way you intend to live you are going to be a very lonely girl.

When my Pentecostal friends in Kelowna heard that I was living in a household where they were set on talking me out of my old-time religion, they got in touch with their friends in Vancouver. I well remember when one of those friends called on the telephone and asked for me. The lady of the house, said, “What is your name please?”

So they gave it.

“And to what church do you belong?”

“Sixth Avenue Pentecostal Tabernacle.”

Bang went the receiver and down went my heart!

She was so right when she said that I was going to be lonely. And especially so if she succeeded in cutting me off from my religious friends—the only kind I had.

IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION

Christ is the great problem-solver—but Christ was my problem. How to stay true to Christ and still please my guardian and the people with whom I lived was a problem impossible of solution. What I believed to be Christian consecration, they thought was narrow-mindedness. They were apparently sincere and so was I.

One Saturday during my first weeks in their home a near-crisis arose at the dinner table. The day had gone very well, harmony filling the house. Mr. H. said, "Let's all go to the theatre tonight."

He looked at his son. There was a ready answer, "Sure Dad, let's go."

Then he looked at his wife. She was in favor.

Then he looked at me. My water glass was shaking in my hand. I was having a hard time adjusting to the discipline of their home. Fearful of his disapproval but nevertheless determined, I said, "I'm sorry, Sir, but I don't go to the theatre."

He said, "You don't go to the theatre? What nonsense! You are no better than we are. We are going and so are you! When I say you are going, you are going!"

I thought, "Lord, what do I do now?"

The question was answered for me. Mrs. H. seeing my distress, turned to her husband and said, "We have discussed this long enough. Leave her alone."

They went to the theatre without me. Through the years that I lived with them, when she got after me, he would say, "Alright, Dearie, leave her alone." When he felt like lecturing me on religion, she would

let it go just so far and then say, "Now let's drop the subject."

My first and last school days in Vancouver were spent in their home. When Mr. H. left one company and became a buyer for another, they sold their home. I lived with two other families before moving back with them. The first family had three little girls. Their chief reason for having me in their home was that they needed a baby sitter, vegetable peeler, dishwasher and general housekeeper's assistant. The little girls wore fancy, newly starched dresses every day. Ironing those twenty-one dresses each week and doing a fair share of the general housework kept me busy. One of the High School teachers complained to my guardian that her usually excellent student was lagging because of lack of time to study. My guardian had me moved.

In that home, as well as the one in which I lived next, I sometimes gained permission to attend a young people's service or some special gathering with my Pentecostal friends. Nevertheless my guardian's orders remained the same. I regularly attended the church of her choice.

In the church-of-her-choice I taught a Sunday School class of twelve-year-old boys. Most of them attended private school. It was not unusual for one to come back to the class after an absence of several weeks and explain that his family had been in Europe. Even on a class picnic, when the menu had on it only hot dogs, mustard and sand, they never forgot they were gentlemen of breeding. When asked to teach the Sunday School class, I had wondered if my services

would be acceptable since my beliefs were Pentecostal. The Vicar of the parish said, "That's alright. There are some good people among those Pentecostals."

Probably my guardian felt that attendance at such a church would wean me away from my seemingly radical views. On the contrary—every time I sat through their services, I knew more certainly what I wanted. When the Sunday School Superintendent commented on the temperance lesson, I was shocked. His views and what I had told my boys were entirely opposite. He said, "To be temperate means to refrain from doing too much of anything. It is alright to drink wine but don't drink too much." Then he made an honest confession. He pointed to the sore on his lip and said, "I got this from smoking my pipe too much. Don't do that." To a born-again Christian his temperance lesson was a flop. The Mohammedans do much better than that.

WHY SO FEW?

For a long time I knew only one girl at the High School who believed as I did. It troubled me greatly that the born-again believers should be so much in the minority.

One year I was president of the public speaking club. At the end of the year it was customary to have a party. In the general discussion at the club meeting it was decided that we would have a dance. I said, "It seems that everyone is in favor of having a dance. We'll have to appoint someone to take care of the arrangements—the president won't be there."

"What is wrong with the president? Why won't she be there?"

My answer was, "As most of you know I was *converted in the country*. I don't go to dances, but that need not hinder your dance. You can certainly have it without me."

Someone spoke up and said that after such a wonderful year together it seemed ridiculous to have the main event without the president.

I said, "I'm sorry, kids. I don't mean to spoil your fun but I honestly cannot attend the dance."

By way of compromise they arranged a banquet, followed by a dance. I agreed to attend the banquet and leave before the dance.

On the night of the event, by the time the banquet was drawing to a close, my mind was on my exit. I did not want to get into any embarrassing situations and I did not intend to stay for the dance. I wanted to be true to God and my convictions and I knew that that was what it took for me to be true. The club was made up of wonderful, clean-cut young people; most of them church members. I liked every one and certainly did not feel superior to any of them. To stay for sociability's sake would have been a pleasure but I knew what I had to do.

The crowd knew that the president planned on leaving. In good spirit they made an effort to persuade me to stay. One of the nicest looking boys in the group came and asked me to dance with him.

"Thank you, Dave, but I just can't do it. I don't even know how to dance."

"Well, that is no problem," said he, "I'll teach you."

By this time there was quite a group gathered a-

round. Everyone was in a gay mood and it seemed they had plotted together to draw me into the fun. Soon there was a line-up of good looking boys, all of them volunteers to help teach me to dance.

To slight their invitation and to appear a wet blanket was the last thing I wanted. But I could not go back on what I had received on taking Christ as my Saviour, "Kids, thanks very much for everything. Go ahead and have a good time. I must go now."

Without an escort of any kind the president left the party and caught the first streetcar home. I felt lonely and uncertain. Most of the girls and boys I had just left were from good families. Their dress was better than mine. There was no question about their background. They had good reputations and most of them if asked would have said, "Yes, I am a Christian."

Could it be that I was mistaken? Was I making life harder for myself by tenaciously clinging to strange, narrow-minded ideas? Did I really get *converted in the country*? Was I the girl for whom old things had passed away and all things had become new as a result of my decision to serve Christ? Now it all seemed like a dream.

When at last I was home in my own room I earnestly sought God with tears. I confessed once again my faith in Christ, thanked Him for His blood shed for my sins, and pleaded for His guidance. I was weak and miserable but He was strong and merciful. In the days that followed I learned more and more of His grace and keeping power.