

Revelation in Nicholasville

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Chapter One

“Welcome to Nicholsville” declared the chipped black letters on the white highway sign marking the city limits of my hometown. It was more than 50 years ago that I recollect first seeing that old wooden sign on the outskirts of Nicholsville, Kansas. And it’s been quite awhile already since its bright green and white metal replacement began simply stating, “Nicholsville, A Kansas Star City.”

Nicholsville began its meteoric rise to “Star City” status some thirty-five years ago when Bigland Industries took notice of this sleepy little east central Kansas town. Perhaps Bigland Industries, the “Everything for the Farm” giant, wasn’t as interested in our little town as in the mile after mile of rich soil that encircled it. But

either way, Bigland Industries soon became *the* medium for growth in little Nicholsville.

It was at about the time that Bigland arrived that I left home for a stint in the Air Force. My father, F. W. Pilgrim, was a farmer. And I, like most teenage boys of that day or any day for that matter, longed to get as far as possible from the smell and hard work of the family farm. So with the ink still drying on my Nicholsville High diploma, I was up into the wild blue yonder, or so I thought. As it rather ironically turned out, most of my Air Force time was spent on the ground cataloging military hardware. I had hoped for more from the experience, perhaps that it would open new vistas of adventure. I was, unfortunately, very disappointed. So when my short military stint was over, I headed to Minnesota for college and medical school (Go, Golden Gophers!).

Then it was off to the famous Cook County Hospital in Chicago for residency training in Internal Medicine. Finally, I came home to set up my practice. Full circle in a few more than a dozen years. The prodigal son had searched the world over to find what he already had but couldn't appreciate as a lad—the matchless tranquility of Nicholsville, Kansas. But like anywhere else, Nicholsville is what you make it. And certainly the lion's share of the tranquility that I feel here is because of Sarah, my beloved wife, who is my fount of peace and joy.

Sarah is, like myself, a native of Nicholsville, though I didn't meet her until I returned home from the Air Force some thirty years ago now. She was too young for me then, barely in her twenties, so naturally I was

attracted to her. She worked at Hill Memorial Hospital as a secretary in the administration office. We met one day in the crowded cafeteria where only one of the burnt-orange, plastic tables for two remained unoccupied. We both headed for it, each unaware of the other's intentions until we arrived. It was momentarily embarrassing, but we mutually solved the problem by inviting each other to lunch. We laughed and sat down, and have been laughing and sitting together ever since—except for a brief but dark period twenty-six years ago this past March.

Sarah and I wanted to have a big family, but after a few years of marriage it was obvious we were off to a slow start. Because we were Christians we frequently prayed about our dilemma, but our prayers seemed to be directed at an impenetrable sky. Yet just when frustration was about to give way to defeat, our prayers were answered. Sarah was pregnant and we were overjoyed! The pregnancy seemed to go well, although Sarah didn't gain as much weight as her obstetrician thought she should. But no one, even her doctor, anticipated the catastrophe at delivery. Our daughter was not a beautiful bouncing baby. She was weak and deformed, with a small head and tiny round face. Her eyes were blue, but vacant, and her cry was a pathetic mew, like a sick kitten. She was only two days old when she died in my arms, her final weak wail only an unmelodious whimper. We named her Melody.

Melody's death crushed me, not so much due to the pain I suffered, but because I had to watch helplessly as Sarah endured losing the only child she'd ever have. In

the end, the experience cost me much more than a child. Though I still believed in His existence, my faith in God was all but erased. I swore I'd never trust Him again.

But Sarah never doubted for a moment. Her faith never wavered as she praised Him for having experienced the miracle of childbearing. I must admit that the strength of her faith through that ordeal inspired me more than any single event in my life, and because of it I haven't regretted a minute of our time together. It is an honor to travel life's path with a woman like Sarah.

Sarah and I live out of town a ways, off Highway 15 going west. Our home is nestled in some trees, surrounded by acres and acres of farm fields. It's a big bright yellow farmhouse trimmed in white with a large porch on the front and rear. A beautiful pond lies just beyond our sprawling back lawn. It's more peaceful and quiet here than anywhere else on Earth.

My clinic is right on the highway at the end of our driveway, only about a half mile from our home. I moved it out here five years ago when we built the house. Before that I practiced in town in the old Martinson Clinic next to Hill Memorial Hospital.

Clayton Hill was the first doctor in Nicholasville. When he died and a few years passed, Jay Martinson came to town. Dr. Martinson wanted to change the name of the clinic from Hill to Martinson, but this didn't sit well with the folks who still cherished old Doc Hill's memory. So a compromise was struck: the name of Nicholasville Community Hospital would be changed to Hill Memorial Hospital and Hill Clinic to Martinson

Clinic. This arrangement seemed to suit everyone just fine and, in fact, remains to this day.

Dr. Jay Martinson, who was our family physician for many years and who's my namesake because he delivered me under duress (a story we need not go into here), died of cancer the same year I completed residency. So when I returned to Nicholasville from Chicago, I purchased the old Martinson Clinic. I practiced there until five years ago when Hill Memorial needed to expand again. As Bigland Industries grew, so did the town, attracting physicians and support staff. The hospital kept sprouting wings until there was nowhere to go but on top of Martinson Clinic, which stood right next door. So I sold the property to the hospital for their new wing. But when I watched the demolition crew level that clinic, the loss put an empty spot in my heart much bigger than the empty lot where my practice had thrived. So in memory of Dr. Martinson and the clinic he and I'd both loved, I built a replica of it on west Highway 15, and kept the name Martinson Clinic. I've practiced there ever since, most of the time solo, except for one extraordinary twelve month period that changed the focus of my life forever. It's about that strange time in Nicholasville that this book is written.