

SAGA OF THE RED TRUCK

Life Lessons From Here and There

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Dedication

To granddaughter Naomi
who will someday write
of her own adventures.

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Introduction

Saga of the Red Truck—Life Lessons From Here and There is the third book of stories from my life. This book, more than the others, is a hodgepodge of happenings. Many of them come from my earlier years. Though I have tried to connect the chapters in a way that provides some small measure of flow from subject to subject, you may justly conclude that my efforts in this regard failed miserably.

I am always amazed with memories stored away in our minds. When I completed my first book of 30 stories, I thought I had exhausted all the material. Then I started the second book and the more I delved into my past, the more I discovered episodes to recount. Now here is yet another book. Perhaps this is a case of the aging process when short-term memory wanes and long-term memory comes alive.

Some of my favorite stories are in this book—things that had slipped my mind completely. For example, there was the Sunday morning when I tossed water balloons on parishioners from the church bell tower. And the time I visited an abandoned outhouse

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and sat on a hornet's nest. And the afternoon I ventured out onto the Lake Washington Ship Canal on a homemade raft.

As in the earlier books, you'll find that I end each story with a moral or spiritual connection. I hope you find this helpful in applying the experiences to your own life. After all, life itself is a schoolroom that teaches us about values and how to live in a worthwhile way.

In these pages you will discover honest reporting of my errors of judgment and some just plain dumb decisions. At times you may wince or laugh, or perhaps even experience some inspiration. All of the stories are true.

Life is a long walk along a narrow road and we need all the help we can get to make our final Destination safely. Someday, through our faith in Christ, we will hobnob with angels and glory in the nearer presence of our Lord. I guess you might say that getting to Heaven in one piece is what this book is all about.

If you enjoy these stories, you will probably like my earlier collections of stories titled, *Hikes, Flights, and Lookout Stories—Life Lessons From High Places*, and *Dogs, Camping, and Other Candid Tales—Life Lessons From the Out-of-Doors*. You will find information about these and my other books at www.papathree.com.

You may wonder about the cover photo and where the story of the red truck appears in the book. You'll find it in chapter 18. For now, let's start out with "Mom's Know," a story of my youthful efforts to extract contributions from neighbors under the guise of raising money for missionaries.

Moms Know

For some reason it is easier for me to recall negative episodes of my youth than those things that yielded positive reward. Maybe the good was so rare that it has been lost in obscurity, whereas the other things occurred in such abundance that they spill out of my memory easily. In any case, I feel compelled to relate stories of the past, if for no other reason than to redeem them through spiritual application to contemporary life.

Today I am recalling my shameful behavior as a childhood fundraiser. I must have been six or seven at the time the following sham occurred.

It started in Sunday school. We were given little piggybanks and urged to go home and put in some of our pennies and nickels for a month and then bring back the banks for a missionary project.

Being something of a scoundrel, my young mind saw unlimited possibilities in this pennies-for-missions program. If I could get other people to put money in my bank, I could use some of it to buy candy. You might call it fundraising overhead. Visions of goodies danced in my mind.

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Monday, after school, I set out to cover the neighborhood. I marched up to the first porch, rang the bell, and waited for the prospect to appear. Then I held out the bank and said something like, “I’m raising money for a Sunday school project. It’s for missionaries in Africa. Do you want to put something in the bank to help?” Bingo! She put in several coins.

I went to the second house and scored again. Soon I had five houses and five donations. What a deal!

I couldn’t wait to spend part of the loot, so I headed off to the corner grocery store. I’d canvass the rest of the neighborhood tomorrow.

On the way home, I stuffed my pockets with the candy and threw away the sack. I didn’t want anyone to know where I’d been. If I could just get to my bedroom and stash the candy without detection, I’d be home free—as it were.

Of course I left a few pennies in the bank for the mission’s project. After all, I didn’t want to stand out as a failure when the teacher collected the banks.

Meanwhile, one of the donors got suspicious and called my mother. This woman was struggling with dissonance as she tried to reconcile my meek little missionary appeal with my dubious reputation as the “terror” of the neighborhood. Was there really a mission’s project?

I walked in the door and ran into Mom. Next came the “look-into-my-eyes” interrogation conducted in our kitchen. I never could handle my mom’s penetrating gaze, so I crumbled and confessed.

Part of my punishment included a door-to-door confession. Another part involved chores to earn the money I had spent so I

Moms Know

could replenish the piggybank for missions. As I recall, another aspect of my punishment had something to do with the seat of my pants.

That early encounter with fundraising fraud cured me good...and I like to believe I've been clean ever since. Yet, sometimes I wonder whether I'm as pure as I should be in other areas of my adult life.

For example, do I accept unwarranted reward? Do I take all the credit for something I didn't do singlehandedly? It may seem a small thing, but on the purity scale it qualifies as dishonesty. Collecting the praise of man under false pretense is unbecoming a follower of Christ.

My fraudulent piggybank fundraising scheme was despicable because I deceived others for personal gain. My mother was absolutely right in her (and my dad's) response. Sometimes, as adults, we would do well to have trusted friends or family help us "walk the line" in both our public and private lives.

On another occasion it was a friend's mother who called me to task. I was visiting a friend who lived on a farm a few hours from Seattle. During the night, when the house was quiet and we were supposedly asleep, we crept outside armed with a few newspapers and a box of matches.

We walked up the two-lane country road a ways and watched in the distance for the approach of a car. Then we wadded some papers, placed them in the center of the road, lit the fuel, and hid in the bushes to see what would happen. One driver might slow and steer around the flame, while another might stop to see what was burning. One guy got out and stamped out the fire.

When the "fun" of that activity waned, we walked into the yard of a house belonging to two elderly sisters. We tossed the

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papers on the lawn and gathered some rocks. These we threw onto the steep metal roof, causing a racket as the rocks rolled down. The sound drew attention and lights came on. We ran back home and climbed into bed like two innocent cherubs.

The next morning, my friend's mom addressed us in the kitchen. "Did you boys go out last night after you went to bed?"

Shocked to the core, we nonetheless pretended innocence and asked why she would think such a thing.

Then this rather large and stern German woman related the phone call she had received earlier in the morning. It seems the two sisters went outside to investigate and found some papers on the lawn. These papers, earlier delivered by mail, bore the name and address of my friend's mom and dad.

Busted! Appropriately disciplined, we were also required to go to the sisters and apologize for our egregious behavior.

The moral, I am sure, underscores the ancient maxim: "Be sure your sins will find you out."

Even though we may think we have eluded detection in some act of misconduct, the truth is that God knows and that we stand condemned in his presence—even for the smallest infraction or wrongdoing. We are born as sinful creatures and we live sinful lives either through commission of evil deeds or the omission of righteous behavior.

However—and this is the grandest news of all time—God who is rich in mercy, even when we fall short of his glory, loves us immeasurably and calls us to the cross where our sins are washed away. Our heavenly Father earnestly desires to apply his forgiveness to our hearts if we will only confess our sins and trust in his marvelous grace.

Moms Know

We may have graduated from prankish behavior, only to become more sophisticated in our wrongdoings and deceptions. The fact is, we never outgrow our need for mercy and grace.

So let us celebrate the ongoing, unlimited, and deep, deep love of Jesus. Let us walk before him in the beauty of his holiness and live in the knowledge that our sins have been buried in the deepest sea, never to be remembered against us again.

