

Chapter 2

My Childhood Struggles

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” Jeremiah

1:5

Boys Will Be Boys

Proverbs 20:11

*Even a child is known by his doings,
whether his work be pure, and whether it be right*

Cowboys Jumping

Mom certainly had her share of troubles and trials with her children. When David and I were very young we were playing cowboys and indians using our tricycle as a horse. We had seen a cowboy on TV jump onto his horse from behind and we thought that was quite clever. We climbed onto the shed with a sloping roof, known then as a coal bin, and launched ourselves tentatively onto our tricycle, which was our horse. Mom was at the window doing dishes and shouted for us to stop because we could get seriously hurt. Well, one last jump to get down couldn't do much harm. Dave jumped one last time, evidently with his tongue sticking out. When he landed he bit his tongue three quarters of the way off. It must have been a neighbor who rushed him to the hospital. The doctor sewed his tongue back on. Mom prayed. After a period of recovery Dave was able to talk again and has never stopped since.

The Rat-Tail Comb

During our childhood David and I shared the same bed. On one occasion we were to be taking a nap, but of course we weren't. I don't know what I was thinking, maybe there was wax in Dave's ear, I don't remember, but for some reason I stuck a rat-tailed comb into his ear perforating his eardrum. My brother's memory was that I was pretending the comb was a gun and pointed the barrel at him and perhaps he moved the wrong way, but the result was the same. His ear drum was damaged. Mom prayed. Dave can hear as well as any of us and Dick got a good spanking for that one. "What were you thinking?!"

A Smashed Finger

When I was about five years old I was playing outdoors and daydreaming, using my imagination, as I was often prone to do. It was a windy fall day and I was holding on to the door jam pretending I was on a ship sailing a windy sea. About that time my sister ran out the door. I remember hearing my mom yell, "Norma, close that door!" She did. What she didn't know was that my right pinky finger was in the doorjamb. What a horror flashed over me to find my finger smashed and stuck in the door jamb. I'm sure the whole neighborhood heard me scream. I still remember it as if it were yesterday. When they opened the door my pinky was smashed flat and dangling half off. They rushed me to the hospital with the blood from my finger soaking towels. The doctor took me in and did surgery on my little finger. I remember they kept me a day or two. What helps me remember was as a middle child even at that age I got very little special attention. In the hospital they brought me presents. I felt special. My finger recovered just fine, except that it still looks deformed and doesn't grow the nail properly. I share that story, not for pity, but to show how much my mother had to endure with her six children and how she always prayed us through.

Kindergarten

When I started kindergarten we had just moved to a new house in the country which meant we had to take a bus to school. School buses are quite traumatizing for shy children. My first day of school was later than the rest of the class because we had moved in the early fall after school already started. I remember it well because I was embarrassed to be singled out to the whole class. My mother took me in and introduced me to my teacher. "This is Ricky LaFountain." That was my name, Ricky, as in Ricky Ricardo from the *I Love Lucy* show. When my mother finally slipped out of the room the teacher introduced me to the whole class as Dickie LaFountain. The name stuck and I was ever after Dick or Dickie, except when my mother was angry, then I was Richard William LaFountain.

Color Blind

Kindergarten is a fun time for most kids. It was fun to go to school and play with the other children learning new things. For me it was a traumatic time. I was terribly shy and never spoke up in school. I also was colorblind but nobody knew it back then. I didn't know it either. Other children would make fun of my purple sky and brown grass. It all looked the same to me. So, in the first grade, once I learned to read the colors, I would refuse to use any crayon that did not have its original wrapper on it identifying the color. It was my way of surviving.

Dog Bite

Early in the year I was waiting for the bus, standing by our mailbox while my mother watched from the window. As I waited a neighbor dog came by. He seemed friendly so I reached out my hand to pet him and he bit me! He

really chomped into my hand too. Off to the doctor I had to go to get a tetanus shot. I hate tetanus shots, they hurt!

Our doctor was a woman, Dr. Ames. She was a nice chubby lady with gray hair. She had delivered me and knew our family well. She had dealt with my smashed finger, my dog bite, and all of our inoculations. Sitting in her waiting room was frightening. It smelled like antiseptics. Then when we would go into her office it smelled like alcohol. When the time came to give shots she would reach into what looked like a little refrigerator and pull out an aluminum tray with hypodermic needles in it. We knew what was coming. Rarely was the shot administered in the arm. She preferred the buttocks. How embarrassing! She was a woman and we had to pull our pants down for her. After, she would give us a stick of *Wrigley's Spearmint Gum* as if that made it all better. To this day I cannot stand the smell of spearmint gum.

Think! Think! Think!

Being shy I never raised my hand in class, except to go to the bathroom, and I refused to indicate my toilet need with one or two fingers. That was nobody's business. I am sure I wasn't the brightest bulb in the class either. I probably had attention deficit disorder, but no one knew about in those days. I didn't like school because it put me in a social setting and I was very shy. I remember being so shy that when company would come over to our house, even if they were my cousins, I would hide in a closet or under the bed hoping they would go away. Much of my classroom time was spent in daydreaming. What a shock it was early in first grade to get one of our test papers back with a huge red X across the page. I hadn't followed the instruction to underline an answer. Instead I circled the answer. The teacher gave out my test last and in front of the whole class. She thumped my head with her finger and said, "Think! Think! Think!" – I hated school ever after. It was a place of humiliation.

Poison Ivy

We lived in the Keagan Road house in the country for a number of years. It was there that I had my first bout with poison ivy. Well, we thought it was poison ivy. Across the street was a huge field of corn. We would play hide and go seek in among the stalks. It was great fun. The day after playing in the corn I broke out with a rash. We thought it was poison ivy. It wasn't. It looked like poison ivy. It itched like poison ivy, but it was much worse.

First they treated it with Calamine Lotion. That was about like caking white mud on my rash. The rash would soon start to ooze a yellow puss. Then whatever the puss touched, the rash spread until it spread all over my body. It got so bad that I was hospitalized with it several summers. I was their guinea pig. They tried soaking me in a purple chemical bath. That didn't help. It got worse. Then they decided what I needed was Aveeno oatmeal baths. I smelled like a breakfast cereal, and it did no good either. These were the days before antihistamines and corticosteroid shots. They finally decided it was weed poisoning, not just poison ivy.

Year after year on into my teens I got this horrible rash that made me feel like a leper. I was covered head to toe with calamine lotion and oozing sores. It usually hit me about July when my parents had their two week vacation. They weren't about to stay home from vacation because of my poison ivy. So they would wrap my arms and legs with gauze to keep the pussy sores from running all over everyone. We would go camping in the northern part of Michigan. It certainly was no fun for me. I looked like Lazarus just coming out of his tomb. Kids on the playground would run away from me. I wanted to run away from me. I itched horribly from head to toe and in between my toes and on all my bodily parts. But I was told not to scratch it because that only spread it. I remember asking God why he allowed this horrible disease to afflict me. Sometimes at night I would pray to die. That's how bad it was.

As a teenager I continued to battle this weed poisoning every year. My mother knew I was hoping to be a missionary. She had asked God for that. Seeing my misery she asked if I was sure God called me to be a missionary. She said, "If God wants you to be a missionary He is going to have to heal you of this weed poisoning." The rest of the story I will relate in chapter eight.