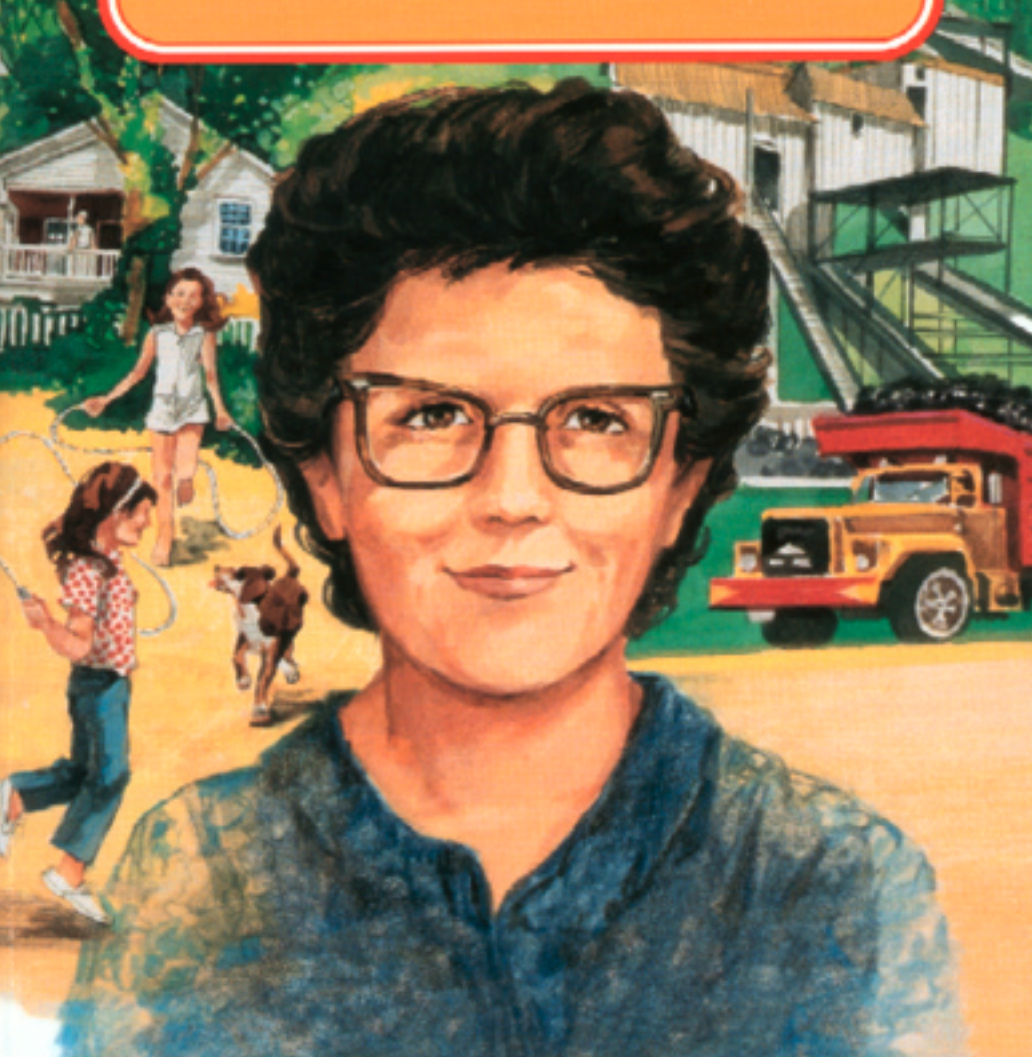


MEET THE MISSIONARY SERIES

Freeda Harris:

Woman of Prayer

Ethel McIndoo
Illustrated by John Ham



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Illustrated by John Ham



Woman's Missionary Union
Birmingham, Alabama

To the memory of my mother,
Mrs. Edith McIndoo,
who instilled in me
a love for missions

My thanks to Freeda Harris for sharing her life with me and
A. V. Colvin, Barry Tackett, Beverly Smothers, and Sharlene
Lockenvitz for the contributions they made to the writing of this
book.

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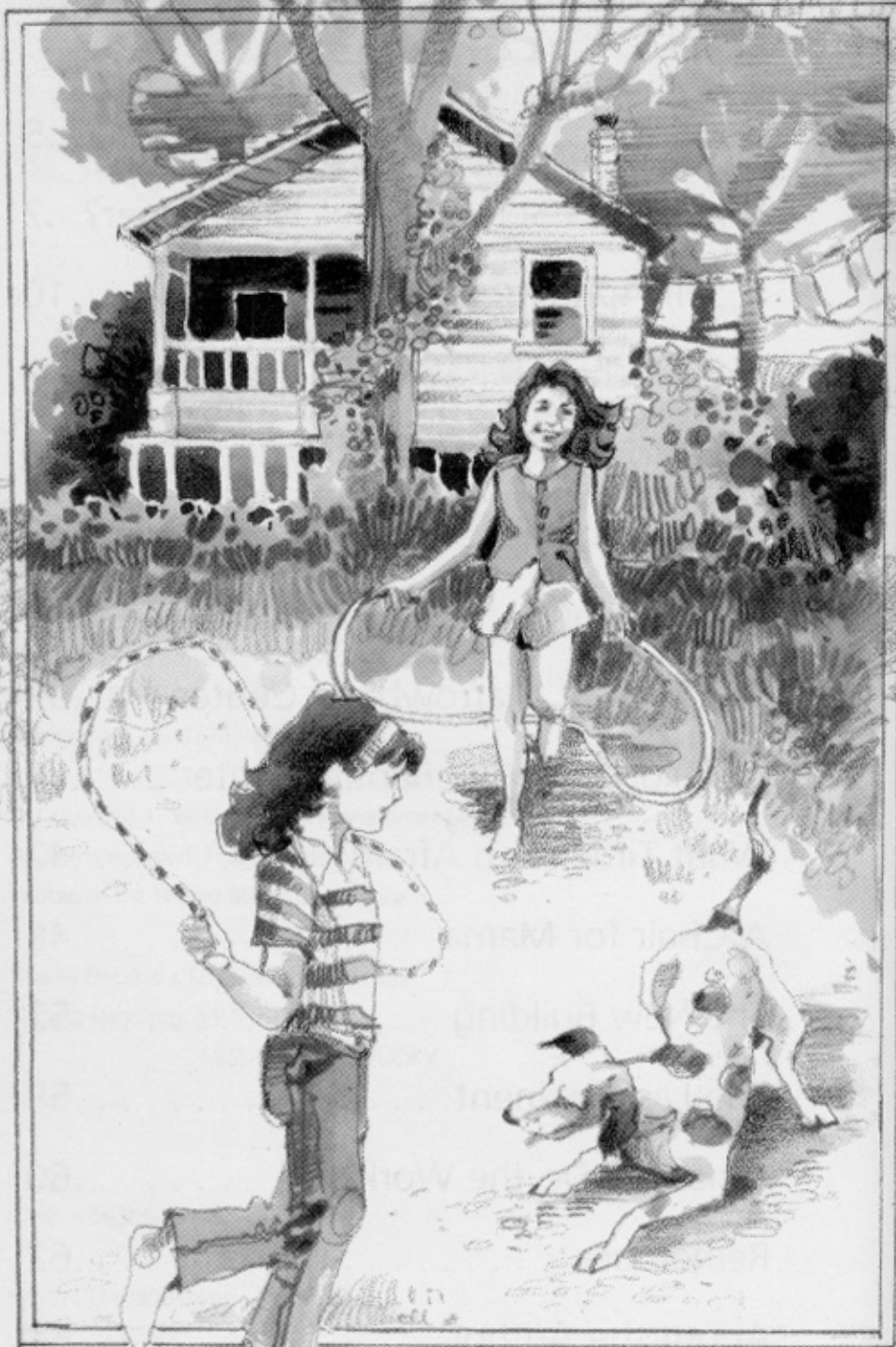
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Daughter of a Coal Miner

Shouts of children playing broke the silence of the brisk December day in Cordova, Alabama. A frayed piece of rope found on a junk pile had become a jumping rope. Children lined up to jump while a child on each end of the rope turned it.

“One, two, three, four, five,” counted the children, as one at a time they jumped into the rope and out again.

A row of tiny frame houses lined both sides of the street. Heavy black coal dust covered whatever color the houses might have been at one time. The wooden structure of the coal mines jutted out from the side of the mountain behind the houses. The structure was a dim reminder of the husbands and fathers who spent long hours under the ground digging black nuggets of coal from the earth.

Two days before Christmas 1914, a little girl was born to the Bailey family. They named the baby Freeda. The family lived in one of those frame houses. Sister Nina was one of the children who played in the street. Freeda’s father was a miner.

Times were hard. The men who worked in the mines didn’t make enough money to feed and clothe their families.

Some children enjoyed fun activities in local churches. But no one had ever invited the Bailey family to church. They did not know about God. The name of Jesus was not spoken in

their home. They did not know about God's wonderful plan for His people.

Four years later, little brother Howard was born. Soon the mines in Cordova closed. Freeda's father moved his family to an area near Pikeville, Kentucky. He had heard that mining jobs were available there. Mr. Bailey found work, and the struggle to provide for his family continued. Still no one invited the Bailey family to church or told them about Jesus.

Several years later, the family moved to Harlan County, Kentucky. Each mining camp looked much the same. The frame houses looked the same. Black, gritty coal dust covered everything in sight.

Here in Harlan County, Freeda grew to womanhood. Her goals in life were to make money and have a good time. She wanted to have the things that she had missed as a child.

Impatient to make her dream come true, Freeda dropped out of high school. She moved to Knoxville, Tennessee, to work her way through beauty school. She earned her beauty license and returned to Kentucky, to Black Mountain to work as a beautician.

Freeda was good at her job. She had many customers. She made money just as she had planned. During this time Freeda married. She was now Mrs. Harris. Freeda's husband joined her in finding ways to have a good time. Together they managed to spend all the money both of them made.

Why Didn't Someone Tell Me Sooner?

“Freeda, why don't you go to church with me in the morning?” said Dot Barton, one of Freeda's customers. Dot was the last customer of the day in the beauty shop. Saturdays were always hard, and Freeda was tired. Dot had invited Freeda to church before. Freeda had always found an excuse not to go, but this time was different.

“OK, I will,” said Freeda, as she gave Dot's hair one last flip with the comb.

“I'll pick you up about nine o'clock for Sunday School,” said Dot, as she went through the door.

“What have I done?” said Freeda to herself. “I've never been inside a church. I don't know what to wear or how to act. I'll probably make a fool of myself.”

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life,” the preacher read from the Bible. Freeda had never heard those words before. Neither had she heard any of the other things the preacher said that morning. He told about a man named Jesus Who loved her so much that He was willing to die a cruel death on a cross that she might live with God forever.

“Could this be true? Why have I never heard this news before?” Freeda wondered.



Freeda couldn't forget those words. The wild things she did for fun didn't seem fun anymore. She got angry with herself for being so disturbed. She told herself that nothing had changed. But something had changed. Freeda had changed.

Dot Barton saw the change. At the shop one day when they were alone, Dot said to Freeda, "You need to invite Jesus into your life." Almost before Dot finished talking, Freeda was on her knees. With tears streaming down her face, 31-year-old Freeda Harris rose to her feet. "Why didn't they tell me sooner?" she asked.

Freeda immediately started working in the missionary organization of the church.

"Freeda, here is your part on the program for the next meeting," said a woman, handing her an open magazine. One of the paragraphs had been circled.

Freeda was terrified. She studied all week. When she stood to give her part, she trembled from head to toe.

"Don't ever give me another part," she said, but they did, again and again. Freeda overcame her shyness as she eagerly told others about her newfound Savior.

"I never heard about a Savior when I was a child," Freeda told her preacher at Black Mountain. "I want people to know about Him." The preacher and his wife taught Freeda much about prayer. She watched as they struggled with the everyday problems of life. She saw the peace that came when they shared those problems with God. They led Freeda to pray.

"We will not always be here, Freeda," they told her, "but God will always be present. Talk to him often about whatever is on your mind."

Prayer became a way of life for Freeda as she shared her thoughts and feelings with God.

A Self-Appointed Missionary

“God, now that You have my life, tell me what You want me to do. I am ready to serve You wherever You want to lead me. You know I don’t have many talents. I don’t have much education, but I can drive a car.”

God answered Freeda’s prayer. She felt He was leading her to return to Pike County where she had grown up.

“You will have to leave your job in the beauty shop. How will you make a living?” asked a friend.

“I can’t answer that,” said Freeda. “I only know I have to go. God will show me the way.”

Freeda was sad. She couldn’t make her husband understand the wonderful change that God had made in her life. She wanted him to experience what she had experienced. She pleaded with him to let God change his way of living. But in spite of all she said and did, he would not change. The time came when Freeda and her husband decided they could no longer live together.

Freeda moved to Hellier, Kentucky, near Marrowbone. It’s in eastern Kentucky near Virginia and West Virginia. Coal was the main business. Huge coal trucks and mining equipment were everywhere. Nearly every family for miles around was connected in some way with the coal business. The people there had close family ties. They were proud people and not easily understood by outsiders. But Freeda was not an outsider. She was the daughter of a coal miner. She understood the people. She understood their problems.

Freeda found a part-time job in a coal mining company store. She saved what money she could from her paycheck and bought a car. It was not a new car, but it ran. She rented a little house in Edgewater Hollow near her sister, Nina.

Freeda began to drive up the hollows to pick up the children after school for an hour or two of games, Bible study, songs, and crafts.

These hollows had names like Bowling Fork, Dry Fork, Bad Fork, Poor Bottom, and Wolf Pit. The roads up the hollows were full of holes and ruts. Sharp curves and steep hills made driving difficult. Most people would not have driven on those roads unless they lived up there and had no choice. But Freeda was not like most people.

The children soon learned to expect Freeda. They stood out on the road and waited for her. When they saw her car coming up the road, they shouted, "Freeda's coming! Freeda's coming!"

One day Freeda noticed that it was hard to shift gears on her car. She took it by the gas station and said to the attendant, "Fix it, please."

The young man ran the car up on the rack while she waited.

"Are you kidding?" he asked. "This old thing is ready for the junk heap. The transmission is gone."

"I hope you are wrong," Freeda told him.

Freeda got in her car. She wondered how she would continue to pick up the children if her car wouldn't run. The money she made was barely enough to buy food and pay rent.

"Lord, help me," said Freeda, as she shifted into low and

stepped on the gas. Slowly she let the clutch pedal out, hoping the car would move. It didn't. Again, she wiggled the gear shift, moved it to neutral and back to low, then tried again. The car moved slowly forward.

The young man was still shaking his head as Freeda drove out of the station and headed up the road toward Bad Fork Hollow.

"She'll never make it," he said.

But Freeda did make it.

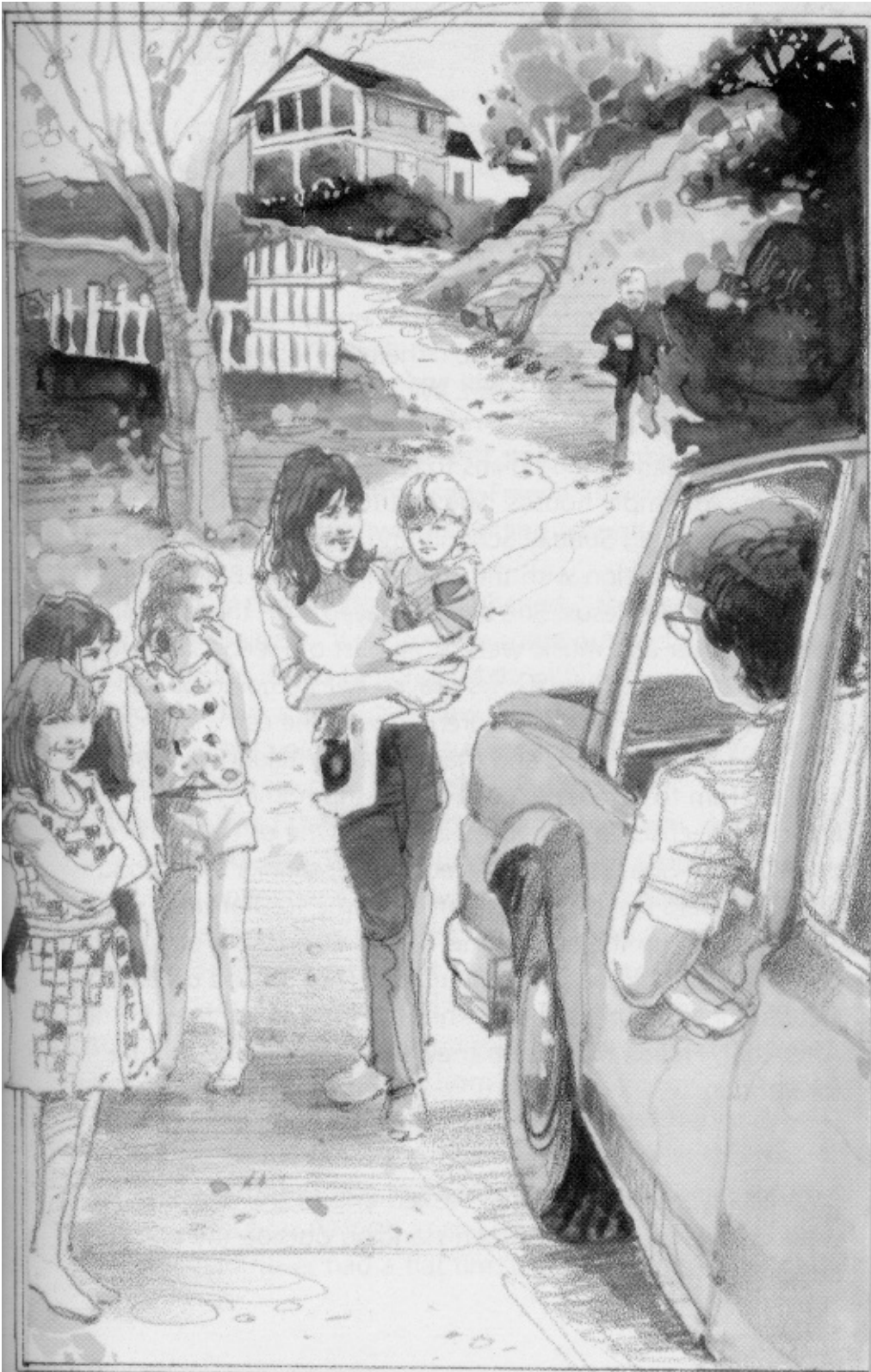
People in the churches in Kentucky were beginning to hear about how God was using Freeda to share God's word with people in this mining community. They couldn't believe that she was working as a missionary and receiving no salary. Often, letters of encouragement arrived with money enclosed. Sometimes there would be a few dollars, sometimes more.

"It's a miracle," Freeda said as she opened envelope after envelope and money fell out.

"What did you say?" asked Opal Birchfield. She was the postmistress in Hellier and had lived there since the 1930s.

"I said it's a miracle," Freeda repeated. "I told the Lord we needed supplies for Vacation Bible School. We had run out of all of the craft supplies. And here is the money. There's just enough to buy what we need."

In the same way, Freeda was able to buy another car. When it wore out, she bought a station wagon, then another station wagon. Every day she picked up the children, rain or shine, through ice and snow. This was the one thing the children could depend on. Many of them lived with alcoholic parents and never knew what to expect when they got home from school. Sometimes no one was home. It was easy for them to feel that no one cared for them. Freeda loved them, and they knew it. They knew Freeda would be there.



“Do you think we might use that old house at the bottom of the hill, Mrs. Bentley?” asked Freeda one day when she took the Bentley children home up Bad Fork Hollow.

“I don’t know,” replied Mrs. Bentley. “It’s in pretty bad shape. What do you want it for?”

“I thought we might have a club there for the children who live up here,” said Freeda. “There are so many children. We aren’t reaching all of them. We need more places to meet.”

Freeda started making plans to reach more children. She fixed up old, empty houses. She had to pay rent for some of them. She started Sunday Schools and clubs in nearly every hollow. Every session with the children included Bible stories and songs about Jesus. She always played with the boys and girls. Laughter and music were a big part of Freeda’s activities with the children. They always prayed before going home. One afternoon, all the children were in the car.

“Let’s bow our heads and thank God for taking care of us, and ask Him to help us to have a safe trip home,” said Freeda. The children bowed their heads. One or two children prayed, then one little boy prayed, “Lord, thanks for a good time, and help Freeda get us home in time for *Batman*.”

That broke up the prayertime. The children were about to pop trying to hold back their laughter. They looked up and Freeda burst into giggles too. They laughed all the way home. After that, Freeda made sure they always got home in time for *Batman*.

“Has anyone seen Freeda?” asked one of the deacons. He walked toward a group of men standing outside the church building.

“No, come to think of it, I haven’t. I haven’t seen the children either,” replied one of the men. “It’s getting late. They are usually here by now.”

“I don’t see her station wagon,” said another man. “Something must have happened. I’ll drive up the hollow and see if I can find her.”

Freeda was almost never late. When the weather was bad, she started earlier because she knew it would take longer. The men knew this. They were worried.

The three men got in a car and started up the hollow. They had not gone far when they saw Freeda’s station wagon. Freeda and the children were standing around looking at a flat tire.

“We knew something had happened,” they called as they got out of their car. “Let’s get the spare out and put it on so we can get on down to Sunday School.”

“I don’t have a spare,” replied Freeda, a note of discouragement in her voice. “All I have are these four, old, treadless tires. One of these days they will all go flat.”

The men fixed the tire. Freeda and the children arrived at Sunday School late. Worship time came, and Freeda was still upset. She knew her station wagon needed new tires. She didn’t have the money to buy them. How much longer could she keep driving on those old tires?

“That does it!” Freeda told the preacher as she entered the church. “I’m not going back up that hollow again. Someone else can pick up the children from now on.”

Freeda sat in church and listened to the preacher. She thought about the flat tire. She remembered what she had said to the preacher. She felt badly that she had been so upset over a flat tire. As long as she had been picking up children, she had never had a flat tire. Goodness knows she had

driven on worse tires. God had been good to her. Silently she told God she was sorry for making such a fuss.

“Forget what I said,” Freeda told the preacher as she left the church that morning, “I didn’t mean it.”

“I didn’t think you did, Freeda,” he replied. “I don’t blame you for being upset. You should have some new tires.”

The evening worship service was just about to begin.

“Before we do anything else tonight,” said the preacher, “we are going to take up a love offering.”

Freeda wondered what the love offering was for. She was always the first to give to a love offering, but she did like to know what the money would buy. She waited to see if the preacher would tell.

“We’re going to buy Freeda some new tires for her station wagon,” said the pastor.

A murmur of approval was heard from all those present.

“And I’ll get them wholesale,” said a woman sitting behind Freeda.

The tires were bought, and Freeda’s station wagon was soon ready to go again. No more worries about flat tires, not for a long time. Freeda laughed when she looked at her old station wagon with brand-new tires.

“The tires will probably last longer than the wagon,” she said. “Thank You for the new tires, God. You always know right when to do things. We couldn’t have gone much further on those old tires. Forgive me for doubting that You would take care of me. You always have. I saw some new children at that old house up the hollow today. I must invite them to the club tomorrow.”

From Riches to Rags

“Lord, help me know how to help my people. You know that many of them are out of work. Another mine closed yesterday. The men don’t know what to do. My heart aches for them. They must either go elsewhere to look for work or stay here and face poverty. The ones here are seeking You with renewed zeal. Give me the strength and wisdom to help them. I get tired, Lord. Help me to keep going.”

Freeda watched her people go from riches to rags slowly through the years. The mines closed one at a time, leaving the men without jobs. Men were being replaced by machinery. They could no longer support their families. Many moved their families to the cities to look for work. Some fathers simply left their families. They could not stand to see them hungry and ragged. Others depended on alcohol for an escape.

Slowly businesses closed. Finally there was nothing left but the post office, a store or two, and several gas stations.

Freeda moved from one mining store to another, always working part time. Finally, there were no more jobs.

“Lord, I’m counting on You,” Freeda prayed. “You’ll have to tell me what to do. You know I can’t leave here now. The people need help more than ever before.”

Freeda’s mother came to live with her. They rented a big, old three-story house on the hill and opened the Community Center Boarding House. Mama had become a Christian and joined Freeda in sharing her faith with the people. Mama met with the mothers. They quilted, crocheted, knitted, and talked about the Lord. Freeda taught Bible study. God answered Freeda’s prayers

over and over again as she was able to lead some of the mothers to believe in Jesus.

Freeda rolled the station wagon up to the door of the house to gather up Cora's nine children.

"Cora," said Freeda, "why don't you join the other women at the mothers' club today?"

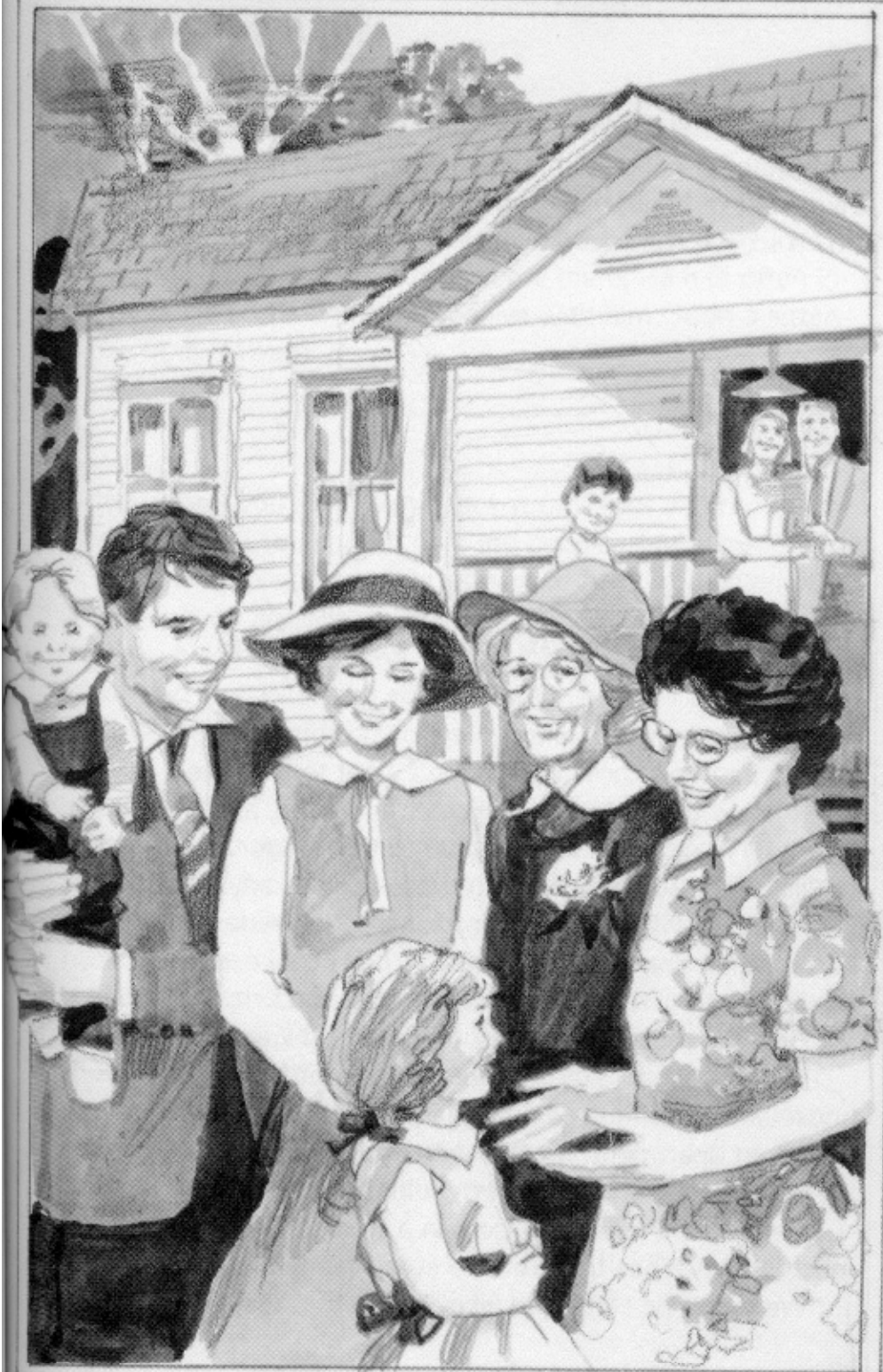
"I think I will," replied Cora. "Give me just a minute to get my shoes."

Cora disappeared into the house. In a moment, she reappeared with shoes in hand and climbed into the wagon. Cora was hungry for fellowship. She enjoyed talking with the other mothers as they gathered around the quilting frame. They talked about their problems and frustrations, as well as their joys. After that time, Cora was almost as excited as her children each time the station wagon pulled up in front of the house. She never missed a session of the mothers' club. She listened intently as Freeda taught the Bible study.

One day Cora could stand it no longer. "I want to become a Christian," she said. And she slipped to her knees and invited Jesus into her life. Cora soon became an active member of a nearby Baptist church.

"Thank You, God," said Freeda. "It's wonderful the way You work in the lives of people."

Finally Freeda's money ran out. There was no longer any way to pay rent or to pay the bills. Freeda's third secondhand station wagon was about to stop running. She prayed and still there seemed to be no answer.



“God, are You telling me to leave?” asked Freeda. “I don’t understand. I guess Mama and I will have to move to Pikeville. I can find a job there. Is that what You want me to do? If so, we will go.”

The Move to Pikeville

“God, I’m not sure why we are doing this, but I have to believe that You know best. I don’t want to leave here. I don’t know what else to do. I can’t find a job, and my money is gone. I’m not even sure this old station wagon will get us to Pikeville. It sure won’t climb those hollows any longer.”

The trip to Pikeville was not a long one. Freeda and Mama had traveled this road many times. They knew each curve in the road, each little bridge, and every railroad crossing.

“First, we must find a place to live,” said Freeda.

The hunt began. Freeda and Mama went from house to house and apartment to apartment. Finally, they rented a little basement apartment. It was damp and smelly, but it was all they could afford. Maybe they could move if Freeda got a job.

Freeda found a job as a clerk in a store. She didn’t make much money. They tried to save every penny they could.

“We won’t be staying in Pikeville, Mama,” said Freeda.

“We’ll go home soon. There has to be a way. I know that God needs me at Marrowbone.”

Freedra wrote to her brother, Howard, to tell him about their move. Howard lived about a five-hour drive away in Columbus, Ohio. He had a nice home there. He had often invited Freedra and Mama to come live with him. Soon a letter came from Howard:

Dear Sis,

Why don’t you and Mama pack your things and move up here with me? You cannot help the people at Marrowbone if you are not there. You might as well be here. You could open a beauty shop and make enough money to live comfortably. You like being a beautician, I know, and you are good at it. You could stop worrying about bills.

*Love,
Howard*

Freedra read the letter over and over. She went to her dressing table and pulled out a box of papers. Sorting through the papers, she found the one she was looking for. She held up her beauty operator’s license to read the inscription that said she could do that kind of work in Kentucky. She had renewed her license every year. In the back of her mind, she had thought, *If things don’t work out, I can use this.*

“What have I been saying?” said Freedra, talking out loud to herself. “Do I mean, if God fails me?” Freedra felt as if God were saying to her, “Where is your trust? Is it in that piece of paper or in Me?”

With one swift movement, Freedra tore the license right down the middle.

“It’s You, Lord. I trust You,” said Freeda, the tears streaming down her face.

Freeda reached for her Bible. She opened it and saw these verses in Deuteronomy:

“But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end. So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul—then I will send rain on your land in its season” (Deut. 11:11–14).

Freeda closed her Bible. She had her answer. Her land was full of hills and valleys.

“Yes, Lord,” said Freeda. “I will trust You. It’s You I want to serve.”

Freeda continued to work and live in Pikeville. She prayed every day that God would send her back to Marrowbone. Each Sunday, she and Mama drove to Marrowbone for church. They visited with the people. Freeda talked and prayed with friends. The children missed Freeda. They missed the Bible stories and the fun. They missed singing, praying, and playing with Freeda. They didn’t understand why she had left.

Freeda waited patiently. She was confident that God would answer her prayers. She wasn’t sure how, but she knew He would.

Many people knew about Freeda and her work at Marrowbone. The associational missionary for Pike County had worked closely with Freeda. Once he taped an interview with her. He used the tape to share her work with many people.



A. B. Colvin, state missions director, supported Freeda in her work in every way possible. He told people about how God was working at Marrowbone. He suggested things that could be sent to help Freeda with the work. Many boxes of food and clothing were sent as a result.

Freeda did not know that Dr. Colvin was trying to work out a plan with the Home Mission Board of Atlanta, Georgia, and the Kentucky Missions Board. He wanted these two boards to hire Freeda as an associate health and welfare missionary. Her job would be to conduct weekday activities through the Marrowbone Baptist Church, just what she had done for almost 13 years. For the first time, she would be paid the salary of a fully appointed missionary.

“Freeda,” said Mama, “there is a letter for you on the table.”

Freeda was tired. She had been on her feet all day. She was fighting discouragement. She saw *Home Mission Board* printed on the envelope addressed to her. Quickly, she tore it open. Inside was an application blank and a letter.

“They want to appoint me as a full-time missionary to serve through the Marrowbone Baptist Church,” cried Freeda. “Oh, Mama, can you believe that? He’s done it again. God has answered my prayers. I knew He would.”

Freeda pulled a chair up to the table to fill out the application form.

“They ask a lot of questions, but I don’t see a thing about driving a truck,” said Freeda. “That’s what I do best.”

Freeda finished filling out the form, sealed the envelope, and took it to the post office. She waited anxiously for a reply. The reply appointing her came quickly.

“They want to know how soon I can go to work,” said Freeda. “I wish we could leave right now, but I’ll have to give the store time to replace me.”

She had waited this long. She could wait a few days longer. What a reunion Freeda and Mama would have with their friends in Marrowbone!

Home Again

“Thank You, God. It’s good to be home. I knew I would be coming back. Forgive me for being so impatient. It feels like I have been away forever. So many things have happened. I need to visit every family in every hollow. I’ve lost touch with everyone. I don’t know what they need. I want to teach Bible classes for the children again just as soon as possible. I want them to know You. I know I can’t do it all at once. Help me to know where to start.”

Freeda and Mama moved into a small two-story house just two doors from the house where they had taken in boarders. Freeda told Mama not to get too settled in the house. They would move again just as soon as the right building for the new weekday program was found. But Freeda couldn’t wait for a building. She was anxious to start back to work. As soon as they moved into the house, Freeda got into her old, red station wagon and headed for the hollows.

Everyone was glad to see Freeda. She visited with each family. She wanted to know all that had happened to them since

she had been gone. She listened as they told the good things and the bad things. She cried with them and laughed with them. She prayed with them.

“We’re going to start the mothers’ club next week,” she said, as she left each house. “I’ll be by to pick you up on Wednesday.”

She prayed that the old station wagon would keep running until Dr. Colvin brought the van he had promised. She had already written a letter telling him to hurry.

The mothers’ club got off to a good start. The living room was full. The ladies chattered and planned what they would do in future meetings. Freeda led the Bible study through tears of joy.

Saturday came, and the children were waiting for her by the roadside just as they had so many times. The news of her return had spread fast. Freeda blew the horn to let them know she was coming. As the last child squeezed into the station wagon, Freeda held her breath for fear the engine would die. It coughed and sputtered, but it kept running.

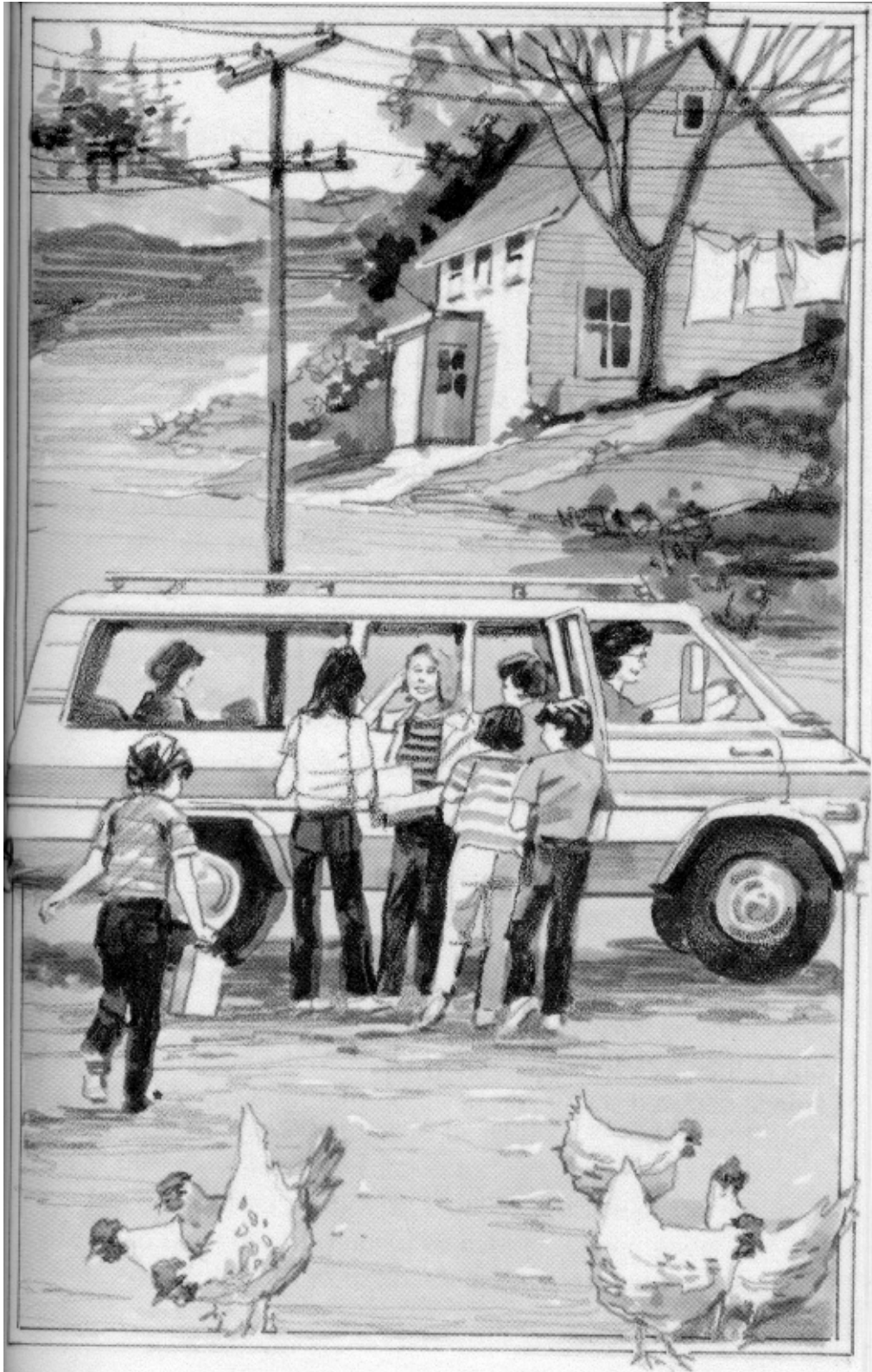
“God, please send Dr. Colvin with a van soon,” prayed Freeda. “I don’t know how much longer this old wagon will keep going.”

Freeda was anxious to get a full weekday program started. She knew it would take time. She knew that she would need a van or bus that she could depend on.

One day a large tan vehicle pulled up in front of the house. It looked like a large tan box sitting on top of four huge wheels.

What in the world? thought Freeda as she peered through the front window. A man climbed from the vehicle and started toward the house.

“Why, that looks like—it is! she exclaimed. “It’s Dr. Colvin!”



“What?” called Mama from another room in the house. She hadn’t seen the vehicle.

“Come and see what Dr. Colvin is driving,” said Freeda. Mama came into the room just as Freeda opened the door.

“Look what I brought you,” said Dr. Colvin, pointing toward the vehicle.

“We see it,” said Mama. “What is it?”

“It’s called a ‘carryall,’” said Dr. Colvin, as the three of them walked out to the vehicle. Freeda climbed up into the seat and looked around. Finally she said, “It’s different.” Then all three of them began to laugh. Freeda looked funny sitting up there in that vehicle. But it was a sight that everyone would get used to. Freeda would be driving the carryall up and down the hollows for the next three years.

“Well, when you told the Lord you needed a van, you did not say what kind,” said Dr. Colvin. “Do you think you can drive it?”

Freeda had always said she could drive anything with wheels. She wasn’t about to back down now.

“Of course I can,” said Freeda.

And drive it she did! That summer, Freeda and three of her missionary friends drove the carryall all the way to Glorieta, New Mexico, to the Baptist Conference Center. They had a wonderful experience at Glorieta. But on the way home they were delayed for several days in Arkansas. The engine burned out in the carryall. The company replaced the engine, but Freeda declared she would never go that far away from home again.

The Auction

The work was growing. The house was just not big enough for all of the meetings, youth club, mothers' club, and all of the children's organizations. More room was needed. The state and Home Mission Boards were still looking for a building, but Freeda needed space now. She could not afford to pay rent on a bigger house.

"God, You know we don't have enough room here. So many people need help. So many are coming to the meetings. I'm afraid we will have to start turning people away. You know we can't do that. I don't know what to do. I'm depending on You to help me work something out."

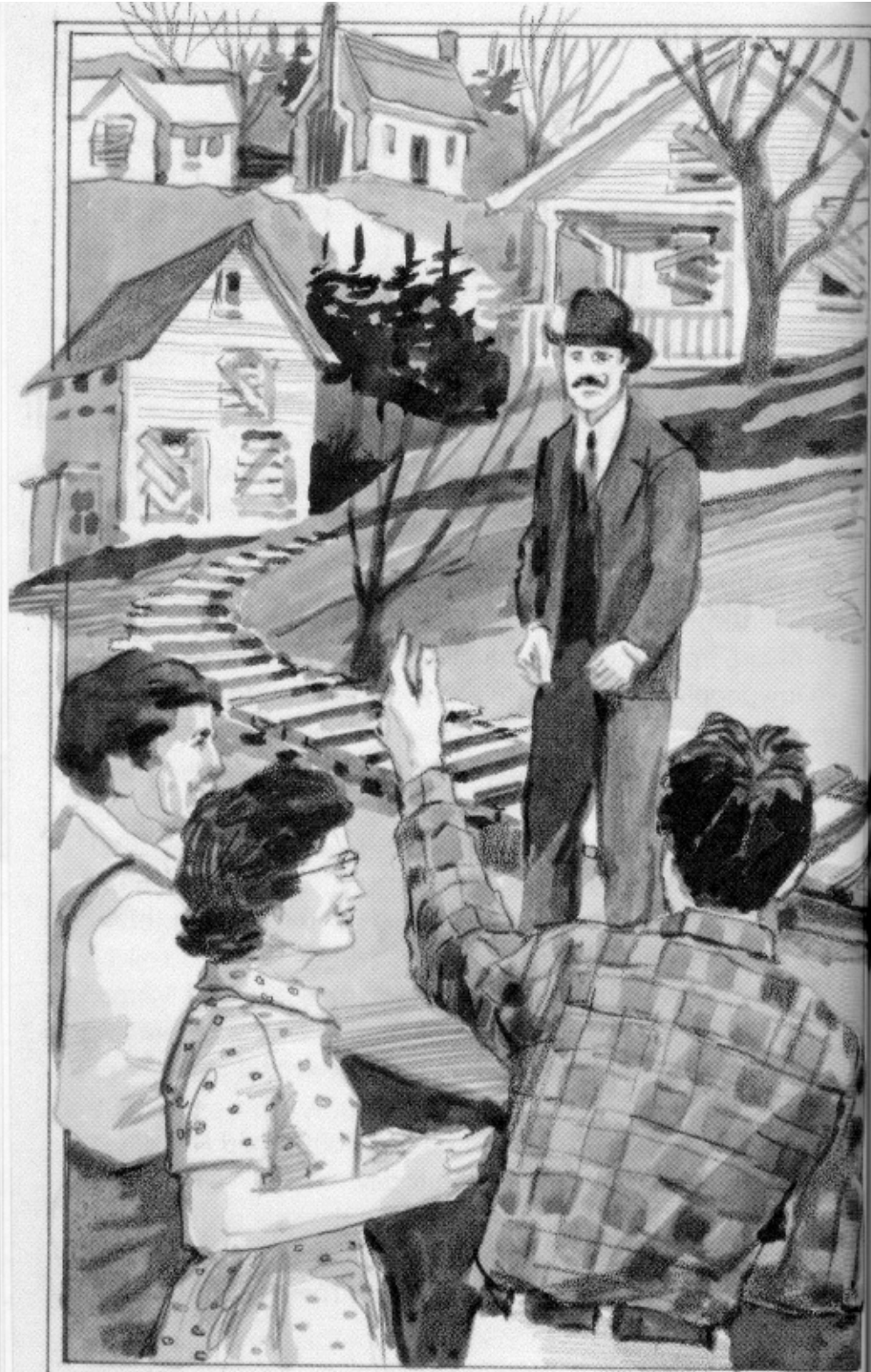
"What kind of house do you need?" asked Jack, a good friend of Freeda's who had money.

"Something bigger," replied Freeda, "like that big three-story house."

Freeda was pointing to the house where she and Mama had run the Community Center Boarding House before they moved to Pikeville. She knew that house would provide more room.

"The house next to it would be all right," said Freeda. "I hear they are having an auction today."

The row of houses that sat high on the side of the mountain had once been occupied by mining superintendents. Many of the houses were boarded up. They had not been lived in



since the mines closed. The mining companies wanted to get rid of them. They held auctions and allowed people to make bids. The houses could be purchased at low cost. A few families had saved a little money. They were able to purchase the house in which they lived.

The people gathered on the railroad track below the row of houses to be auctioned. The auctioneer stood above them on the side of the mountain.

“How much am I to bid for this house?” he said pointing to Freeda’s first choice.

The bidding started. “Six hundred dollars, \$700, \$800, \$900.”

Soon only Jack and one other person were bidding. Jack looked around to see who was bidding against him. A woman called out, “Twelve hundred dollars.” She smiled at him through the crowd. He recognized his sister and stopped bidding.

Freeda was disappointed. She did not understand what had happened. Surely the house was worth more than \$1,200. Later Jack explained.

“I just couldn’t bid against my sister,” said Jack. “She seemed to want the house so badly.”

The auctioneer turned and pointed to the house that was Freeda’s second choice. Jack bid on that house and bought it for \$1,300. He agreed to rent it to Freeda for \$25 a month.

Freeda and Mama went to inspect the house. They walked around to the back, which was against the side of the mountain. The whole back side was caved in. Inside the house, the rock fireplace had crumbled. Most people would have been discouraged, but not Freeda.

“Thank You, God, for giving us this house,” said Freeda.

Jack offered to fix the fireplace and make other repairs. After he made those repairs, Freeda called in her troops. The youth came by the dozens. They hammered, painted, made curtains, and found odds and ends of furniture. Weeks later, Freeda and Mama moved into their new home.

“It’s a mansion,” said Freeda, as she looked around. Of course there was no running water, but that was nothing new to Freeda. She had never lived in a house with running water since moving to Marrowbone.

The house had a big, old coal furnace in the basement. Freeda had to carry coal from a pile behind the house on the side of the mountain. In the winter, she was up at all hours of the night checking on the fire in the furnace.

The old house was always full of people. Freeda met with a different group of children every day. The mothers’ clubs met. Large groups of youth gathered to sing and pray and listen to Freeda teach the Bible. She shared what God had done in her life. She told how much she loved God. Many people, young and old, heard about Jesus for the first time. Some of these people invited Jesus into their lives. Freeda helped them to understand what being a Christian means. She taught them how to talk to God. She encouraged them to read their Bibles to learn all they could about how God would save more people. She prayed for those who were saved that they would share what God had done for them with others.

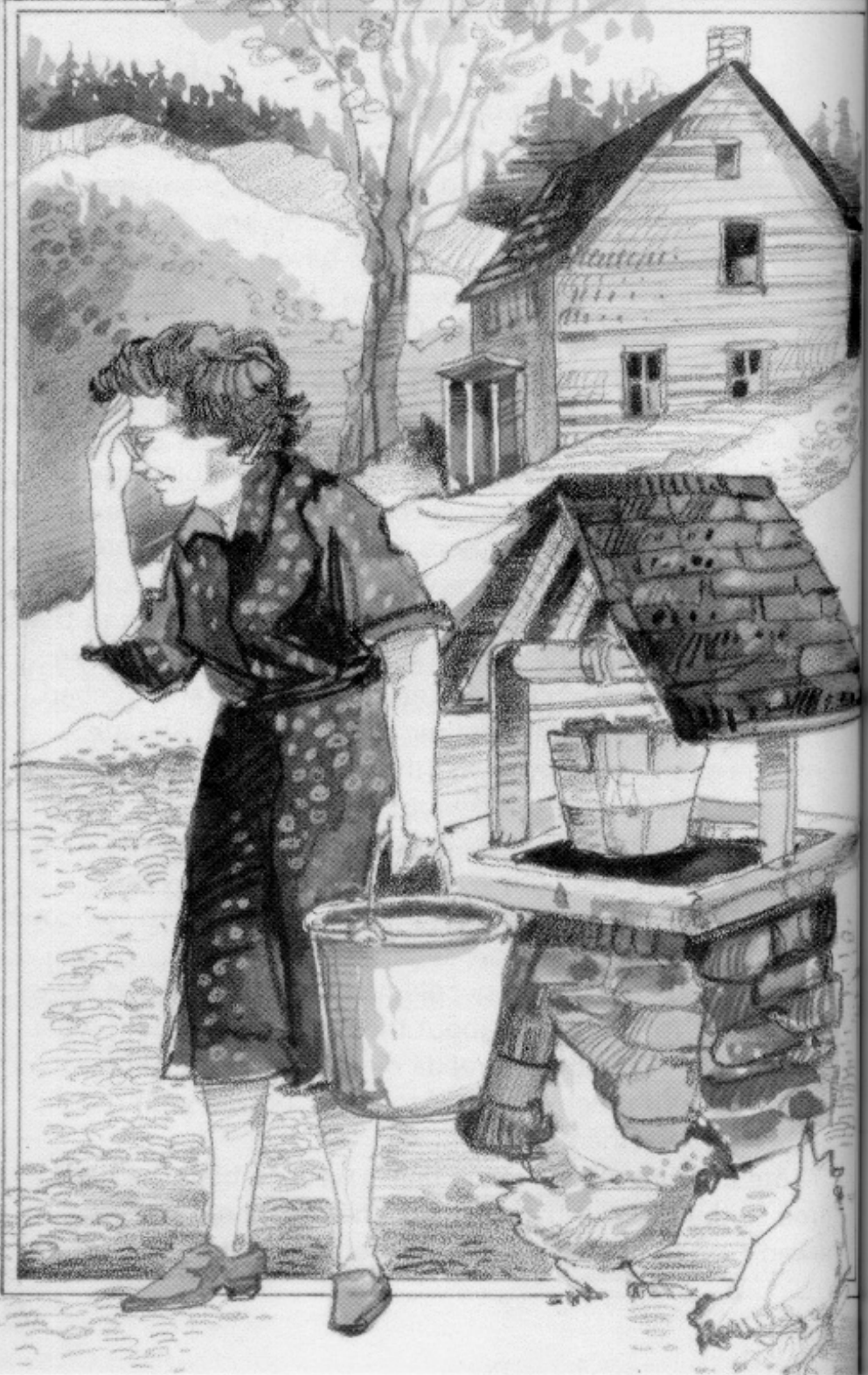
The Birth of Marrowbone Center

Freeda was busier than ever now. She had a big three-story house to take care of. More space meant more people coming to meetings. It meant more refreshments to prepare and more water to carry from the well. It meant more hours driving the van to pick up people and deliver them back to their homes. Some days she did not even stop to eat. She often stuffed a package of crackers into her purse as she climbed into the van to go after another load of people. She ate crackers as she bumped along the rough, winding roads.

Freeda spent many hours visiting in homes. She knew who lived in every house in every hollow. She knew the name of every person in every family. Most of all, she knew their needs. Often she gave the last dollar in her purse to someone she thought needed it more than she did.

Money was not all the people needed. They needed someone to talk to who cared about them and cared about what was happening to them. Freeda did care, and they knew it. She visited with them, listened to them, prayed with them, and prayed for them.

Late at night when Freeda finally went to bed, she had time to think about the events of the day. She sometimes asked God to help a child to feel better about himself. She



asked how to help another child who was too sure of himself. No problem was too small for Freeda to talk with God about. One night, the ache in her arms reminded her of the many buckets of water she had carried from the well that day. She thought, *I must write Dr. Colvin again about that water pump. I don't believe I can carry water through another icy winter. But I'm tired tonight. I'll write him tomorrow.*

A water pump would pump the water from the well outside the house through pipes to a faucet inside the center. Dr. Colvin had promised Freeda that he would try to find a water pump for the center. He knew that carrying water was a hard job. Freeda mentioned the water pump often when she prayed. She also mentioned it often when she talked with Dr. Colvin.

The sun was just beginning to show above the top of the mountain when Freeda opened her eyes the next morning.

“Thank You, God, for the sunshine,” prayed Freeda. “I guess You know my schedule for today. You always seem to know what I need before I ask. I’m trusting You for strength to get everything done. I mustn’t forget to take some chairs from the center up to that new mission Sunday School. Lord, we do need that water pump. I know You must get tired of hearing me ask for it. I don’t want to seem impatient, but I don’t know how much longer I can carry water. We have so many more people coming to the center. It takes so much water to make coffee and punch for refreshments. Help me to be a good witness today. Lead me to those who need to know You. That’s what we are all about. If we don’t lead people to know You, then we aren’t doing our job.”

“Good morning, Opal,” said Freeda as she entered the post office later that morning. “Do I have any mail?”

“Yes, you do,” replied Opal, “and you also have some big

boxes in the back room. They are terribly heavy. You will need someone to help you lift them into the van.”

“What’s in them?” asked Freeda, as she followed Opal to the room at the back of the post office.

“I have no idea,” responded Opal, “I just know they are heavy,”

Freeda stooped to lift the smaller of the two boxes. She couldn’t budge it.

“It’s from Frankfort,” said Freeda. “I wonder what those ladies have sent us now. They do so much for us at Christmastime, besides all the boxes of food and clothing they send throughout the year. I don’t know what some of our people would have done without them.”

Freeda tugged at the stapled flap of the box, She pulled one corner up just enough to see inside.

“It’s the pump!” cried Freeda. “We got our pump!”

“Thank You, Lord,” said Freeda. “You knew it was here this morning when I asked You about it. I must write Dr. Colvin to tell him that we finally have our pump. I know he will be glad.”

“Isn’t God good, Opal?” asked Freeda.

“He is, indeed,” replied Opal.

The new pump was soon installed. When winter came, Freeda turned on the faucet to fill the water glasses and remembered those long, icy walks to and from the well.

“Come on, Christine, let’s go to Sunday School,” called Freeda as she pulled up in front of the little house.

“I can’t go this morning,” replied Christine.

“Why not?” said Freeda.

“I don’t have any shoes to wear,” said Christine, pointing to her bare feet as she walked out to the car.

Freeda reached for a pair of house shoes which she kept under the front seat of the van. She took her shoes off and handed them to Christine. She then put on the house shoes.

“Now you have some shoes,” said Freeda. “Put them on and get in.”

Christine had learned not to argue with Freeda. She put on the shoes and climbed into the van. The two women then drove off to Sunday School.

Freeda knew Christine’s problems. Her husband had lost his job in the mine. He couldn’t find work, so he began to drink. He stayed drunk most of the time. The family had no food to eat or clothes to wear. Freeda bought clothes for the two teenaged boys so they could go to school. She took Christine to a government office to get some help. Freeda brought more food and clothes from boxes which had been sent by churches. She took the younger children to the doctor when they were sick. She paid the doctor’s bill. When the first government check arrived, Christine cried with joy. Now she could feed and clothe her family again. Tears streamed down her face as she thanked Freeda for all she had done.

“I don’t know what we would have done without you,” said Christine.

“Don’t thank me,” replied Freeda. “Thank God. He did it. I couldn’t do anything without Him.”

Christine became a Christian. She and Freeda prayed together that God would save Christine’s husband.

Freeda drove up and down the hollows, helping people. Once she pulled up in front of a house just in time to put out a fire and drag the children to safety. Once a mother called in the middle of the night. Her baby had a high fever. She was frantic. Freeda got help, and the baby lived.

Many families needed to know how to apply to the government for help with food and clothing. Freeda took them in her car to fill out the necessary forms.

Freeda prayed every day about the needs of the people. Often boxes of food and clothing were sent for her to distribute. Occasionally, Freeda would go through the clothing and find a dress for herself.

“I like the pretty dress you have on,” someone would say.

“Thank you,” Freeda would answer. “The Lord sent it.”

“Well, He certainly knows your size,” they would reply.

In the meantime, more and more women in church missionary organizations in the surrounding towns were learning about Freeda’s work. They heard about how God was using Freeda in this community. More gifts of food, clothing, and money were sent to help the people. Freeda was able to set up a storeroom. When Freeda discovered a family that needed help, she could go immediately to the storeroom and get what they needed. Each time she shared food and clothing with a family, she told them about Jesus.

A Building for the Baptist Center

Dr. Colvin and a man from the Home Mission Board continued to look for the right building for the Marrowbone Baptist Center. They needed a building that was easy to get to and that had lots of space. Finally they found just what they wanted.

Freeda was surprised when they told her that the old Marrowbone Baptist Church would become the Marrowbone Baptist Center. It was a big, old, two-story frame building. It had a lot of space and was in a good location. The two mission boards worked out the details with the church. They helped the church buy the old store building right beside it. With a little remodeling inside and a new front, the store building became a church building.

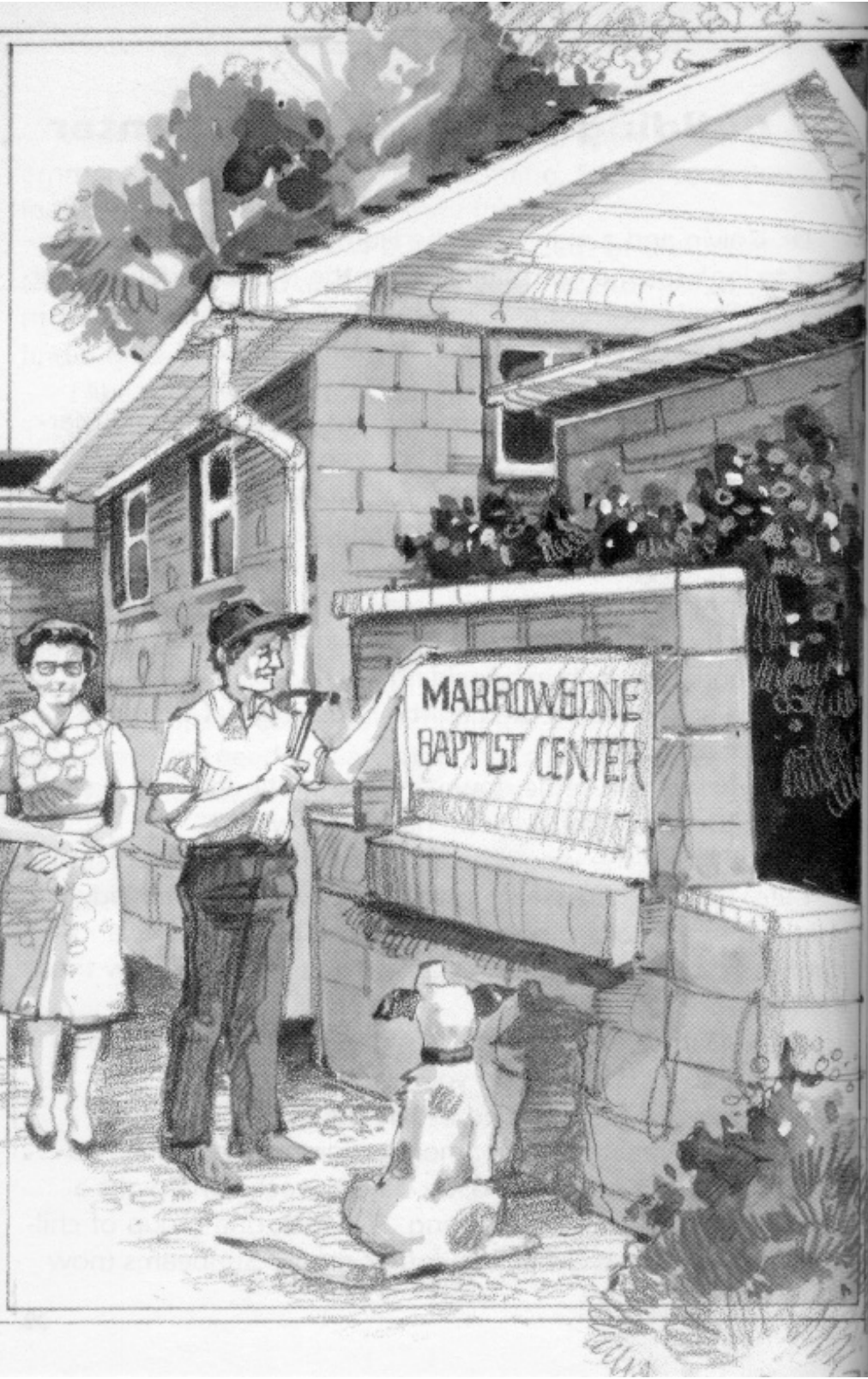
Freeda and Mama rented a little house not far from the new center.

“Maybe we can settle down and do a little fixin’ up.” said Mama. “Do you think we’ll be here for a while?”

Freeda knew she would be at Marrowbone for the rest of her life, but not necessarily in that house. She had already asked God to make it possible for her to buy a house, and she was sure He would. But Mama didn’t need to know that right now.

“Yes, Mama,” replied Freeda. “We are at Marrowbone to stay. You do all the fixin’ up you want to do.”

The added space provided by the purchase of the new building led Freeda to begin more programs. Soon she had clubs meeting every evening, six days a week. One night a week she had two clubs meeting. She took one group of children home, then went after another group. Sunbeams (now



MARROWBONE
BAPTIST CENTER

called Mission Friends) on Monday afternoon, Girls' Auxiliary (now called Girls in Action) on Monday night, boys' club on Tuesday night, girls' club on Wednesday afternoon, mothers' club on Wednesday night. On and on the schedule read. Some days Freeda drove up the same hollow three times, gathering different groups. She carried over 100 children and mothers a week to the weekday clubs, missions meetings, Bible studies, and mission Sunday Schools. A speedometer check showed that she drove nearly 2,000 miles in one month.

“Driving down Bad Fork Hollow reminds me of a bottle that reads ‘shake well before taking,’” said Freeda. She and Sherry Little were returning home at the end of the day. They had just dropped off the last child. Sherry laughed. She loved Freeda's sense of humor. Sherry had been riding in Freeda's van or station wagon since she was three years old. Now as a teenager, she helped Freeda with the younger children.

“I don't know how you do it,” said Sherry, as the van swung onto the main road and a smoother ride.

“Do what, Honey?” asked Freeda.

“Drive up these awful roads with all of those kids breathing down your neck,” said Sherry. “Did you know we had 34 kids in this van when we left the center?”

“Is that right?” said Freeda. “I knew there was a bunch of them. I guess I've just gotten used to it.”

Freeda had special feelings for Sherry. Freeda had watched Sherry grow up into a beautiful young lady and become a Christian. Now Sherry shared her faith with the younger ones. That's what it was all about. Each generation would teach the next. That was God's plan.

What Time I Am Afraid

“God, help me get these children home before the storm breaks. You know I have to. They are so precious, every one of them. I know they are special to You.”

“One little stone in the sling went ’round and ’round,” sang the children, as they made circling motions with their hands over their heads. Each child held a pretend sling.

“And the giant came tumbling down,” the children sang as they flung their imaginary stone and fell to the floor. The children scrambled to their feet, giggling and falling over one another.

“Who killed the giant?” asked Freeda, as the children gathered around her.

“David!” shouted the children.

“Who helped David kill the giant?” asked Freeda.

“God did!” said the children.

“And why did David need to kill the giant?” asked Freeda.

“Because he was bad!” answered one little boy. “He wanted to hurt David and his brothers.”

“And King Saul,” came another voice.

“And he didn’t love God,” came a small voice from right at Freeda’s knee.

“That’s right,” said Freeda. “Loving God is most important. He loves us so much. We must remember to obey Him in all things.”

Another glance out the window reminded Freeda that the gathering storm clouds were probably not going to pass over.

She knew, from past experience, that driving up into the hollows in pouring rain could be dangerous. She never wanted to endanger the lives of the children. They must leave now. The children could eat their refreshments in the van.

“I know a promise God has given us. Let me share it with you,” said Freeda. She opened the Bible in her lap and read, “‘What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.’ Let’s remember that verse as we all go out and get in the van. We need to start home right now.”

“It’s not time,” cried one boy. “We haven’t even had refreshments yet.”

“Yes,” said Freeda firmly, trying not to sound anxious, “we must leave now. A storm is coming. We can eat our cookies in the van.”

Freeda realized that she had read that particular verse from the Bible as much for herself as for the children. She felt tense as she thought about driving up those narrow roads full of ruts and holes. She recalled how the rain sometimes washed the dirt away from the sides of the road leaving big drop-offs.

“Freeda, let’s go!” called Sherry. “It looks like the bottom is going to drop out of those clouds any minute.

Freeda locked the door to the center and got into the driver’s seat. Behind her in the van were 35 quiet children. Freeda sensed their fear. Cheerfully, she said, “Let’s bow our heads and ask God to help us drive safely home.” The children bowed their heads, and Freeda prayed.

Just as the clouds seemed to darken, a little girl standing right at Freeda’s elbow leaned her head forward onto the dashboard and said, “‘What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.’ God, please make the sun shine, and help Freeda get us home safe.”

As she spoke the words, a big hole opened up in the clouds and just for a minute the sun came through. As the girl looked up and saw the sun, she said, “Freeda! He did it! God did it!”

“He sure did, Honey,” said Freeda.

The little glimpse of sun strengthened the child’s faith in God. It also reminded Freeda that God was in control. She knew He would help her get the children home safely.

The clouds grew blacker. The rain came. Freeda peered intently through the front window of the van as the windshield wipers slapped away at the rain. Up Back Fork Hollow to the Bentleys, then back to Poor Bottom to the Fitches. Now to Allegheny to take the Aker children home. Just a few more children to drop off, and she could relax.

Exhausted, but relieved, Freeda pulled the van onto the wooden bridge that spanned the creek in front of her house. She looked up at the house through the windshield. It really was her house. She and Mama had moved in just last week. She had gone to the bank and made a small down payment. She had signed the papers agreeing to pay a certain amount each month. She was not sure she would have enough money for the payments. She had talked to God about buying the house. She felt God wanted her to have it. He would help her to pay for it.

“Thank You, God,” said Freeda, as she opened the door and slipped from the van seat to the ground. “Thank You for my new house, and thank You for helping me to get through the storm. I knew You would help me; but just between You and me, there were a few times up there on some of those washouts that You had it all alone. I couldn’t see a thing through all that rain.”

One morning the telephone rang just as Freeda was going

out the door. She ran back to answer it. It was Opal, the post mistress.

“I have some boxes for you, Freeda,” she said. “What do you want me to do with them?”

“Just stick them back somewhere,” said Freeda. “I’m coming back by the post office in a little while. I’ll pick them up then.”

“I don’t think so,” said Opal.

“What did you say?” asked Freeda, thinking that Opal’s voice sounded strange.

“I said I don’t think you will pick them up,” replied Opal.

“What do you mean? Why not?” asked Freeda.

“Come and see,” replied Opal.

Freeda was curious. Opal sounded so mysterious on the telephone. Freeda had not planned to go by the post office until later in the day, but curiosity got the best of her.

“Now, what is this about some boxes?” said Freeda as she entered the post office.

Opal didn’t say a word. She turned and opened the door to the back room. Boxes were stacked as high as the ceiling.

“They are all addressed to you,” said Opal.

“What’s in them?” asked Freeda, a look of amazement on her face.

“I suggest you open them and find out,” answered Opal. “I’ll confess, I’m just as curious as you are.”

Freeda picked a box nearest the door. She pulled the tape off and opened the box. Inside she found scissors, crayons, paints, glue, construction paper, and tape.

“These are things we have needed at the center. We have not had enough money to buy them. The children have done without. But where did they come from?” asked Freeda.

She opened another box and found more of the same. “I

can't believe this," said Freeda. "I asked the Lord to help us get some supplies. He certainly was generous this time. This is almost like having Christmas in August."

Christmas in August! That was it. Freeda remembered. A few weeks back, she had received a letter telling her that she had been chosen to receive some gifts from a special missions project. Girls all over the country participated in the project. She had returned a card listing the things needed at the center. These were the things she listed. She explained to Opal.

"I'll have some of the youth come to load the boxes on the van. I think I can find a place to store them at the center," said Freeda. "We can really use these materials right now."

Little did Freeda know that this was only the beginning. She was glad that Opal was good-natured. For almost a month, boxes arrived every day. Freeda could find no more room for storage at the center. Opal rented an old store building next to the post office. That building was soon full. She rented a second building and nearly filled it up before the boxes stopped coming.

"This is more than Hellier has received in the past 25 years," said the driver of the mail truck.

"Yes, I guess it is," replied Freeda. "These materials should last us for 25 years."

"God, thank You. You really went all out answering my prayer this time. The children will have plenty of supplies for a long time to come."

U. S.
POST OFFICE



A Chair for Mama

“Do you think we have taken care of everyone?” asked Sherry. The notebook in her hand contained names of families. Beside each name were listed items that the family needed. Christmastime should be a time of joy. Freeda wanted every man, woman, and child in the community to have a gift for Christmas, as well as food and clothing.

“I think so,” said Freeda. “We have distributed every box but the one for that family in Wolf Pit. I can do that on the way home. Sherry, you are so good to stay and help me finish. I don’t know what I would have done without you. You must have had other things to do on Christmas Eve.”

Sherry shrugged her shoulders and glanced at the clock on the wall.

“It’s only ten o’clock Freeda,” said Sherry. “We still have to go to Pikeville to get that chair for Mama.”

Freeda smiled. For more than two weeks, members of Freeda’s youth club had worked at the center unpacking boxes and sorting and repairing toys in preparation for Christmas. They had helped Freeda compile a list for every family who needed help. Today, Christmas Eve, they had finished taking the boxes to the people.

“People have a hard time celebrating Jesus’ birth and thanking God if they are cold, hungry, and miserable,” Freeda had said. “I want everyone to know how good God is.”

God had been good. Boxes began to arrive at the center in November. People in Kentucky and surrounding states had sent food, clothing, toys, and many other gifts. Gradually through the years, more and more people responded to the needs in this little community. This year so many boxes arrived that Freeda was able to store many things for later use.

As she and Sherry had worked side by side, Freeda shared her secret desire to buy Mama a gold, velveteen chair for Christmas. She had seen it in a furniture store in Pikeville. Mama was old and feeble now. She had never had a comfortable chair.

“God,” Freeda had prayed, “I would like to buy that chair for Mama, but if it isn’t what You want, let me know. I want Your will done, not mine.”

Freeda still had \$55 in her purse, enough to make a down payment on the chair.

“OK, let’s go,” said Freeda, in answer to Sherry’s suggestion. “First, let’s go check on Cora. She is not feeling well.”

Freeda and Sherry left the center and headed up Poor Bottom Hollow to the Fitches’ house. They found Cora in bed. She needed medicine and didn’t have the money to buy it. Freeda pulled the \$55 out of her purse and handed it to Cora.

“You call right now and get that medicine,” she said. “We can’t have you lying around on the bed sick when you could be well. We need you to help with the children.”

Sherry and Freeda left Cora’s and started back down the road. Sherry knew Freeda had given Cora the money for Mama’s chair.

How could she? thought Sherry. *Now she can’t buy Mama her chair. It’s not fair.*

“Well, that’s that,” said Freeda. “God just didn’t intend for Mama to have that chair. People are more important than

things. Don't ever forget that. God tells us that even a cup of cold water given in His name will not go unnoticed. I know what you are thinking, but I have talked to God about that chair. If He had wanted Mama to have it, He would have provided a way."

As Freeda talked, Sherry began to understand a little of what it meant to be willing to follow God's way. She wished she could be more like Freeda.

"I think I understand," said Sherry.

"Let's see if we can find a box of candy or something for Mama," said Freeda. "I want to give her something for Christmas."

Freeda had been busy with all the activities and Christmas parties at the center. She hadn't had time for Christmas shopping.

"Run in and see if I have any mail," said Freeda, as she suddenly swerved the van over to the curb. "And tell Opal to have a Merry Christmas."

Sherry jumped from the van and disappeared inside the small concrete block structure that was the post office.

When Sherry returned, she had several envelopes in her hand. She climbed into the van and handed the mail to Freeda.

"Open them, and see who they are from," said Freeda.

Sherry opened the first envelope and a check fell out. It was for \$50!

"Look, Freeda," she almost shouted, "Fifty dollars! You can buy that chair for Mama after all."

Tears came to Freeda's eyes.

"He's done it again," she said. "You can't outgive the Lord, Sherry. Don't ever forget that. Whatever you give, He will return tenfold."

By the time all of the envelopes were open, the checks totaled over \$300. They had been sent by different people who felt led to send some money to Freeda.

“Thank You, God,” said Freeda. “You are so good to me. You have answered my prayers again and again. You do want Mama to have her chair. She will be pleased. I’ll tell her that it is a gift from You.”

Freeda looked at her watch. It was too late to drive to Pikeville. She called the furniture store. Yes, the salesman knew which chair she wanted. No, they couldn’t deliver today. The store was closing early for Christmas.

“But I need it for Mama for Christmas,” explained Freeda. “Isn’t there some way I can get it today? This is Freeda Harris in Hellier.”

“Just a minute, Mrs. Harris,” said the salesman. Freeda waited impatiently. She tried to think of someone who might be coming this way from Pikeville who could bring the chair.

“Mrs. Harris,” said the voice on the other end of the line, “ordinarily we wouldn’t deliver on Christmas Eve. For you, we will make an exception. Your chair will be there sometime this evening.”

By eight o’clock the chair was sitting in Freeda’s living room. Mama had gone to bed early. Freeda moved the chair near the little Christmas tree she and Mama had decorated.

“Won’t Mama be surprised?” said Freeda softly to herself as she snuggled into the chair. She felt the soft velveteen all around her. It felt good.

“Silent night, holy night,” came the soft voices of a children’s choir from the radio on the table.

“Thank You, God, for sending Jesus. So many still have not heard about Your wonderful gift of a Savior. I wish someone had told me sooner. Help us reach the children. Now is the



time to teach them while they are young. They are our hope, God, the children. They are so hungry for Your love. Don't let one child go unnoticed. Thank You for the new van Dr. Colvin will bring next month. It's coming just in time. The old one is getting tired. Those hollows can beat a van to death—a body, too, I might add. Heal Cora's body, Lord—only if it is Your will. You are so good to us. Mama's chair is beautiful. I'm tired, Lord, but I'm happy. Thank You for giving me this place of service. I just want to glorify You, Lord. Help me to glorify You. Help me to listen to You.”

The New Building

“Freeda,” said Jody. “I don't feel good.”

“What's the matter?” asked Freeda.

“My head hurts,” said Jody.

“My stomach feels funny,” said another child.

The children were at work on some art activities. Freeda looked around the room and saw some with their heads on the table. Jody looked really sick. What was happening? Freeda felt responsible for the children when they were with her. She noticed a strange odor in the air. Suddenly she ran to raise the windows.

“Everyone, put on your coats and go outside quickly,” said Freeda. “Help them, Sherry. When you get outside, take a few deep breaths.”

Freeda recognized the odor as fumes caused by the furnace. Something was wrong with it. This was the last group for today. She would take them home, then see about getting the furnace fixed.

Freeda was tired and a little discouraged. Something was always going wrong with that old building. The wood was beginning to rot around the foundation. The building was drafty. It looked like a barn, no matter how much fixing up it got. Now the furnace! She was tired of that furnace. It had always been a problem. They had talked about building a new center, but that’s as far as it went—just talk. Freeda felt the tears coming to her eyes.

“Lord, how can I keep on going when so many things are going wrong. I don’t know what to do about the furnace. I have asked for a new one, but I don’t think I’ll get it. What shall I do?”

After a night’s rest, Freeda felt better.

“I think I’ll call Dr. Colvin and tell him what happened,” said Freeda, talking to herself again. “He needs to know how dangerous it is.”

Freeda dialed the number and waited.

“Hello,” said Dr. Colvin.

“The furnace is on the blink,” Freeda blurted out, choking back tears. “We can’t meet in that building again until it’s fixed. The children got sick from the fumes.”

Freeda didn’t even tell Dr. Colvin who was calling. He knew. By the time their conversation had ended, Freeda was smiling. Dr. Colvin had shared some good news. The Marrowbone Baptist Center would have a new building. It wasn’t just

talk any more. It really was going to happen. Mrs. A. H. Jenkins of Elizabethtown heard about the Marrowbone Baptist Center. She decided to give some money to start a building fund. The Kentucky Woman's Missionary Union and the Home Mission Board added to the fund. Construction would begin right away.

"Praise the Lord," said Freeda, out loud, as she hung up the phone.

"What did you say?" asked Mama from her room.

"I said, 'Praise the Lord,'" repeated Freeda as she walked into Mama's room.

Freeda shared the good news. The two ladies knelt together and offered prayers of thanksgiving. God had answered their prayers in His own time. Why hadn't He answered sooner?

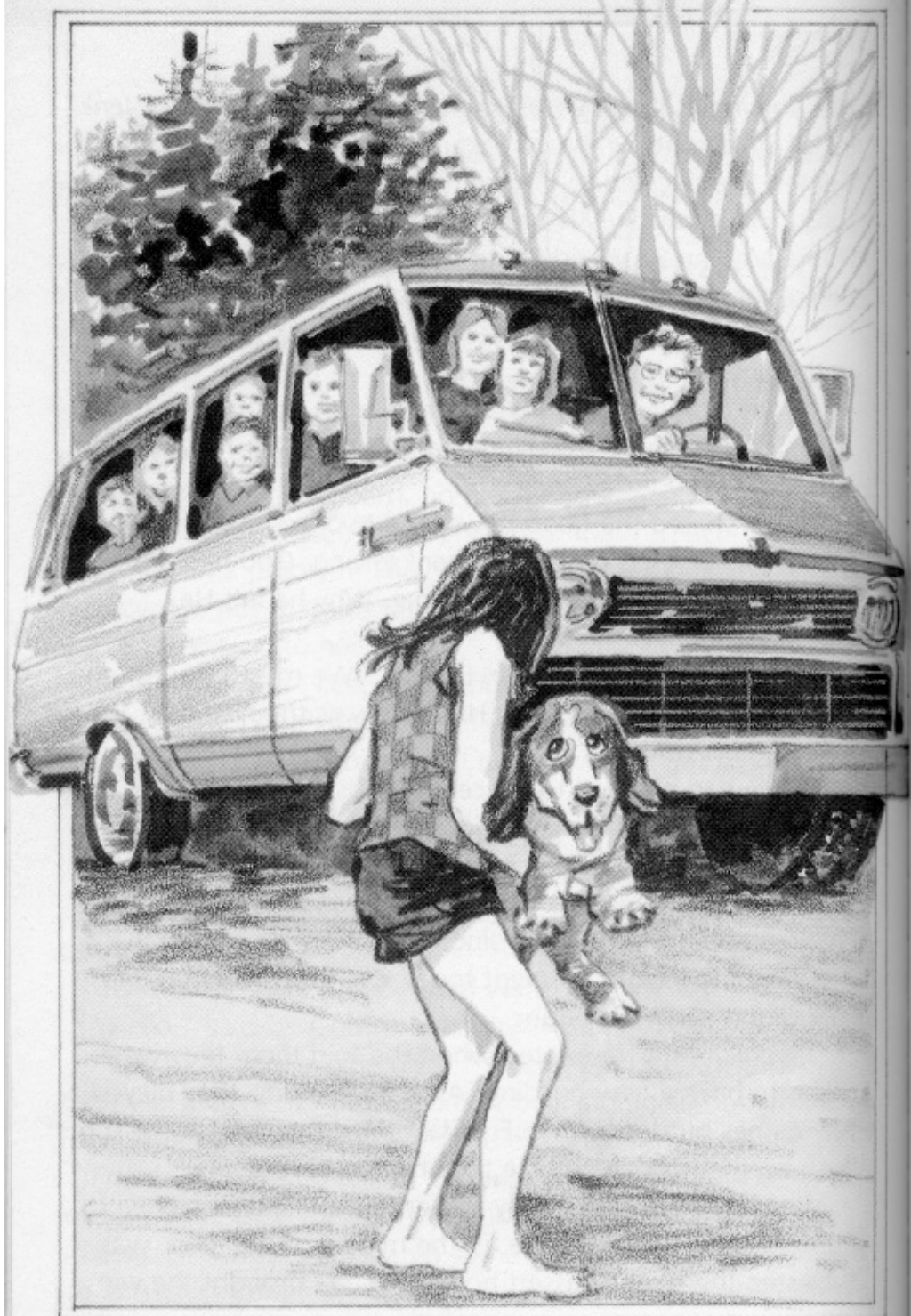
"He had His reasons," says Freeda. "We mustn't question God. He works things out in His own way, the best way. We have to believe that."

Freeda had planned to cancel the missions meetings for that day because of the furnace. However, the sun was shining. The air felt warm. If the children left their coats on, they would be warm enough. Besides, she was eager to tell the children about the new building.

Everything looked different today. Even the holes up Bad Fork didn't seem so rough.

The children were excited when she told them they were going to have a new building. After Bible study, they played a few games outdoors, then Freeda loaded the van for the trip back up the hollows to take the children home.

They turned the corner by Hellier Baptist Church to head up Allegheny Hollow. There, in the middle of the road, was Sylvester, the Akers' basset hound. Freeda brought the van



to a stop just a few feet away from Sylvester. Sylvester didn't budge. Sylvester didn't even open his eyes. Freeda climbed down from the van, grabbed Sylvester by the collar, and let him into the yard. She climbed back into the van and headed on up the hollow. Everyone laughed, including Freeda. This wasn't the first time she had moved Sylvester from the middle of the road. In fact, it happened often. It delighted the children every time.

"Old Sylvester thinks this road belongs to him," laughed Freeda as they bounced on up the hollow.

Within weeks, work began on the new building. One morning Freeda arrived at the center and found men surveying the property.

"Thank You, God," said Freeda half aloud. "You have answered my prayers once again. Forgive my impatience. I just want this building to honor You. That's the only reason. We can lead more people to know You. So many are still lost. Help us to reach them."

Freeda watched the building take shape. Each day she checked on the progress. The building moved slowly. Some days, it looked as if nothing had been done. Freeda tried to be patient. However, when she arrived one morning and found the men sitting around talking and laughing in the middle of the day, she became quite disturbed.

"What's wrong?" Freeda asked the workmen. "Why aren't you working?"

"The lumber hasn't been delivered," said one of the men. "We can't do anymore until it gets here."

"Where is it coming from?" asked Freeda. "When was it supposed to be delivered?"

“From Pikeville,” replied the man, “and I’m not sure when it was supposed to be delivered. Maybe not until tomorrow.”

“Not if I can help it,” replied Freeda. Delivery of supplies had slowed the work on the building before.

Freeda drove off in the van. The men were not at all surprised when she returned a few hours later with a van full of lumber. Freeda had driven to Pikeville and picked up the lumber herself so that work on the building would not be delayed any longer than necessary. This was not the first time Freeda had used the van to haul materials for the building nor would it be the last. Freeda would do whatever she could to help finish the building.

The new Marrowbone Baptist Center building was dedicated in August 1971. What a day that was! Everyone in the community was there. Freeda struggled to hold back the tears of joy. As she looked about at the happy faces, she quietly thanked God again for letting her be a part of all of this. She thought about all those years in that drafty old building. Now the children would be warm when the winter came. Everything was bright and shiny and new.

The Last Payment

“God, thank You for answering my prayers once again. I knew You would, but I guess I get impatient.”

Freeda clutched the check tightly in her fist. It was the last payment on her house. She had asked God to give her a house, and He had done it.

“Good morning, Mrs. Harris, what can I do for you?”



asked the man sitting behind the wide, shiny desk.

“You can take this check and give me the deed to my house,” replied Freeda. “It’s all mine now.”

The banker smiled. He knew how much this meant to Freeda. He arose from his chair and disappeared through the door behind the desk. When the banker reappeared, he had an impressive-looking envelope in his hand. He handed the envelope to Freeda.

“I don’t know how you managed to purchase this house, Mrs. Harris, but I’m happy for you. You will never be sorry. You invested your money wisely,” said the banker.

“I didn’t do it,” replied Freeda. “God did it. He knows what I need, and He has always supplied my every need.”

As Freeda left the bank and climbed up into the driver’s seat of the van, she smiled at Mama in the seat beside her and said, “It’s all ours, Mama. We own our house. Isn’t God good?”

“Yes, indeed, He is,” said Mama.

Who Will Do the Work?

“Lord, You know how I love my work here in the center. I don’t want to give it up. It seems like so many things are tug-gin’ at me right now. I must put Mama in a nursing home. You know I can’t take care of her here at home any longer. I won’t let her go alone. I’ll have to go with her and stay with her. I don’t seem to be able to move as well as I used to. I’m getting weary in my bones. Sometimes just climbing up into the van is an effort. Are those ruts and holes up Bad Fork Hollow bigger, or do they just feel that way to my old bones? Anyway, You’ve always known best. I guess this is Your way of telling me I need to retire. I know You will have someone to take my place. It needs to be someone young and strong. You know you have to be strong to work up here, Lord. I’m depending on You to find someone.”

Years of hard work and depriving herself of even the necessities of life were beginning to show. Freeda was tired. Mama was old and sick. Freeda was having to hire a sitter for Mama for the hours she was away at the center and driving the van. She couldn’t take care of Mama at home any longer.

“I can’t imagine anyone else opening the doors to the center or driving that van,” said Spanky Baldrige.

Freeda had just told Spanky that she was planning to retire. Freeda and Spanky were longtime friends. It was hard to remember exactly how long they had known each other. They had laughed together, cried together, and prayed together. Whenever one of them felt a need, they met to pray.

The years had passed too quickly. Freeda would miss the



children and meeting with the mothers. She would miss everything, but she had her house and could come back to it. She would always be near the center and people she loved.

Freeda stayed at the nursing home with her mother for eight-and-a-half months. When Mama died, Freeda returned to her home at Marrowbone.

Arthritis keeps Freeda from being as active as she would like. There are times when she wishes she could drive up to the hollows again to pick up the children. She spends a lot of time on the telephone. Nearly everyone calls her.

“Pray for me,” they say.

“I’d rather have Freeda praying for me than anyone I know,” says the preacher of Hellier Baptist Church. “I reckon Freeda knows the Lord better than anyone I’ve ever known.”

Freeda often recalls experiences from the past. Back in Black Mountain, Kentucky, right after she heard about Jesus, she sang:

If you cannot cross the ocean,
And the heathen lands explore,
You can find the heathen nearer,
You can help them at your door.

“This is the way it started,” says Freeda. “I wanted people to know my Savior. I didn’t want them to have to wait as long as I did to hear.”

Remember

- Who told Freeda Harris about Jesus?
- Why do you think Freeda was so determined to tell children about Jesus?
- What did Freeda say she could do best? What do you think Freeda did best?
- How did Freeda know that God wanted her as a missionary?
- Do you know someone who does not know about Jesus? Can you tell that someone about Jesus?

God may call you to be a missionary, but first, you need to accept Jesus as your Savior if you have not. Pray that God will lead you. God sometimes speaks to people through special feelings or thoughts. If you think God might be speaking to you, talk with your teachers at church, your family, or your pastor.

INDIANA

OHIO

LOUISVILLE

FRANKFORT

ELIZABETHTOWN

KENTUCKY

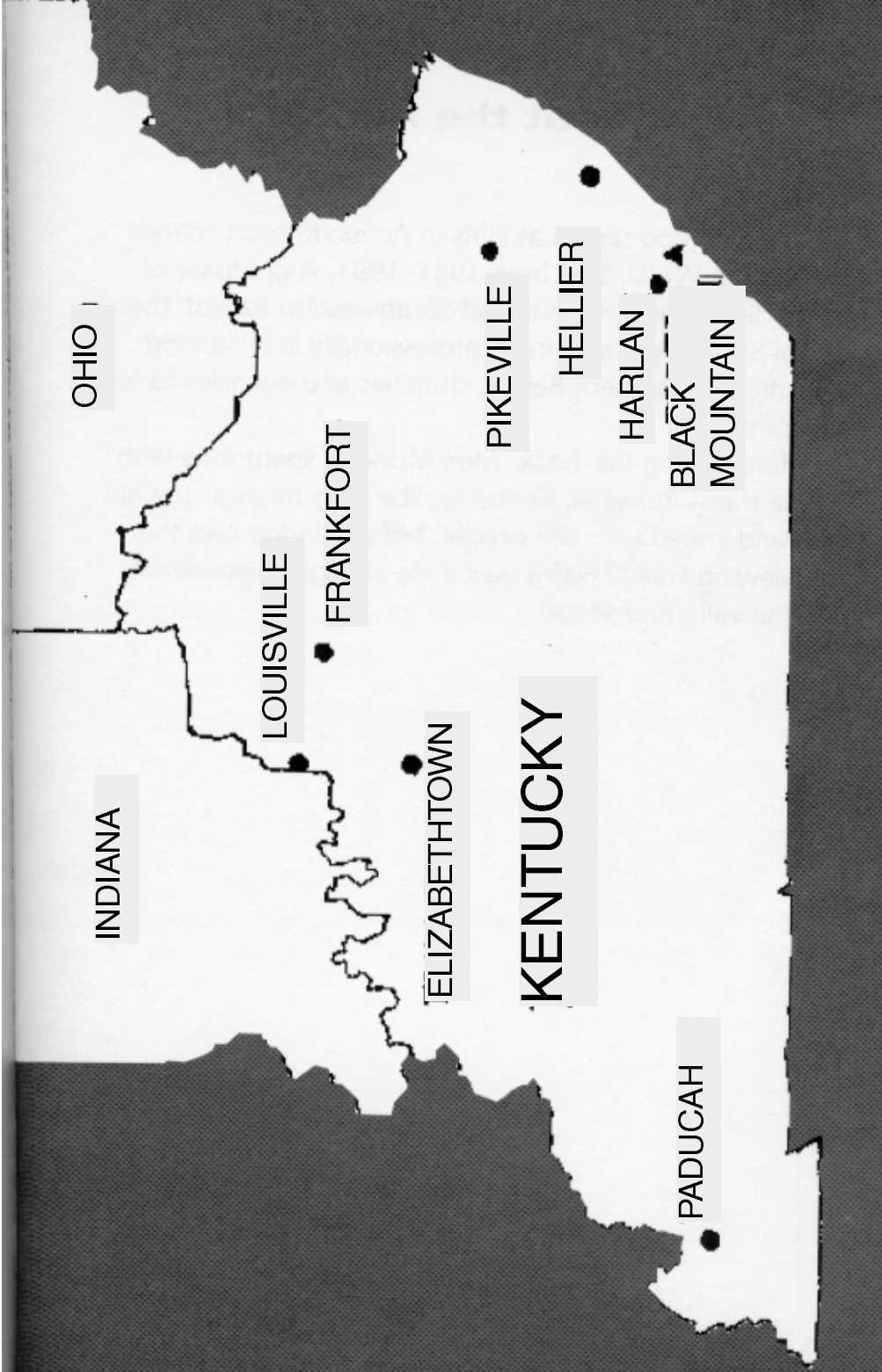
PADUCAH

PIKEVILLE

HELLIER

HARLAN

BLACK
MOUNTAIN



About the Author

Ethel McIndoo served as Girls in Action/Mission Friends specialist at WMU, SBC, from 1981 to 1991. A graduate of Hardin Simmons University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, she worked professionally in childhood education in Southern Baptist churches and agencies for over 40 years.

Before writing this book, Miss McIndoo spent time with Freeda Harris in Hellier, Kentucky. She rode through the hollows and visited with the people. Miss McIndoo says that interviewing Freeda Harris was a life-changing experience, one she will never forget.



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