

A young girl in a red baseball uniform is captured in the middle of swinging a bat on a baseball field. She is wearing a red helmet and has a long blonde braid with a red ribbon at the end. In the background, another player in a blue uniform is visible on the field, and there are trees with red flowers under a blue sky with white clouds.

CONFIDENCE: RELIANCE ON THE SPIRIT

The Innocence and Resilience of Youth
Second Edition

Peggy L. Headlund

Confidence: Reliance on the Spirit

The Innocence and Resilience of Youth

SECOND EDITION

By Peggy L. Headlund



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my best friend in Minnesota, Sue Strese, although I've called her "Sues" most of my life. We've been friends since we were little girls. We grew up together riding our horses, Blaze King and Rosie, around the countryside. Ours is a long-lasting and revered friendship. Thank you for bringing out the best in me, Sues. If it weren't for you, I'd still be a brat. Thank you for standing by me over the years through the good and the bad. You are one of the few people in my life who has loved me the way I am, flaws and all. God bless you always.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to my nephew, Lukas VanDyke, for his fine art photography, as seen in the picture of the author at the back of this book. Thank you for your cheerfulness and professionalism. You are a delightful person. Everyone should be as lucky as I am.

I am grateful to my best friend in Minnesota, Sue Strese. You are a wonderful inspiration for the character of Mele. Thank you for the sincerity, loveliness, and wisdom of your character.

I extend a huge, warm, and loving thank you to my husband, Donald. Thank you for listening patiently to all my ideas, and for taking us out to eat if I'm working towards a deadline, or if I'm on a writing frenzy. Thank you for supporting me in my book ministry and my music ministry, and for praying with me about the direction of the ministries. Donald, sweet man, your love is precious to me. I'll never be able to thank you enough in this lifetime.

Most of all, I am thankful to Jesus Christ, my Savior, for his forgiveness, guidance, and inspiration. Thank you, dear Shepherd. The gift belongs to you, my Maker. I pray that I will always use it wisely to glorify and honor you.

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Prologue: A Lesson about Making Friends

Summer was over and so was Lilia's childhood. She was now in junior high school. When Lilia saw Jimmy on the school bus that morning, she couldn't help but think back to an evening with her family two years before. This is what she remembered:

After the family had joined hands, Jacob prayed, "Dear Father, bless this food to our use and us to thy service, and help us always to remember to put our work in your hands." Everyone closed with "Amen." The family enjoyed their evening meal. It was a time of sharing a little about what their day had held.

"Can I go first?" Lilia wanted to know. She impatiently placed her elbows on the table and crooked her chin on her hands.

"Go ahead honey," Francine, her mom, urged her on with an affectionate pat to the side of Lilia's face.

"You know how that *nasty Jimmy* is always pulling my hair and running off so I can't catch him? *I can't stand him!* Today was the last straw. We were playing softball, and it was my turn up to bat. Jimmy ran over and yanked my ponytail so hard that he pulled some out, *and I screamed!* Then somehow, he was stuck between me and the catcher, so I threw down my bat, grabbed him, pushed him to the ground, *and sat on him!* Everyone cheered! I grabbed his arms and held them down in the dirt while *he kicked and screamed!* Defeated, that's what Jimmy was! *That'll teach him!*" Lilia thought back to all the dirt sticking to Jimmy's sweaty face as he tried to push her off him.

The three startled faces of her mom, dad, and grandpa stared back at Lilia.

She saw big eyes and slight smirks, but that's all. *This can't be good*, thought Lilia.

Her grandpa, Apelehama, began, "Lilia, in Hebrews 13:5, the Bible tells us '... Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'" Apelehama looked at her pointedly with his large brown eyes, which peered into her soul.

"What does that have to do with Jimmy, *for crying out loud?*" cried Lilia. *This feels like a trap*, thought Lilia.

"What does that *mean* to you, Lilia?" her grandpa asked her as he placed his hand on her shoulder. She knew the motion. She'd better pay close attention. Her grandpa was about to make a serious point.

"It means that when I need God's help, he'll always be there to help," Lilia replied. *This probably isn't going to help at all. Grandpa's so smart in the ways of the Lord. He's going to corner me*, thought Lilia.

"Yah, that is partially right. It means that He's *always* with you, not just if you call Him to be with you." Lilia's eyes grew wide with shock, and Apelehama could see the dawning of truth in them.

"You mean when I sat on that brat Jimmy, and held him down *God was there?*" She asked a little too loud. *This is not good*, thought Lilia.

"Yes, Child," Apelehama replied quietly. He had always been a man of few words, but every word usually had important meaning.

"Oh, *this stinks!* Now, you're telling me that what I did *was wrong and God knows it?*" She tugged on her long blonde braid and knew she was losing ground.

"Yes, Child, He does. God is not with us for just inspiration and extraordinary circumstances. He's with us in *everything* we do, even mucking out the barn or feeding the cattle or riding your horse, King." Apelehama drove his point home with the Bible as his guide.

The only person in the Christian family who did much yelling was Lilia herself. Her parents and grandpa were usually soft-spoken. On occasion, though, Jacob raised his voice at a deserving Lilia when she engaged in outrageous behavior.

“Well, if He’s *always* with me, then I’ll have to write a song to sing to Him while we’re working.” She sang with vigor, “I’m cleaning the barn, praise the Lord! I’m feeding the cattle, praise the Lord! I’m shucking corn, praise the Lord! I’m hauling hay, praise the Lord!”

All the smirks turned into outright laughter. Lilia’s dad looked like he was going to need a tissue for his watering eyes. Francine held her hands over her mouth as she laughed at the hilarity of Lilia’s song. Apelehama threw his head back and howled with laughter in his rich baritone voice.

After a minute or so, Apelehama brought everything back to the right tone, “You’re getting *closer*, Child. The Lord gives us everything: the horses and cattle that eat the hay *and* the hay itself. If we remember that God is *always* with us, we can honor Him with our work and our actions.” He looked at her pointedly, and willed her to accept his wisdom.

“I guess I didn’t honor God today when I sat on Jimmy,” reflected Lilia mournfully. “That’s what you’re trying to tell me isn’t it, Gramps?” She gazed at him with a guilty frown. She never liked to disappoint God, and her grandpa knew that.

“No, you didn’t,” reiterated her dad. His brows knitted together in seriousness as he eyed his precocious daughter with authority. “Someday that boy will be twice as big as you, and he’ll *definitely* remember that you bullied him and *then* what will you do? *Huh?*” Jacob raised his eyebrows, and quirked his head as he drove his message home.

A little too quickly Lilia cried, “*I’ll sing ‘Praise the Lord!’ Then I’ll run for my life!*”

The adults burst forth as one in laughter. Apelehama started one of his laughing fits where he threw his head back and let it all loose. Jacob laughed, but not out of control like his dad. He didn’t want Lilia to miss the point the adults made. Francine covered her mouth and tittered with mirth at her inventive daughter. Lilia could see that they couldn’t hold it in.

Francine slowed things down a bit, “Think about how you can make it up to Jimmy, dear.” She gently stroked Lilia’s cheek with her lovely smooth hand to encourage her daughter.

“Do you think he’ll forgive me if I say I’m sorry and bake him some brownies?” Lilia asked, and hoped that such an action would put the episode behind her.

“That is a good start Lilia. I’ll help you after dinner.” Francine smiled at her daughter.

Even now, the memory of that fateful night two years ago didn’t set too well with Lilia. She cleared her throat and tried to think about something else.

A Spat with Jimmy

“*W*hat are you trying to do Jimmy, kill me?” Lilia screeched at the top of her lungs when Jimmy pitched the softball directly at her head.

She heard the whirring of air around the ball as it picked up velocity. She leaned backwards to avoid it as the ball flew one inch past her nose.

“This is *supposed* to be for fun, not for *blood!*” Lilia squalled at him. She couldn’t believe he had done that. For years, Jimmy had been the nemesis of her life. He pestered her any chance he had for whatever reason he could find. She didn’t know why he did it either, or how to make him stop.

He’s probably just trying to get back at me for sitting on him and holding his hands in the dirt last spring, speculated Lilia as she pushed the sweaty hair away from her forehead. Back then, Lilia had been bigger than Jimmy. Lilia hadn’t seen Jimmy for the three months over this last summer. When she saw him on the school bus the first day of junior high school, she was shocked! He had grown at least six inches over the summer!

Her father’s fateful words rang in her ears, “Someday that boy will be twice as big as you, and he’ll *definitely* remember that you bullied him and *then* what will you do? *Huh?*”

Lilia pounded the bat on the plate and resumed her hitting stance. She ground her feet into the ground in preparation. Her lips pressed together tight in fierce defiance.

“What are you *gripping* about? Keep your *eye* on the ball and you *won’t get hit!*” Jimmy yowled sarcastically at her. He snickered outright at her and nodded his head at his team members, “Right?” They too, enjoyed making fun of Lilia and nodded in agreement.

Lilia focused on the ball while Kimo, the first baseman, and Jeremy, the second baseman, heckled her, “Batter, batter, batter, batter, batter, *miss!* Batter, batter, batter, batter, batter, *miss!*” Knowing the bases were loaded, they did their best to distract her. They didn’t know her very well, though. Distractions just made Lilia focus harder.

Jimmy hurled the ball hard and fast. The ball picked up speed, and whizzed a little high and to the right. *Smack!* It slammed into Lilia’s upper arm with force.

Mele, Lilia’s best friend, watched from the dugout. She held her hand over her mouth in alarm and whispered to Cindy, “That had to *really hurt.*”

“*O-w-w-w-w-w-w-w-w-w!*” Lilia held her upper arm and dropped down to the ground on her knees in the red volcanic dirt.

“*Get up! You’re a big baby!*” Jimmy howled and laughed along with his friends, Kimo and Jeremy.

Kimo and Jeremy echoed Jimmy with screeching sarcasm, “*Baby! Baby!*”

Lilia stomped out to the mound, stuck her face up into Jimmy’s sarcastic grimace, and jabbed him repeatedly on the chest with her pointer finger.

In an angry dither, Lilia shrieked, “*If you do that again, I’m going to punch your lights out!*” Her face and ears turned bright red with anger as she delivered her missive.

“*Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! You just try it!*” Jimmy shoved her backwards, which threw her off balance.

It’s bad enough to get a giant contusion on my arm, thought Lilia, but calling me a “baby” is the last straw! She stomped back to the home plate in a temper of fury.

She ground her feet into the ground in her hitting stance, re-gripped her bat, circled it in preparation of whatever Jimmy threw at her, and prepared herself for the next onslaught.

She swore under her breath, “Bully! I’m going to let you have it!”

Jimmy backed up his arm and threw the ball as hard and high as he could.

Lilia watched the ball approach. “Get ready Jimmy, here it comes!” she said with emphasis under her breath. *Thwack!* Lilia hit a straight line drive into

Jimmy's belly. "There, that'll show him," she said with satisfaction under her breath.

Jimmy buckled over in pain, slunk to his knees, and then rolled to the ground. *Thunk!* He fell in the dirt and tried to catch his breath, "*Ah-h-h! Oh-h-h!*"

The concerned coaches dashed out to the field to see what they could do to help him.

Lilia barreled to the first base, the second base, the third base, and then to the home plate as she kicked up a cloud of red earth. She hit the home plate with her right foot, hard, in scornful defiance, and rusty dust flew up in a whirlwind of movement. *There, we have four more points. They'll never be able to catch up now,* thought Lilia.

No one in the stands cheered. The spectators kept their eyes glued on Jimmy the pitcher. Sweat beads mixed with red dirt streamed down Lilia's fair cheeks to her chin. She followed everyone's gaze to the pitcher's mound.

Lilia's mom and dad, Jacob and Francine, and her grandpa, Apelehama, and his new wife, Mandy, were perched up in the stands at the league softball game. Apelehama felt appalled at Lilia's conduct. He turned to his son, Jacob, and gazed at him disdainfully.

Jacob re-tallied, "Don't look at me, Dad. I warned her when she sat on Jimmy that there would be payback time when he grew bigger. That time has come." Jacob shrugged his shoulders and lifted his hands as if to say, "What am I to do?"

Each coach held an elbow and lifted Jimmy to his feet. Everyone in the bleachers clapped and cheered to encourage Jimmy, and Lilia's family clapped too.

Her grandpa felt relieved that Lilia had not hurt Jimmy more severely. "Thank God," he said under his breath to Mandy.

Jimmy dusted himself off, stared at the ground to re-gain his focus, and imagined the pitch. He circled his arm back, and whizzed the ball square over the plate. Cindy missed.

“*Strike One!*” The umpire yelled.

Cindy swung the bat a couple of times for concentration and dug her feet into the dirt. When Cindy appeared to be ready, Jimmy hurled another ball square over the plate. Cindy whacked it up and out towards the third base. *Whuck!* Dick, the third baseman, caught it with one hand extended above his head. Three outs, there was only a half inning left.

Lilia had watched in disbelief as Jimmy pitched the ball to Cindy right into the strike zone. *That Jimmy, he hit me on purpose! I'll deal with him later,* thought Lilia. She grabbed her glove and trotted out to the shortstop position between second and third base. She punched her right fist into her glove a couple of times to prepare her glove for the next hit. She bent down with her feet apart, prepared to move in any direction, and focused on the ball.

Kimo came up to bat first. Being a lefty, he aimed an easy shot out to the right field. Bill jogged a couple of steps and then jumped up and caught it with ease.

“*Out!*” The umpire hollered.

Jeremy came up to bat next. He aimed the ball out to center field. Mele scooted backwards quickly with agility. *Whuck!* She jumped up, and caught it expertly with two hands.

“*Out!*” The umpire squalled again. Mele laughed in satisfaction with her dimpled apple-pie smile.

“*Yes!*” Lilia cried, as she fisted her right hand and pumped her arm down in celebration.

Then, it was Jimmy's turn. He stared right at Lilia, and locked his eyes with hers in the challenge. Lilia broke the gaze to focus on the ball. Jimmy aimed his bat up. *Whack!* The ball went right up over Lilia's head, dropped a distance behind her, and Dennis in the left outfield chased it down. He cracked it to Lilia, who caught it skillfully, and whirled around.

Jimmy tore past the second base and bore down on Lilia with ferocity. He pumped his arms and legs as hard as he could make them go. The toes of his tennis shoes sent puffs of red earth up into his path.

Lilia stood ready with her feet apart, and faced Jimmy as she solidly held onto the ball. She tagged Jimmy squarely in the center of his chest.

Jimmy plowed right over the top of her knocking her down to the red earth with his momentum, and kept running.

The onlookers murmured with concern, “*Oh!*” They waited for the dust to settle. Lilia raised her arm with force and showed the umpire that she still held the ball in her glove, even though she lied on her back.

“*Out, the game’s over!*” The umpire howled.

Cheers echoed from the bleachers. Lilia got up, dusted herself off, and trotted into the dugouts.

“*I can’t believe how rough this game can be!*” Francine bemoaned, as she shook her head back and forth. “*Somebody could really get hurt!*”

“Sports help kids understand how to survive in this world,” interjected Apelehama. “A few knocks teaches them that they *can* take it. It gives them more *confidence*.” Apelehama uttered wisely as always and nodded his head.

“But the boys don’t treat the girls *any different* than they do the guys! The girls are not as big. They could get *hurt*,” Francine reiterated with apprehension for her daughter. She held her right index finger to her lips and shook her head back and forth. “It doesn’t seem fair.”

“What doesn’t kill them makes them stronger honey,” said Jacob with an unworried lift of his shoulders. “What can I tell you?” He chuckled and patted her knee. He knew she had never played competitive sports of any kind.

“I’m with Francine. I wouldn’t like to get beat up like that. How does Lilia *stand it?*” Mandy asked in wide-eyed amazement.

Apelehama chuckled, and slapped his knee. “Lilia has been thrown from a horse, kicked by a cow, trampled by our Hereford, dragged by her calf, and fallen off the hay wagon. She’s still in one piece. She is *one tough cookie*.”

“I had *no idea*,” said the dumbfounded Mandy.

She stared at Apelehama and he grinned and nodded, “It’s true.”

Lilia stomped up to Jimmy, who just climbed out of the opposing team's dugout. He wiped the sweat from his brow along with the red earth smeared all over his face. Lilia stuck her face right up at the end of Jimmy's nose.

"*This is not over yet Jimmy! You hit me on purpose!*" Lilia accused him with her eyes popping out and her face redder than sunburn. "I noticed how you pitched to Cindy *right into the strike zone!* You were *trying* to hit me!"

"Well, you'll never know now, will you?" Jimmy said with a sardonic sneer, as he looked down his nose at her.

"*Why* do you want to hurt me anyway?" Lilia demanded. She forcefully poked him in the chest with her pointer finger. "*What* have you got *against* me?"

"You're just too dang smart for your own good!" Jimmy retaliated with a sneer of contempt. Before Lilia could stop him, he quickly grabbed her by the knees and swung her easily up onto his shoulder like a sack of feed. Lilia pounded his back with her fists as he spun her in a circle.

"*Put me down! Jimmy! Put me down!*" He provoked her to fury as she slammed her fists into his muscled back repeatedly until it started to hurt. *Plop!* Jimmy dumped her unceremoniously in the grass, and she rolled backwards.

"You're not so *big* anymore, are you *little girl!*" Jimmy jeered, spun on his heel, and trotted off leaving Lilia slumped on the ground in disbelief.

Apelehama and Mandy, and Jacob and Francine had observed the entire escapade as they joined Lilia near the dugouts.

"Are you all right dear?" Francine asked with misgiving. She offered Lilia her hand to help her up to her feet.

"I'm all right, Mom. *I'm just mad!*" Lilia snapped off as she got up and dusted herself off. "Dad, please don't tell me you told me so. That'll make me feel even *more* humiliated." She gathered her bat, glove, and ball and tried not to look at her dad.

"Okay sweetie, I won't." Jacob laughed lightly and patted her back.

"*O-o-o-o-o-o-o-o*, what am I going to do about Jimmy? He hit me *on purpose!*" Lilia said angrily. "I'm in a quandary. *He hates me!*" She slammed her bat into the ground with frustration.

“Love is just over the fence from hate, Child,” said Apelehama discerningly. He knew a teaser when he saw one.

“*Oh Gramps, that doesn’t help me at all. I have terrible feelings towards Jimmy. How’s that going to go away?*” Lilia asked as the feeling of defeat threatened to conquer her. She stomped the red earth from her shoes. He clearly saw her exasperation.

“Take some quiet time in your room when you get home, Child. Close the door and pray about it,” Apelehama said quietly with perception. He placed his hand on her shoulder with a firm grip. Lilia knew he meant it.

“I suppose you’re going to tell me that I should pray for *Jimmy too!*” Lilia felt this whole episode was getting out of hand. She thought if she had to pray for Jimmy that she just might choke on the prayer.

“That is a good idea, Daughter. Then, maybe some of the bitterness will go out of your heart.” Jacob had always encouraged Lilia to pray for those with whom she was at odds. He hugged her shoulders, and tried to help her calm down.

“O-o-o-o-o-o-o-o, *Daa-aaad! No-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!*” Lilia rebelled. “That’s exactly what I didn’t want to hear you say!”

“O-o-o-o-o-o-o-o, Lilia, *Ye-e-e-e-e-e-e-s!*” Jacob teased and hugged her again.

It seemed like no one was on her side. “*Let’s go home!*” Lilia snipped and then slammed her mouth shut in silence. The family ambled off together to Mandy’s tasteful pearl-colored Escalade, the only vehicle between them all that was big enough to hold everyone. The slump in Lilia’s shoulders said it all as she nailed the bat into the ground.

Lilia’s mom peered out the kitchen window above the sink where she was doing dishes. *I just love this little ranch,* thought Francine. She looked around at the beauty of it. The pond in the middle of the large grassy area had a stand of paradise flowers on one end and day lilies on the other end. They framed the pond perfectly. Francine didn’t mind in the least that the kitchen window

faced the old barn and horse paddock or that the circular drive of gravel encircled the grassy area. It gave her a chance to keep an eye on the activities of their little ranch, especially Lilia. Francine sighed and breathed in the gentle scent of ginger, which floated in through the window. She had planted a stand of it in the corner off the veranda for that precise purpose. She knew there was a slight trade wind today as she heard the swishing of the palm branches next to the barn. She gazed around at her flowerbeds and garden. *There's no question that I have an idyllic life*, she thought.

Francine smiled as she watched Lilia and her best friend, Mele, set up a course of straw bales in the grassy area next to the pond. Mele showed Lilia how to use the bale as a prop to flip over it. Lilia quickly ran three steps to the bale, placed her hands in front of it, and propelled herself over it back onto her feet. Mele already knew how to do it, along with just about everything else associated with cheerleading, including the cheers. Francine could hear Lilia's frustration all the way from the kitchen.

"I'm *never* going to get this! I'm *bigger* than you and have more weight to throw around!" Lilia hollered at Mele with her hands nailed to her hips in protestation.

The patient Mele replied, "You'll get it, Lilia. You're a little timid. Are you *afraid*?" Mele asked instigating her. She crossed her arms in front of herself in body language that said, "Prove it to me that you're not scared."

"Well now I'm at the end of my rope! Especially if *you* think I'm afraid!" Lilia blurted back at her. *It's a fine day when even Mele the meek thinks I don't have the courage in me*, thought Lilia.

"Lilia, the bale *will* catch you. Just try it! *Believe me!*" Mele encouraged Lilia with a smile and made a flipping motion with her hand to get Lilia moving.

"*What the heck!*" Lilia ran three steps, quickly bent and placed her hands before the bale, threw herself in the air with abandonment, and landed hard on her butt on the other side. "*Ouch!*" She threw Mele a disgusted look and sat slouched on the ground.

Not even that look could deter the patient Mele. She said, "Keep your feet *under you*, Lilia. You pushed a little too hard, which created more momentum

than you needed. *Ease up a little,*” Mele coached. “I’m *waiting* for you to do it right.” She quirked her eyebrow and laughed, “Anytime now will do Lilia.”

Lilia recognized a dare when she heard one. She sighed deeply and readied herself to try it again. *This time I’ll ease up on the thrust of my arms,* she thought. She flew over the bale easily and sprang forward on her hands. “*Oo-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-oh! Ouch!*”

“Let me show you again Lilia,” said Mele with the patience of Job. She sprang a couple front handsprings effortlessly without the use of the bales. She appeared as if she was made of air, and that it was the most natural thing for a person to fly through the air upside down defying gravity.

Lilia felt completely disgusted with herself and discouraged. “Can we work on something else for a while? I have to practice the handspring thing on my own. It’s probably going to take more time than what we have today,” Lilia coalesced. She sat on a bale with a *kerplunk!*

“Sure, Lilia, let’s practice our jumps. Follow my lead, Lilia.”

Lilia stood and poised herself next to Mele.

“Step forward with your right foot, cross your arms, and then forward with your left foot.”

Lilia watched and followed along with Mele, and mimicked her exactly.

“Push your arms down, bring both feet together, and then jump up into the air with arms flying high and wide.”

Lilia followed Mele, and sailed up into the air, but not with quite as much height as Mele.

“*Good Grief Mele,* you look like you’ve been jumping like that since you were in *diapers!* Tell the truth. Do you have flubber on the bottoms of your shoes?” Lilia teased her friend as she thought of the old Disney movie where the professor filled the car’s gas tank with flubber and flew it around in the sky. Both the girls had a penchant for older movies. When they stayed at each other’s house for a sleepover, they would stay up a good portion of the night and watch old movies on TV or DVD.

“You goofus!” Mele giggled and shook her head back and forth. *My counseling is never going to change Lilia,* thought Mele.

Lilia tried the jump again. *I should be able to do it*, thought Lilia. *After all, I have muscled-out thighs from working on the ranch all my life.* Lilia followed the steps that Mele had shown her, and sailed up into the air mastering the jump perfectly.

“*Wa-hoo!*” Lilia cried as she jumped up and down with exhilaration.

“Part of the judging depends on how high you can jump so try to gain as much height as possible,” coached Mele knowingly. “Use the strength of your arms to propel your body. Throw your arms out as hard as you can, and it’ll help you get more height,” Mele said vigorously. She demonstrated for her while standing in place.

“*Okay coach!*” Lilia cried exuberantly. She ran the three steps, followed the arm motions, flung her arms as hard as she could, and she flew even higher than before. “By George, I think I’ve got it!” Lilia cried with the British accent that she had learned for the musical *My Fair Lady*.

“*By George, I think you’ve got it!*” Mele cried with delight. She always enjoyed helping other people and making them happy. The two girls laughed uproariously and threw their heads back. “Whoops, there’s my mom! Keep practicing, Lilia. I’ll see you tomorrow.” Mele took off in a trot towards her mom’s car now parked in the circular drive next to the veranda. Francine waved to Ioka from the kitchen window.

“Thanks Mele, I will.” Lilia waved good-bye and smiled at Mele a big thank-you.

Lilia knew she needed lots of practice because the judging had two criteria: first, a majority vote from the student body, and second, Mrs. Hansen’s vote, the physical education teacher. Each was half of the total votes. Mrs. Hansen liked Lilia’s diligence in fitness class and her agility and strength. Lilia speculated that she would probably get Mrs. Hansen’s vote. However, Lilia was not as popular as Mele being a nerdy sort and all, and she didn’t think a majority of the student body would vote for her. She puzzled over how she might feel if she didn’t make the squad, and Mele did. *Oh well, I’ll worry about that later*, she thought.

A Sticky Situation 2

“Hi, Lilia?” Bill called her on the phone without identifying himself.

“Yes, Bill, I recognize your voice.” *He should know by now that I can always tell it’s his voice.* She giggled and then changed to a listening mode.

“Cindy and I would like to join your ‘Ride by His Side’ ministry. If there are more of us to supervise, maybe we could have more horses and a little bigger fellowship. What do you think?” Bill inquired bashfully. *I hope that she doesn’t think I’m being too bold,* thought Bill. *We’ve been getting along so well lately.*

“You’re sure *full of surprises* aren’t you?” Lilia giggled.

Before Bill had done the “one-eighty” after his mother and brother died, he had been an impolite and brash young man. At the hospital that night, Lilia’s family had prayed with Bill, his two brothers, Dick and Dean, and his dad, Darrell. The Christian family had witnessed the father and sons’ revival by the Holy Spirit right before their very eyes.

“What am I supposed to say to *that*?” Bill retorted. He knew he had changed, but he didn’t want to talk about it all the time.

“What’s on your mind, Bill? *Spit it out!* I don’t have all day here,” quipped Lilia at him.

Bill liked Lilia’s forthrightness. Last year, he had had a crush on her, but Lilia had liked another boy. Then Bill met little, shy, redheaded Cindy on one of Lilia’s “Ride by His Side” Saturdays and forgot all about Lilia. In the back of his mind, he knew that Lilia had planned it that way.

“I’ve bought an untrained two-year-old gelding. Do you think you can break him for me?” Bill asked with confidence.

He knew the magical relationship Lilia had with all her other animals. The crux of the matter would be if she wanted to do it or not, or if she had the time. Lilia attended an advanced class for gifted students and already had college-preparatory classes. With the combination of her chores, homework, the animals, music, and her ministry, he didn't know if she could make it fit.

"We don't use the term, 'break,' anymore Bill. If the horse has some spirit, you want him to *keep* it. We use the term 'train' or 'tame,'" announced Lilia with authority.

"Oh well you know what I mean, don't ya'?" Bill chuckled. When Lilia invariably engaged in an oratory mode, it made him laugh. He didn't know anyone else like her.

"Yes, I know what you mean." *How did we get into this circular conversation anyway? After all, that's my masterpiece,* thought Lilia. "And yes, I would love to help you train your horse. You notice I said 'help.' You'll be involved in the process too, so that the horse learns to trust you. What's his name?"

"His name is Big Boy. He's a sorrel gelding about sixteen hands high, a little smaller than your American Saddlebred, King. He's a *Quarter Horse*," stated Bill proudly and waited eagerly for her response. He knew he wouldn't be disappointed.

"This could be a *lot of fun!* Quarter Horses are renowned for how fast they can run a quarter mile, sometimes up to *fifty-five miles per hour!* It's a wonderful horse for reining, cutting, working with cattle, barrel racing, and calf roping. The Quarter Horse has a great potential for stopping and swiveling with accuracy and speed." Lilia informed Bill as she showed off her knowledge of horses. "Let me ask gramps first for permission to keep him in the paddock okay? You'll have to pay for his feed, but I won't charge you for my services," Lilia added in fairness. "I'll give you a holler when I know. By the way, what is Cindy going to ride?" Lilia asked. She knew the answer could change the training techniques used.

"She'll ride behind me," said Bill with a reasonable sense of his own worth.

"I'm glad I asked. That's another skill the horse has to learn, not to crowfoot with a second rider aboard," added Lilia with expertise.

“Okay, thanks, Lilia.” Bill hung up before Lilia could say, “You’re welcome” or “Goodbye.”

When Bill finished talking, he was just plain done. Lilia smiled. She was glad she, and Bill had finally become friends. They had gotten off on the wrong foot when he had harassed her by saying and doing inappropriate things, but the “one-eighty” had changed him.

Francine, poised at the stove, pushed the egg-battered bread around in the sizzling butter with a spatula. Jacob loved French toast, and so she decided to make it for breakfast this morning. Francine missed Apelehama’s company at breakfast these days. He was so wise. He always had something constructive to add to their day. Francine determined that she would reestablish, at least weekly, the family dinner. It would give each person a chance to share what was happening in his or her life. She would have it on Wednesday evenings in the atrium. Then, the second gathering would be for breakfast after church on Sunday. *That’s perfect*, thought the delighted Francine. *I’ll call Apelehama and Mandy today.* Francine smiled, *one down, there are only seven dragons left to go!* Francine felt like the conquering princess leading an army against another country.

Francine had acquired her buoyant mood at Mammoth Mountain where she, and Jacob had been on vacation a few weeks ago. For the last thirteen years, she had focused on Lilia. She and Jacob had had no vacations since their honeymoon. Francine marveled at how patient Jacob had been with her. From this point on, Jacob had vowed that he and Francine would go away at least once every year. She was all for that.

Jacob tiptoed quietly from his office next to the kitchen and hugged his arms around Francine from behind.

“Jacob, you startled me!” Francine cried with pleasure. Jacob had been very careful about his attentions towards Francine until recently. *Well, Lilia is now a young lady*, thought Francine. *She should understand about affection between a mom and a dad.* “Lady” that doesn’t feel quite right, thought Francine. *Let’s stick with “young.”*

Lilia washed her hands and face after her barn chores, and now the family linked hands as Jacob said grace, “Dear God, way out there in your third Heaven, thank you for caring for your children. We ask you to bless this food to our use, and us to Thy service.” They all said together, “Amen.”

The family of three relished their French toast smothered with lots of butter and maple syrup. Lilia looked up at her mom appreciatively and smiled while she chewed. So far, being a chowhound had not gotten the best of Lilia, since she was such an energetic youth.

Lilia swallowed the last bite and requested, “May I be excused, Mom? I’d like to check on Valentine and Firecracker out in the meadow.”

“Certainly dear,” Francine replied with love and another emotion she couldn’t quite identify. She watched her maturing daughter exit through the screen door.

Jacob and Francine carried their dishes to the sink. Francine washed, and Jacob dried as usual. When they were finished, Jacob hugged Francine.

Lilia came in the screen door. *Slam!* She witnessed her parents embracing, and shook her head and smiled. Her parents had been like that ever since they returned from Mammoth Mountain in the High Sierra Nevada Mountains in California. The vacation had rekindled their marriage and love for each other.

Lilia loved how her mom always kept fresh bananas on top of the refrigerator as a snack for a hungry youth. Francine didn’t make cake or cookies. The snacks she bought were always fruit because she knew of Lilia’s voracious appetite. She didn’t want Lilia’s weight to get out of control.

Lilia also loved her mom for how well she listened, not like the boys at school who ridiculed her until all her patience exploded into fury. Lilia felt mortification at their goading. Lilia held herself above the crowd in most circumstances and ignored the taunting. *Someday, I hope they gather a little sense, and stop acting so stupid!*

Jimmy strolled down the school hallway towards Lilia as he sucked on a

large purple sucker. Just as he passed Lilia, he quickly pressed the sucker into the back of Lilia's head, and secured it into her waist-long honey hair. He snickered and kept walking. Lilia felt something heavy pull at her scalp. Her hand flew to the back of her head and grasped the sticky clump.

"Ugh, it's stuck! *That Jimmy is horrible!*" bemoaned Lilia with frustration.

Lilia knew she would need her mom's help to extract it without pulling all her hair out. *How embarrassing*, Lilia thought as she blushed pink. *I still have three more hours of classes and humiliation. I'll get him*, thought Lilia as a promise to herself. The extra weight pulling on her scalp-line bothered her temple for the rest of the day. She just barely tolerated all the teasing from the annoying boys.

Lilia jumped off the school bus and tore down the driveway. She scampered down the hall of the house and grabbed a hand mirror to survey the damage. Lilia stared at the gooey purple stain in her hair and wondered if it would come out. *I'll have to wait until mom comes home from work at the day spa*, Lilia conjectured. She changed her clothes and ventured out to the barn.

As soon as her grandpa spied the malady, he deplored, "*What's this?*"

"Don't ask, Gramps," Lilia recoiled. Apelehama had a stinking suspicion that Jimmy was at the bottom of this new affliction.

Lilia did her chores and then walked to the house. She waited patiently for her mom to come home from work. Francine climbed the veranda steps with an effort after a long day on her feet, opened the kitchen door, and jolted to a stop inside the front door.

Lilia's back faced her as her daughter screamed, "*Help Mom!*" Francine saw all the signs of an interaction with Jimmy, but she didn't tease or aggravate her daughter.

She said calmly, "Of course dear." Francine said a silent prayer, "Dear God, my child is now fully grown, and she is a fierce force. Teach her not to have such a short wick."

Lilia vowed to her mom, "*I'll get him so big and bad and mean that he'll regret it forever!*"

“Lilia, *listen* to your words. You sound so *vindictive*,” Francine warned.

Lilia pondered what her mom said. She was trying to establish some independence and trust with her parents, and gramps and Mandy. She was hoping they would allow her more freedoms. So far, it wasn’t working.

Lilia bent over the kitchen sink as Francine guided warm water over the congealed sucker covered with blonde hair. The sucker slid out with some coaxing.

“Well at least you didn’t lose any hair, Lilia,” said her mom with a small sigh of exasperation.

“Is my hair *stained*?” Lilia wanted to know the full extent of the damage, so she could start planning the size of the payback she would deliver to Jimmy.

“Yes, dear, it is, but it will probably wash out over time,” said Francine as she tried to comfort her. She spied the obstinate expression on Lilia’s face and shook her head back and forth with frustration.

“Great, now Jimmy will be laughing at me every day until it’s gone!” Lilia cried with exasperation. She continued to towel the moisture from her hair.

“Lilia, I know that patience is a scarce commodity with you, but remember what the Bible tells us in Colossians 3:12: ‘Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and *patience*.’”

“*Mo-om*, it’s really hard to be patient with someone who sticks a *purple sucker* in your hair!” Lilia defended her thoughts and kept toweling her hair.

“I know, dear. I can only imagine. God is testing you in this way for a reason, though. He might want you to develop more patience. You can’t learn patience, unless you’re tried in some way,” Francine replied wisely. She gazed at Lilia seriously and willed her to understand.

Lilia knew that her mother was levelheaded, and so she asked, “Did you have to learn patience, Mom, or have you always had it?” She quirked her head sassily and thought that she already knew the answer.

“I’ve always had it,” said Francine as she replied quietly. She knew what was coming next.

“Well there you go, nature versus nurture,” Lilia claimed her victory. “What

came naturally to you doesn't come so spontaneously to me. I'm going to have to learn patience I guess." She grimaced, turned, and trotted down the hallway to her room.

"Apele dear, I received a letter from one of my best friends today asking if her daughter, Martha, may come and visit us for a week. Patty's daughter used to be a nun, but has always wanted to be an elementary school principal. Recently, Martha retired from the convent and is now looking for her dream job. There happens to be an opening here on the island. She'd like to come for an interview. Sister Martha is a very nice woman in her late thirties. Would that be all right with you, do you think?" Mandy asked respectfully. She didn't expect him always to agree with her, but to have his own opinion.

"Mandy dear, whatever you decide to do is fine with me. Is she going to rent a car?" He asked pointedly. He knew that guests are easier to entertain if they can get around by themselves.

"Yes, she's renting a car. She doesn't want to confine herself to our schedules," said Mandy, and she nodded with a smile.

"That will work." Apelehama knew that Mandy liked her independence. He hugged her gently.

Francine's family dinner night arrived. She felt thrilled to have the family back together again. She prepared roasted beer-can chicken. Francine opened the beer can, placed the chicken on an upright oven rack, slipped the opened beer can inside the chicken, and popped it into the oven. The chicken roasted while the beer evaporated into the tender meat, and lent it the unique spices used to make beer. The aroma wafted all over the house.

Francine also stirred a ratatouille made from capers, sweet Maui onion, Italian squashes, tomatoes, and white wine, which simmered on the stove. The final touch was the warm freshly baked rosemary bread. The individual aromas blended to give the nose a treat and build the appetite in expectation.

Jacob prepared a place for the family of five to eat in the atrium, which they shared with his dad and Mandy. He pushed two of the patio tables together.

He decided to leave it that way after dinner, so they would be ready again for next week. He too had missed spending time with his dad and Mandy. Lilia saw his dad every day, whereas Jacob was off managing the properties under his care. His property management business had exploded. He had a good reputation for delivering what he promised. The island soon heard about his expertise, and kept him very much in demand.

Apelehama and Mandy arrived from their side of the dual-residence ranch house right on cue.

“*What is that delightful aroma, Francine?*” Mandy asked as she sniffed the kitchen scents.

“I’d say it’s a combination of beer-can chicken, ratatouille, and rosemary bread,” said Francine as she smiled with pleasure.

“I can’t wait, Francine,” Apelehama added. “My stomach is growling already.”

“Francine, may I have the honor of preparing the family dinner every other week?” Mandy asked. She wanted to do her part. “It doesn’t seem right to make you do it every week.”

“That would be *so nice*. Thank you for offering Mandy.” Francine kissed Mandy’s cheek. “You’re sure nice to have around.”

“May I help by setting the table?” Mandy inquired and laughed. Their bantering back and forth sounded a lot like a game Mandy played as a child, “Captain, May I?”

“You may.” Francine responded while Mandy headed for the china cabinet.

“I just love how you two ladies get along,” Apelehama said with satisfaction and a smile.

“I do too Apelehama,” answered the happy Francine. She felt delighted to have the whole family together again for dinner.

The family ate the delicious meal as they shared what was happening in their lives. They always took turns as to who would start. Mandy was up first tonight.

“Sister Martha, the daughter of an old friend, is coming to visit. She wants

to interview for the job of principal at Wailua Elementary School. As you all know, Mr. Simon is retiring. She arrives on Saturday and plans to stay for a week," mentioned Mandy. "I'd like to invite Sister Martha and Darrell Linderman to next week's dinner. What do you think everyone?" Mandy threw the matchmaking idea out to everyone.

"*Oh-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o, I love it!*" Francine beamed with excitement and rubbed her hands together in expectation.

"You're pretty funny, Mom. You sounded just like me!" Lilia giggled as she held a hand over her mouth to hide the food she chewed.

Apelehama advised, "I don't think it's a good idea, honey. We shouldn't meddle in the lives of other people." Something about the suggestion didn't feel right to him. Maybe it was because he had never believed in blind dates.

"Oh, I agree with Mandy, Apelehama. If Sister Martha loves children, and Darrell has *ten of them*, they might be a perfect match for each other!" Francine said light-heartedly with a smile and nodded her head up and down for encouragement.

"Dad why is it that women like to match-make anyway?" Jacob inquired in a teasing tone.

"You've got me there, Son. It's against my better judgment," Apelehama confessed, "but I'll go along with it anyway Mandy."

"Thank you, Apele dear. Oh Francine this is going to be fun!" Mandy lit up. "Let's talk about what we should make when we do the dishes!"

Yes, thought Lilia, *this ought to be very interesting*. She'd ask Bill what his dad thought about Sister Martha after the matchmaking dinner.

"Why don't you go next, Son," Apelehama suggested. He wanted to go last tonight for a good reason.

"Well, mine is business-related tonight. Business has been booming lately, as you all know. I was thinking of hiring a full-time handyman to do repairs. Does anybody have any input?" Jacob inquired, but looked directly at his dad.

"Do you have enough income to cover the handyman *and* offer small benefits?" Apelehama asked astutely.

"I think so, Dad. I put together a pro-forma. Would you take a look at it and see if you can poke some holes in it?" Jacob glanced up from his food as he looked for the answer.

"I'd consider it a privilege, Son." His dad patted him on the shoulder.

"Francine, honey, what do you think?" Jacob asked. He stopped eating his food and directed all his attention towards her.

"Well, would it mean we might have more money for travel?" Francine's eyes sparkled as she lifted her eyebrows.

Jacob laughed openly at her enthusiasm, and replied, "Yes. It might mean that, *sweetheart*."

"Well then I'm all for it!" Francine laughed along with everyone else.

"Lilia, why don't you go next?" Francine suggested with a smile at her lovely daughter.

"Okay, updates first, I've learned all the moves and cheers for the cheerleading tryouts. *I'm ready*," Lilia mentioned proudly. "I've worked really hard with Mele. She's still better than I am, but I'm improving."

"Dear, who's driving you to and from cheerleading practices, and to the games if I'm working?" Francine asked delicately as she gazed at her daughter. She didn't want to burst her bubble all at one time.

Lilia hadn't thought of that. She automatically expected her family to adjust their schedules for her activities.

"I don't know, Mom," she answered slowly. She sensed that her parents had more to say about cheerleading.

"When are your practices, Child?" Her grandpa asked as he steered the conversation.

"On Saturday mornings," Lilia replied. She knew what he would say next.

"You'll be taking your voice lessons with Madame Mady on Saturday mornings. You start next week, remember? I'll be driving you to those until you start driving. The lessons will begin at ten o'clock in the morning for one hour," Apelehama added with a nod of his head. He watched her face carefully.

This is getting to be too difficult, reflected Lilia. "Doesn't *anyone* want me to

be a cheerleader?” Lilia questioned them and wondered why they discouraged her.

“The fact of the matter is, Lilia, it isn’t very convenient for *any of us* to put everything down so that you can do what you want,” Jacob explained firmly, but kindly. “You didn’t ask us first.” He looked at her right in the eye. Lilia could see all her dreams sliding down a hill.

“You’ve come to a point in your life, Child, when you need to decide what’s truly important, and what’s *not* essential,” interjected Apelehama sagaciously. He grabbed her attention and locked his eyes with hers.

“Well, you all know that my animals and my ministry are important, but the music is *really* critical.” Lilia had discovered her purpose in life when she sang a solo for the spring concert last year. “Oh, and then I promised to help train Bill’s horse. I figured I’d do that on Sunday afternoons. He’s bringing Big Boy over this Sunday,” Lilia announced. She had already asked her grandpa for permission, and he had told her the amount that Bill should pay for feed and care.

“You’ll need to work with him *more* than once a week Lilia. You’ll need to work with him *every* day so that the horse doesn’t forget his training,” her grandpa informed her. He watched her face quietly. Some lessons were harder to learn.

“Lilia, *when* are you going to study?” Jacob queried. He stared at her, and waited for her answer. She seemed to overload herself constantly.

Why is my family putting up so many roadblocks? Lilia wondered. “I was going to get up at four o’clock every morning to study,” she replied calmly and looked at both her parents with pleading eyes that begged for acceptance.

“*When* are you going to *sleep*, honey?” Francine asked. She felt concerned that Lilia was taking on too much.

“Are you *trying* to get me to forget about cheerleading? What if Mele gets on the squad and her mom, Ioka, drives both of us?” Lilia inquired in an exasperated tone. She sighed deeply.

“It’s not *fair* to make Ioka do all the driving for both of you,” said Francine as she countered with certainty in her voice.

“Well, I guess I’ll think about it some more.” Her discouragement felt acute.

She stopped talking and started eating her dinner.

“Good idea Einstein,” Jacob replied, and he too returned to the evening meal.

“Well I have *more* news too,” Lilia said with hesitation in her voice. Both her parents and her grandpa and Mandy glanced up from their plates with interest. “I really got back at Jimmy for sticking that purple sucker in my hair, *and* I did it in a nice way,” she announced with confidence. She had all their attention now. They listened cautiously for her explanation. With Lilia, one never knew what to expect and they all knew it.

“*How?*” The four adults demanded in intimidating unison.

“I overheard Jimmy, Kimo, and Jeremy. They made a pact with each other to perform poorly on the big Spanish test. Jimmy hates Spanish and is always giving me grief about doing so well. Mrs. Emilia told us that she was going to judge the test on a curve. She told us that if anyone got a perfect score, she would use a higher curve. I studied and studied, and I got everything right! *Mrs. Emilia flunked Jimmy!* He was outraged, but I’m not mad at him anymore.” They all stared at Lilia with apprehension. “What’s wrong? I didn’t *kick him* or anything like that!” She defended her position and stared back at them in rebellion.

“Child, why is it that someone has to be paid back for a wrong? I thought you had already learned that we don’t keep score and pay back evil with evil,” her grandpa related in astonishment at his granddaughter. He knew she was going to be a handful for any man, if anyone would have her.

“I know that, Gramps. Maybe what I did is *good* for Jimmy, though. He’ll have to take Spanish *again* and learn it a little better next time.” Lilia offered the only positive thought she could think of right then. She looked at her family’s faces and saw disapproval.

“Your action and the intent were *vengeful* Lilia. You *wanted* Jimmy to suffer,” said Francine soberly as she pursed her lips together in disappointment.

“*Yes I did!* How am I ever going to get him to *leave me alone?*” Lilia supplicated. She started to feel agitated that they didn’t understand.

“Have you been praying for Jimmy, Lilia, as I suggested after the softball

game the other evening?” Jacob asked patiently. He looked at her fixedly with wide-open eyes, and sought her agreement.

“No, Dad,” Lilia said glumly and looked away.

“It’s time to start.” Jacob dismissed the subject at hand, and turned his attention to his father. “Dad, do you have anything you’d like to share tonight?”

Apelehama stood up straight to his full height with great measured aplomb. He kneeled down on one knee in front of Mandy and took her hand in both his hands. Mandy’s face displayed bemusement and confusion at the same time.

“*What is this all about, Apele? We’re already married!*” Mandy deplored with surprise.

Jacob, Francine, and Lilia gawked at Apelehama. They felt flabbergasted at the drama, which played out in front of them.

“My princess, would you do me the honor of attending the Governor’s Ball with me in Honolulu?” Apelehama asked Mandy with grandeur and dignity.

“*What? Who invited you?*” Mandy asked, stunned, and sounded a bit ungracious.

“*Why, of course, the governor invited me,*” replied Apelehama as he winked at her.

“*Dad, we can’t wait here! Tell us what’s going on!*” Jacob implored and hit the table with his hand. He knew his dad was setting them all up for a surprise, and he grew impatient.

“You’re looking at the governor’s new Farm Advisor.” Apelehama smiled at how nonplussed his family all appeared as they stared at him in bug-eyed wonderment.

“I didn’t even know that you *knew the governor!*” Jacob responded in shock. He raised his hands upward in question. “What’s going on here?”

“His father was a close friend and advisor of my father. In fact, his father was my dad’s campaign manager when my dad ran for governor,” Apelehama completed the picture in a calm and factual tone. “The current governor and I have known each other since childhood.”

“*My grandfather ran for governor!*” Jacob yelled, and felt completely

dumbfounded. He stared at his dad, and wondered what else he kept a secret.

“Yes, there are thirteen boxes of his memorabilia and speeches at the Honolulu Historical Museum if you’re interested.” Apelehama enjoyed his son’s stupefaction. He smiled knowingly and nodded at him.

“*Why* didn’t you ever mention this *before*?” Jacob demanded.

“It never came up, until now,” Apelehama said simply. He loved being able to toss out a few surprises of his own. He looked at his family with a smile as they all stared at him in bewilderment.

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