

MICHELLE - THE RICH LITTLE POOR KID

“Michelle,” my father said in a very serious voice, “there are some things we need to talk to you about.”

I felt like something must really be wrong for my dad to be so serious so I asked, “What is it, Dad?”

“Go get Andrea and come join your mother and me in the living room.”

I ran upstairs and got my younger sister, Andrea, and told her that mom and dad wanted to talk to us in the living room. I could tell by the look on her face that she was as worried as me as to what news they had to tell us.

Finally after we were seated, he explained, “Your mother and I have spent a lot of time talking and praying about this and we realize that your grandmother needs more care than we can give her, so we have decided to put her in a nursing home.”

“No,” I said in a voice that expressed my pain. My eyes immediately filled with tears and I said, “I love Grandma. I’ll help take care of her. Please don’t take her away,” I pleaded.

I thought of my dear grandmother asleep in bed at this very moment, completely unaware of the decisions that were being made for her life.

“But Michelle,” my mother protested, “you know that she has become very forgetful lately. What I haven’t told you girls is that last night I found her wandering around outside. Thank the Lord I happened to check her room before I went to bed last night. When she wasn’t there and I checked through the rest of the house and I couldn’t find her, I was frantic and was just about to call the police when your father came home. We both looked outside and we found her three houses down in the Miller’s front yard.”

“Really?” exclaimed my seven year old sister in disbelief.

“Yes dear,” my father said, “I’m afraid so.” He then put his lips tightly together so I could see that he was not through giving us bad news. After a minute of silence, he continued, “It’s going to cost a lot of money to put her in a decent nursing home. You know daddy doesn’t make a lot of money and with me putting Grandma in a nursing home, well, it looks like we have no choice but to sell our house and move into a less expensive house.”

It was bad enough to hear that Grandma was going to have to move out, but it was almost too much to bear to hear that we had to move out too.

I said, “Isn’t there any other way, Daddy?”

“I’m afraid not Michelle.”

My little sister started crying and ran into my mother’s arms. I was ten years old and I felt like I was too big to cry even though I certainly felt like it.

My parents sent us off to bed and it was there in the privacy of my own bedroom that I let

my emotions out. I started crying so hard that I buried my face in my pillow so no one in the house could hear me. I loved my grandma so much and it hurt me to know her mind was slipping and that she was going to be separated from the rest of the family. She had a special place in my heart and I knew I had a special place in hers too so thinking of her leaving us only made me cry harder.

And then I thought of having to move which probably meant having to go to a new school and make new friends. I was a shy person and the thought of having to go to new surroundings terrified me.

That week my parents found a nursing home they liked and Grandma told us that she was happy to be moving to a new place, but I could tell by her eyes she was just saying that so we wouldn't feel so bad.

Then Dad put our house up for sale and started looking around for another house to buy. He was hoping that we could continue going to the same school, but it turned out that the house he could afford was on the other side of town. This house was a lot different than the one I had grown up in. Even though we had never been rich we had always lived comfortably, but this new house was run down and very small. In our old house I had my own bedroom, but now my sister and I had to share a room.

I tried so hard not to show my disappointment because I didn't want to hurt my father's feelings. But my sister started crying and saying, "Please takes me home."

"Andrea," my mother said, "this is home."

"No, no," she protested, "I don't like this place, it's not nice and big and new like our house."

My mother hugged her and said, "Honey, home is where love is and this IS home."

My father came over and took her and picked her up and said, "Andrea, you'll be surprised what a little paint and work will do to this place, You'll see, it will look great."

After my father had applied a lot of paint and a lot of work, the house still looked old and run down. I felt his efforts were like putting a lot of make-up on a very old woman. No amount of make-up can make an old woman look young and no amount of paint could make our house look new. I resigned myself to living in a house that displayed the fact we were poor.

I started going to my new school right after Winter Break and it was as difficult as I thought it would be adjusting to my new surroundings. But that all changed when two boys from my class, Eric and Ricky, approached me at lunch time one day. Eric, who was very cute with blonde hair and blue eyes, told me that he and Ricky went to a Bible Club on Sundays and that they learned a lot of neat things about the Bible there. Then he asked me if I knew what I had to do to go to heaven.

I thought that everyone knew that you had to be good to get there and I told him that. So I was surprised to find out that I had the wrong answer. He explained to me that heaven is a gift, not a reward, so it's not what we do, but what Jesus did that gets us to heaven. The only condition to go there is to believe in Jesus.

At first it didn't make sense to me because I was thinking that if you didn't have to be good to go to heaven, then why did the Bible teach that we are to be good? When I asked them

that question, Eric explained, "So God can reward you with a happy life and give us rewards in heaven."

Ricky had a pamphlet in his pocket and he pulled it out to show me some verses that were quoted in it. After listening to them and reading the verses myself, I was convinced that what they were telling me was true. I was so excited to know that I was going to go to heaven because I had trusted Jesus to get me there. I said, "That's wonderful news. That means I'm going to heaven!"

I could see they were as happy as me and Eric asked, "Would you like to come to our Bible Club next Sunday?"

"Yes, I would."

My parents weren't regular church-goers so when I asked permission to go to Bible Club, they were happy I would be going somewhere to learn about the Bible.

Bible Club was as fun as I expected. The teacher, Miss Helen, made the stories in the Bible come alive. And the other kids in the class (there were seven), were really nice and made me feel welcome, except for one girl who was also one of my classmates at school. Her name was Haley. I could tell she didn't like me, but I was too happy to let her bother me.

Miss Helen explained that God wants us to talk to people about how to go to heaven and when she asked if anyone wanted to go with her that afternoon to go talk to people in neighborhoods, I raised my hand. I phoned my mother after Bible Club and got permission. I had the most wonderful day listening to Miss Helen explain the Gospel to people and seeing how much people wanted to hear about God.

The next day at school, Eric and Ricky asked me if I wanted to go with them after school to a park to talk to some people. We really had a fun time, but the next day at school I could see that Haley was treating me worse than she had. When I asked Eric about it he told me that he and Haley were boyfriend and girlfriend and she was jealous of me. I felt bad because I didn't know that they were boyfriend and girlfriend. But she had no reason to be jealous of me, I only wanted to be Eric's friend, not his girlfriend. And the only reason I spent more time with him than she did was because she wasn't as interested as we were in sharing the Gospel. He told me that when he would ask her to go with him to the park after school, most of the time she would have an excuse not to go.

But a short time after that it seemed like her feelings for me completely changed because she started treating me real nice and even asked me over for dinner at her place. Seeing her in her home environment helped me understand why she was so different from the rest of the kids at Bible Club. I had observed at Bible Club and at school that she wanted to be looked upon as special and was jealous when any of the other kids were praised. She wanted all the attention to go to herself. Sometimes when Miss Helen was teaching, Haley would interrupt and talk about herself and she would do the same thing at school. After seeing how her mother treated her, I realized the reason for her behavior was because her mother spoiled her rotten. It was sickening to see how she gave into her demands. And Haley treated her mother as though she were her sister instead of her mother. It was really

gross.

After I had dinner at her place, she kept dropping hints about how nice it would be to come over and meet my parents and sister. At first I didn't want her to come because I was ashamed of the house I lived in. Haley's house was so nice; it even had a swimming pool in the back yard. My house was a shack in comparison.

But one Sunday, Miss Helen gave a Bible study on the subject of possessions. She explained it's not the things that we accumulate down here that are important, but what we accumulate in heaven. She explained that God wants us to do things for Him so He can reward us for those works when we get to heaven. That's what Jesus meant in Matthew chapter six, verse twenty, when He said, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven."

The more Miss Helen talked, the more I realized that I shouldn't be ashamed of being poor, because if I was serving God, in His eyes I was rich. That really made me feel good and after Bible Club I asked Haley if she would like to come to my place for dinner. I knew my mother wouldn't mind because she had told me I was welcome to bring a friend over for dinner any time.

She came over Wednesday after school and after dinner when we were playing in my room, she walked over to my closet and opened it up. I was surprised how bold she was. As she looked over my clothes, she said, "I really love your clothes, where did you buy them?"

I could feel my face turning red and I looked down wishing with all my heart she had never asked. At first I thought about lying, but I didn't want the Lord to be upset with me, so in a quiet voice I answered, "Salvation Army."

This year my parents couldn't afford to take me to a regular store and my mother spent a lot of time looking for things that were nice and looked new. So I felt ashamed that I was embarrassed, but my pain only became greater when she responded to knowing where my clothes came from. She said, "Uwww, gross."

I had no control over the tears that filled my eyes. I quickly turned away and said, "Maybe it's time to go home. Do you mind?"

"Oh, not at all. I'm sure my mother is expecting me. See you later."

There were hot tears on my pillow that night. I started praying that my father could get a really good job that paid a lot of money so we could move into a nice house and I could have store bought clothes. I was terrified that at school the next day, everyone would know my secret.

Instead, Haley was extra nice to me. After school, she and Eric paid me an unexpected visit. When I opened the door Haley was grinning from ear to ear and she was holding a large bag. She said, "I have some things I wanted to give you."

I couldn't imagine what was in the bag and when I opened it up and saw a lot of toys and games and a few stuffed animals, I was really embarrassed. I could barely utter the words, "Thank you." I had been to Haley's house and had gotten to spend time in her room. It was so filled with things that it looked like a circus, and now out of pity for me she was giving me

some of her things. I felt so humiliated that not only had she done this, but she had done it in front of Eric. At that moment I wished the earth could open up and swallow me.

The next day at school Eric went out of his way to be exceptionally nice to me. After school, Haley came up to me and told me she had something she wanted to tell me. As she walked home with me she told me that what she wanted to tell me was a secret and it had to be between just me and her. I agreed to keep whatever she was going to tell me a secret and then she told me that this secret was going to hurt my feelings. I immediately felt hurt but wanted to know whatever it was she had to say.

I could not have been more unprepared for what she told me. She said, "Eric said he couldn't believe how shabby your house was and it was too bad you were so poor because that meant you could never be popular."

I walked in stunned silence. I really liked Eric and thought he was my friend. Soon tears were falling down my cheeks and I muttered, "I have to hurry home" and started running home feeling like someone had just broken my heart.

It was Friday when this conversation took place and Sunday morning when my mother woke me up to go to Bible Club, I told her I wasn't feeling well. I really wasn't feeling well; my soul was sick.

I wasn't expecting a call from Miss Helen after Bible Club, but she called to see why I hadn't come. I couldn't tell her that I wasn't sure if I would ever come back to Bible Club; I just told her I wasn't feeling well.

I went back to my room and threw myself on my bed. I was so glad that my sister was outside playing so I could be alone. I felt so bad.

Then about an hour later the phone rang and it was Miss Helen again. She said, "I hope I'm not bothering you, Michelle, but I thought since you're going to be in for the day you would like to read some stories that a friend of mine wrote. I could drop them off to you now if you like?" Miss Helen was so sweet to think of me. I thought maybe those stories would take my mind off my misery so I said, "Yes, I would like that. Thank you."

Within an hour I was propped up with pillows in my bed totally absorbed by the stories she had dropped by. They were about young people, like myself, who had gone through hard times and had seen God work things out for them. Many of the stories brought tears to my eyes and I realized that the God I served could be trusted to help me in my life. After about an hour of reading, my sadness was replaced by joy.

The next day I woke up with a cold so I had to stay home from school and it also meant that I would miss going to Haley's birthday party that night, but I didn't mind because I wasn't looking forward to seeing Eric.

The next day he approached me at lunch time and asked if I wanted to join them for lunch at the school cafeteria. My eyes filled with tears and I quickly turned away from him and said, "No, thank you."

Then after school he walked up to me and asked me what was wrong. I told him that I really

didn't want to talk.

That night when I was praying I couldn't get Eric off my mind. I realized that I was holding what he said against him and that was wrong. God doesn't want us to hold grudges. So I prayed, "Lord, You have forgiven me for so much, please help me to forgive Eric." As soon as I uttered those words, I felt like a tremendous weight was lifted off my shoulders. And when I went to school the next day it didn't bother me to be around him. It was exciting seeing God be so real in my life. Not only had He helped me forgive Eric, but He took away those bad feelings I had whenever I was around him.

There were only three weeks left of school before summer vacation. It made me sad because my only friends were the kids at Bible Club so I would only get to see them once a week during the summer. But a week before school got out, Ricky came up to me after school and asked if I would like to go ice skating with him. Ricky had dark curly hair and blue eyes and he was so shy he couldn't even look me in the eyes when he asked. I told him I would like to but I would have to ask my parents' permission. I gave him my phone number and asked him to call me that night.

I was so happy walking home that day because I thought it would be fun to have Ricky as a boyfriend. And I liked the fact he was shy because I was shy too.

My parents gave me permission and that Saturday, his mother picked me up and drove us to the skating rink. We had a lot of fun and he bought me hot chocolate when we were finished.

Ricky and I spent a lot of time together as the weeks went by and the more we got to know each other the more we could share things about our lives with each other. I told him how much it bothered me at first to move to a poor section of town until I learned from the Bible how God sees things. It not the things we have, but the relationship we have with Him that is important. Money can be here today and gone tomorrow, but the person who serves the Lord will have a friendship with God now and rewards in the future.

Ricky confided in me that having me as his girlfriend was one of his rewards. He told me that the first day I came to school he prayed that I would like him someday. I blushed when he told me that I was the prettiest girl in the whole school; I had never thought of myself as pretty.

Ricky and I met at the park a lot that summer so we could talk to people about the Gospel. I could see that the more time I spent serving God, the more God was changing me. And I couldn't help but observe that I wasn't the only one changing. I noticed from week to week when I went to Bible Club that Haley was being transformed into a different person too.

One day toward the end of the summer she gave me a call and asked if we could get together to talk. She came over to my place and we went and sat in some lounge chairs in my backyard. I could tell something was bothering her.

She said, "There is something I have to tell you." She paused like she was groping for the

right words. She continued, "This is really embarrassing, but you know last year when I told you that Eric said you'll never be popular because you're poor?"

Just repeating those words hurt me. I quietly answered, "Yes," not knowing what she was about to say.

"Well, I made the whole thing up."

I sat there for a moment stunned by this admission. I thought of all the pain I had suffered because I thought Eric said those cruel things and how I had never been friends with him since because of it. Then I felt really angry at Haley for doing that, but I held back my anger and asked, "Why did you do that?"

Before she could even answer, she started crying and my anger turned into pity. I knew she was really suffering and it took a lot for her even to confess this to me. Finally she said, "Michelle, you are so pretty and I was afraid that Eric was going to start liking you." Sobbing, she said, "I'm so sorry, please forgive me."

The words of Miss Helen rang in my ears as I remembered how she quoted from the Bible where it says we are to forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us. I answered Haley, "Of course I forgive you."

Haley gave me a hug and said, "You're such a special person. You know, when I came over to dinner that night last year, I was jealous of you."

I was really taken back that Haley, with all her wealth, would be jealous of me who had so little. I asked, "Why?"

Because I saw how much your family loved one another. I was jealous of the relationship you have with your parents."

This really surprised me because I couldn't help but notice after Bible Club each Sunday how Haley's mother always gave into her demands. And after seeing her room, it was obvious that her parents had withheld nothing from her.

With tears in her eyes, she said, "Michelle, I was a miserable, unhappy kid until about three months ago when my parents told me that they realized that they weren't raising me the way God wanted them to. They told me that I was no longer going to get my own way and that 'no' meant 'no'. I fought it at first but when I realized they meant business I surrendered and instead of being miserable like I thought I would be, I started feeling better. And I don't think you'd recognize my room."

Why not?" I asked.

"Because most of my things are gone."

"Really?" I said, "how come?"

"My parents made me give most of my things away to needy children. At first I was really upset, but I started realizing it was wrong for me to have so much when so many had so little."

Then she laughed and said, "And now, thank goodness, I have some space in my room; it's

no longer cluttered.”

Now I understood why I had seen Haley change over the summer.

That night Eric called me and told me that Haley had talked to him. He said, “I always wondered why you treated me differently. I never thought Haley would do anything like that. Anyway, I’m glad that things are straightened out now. I hope you’ll want to be friends with me again.”

“Of course I do.”

As I lay in bed that night I thought of all that I had been through the past year and how God had blessed me. My whole family, including Grandma, had believed the Gospel. I was happier than I had ever been in my life. I knew where I was going when I left this earth and I knew my purpose for being here on earth. I smiled as I drifted off to sleep knowing I truly was a rich girl.