

# Left Homeless

A short story by Jerry S. Eicher

The glow could be seen for miles against the dark Northern Ontario sky. Homer Esh sat at the kitchen table finishing off his bowl of store-bought ice cream. He hadn't seen it yet. The sun had set some time ago, and it was by now late evening and dark. Then, when he stood up to walk into the living room, he saw it.

"Rachel, come look at this."

Something in the sound of his voice brought her running down the hall from the far bedroom where she was attending to one of the younger children. She didn't waste any time looking out the kitchen window or going to the basement for her coat before coming out to the front yard. Homer joined her after going for his coat and boots. Several of the older children also joined them in the yard, and they all looked in the direction of the glow in the night sky.

"It looks too far to the south to be Elmer's house on the corner. Maybe it isn't anyone we know," Rachel said, thinking out loud.

"Big enough to be something like a barn at least."

"I wouldn't be so sure it is a barn, Homer." Then, with hesitancy in her voice, she added, "There's also something else big enough to cause such a fire down in that direction."

"Surely you don't suppose it's that?"

“Yes, you know what I am thinking—my father’s place. Please, quick! Go down there! They may need help.”

“How do you think I’m supposed to do that? There’s no use trying to harness the horse. It would take too long. And then the drive down. The horse is already worn out.”

“Hitch a ride out by the road. There! Another car just went by. There’s more traffic than usual. They must be going to see what is happening, too.”

The traffic was indeed increasing. Homer was glad he took the time to go through the basement for his coat and boots. By the time he got to the edge of the road, one of the drivers must have seen him coming, because he stopped the car. It was a neighbor who rolled down the window.

“Jump in, Homer! I’m going to see what is going on. You’re welcome to come along.”

As Homer climbed in on the passenger’s side, his young son, Jason, who had followed Homer out to the road, asked to go along.

“Up to you, Homer,” the neighbor said through the partially rolled-up window.

“Let me go, please! I want to go.”

“No, you just stay here.”

“Please, I want to go!”

“No, it could be too dangerous for you. We don’t know what’s going on.” The car left in the direction of the glow, leaving the boy standing in the yard.

Rachel gathered the smaller children around her and, after they watched the sky a little longer, took them into the house. Jason stayed out by himself a little longer and

watched the smoke rolling in the sky. He was a tall boy, serious looking, with dark hair at seven years of age. How he wished he was over there at the fire right now! Things like this didn't happen every day. Somehow he just *knew* that. *Why didn't Dad let me go along?* he wondered. *A time like this will never come again.*

For Jason, life itself was summed up in that moment. It was far away and unreachable. He lived where the days went by much the same, with one following the other. Then, when the important times came, like right now, obstacles always seemed to be in the way. Not that there had been many yet in his young life, but this big one seemed to foretell many more to come.

The children had all long gone to bed and were asleep when Homer returned. His face was serious and sober.

"Was it my father's place?" Rachel asked in a whisper so as not to awaken the children.

"Yes, that's what it was. There's not much left of it. Burned almost to the ground."

"No one is hurt though?"

Homer shook his head. "No. Just shook up. They couldn't get the fire department out fast enough, with them living so far from town. Then there was the time it took to run to the neighbor's to use the phone."

"Is it really gone? I mean, *gone*?"

"A couple of brick walls are left. You know that house was old, and it must have been dry, too, with all that aged lumber."

With that they went to bed for what was left of the night. The children were told in the morning. Grandfather's house had burned.

"Burned right down to the ground," Rachel told them. "My beautiful old home."

Earlier that night, Peter Stolsfus walked toward his house after the evening chores. He left the barn where he had just finished milking the cows. Milking to him still meant doing it by hand and cooling the product in the water tank outside afterward. Two of his daughters helped with the milking but they had gone in some time ago to prepare supper.

*What a beautiful evening God has made, he thought. No rain today, and the air still a little warm from the summer. I'm so thankful for what God has given us.*

His step was still sharp for his age, and the wind stirred the white hair in his long beard. The eyes with which he looked toward the big brick house he called home were kind and held a depth of wisdom that came from suffering. Peter had been fairly healthy all of his life. Lately, though, something was causing problems. He had been to see a doctor this past fall about his frequent pains in his upper arms and shortness of breath, but the doctor seemed to think little was wrong other than working too hard. Beyond that his physical problems were few. Peter's sufferings had been of the heart and soul, hard to lay a finger on.

If you asked him, he would have told you that his spiritual journey with God was where it should be. He was Amish because he believed it. He raised his children in the faith because he was sure it was best. His quest for spirituality vexed the local ministry at

times, but he submitted to their direction because he was sure he needed their guidance and protection to watch for his soul. Yet there were times like tonight, after the day's duties were done, when for no reason in particular he would hunger for something beyondhe didn't know what. It would cause him to lift his eyes higher than his farm and his chores and being Amish, and he would long for God until it hurt.

Across to Peter's right was the main road that ran past the farm. As he walked toward the house, he thought over the day. *The chores and the field harvesting have really wound down well for the night. The preparation work on next year's strawberry patch is almost done. The old stone water tank in front of the barn needs some attention, but it rarely has problems, so a problem once in a while is not so bad. The northern field behind the barn is harvested and ready for fall plowing. Maybe we can do that next week.*

As his mind continued to drift, he considered that at present, he wasn't running a very large dairy herd. *The farm could be handling a larger herd I suppose. The verdict is still out on our second year with these alternative crops. I think the strawberries should do okay.* Peter paused at the front door before opening it and entering. His thoughts interrupted, he was glad to be in the house and ready to settle down for the evening.

His three youngest children, Beth, Matthew, and Susie, were still living at home. His son Fred was teaching in Indiana at a Beachy Amish school for his second term. The others were all married and lived close by. All were still Amish, and Peter had every intention that they remain so. Not that any ever went wild or questioned the Amish way, but keeping one's children was always a high concern for any Amish father.

There were some men who lost most of their children and so lost their influence

and status at church. Worse was the sense of failure that came with having failed at life's most important task. Peter mused that there was no higher measure of acceptance among any Amish than being able to keep all of one's children in the faith. He was not motivated so much by that but by what he himself believed to be right. Still, he thought of it. By that standard he should have been well liked, but the fact of the matter was that the bishop was not quite sure of him. Any Amish bishop worth his salt was always on the lookout for cracks in his members. Peter seemed to have little success in keeping the searching eye of the church off of him. He and Bishop Wengerd spoke many times, but the result rarely benefited Peter.

Peter settled down on his rocking chair. *I guess I should not tell the bishop so much about my feelings. Seems like they just come out.* The rocker settled back and Peter could see the bishop in his mind's eye.

Bishop Paul Wengerd was a tall man, his face lined with purpose and intent. He was not one to be easily pushed around or persuaded. Some bishops led their flocks with an easy but firm hand. Bishop Wengerd favored the firmness and cut quickly through the easy part. His beard was grayed as befitted his age and reached well down his chest. Some Amish beards at that length lent a gentleness to the face by their shape. This sort of beard had a rounded look that often reflected a heart that was merry and large.

The beard of Bishop Wengerd had no rounded look. It started out the width of his chin and jaws, then narrowed on the way down, before fanning out just a little at the end. He was not a man to lighten one's eyes when he went forth on church business.

The rocking chair rocked back and forth as Peter pondered the situation. *I am a*

*member in good standing. Why is it that I always seem to get in trouble with Bishop Wengerd?*

As Peter knew, Bishop Wengerd had no complaints of the ordinary kind to bring against him. Normal infractions for a farmer would be modern machinery, a two-bottomed plow, an updated milking parlor, or rubber tires on his tractor. Since Peter had no desire for such things or ever expressed his support for them, nothing was ever brought against him as a disciplinary offense.

What he and Bishop Wengerd could not see eye-to-eye on were things like missions. Peter and his family had spent a winter two years ago further north helping the Indians. Bishop Wengerd watched for any indications of the typical violations, such as driving vehicles while away from the Amish community, failure to wear regulation hats, or any other such dress code violations. As there was no local Amish bishop close to the Indian reservation to give Bishop Wengerd first-hand information, he settled for Peter's word on the matter. Peter assured him that none of the church rules had been broken. He said that they had gone up to the reservation only to attempt ministry and aid to the Indians. Bishop Wengerd did not seem totally satisfied but let the matter lie "until any evidence should come up to the contrary." At the time, Peter felt his temper beginning to rise. From past experience he knew it was best to keep it under control. He often said things under stress that he later regretted.

The last time they were together talking after church, Peter brought up the subject again. "You know, Paul, how much we enjoyed ourselves during the winter with the Indians. It was a real blessing to our whole family. Do you think the church could support

more missionary efforts like that?”

The bishop then proceeded to give Peter a lecture on the dangers of mission outreach and its corrupting influence upon the morals of those who went to the mission field. Peter was forced to agree on the basis of much testimonial evidence presented by Bishop Wengerd that mission work seemed to be a sure road out of Amish life. Yet even in the face of this weight of evidence, Peter expressed his displeasure at the lack of Amish mission outreach. Unmoved, Bishop Wengerd rebuked Peter for having high ideas and disrespect for those in authority over him. The injustice of the charge finally caused Peter’s temper to flare. He expressed himself further on missions in general and the lack of sympathy for it in Amish church groups. His outburst necessitated a return trip some days later to apologize. The bishop accepted the apology, and to Peter’s gratitude pushed the matter no further. Even tonight Peter could feel the eye of the bishop upon him, but inside he knew his hunger for the work of God was still there.

Across the house, Peter’s daughter Beth lifted the kettle sitting on the old stove in the kitchen and shook it. That was sometimes faster than stirring the corn, and she was in a hurry. Not that this was unusual, but tonight the supper must be ready on time. All around her on the old wood stove was supper—mashed potatoes, gravy, meatloaf, corn, and green beans. The stove had its quirks and needed to be controlled carefully with the damper on the back if she wanted plenty of heat to cook with but not too much.

She was a girl of action, a flurry of movement even among the Amish, who were not afraid of work, whether male or female. Beth possessed a slight build and cheerful



temperament, in spite of how hard she worked and how intense her emotions could be. Perhaps those who accomplish the most in the physical world are the ones who have the most hope. Right now, in the middle of the supper preparations, she heard her sister Susie calling from the back room.

“Beth, would you come help me?”

“I can’t right now. I’m watching supper. You know how hot this stove gets.”

“It will only be a minute. See if Mom can watch the stove.”

Beth looked out the kitchen door for her mother, but she was nowhere in sight. *It will only take a minute*, she thought. “Okay, I’m coming.”

Beth walked through the rooms at a brisk pace. Helping Susie probably wouldn’t take long, but she would try to be quick. She found her sister with the ironing board up and struggling with the pleat on one of her head coverings.

The Amish head coverings for women are complicated affairs. Making one is an art not easily learned. On the back, the main part runs in a half moon shape that fits over the head. Around the top and sides are numerous pleats to complement the shape of the covering. The back is straight from top to bottom when first made, but often molds to the rounded shape of the head after being worn. Some Amish communities allow the use of starch on women’s coverings to avoid molding and other natural sagging of the cloth, but this community did not.

The Amish believe humility is bound up in personal appearance. They believe that a sharp and professional look in one’s grooming becomes a humble man or woman. No one was sure if the men or the women were the primary promoters of this train of

thought, but everyone was sure that the women needed to be watched the most lest fancy dress and fancy worldly grooming should creep into the church culture. Even though the general attitude was that women tended toward this error, the men were not left out of the equation. Men were required to do their part in taking a stand against worldly hairstyles, although men usually supplied less resistance than the women. The hair on a man's head couldn't be altered in any way whatsoever after it was cut. In most cases, cutting had to be in a circular fashion without any angles that might appeal to vanity. In no way could the hair be thinned out or layered in a worldly manner, which the Amish "shingling." The result was not only hair cut in a circle on the head but also a resulting true circle from upturned hair on the outer tips that came from being pressed down by the ever-present hat. The look had a down side in that it stirred some of the young boys to look longingly toward the world of shingling, but it also resulted in a look that satisfied even the strictest soul of the community that the fashions and vanities of the world were not being followed.

As Beth arrived, Susie was holding up the covering for demonstration purposes. "This pleat here—I can't seem to get it right."

Beth told her to hold it around the other way when she ran across it with the iron, and also to spend less time on vanity. "You know what this will look like after you have worn it even for five minutes."

"I know that, but I want it to look nice for a little bit at least."

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself, but here—let me help you. Let’s see the other side.”

“I really have already tried that. The ones on this side came together, but now the last six won’t lie down properly. How will it look in church if I can’t make them lie down flat? This is my very best Sunday covering.”

Beth held up the white handcrafted head covering with its contrary pleats. Suddenly, they both heard a cry of alarm from the kitchen.

“Help, fire!” It was mother’s voice from the kitchen door!

Both sisters took off running through the house. Mom was at the kitchen door but could go no farther because of the thick smoke.

“Quick, some water!”

“The only running water we have is at the kitchen sink.”

The kitchen sink was unreachable. What followed was a general flurry of activity that later became a blur in their memories. They threw things like blankets and coats at the flames but to little avail. The old wood-burning stove must have been angry when it exploded because the job was well done.

“Run, go tell Dad.”

Dad already knew, and was right beside them. His first concern was his wife and daughters’ safety. He told them to keep away from the kitchen with their blankets and coats. “It looks too late for that. Go tell Matthew to run to the neighbors’ to call.”

“That’s half a mile, Dad. Shouldn’t he just take a horse?”

“No. He’s young. Matthew can get there running before he can catch the horse.

Go, be quick about it. Tell him.”

Matthew was still in the barn when Beth found him.

“The house is on fire! Dad said to run to the neighbors’ to call on their phone.”

Matthew looked at the flames and smoke coming out of the kitchen window and up the side of the brick dwelling. He said nothing as he sprinted as fast as he could down the gravel lane.

Peter was already organizing the removal of items from the house according to importance when Beth got in from the barn. The flames were spreading quickly.

“Here girls, work on the clothes in the bedroom.” Her turned to his wife, Anne, and said, “Just grab things and throw them out the window. Maybe the neighbors will be here soon. I’ll get the papers from the desk. We have to save what we can.”

Some minutes later, after having run outside with an item herself, Annie found Peter in the living room trying to move a large piece of furniture.

“Don’t try to move that big piece, Peter. Wait till the girls can help you or Matthew comes back. There are smaller things you can move.”

“Well, let’s get what we can. I’ll work on some of the other things. The papers from the desk are already out in the yard. We may not have much more time! This old house is going fast!”

The cars began pulling into the lane as neighbors and people going by stopped. After the driveway filled up to a safe distance from the flames, people parked on the road. They ran from their vehicles and offered to help. Peter told them to get what they could carry out of the house. The scene was soon one of furniture strewn all over the yard with

clothes draped over them.

“At least none of the other buildings should go. The barn is too far away,” Peter heard one of the neighbors from down the road say. “Where in the world are those fire trucks? Did someone call for sure?”

By now flames began to shoot out of the side of the roof where the kitchen was. With the heat, the fire spread more rapidly. Peter was the first to call off the rescue effort for the household items.

“Better to back off, friends. It is just worldly goods.”

“We can still try for more of the beds on the side facing the road. I think one of those windows will open up wider—we might do better to break it out,” a stranger said.

“The door toward the road could be broken off and widened. It’s small, but that side jamb may give. It looks like she will go anyway,” another offered.

“Any objections, Peter?”

Peter Stolsfus had no objections.

Many heads turned as they heard the sirens of the fire trucks in the distance. The sound wavered low at first, then grew in intensity.

“Looks like the fire trucks are here, but it’s too late for this old house, I’m afraid.”

It was the voice of Neil Armstruck, the grain and milk farmer whose large farms were across the fields. “Everybody over here by the furniture. Let’s get it off the yard so the trucks can get closer.”

They cleared a path at the front of the house and down the side toward the road for access to the back.

The fire chief soon sought out Peter. "Sorry about the fire, Mr. Stolsfus. We got here as fast as we could. That old timber makes her go fast. My men will do what they can, but I can promise nothing."

"I understand, Chief." Peter stood still for the first time in a while and removed his hat. Even more than usual the marks of the circle outlined his hair all the way around. Peter wiped the sweat from his brow. "We must rest in the will of God."

"No doubt," said the chief. "You will excuse me, Mr. Stolsfus We will do our best."

By eleven o'clock the fire in the old house died down to a smolder. Little was left despite the best efforts of the firemen. One side of the house had charred timbers sticking skyward out of the crumbling brick facing. There was little left standing where the kitchen had been. Even the bricks fell. For a while it looked like the two chimneys in the kitchen would stay up, but they fell near midnight. The shower of sparks caused the fire chief to move the spectators even farther back.

Away on the other side of the driveway some of the neighbors still lingered with Annie and Peter. The girls were standing a little ways off, while Matthew mingled somewhere in the tangle of furniture and strewn objects. All of the married sons who lived in the community, along with Peter's son-in-law Homer Esh, were there at some

point. Peter wondered how they all came so quickly. He figured they must have caught rides in someone's car, because he could not see any buggies or horses tied anywhere. Soon, everyone had left, except for his son Jesse.

"If you are ready now, Dad, we have a driver to take you all over to our place for the night."

Peter turned to face Jesse. "I think we are. There's not much sense in staying any longer tonight."

"How are you feeling with your heart? Any pain?"

"Well, I am stressed of course, but seems to be nothing unusual."

"Maybe you need to make a trip into town tomorrow after all this to see Dr. Tenner, just to be sure."

"I'll think about it."

"First, though, let's get all of you over to our place for the night and some rest. Lois can get something ready fast, I am sure."

"We can hardly put such a burden on you and your family, Jesse. Lois will not even know we are coming, and you have a full house already."

"It won't be a burden. I suppose someone has already stopped in to tell the family what's going on. You will be staying only for one night; then we go from there."

They left soon after that, all piling into the van and looking back one last time at the house that was now little but a foundation.

The next morning, though, the place buzzed in a flurry of activity. Neighbors were everywhere cleaning up debris, and already several of the sons were working with Peter Stolsfus on plans for a new house across the lane. The women set up a makeshift kitchen in the back toward the barn and were already carrying in food for the day. As people came and went both to help and to show their concern, the hats and bonnets outnumbered the English neighbors by far. These were people who practiced in sincerity the admonition of the Holy Scriptures to care for the household of faith. Times of suffering were times to be there for one's fellow man whether he was friend or foe.

Homer had arrived early with his crew. They were taking time off for a few days from their regular work to help out. Rachel arrived at nine o'clock with the children. Jason was the first out of the buggy. He paused at the edge of the driveway and looked toward the ashes of the old house, the morning breezes stirring little wisps of dust into the air. He had lived in that house once; that is, in one corner of it. For the first three years of his life, his parents had rented the two bedrooms on the east side. Jason could not believe his eyes. How could so much be reduced to so little in one night? Was this not the place of such great memories for him? That morning standing by the driveway, he saw himself in his mind's eye as a three-year-old. He had a stick and was chasing a strange dog out of the yard. He saw the box under the front window where his uncles kept the groundhogs they captured in the hay field. He saw them showing him how to place fish worms on the ends of hooks. *It's all gone*, he said to himself. *How can that be?*

Standing off to the side, he saw his grandfather. Bishop Wengerd was walking up to him. The bishop's straw hat sat firmly on his head, having seen its years of sun and



weather.

“Well, Peter, you can be thankful it happened so early in the evening. If it had been late at night when you were all in bed, who knows?”

“We are thankful for the protection of the Lord.”

The bishop as usual was not one to beat around the bush. “Have you been doing any thinking since last night?”

“Sure I have been thinking, but what do you have in mind?”

“Well, of course we don’t know for sure—it being the Lord’s will that moves in our lives. All of us are sinners and make our failings and mistakes. I for one do not point the finger at anyone, but with this fire, could God be speaking to you?

“I am sure that He could be.”

“*You* know some of the ideas you have been having lately. Just the other Sunday after church out at Elmer Zook’s barn, I heard you talking to young Amos Byler about how as Christian people we ought to be reaching out more. ‘Mission-minded,’ I think you said. You know such things are strange for our people to be thinking of, and especially for you to be talking about with our young ones. I thought I pointed out the dangers to you when you came back from your time up north with the Indians. Maybe God is speaking to you through this fire about the wrong ways of your thinking.”

Peter paused for a moment and said nothing. His temper was crying for attention. He wanted no further outburst that would require further apologies or worse.

Bishop Wengerd took the pause as a sign of encouragement to continue. “I sure hope you give it yet deeper thought. You know how easy it is to be deceived in these last

days.”

Peter slowly found his voice. “If God wants to speak to me, I am always willing to listen. He is quite welcome at all times to bring His message. It wouldn’t seem quite necessary to me for God to have used this fire to get my attention.”

“You know, Peter, what is it about you that just resists correction all the time? It is none of your business to be telling the Almighty how to talk to you. We know the dangers of those who claim God speaks to them personally. It’s much safer to trust in the voice of the church for direction. The church is speaking, Peter”

“You surely do not mean that you are the church?”

“No, of course I don’t mean that. I am just a small part of the church, really nothing at all, but the voice of the church has been heard many times on this subject of missions. Missions are a good thing, but they are a great danger to our people. There are others for whom it works to do missions. It doesn’t work for Amish people to get involved in mission work. The church has been very clear on this for many years. Why can you not hear the voice of the church, instead of insisting on following your own direction, which could easily be leading you into error?”

Peter found his voice. “There was a time when our forefathers were great missionaries.”

“That is true, but that was a long time ago, and now it’s our responsibility to carry on and keep the many great traditions they have left us. Why can you not submit to the will of the church, Peter?”

“You are right in what you say about the fire, but not in the way you mean it. The

Bible speaks of a time when Elijah stood outside a cave, and a great fire roared by on the hillside. But God was not in the fire that time. Nor is He in this one. God spoke to Elijah in the still small voice, and He speaks to me also in a still small voice.”

“Now look, Peter. You don’t have to go quoting the Bible to me like I were an Englishman. I know what is right. Pretty soon you’ll be quoting the chapter and verse. What is happening to you anyway? Your father was never like this.”

“What my father was or was not has little to do with it. I can read the Bible for myself.”

“There you go again, Peter. How can you say such things? We aren’t wiser than our fathers were. Why, if you were any younger, and not an old man like you are, we would have to deal with you in church.”

Peter’s temper wanted attention again, but Peter thought it better to leave it unattended. “What you really mean, Paul, is that since I am older I am not as tempted to break any of the church rules, so you really have a hard time finding anything against me. My ideas—you really wouldn’t want to try and discipline me for those, would you? Might cause too much discussion, now wouldn’t it? Some young men might even do some thinking?”

The bishop only shook his head. “You will maybe learn yet. Remember your heart trouble. *That* may be God talking to you also. A man was born from the dust, and he must go back to it. We must all be content with that.”

“In the beginning,” Peter said, turning his hat in his hand, “God put us on this earth to live. He did not put us here to die. Some of us have not forgotten that.”

“There you go again. You know such thoughts are not meant for Amish people! You would do better to teach our young men how to obey the church and God.”

“I’d be glad to do that, but the church must also be taught of God.”

“That is not your business to decide. We must all obey the church.”

Then Joe Yutzy walked up and interrupted the conversation.

Jason, still standing over by the driveway, had caught bit and pieces of what was said. It all seemed a little strange and unimportant to him. Why were these grown people talking about missions? Didn’t they see that the important thing was still the pain caused by this house, now gone and burned down?

Joe Yutzy addressed Peter. “We need to know where you want the debris and ashes from the house hauled to. Is there a place on your farm, or will it all have to be taken somewhere else?”

“There is a gully that needs filling in behind the field to the right of the barn. It should easily hold anything we haul down there from the house. Just have them take the ashes and brick no one wants down there. The wood we’ll dispose of some other way, and some of the bricks can be used again, or someone may want them.”

“We’ll do that,” Joe said and walked away.

Peter turned around, but the bishop had walked on also. He could see his straw hat nodding in conversation among the crowd.

“What was that all about?” Peter turned to the sound of his son, Jesse

“Paul and I were just talking.”

“Anything to do with the fire?”

“Yes. That and my opinions on the mission field. The bishop thinks God might be talking to me through the fire.”

Jesse said nothing at first. “Well, I don’t know much about how God speaks, but I do think some of your ideas on missions are quite sound.”

“I am glad someone else believes in them too.”

“Take for instance what we were talking about Sunday night when we were all here at your place. Here we are in Ontario, Amish people who are knowledgeable in the soil, know how to raise good crops, have a good work ethic, and are prosperous by and large. Don’t we have some responsibility to others less blessed than ourselves? How much do the special lives we live add anything to the world around us? Who wants to know about the horse farming that we do, excellent though it is? Of what benefit is our self-sufficiency to a country where there is such plenty? Here in North America there is such abundance that a little waste goes unnoticed. Couldn’t our frugality and hard work be of better use somewhere else, a blessing maybe to another culture? Could some third-world countries benefit from what we know? Could we have more of an impact somewhere else?”

“Well, be careful what you say around the bishop and some of the others, even though I agree with you. Such talk is not looked on kindly. We don’t want others thinking this fire was set by heaven.”

Two weeks later the foundation for the house across from the lane was in place. Rachel came to help on the day of the working frolic. The home was quickly framed and

roofed. Jason was amazed at the speed of things, but found little interest in the new home. Sure, there it stood fresh and new, but it lacked the mystique and presence of the old home.

For the next month the sons and sons-in-law would finish the interior as they found time. People still stopped by to help for a day or so. Each gave something, some giving more and others less. As was common among the Amish, there was no insurance on the house or on any of the other buildings on the farm. Donations came from neighbors and other Amish communities.

Bishop Wengerd made mention of the need, and as no offering plate is ever passed in an Amish church, a person was designated to collect the money people gave for this purpose. With the free labor they only had to pay for the cost of materials, and the impact of the loss of the house was much lessened, although it was not entirely without financial pain. Once in the new house, Peter lay in bed at night and looked out his window across the lane and wished the old house still stood there. Beth was glad to stay with her cooking around the new stove. Susie pointed out that such dedication may not always be wise. If Beth hadn't left the kitchen at the old house that evening in answer to her call, what might have happened? She would remain dedicated to her cooking, Beth said, and let Susie count the blessings of the other—although she was glad and thankful she had not been in the kitchen when the stove blew up.

As Peter sat in his rocker again one Saturday evening, the last outline of the old foundation could still be seen across the road in the gathering dusk. There was a brick scattered here and there from what had once been a grand old house. Peter wondered if it

really was a sign of things to come and what it all meant. His thoughts got too deep even for himself, and to shake the shadows from his mind he got his Bible and began reading. “A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, a time to cast away,” and then he read the verse that meant most to him. “A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.” Only he read it in German. Not just because it was the language of his people, but because he always thought it was much grander in the old tongue. It rolled out of the mouth with such dignity and added to the splendor of the Holy Scriptures.