


“God my maker, who giveth songs in the night.”

—*The Bible, Job 35:10*

Singing in the Train!

By Scott McGregor



Jack sat in the cold train carriage and pulled his hat down over his ears. He and his fellow passengers had been stranded there for several hours already. The steam locomotive and the lead carriage of the overnight express train had jumped the tracks halfway between Hell and nowhere. Now all they could do was wait until help arrived. It was 1959, the middle of winter, and the dead of night. No power, no heat, and no light except for a few flashlights that the conductor and some passengers had.

Jack knew it was going to take awhile before the alarm was raised somewhere up the line when they realized that the express was not on schedule. Search parties would have to be mobilized and sent out with some caution. A train could be sent up the single spur line in the other direction, but that would have to be done with great caution as they could find themselves traveling head on into the delayed express traveling from the other direction. The signal system on this part of the track was antiquated, as Jack, a train aficionado, knew. The real search, he concluded, would not begin until dawn.

He and the other passengers had scrambled off the train once it had come to its jerking halt. The steam locomotive and the lead carriage were off the track and had plowed into a thick gravel embankment. Both were upright, and miraculously no one was killed, although the engineer and fireman had sustained nasty head injuries.

They had been carried back to one of the carriages to endure the

freezing night with their passengers, several of whom had also been hurt. It was frustrating and scary to know that they were out there with little chance of rescue till daylight.

Then from somewhere in Jack's carriage someone started singing. It was the old World War II Vera Lynn song, "The White Cliffs of Dover." Soon everyone in the carriage joined in. When that one was over, someone started another.

"We sang all night," recalled Jack. "We didn't care what the song was. We sang popular songs, old music hall numbers, hymns, even Christmas carols. As long as we kept singing, it kept our spirits up. People from other carriages came up and we all, as much as we could, crowded in together to keep warm. Most of us were strangers to each other but we all became comrades in disaster, lifting each other's spirits.

"They were a mixed bunch, from young army recruits returning to camp from leave, young families, a few old-timers, even some guys I wouldn't want to be around normally on a dark night. But somehow the social barriers all came down. I initially heard one enormous fellow, Clifford I learned his name was, let off such a stream of cursing when the accident first occurred that it probably equaled all the other swearing and blasphemy that I had heard in my life. But he was the fellow that scooped up the engineer in his arms, carried him back to the carriage, and hovered about him like a cross between an angel and a nurse for the rest of the night. If I've met anyone in my life that was a rough diamond it was him.

“I had been pretty guilty of judging books by their covers, but I have to admit that in this fellow’s case I was wrong and probably have been many other times. There’s nothing like the worst of happenings to bring out the best in people.

“It was the most incredible night of my life in many ways, and I made fast friends with many that were there. I was almost sorry when the rescue teams located us early the next morning.”

On that miserable night, stranded in the middle of nowhere, Jack and his fellow passengers forged a lifetime of friendships. They decided to have a reunion every year on the date of the accident. Jack went to their weddings and some of their

funerals. Clifford became an orderly at a hospital and then joined the Saint John Ambulance Brigade. Seems he had only been out of jail a few weeks before the wreck and was traveling that night to settle a few scores with some erstwhile friends. “That wreck stopped me from making a wreck out of my life,” he told Jack at one of their reunions several years later.

Jack got on with his life, being my dad amongst other things. It wasn’t the most outstanding of lives, some might say, but he gained an outstanding lesson that night that never left him and one he was fond of telling me. Our darkest experiences can sometimes turn out to be our best and can forge the greatest friendships.

“God gets His greatest victories out of seeming defeats.”

—Virginia Brandt Berg

The Friend

By Francis Gay, *The Friendship Book*

I don’t know if you are like me, but when I read an especially lovely hymn I always want to know something about the writer. One of my favorite hymns is “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” written by Joseph Scriven.

I had imagined him to be a man upon whom the sun always shone, one who was surrounded by a loyal circle of valued friends—yet who regarded Jesus as his supreme Friend. How wrong I was about the unbroken sunshine! Joseph Scriven faced many troubles, setbacks, and disappointments. One was on the eve of his marriage, when his fiancée was drowned as she brought her wedding dress home by boat. Brokenhearted, Joseph Scriven left his native Ireland and emigrated to Canada. There his second fiancée died of a serious illness.

Did sorrow and adversity make him withdraw in self-pity? No! He devoted the rest of his days to helping the physically handicapped and others worse off than himself. He lived out the words of his hymn: “We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.”

HOW TO COPE

Often what seems to be the worst tragedy or the most unbearable turn of events can be turned to good when we put it in the Lord’s hands. Oh, I know sometimes that’s easier said than done. Sometimes we want to “fix it” ourselves, and just end up making a greater mess of things. But when we relax and look to Him and put the matter in His hands through prayer, then He can work a miracle, and He can make everything turn out well.

So try that, won’t you? Let the Lord take care of your problems. Just tell Him about it in prayer, then roll over and go to sleep, and let Him stay up all night! He’ll take care of it, and you’ll have the promised “peace that passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7).—David Brandt Berg