

because of repeated abuse, mostly by fathers, and mostly due to alcohol, and the remaining third, were simply unwanted children.

At Christmas it was customary to "farm out the boys" to a home for Christmas Day. The three weeks prior to this event were anxious weeks. The boy's names were all thrown into a hat, and each time a request came in by letter or phone to have a boy over for Christmas Day, a name was drawn. The anticipation was sheer torment for some. When a name was drawn there was excited jubilation for many, but also sad evidence of tense apprehension for a few. Questions were asked, "Who are the people who want me there for Christmas?" "Is the father a kind man?" "Does the father get drunk?" A week before dead-line, some boys would ask, "Are you sure my name is in the hat?" Three or four days before Christmas, some would show depression. One could easily read their down-cast thoughts, "Nobody wants me!"

The boys concocted some very exaggerated descriptions of the homes to which they were billeted. They revelled in their fantasies which they shared with each other, and modified as often as they shared them. "I'm going to a very rich home. They have rugs on their floors and a brand new car." Another would chime in, "I'm going to a teacher's home, and they have lots and lots of lights hanging on their house and a decorated Christmas tree on their front yard." Still another would not be out-done, "I'm going to a doctor's home, and their Christmas tree is in the hall and it reaches right to the ceiling, and they give away lots and lots of presents and they have two or even three cars, and the bedrooms have rugs too and I'm the only one they have asked to visit them."

The number of homes that were voluntarily made available, were never sufficient to accommodate all the boys, and no matter how hard the staff tried to entertain those left behind, spirits dropped to the very bottom, and the atmosphere became morbid and depressing for the remaining few. Conversations dwindled to a whisper. Black and white TV was stared at, but minds and hearts were in pits of despair. No repeated plaintive pleadings to those in authority to have modifications implemented to these programs, ever resulted in any bending of this lamentable and often damaging tradition.

Three days before Christmas, Richard's name had still not been picked. A boy across the dining room table asked, "Richard, doesn't nobody want you?" How absolutely devastating not to be wanted!

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Richard needed to come up with a convincing alibi to still the many queries levelled at him. It was imperative that the boys should know that he too, was a "Wanted Boy." At the supper table he made an unexpected announcement. "A lady phoned this afternoon, and she asked just for me. She said she wanted Richard. I'm going to a very big home. She even has maids in her home, and the house has rug floors and even the steps are covered with rug, and I'm not going by streetcar either because she's going to come and get me in one of her cars, and her husband wants me too, and she said she wanted Richard — me." He had unfortunately forgotten her name. What was most important however, was that she had wanted Richard. He was convincing, and received a strained ovation.

A trip to the office to examine the check-out book showed no placement for Richard. Richard had contrived a story so that all would think that he too was "A Wanted Child." How he would face his predicament, should no invitation come, would be indeed sad to see.

Christmas Eve arrived, and Richard's name had not been drawn. "When is the lady coming for you, Richard?"

Richard answered without hesitation. "She said she would be here very early Christmas morning. Don't worry, she's coming. Rich people always keep their promises!"

Christmas morning arrived. The boys would be racing downstairs to see what "used and cast-off gifts" Santa may have brought. There would only be about a dozen or so spending Christmas at St. Joes' today. My heart went out to Richard. Everybody harbours the need to be wanted. In that respect Richard was a normal child, but how would he face the boys this Christmas Day, and what further falsehoods would he have to fabricate to justify the claims he had made?

As a supervisor in this institution, I was the first to rise on Christmas morning. My very first thoughts

focused on Richard. I looked across the dormitory. Richard's bed was second row, five down. Empty? I walked over to his bed. Quite empty! Perhaps in the washroom. Check — empty! How could this be? I ran down to the office. No check-out for Richard! Clothes, parka and boots... gone. The obvious answer — Richard had run away.

The boys had a late breakfast. The dining table had many empty places. Conversation was sparse and barely audible by the remaining "unwanted" few. The police would have to be notified regarding Richard. A strong and uncontrollable intuition made me feel that somehow Richard would show up, but the consequences of not making a call to the police were too serious should something grave happen to the boy. The morning dragged. There wasn't a single moment that Richard wasn't heavy on my mind. We played a few games and at noon decided to go to the rink. There were just enough guys to play hockey. We would play until supper time. Supper was scheduled at five, and the boys would be ravenously hungry. But, where was Richard?

It was almost five o'clock when the kitchen staff rang the bell. The boys rushed to the changing room. As I left the rink, I noticed foot-steps in the snow leading to the shoe-repair shop, but none coming back. A-ha! Richard! So that's where the rascal is hiding!

I was about to go into the shop to prove my hunch and bring him out, but stopped to consider the consequences. Why embarrass him? How utterly painful it would be for him if I were to present him to all the fellows at this time! How would he ever live down the shame. Surely there must be a more gracious and beneficial way of handling this situation. I reconsidered and went to see the boys wash up for supper, say their grace, dig into the turkey, mashed potatoes, dressing and pudding for dessert. They ate like starving hungry wolves.

I waited until supper was in good swing, then tip-toed out of the dining area, put on my parka, and walked to the shoe-repair shop. It was dark and only one yard light turned on. I opened the door to the shoe-shop. The door creaked and grunted on its dry hinges. Where was the light switch? Why wasn't it beside the door where a switch should and usually is? After much searching, my eyes finally adapted to the darkness, and I discovered the switch. It was at the end of the cord dangling from the ceiling. I pulled it and turned on the light, and there on the floor, covered with

old, dirty and mouse eaten army coats, lay Richard, asleep. The intense cold had put him into a slumber so deep, that the creaking door, the light being turned on, and my walking about, had failed to waken him. What a joy to hear him breathing!

I finally got him awake. His first words were, "Are you going to take me in?" Richard did not need a scolding. He needed someone to show him that he was special and was wanted. He was not an orphan. He had been brought to the orphanage as an unwanted child. His mother had "given him up" shortly after birth, and the foster homes where he had been placed, all reported that he was unmanageable.

"Richard, come with me to the furnace room. Its warm there and you can thaw out. What's more, I'll go and get you something to eat. Don't be alarmed, the other guys won't know you are there, in fact, I'll get two dinners and we will eat Christmas Dinner together, just you and me, in the furnace room."

Poor Richard, he was so stiff. He had gotten up in the night, and had spent the night, and all that day in the shoe-shop. Had I not found him, he may very well have slept his last sleep there on the floor. With some assistance, he struggled to his feet. His legs didn't want to bend, but we persevered and made it to the furnace room. Fortunately nobody was there. I propped him up in the old filthy arm chair which the custodian had worn through to the springs. "I'll be back with the most scrumptious dinners you ever did see."

He cleaned off his plate in short order. "Thank you for finding me, I'm so ashamed. Stupid thing to do, right? Sorry!" We had a long talk about "being wanted" and about God wanting us too. "Richard, that's what Christmas is all about. Its Jesus being born as a baby so that he could come and tell us that God loves and wants us." The story was told in detail. It was new to Richard, and without a doubt, it would never be forgotten. When the boys woke up the next morning, Richard was back, but he never divulged where he had spent his Christmas. It was a secret which only Richard and I shared.

A few years ago, Richard showed up at the door of the Union Gospel Mission. "Do you recognize me?" I failed the test and he had to introduce himself. He had just been released from prison and wanted something to eat. "How about a dinner, just you and me, in the furnace room?" He

followed up his remark with a nervous raucous laugh. It was obvious by his speech and behaviour that Richard was high on drugs.

Richard and I did indeed share a dinner, and I invited him to join the Union Gospel Mission Rehab Program. He said he would think about it — but to this day, he has not returned. I do hope he will come back one day, attend our resident programs, and discover *NEW LIFE IN CHRIST!*

Dear Reader

In a few more days we will be celebrating our Saviour's birth. Few living in Winnipeg's core area will be having a Merry Christmas, but all will know that Union Gospel Mission will remain open throughout the Christmas season to serve the hundreds of needy people, both adults and children with special celebrations — including a Turkey Dinner. The Christmas story will be told and presents you have provided for this occasion will be distributed. Thank you for helping. If you have not yet participated in making this event a special outreach to those who need the Saviour, we give you this opportunity. Join us as co-labourers together with Him in this glorious celebration. Perhaps your heart will be warmed this season to reach out and help with a special financial Christmas gift to Union Gospel Mission. How grateful we would be!

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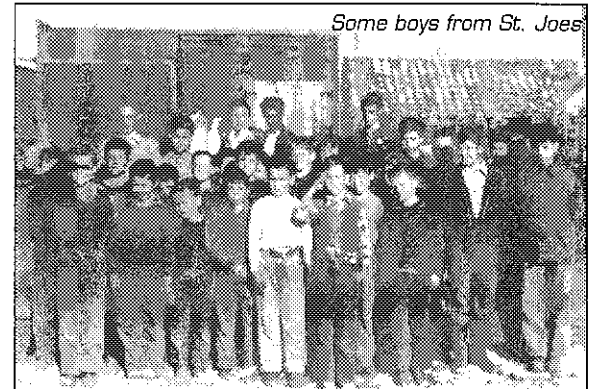
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—WANTED— a boy called Richard

In 1952, St. Joseph's Vocational School for Boys, stood across Portage Avenue from Polo Park Shopping Mall. The top floor was a dormitory which housed five rows of beds for seventy-eight orphans. A secondary building contained the laundry and heating facilities. An ancient octopus furnace produced steam which was pumped underground to the many rattling radiators in the school. There was a third building which contained some primitive shoe repair equipment. It was used by a volunteer cobbler who faithfully came every second Saturday to maintain the boy's footwear. Two charitable agencies, Red Feather and Community Chest, were the main supporters of this institution.

Only about one third of the boys were orphans. About one third had been removed from their homes