

## UNJUSTLY ACCUSED

*Malice scorned, puts out itself; but argued, give a kind of credit to a false accusation.  
Philip Massinger*

Watching crime shows on television is, I admit, one of my favorite pastimes. I am not sure what fascinates me about them except that I love it when justice is served to the perpetrators and they realize with all of their cunning and planning they did not get away with it. There are shows, on occasion, depicting an innocent person blamed for a crime, and no one will listen or believe them. That is the moment my heart kicks in, and I sympathize with their plight. Not that anything on that large of a scale has ever happened to me, but even on a small scale, I know how it feels when someone blames you for something for which you are innocent.

It is the year 1961. I am eight years old. Times are favorable in the family business, allowing my mother the privilege to splurge on getting her hair done at a salon every Saturday. I would later become her hairstylist when money was tight, washing and styling it every Saturday and coloring as needed. I enjoy the Saturdays I get to go with my sister and Mom to the Broadmoor Shopping Center in Baton Rouge, La. for Mom's hair appointment. I always look forward to going anywhere beyond the gravel road on which we live.

When Mom enters the hair salon, it is as if she is on a mini-vacation, like checking into a fancy hotel and forgetting all the world's cares. Mom knows everyone and everyone knows her. They say their usual remarks about my sister and I. "Oh, you are getting so big." "My, how you've grown." Mom forgets all about the business, the bills, the employees, the problems. She seems to enjoy the mindless exchange of banter. To this day, I cannot be around the smell of perms or hair coloring chemicals that I am not transported back to that place as a child with my mother. My sister and I listen, read magazines, and when we can stand it no longer we ask

Mom's permission to leave so we can spend the money that has been burning a hole in our pocket.

It is not the waiting on Mom to get her hair done that excites us so much about those days, but the thought of getting to spend our allowance money on anything we want at the TG&Y five and dime store which is in the same strip center as the salon. Our allowance never depends on doing chores. Mind you, if we didn't do our work, we would not get our allowance. But we do not get an allowance because we do our chores. It is merely the expected thing to do. There is no choice in the matter. On a farm, tasks are inevitable.

This Saturday we take our enormous amount of 25 cents, yes, a whole quarter, and stroll over past the Rexall Drugstore to the dime store. We get to spend it on anything we choose. I pass the rows of school supplies looking at the new notebooks and the boxes of crayons. I pick a box up to smell it for I do love the smell of crayons. I pick up the coloring books and glance through them. After looking at all the possibilities, I decide to purchase the same thing I almost always do. I love the plastic toy dress-up play high heels that usually come in a clear color with little silver or gold flecks in them. On a lucky day, the store carries red ones. They have two pieces of elastic that hold them on your feet, one across the top of the foot and one behind the heel. My favorite part of the shoes is the high heels. Why I could put them on and pretend that I am a beautiful woman of sophistication. I forget, for the moment, the reason I buy them so often is the elastic will break, or, more often than not, the heel will pop off after three or four wearings. I am eternally optimistic this is the pair that will last.

With heels in hand, I head to the cashier at the front. Passing the aisle of candy, I stop to look. Candy, never kept in the house, is not something Mom lets us often have. It is a real treat

when we are allowed to get it. This moment will be forever embedded in my memory because I was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

As I walk down the candy aisle, I catch sight of a pack of gum unwrapped. I have done research and cannot find the name of this type of candy. However, it comes in a flat rectangular pack, wrapped in paper similar to vellum. The fruity gum is one big rectangle in multi-colored rows. The gum is unwrapped, exposed to the elements. I reach down to close the wrapping over the gum, an action I would come to regret. At that same moment, the lady employee with the cat-eyed glasses wearing a very stern look on her face sees me and begins to accuse me of trying to unwrap the candy to steal it. I open my mouth to explain I was merely trying to wrap it back, not take it, but am not allowed to utter a word. She quickly cuts me off, denying me the chance to defend myself. She points at the front door telling me to leave and not come back. I will never own another pair of toy dress-up play high heels.

I was always a hypersensitive child. What this woman did that day hurt me to my core. Even this retelling of the story stirs up a lot of emotion in me. The thought of being innocent of something and yet no one believing you is, to me, a form of torture. Mind you, there were many things I did in my childhood I regret for which I never got in trouble. This incident was not one of those times. After that day, I found other places and other ways to spend my allowance, including shopping at the Rexall drugstore at the end of the strip center. I never told my mother of the incident fearing she would never allow us to go in the stores alone again. I never went back to the dime store after that even though the cat-eyed glasses lady probably forgot about the incident that very afternoon. It has stayed with me a lifetime.

Often when I hear the Easter story of Jesus taking so much abuse and pain and yet not opening His mouth, I am reminded of that incident even though my story does not compare to

His. Isaiah 53 says that He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth. He could have called ten thousand angels to destroy the world and set Him free. Yet He opened not His mouth. He was completely innocent, full of love and grace. Yet He opened not His mouth. He was made like a lamb to the slaughter and a sheep before it's shearer is silent, and He opened not His mouth. He did all of that for you and me. He could easily have defended Himself, but he was doing the will of His Father. To be silent in the face of such persecution is an act of great love.

I wanted nothing more than to defend myself that day in the dimestore. I longed to set the woman straight and give her a piece of my mind. I wanted her to regret having accused me. That little girl would later go on to give presentations at school staff in-services on *The Power of the Spoken Word*. What I would tell the cat-eyed glasses lady today is, God used even that for good.

*Matthew 27:14 - But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge - to the great amazement of the governor. (NIV)*