

The Free Press Short Story

DANNY RIVERS

By J. RAE TOOKE

THE GREAT DAY had come at last! As the first streaks of sunlight stole in through the dusty bedroom curtains, Danny Rivers stirred in his rickety little bed. His misty brown eyes opened slowly, then kindled with a warm light. A strange, new animation lighted up his old, child face.

Softly he pushed back the ragged quilt and slid out onto the floor. On a pile of rags by the bedside lay an old telescope. Quietly, adoringly, Danny knelt down beside it. His toes wriggled and curled on the bare floor as he ran his hand lovingly over this wondrous thing.

Just an old valve it was; battered and soiled and borrowed from the neighbors, but it held all of Danny Rivers' hopes and dreams, a promise of the gratification of his great yearning for a holiday at the Fresh Air Camp at Gimli.

Quietly Danny pulled up the lid and laid it aside. In his eyes was no trace of sleep as he leaned forward, touched, lifted, rearranged the meager contents. His new overalls that the lady from the mission had given him; the white blouse that his cousin was too big for, with when they played tennis in the parks; the new running shoes that his daddy had thrown down to him that day he was in good humor. Danny handled them all. Just to be near them, to feel them there, waiting for the hour, was food for his hungry heart. Surely nothing could happen now to keep him from going. All the pangs of anxiety that had tortured him in the past weeks seemed suddenly to have left him.

Carefully he replaced the lid and rose to his feet. He was going to a camp! Away from the hot pavement, from the choky smoke of the railway yards! His body wriggled. There'd be water there, a lake where you could jump right in, maybe learn to swim! There'd be grass that you could walk on, even lie down and roll on so the lady'd said. Danny's faded little face took on a faint rosy tint as he gazed down into the picture his thoughts created.

There were beds there, too, for everybody with white cloth sheets on them, and—his hands twisted in ecstasy—there'd be something to eat three times a day, meat and things and lots of milk and maybe ice-cream sometimes, and the lady'd said you could eat more'n three times if you was hungry. Maybe there'd be pie! He laughed out loud.

A movement in the bed in the corner of the room startled him. He shot a frightened glance over his shoulder as a heavy be-whiskered face rose up.

"Get back into bed there, you! What do you mean getting up waking people at this hour?"

Danny's figure seemed to shrink as his father's angry words fell about him. He scrambled back into bed, sinking under the quilt as though for protection. When the creaking of the bed in the corner subsided, Danny relaxed. What time could it be, he wondered. Surely, surely nothing could happen now, but the train. The train went at nine o'clock. Wasn't it near nine now? No, it could not be, for Mum wasn't up yet, and Mum was always up early. He must wait and he must be quiet. He lay still and pictured himself walking down to the station. He'd have to go alone—Dad wouldn't take him even if he weren't busy and Mum was always busy. They didn't care if he went or not, anyway. Dad said it was just a scheme to get people into the Church, or something. Mum never said anything. She never talked much any more.

"Would the big people be talking to each other down at the camp?" he wondered. Maybe they'd be laughing. The mission lady didn't laugh much but she smiled, and when she did and patted you on the back, it seemed like tickles were running all over you. Danny lowered the quilt and smiled up at the cracked ceiling.

It seemed that a whole long day had passed before Danny heard his mother getting up. Quickly he pushed back the covers and crept to her side.

"Is it time now?" he whispered, pointing to the wall.

His mother put her finger to her lips as she nodded, glancing towards the figure in the bed.

"They dressed in silence, Danny nearly giggled out loud again when his mother motioned for him to put on his white blouse.

"You know your father thinks you shouldn't be going, Danny," she said to him as they sat, one at each end of a grimy-topped table eating their scanty breakfast. "He doesn't see any sense to these new ideas."

"But he won't stop me now, Mum, with my things all ready and my new running shoes and all!" In the dark eyes was a frightened, appealing look.

It was there still an hour or so later as Danny moved timidly across the big rotunda of the depot in the direction of a group of children he guessed were gathered for the trip to the Fresh Air camp. His valise gripped tight, knocked against his legs as he walked. He suddenly felt a bit ashamed of his side. It had seemed so perfect at home, but a quick glance over the ones sitting about on the floor beside the other children told him that they were all small and much cleaner.

Then the Mission Lady caught sight

of him. His heart beat fast as she stepped out from the group to greet him.

"Oh, here is Danny Rivers," she said. "Come on, Danny."

Her arm encircled his shoulder as she led him towards a tall man at the edge of the group.

"This is one of my boys from the mission, Mr. Hodson. He is my right-hand man out there, my best helper."

Danny's shoulders moved to a solidly angled beneath his best blouse as the man looked down at him. This was a great day! To have the Mission Lady call him her best man!

As he moved off with the rest in the direction of the stairs which they said would take them to the train, Danny felt as though he wanted to laugh out loud, to laugh and laugh and never stop!

At the top of the stairs the train was waiting. Mr. Hodson and a train-man helped most of the children up. Danny scrambled up unassisted, dragging his valise in after him. He found a seat by an open window. And what a seat! Smooth and soft, just like the pussy willows he found that time down by the river only not the same color. His hand moved slowly over the plush surface while his wandering eyes took in the interior of the car. Lights up in the ceiling in big white bowls! A carpet on the floor! Who would ever have thought a train would be like this inside! It must feel great when it started to move! He pressed his arms close to his knees, close together in delicious excitement.

More and more children were coming in. The seats were filling up. Surely they would soon be starting. Nothing could happen now, but he wished they'd start.

He turned to the window. Children still coming. Lots of them had their mothers with them. Must be nice to have a mother who had time to go places with you!

It was then that something at the head of the stairs caught his attention. A woman, little and white looking. She stood before Mr. Hodson. Her hands were opening and closing as she leaned forward and talked to him. Her words reached Danny's ears.

"Can't you get him in some way?" she was saying. Danny's eyes widened. A poor, sick-looking little boy clung to the woman's skirts. How tired he looked. He was lame, too. One foot was turned right in.

"He needs it so much," the woman pleaded.

Mr. Hodson's face looked tight. "I'm sorry, but we are filled up to our capacity now. Every bed will be taken at the camp. We can't possibly take any more children at present."

The woman moved nearer. Her voice was low, but Danny could see her face. He turned his head away. His lips twitched, his throat felt dry. He leaned down and looked through the window on the other side of the car. Only one thing could he see; a little crippled boy with a tired, tired face. A boy far worse off than himself, sick and lame, couldn't even walk to the park and wade in the little pool like he could. Danny's head turned slowly, unwillingly. He could not keep his eyes from his own window. The woman was still there. Her hands were trembling. Mr. Hodson looked sad. He was turning away from her.

"If we had one place," he was saying, "we would take your little boy, but—"

"One place?" Danny's hands were clutching at the window ledge. He wanted to look away. He wanted not to hear. But he had heard, and a cold, lifeless feeling seemed creeping over him. Such a sick little boy and they needed one place. He had a place—one place! A dull ache was surging through his body.

"The water! the nice clean beds! the milk and things! He took his lip between his teeth to keep it firm.

"The woman and the little boy were standing alone. They looked so lonely. He knew how it hurt to feel like that. His heart was bursting. One place! And the Mission Lady had called him her best man. He clenched his fists tight. He leaned slowly forward out of the window.

"Come here, Mister," he called. His voice sounded strange in his own ears. Mr. Hodson heard and came to the window.

"What is it, son?" he asked.

Danny's fingers were knocking hard against his lips as he nodded toward the other boy.

"He kin have my place," he said, simply. "My father didn't want me to go, anyway."

"Sure you don't want to go?" Mr. Hodson questioned.

"No, mister, he kin have my place." His voice was high and queer, but steady.

He turned from the window. He could hear a sudden busting of wheels about him. He leaned down. His hand gripped about for the handle of the old valve. He got to his feet. He felt that every one in the car was looking at him. He must get outside. Yes, he must get out quickly. He must leave his place ready for the little lame boy.

He started down the aisle. His big valise bumped against the seats and kept him back. He jerked at it fiercely. "See the kid that doesn't want to go,"

POISON IVY

How to Identify It and What to Do

Many a holiday has been made wretched by contact with poison ivy, and to persons who cannot identify this noxious plant there is little comfort in the caution to keep away from it or from people, clothing, tools or anything that has been touched by it. To begin with, the leaves of the poison ivy are arranged in three after the manner of those of the strawberry, but unlike the strawberry leaves they are smooth and firm, sometimes leathery, with the edges

dentated here and there, or, in other words, valve shaped slowly from his hand onto one of the steps. Quietly he sat down beside it, his hand running dazedly over its surface. The remnant of a smile still played about his lips, but the animated flush was gone; it looked again like the face of a worn, little old man.

One foot began a tap-tap-tapping against the wall at his side.

A rumble of wheels overhead came to his ears. The train was going. Danny's little body seemed to tighten. A quivering rush of breath trembled across his lips. The train had gone. "The water, the grass, the meat and things! His eyes were staring hard. Suddenly his lips began to twitch. He jerked his shabby, broken-peaked cap off his head and crushed it fiercely against his eyes. Great sobs were tearing at his heart, but he twisted his lips hard with his fingers and would not let them out.

Go back, that is what he must do. His hand went to his forehead. A quiver felt again for the handle of the valise. As one walking in his sleep he got up and started on down the stairs. All the sunshine of this glorious day had been blotted out. It seemed that he was stepping down into darkness, unreal and lifeless. His shoulders sagged.

Then he heard some one coming toward him. His cap brushed hurriedly across his face, his neck stiffened as he felt a kind hand upon his shoulder. A kind voice was speaking.

"So here you are, Danny. I had to stay to see them off, but I wanted to find you."

It was Mr. Hodson. Danny held his breath to keep it from shaking. They were standing together now. Mr. Hodson's two hands were on Danny's shoulders.

"You're a brave lad, Danny boy. Miss Wilson's right-hand man down at the mission and a regular fellow here today."

Danny could not look up. His lip was tight between his teeth. The kind words sounded in his ears like the chiming of a distant bell. They made it hard to keep the tears from running over.

Mr. Hodson leaned nearer. "You're just the sort of man I'd like to take with me down to our summer home at Lake of the Woods, Danny."

Danny looked up now, wide-eyed.

"Yes, I meant it, Dan. We're going to-morrow. I can fix it with your dad."

He shook Danny's shoulders gently. "How would you like to help the chauffeur run the boat and go fishing and learn to swim?"

As sunlight slowly sweeps across a field when the cloud has moved away, a great light spread over the face of Danny Rivers. His lips opened. A tremulous smile quivered across them.

"Oh, gee, Mister!" was all he could say.

Douglas Egyptian Liniment relieves toothache and neuralgia. Invaluable in cases of croup, sore throat and quinsy. Keep a bottle handy.

IN ORDER TO EARN A LIVING

To know a little about a great many subjects is desirable. It adds to the pleasure of life and makes one interesting to many people. When it comes to the business of making a living, however, being well informed on a great variety of subjects will hardly keep a roof over one's head. In these days of competition one of the factors in success is possessing great knowledge about one subject.

Often people are impressed by the ignorance of a successful man. They are appalled by the number of topics about which he knows nothing. If they look into the matter, however they find that there is at least one subject on which he knows a lot. Where cultural matters are concerned, he may be an ignoramus. He may miss a large amount of pleasure by the limitations of his knowledge. If there were not one subject on which he was better informed than other men, however, he would not be at the place that he is.

BROADEN YOUR OWN LIFE

Science is doing much to lengthen human life. All of you people may expect to be considerably longer on this planet than if you had been born twenty-five years earlier. While inspecting drinking water, and food are helping to lengthen human life, however, it is up to you as an individual to deepen your life and to broaden it. Living a hundred years would not mean much if your chief interest was eating and drinking. A long life to the selfish and grasping is merely a multiplication of unhappy days. Deepen your life, broaden your interests, or length of days will be only a mockery.

GO AHEAD

He: "Would you scream if I kissed you, little girl?"

She: "Little girls should be seen and not heard."

A REAL Sissy

Willie (aged twelve, looking contemptuously at Kiddle Kar among his birthday presents)—I'll bet the guy what gave me that sent Venus de Milo a bracelet.



If It's Results You Want Read This!

THE FREE PRESS circulation is the best and cheapest medium which thoroughly reaches the people of Acton and district. Furthermore, it reaches those people who can still afford to buy goods and services. THE FREE PRESS goes into the majority of homes in Acton and most of the farm homes within the purchasing area of Acton.

Think of the Advertising Possibilities

People are still buying and reading THE FREE PRESS, and it isn't any secret that we have many advertisers that are getting real results! And here's a jolt for the skeptics---when we speak of advertisers we don't mean the fellows who are giving things away at a loss. Surprising as it may seem, our most successful advertisers are the ones who are selling medium priced articles of good quality and making a fair profit!

But, gentlemen, they make their ads interesting! They've observed that people are interested in news, if they are not, why do they buy THE FREE PRESS? They've observed that people are still interested in clothes, their homes and the rest of the things that make up their life---and that people can still be sold. And to sell them they give their ads an even break with the news of the day. They make their ads news and attractive, and they choose merchandise that people want (not something they want to dump) and the cash register jingles a merry tune accordingly.

You Can Make Advertising Pay, Also

If you are puzzled how to present your story --- puzzled how to sell people through advertising, call on us. As newspaper workers we know what people are interested in (we couldn't sell our papers if we didn't). We'll help you make your ads attractive and interesting. If your merchandise is right --- you'll get results. Call 174 to-day, you will receive a prompt response.

The Acton Free Press