

Hope in the Heart

BY BRYNA BOZART

The afternoon had been very long, longer than most, because we didn't seem to be getting anywhere. Even while his grandmother was dying in the hospital, Johnny refused to accept it. Now that she was gone, his denial grew stronger. The harder I tried to console him, the more he resisted. I wanted one thing—to give Johnny hope.

I tried to explain to Johnny how death happens. But this eight-year-old boy was having none of what I had to say.

"No! She's not dead. She's home right now, on the porch in her rocking chair."

I explained to Johnny how old his grandmother was, how her life could not have gone on.

"No! She wasn't *that* old. She's my granny. She does everything for me."

"Maybe she wanted to be with your mother in heaven," I suggested.

"No! She would never leave me. She's all I've got."

Weeping and angry, he raised his small arms to fight off my words. I held him, and we rocked together in this embrace.

Later, I took Johnny to his home and waited there with him for a cousin to arrive. It was a small apartment in an inner-city project. I immediately spotted the rocking chair on the small front porch. It seemed welcoming as it nestled in the shade among scattered toys.

Johnny invited me to sit beside the rocking chair. Taking my seat, I found the view was most pleasant. It was already early evening, and a stillness settled all about.

His little frame momentarily drooped as he glanced at the rocking chair, but then quickly he drew himself up. I could see his inner strength growing. He was enduring.

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Johnny nodded toward the rocker. "Well, there she is." He looked back at me. "You just sit there and talk to my granny while I get my basketball."

I could hear Johnny rummaging around inside the apartment as he searched for his ball. A vine of morning glories hung overhead, the flowers already folded in upon themselves for the night. The rocking chair seemed so empty. I asked Johnny's grandmother to show me how to help him start to heal and find his way out of the darkness.

Johnny returned without the ball. Silently, he sat down by me and cried. After a while he calmed down. We sat there for some time, resting, watching the sun set. Slowly, the conversation began.

"You know what?" he said. "I think the morning glories have gone to sleep." He was quiet a moment. "But they'll wake up tomorrow." We sat together in silence.

"You know what else?" he finally said. "My granny isn't sitting in that chair anymore. My granny has gone to sleep."

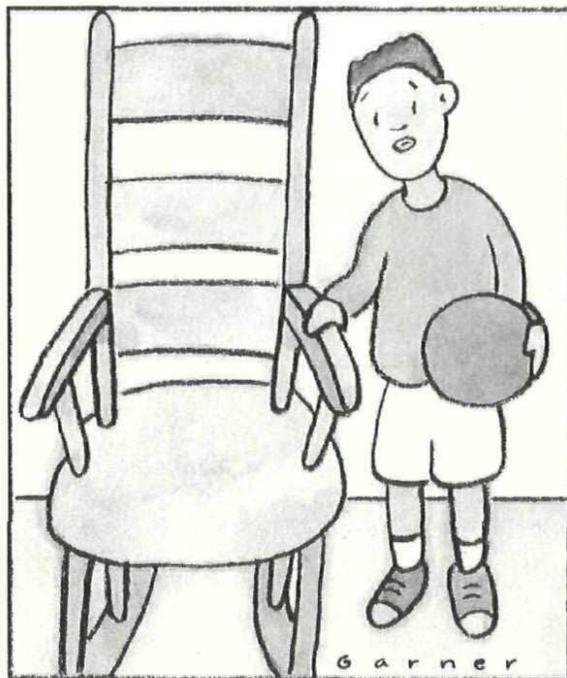
"Your granny really was getting old," I began.

He agreed.

Then we talked about his grandmother waking up in heaven. We talked about how we imagined that would be. She would look beautiful and happy.

Johnny's cousin arrived, and we gathered up some of his things. Johnny found his basketball. He believed his grandmother had helped him find it by telling him in his heart where it was.

Such things happen when the heart is filled with God's love. I told Johnny that his grandmother would never be taken from his heart. This is the hope we cling to in the belief that we will endure loss in our earthly life to embrace everlasting joy with God. □



David Garner