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..By the Editor..

Good News

"Do not be afraid," the angel said to the shepherds tending their flock on the hillside beyond Bethlehem, "for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which shall be to all the people; for there has been born to you today in the town of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

Good news of great joy! That is what the first Christmas was for all the world. And since that time, as each Christmas day recurs, men and women try to recapture the ecstasy of the angel and the delight of the shepherds and wish one another a "Merry Christmas."

Joy is synonymous with Christmas, but uninhibited joy should not be reserved for that day alone. So often, sad to say, it is. Joy is really the birthright of man. For it was he created. It is his ultimate purpose, his eternal destiny. Why then should there be so little of it in so many human lives?

True, life is, as scripture records, a land of exile, and, as the Church teaches us to pray, a vale of tears. Sorrow dogs our footsteps not as a solitary spy but as a battalion. Sickness, misfortune, suffering, war and death take their toll of tears and slash into the heart. But could it be that we do not recall enough the "good news of great joy" that came to earth when Christ was born? Could it be that, when affliction falls, we lose touch with the Divine, we forget Him Who alone can give us deep and abiding joy?

Peace on earth was promised "among men of good will." Not simply among men. Good will, when analysed, means God's Will. If we are attuned to it, we cannot for long succumb to sadness. Certainly not, when we contemplate the Infant in the manger. That was only one of many visible signs of His love for us. Hiding our own hurt, submerging our own sorrow can be our little way of reciprocating. And it is a sure way of making "Merry Christmas" remain in our hearts from day to day.

May you and yours, even in the midst of war, share deeply—and always—in the joy that is Christmas.

SUPPORTS POOR BOYS WHO ARE STUDYING FOR THE FRANCISCAN PRIESTHOOD

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PENNIES FROM HEAVEN

Gertrude Lakowski, Chicago girl whose life's work was emptying Purgatory

by EDDIE DOHERTY

ILLUSTRATED BY TED PFITZER

THERE is a woman in Chicago who values pennies more than she does fifty dollar bills. She collects them by the hundreds, by the thousands, Indian-heads and Lincoln-heads in copper and white. Yet she never keeps a cent. When you know why she collects pennies, you will not think it strange.

Her daughter used to collect Indian-head pennies. They came to her in the mail, from Maine, from Texas, from California, from Canada and Mexico —and sometimes from such far off places as India and China. And they came to her home at 1334 Wolfram street, in the grimy hands of adoring children, in the purses of friends, in the pockets of priests, monsignori, bishops, and ordinary guys like me.

"Gertski" lay in bed for nearly twenty years, suffering intense pain, but making her whole world happy. She occupied many of her aching moments with writing cheery letters to other shut-ins, adorning them with little drawings of the Sacred Heart or the American flag, saying the rosary, or stacking her Indian-head pennies into neat little packages to be sent away.

One of her great loves was Tekakwitha, the Indian maiden known as the Lily of the Mohawks. The Indian head on the copper was a symbol of that little saint. That's why Gert collected them. She used them to further the canonization of her friend.

Tekakwitha was a very real person to Gert. She was not dead. She was still in the depths of her pine forests, speaking to God—and at the same time she was in Gert's room. And the aroma of the pines was with her.

One of Gert's intimates sent her a pine pillow from Vermont some years ago—believing it might somehow bring Tekakwitha a little nearer to the sick bed.

"It is wonderful to smell real pine," Gertie wrote. "Until the pillow came I only imagined how it might smell—and how a forest might look.

"And the pillow is so hard! When I lay my head on it I think of Christ, and His dear head lying on the pine cross—only it must have been much harder than my pillow. And there were thorns piercing it too.

"Yes, the pillow brings Teka quite

An invalid, she collected pennies to have Kateri Tekakwitha canonized. Today the pennies go to missionaries to have Masses said for the souls in Purgatory

close to me. And it brings my Boy Friend close too."

The picture of her Boy Friend stood on a little altar to the right of her bed. The Sacred Heart. Near it stood the statues of Our Lady, and Tekakwitha.

There were many other little figures on that home-made altar. There was a crucifix. There were the relics of a few favorite saints. There was a vigil light or two. And—sometimes—a row of medicine bottles.

Gertski—she coined the name out of Gertrude and Lakowski—though she was in constant pain, was one of the happiest mortals who ever lived. Nobody who ever talked to her for a moment failed to catch that happiness.

Her doctors, however, looked upon her as a baffling problem, a denial of everything they had learned in medical schools or read in medical books, a challenge, a miracle. Dr. S. B. Nelson, of 3131 North Lincoln avenue, her last physician, was sure a hundred times or more that Gertie was dead, or dying.

"And why she lived so long," he says, "I don't know. She had many doctors before I took the case. Each of them quit in despair, even the most famous heart specialist in Chicago whom I brought to the Wolfram street house for a consultation.

"The girl had a heart that filled her entire chest. It crowded out all the other organs. An x-ray picture showed nothing but the heart, not even a shadow of the lungs, though we know the lungs were there. I percussed her peritonial cavity scores of times, but never found anything except heart muscles.

"It began, when she was a child, with rheumatic fever. The heart swelled and swelled with the years, grew until it couldn't grow any further. And always, it swung, as on a pendulum, between life and death. It beat slowly and more slowly until it stopped, or seemed to stop.

"Then there would be a call for the doctor. That call might come at noon, at dinner time, at 3 o'clock in the morning. I was called so many times I got to know the Lakowski ring whenever the phone woke me. Usually I got to the house before the priest.

"And always and always and always the same thing happened. There was not the faintest flutter in her pulse. There was not the least sign of life in her heart. There was no sound my stethoscope could detect.

"Then the priest would come. Gert would receive the Host. And, in a moment I would feel a feeble stirring in her pulse. Her heart would begin to beat again. Pulse and heart would grow stronger. Eventually she would open her eyes and smile!

"I wouldn't have believed it if it had happened only once. I would have said my instruments or my senses were at fault. But when it happened again and again and again, how could I disbelieve?"

THE doctor, who is not a Catholic, speaks reverently when he talks of Gertrude Lakowski. His eyes shine. His face glows with a tenderness not looked for in a physician discussing a patient. And there is wonder in the timbre of his voice.

"That is the oddest house in Chicago," he says. "It holds an atmosphere of happiness so great it almost knocks you down. It rushes toward you, like a big Newfoundland dog, as soon as you open the door.

"And it was just as palpable when Gert was dying as when she was coming back to life again. Nobody in that family feared death. They'd talk about death openly, as though it were a friend. 'When Gertie dies,' they'd say, or 'after Gertie dies.' It was never 'if Gertie dies.' Sometimes it was 'Gertie, when you die—'."

When Dr. Nelson first saw his patient her whole body was swollen, and filled with water. He tapped her, drew off quarts of water, and gave her digitalis for her heart.

"I guess the doctor was really sent to us by Tekakwitha," Mrs. Lakowski says. "Gertrude made a novena to her little Indian friend, asking to be made well for Christmas day. Dr. Nelson came. She was well enough on Christmas day to enjoy her crib."

The crib occupied the entire top of the table near the sick bed during every Christmas season—and every child in the neighborhood came in to see it.

On Christmas Gertie was in less pain than at any other time of the year, her mother declares; whereas she suffered frightful agonies all during the forty days of Lent.

Gertrude was born in Chicago on July 20, 1917. She never was strong. She never was quite like the other girls. Her mother carried her to school some days, when Gert could stand being carried. But most of the time she was forced to stay at home.

This brought about the first great tragedy in her life.

The Sisters thought her too young to make her first Communion, but Gertie knew her catechism so thoroughly, and she begged so hard, that they relented.

"I must make my First Holy Communion as soon as possible," Gertie told them seriously, "because I have to empty purgatory."

ONE day the parish priest came to examine the children. He asked Gertie a question. She was so frightened she could not answer.

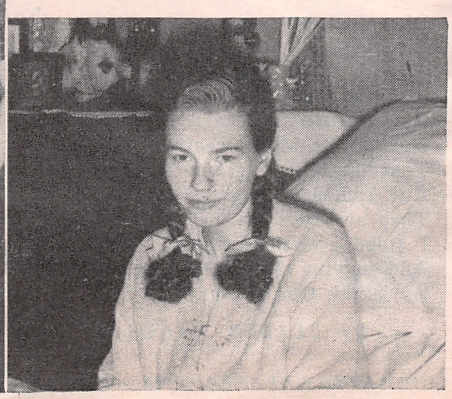
The priest decided Gert was either too young or too backward to receive the Sacrament. Gertie stood staring at him until he turned to leave. Then she fainted. A Sister carried her home—the most wretched child on earth.

"The poor souls," she wept. "The poor souls. They'll have to wait."

Mrs. Lakowski hurried to see another priest.

"Send the child to me tomorrow morning," he said. "We're having our First Communion Class receive at the 8 o'clock Mass. Get her a white dress and a veil and she can receive with them."

Before she went home, Mrs. Lakowski bought not only the veil and dress, but white shoes and stockings, new underwear, a pearl rosary, a prayer



At left, Gertski's father, mother and twin sisters. Below, Gertski during her illness that baffled Chicago's physicians.

a dozen red roses.

She left the flowers, wet with happy tears, at the foot of Our Lady's statue, then hurried home.

"Tomorrow!" Gertie cried. "Why—why that's two days ahead of the other class! God has heard my prayers. O how can anybody be so happy and still live?"

The Lakowski's are in the habit of placing roses before the Mother of God on her great feast days; but there was an Assumption day when Gert was so sorely afflicted her mother could not leave her, even for a moment—and there were no roses.

Mrs. Lakowski knelt on the spotless floor of her kitchen, turned her face toward the altar near Gert's bed, and begged the Virgin's pardon.

"Please take the intention for the deed, dear Mother," she prayed. "You know I wouldn't have neglected you if I could help it."

"Your prayer will be answered, Mom," Gert assured her. "Our Lady's roses will be here any minute."

SHE had scarce spoken when a messenger boy rang the door bell. He was carrying two dozen American Beauty roses, telegraphed from New York.

Gert's favorite flower was the white rose, the symbol of purity.

"St. Therese, the Little Flower showers red roses from heaven," she told her mother. "I'll shower white ones."

She promised Our Lady two dozen white roses as part payment for a favor granted one of her friends. She had no money to buy these flowers. It was unlikely there were any white roses in Chicago at the time. But Gert didn't worry.

An acquaintance passing, a florist shop in the Loop, saw two dozen white roses in the front window.

"They just came in," the florist said. "Very beautiful, no? And very rare."

They were sent forthwith to Gertski —and the donor didn't know until after her death that she had confidently expected them.

Should you ask Mrs. Lakowski if her daughter ever had any supernatural experiences such as raptures or visions, she would say:

"No, nothing special; although, years ago, after she had lain three weeks with her eyes closed—blind, I believe—she called out, 'Stay right by me; something is going to happen'! After a time she said, "Isn't she beautiful!' And a little after that, she said, 'I can see again.'

"She went into a coma for about three hours. She was ice cold all over her body. We sent for the priest. He anointed her, and we were all kneeling around the bed saying the rosary, when she opened her eyes. She could see perfectly."

What did Gert mean when she said "Isn't she beautiful?" Mrs. Lakowski doesn't know; she never asked.

"Another time," she adds, "Gert told me she had seen a long road with many rocks on it, and two hands stretched out toward her. Those hands held the Host. Light came from the Host. But, of course, that might have been a dream."

Gertski's days and nights were made up of little things, the writing of letters or notes, the sending of valentines or birthday cards, the drawing of pictures. Then, friends dropped in at all hours, not so much to cheer as to be cheered. Bits of conversation, a laugh or two, a word of encouragement, a promise to pray and to offer up an hour's suffering, or a day's. She lived on these little things.

"After all," she wrote, "we are but very tiny specks compared to His majesty and immensity. He expects little things from little souls. All He asks is that they be perfectly performed for His love, honor, and glory."

Life itself was, to her, a little thing, but something to be lived only for Him.

Her father, George Lakowski, employe of a candy factory, and her sisters, Marian and the twins, Helen and Anne, spent every spare moment with Gertski, but there was always work or school for them. The full burden fell on Mom. The house must be kept spotless. Meals must be prepared. Meats and groceries and medicines and clothes and many other things must be purchased and carried home from the stores. Dishes must be washed and dried. Garments must be mended or cleaned. Visitors must be welcomed and entertained. But, at all times there was Gert to be cared for, Gert who might die at any moment. Every night for years Mom kept vigil beside Gert's bed. And if she slept at all during all those years it was only in fitful and fearful snatches.

Dad and the girls helped with the housework when they could, and kept up Mom's morale with music and song, with dances, with comic antics, with wild jokes and hearty laughter.

SOMETIMES, in the quiet nights, with Mom nodding in her chair, Gert would write of her Boy Friend—or pencil a note to Him.

"I am the little toy lamb of the baby Jesus. Even if I am black I know He loves me. He will never leave my heart again. He told me so this morning. In fact He said He had never left it! He is so sweet." Or—

"My dearest Jesus; In the long night of the world which is my life I sometimes wake and miss You as did the bride in the 'Song of Songs.' I go and try to find You everywhere, but You are gone. But there is one place I am sure to see you, and that is on the bed I dressed for You, the cross! Make me love You. I know I have not even begun. Teach me how."

Once in awhile the exhausted, anxious, sleepless mother broke down and wept. Once in a while she dropped to her knees and prayed for strength to carry on, and begged the Almighty to soften the anguish of the child who loved Him so.

Then Gertie would chide her gently.

"You have it easy, Mother. You can wash the sweat off my face. You can give me a fresh nightgown. You can fix my pillows and make me more comfortable. You can bring me things. You can do a thousand things for me.

"But think of our poor Lady, watching Jesus, crowned with thorns, as He carried the cross on the cruel road to Calvary. All she could do was look at Him. She couldn't lift even a hand to help Him."

The greatest joy Gert knew came to her when children brought in their friends, and commanded, "Gertski, teach this kid how to say the Hail Mary, and how to bless hisself."

One of these "little heathen" was a child named Betty, a four year old whose mother hated everything Catholic.

Gertski said fervent prayers; so perhaps it was not surprising that Betty's mother asked Mrs. Lakowski to take care of the little girl during the day. The *(Continued on page 62)*

Feeding Birds On a Winter Day

They took my scraps of suet,
My offering of bread,
The starlings and the snowbirds,
And not one word was said
Praising me for charity,
Nor of the bitter weather
That laced the sycamore with ice
And ruffled each gray feather.
They ate their fill and flew away;
I stood aware, enchanted,
And envying their wild strong faith
Of taking God for granted.

By GLADYS McKEE

light in dancing. The music is not heard but its rhythm felt through the floor's vibrations. This "feeling" is quite acute and even the very young can distinguish between the playing of a waltz and a march merely by placing their hands upon the piano.

The entertainment committee of the Guild provides the deaf with recreation, picnics, outings and socials. One of its most popular features is the Dramatic Club. Several plays are offered annually in which both hearing and hard of hearing participate. The actors sign their lines. In dark or dully lighted scenes they wear white gloves with fingers dipped in phosphorus so that all signs are plainly visible from the audience.

Raising funds for the maintenance, enlarging and modernizing of the Archbishop Ryan Memorial Institute for the Deaf is one of the Guild's major aims.

Although a diocesan charity, this institution attracts very few Catholic pupils. Because of space, funds and lack of vocational training facilities, it cannot compete with the luxuriant, modern Pennsylvania School for the Deaf in suburban Philadelphia. This state institution gives free transportation to its day pupils. The Catholic institution cannot afford this. Consequently many Catholic parents send their afflicted little ones to the school that gives the most materially for the least. The child's religious and spiritual welfare frequently pays the penalty.

Through the efforts of Father Landherr, a carpentry and leather shop has already been added to the Archbishop Ryan Memorial Institute. But many more innovations are necessary before it can compete on equal terms with the state school which boasts model printing, painting, barbering, tailoring, electrical and shoe-repairing shops.

Another Guild endeavor is the installation of hearing aids in all churches, confessionals and schools throughout the diocese. St. Boniface church has ten, the first in the city.

Christian Doctrine instructions and bringing back to the fold those gone astray is a vital work of the Philadelphia Guild. It sponsors yearly missions and retreats. One each for the hard of hearing and deaf women and one for the men. Retreatants come from not only Philadelphia but all parts of the state, New York, New Jersey, Delaware and even Washington, D.C.

On the first and third Sundays of every month Father Landherr conducts services for the deaf at St. Boniface church, headquarters of the Philadelphia Guild. The second Sun-

PENNIES FROM HEAVEN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

woman, a widow, had to work downtown, and it was inconvenient to take the child with her.

For years Gertski and Betty spent their days together, talking about God, and getting ready for the day when Betty, all in white, would receive the Lord God Almighty on her tongue.

"The dearest wish of my life," Gertski said often, "is to see Betty make her First Communion."

Betty's mother got a job in another city, and took the child away. Betty was inconsolable when she said goodbye, but Gert assured her that no matter what happened she would make her First Communion before very many years.

Betty came back to Chicago a few months ago. She took a streetcar and a bus to a corner near the Lakowski home. She came running down the passageway between the Lakowski home and the one next door, crying "Gertie, Gertie, Gertie!"

She came flying up the back stairs. "Gertie, it's me. It's Betty!"

She flung open the back door, as she always did, and rushed into Gertie's room. And there she stopped, the happy little cyclone with the shiny blue eyes, and looked around in fear.

Gertie wasn't there. The altar was in its accustomed place. So was the table, and Mrs. Lakowski's chair. But Gertie's bed had disappeared.

She looked at Mrs. Lakowski.

"I'm going to make my First Communion," she said. "Mama says it's all right. And I must tell Gert. Where is Gert?"

Mrs. Lakowski took the little girl gently onto her lap, stroked her hair, and let her cry.

"She's gone to see her Boy Friend. You know how she always loved Him. You know how happy she is. But she'll be there, by your side, Betty, at the Communion rail.

"You should be happy too, so very happy. We'll buy you a white dress, and a veil, and everything else. And we'll have the Communion breakfast right here, where Gert so many times received her Lord. If Gert could be any happier than she is, how happy she would be now!"

Gertrude accepted her suffering joyfully, feeling herself blessed with the privilege of bearing it. It was a gift she could offer up to Christ, Who suffered so much for her. It was a gift by which she could win favors for all who asked, and some who didn't ask. It was a priceless ransom for the souls in Purgatory.

She died on March 12th, 1943, the first Friday in Lent. Her great tired heart quit beating for the last time at 11:15 in the evening, in the hour of suffering she was offering for the intentions of a former confessor, now a chaplain in the army.

Mrs. Lakowski sees Tekakwitha, sometimes, in the pennies that come to her. But she sees Gertski too. She doesn't use the pennies for the furthering of the Indian maiden's cause at Rome. She sends them to priests all over the country, priests who will say Masses for the poor souls.

Gertski's life work, the emptying of Purgatory, is continued by her Mom.