

'The call,' or ' _ _ _ _,' the preacher is coming'

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It was Friday morning when I got the call from Donnie.



Les Hollon "Brother Les, I've got some bad news. Gary and Tyrone were caught drinking this morning on the school bus. High school rules required us to suspend them. Tough part about being the assistant principal in charge of discipline. I know you've been working hard for them to go on the youth retreat this weekend. So, I thought I'd better call you. I don't know what you can work out with their grandmother, whom you know is taking care of them."

I responded with a "Yes," with a "Thank you for the call," and with a "This is sad news for all of us."

For a moment, I stood looking through the parsonage's kitchen window, at the back-pasture cows. Catching my breath with a prayer, I called the boys' grandmother, Mrs. D. She was a good woman—strong in character, powerful in faith and filled with spunky love. The boys became her

responsibility when it was clear her son in Cleveland couldn't raise them right. They'd been living with her about a year.

... now this

My wife and I had been reaching out to them for about as long as we'd been living in the village of Finchville. After six months, a breakthrough seemed possible. Now this.

She answered with a mellow "hello."

"Mrs. D., this is Brother Les from Finchville Baptist Church. I understand there was some difficulty with Tyrone and Gary on the school bus this morning."

"Yes, honey, that's right."

"Well I am sorry. But I was hoping I could come over to talk with you about their still going with us to the retreat this weekend."

She said: "Sure. You come on over. That'll be fine."

And then, evidently thinking I had already hung up my phone, she said, "Ah, _ _ _ _ , the preacher is coming."

Silencing my laughter, I quietly hung up the phone. And then laughed until my gut hurt as much as my heart ached for the boys and their grandmother. I understood her "_ _ _ _ ing" me. It seemed I was just one more authority figure about to show up on her front porch.

Her domain

Praying my way as I drove along through the country lanes to Mrs. D's home, I wondered how she would greet me. I relaxed as soon as I saw her on the front porch. She greeted me with a smile and opened her screen

door so I could enter her domain.

This is where she ruled. And I respected her authority. She understood I was trying to help in the same ways she wanted her boys to be helped.

Gary and Tyrone made the retreat, but Tyrone didn't make it through high school. When Mrs. D died a few years later, Tyrone entered the sanctuary for his grandmother's funeral service dressed in an orange jumpsuit and wearing handcuffs. He was serving time for a botched burglary that led to an abduction. This is not what she wanted for her boy. But?

Well, the aching prayers she had prayed earlier for Tyrone and Gary would continue to be God's hoping hand on their lives. My prayers continued also. In the most dire circumstances, God's hope still gives us hope.

And to this day, many years later, when I place a call for someone who didn't answer the phone and the attendant calls out to the desired person with: "Hey, the preacher is on the phone. He wants to talk to you," I cover my receiver.

I don't need to hear what is said on the other end. I've already heard it from Mrs. D: "Ah, _ _ _ , the preacher is coming."

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