

## MIKEY

Bettina Marple, Hardin County

It was a crisp, cool fall morning in 1948 on a rural country farm in Taylor County. Mikey, my little brother, was 3 years old and I was 4 ½. We were so excited to be outside playing and enjoying the countryside as we ran and played in the yard. Our dad and 2 of his helpers were busy stirring a trough of sap that was cooking over a fire. This sap would eventually become molasses.

The process of making the sweet concoction was an intense one and, also, a dangerous one. Dad warned Mikey and me to stay back away from the fire and the boiling liquid. We were just enjoying this opportunity to explore the yard and the surrounding trees. We did, however, heed our father's warning and stayed a distance away.

As the molasses finished cooking, Dad and his helpers would dip the liquid out and put it into "lard cans" which were a thin metal 5-gallon container. The lid would not be secured onto the can yet but tilted so the steam could escape.

Mikey and I were playmates, and we loved the fact that we were each other's best friend. I was more of a mother hen type of sister, so I felt the need to watch over him. At one point we got too close to the fire and Dad sharply warned us to stay back. As we did back away from the fire, Mikey backed into and fell into one of the steaming cans of the molasses!

I felt shock and horror as I heard my little brother scream and my dad run to him. Mikey's hips, back, and thighs were in the hot liquid. Dad pulled him out and immediately took the hot, soaked overalls and other clothing off him. Mikey was hurried in my dad's car to the hospital in Campbellsville which immediately sent him by ambulance to the hospital in Louisville.

For days I stayed with relatives and family friends while my mother and father were at the hospital with Mikey. He had suffered second- and third- degree burns on his torso. During the time he was gone, I was filled with worry and a sense of guilt. I know now that it was not my fault that he was hurt, but to this 4-year-old, there was anxiety and lots of tears because I did not protect him.

Mikey was in the hospital for several days. When they brought him home, he was wrapped in bandages from his chest to his lower legs. Mikey did survive and today he bears the scars from his burns. I was traumatized by this ordeal as well, but the experience brought these two playmates closer as time passed.

As I think back over this incident in my life, I thank God that He saved Mikey so he could return to me and the rest of the family. Though many years later, he is still my beloved "little" brother.