



# My Fifty-Five Years

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## THE OLDEST LEADING OFFICER IN THE SALVATION ARMY WORLD WRITES THE STORY OF HIS CAREER

### Chapter Twenty-one

AS I write these memoirs it is Tuesday, October 1, 1940, and I am back in Elgin. Just fifty-five years ago today I left home to begin my career as a Salvation Army officer. Now, at seventy-one years of age, I shall spend a few hours retracing the familiar scenes of my boyhood.

What memories the old Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul railroad station brings to my mind! On this line I had engaged in one of my many boyhood endeavors to earn money. I had heard that there was an opening as a news agent on a certain run of the St. Paul Railroad. Just think of it! Big money and free rides, for carrying a basket along the aisle and offering fruit, candy, books and newspapers to the traveling public!

Hoping that the job would still be open, I hustled off to Chicago. It was, and within two days I had jumped from a three-dollar-a-week position to one which frequently netted me that amount in a day. Yes, here I was, not only working on the railroad, but also on the road to big money; and with a chance to see the world, as well—at least that bit of it that lies along the tracks of the St. Paul Railroad. I would soon have a lot of cash, and then my brother Charlie and I would buy some new chairs for the front room and surprise Aunt Carrie.

IN spite of all these advantages, there kept ringing in my ears the admonition of my aunt: "You will never amount to anything if you don't learn a trade." So I gave up my soft life and left the St. Paul Railroad to find another candy peddler, while I got down to the one important business of learning a trade. To do this I secured a job as a printer's apprentice in the office of the *Elgin Daily News*. How well I remember my experiences in the press and composing rooms, and the pranks often played on the innocent young "printer's devil."

At the end of my last run on the railroad I brought home my newsie's cap and basket. I can't recall what happened to the cap, and for many years I didn't know what became of the basket.

At any rate, one December day—I suppose about forty years ago—Mrs. Parker brought out a basket to hold our Christmas cards. "Do you recognize this?" she asked. And then she told me that dear old Auntie had

cherished that basket down through the years and had brought it along when she came to live with us at Boston after our second baby (Paul) was born. "She gave it to me," Mrs. Parker continued, "thinking that I might like to have it as a work basket, and because it was 'a souvenir of Eddie's railroad peddling days.'" For many years now the basket has been brought out just before Christmas, when the greeting cards arrive.

As I stand here at the St. Paul station in Elgin on this fifty-fifth anniversary, I again visualize that basket filled with bananas, oranges and candy and carried by a fourteen-year-old boy who had very few acquaintances and friends. What a contrast to that same basket as it stands on our living-room table year after year, filled with hundreds of Christmas messages and greetings from Salvation Army comrades in all parts of the world! When I return to New York, I decide, I shall take a picture of that overflowing basket and use it as our Christmas card for 1940. How good God has been to me through these fifty-five years!

The old railroad station has changed but little. From here I look

across the Fox River, now spanned by a beautiful new concrete bridge. What happy memories come to my mind—recollections of long-ago summer swimming and winter skating up at Dundee or down at Clintonville! I remember, too, the tragic accident which happened here in April 1881 when an ice jam swept away the old wooden bridge. A temporary ferry boat was built to meet the demands of those who must cross from one side to the other. It was a crude affair, and quite inadequate. On one of its first trips across it met with disaster. It was overloaded with school children, who became panicky with the swaying of the flat, raft-like structure. As a result, the ferry shipped water first from one side and then the other, until it finally plunged beneath the icy waters. Many of my school companions were drowned.

On that fateful morning, I remember, my inherent curiosity prompted me to go down to the river and see just how those cables could propel a boat against the current. I gulped my breakfast hurriedly. There was just time to catch the boat if I ran all the way. As I dashed out of the house, the voice of Aunt Carrie came

through the frosty air, "Eddie, you have not brought in the fire wood."

"But, Auntie, I'll do it after school. I want a ride on the ferry boat."

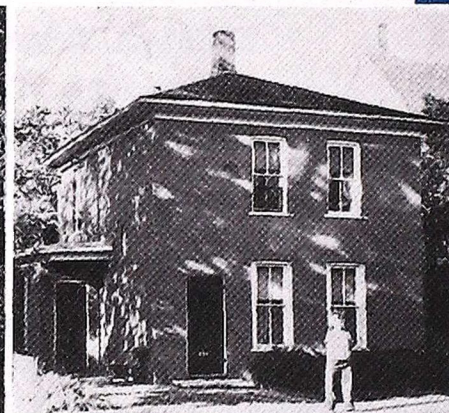
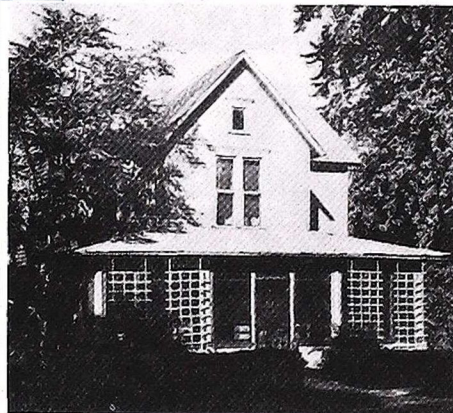
"You'll have plenty of time for that after school. March right back here and do your chores!"

If I had not obeyed the command of the auntie who was forever trying to get me out of one scrape and keep me out of another, I probably would not be sitting here at the railroad station writing this final chapter.



Commissioner and Mrs. E. J. Parker cut cake at celebration of fifty-five years of Army service.

(Left, below) In the front upper room of this house young Parker signed his candidate's forms in 1885.



The house in which Commissioner Parker's mother died.



(Left) A recent photo of the Army's beautiful, modern building in Elgin, Illinois.

Still thinking of the catastrophe of the ferry boat, I stroll across the new bridge. Just ahead is a man whose face seems strangely familiar. Yes; believe it or not, that is the face of Jake Bode, one of my dearest boyhood chums. In our teen-age days we were almost always together. Jake worked in the tin shop at the condensed milk factory while I picked the grass from between the bricks on the front walk. Then, too, it was Jake who started me on my career as a musician by introducing me to the violin teacher mentioned earlier in this story.

How strange and almost unbelievable that after more than half a century I could still remember that face! Well, I did, and I felt perfectly safe in approaching the owner and addressing him with, "Pardon me, but aren't you Mr. Jake Bode?"

He stared and hesitated a moment before replying, "Yes, my name is

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Willow Creek, a spot dear to the remembrance of the author of this story.



Poplar creek, another place that is full of memories for Commissioner Parker.



"The cows still graze in the pastures and wade in the waters of the old creek."