

■ *Guideposts*, a little magazine with a big mission, has brought new hope to thousands.

## POCKET MESSENGER OF FAITH

A single light gleamed in the window of a modest apartment building in Newark, New Jersey. It was 5 a.m. on a sultry July morning two years ago, and most of the city was silent in sleep. The lone inhabitant of Apartment 3-B, however, was awake.

She was sitting at an untidy desk in her combined bedroom and living room. Red rimmed eyes stared out into the night. She had sat like that, motionless, for almost 12 hours — ever since returning from the cemetery.

Nancy had been an only child. Since her husband's death years before, the woman had lived for her lovely daughter. She had worked to pay for schools, had listened tirelessly to recitals of dramatic roles and, finally, had rejoiced when Nancy won a role in a Broadway show. The show would open tomorrow. But without Nancy. For Nancy had been killed two days before in an auto accident.

A breeze rustled the window curtains. The woman looked at her hands, spread before her on the desk. This was the end. Life for her had stopped with Nancy's death. Yet her worn, sorrow-wracked body remained.

The woman walked unsteadily to the medicine cabinet. From it she removed a small bottle marked with skull-and-bones. Back to the desk she carried the poison. Then, overcome by anguished sobs, she buried her face in her arms and wept.

Finally the woman raised her head from the desk. Through tear-blurred eyes, she saw a tiny leaflet framed between her hands. The simple heading, *Guideposts*, stood out vividly. She picked up the little magazine and began to read . . .

Several months later, a letter arrived at a busy editorial office. "I can't begin to express my gratitude," it read. "Your magazine has restored my faith and saved my life . . .

When I read how one of your authors conquered his fear of death, I realized I had to conquer my own fear of living. No, I never drank that bottle of poison. For, thanks to you, dear *Guideposts*, I knew that suicide was not the way God wished me to ease my sorrow.

"I shall always be thankful to *Guideposts*, and to the thoughtful neighbor who sent me that fateful copy when she read of my daughter's death. God bless you!"

What was the powerful little publication responsible for this modern miracle? It is a simply printed, 24-page monthly named *Guideposts*. Since its birth three years ago, the nonprofit, nonsectarian magazine has "performed" countless such miracles and brought new hope and faith to thousands of Americans.

*Guideposts* was born in 1945 in a modest room above a Pawling, New York, grocery store. Its midwife was a stocky, exuberant businessman named Raymond Thornburg. "Pinky" Thornburg, president of the Pawling Rubber Corporation, was a deeply religious man, who viewed with concern the increasing

neglect of Christianity by millions to whom it could bring happiness. Too few Americans, he feared, knew how to practice day-by-day religion. And too many were drifting away from churches and forgetting the power of prayer.

The solution, Thornburg decided, was to explain religion in terms of personal experience. Non believers, he knew, demand concrete examples before accepting such a hard-to-prove doctrine as faith. As a successful businessman, "Pinky" Thornburg also felt that religion could well adopt modern advertising techniques to spread its spiritual lessons.

So Thornburg enlisted a group of friends as sponsors of a new educational project. Such prominent individuals as Lowell Thomas, Eddie Rickenbacker, Branch Rickey and Stanley Kresge were among *Guideposts* founders.

The magazine would be just what its name implied — guideposts to a workable pattern of living. Each issue would contain articles by great men and women who would explain how — through applying religious principles — they had discovered the

secret of overcoming fear, tension and failure. Moreover, the majority of these articles would not be written by ministers and professional Christians, but by persons whose lives already were examples to large numbers of people. Also, authors would include Protestants, Catholics and Jews.

With Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, popular New York clergyman, as editor, and Thornburg as publisher, the first issue of *Guideposts* was tapped out with a borrowed typewriter on a card-table desk. Although its \$2,000 budget barely covered initial costs, the ambitious little magazine finally rolled off the presses.

At once *Guideposts* was warmly welcomed in hundreds of homes. Within weeks, circulation zoomed into the thousands. And *Guideposts'* editors, encouraged by the response, sought out more prominent figures from whom they solicited manuscripts. Famous men and women whose writings could command four-figure sums generously wrote special articles without payment.

Rickenbacker wrote an inspiring recital of the per-

sonal crises in which prayer had helped him to overcome obstacles. William Green, AFL president, told how religion had aided him in his hard fight to improve workers' conditions and wages. Producer Cecil B. de Mille related a boyhood experience which convinced him of the power of faith. Gene Tunney recalled how prayer eased his mind and erased fear when he fought Jack Dempsey to win the world's heavyweight championship.

One by one, other well-known persons — such as Dale Carnegie, Joe E. Brown, Gil Dodds, J. Edgar Hoover, Faith Baldwin, Cardinal Spellman, Gov. Thomas E. Dewey, Mary Pickford, Louis Bromfield and scores of others — joined the impressive roster of *Guideposts* authors. Soon, word of the impact created by these articles began to filter into *Guideposts'* offices.

For three years, a California widow had been paralyzed from the waist down. Helpless and discouraged, she relied on her son for support. Her life was imprisoned in her wheel chair. Then she read a *Guideposts* article by Harold Russell, the veteran who lost both hands but still

won acclaim in the motion picture, *The Best Years of Our Lives*.

The story had a profound effect on her. If Russell could be happy without hands, she told herself, she could be happy without legs. The woman promptly opened a magazine subscription agency; and her son, released from responsibility for his mother, was able to marry.

After reading a *Guideposts* article, "You Can Get Fear Out of Your Mind," a Delaware housewife was able to undergo calmly a major operation of which she had been terrified. She even joked with the surgeon, she confided joyfully.

After an article by Len LeSourd, called "I Speak for the Bums," was published in *Guideposts*, an elderly and wealthy woman in San Antonio, Texas, wrote to say that she wanted to set up a mission in her home for down-and-outers. LeSourd who had spent a month in the Bowery disguised as a bum to collect material for his article, obliged with suggestions. A friendly correspondence developed between the two. Then occurred

what may only be termed a modern miracle.

On March 23, 1949, LeSourd and *Guideposts*' managing director met in New York with a Park Avenue matron to discuss how to raise money for new projects. "If we are on the right road," the woman remarked, "the money will come to us. We won't have to go after it."

On March 23 — the same day — in San Antonio, the rich Texas woman made out her will. In it she provided that the bulk of her estate, including three huge houses, should go to *Guideposts*. Fifteen days later, on April 7, the woman died.

Along with such dramatic stories are scores of examples of readers who assume personal responsibility for widening *Guideposts* horizons. For almost a year, at three-month intervals, a salesman in Seattle, Washington, ordered 200 copies of the Rickenbacker article. When the curious editors finally inquired how he used them, the man explained that he was impressed by Rickenbacker's declaration of faith and wanted it to inspire others as it had him. So, every three months, he takes a bundle of copies

and slips them under doors of Seattle homes.

A Kansas City merchant always keeps a stack of *Guideposts* on his desk for visitors. Recently he complained to the editors that "while waiting for me to finish phone conversations, salesmen pick up *Guideposts* and then I have a hard time getting them to talk business."

Other subscriptions send in names of people they think "need" the spiritual messages published in the little magazine. Often they ask to remain anonymous, leading *Guideposts* editors to suspect that the new "subscribers" might not be pleased to know someone thought they "needed help." Still other readers radiate an almost-crusading zeal by asking for copies to leave in streetcars, buses, taxis and in waiting rooms and offices.

Despite its widespread influence, *Guideposts* is still a small, unassuming organization, operating on a modest budget from a sprawling converted mansion atop Pawling's Quaker Hill. It occupied the old gabled house after a former home burned to the ground in 1947. At that time *Guideposts*' circulation num-

bered 30,000. But the entire list of readers went up in smoke. Lowell Thomas promptly broadcast an appeal for help, and within a few months 70 per cent of all subscribers had been reinstated. Today, more than 100,000 persons in every state and 28 foreign countries eagerly pay \$1.50 for 12 issues a year.

Typical of *Guideposts*' personnel is its managing director, Frederic Decker, who left a \$15,000-a-year advertising job to join the staff at a third his former salary. Like Decker, *Guideposts*' editors are competent craftsmen who frequently refuse flattering offers from other publications.

Associate Editor LeSourd, for instance, surprised Louis Bromfield by turning down an invitation to become his manager and tour the world with him. The managing editor is Grace Perkins Oursler. Author of 14 books, nine movies and dozens of magazine articles, she turned her back on a profitable career to write for *Guideposts*.

Encouraged by the warmth and sincerity reflected in *Guideposts* articles, many subscribers appeal to the

editorial staff for help in solving personal problems. One subscriber wrote from an Ohio sanitarium, enclosing a photograph of himself in a wheel chair. Could *Guideposts* help him to get a self-supporting job addressing envelopes or typing?

An editor consulted the Ohio circulation file and pulled out the card of a prominent mining company official who had donated to *Guideposts*. He wrote the executive, enclosing the invalid's letter. A few weeks later the man in the wheel chair penned a touching note of thanks. He had a new job, new hope and new faith — thanks to *Guideposts*.

In addition to thousands of individual subscribers, several hundred firms and organizations place bulk orders for the 5-by-7 1/4-inch magazine. The R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, for example, purchases 12,000 copies monthly for distribution to employees and for placement in recreation centers. Likewise, the battery division of the Thomas A. Edison Company, Inc., buys 1,500 *Guideposts* a month. The J. C. Penney Company orders 2,000; the Bibb Manu-

facturing Company of Macon, Georgia, 1,400; and the Island Creek Coal Company of Huntington, West Virginia, 2,700.

Not content with subscribing for thousands of copies, many businessmen-readers have mobilized other executives to relay the *Guideposts* message. John C. Whitaker, vice-president of the Reynolds Tobacco Company, recently told 500 merchants in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, about *Guideposts*. An Atlanta luncheon several months ago was attended by outstanding business and civic leaders who heard William N. Banks, president of Grantville Mills, tell the story of *Guideposts* and enlist support for its work.

Labor unions, too, endorse *Guideposts'* program of practical religion and take subscriptions for members. Likewise the Veterans Administration is well aware of the spiritual boost *Guideposts* can give hospitalized ex-servicemen. The Salvation Army passes out 200 copies monthly. Bible classes in dozens of states use *Guideposts* for inspirational matter, and Bucknell University distributes at least 300 copies of

every issue to its students.

Such wide distribution of their little magazine has convinced the *Guideposts* staff that more and more people are learning how faith can be made to live for all men.

For proof, the editors can point to the ever-growing volume of personal mail that comes to their Pawling offices every month. — *By Ralph H. Major in Coronet of November, 1949.*