

In Pursuit of Success

By Sheila Luck

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Finish high school, get a good education, find a job and make lots of money, then you'll be successful. Success. Wealth. Happiness. That is the American dream. But what is true success, true wealth?

I grew up near a little town called Scandinavia, which had a population then of 268. We lived four miles out of town on a farm established by my great-grandfather in 1903. He built the farmhouse around 1917. It was a two-story, white brick home with four bedrooms, a sewing room or nursery, a kitchen, a walk-in pantry, a dining room with a built-in china cabinet, a living room, a washroom (now probably known as the laundry room), a full basement with rock walls and a concrete floor, and a woodshed.

The woodshed was an unfinished and unheated room just off of the washroom. It had a door leading to the back yard and from it you would go into the basement. We had all of the usual electric appliances and a furnace that burned fuel oil, so we didn't really keep wood in the woodshed. But someone probably needed wood for a wood stove or furnace at one time. Thus, it got its name.

I remember thinking, as a child, that we were the wealthiest people in town. We certainly, in my heart and mind, had the best house ever built. It didn't matter that I got only three new dresses at the beginning of the school year as my new wardrobe for school. I never thought we were missing anything when we brought out the box of old swimsuits, summer after summer, and searched for the one that was the closest fit. The joy was in the swimming, not in the swimsuit. I was thrilled when I got a new coat, even if it was a couple sizes too big so that I would be able to wear it for at least two or three

winters. Santa Claus always seemed quite generous, giving us perhaps some new pajamas, a pair of slippers, and other clothes that needed replacing, along with a game, doll or other toy.

I was certain that our family was rich.

We were happy, but not because of the things that we had. We were happy because of the love within our family, our friends and neighbors, and the beauty of the land that surrounded us. God had blessed our family in many ways. My mother and all my siblings have very fond memories of that farmhouse, memories of a happy simpler time, and memories of a solid family time.

There were also extremely serious times of deep sadness and strife during our lives in that farmhouse. My oldest sister died of cancer just five days after her thirteenth birthday. During much of her illness, I had an unexplained, blood problem, an extremely low platelet count. My parents had many reasons to worry, ultimately facing heartbreak with the death of my sister. Then just six years later, my father died when a blood clot moved into his heart. Our lives as we knew them were shattered.

It was during the times of family pain and sorrow, that the value of our extended families and many friends in the community was truly appreciated. It was during these times that the strength and comfort of our Lord was desperately needed, and he never let us down. He was with us along each painful step.

Wealth? I know now that our house wasn't the best in town and that others had more possessions or more money. Maybe it is the strength of God's love, along with the strength of our family ties and community friendships that we remember most fondly when we think about that old farm. My mother and family re-purchased the old farm a

few months ago. Maybe we hope to recreate those times of love, feelings of family security, and close community ties.

The author of Ecclesiastes tells us of the great wealth that he had acquired, including herds, flocks, slaves, and gold and silver. But, upon reflection, he concluded, "Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 2:11, NIV) Jesus tells us to "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15, NIV) And the Apostle Paul said, "But godliness with contentment is great gain." (1 Timothy 6:6, NIV)

Success ? Wealth? We had it all along, as children on the farm.