

## LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

# 289

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal with a famous woman from a previous generation. Her stage name was Annie Oakley. She was a remarkable marksman who was the subject of several books and movies. The first movie about her life came out in 1935. Later the musical "Annie Get Your Gun" premiered in 1947. That musical was also made into a movie in 1950. Then that movie was remade in 1957. Her life also inspired a TV series that ran from 1954 – 1957. The reason I want to tell you about her is that she was a devout Christian who set a good example for us all. Of particular interest is the fact that she paid for the care and education of at least 18 orphans. This is of special significance to God for: **"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world"** (Ja. 1:27).

Annie was born Aug. 13, 1860 in Darke County, Ohio. Her original name was Phoebe Anne Moses. She was the sixth of eight children born into incredible hardship and poverty. Her father died when she was only six years old. They had to mortgage the family farm to pay his medical and funeral expenses.

A couple of years later, in order to help feed the family, Annie took her father's Kentucky rifle down from the mantel, balanced it on the banister of their porch, and shot a squirrel's head off. She was only eight years old. Unfortunately she had loaded the gun with so much powder that she suffered a black eye and broken nose from the experience. She never regretted it, however, for the family now had something to eat. Even though she was only a child, Annie became a professional hunter. She was so successful that she not only fed her family, but also sold enough wild game to hotels and restaurants to pay off the mortgage on the family farm. At the tender age of ten she boasted "I never had a nickel in my pocket I didn't earn".

Since Annie couldn't read or write her mother sent her to Cincinnati to live with her sister Lydia. There she went to school and became literate. One day while demonstrating her shooting skills at a local shooting gallery, someone recognized her talent and asked if she would like to make some money with her marksmanship. He arranged a shooting match with a traveling vaudeville marksman named Frank Butler. The purse was \$100 which was more than a year's wages for many. Annie was only 15 years old at the time. Further, she was only 5 feet tall, and weighed a mere 100 lbs. Frank was totally taken off guard when he saw his opponent. Remarkably, she not only won the contest, but also Frank's heart. Later they would be married and travel as a team demonstrating their shooting skills. That's when she took the stage name of Annie Oakley.

Soon Annie was recruited by the Sells Brothers Circus where she shot targets tossed into the air while riding on the back of a galloping horse. In 1884 she was hired by the Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. For her routine she wore simple handmade western costumes and again shot glass balls thrown into the air while riding on the back of a galloping horse. She could even hit two targets at the same time with a gun in each hand. Her routine ended by shooting the hat off of her husband's head. Chief Sitting Bull was so enamored by her skills that he adopted her as his daughter and even willed his belongings to her.

The Wild West Show was so popular that in 1887 Queen Victoria requested that they come to London and perform at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her reign. At the performance, Grand Duke Michael of Russia challenged Annie to a shooting match which she easily won. Prince Edward presented her with a medal of victory and English newspapers called her "Annie Oakley of the magic gun," Thousands of

people saw her cut a playing card in two with a single shot. She would face the thin edge of the card at 30 paces and hit it every time. Kaiser Wilhelm II had her shoot a cigarette out of his lips. She became the darling of Europe and on a single day shot 4,772 out of 5,000 glass balls tossed into the air.

Annie was described as a religious “fundamentalist” who was Puritanical in her devotion to Christ. Consequently she was never involved in a scandal and throughout her life was constantly concerned for the welfare of others. As we mentioned, she provided for the care and education of at least 18 orphans. She and her husband lived frugally so that they might share their wealth with others. Near the end of her life she melted down all of her gold medals, sold the gold, and donated the money to a children’s home. Typical of her selflessness, her grand niece said she spent the last days of her life wrapping gifts which she sent to her many friends around the world.

Annie passed away Nov. 3, 1926. Her husband Frank died 18 days later.

On earth her shooting skills made her famous and hardly anyone knows of her Christian faith or her care for orphans. In heaven the reverse is true. In heaven Annie is famous for her Christian faith and taking care of orphans and hardly anyone knows or cares about her shooting skills. In the eyes of God pure religion is not about making money and becoming famous, it is about caring for the “least of these” like widows and orphans. May Annie Oakley’s godly life be an inspiration to us all.

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce