

# When a Leg Saved a Life

Willie Rugh, a crippled Chicago newsboy, lived in a suburb of Gary, Ind. He died in the fall of 1912 as a result of having his lame leg amputated to provide skin for the burned body of Ethel Smith, a girl whom he hardly knew.

The skin graft was successful, and the young girl was discharged from the hospital.

The anesthetic given to Willie before the operation was too much for his weak lungs and pneumonia developed. When the doctor told him he could not recover, Willie smiled and said weakly: "I'm glad I have done it, doctor. Tell her for me I hope she gets well real quick."

As the end neared, his foster mother knelt by his bed and buried her face in the edge of his pillow. Willie reached out a weak hand and stroked her hair. "Don't cry, Mammy," he begged. "I never 'mounted to nothin' before, and now you know I've done somethin' for somebody. I guess I'm some good after all."

Newspapers far and near published the story. The city of Gary went into mourning. Public offices were closed, and business stopped.

A band and a cordon of police led the funeral procession as Willie's body was carried to rest.

People contributed large sums of money to erect a monument to this courageous youngster. In a proclamation, the mayor of Gary said: "The name of Willie Rugh should be remembered in Gary as long as the city shall last."

Some people feel they are good for nothing because their physical condition or appearance may not be all they could wish for. But no matter what our condition, we are good for something.

*Something* is what God has in mind for us, because He has a plan for each of us.

And whatever it may be, serving others is at the top of the list.

We may not allow a leg to be amputated to save the life of another person, as Willie did. But there are sacrifices of our time, our energies, and our talents – given in love and compassion – that change and brighten the worlds of those in our care.

– Beecher Hunter