

Elias Kline changed a few things in his life soon after leaving Mills Bluff. To be on the safe side, as he feared the Sauers would send someone after him to snatch his son, he began to use the name Ezra King. It sounded more American, hinting less of his parents' immigrant status.

The second change he made concerned Frank. He gladly rechristened his son, calling him Buddy King. The boy loved traveling with his father and chattered happily about what he saw as Elias followed the trail from Indiana to Missouri. The new name merely seemed like another part of the adventure. He repeatedly answered to it and could parrot back his new first and last name each time Elias asked him to do so.

Within fifty miles of reaching St. Joseph, he began asking if anyone needed a temporary blacksmith. God opened a door for him in Stewartville. There he met Robbie McDougal who ran a livery and smithy. The man welcomed him with slightly damaged open arms. He pointed to the splinted wrist and told of breaking it a few days before. "Weren't sure what to do, but the Lord above seems to have solved my problem for me."

The man provided a room in his home for Elias and his son. Mrs. McDougal fed them and even did their laundry. It was no stretch to say that they treated him as one of the family to show their appreciation for his work.

While he worked, Mrs. McDougal even watched his son. Part of the day, though, Elias took Buddy with him. He wanted the boy to see him work the forge or care for the horses. It was part of how he would learn to do those things for himself one day.

Working at the smithy, he remembered the day two weeks before that he'd determined to send for a bride. By now the letter would be in the hands of the matchmaker. Surely he'd get a telegram or letter in the mail next week. Would it read that his request was impossible or, God willing, would he learn the name of the woman who would marry him? Thinking about it brought back the memory of the day he wrote the letter.

Buddy had sat on an overturned bucket with a worried frown on his face, watching his father comb burrs from a horse's tail. The little boy's brown curls stuck damply to his forehead from the hot July air.

When he didn't do his usual ceaseless chatter, his father had stopped combing the tail and wiped his sweating forehead with his sleeve. Then he'd prodded the boy. "What's going on in that head of yours? Seems you're deep in thought over there."

Frown still in place, Buddy met his father's gaze. "Do you think Mrs. McDougal would let me call her ma?" Once he asked that question, the boy stuck his thumb in his mouth, reminding Elias of how young the boy was.

At that moment, Elias knew he couldn't put off writing the letter. Even in Mills Bluff, he recognized that he and Buddy would need a woman in their lives. Well, this proved it.