

## A Night to Remember

James Nelson Ervin (1895–1938), pioneer administrator of Jarvis Christian College in Hawkins, Texas, has seen his share of conflict in working with this East Texas school. The white citizens of Hawkins did not welcome the idea of the mostly black school.

When President Ervin persuaded the highway department to build the new U.S. Highway 80 along a route that passed by the school, instead of along another route favored by some townspeople, the community's anger grew.

A local man who was particularly upset with Mr. Ervin about this issue confronted the college president. The angry man stopped Mr. Ervin on a dark street and raised a gun to the black man's head. "Hold it right there, Ervin," the man shouted. "You even bat an eye, and I'll blow your head off."

The two men stood motionless in the street for what seemed an eternity. President Ervin was so scared he could hardly breathe. Finally, the man slowly lowered his gun. "I ought to kill you," he said, "but you can go."

One evening, several years later, Mr. Ervin recalled that incident. When he opened his door, two young men stood on his porch in the dark. The sons of the same white man who had terrorized and threatened to kill Mr. Ervin had come to beg his help for their father.

"Mr. Ervin, you've got to help us," they pleaded. "Our daddy's real sick and may die. He needs to get to the hospital fast. But the train that could take him to Dallas doesn't stop in Hawkins. The railroad agent said the only person in town who might get it to stop is you. Our daddy needs your help. Will you please try to get the train to stop for him?"

The small town of Hawkins was not on the railroad's scheduled stop for the passenger train that sped to Dallas each day.

President Ervin listened sympathetically to the plea. His painful memory of his last meeting with this family faded as the urgency of the situation and the anguish of the young men gripped him. "Gentlemen," he said, "I do not know if I can get that train to stop, but I'll try."

He excused himself and went back into his house to pray. After several minutes, he telephoned a railroad official. On the strength of his request, the passenger train to Dallas made an unscheduled stop in Hawkins, Texas, that night—directly in front of Jarvis Christian College, and right next to U.S. Highway 80.

The gravely ill man made it to the hospital on time. He made a complete recovery. He recognized that the prayers and concern expressed by James Ervin saved his life. Mr. Ervin's compassion and forgiveness helped the man overcome his prejudice and hatred toward Mr. Ervin and Jarvis Christian College. Because James Ervin was able to express his faith in his actions toward the man, Jarvis Christian College gained a friend and supporter.