

## CHAPTER TWELVE

~12~

**Thou shalt not kill** was the commandment Tom had planned to preach on for Sunday. He knew that the fifteenth century protestant reformers had changed the word from murder to kill. Murder was a better word to use; especially in Africa where over 6500 Nigerians are killed on two and three wheeled vehicle's each year. To preach that thousands of Nigerians are murdered by an Okada's or Keke's would not be an accurate narrative. Rather it was the fifth or sixth commandment; Tom was in agreement with his wife's catholic catechism. It stated that **Thou shalt not murder** was the intentional act of an unlawful slaying — not death by an accident or war. Her catechism also stated that killing under limited circumstances may be justified.

At this time it really didn't matter, Tom wouldn't make it back to Lagos Sunday morning to preach. In addition, after the adulterous act with his niece he'd probably have to step down from head pastor. The road trip to the Glory and Praise girls' school was a good break to discern the ending of a twenty plus year marriage. Their interfaith bond had never been solid from the beginning. A sabbatical from pastor duties and preaching was long overdue. Maybe a teaching position at the outreach school was in God's plan?

Back in the states the church elders had discussed starting a student exchange program with the Glory and Praise private school in Los Angeles. One of Tom's agenda items was to check out the school in Zangam Village and then put together a report. Maybe what had just happened was somehow in the master plan? Tina had briefly mentioned something about recruiting African girls for part time acting and modeling positions — LA would be an ideal place.

Tom visualized the fundraising potential. Videos of barefoot African girls walking on dirt roads carrying strapped together books would be irresistible go-fund-me and click-bait. Maybe fade to some lions lurking in the bush and then a close up of their books, making sure to focus

35 on a Bible. Tina had that Jane Goodall look; the perfect face for  
36 posters and commercials. Tom had always been able to turn adversity  
37 into a positive; a few of the church leaders considered him sketchy.  
38 But, Tom always overfilled the collection basket, so he was left alone  
39 when it came to fundraising.

40 The drive to the northeast part of Plateau state, Nigeria, put him  
41 about equal distance from the Benin and Niger borders; two countries  
42 that he did not have a passport to enter. He last fueled up in Jos, also  
43 called J-town; the gas gauge was now less than an eighth tank.

44 The Zangam village was tucked into a remote valley along the  
45 Gongola River at an elevation of more than 2000 feet. The basin is  
46 used as grazing ground for cattle, goats, sheep, horses, and donkeys.  
47 The Fulani herdsman are nomadic and considered illegal aliens. Fulani  
48 pastoralists started migrating into north central Nigeria around the  
49 thirteenth or fourteenth century, to date they are still not considered  
50 an indigenous tribe in West Africa. If it were not for the fact that the  
51 Fulani people supplied most all of the beef and milk to Abuja; the  
52 capital of Nigeria, they would have been eradicated centuries ago.

53 The Zangam village looked like a ghost town; it had the feel of  
54 malevolence. There were some chickens pecking at corn that had been  
55 spread out in a side alley. At the end of the alley silhouetted by the  
56 fading daylight a lone herdsman was walking behind about half a  
57 dozen white cows with engorged utters. Being from Texas Tom knew  
58 dairy cows should be milked two or three times a day, their milking  
59 schedule wasn't his concern. Toms kept driving around looking for a  
60 fuel filling station and a place to get some dinner. There was an eerie  
61 specter feel like he was being watched. Tom needed to quit wasting  
62 fuel or else he'd be stuck in the middle of no place.

63 On the outskirts of town a cinder block building with a corrugated  
64 metal roof resembled more of a barn than a school. Behind the one  
65 room building were two out buildings; one was an outhouse and the  
66 other was a storage shed that looked like its heavy door had been  
67 broken thru with an ax. Tom creped by and then parked in a clump of  
68 trees at the far end of a play field. He tapped at the gas gauge it didn't  
69 help; the needle was almost touching the **E**. Tom shut off the

70 motorhome and got out. The outside air was brisk and dry. He peed  
71 while he checked the display on his phone — **NO SERVICE**.

72 Planted in the center of a dirt and grass field was a make shift flag  
73 pole with a black flag. Tom got about twenty yards into the playground  
74 area when a snake hissed and then slithered off from a day long  
75 warmed up flat rock. A cold chill shot down his spine. Tom high  
76 stepped backwards out of the field, if there was one snake there were  
77 more.

78 Back inside the motorhome Tom found binoculars and then peered  
79 from the open backdoor. The flagpole was nothing more than branch  
80 off a tree. There was white Arabic script across the top of black  
81 material; in the center was a white filled in circle indicating the world.  
82 *No God but God will again rule over the darkness of the world* was  
83 Tom's rough understanding of the ISIS flag. He was not aware that the  
84 Islamic State had a presence in or around this part of the Nigeria.  
85 Glory and Praise headquarters had a verbal agreement with the  
86 governor of Plateau State that religion; especially Old Testament  
87 scripture would not be taught at the outreach school. With over forty  
88 different ethnic tribes in this part of Nigeria evangelizing was  
89 discouraged.

90 Tom found some soda crackers, opened a can of sardines and  
91 boiled water to make rice for dinner. He checked his phone again; **NO**  
92 **SERVICE**. An eerie darkness settled in over the school grounds, any  
93 after dinner investigating would have to wait until daylight. Tom didn't  
94 last but ten minutes on the foldout memory foam mattress. The 357  
95 revolver was slipped under Beth's pillow; it was a big bulky weapon  
96 more about intimation than concealment.

97 Early Sunday mornings was the time that Tom would have a cup of  
98 coffee and look over his discourse for the 9:00 am service. There  
99 would be no preaching on this Sunday.

100 While making coffee and looking out a side window Tom observed  
101 a lone woman hanging large colorful sheets on a clothesline. He slid  
102 the window open and yelled, but went unnoticed. Out the opposing  
103 side window were three small round shaped homes, two had burned or  
104 at least the roofs had been set on fire. There was an old transport

105 truck off to the side that had been completely burned. It looked like  
106 the old army supply truck he'd seen a couple of times in Lagos at his  
107 church — something was awry!

108 Tom retrieved the 357 revolver from under the pillow, opened the  
109 side door and shot one round into the air. The long limbed woman  
110 didn't even look back. In one swoop of her lanky arms she pulled the  
111 three African burial cloths from the clothesline and dashed into the  
112 trees. Tom sensed her fear. The fact that he didn't have enough fuel to  
113 get out of town made him nervous. He checked for cell phone service  
114 on his phone and the burner phone; both displayed **NO SERVICE**.

115 Thru the binoculars he could see a few dim incandesce lights far  
116 down the road. *Those lights must be the center of town. I'll hike down*  
117 *there to see if they have internet service or a landline. Then I'll call*  
118 *Tina and tell her to put a sign on the church that there is no church*  
119 *service today. I'll call Beth later, it's after midnight in Texas.*

120 Tom dressed into his hunting gear and tucked the camo pants into  
121 his high top boots, in case of snakes. He replaced the one spent round  
122 into the chamber of the 357 Peacemaker and strapped on the leather  
123 holster. At the first house he came to; there was no answer, same  
124 thing at the second and third home. Before he knocked at the fourth  
125 house he first put his ear to the door and could hear a baby crying.  
126 When he knocked there was running sounds behind the door and then  
127 the crying ceased to a muffled whimpering baby struggling to breathe.  
128 Tom tried opening the door and someone on the other side pushed the  
129 door closed. "Go away! Go away! No girls in here."

130 When Tom heard the distressed baby again he pulled the gun and  
131 shot one round into the dirt. Thru the door he heard multiple  
132 footsteps, pattering feet and then silence. He jolted the door with his  
133 shoulder, in the dim morning light his eyes locked on a women breast  
134 feeding a child. She pulled down the front of a cloth diaper. "See my  
135 baby is boy not girl." The rear screen door slapped shut; Tom saw  
136 three children holding hands running into the woods.

137 Tom shoved the large stainless steel revolver back into the holster.  
138 A pair of dark blinking eyes looked up and around then went back to

139 suckling. "I need fuel and food," Tom said as he looked around the  
140 kitchen.

141 "Our village is short on supplies since the rebels attacked us." The  
142 women used her finger to break the hold the baby had on her nipple  
143 and then turn him to feed on the other side. Her milk supply was low,  
144 mainly from anxiety that the village was under.

145 "Don't shoot again! You have frightened everyone," a hoarse voice  
146 at the front door ordered.

147 Paul turned around. "I heard the baby whimpering thru the door. I  
148 thought something bad was happening. It was a warning shot."

149 "Side arms aren't allowed in Plateau State." The village elder  
150 stepped inside and leaned a top weighted club against the wall.

151 "I need to get something to eat and some diesel fuel." Tom said in  
152 a demanding tone.

153 "So would those children that you frightened into the woods." In  
154 the dim room light it was hard to make out features on the well  
155 seasoned thin face. The few brown teeth left an impression of age and  
156 a hard life.

157 Tom went into the kitchen and looked out thru the tattered screen  
158 door. "Are any of those kids enrolled at the outreached school?"

159 The old man moved to between the front room and kitchen. "Are  
160 you the new priest?"

161 "I'm not a priest. I'm the new Pastor for Glory and Praise Ministries  
162 in Lagos."

163 "Can you do an obsequies service so we can bury our dead?"

164 The old man pushed open the screen door and then led Tom out to  
165 the backyard and then around the perimeter of the small house to the  
166 dirt road. Tom kept looking down making sure not to step in a pile of  
167 cow manure or on a snake. He hoped the worn man was taking him  
168 someplace to get breakfast. They started walking back toward the  
169 school. A teenage boy came running after them with the old man's  
170 Rungu stick that was now used more for as cane than a club.

171 Slowly out of the brush and from several homes Fulani villagers  
172 with farming tools and some with planks of wood fell in behind. One  
173 man with a long gun strapped across his chest hurried to the front of

174 the mob. The rusty Russian AK47 didn't have a clip/magazine in it.  
175 Tom surmised that he couldn't be shot, unless somehow one round  
176 was chambered. Oddly, it didn't feel like he was in danger nor  
177 surrounded by an angry mob; it felt more like he was leading a  
178 procession.

179 For this remote Fulani village a white man in military camo with a  
180 big gun on his side was somewhat of a spiritual sign. The American  
181 flag on Tom's left shoulder with the Special Forces blue and yellow  
182 bars with a Ranger patch below were signs that a Peacekeeper had  
183 finally arrived. Tom was ex-military but never got deployed to the  
184 frontline; his calling was to help make peace thru words.

185 As the crowd grew so did the native Hausa singing. One of the  
186 elders unlocked the door of the school and Tom went inside. There was  
187 a pungent smell of burnt incense; white sheets were draped over three  
188 corpses. The door was pulled shut and latched. The low beating of a  
189 drum turned the Hausa singing more into a chant. Tom went to one of  
190 the small screened side windows and at the far end of the field a group  
191 of men were using shovels, picks and other tools to dig and build with.

192 Within a few minutes Tom could tell graves were being dug and  
193 wooden coffins built. He moved out of site from the window and to the  
194 center of the room. There was a pile of palm branches and a wok  
195 shaped metal vessel with orange embers still glowing. Tom added  
196 some more palms branches and then pulled back one of the white  
197 sheets. His heart felt heavy as he gazed down on the pure innocence  
198 of a young girl. Her hair and body had been washed and there was  
199 some blood that had seeped thru the white gauze that was been  
200 wrapped around her neck. Tom fell to his knees and prayed over the  
201 child.

202 The Hausa music and singing carried a comfort that assisted Tom  
203 as he observed each girl. All three had gauze wrapped around their slit  
204 throats; they had bled out, like cattle slaughtered at market. Tom  
205 reflected back on his darkest day, when Beth delivered a still born  
206 child. The absolute not knowing what to do or how to react was  
207 overwhelming. They had left their lifeless baby at the hospital, without  
208 a funeral — worse yet without a name.

209           As Tom meditated over the bodies he weaved three crosses from  
210 palm branches and placed the iconic Christian symbols on each girl's  
211 stomach. Then he used his thumb to swipe ashes from the incense  
212 bowl and made a cross on each child's forehead. When he pulled the  
213 sheets back over each angelic face there was a feeling of respect for  
214 the dead and a gift of the Holy Spirit.

215           It was close to noon by the time Tom meditated the Joyful,  
216 Luminous, Sorrowful and Glorious mysteries of the New Testament.  
217 The passing of the innocence by a tragic end is the last mystery —  
218 Grace of final perseverance is a gift from God. Afterlife versus atheism  
219 wouldn't be a debate here, since both Muslims and Christians believe  
220 in heaven and or the abyss.

221           When he pushed open the door grey incense smoke rolled out like  
222 dew fog and floated among the people. A group of seasoned villager's  
223 entered the one room school building. Tom's pastoral service wasn't  
224 finished; he meandered past the three freshly dug graves to the  
225 motorhome and retrieved a bible. More people were coming up the  
226 road; some came out from the brush and trees. The singing intensified  
227 as the town's people swayed side to side and waited. Each girl had  
228 been laid on a wood plank and a striking African burial cloth draped  
229 over each of them.

230           Tom stood firm and prepared to recite, *"By the sweat of your brow*  
231 *you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you*  
232 *were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."* This  
233 passage from Genesis he had used many times back home at funerals,  
234 but now, it just didn't feel right. He watched as the bodies were  
235 lowered with ropes into the earth. The bright colors and montage of  
236 African patterns now six feet down left him without words. The singing  
237 turned to a low hum and the procession line had spread circling the  
238 three graves. Tom raised the Bible over his head and then looked into  
239 the waning crowd.

240           Tom swallowed hard and lowered the bible. "Before I formed you in  
241 the womb, I knew you and have called you by your name," were the  
242 words to come out of his mouth.

243           Several "Amen's" came from the crowd.

244 Tom continued, "The names of these three children I do not know.  
245 But God knew their names before he formed them in the womb. Why  
246 God calls some of his children home is not explained by a horrific  
247 death such like the Crucifixion. Why God did not spare his own son  
248 Jesus, from unfathomable pain seems unfair and unbelievable. But  
249 when you look at the Glorious Mystery your heart should feel lifted by  
250 the witnessing of the Resurrection.

251 Tom's part was done and during the celebration of life piece the  
252 seasoned Fulani pastoralists added five gallons of light stove oil into  
253 the Mercedes Sprinter. He then used his runga stick/cane to draw  
254 directions into the dirt road. The back road would save about a  
255 hundred miles off getting Tom back to J-town, plus it was rarely  
256 traveled by hoodlums or rebels. The elder warned Tom about the  
257 section of road that was booby trapped.

258 The village patriarch shared about the schools girls being knelt  
259 down, blindfolded and told to denounce Jesus. The three that didn't  
260 denounce Jesus as their savior had their throats slit to prove a point  
261 and instill fear.

262 In a what-the-hell daze Tom surveyed around the grounds. A fire  
263 had been set against the side wall of the school, miraculously the  
264 flames didn't spread; the supply building didn't fare as well. All the  
265 supplies and food had been looted before the fire turned the small  
266 storage building into a pile of ash. There was a pile of books, some  
267 wall charts, a globe, the Periodic Table of Elements all heaped together  
268 that had been set on fire but miraculously self-extinguished. This  
269 rouge group of Boko Haram soldiers got their point across — girls  
270 should never be educated by western teachers.

271 Appalled with what he saw he still needed to make J-town before  
272 dark. "Should I call the Nigerian Police when I get phone service?"

273 "No don't do that!" The old man looked up from the map he had  
274 scribed into the dirt. "This northeastern section of Nigeria has been  
275 under siege by a volatile mix of Sharia Law and Tribal customs since  
276 before our independence from the British in 1960."

277 "You still have to report the murder of three girls to someone."  
278 Tom sensed he was sticking his nose somewhere he shouldn't.



279 "The solution for the Nigerian government for this type of tribal  
280 fighting would be to come into our small village and bulldoze  
281 everything. We are nomadic herdsman. There are only few places left  
282 to move. We are like the Native Indians in your country. No land to  
283 call our own."

284 Out of the corner of his eye Tom saw a tall Fulani woman walking  
285 toward them. In her right hand she had the cross that Tom had  
286 weaved out of a palm branch. In the other a colorful, triangular shaped  
287 head scarf.

288 She stood toe to toe and eye to eye with Tom. "My daughter's  
289 name was Cecelia, we called her Cece. Please take her Gele; she  
290 always wore it in church." Tom took the Gele and then the lanky  
291 woman wrapped her arm around Tom and whispered, Thank you for  
292 the words you spoke. I now know that Cecelia is with her savior,  
293 Jesus. I'm so proud of Cece.

294 \* \* \*

295  
296 This road trip north, up to Zangam village was what Tom had  
297 hoped would help to sort out his personal life. That didn't happen; his  
298 faith had been stretched to a point of no return. Now traveling south  
299 back toward Lagos he had to worry about running out of fuel. And  
300 then, there were the buried steel rebar with sharpened tips that could  
301 puncture tires on military equipment. Breaking down on this not well  
302 traveled dirt road wouldn't be good. At least he had the 357 revolver  
303 still strapped to his side; a few days worth of rice plus two tins of  
304 sardines.

305 Without delay after he crossed the second cattle guard he steered  
306 down into the shallow stream and drove in the water for the next mile.  
307 The Fulani elder warned him that the herdsman had bobby trapped  
308 that section of the road with rebar spikes. Two times he steered  
309 around single stands of barbed wire stretched taunt across the road. The  
310 wire wasn't meant to coral animals — it was strung neck high to slice  
311 thru anyone riding an Okada motorbike, ATV or fast vehicle without a  
312 windshield.

313           The yellow low gas indicator flashed at the same time a chime  
314 sounded from the dash, Tom said another prayer. Eventually the  
315 narrow creek canyon opened onto an expanse of grassland and Billy-  
316 goat weed. Five more miles on the scarcely traveled road Tom finally  
317 ran into a more traveled crossroad main road. The GPS showed a  
318 fueling icon **47.5 KM** to the west. Tom breathed a sigh of relief when  
319 his phone got signal and started downloading his messages and voice  
320 mail. More good news was a foldable tent type sign on the shoulder of  
321 the road that it read: **Petrol 2km ahead.**

322           Fuel that was poured from Jerry-cans was an obvious indication  
323 that he was buying illegal black market petrol. Tom didn't care as long  
324 as it would get him to Jos. The attendant told Tom that he had some  
325 local beef on the grill out back. The beef was most likely black market  
326 meat. Tom didn't care; rice and sardines was the only thing he eaten  
327 in the last two days.

328           The barbeque was a fifty gallon barrel with a grill made from  
329 crisscrossed rebar. Tom hadn't seen cuts of beef like these since  
330 leaving Texas. He pointed at a two inch thick T-bone and asked if  
331 russet potatoes were what were wrapped in the aluminum foil. He had  
332 to settle for African yam smothered in honey butter.

333           Off to the side sitting at a table made from a giant cable spool Tom  
334 devoured the steak. The honey buttered yam was delicious but made  
335 him homesick. Often Ruth would ask for a sweet potato when they  
336 would go out to dinner; she'd wink at Tom and say, 'I want to be all  
337 sweetened up for you later.' Tom knew that the real reason she  
338 ordered sweet potato was because it was a more healthy choice. Beth  
339 was a health nut introvert; she didn't go around preaching to anyone  
340 what they should or should not eat. This was one of the many things  
341 Tom loved about Beth.

342           The attendant had just emptied the third Jerry-can of fuel into the  
343 Mercedes Sprinter when a motorcycle rider pulled up behind it. The  
344 attendant pointed directly at Tom. The rough leathered up rider used  
345 the heel on his black boot to flip out the kickstand; next he pulled off a  
346 full face helmet and hung it on the handlebar. When he pulled off his

347 riding gloves it exposing scarred up pale white hands. Tom figured the  
348 weathered up Caucasian rider was American or European.

349 Paul dismounted the sky-blue 80 inch Harley and headed directly  
350 for Tom. Ten feet out he said, "I was hoping I could catch up with  
351 you."

352 Tom swallowed a mouthful of African yam and then said. "I was  
353 hoping I'd run into you too. I just came from the Zangam village girl's  
354 school."

355 "I know." Paul moved next to the makeshift table. "You witnessed  
356 a horrific event that there is no earthly justification for."

357 "What the hell happened? Shouldn't the authorities be notified?"

358 "At this time it's probably best that government not get involved."

359 "That's what one of the elders in the village said," Tom replied.

360 Paul went on to explain that the slaughter of the three school girls  
361 was most likely by a splinter group of Boko Haram or ISIS. He  
362 explained that if the Nigerian government were to get involved that  
363 they might order the military to bulldoze the entire village. Fulani  
364 herdsmen are semi-nomadic whose primary occupation is raising  
365 livestock. Their pastoralist life style in Nigeria goes back to the  
366 seventeenth century yet they are still considered illegal immigrants in  
367 most West Africa countries. Tom equated them as Native Americans  
368 living on reservations that lived under their own sovereign autonomy.

369 That African history lesson got interrupted by a vibration. "Excuse  
370 me. It's probably my wife." Tom pulled a phone from his pocket and  
371 put it to his ear.

372 "Tom, where have you been?" Beth sounded mad and relieved at  
373 the same time "Your church handyman called yesterday looking for  
374 you. I've been calling you phone day and night."

375 "Beth, I'm sorry. I traveled up north to the girl's school. There was  
376 no cell service up there on the high plateau. I'm talking to one of the  
377 school supply drivers right now. I'll call you back."

378 "Promise that you call me back ASAP. Your niece texted a  
379 message saying that she had something important to share with me.  
380 You know how I feel about Tina, I'm sure she's up to something!"

381 "I promise I'll call you back." Tom shoved the phone back into his  
382 pocket. "I'll be right back."

383 The small store had living quarters in the back. A middle aged  
384 Fulani woman in a blue Hijab parted thru a curtain hanging in the  
385 doorway, she intentional kept her eyes cast downward so not to covet.

386 Tom grabbed a six pack from the cooler. "Put this on my gas bill,"  
387 Tom told her while looking at some slices of pie in a glass display case.

388 When Paul heard the screen door slap shut he turned away from  
389 the reddish orange sky in the west. "I should go, it will be dark soon.  
390 Don't forget, you promised to call your wife back."

391 "I will call her back. But, I need to have a beer first. It's not going  
392 to be an easy call." Tom cast his eyes downward in shame as he  
393 handed a beer to Paul.

394 "You must have something serious to discuss with her?" Paul  
395 twisted off the top of the ice cold beer.

396 "I do..." Tom opened his beer and took a long hard pull. "I messed  
397 up and committed adultery. I'd been faithful all during a twenty some  
398 year marriage. I was chaste before that, unlike my wife."

399 "You want to confess your relationship to me?" Paul asked.

400 "Sure, I'd like to run this by someone before I call Beth back."  
401 Tom replied.

402 "I'll listen, but I don't need to hear about any of your wife's past  
403 indiscretions."

404 Okay, not seeing Beth for the last six weeks is part of it. But  
405 there's no excuse for my actions."

406 "I understand how powerful temptation is. The sins against the  
407 flesh have taken down many prominent men."

408 "The sins of the flesh! Do you think that there is more than one sin  
409 for adultery?"

410 "I do. Fornication, impurity, pedophilia, sorcery, pornography,  
411 carousing orgies and all temptations that stain a pure soul are  
412 examples. "

413 "What about homosexuality?" Tom asked.

414 "Of course. Some religions define adultery as any lewd sexual act  
415 outside of marriage. That is true but..." Paul stopped, he had this

416 discussion once with his best friend and Vietnam War comrade — it  
417 didn't end well.

418 "I think you're wrong!" Tom took a long drink off his beer.

419 "Why's that?" Paul asked and then added, "I once thought the sixth  
420 commandment only applied to heterosexual married couples."

421 "You mean the seventh commandment." Tom was a legalist, he  
422 went on theological defense. It was a tool he learned at seminary.

423 Paul had spent years in seminary study also; he learned that  
424 fundamental religious debates are rarely about love of neighbor.

425 "Gay's can't be saved; they are an abomination." Tom spoke with  
426 authority.

427 "What about the other abominations in the bible, like bestiality,  
428 incest, prostitution, child sacrifice and so on? Homosexual sex is not  
429 singled out as the only Toevah act that is sinful," Paul rebutted.

430 Tom was caught off guard. He hadn't heard the word 'Toevah' since  
431 his seminary days while studying the book of Leviticus. "You sound like  
432 all the new age, progressive preachers and catholic priests and that  
433 have indoctrinated Americans since the Declaration of Religious  
434 Liberties promulgated by some liberal Pope in 1965." Tom spewed out  
435 his facts with authority and then finished off the rest of the bottle of  
436 beer.

437 "Why's a fundamental pastor reading Vatican Two doctrine?"

438 "My wife is a devout Catholic. I've been reading all about her  
439 church ever since they wouldn't let us get married in the very church  
440 she was baptized and confirmed at."

441 "Oh?" Paul took a drink off his beer. "Didn't the church offer to do a  
442 civil marriage? I understand not performing Holy Matrimony for an  
443 interfaith couple. There are workarounds that her parish priest should  
444 have explained to you."

445 Tom opened another beer. "I told Beth to screw her church! We  
446 went to a justice of the peace and got married."

447 "I'm sorry to hear that. I bet it hurt your wife deeply."

448 "It did." Tom took a drink off the fresh beer. "I guess in the long  
449 run it will work out better. Beth won't have to go through that lengthy  
450 annulment process that the Catholic Church has."

451                   The intellectual narrative went back and forth until all six beers  
452                   were gone. Tom schooled Paul about John Rock. The Roman Catholic  
453                   fertility doctor that helped develop the birth control pill just as the  
454                   sexual revolution rolled out. Tom blamed 'The Pill' for the reason he  
455                   and Beth never could conceived a child.

456                   Paul was serving in the Vietnam War during that period of history  
457                   when free love, drugs, rock 'n' roll and protesting was reshaping the  
458                   world. Out with the old — in with the new, was transforming many  
459                   progressive Christian religions back in the sixties and seventies. Their  
460                   civility continued as they buddy walked toward the motorhome. Tom  
461                   insisted that Paul not ride off into the night, especially after drinking.  
462                   Paul took one side of the queen bed.

463                   Tom crawled onto the other side and then said, "Truthfully, I don't  
464                   know whom God will save or let perish. I should be more careful telling  
465                   Him whom to call into his home.

466                   "Amen to that," Paul replied.