

about 9,850 words

IN THE SHADOW OF TRUTH

By Steven Ross Strutz

Kelly Henson was at her desk grading the math test that she had just given to her 5th grade class. Her classroom was typical for an elementary school; in one corner was a globe, while a United Nations flag flew in another. Peculiarly absent was the American flag. Ringing the room were pictures of important historical figures, such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Michael Moore, and Al Gore.

On the wall opposite the windows looking out on the lush inner courtyard, were bulletin boards that featured class projects. The class was learning the values of being

good global citizens. One of the current projects had the children portraying members of the United Nations. They were working on an international agreement to reduce greenhouse gases. Another class project involved organizing volunteers to help cleanup at the zoo. Facing her desk were rows of work tables, each with two chairs. There was a computer on each table that the students shared.

Kelly was nearly halfway through the stack of tests, and so far the results were appalling. She had just finished grading Tim Hudson's paper, which had earned the only A so far, when she heard a commotion. Looking up, she saw two of her more wild students horsing around; they bumped into two women entering the classroom.

Seeing how the women were dressed, she groaned inwardly, "Oh no," she thought "not Muslims. I am going to have to really watch what I say here. If I'm not careful, I'm going to have all kinds of problems."

However, while they dressed like Muslims, they were obviously not Arabs. Both women were Caucasian. They both wore long sleeve dresses that fell to their ankles, and had colorful scarves on their heads. It had to be Mrs. Bannerman; she had requested a conference regarding her son Antoine.

"You are Mrs. Bannerman?" Ms. Henson asked the taller of the two women, who led the way into the classroom.

"Yes, I am Kathleen Bannerman," she said, offering her hand.

Kelly turned to the other woman, who had piercing blue eyes and strands of red hair poking out from the edges of her scarf. "Can you please wait out in the hall? All communications regarding a student are confidential, Ms ...?"

"My name is Stacy Bannerman. I am also Antoine's mother."

Kelly let out a sigh of relief; they were just a couple of lesbians. That explained why neither of them wore a wedding ring. She got up, grabbed two chairs, and set them in front of her desk.

"Won't you please sit down?"

"Now then, what is it that I can help you with? It can't possibly be Antoine's schoolwork. He is one of my brightest students. In fact, he is helping to develop a class homepage on the internet."

"No," replied Kathleen. "It is not about his schoolwork, although we do have some concerns about some of the things that he is learning. Normally our husband would be here to take care of this matter, but he was called out of town for an important business meeting."

Kelly's smiling face suddenly turned into a rigid mask as her facial muscles contracted and froze. Her once bright smile turned into a tight grimace, and a dull glaze clouded her bright, coal black eyes. Her right eye started a nervous twitching that occurred only when she was highly stressed, and her fingers turned white as her grip on the pen tightened. "Our husband? Why do I always get these religious nuts?" she asked herself.

Kathleen's voice penetrated the fog of Kelly's thoughts. "I wanted to discuss an ongoing situation between my son and several of the other boys in the class."

"What situation is that?" asked Kelly curtly.

"It is about the school's Anti-Bullying Policy that we signed when we enrolled Antoine. It seems that several boys..."

Kathleen opened her purse and pulled out a slip of paper which she consulted. "Lets see, Jake Laxson, Paul Morrison, and Morris Andrews have been harassing Antoine."

"This is the first that I have heard about this," said Kelly. "What have these boys been doing to harass Antoine?"

"They have been taunting him at school about our religious beliefs. They call him names, such as Jesus Freak, Fundie, Mormon, and Sicko. He has tried to walk away from them, but they follow him. They are trying to incite

the other children against him. There have been several occasions when they have surrounded him away from everyone and he feared he would be beaten up."

"How long has this been going on?"

"It started about two months ago. As you know, we are new to the community. We had a party to which we invited several of our new neighbors so we could get to know them. Andrew lives next door to us, and he was one of those invited. He came with his father, who is homosexual, along with his male partner. We then learned that they do not think very highly of our beliefs, and that is putting it mildly. It was right after this party that the problems started."

"If this harassment started two months ago, why did you wait so long to complain?"

"It was a couple of weeks before Antoine told us what was going on. We could see that he was upset about something, but he didn't want to discuss it with us. Since we teach our children to be independent and work out their own problems, we let it go."

"Yes," agreed Stacy. "Then when he did tell us about the situation, we discussed it and decided that the best course of action would be to ignore them. Bullies get their thrills from the victim's reaction. If you ignore them,

they will eventually go away. However, they haven't. In fact, the bullying has gotten more vicious. Yesterday at lunch, Morris threw a rock at Antoine. It narrowly missed his head. We decided that it is now time to get the school involved."

"Don't you think that you are taking this too seriously, Mrs. Bannerman? After all, boys will be boys," replied Kelly, with a forced, hollow laugh.

"No we don't," said Stacy and Kathleen together.

The two women glanced at each other, and Kathleen, taking the lead continued. "Normally, we would agree with you, but as Stacy has already pointed out, these boys are getting vicious."

"Come now, it is only name calling," replied Kelly. "Whatever happened to sticks and stones shall break my bones, but names will never hurt me?"

"Excuse me? It is more than name calling. The "only name calling" has graduated to assault. Whatever happened to the zero tolerance that the Anti Bullying Policy advocates? This is bullying, and could even possibly be construed as a "hate crime" under the new federal Hate Crime laws."

"A Hate Crime? Get real, Mrs. Bannerman. These are ten year old boys calling names."

Stacy spoke up at that remark. "Mrs. Henson, it is Mrs. isn't it?"

"No, its Ms., I am not married."

"OK, Ms. Henson. Ten year olds are capable of anything these days. Just last week, there was a report on the news about two ten year olds in Chicago who raped and killed a woman whose house they broke into while skipping school. So don't give me that innocent boy routine. We do not believe in punishing people for what they think. That is unconstitutional. However, people are increasingly being charged with "hating" whenever they attack one of our "privileged" minorities. Hate crimes apply to everyone."

Kathleen broke in at this point. "I notice that you are wearing a cross, so I assume you are a Christian. Is that correct?"

"Yes, I belong to the Earth for Christ Church over on Mason St."

Now it was Kathleen's turn to groan, "It figures, another New Ager," she thought. "As a Christian, I would assume that you would be sensitive to others being attacked because of their faith."

"What is it with you people?" Kelly asked. At this point, Kelly was exasperated, and her tone was very short.

"I'm sure that I do not care for the tone of your voice, or the direction this conversation is taking," said Kathleen in a level voice. "What do you mean by '*You People*'?"

"I mean you Mormons and all the other hypocritical Christians. You people are the first to condemn others, such as homosexuals, and women who get abortions, yet you wallow in sin yourself. You commit bigamy and incest when you force minor children into marriage with an older man. That is sick. At Earth for Christ, we accept all people for who they are. We don't discriminate against someone because they may have been born a homosexual. Did not Jesus say to '*love your neighbor as yourself*'?"

"Ms. Henson," said Kathleen, "I did not come here to have a religious debate with you, but if you want to speak about our Savior, I would appreciate it if you would at least call Him by his correct name. His true name is Yahushua; some shorten it to Yashua. I am sure that you would not like others to call you by some name other than your proper name, so why not call him by His proper name? In case you are not aware, the Messiah's name CANNOT possibly be Jesus, because the Hebrew alphabet does not have the letter 'J'. The name Jesus evolved from the Greek IESUS. The 'IE', means 'hail'. Also, the Greeks added the

suffixes SUS, SEUS, and SOUS (phonetic pronunciations for the Greek god Zeus) to names and geographical areas to honor Zeus. So when you say the name Jesus, you are actually saying 'Hail Zeus'. Eventually the 'I' grew a tail and became the 'J' we know today."

"I suppose you are now going to tell me that God is not the Creator's name either," said Ms. Henson with a hint of sarcasm in her voice.

"Do, you want to take this one Stacy?" Kathleen asked.

"Sure, Kathleen," she replied. Turning to Ms. Henson she said, "It is true. God is NOT His name. His name is Yahweh. It's a long involved story, so I'll just give you the short version. As I'm sure you know, there are many gods that the pagans worship, so how could God be His name? The word God comes from the Teutonic word for an object of personal worship. The Teutonic Druids called the sun, GUD, GUDH, GOTH, or GOTT. Oh, and in case you were wondering, the word Lord is actually Hebrew for BAAL. So whenever you refer to either the Father or Son by these terms, you are actually 'dissing' them, as the kids today would say."

Kathleen added more to this. "How can you call on His name if you don't know it? *'... everyone who calls on the name of Yahweh shall be saved.'* (Acts 2:21). He does NOT want to be called by the names of pagan gods." *'And in all*

[things] that I have said unto you be circumspect: and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth.' (Ex. 23:13) "I think we've covered that sufficiently Stacy," said Kathleen. "However, we've gotten away from the point. Ms. Henson," Kathleen continued. "We are not Mormons. We practice the Jewish faith, although we do believe that Yashua is the Messiah. Second, we have not committed bigamy. While Patrick and I are legally married, Stacy and Patrick were joined in a pure religious ceremony. Contrary to popular belief, a man having more than one wife is not sinful. So, we have violated neither man's law nor Yahweh's law."

"Another thing," Stacy said, jumping in to the conversation. "You are implying that all polygamists are abusive in their relationships. We too condemn those who would force a woman into marriage, or abuse minor children. Any union must be entered into willingly, and all parties must have the legal capacity to enter into this relationship." "Third," Stacy continued, "we love all men, including homosexuals. Scripture does condemn homosexuality. It also tells us to love the sinner, but hate the sin. And finally, for someone who puts on airs of tolerance towards others the way you do, you are certainly

intolerant of our beliefs. I doubt that you know anything about our faith."

Kathleen turned to Stacy, "Let's go sister. I think it is time we speak with the principal."

Kathleen and Stacy rose and replaced their chairs at the desk that Kelly had taken them from. "Thank you for your time, Ms. Henson, we wish you well in all your endeavors."

At that moment, the classroom door opened, and a tall, distinguished gentleman, who looked to be in his late 50's to early 60's, entered the room. He was tall and thin, yet muscular. He had a hard, leathery face with a nasty looking scar on his right cheek. His blonde hair was cut high and tight, the look of a former Marine. He was dressed very elegantly in a dark blue, three piece Santori suit; over a powder blue Jacobi shirt, with what looked like a Jerry Garcia tie. He stopped in front of Kathleen and Stacy, and offered his hand.

"Good afternoon ladies. You are Mrs. Bannerman?"

"Yes, we are, how did you know?" asked Kathleen.

"Allow me to introduce myself. I am Tyler Phillips, the principal."

Mr. Phillips pointed to a camera located in an upper corner of the classroom. "Our security system is programmed

to alert to certain keywords. Our security office then monitors the room. They notified me that there was a problem in Ms. Henson's class, so I monitored the situation. I apologize for Ms. Henson being rude in dealing with your concerns. Why don't we go talk in my office?"

Seated in Mr. Phillip's office, Kathleen and Stacy relaxed, and accepted an offer of bottled water. It was a pretty ostentatious office. Lining the walls were photos of him and his comrades-in-arms, in and around F15 fighters. There were several pictures of Mr. Phillips with prominent politicians, including former President Clinton. Suspended from the ceiling was a large scale model of an F15 fighter, loaded with a full complement of Sparrow and Sidewinder missiles, in a climbing turn.

Pointing at the model of the F15, Kathleen asked. "I take it you were a pilot?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Phillips. I served in a Marine fighter squadron in both Gulf Wars."

"Is that how you got that scar?" asked Stacy.

"Yes, I was on a low level ground support mission in the First Gulf War when my plane was hit by ground fire. I had to make a wheels-up landing in the desert, and hit my face with the control panel."

"Well let me thank you for the sacrifice that you have made for our country, Mr. Phillips. These days, too many people either feel that America is the most evil thing in the world, or else they are too self-centered to serve. However, to get to the point," said Kathleen, "can we assume that you are going to deal with this harassment that our son has been undergoing?"

"Mrs. Bannerman," said Mr. Phillips with his best campaign smile, "I would love to assure you that this matter is over, but unfortunately, my hands are tied. As Ms. Henson pointed out, it is only a matter of name calling. This hardly rises to harassment."

"Do you consider rock throwing to be innocent name calling?"

"Mrs. Bannerman. Did anyone see Morris Andrews throw the rock at Antoine?"

"Yes, there were several boys there when it happened, but they are all friends of these three boys. Obviously, they are not going to tell on their friends."

"Without witnesses, there is nothing I can do."

Stacy spoke up at this point. "So our son's word counts for nothing?"

"Mrs. Bannerman. People, especially children, often make outrageous claims against others for personal reasons."

"Our son does not make false accusations against others. That is strictly against Scripture." *'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.'* (Exodus 20:16).

"Mrs. Bannerman, I do appreciate your concerns, but without more to go on, there is really nothing that I can do here. However, as a courtesy to you, I will speak to the three boys and put them on notice. You might advise Antoine to stay away from them."

"He has been trying to avoid them, but they hound him."

"As I said, I will speak to the boys. In the meantime, try to document anything that happens in the future."

Mr. Phillips stood up, signaling that the meeting was over.

Back at home, Kathleen and Stacy could hear the sounds of a baseball game coming from the family room as they paused in the entry hall.

'...for a called third strike. That is the 12th strikeout for Jason Carr, who is now taking a no-hitter into the 8th inning here in New York.'

'Bob, that was a particularly nasty backdoor slider that literally froze Derek Jeter, who has struck out twice today. Jason has commanding control stuff today. He has struck out 12 while walking only one, and of course, he has held the Yankees hitless so far. We are watching a real masterpiece tonight.'

The Bannerman's home was an older two story frame house with a veranda that circled the lower level, with an attached garage, circa 1950. There was a master bedroom on the ground floor and three bedrooms upstairs.

"Antoine, we're home," called Kathleen.

Antoine came running and skidded to a stop in front of his mothers. Even at 10, Antoine was starting to sprout like a beanstalk, and he was just as thin. His bright orange hair had earned him the nickname Carrot Top, among his friends. His full, round face was covered with matching freckles.

"So what did Ms. Henson say mom?"

"Well, she was not very helpful at all," said Kathleen. "In fact, she was pretty hostile to us because of our beliefs. She tried to say this is nothing more than childish name calling."

"We even talked to Mr. Phillips," added Stacy.

"You talked to Eraser Head?"

"Antoine, you know better than that," reprimanded Kathleen. "We do not call names. That is why we went to your school today, remember? Didn't we raise you better than that?"

"Oh, yea," said Antoine with a sheepish grin on his face. "Sorry."

"Anyway," said Stacy, "Mr. Phillips basically shined us on."

"What does that mean?"

"Well it means..."

"It means that he lied to us," interrupted Kathleen. "He said it was just innocent name calling. When I pointed out that Morris had thrown a rock at you, he said that without any witnesses, there was really nothing he could do, though he said he would talk to the boys."

Antoine's face fell on hearing that. "So what do I do, mom?"

"Mr. Phillips suggested that you try to stay away from those boys," said Stacy.

"But I'm trying that right now. It doesn't work very well."

"That's what we told him, but he didn't want to listen to us. We were given the impression that if we were not people of faith, this problem would be squashed like a bug.

Stacy and I will discuss this with your father when he calls tonight. We'll see how he wants to deal with it. Now, where is Mrs. Robinson?"

"I think she's upstairs with Jessica."

Mrs. Robinson was an older widowed lady who lived across the street. She loved children and would occasionally watch Rachel, who at 3 years was their youngest child.

"Ok. Now, you know that you aren't permitted to watch television until your homework is done."

"But I don't have any. I'm ahead of the game."

"Then go help Matthew with his."

Matthew was the eldest son, and though he just started high school, he still struggled in a few of his classes. He was the athletic one of the family. He had apparently inherited his father's talent for baseball and had made the freshman team as a second baseman and pitcher. He had a sweeping curveball to complement a wicked fastball, and was trying to master the slider. Antoine, while he loved sports, was lacking in talent. However, he was blessed with high octane smarts that was already starting to attract attention from some of the elite prep schools.

"But mom, Jason Carr is working on a no-hitter, and the game is almost over."

Stacy looked at Kathleen for confirmation. "Ok, but after the game is over, I want you to see if Matthew needs any help."

Dinner was over and the dishes washed and put away before the phone rang. Antoine was trying to help Matthew understand basic algebraic equations. Kathleen and Stacy were downstairs in the family room. Stacy was relaxing in the "Master Recliner," as Patrick called it, playing with Jessica. Kathleen was curled up on the sofa watching an old western movie.

Noting from Caller ID that it was Patrick calling, Kathleen answered and put the call on speaker phone. "Hi, honey, how is your trip going?"

"It's going well. We have Senator Baker onboard."

"That's great! With him in our corner, we might actually be able to get that Thought Crimes bill repealed."

"It's still going to be an uphill battle. Don't forget that Thad Kenney is still chairman of the Judiciary Committee. He is going to fight to the death to keep this bill from getting out of committee."

Patrick was a political activist who worked for the American Justice League, an organization dedicated to restoring a constitutional government. They worked to repeal socialist laws that exceeded the constitutional

authority of the federal government and infringed on the rights of American citizens. They also worked to elect representatives who stood for the values that our Founding Fathers believed in.

"So how did your meeting with Mrs. Henson go?" he asked.

"It is Ms. Henson, and it didn't go very well," replied Stacy.

Stacy and Kathleen filled Patrick in on the meeting with Ms. Henson and Mr. Phillips, explaining that while Ms. Henson professed to be Christian, she really wasn't; that she belonged to a liberal, New Age church, and had a real hostility towards those with fundamentalist beliefs.

"She actually called us Mormons," said Kathleen. "So what do you think we should do about this situation? Stacy and I think that we should pull Matthew and Antoine out of school and homeschool them. We think it was a mistake to put them in the public school in the first place."

"You may be right about that," conceded Patrick. "However, if we pull them out now, we would be giving them the impression that people of faith are easy targets; pick on them and they run. It will embolden them to go after other people whose beliefs they don't agree with. We can start homeschooling after this is resolved, but for now

we'll leave them in school. I'll be home tomorrow, and I'll call Victor for some legal advice."

After a bit of chit chat about the children, they concluded the conversation and hung up. Stacy took Jessica upstairs and put her to bed, and went to her room to read a mystery novel she was in the middle of. Kathleen finished watching her movie before she went to bed.

It was nearly 10am when the doorbell rang. Stacy, who was holding Jessica, answered the door to a woman carrying a briefcase who had an air of officialdom about her. She was a very tall woman with obviously bleached blond hair in a butch cut, and she wore about 10lbs of makeup on a rather plain face. She was dressed very sharply in a charcoal grey Maximus suit, over a Penchot silk blouse that exposed a large amount of ample cleavage. Behind her, and off to the side, was a small, portly man with balding hair styled in a ridiculous comb-over. His wrinkled, J.C. Penny suit bulged across his protruding belly, threatening to pop at least one button. His powder blue shirt, was also wrinkled, the collar points all curled up, gravy stained tie askew. He had beady green eyes topped by a single eye brow.

Displaying an ID badge in a leather case, she announced, "I am Barbara Cross, and this is Douglas

Winchester, we're with Child Protective Services. Are you Mrs. Bannerman?"

"I am Stacy Bannerman," she answered.

"We received a report that you and your husband are exposing your children to dangerous influences and that they need protection."

"Who told you that?"

"I'm sorry, but that information is confidential. Can we come in?"

"Not really, but I don't suppose it really matters what I want, does it?" said Stacy.

Stacy led the way into the living room. There was a sofa placed against the large picture window. On one side of it, at right angles, was a matching loveseat, while the "Master Recliner" was on the other side, at an angle. In the center was a large, wooden cable spool that served as a coffee table. It had been varnished and covered with a piece of glass, with a circular hole to match that of the spool. Against the wall opposite the sofa, was an entertainment center that held a 27" television with a DVD player, a stereo, and a small collection of CDs, DVDs, and vinyl record albums. Around the walls were various family photos and some seascapes.

Barbara sat down on the sofa, unasked, while Stacy sat down in the "Master Recliner." Douglas remained standing. While Barbara and Stacy were talking, he walked around the room, examining the titles of the books in the bookcase along one wall, and particularly the rifles in the gun rack along another wall, which contained a .22 squirrel gun, a .30 -.30 and an M1A1 sniper rifle.

"Now, what is this all about? How are we endangering our children, what sort of dangerous influences are we exposing our children to?"

"How many children do you have?" asked Barbara, ignoring Stacy's question.

"I only have one; that would be Jessica, who is three years old. As you can see, there is nothing wrong with her."

"Antoine is Kathleen's son?"

That's when it dawned on Stacy that either Ms. Henson or Mr. Phillips had reported them to CPS.

"Yes, Kathleen is Antoine's birth mother. She also has an older son, Matthew, who is a freshman in high school. Just what is this all about, how are we endangering our children?"

"It was reported that you are involving your children in a religious cult," answered Barbara.

"Religious cult?" asked Stacy with a nervous laugh.

"Where did you get that idea?"

"So tell me about your living arrangements."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Stacy.

"Are you and Kathleen both married to Patrick Bannerman?"

"No, that would violate the laws against bigamy. Patrick and I were joined in a purely religious ceremony."

"But you all live together as man and wife?"

"Yes, do you have a problem with that?"

"Why all the guns?" asked Douglas.

"Frankly, I don't think that is any of your business. All of our guns are legal."

"Aren't you afraid one of your children is going to either hurt themselves or someone else?"

"Mr. Winchester, our children, excepting Jessica, who isn't old enough, have all completed firearms safety programs run by the NRA. They know how to safely handle firearms."

"Why do you have a sniper rifle? Do you people belong to one of those anti- government militias? Mr. Bannerman **is** a political agitator, isn't he?"

"So, you've been investigating us Ms. Cross, because some one does not like our living arrangements? Why is it

that I feel you would not be here if we were just a bunch of homosexuals living together? I am afraid this interview is over. If you have any further questions, I will refer you to our attorney."

"Mrs. Bannerman, I don't think that I like your attitude. This investigation is far from over," said Barbara as she rose to leave. "Douglas, let's go."

It was nearly 4:30 that afternoon when Patrick climbed out of the taxi that had brought him home from the airport. Stacy met him at the door with a big hug and kiss.

"Kathleen's not home from work yet?" he asked.

"Not yet, she called and said that there was a rollover on the 10 that had traffic at a standstill. She doesn't know how long she'll be."

"Where are the children?"

"Matthew is still at baseball practice, and Antoine is upstairs doing some stuff on the computer. Jessica is in her room playing."

"Did Antoine say anything about how school went today?"

"No, he went straight upstairs after he came home. We have another problem. I had a visit from two Child Protective Service workers today. Somebody filed a complaint that we were endangering the children."

"What did they say?"

"Well, they were asking a bunch of questions, implying that we belong to a religious cult and are anti-government militia types, because of our guns."

"A religious cult?"

"Yes, because of the relationship that you, Kathleen, and I have. Funny isn't, after Ms. Henson called us Mormons?"

"So what did you tell them?"

"Basically, I told them to take a hike."

Patrick laughed. "You know, that is one of the things I love about you. You take no prisoners."

It was nearly dinner time before Kathleen got home. Matthew was setting the table and Stacy was tossing a salad to go with the roast beef that was in the oven. Patrick was out in the back yard playing catch with Antoine.

Kathleen got her glove out and joined them.

"Traffic was murder out there today. Some idiot cut off a gasoline tanker on the 10 causing it to jackknife. The whole Interstate was shut down. The police had to turn traffic around. I am so ready to relax."

"Well, don't get too comfy cozy," said Patrick. "Stacy had a visit from Child Protective Service workers today."

"Child Protective Service, what did they want?" asked Kathleen.

"We'll discuss it at the table," said Patrick, tossing a high pop up to Antoine. "This concerns all of us."

Soon they were all gathered around the dinner table. Patrick was carving a fantastically juicy organic roast, while Stacy set out bowls of fresh green beans, and scalloped potatoes, also organic. Antoine set a salad at each place, while Matthew brought out the drinks. The conversation was wholly centered on the events of the day, including the obvious conclusion that either Ms. Henson or Mr. Phillips was the one who reported them.

"So Antoine, did you have any problems today?" asked Patrick.

"No. Ms. Henson was out sick today, and we had a substitute, a Mr. Bartlett. Morris and his pals started in, but Mr. Bartlett put a stop to it real quick."

Dinner was over, and Stacy was serving desert, chocolate pudding, when out of the blue Antoine asked the \$69 question. "Why does Ms. Henson hate us?"

"Son," answered Patrick. "I don't think that Ms. Henson hates us. It's just that we are different. We don't share the same beliefs. People like her feel threatened by people who believe as we do."

"So why don't we invite her over, so she can see what we are really like?" suggested Antoine.

"Out of the mouths of babes!" exclaimed Kathleen. "I think that is a great idea."

"So do I." Looking at his watch, Patrick said, "It's not too late, let's call her right now. We do have her home number don't we?"

"I think it was in the information packet we received when we enrolled Antoine," said Stacy.

"Tomorrow is Wednesday, so let's set it up for Sunday afternoon."

They all gathered in the living room while Stacy found Ms. Henson's telephone number. Patrick dialed, and after Ms. Henson answered, he put the phone on speaker so that everyone could hear. From the conversation, it was obvious that she did not want to accept the invitation.

"Ms. Henson," said Patrick, "we're not trying to convince you of anything. We would never force our beliefs on anyone. All we want is to share truth with you and let you make up your own mind. After all even Yahweh gives us free choice to accept or reject His Truth."

They could all hear someone in the background who was urging her to accept, which she finally did.

After hanging up the phone, Patrick said, "Let's make it a regular party. We can grill some hamburgers, the whole works. You and Stacy can plan it. We'll invite the Wards and the McNeals."

"I'm already starting to get tingles," said Kathleen.

The rest of the week went pretty quickly, fueled by anticipation. Antoine only had a couple of minor incidents at school. Matthew not only aced his Algebra test on Thursday, but also started his first game against Freeman High. He went 6 innings, giving up 3 earned runs, and struck out five while walking only one in a 7-4 win.

Sunday morning was cool and breezy, with only a few puffy cotton ball clouds drifting above across the clear blue sky. Patrick put an old Spooky Tooth LP on the turntable, switching on the outside speakers. Grooving to the sounds of *Tobacco Road*, Patrick and Matthew worked out in the yard, cutting the lawn, trimming hedges and bushes, and pulling weeds out of the flower beds. Kathleen and Stacy went shopping at Martindale's Organic Foods for party supplies. Antoine watched Jessica, helping her to learn to read.

Finally, things were all ready and the Bannerman's were relaxing out in the back yard, Pink Floyd's *The Wall* wafting through the air. The Ward's were already there;

Paul with his wives Misty and Darlene. Lloyd McNeal had called and said he was running a bit late. His son Harry had broken a glass and cut his hand.

It was nearly 12:30 when Kelly Henson arrived at the Bannerman's. She pulled into the driveway and parked behind a purple 60's Chevy Nova sporting the license plate BEARARMS. It was a cute house, she thought. The lawn was well kept and surrounded by rose bushes that were just starting to come into bloom. Ringing the doorbell, she waited and waited, for someone to answer. She was just about ready to give up and leave, when the door was opened.

"Hi, I'm Patrick Bannerman, Antoine's father. You must be Ms. Henson. We're glad you could come," he said, offering his hand.

"Yes, it's a pleasure to meet you," she replied, taking his hand, stiffly.

There was an aloof tone to her voice, but there was a little flutter in her heart. Patrick Bannerman was a HUNK. He was about 5' 10" and he was built like a fireplug, with thick, muscular arms and legs. He had a small, Roman face which was garnished with a full beard that was starting to grey. His thick, curly hair was long, and pulled back in a ponytail. He was wearing shorts and a red Chicago Bulls tank top shirt.

"Let's go into my den," he said. "I'd like to have a talk with you."

Following Patrick through the house, Kelly took in everything, especially the gun rack, with eyes that would make any neighborhood gossip proud.

"I like to call this the War Room," he said, leading the way into the den. "I do most of my work here. I work for the American Justice League. The American Justice League is a public service organization whose mission is to restore our Constitutional government to what the founding fathers gave us. Today's government has gotten out of control, usurping power that does not belong to it. In fact, much of what the federal government does has no constitutional authority. We work to pass legislation or referendums that will restore government to its Constitutional limits. We also work to elect officials who will respect the Constitution. Also, our legal department assists those who are having their constitutional rights walked all over. Working at home allows me to help share the responsibility of watching Jessica when Kathleen and Stacy are working."

"They both work?" asked Kelly.

"Yes, Kathleen is a legal secretary. She works for Justine and Foch, I'm sure you've heard of them."

Kelly nodded her head, indicating that yes, she had heard of the largest law firm in the city.

"Right now, Stacy is only working part time through temp agencies, until she finds the right position. She has a Masters in Education, and is looking for a teaching position. However, she does not want to be a part of indoctrinating children into being good global citizens."

Kelly started to protest, but Patrick cut her off. "I realize not all teachers fall into that category, but it is getting harder for good teachers to teach in the public schools today."

The War Room was a small room that contained a desk, with a computer on it, flanked by two leather wing chairs. Filing cabinets lined one wall, along with a bookcase. A small credenza with a television was against another. The walls were mostly bare, but there were a few action photos of old time baseball players, and there was a glassed frame that held Marine Gunnery Sergeant stripes, along with various ribbons. Patrick motioned Kelly to sit down in one of the wing chairs while he sat down in the other.

"Ms. Henson ..."

"Please call me Kelly."

"OK, Kelly, I'm Patrick. Kelly, the reason we asked you here today is because we know that you called Child Protective Services, making wild accusations against us."

"I did not call them," denied Kelly vehemently.

Patrick waved a hand through the air, brushing aside the denial. "The call was made right after your meeting with Kathleen and Stacy. It was either you or Mr. Phillips. But it doesn't really matter. We do know that you feel that we are religious nuts. You even called us Mormons. We are not Mormons. Unfortunately, the Mormons have given polygamy a bad rap because their plural marriages are not always voluntary, and they frequently involve minor children."

"OK, you may not be Mormons, but having more than one wife is still a sin. You're committing adultery."

"No, that's not quite correct. Biblically, adultery is a married woman having sex with someone other than her husband. The one she has sex with is also guilty of adultery."

"But having more than one wife is still sinful," persisted Kelly.

"Says who?" asked Patrick.

"Says the Bible," said Kelly.

"If you don't mind, I prefer to use the word Scriptures. The word Bible means books in Greek. It came

from the name of a Phoenician port city, Byblos, which exported papyrus, and was named after the fertility goddess Byblia. Since Yahweh tells us that light and dark cannot mix, I believe that we should not use pagan names. ... *For what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness? And what fellowship has light with darkness?*' (2 Cor 6:14).

"Wow," said Kelly, "You sure know an awful lot."

"It comes from study. But getting back to the point, where does Scripture say that having more than one wife is a sin?"

"I don't know exactly, I'm not very knowledgeable about the Bible, er, Scripture. But if it were not sinful, why would all these people who know the Scriptures inside and out say that it is?"

"They have been deceived. *'For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect'*. (Matt. 24:24) If you don't know Scripture, then how can you be even sure of your own salvation?" asked Patrick. *'Yashua answered and said unto them, 'Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of Yahweh.'* (Matt. 22:29). "Yahweh set out his plan for our salvation in His Word, and He expects us to know what His Word says. Contrary to what many believe, salvation

isn't as simple as acknowledging Yashua as the Messiah. He has certain expectations of us, and they are all to be found in Scripture. He expects us to obey His commandments."

"But that is just for the Jews, we are under grace," countered Kelly.

"So, you believe that you can get to heaven by simply accepting Yashua as the Messiah?"

"Right. 'For by grace are ye saved, through faith and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God'," quoted Kelly, proud to have remembered a verse to back up her position.

"So, in other words," said Patrick. "Because you have been saved by grace, you do not have to follow Yahweh's commandments. Is that correct?"

"Yes, Jes..., sorry, I mean Yashua, fulfilled the law with His death."

"So, we don't even have to obey the Ten Commandments, because they are Old Testament?"

"You know, I never even thought about it like that, but I guess not. That is part of the Old Testament laws."

"So then, you can go out steal, and murder and it will be alright with Yahweh because you are 'under grace'?"

"No, I never said that."

"Yes you did. You said that you believed that we did not have to obey the Ten Commandments, because they had been done away with. If we do have to obey them, then where do you draw the line at which commandments you do not have to obey? Would it surprise you to know that Yashua, in the New Covenant tells us to keep the Ten Commandments? *'And He said to Him, "Which?" And Yashua said "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Respect your father and your mother, and You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*' (Matt. 19:18-19). Paul, in his message to the Corinthians, makes it clear that those who disobey Yahweh's commandments shall not be saved." *'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.'* (1 Cor 6:9).

"But that still applies only to the Jews." Kelly was sticking to her guns.

"But you can't have it both ways. You can't say that Yahweh's commandments only apply to the Jews and then say

that Gentiles have to obey some of them. By the way, the Corinthians were Gentiles."

"Oh," said Kelly, a look of confusion appearing on her face.

"You mentioned that Yashua had fulfilled the law. What do you think he meant by that? That the law was abolished? That's what most Christians believe. But I think I have proved that is not the case. When Yashua said that he had come to fulfill the law, he simply meant that He was fulfilling the law requiring a sacrifice. After all, His sacrifice was the ultimate price for all of our sins. Yahweh tells us that if we love Him, we will obey His commandments. *For this is the love for Elohim, that we guard His commandments, and His commandments are not heavy. (1John 5:3) And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to fight with the remnant of her seed, those guarding the commandments of Elohim and possessing the witness of Yashua Messiah.*' (Rev. 12:17) *'Here is the endurance of the set-apart ones, here are those guarding the commandments of Elohim and the belief of Yashua.'* (Rev. 14:12) The flip side to that is that if we do not love Him, we will not obey His commandments. There is the story about Judgment Day and how all those people who thought they were going to heaven were denied admission. Perhaps

these were all Christians who having accepted Yashua, failed to keep Yahweh's commandments?"

"I don't know." Kelly was now on the precipice; truth within her grasp.

Patrick was very patient, walking Kelly step-by-step to realizing her salvation. "First, let me say that yes, we are all saved by grace, through faith. But grace is the reason WHY we are offered salvation, not HOW we are saved."

"Now you are really confusing me. You are telling me that we HAVE to obey all of Yahweh's commandments to get to heaven, not simply believe. I happen to know that Scripture talks about NOT being justified by the law. *Knowing that a man is not declared right by works of Torah, but through belief in Yashua Messiah, even we have believed in Messiah, Yashua, in order to be declared right by belief in Messiah and not by works of Torah, because by works of Torah, no flesh shall be declared right.*" (Gal. 2:16).

"That is true. Because man is imperfect, he cannot possibly expect to completely keep all of the law. So, if man fails to obey even the smallest part of the law, then he is guilty of disobeying all of it. *Forever who shall guard the Torah and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of it all.*' (James 2:10). That is why Yahweh offered us salvation by His grace, through the sacrifice of Yashua."

"I guess that makes sense."

"Let me ask you something. Who did Yahweh make His covenant of salvation with?"

"The Jewish people," she responded. *'Because that Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws.'* (Gen. 26:5).

"To be precise, it was the Israelites. Didn't He call them His 'Chosen People'?"

"Yes," said Kelly with a hint of exasperation coming back into her voice. She was starting to feel like a school girl being lectured to. A barely perceptible wall started to lower over the lens of her eyes; the wall that shuts out truth. Her right eye started twitching. She was anxious to end this conversation.

"So doesn't that mean the rest of mankind is NOT chosen to take part in His covenant?" asked Patrick.

"But Yahweh gives everyone the chance to go to Heaven, so that blows your whole theory out the window?" Kelly said with a spark of triumph in her eyes.

"That is correct. Yahweh did intend for all of mankind to share in the blessings of Abraham. However, in order for Gentiles to be saved, they must be grafted into the Tree of Life; in other words, they must become part of the Chosen People. They must become Jewish. *'And if some of the*

branches were broken off, and you being a wild olive tree, have been grafted in among them, and come to share the root and the fatness of the olive tree.' (Rom 11:17). 'You shall say then, "The branches were broken off that I may be grafted in."' (Rom 11:19). So these commandments do apply to us all."

'For he is not a Yehudite who is so outwardly, neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But a Yehudite is he who is so inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in Spirit, not literally, whose praise is not from men, but from Elohim.' (Rom 2:28-29)
'The circumcision is naught, and the uncircumcision is naught, but the guarding of the commandments of Elohim does matter.' (1 Cor 7:18).

The wall that had been closing over her mind was suddenly lifted. "You know, I never thought of it that way. That makes sense. But that still doesn't change the fact that Scripture does not say polygamy is OK."

"That is not entirely true," said Patrick, "There are even two instances where polygamy can even be considered a commandment. *'If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform*

the duty of a husband's brother unto her..." (Deut. 25:7-10) *'And if a man entice a maid that is not betrothed, and lie with her, he shall surely endow her to be his wife'.*" (Exodus 22:16). Because these commandments to marry do not specify a single male, then they would also apply to married men. Yahweh will not command unrighteousness. Moreover, Romans 5:13 tells us that *'sin is not imputed when there is no law.'* Nowhere in Scripture does it forbid us to have more than one wife."

"That may be so, but Go... Yahweh does not really want man to have more than one wife. He just allows us to have our desires."

"When Yahweh does not want us to do or not do something, He tells us so. Moses was already married to Zipporah, a Midianite when he took an Ethiopian woman as his wife. His brother Aaron and his sister Miriam rebelled against him because of the Ethiopian woman. Yahweh became angry at Miriam and Aaron because they spoke against Moses over his polygamous relationship." *'And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the*

similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and he departed. And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous.' (Numbers 12:6-10.)

"But all kinds of bad things have happened to people in the Scripture who have had more than one wife."

"Yes; and bad things have also happened to monogamists and celibates. Bad things happen to people not because of their lifestyle, but because of their deeds. For example, Solomon was not punished because he had over 700 wives, but because he descended into idolatry. I can go on and on with examples. When scripture talks of polygamy, it does so to set forth the rules for the relationship. *'If he take him another wife; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish'*. (Ex. 21:10), *'If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated...'* (Deut 21:15-17).

"Then why do all of the greatest religious scholars agree that it is wrong?"

"They have been deceived. Scripture tells us that *'...even the elect shall be deceived'* (Mat. 24:24.) Satan is the Great Deceiver, and he has infiltrated the Church from the beginning, spreading lies and confusion, changing the seasons and times. Yahweh intended His Word to be understood by all, yet people who have set themselves up as religious leaders play word games with Scripture, looking for hidden meanings in the words. Scripture is not always easy to understand, however, Yahweh meant for us to gain understanding of His Word through communion with Him."

"Did you know that some of Yahweh's most faithful servants had more than one wife? These included David, Solomon, and Moses. Yahweh brought judgment against even his faithful servants for their transgressions, but never once did he punish anyone for having more than one wife. In fact, in *1 Samuel*, it talks about how Yahweh had given David all of his wives, about 700, and would have given him more if he had asked. Yahweh did punish David for taking Bathsheba, Uriah the Hittites wife, but that was adultery. It wasn't until the 4th century when polygamy was banned by St. Augustine."

"I don't know," said Kelly. "It still sounds like adultery to me."

"You see, that is part of Satan's deception. Even these so called scholars, who know every verse of Scripture, front and back, know all of these verses and still refuse to accept that polygamy is actually a blessing of Yahweh. I know it's not for everyone, but in today's world where women outnumber the men, each woman could not possibly have her own husband. Is she to be denied the fruits of marriage?"

Seeing the blank look on her face, he continued. "I'm not going to try to convince you of anything, but I just wanted to present the truth to you. Let's go join the party."

Sounds of laughter were in the air as they stepped through the patio door. The McNeals had arrived, and Harry was playing with Jessica on the swing set. They were competing to see who could swing the highest. Antoine and Matthew were throwing a football around, and Stacy was preparing the barbeque to grill hamburgers. The others were relaxing in the gazebo, which was center stage in the backyard.

Patrick introduced Kelly to everyone. "You already know Kathleen and Stacy," he said. "Over here we have the McNeals, Lou, Wanda, and Traci. Their son Harry is over on the swings with Jessica. That lazy dude over there," he

said pointing at to a handsome, muscular guy with short blond hair and a handlebar mustache, is Paul Ward. Paul is the former star 2nd baseman for the Chicago White Sox. Those lovely ladies who are attending to his needs are his wives, Misty and Darlene. Misty is a model. She does mostly television commercials. You may have seen her in the new spot for Enrique's Restaurants."

"That was you? I love that commercial. It is really funny," laughed Kelly, a chink finally appearing in her armor.

"Can I get you something to drink Ms. Henson? Lemonade, bottled water, soda?" asked Kathleen.

"Water would be nice thank you, and please call me Kelly," she said.

Patrick went into the kitchen and brought out a platter of hamburgers, and took over the grill from Stacy, who joined the others. A short while later, Patrick was serving hamburgers, potato salad, and barbeque beans (no pork - it's unclean). Kelly was asking lots of questions of the women.

"...so don't you find it difficult to share your man?" she asked.

"Actually I don't," Wanda said. "I do have to admit that polygamy is not for everyone, because for some, the jealousy factor is too strong to overcome."

"I agree," chipped in Misty.

"...however," Wanda continued, "If you can get past that, there is nothing but positive benefits. The women have a sisterhood relationship, and the responsibilities are spread out. It makes things easier for everyone."

"What about, um, you know, your living arrangements?" asked Kelly, her face starting to turn a bright red.

"Well, that all depends on the individual family's preferences and also their finances. In some families the sister-wives each have their own bedroom. In others the bedroom may be partitioned or they may even all sleep in the same bed," said Darlene. "As for sex, well having plural wives makes it great for all concerned. I'm sure that you do not want to make love every night of the week. This arrangement ensures everyone is satisfied. In our family, we play it by ear. When he is horny, Paul sleeps with whoever is in the mood."

"Sometimes we all play together," Misty said, with a playful grin on her face. "Though from a purely heterosexual standpoint," she quickly added.

Patrick went around picking up the plates after everyone was done eating. Reaching past Kelly to pick up her dirty dishes, he brushed her arm and she felt a jolt of electricity surge through her body; goose bumps appeared on her arms. Looking into his deep blue eyes, she felt an urgent desire, a desire she hadn't felt in forever.

The ballgame the guys had on a small portable television was all over but the shouting. It was only the 5th inning, but the Indians had a commanding 12-1 lead, and Lou was starting to get bored. Wadding up a used napkin, he tossed it at Patrick. "Hey Pat, do want to play?"

"Do you have your guitar?"

With a sweeping glance at everyone, he laughed. "Do I have my guitar, he asks. "Do fish fly?"

"No, they don't, but I'll take that for a yes."

Checking with Stacy and Matthew, Patrick and Lou started to set up their equipment. They had started a band after meeting the McNeals about a year ago. They played just for fun, though they did play some parties and weddings. Patrick played lead guitar, and Lou played rhythm, though he sometimes played a dual lead. Stacy played keyboards and vocals, and Matthew was on the drums.

They started out mildly with America's *Horse With No Name*, then shifted into high gear with *Highway Star*. By

this time, Kelly was bouncing around with the beat. By the time they were into *Taking Care of Business*, Kelly, after checking with Misty and Darlene, pulled Paul out of his chair and started dancing. She was twisting and gyrating all over, and her hair, which had been up in a bun, shook itself out, flying every which way. After their finale, aptly, *The Doors*, *The End*, Kelly sat down and chugged another bottle of water. The party soon broke up. Saying her goodbyes to everyone, she surprised everyone with a parting question. She asked Patrick if he ever thought of adding more wives.

His reply. "If Yahweh wills."

Romans 11:11-21 *I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall Salvation is come unto Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. And if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the gentiles, how much more their completeness. For I speak to you, the gentiles, inasmuch as I am an emissary to gentiles, I esteem my service, if somehow I might provoke to jealousy **those who are my flesh** and save some of them. For if their casting away is the restoration to favor of the world, what is their acceptance*

but life from the dead? Now if the first fruit is set-apart, the lump is also. And if the root is set-apart, so are the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, came to share the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. And if you boast, remember, you do not bear the root, the root bears you. You shall say then, "The branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." Good! By unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by belief. Do not be arrogant, but fear. For if Elohim did not spare the natural branches, He might not spare you either.

THE END