

PIZZA

“Hello. This is Rick Paulson.”

“Hey, Rick. This is Tom.”

“Not Tom Peterson!” said Rick. “How are you, old buddy? What a pleasure. I haven’t talked to you in what ... years.”

“We talked last month, Rick,” said Tom.

“Oh yeah. I know you probably don’t understand, but when you get to my age, you can get a little forgetful.”

“We’re the same age, Rick. And that’s not old.”

“Well, you were always smarter than me,” said Rick.

“You graduated Summa cum laude, Rick. I just graduated cum laude.”

“You’re going to shoot down everything I say, aren’t you?”

“It’s about the only thing that’s even remotely kept you in line.”

“Okay, so what do you want with me, Tom?”

“I’m taking a couple of weeks off and heading to the mountains. I wanted to know if you would like to get together for lunch on Friday.”

“Friday? This coming Friday?”

“Yes,” answered Tom.

“I don’t know, Tom. They keep me running pretty ragged around here. My boss is a bear, you know. I’m just not sure I can make that.”

“You are the boss, Rick. And you’ve always set your own agenda.”

“Okay, well, if you’re going to put it like that. Friday for lunch is quite acceptable. Corky’s Pizza, then?”

“Yes. 12 o’clock noon?”

“Yessir. See you then, Tom.”

“Bye, Rick.”

Late Friday morning, driving through a light rain, Tom soon reached the world-famous eating

establishment called 'Corky's Pizza'. Now some may say that "world-famous" stretches the market just a little. But if you consider all the college graduates who dined there for four or more years and then went off to careers all around the world, then perhaps "world-famous" wouldn't violate any truth in advertising law.

Walking through the front door that was covered with all kinds of college news, Tom first saw good old Hazel at the reception podium.

"Well, land sakes alive, if you aren't a sight for sore eyes," said Hazel. "Come and give old Hazel a hug."

"Hello, Hazel," said Tom. "Are you still running the place, unofficially, of course?"

"What do you think, Tom?"

"I imagine so."

"Somebody's got to keep you young people in line."

"Well, it certainly worked for me, Hazel."

"Now, Tom, if everybody had behaved like you, I wouldn't have gone home tired every night.

It was that buddy of yours ... Rick ... uh, what was his last name?"

"Paulson," answered Tom.

"Yeah, Paulson. Has the law caught up with him yet?" asked Hazel.

"Now, Hazel. Be kind. Rick's doing all right. He's become a very successful businessman."

"I know, Tom. I'm just pulling your leg a little. Rick owns this place now. Did you know that?"

"No ... no wonder he wanted me to meet him here for lunch. Create a sale whenever he can. Sounds like Rick."

"Despite all the grief he gave me many years ago, Rick is really a good boss. He treats everybody here with respect and gives a hand when needed."

"Ah, here comes the pizza tycoon now," said Tom. "Look busy, Hazel."

As Rick approached the table where Tom sat, Hazel said to Tom, "Thank you, sir. We appreciate you coming to Corky's. I'll get you a menu and be back in a minute."

“Hey, Rick,” said Tom. “That is a fine lady. She’s a valuable asset to this place.”

“Hey, Tom ... yes, old Hazel’s been around a long time. I’m kind of surprised she didn’t recognize you, though.”

“You should give her a raise, Rick.”

“Now, why would I ... ah, she happened to mention that I own this place, didn’t she?”

“Yes,” answered Tom. “And I think your buying this place is due penance for all the trouble you caused here.”

“Actually, it has rewarded me beyond measure, especially when you consider all the competition in the pizza business. I’m glad to see you found our table. Brings back a lot of memories, doesn’t it?”

“Yeah, though, I can’t help but wonder if you don’t have your own VIP table in the back now.”

“No, Tom. I like it just fine out here.”

Hazel returned with a menu for Tom and greeted her boss, “Good day, Mr. Paulson. I’m so glad to see you here today.”

“Hello, Hazel. I’ll just have my usual with a pitcher of Coke. And if I might take the liberty to suggest the house super special for my client here ... Tom?”

“How could I refuse a kind and thoughtful gesture like that,” replied Tom.

“Very good, sir,” said Hazel. “Two house super specials and a pitcher of coke. Thank you, gentlemen.”

“Fine lady,” commented Rick. “I should give her a raise, but it might put her in a higher tax bracket. Then, with the way the progressive tax system works, she might actually have less money to take home, and then she could lose her house and be out on the street. I just don’t think I could do that to her.”

“No, no, we wouldn’t want to do that,” said Tom.

“Maybe I could give her a free pizza every week, you know, no cash involved kind of thing. What do you think, Tom?”

“I think God will provide you with all the wisdom you’ll need in that decision,” answered Tom.

“Well, that was certainly a political answer. Are you running for office now?”

“No ... I just meant ...”

“I know what you meant. So, is this your annual get away from it all thing to the mountains? What do you want with me?”

“I’ve been doing some thinking, Rick. I ...”

“What are you looking at, Tom?”

“That lady at the door talking to Hazel ... she looks kind of down.”

“Yeah, you’re right, man. Something’s going on. Hazel is coming over here.”

“I’m sorry to interrupt, Mr. Paulson,” said Hazel. “That lady needs some help. Her son has cancer, and the doctors have only given him a few weeks to live. He apparently loves pizza and wants a pizza party as one of his last wishes. She wants to know if we ever have any leftover pizza that we might be able to spare.”

“Have her come over, Hazel,” said Rick.

As the lady approached their table, Rick and Tom stood up.

“Welcome to Corky’s,” said Rick. “I’m Rick, and this is my buddy, Tom. Please, sit.”

“Rachel, sirs,” said the lady.

“So, your son wants to have a pizza party?” asked Rick.

“Yes, sir. I was just wondering if you ever have any leftover pizza, you know, like a cancelled order or something, that you might be willing to give away.”

“I’m sorry, Rachel. We can’t do that because of government regulations, but we might be able to work something else out. Tell us a little about your son, Rachel.”

“His name is Scott, and he’s nine years-old and he loves pizza, especially Corky’s pizza.”

“Tell us a little about Scott’s illness,” said Rick.

“It’s cancer, sir. The doctors at the hospital say they’ve done all they can do. They’ve given

him only a few weeks to live. The doctors and the hospital have been really good about the money. I owe them a bunch.”

“Which hospital?” asked Rick. “Medville?”

“Yes, sir,” answered Rachel.

“Did they have any other recommendations, Rachel?” asked Tom.

“They did give me the name of a specialist, but he’s so overwhelmed it would be four weeks before we could get an appointment. And I don’t have any money.”

Tom looked at Rick and said, “St. Matthews?”

“St. Matthews,” said Rick.

“When did you want to have this pizza party, Rachel?” asked Tom.

“I was hoping for tomorrow. It’s Saturday and some of his cousins and friends from school would be able to come then. That’s why I stopped by today to see if you had any leftover pizza I could warm up tomorrow.”

“Rachel, you tell Scott to invite everyone he wants,” said Rick. “We’re going to have a party. Noon okay?”

Fighting back tears, Rachel said, “Oh, thank you. That seems so ...”

“It will be our overwhelming pleasure, Rachel,” said Rick. “We’re gonna have a ball.”

“It ... it sounds so wonderful, but I don’t ... I don’t have any money to pay for such a party.”

“Open your purse, Rachel,” said Rick. “Take out your wallet and tell me how much money you have in it.”

“Okay, I only have some coin ... it comes to one dollar.”

“That’s really a coincidence. I just finished calculating your bill here for the pizza, assorted party goods, and other miscellaneous things and it comes to exactly one dollar.”

Rachel emptied out her coin purse and handed the money to Rick.

“I’m sorry, Rachel,” said Rick. “I forgot to tell you that you don’t pay until we’re done with the party. Can Scott get out to come here?”

“Yes, he’ll make it,” replied Rachel. “I’ll see you here tomorrow at noon, then.”

“On your way out, give Hazel your address and phone number, okay?”

“Yes, sir. And ... thank ... thank you, sir.”

“You bet, Rachel,” replied Rick.

When the lady left their table, Rick looked at Tom and asked, “Can you hang around tomorrow?”

“I wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

“Hazel will take care of the pizza. You and I, buddy, are going to make this kid’s day.”

“Do you happen to own any hotels in this town where I could get a room for a reasonable price?”

“Hotel, schmotel, my friend. You are coming home with me. Nancy will love to see you again.”

“Are you sure you have the room, Rick? ... no, wait, you just built a new home, didn’t you? Probably a mansion with twenty rooms, huh?”

“No, Tom. It’s just a cozy four bedroom and two bath in a nice little gated community. Nothing fancy. You will have to be fingerprinted and give some blood to get in the gate, though.”

“Will I get a written copy of that report?”

“Absolutely. John, the gatekeeper on Friday night, will handle the whole thing, if he’s awake.”

The two gentlemen finished their world-famous house super special pizzas and laid out a plan for the party and for getting Scott further medical care. They decided to split up and get more done for the afternoon. Tom took care of all the work in getting Scott into St. Matthews, and Rick worked on getting ready for the party. They met back at Corky’s at 5 o’clock.

“Hey, Tom,” said Rick. “Mission accomplished?”

“Yes, I spoke with Dr. Frederick Peterson at St. Matthews, and he’ll be seeing Scott on Tuesday.”

“Great. It helps to have connections sometimes, doesn’t it? How is your brother anyway?”

“He’s fine, Rick. He wanted me to thank you again for that million-dollar donation last month.”

“Peanuts, Tom. Peanuts.”

“I don’t know, man. A cool million isn’t exactly peanuts.”

“No, I mean, we had a bumper crop of peanuts on a farm I own in Georgia. Prices remained high, and I made a tidy sum from it, which allowed me to donate it to St. Matthews.”

“He says you’ve established a fund to help pay the cost of medical care for those who are desperate.”

“Yeah, it’s worked well. Your brother has been great to work with.”

“Yes, he’s a good guy, even if he is my brother. I do think God gave him a few extra brains and shorted me.”

“It takes a big man to admit that. It’s just a shame it took you so long to figure that out ... you ready to go?”

“You’ve got the lead, Rick.”

“We’re not too far away. You got your cell phone on in case we get separated in traffic?”

“Yeah, man.”

“I’ll give John at the gate a little bribe and we should be able to skip the fingerprinting and blood work.”

“You are so wise, my friend. I still don’t know what Nancy saw in you.”

“You wear your jealousy well, Tom ... see you later, Hazel.”

“Bye, boss,” said Hazel. “You and your client have a good evening.”

Fifteen minutes later, they arrived at Rick’s house. Tom turned off the engine to his car and walked toward Rick.

“Listen, Tom, I had better call Nancy and let her know you’re going to be spending the night.”

“Nothing like a little short notice, huh.”

“Nonsense ... Hello, Nance. I just wanted to give you a heads up. I’m bringing a guest home tonight.”

Rick opened the front door to his house and continued talking with his wife on the phone, “Yeah, yeah, I know. I should have called you earlier, but this guy just kind of wormed his way in, if you know what I mean.”

Walking down the hall and entering the kitchen, Rick met his wife and gave her a kiss while still talking to her on the phone. When Nancy saw Tom, she ran over and gave him a big hug.

“Hello ... hello... I lost her, Tom. She hung up on me.”

“How are you, Tom?” asked Nancy.

“I’m doing well. How’ve you been?”

“I’m doing great, despite my ball and chain over there,” answered Nancy.

“Hey, hey, I heard that,” said Rick.

“Let me look at you,” said Nancy. Holding his hands, she continued, “No ring, hmm. Just forget to put it on or not married yet?”

“Now, Nancy, don’t you think if I had gotten married, you’d be one of the first to know?”

“I’d hope so. Seeing anyone steady?”

“Look out, man!” exclaimed Rick. “Look at that gleam in her eye, Tom. You’re dead meat if you don’t stay totally vigilant.”

“Married life that bad, hon?” asked Nancy.

“Of course not. That’s not what I meant. I ... I, uh ... just look out, Tom.”

“Follow me and I’ll show you your room,” said Nancy. “It’s just down the hall. I may need to do a couple of things with such short notice. Well, you know how it is.”

When Nancy opened the door, it became apparent that there weren’t any “couple of things” she needed to do. The room looked better than any hotel Tom had ever stayed at.

“You can put your suitcase over there and the bathroom is well stocked with toiletries.”

“What did you do, wiggle your nose, Samantha?”

“Hazel called me this afternoon and gave me a heads up,” whispered Nancy.

“Good old Hazel,” said Tom.

“Dinner will be ready in about 30 minutes.”

“Thanks again for having me, Nancy.”

“You’ll always be welcome here, Tom. Besides, I love seeing how you and Rick interact. It shows a little different side to him.”

“Well, I appreciate that, Nancy.”

Nancy and Tom walked back into the living room where Rick was talking on the phone.

“So, you think you’d be able to make that, Jerry?” asked Rick. “One-thirty tomorrow. Thanks a lot, Jerry. We’ll see you then.”

“Who was that?” asked Nancy. “Jerry Poin-dexter?”

“Yes,” answered Rick. “His band is coming down to Corky’s tomorrow to play some music, but I’ll explain it all to you after dinner when we lay

out the plan for tomorrow. By the way, what's for dinner anyway?"

"I ordered a couple of house super special pizzas from Corky's," said Nancy.

"Ugh," moaned Rick. "That's what we had for lunch."

"Okay, then," said Nancy. "You're just going to have to settle for the meatloaf, mashed potatoes, and green beans I have cooking in the kitchen."

Walking over to give her a kiss, Rick said, "I love you, babe."

"It's going to be about 30 minutes still," said Nancy. "Why don't we come sit down and talk for a little while."

Looking at the coffee table, Rick asked, "Why is our wedding album sitting there?"

"I just felt like reminiscing a little," answered Nancy.

Rick looked at Tom, pointed to his eyes, and mouthed the words, "be vigilant".

“Oh, look, Tom, there’s you and Nichole coming down the aisle behind Rick and me. You remember Nichole, don’t you, Tom?”

“Of course I do, Nancy. She’s an absolutely gorgeous woman, but then how could she not be with a gorgeous big sister like you.”

“She’s in her last year of nursing school at the college and she just lives down the street ... and she’s not married either.”

Rick buried his head in his hands and sort of groaned.

After another fifteen minutes of such reminiscing, Nancy got up and said, “Why don’t you two come help me set the table. It’s getting close.”

When they got into the kitchen, Nancy opened the cupboard door and handed Rick four plates and glasses.

“Why are you handing me four settings, Nancy? You didn’t ...”

Before Rick could finish his question, the front doorbell rang.

“Would you get that, Rick?”

“Uh, sure.”

Opening the front door, Rick said, “Hi, Nichole. Fancy meeting you here tonight.”

“Hi, Rick ... well, are you going to let me in?”

“Oh, sure ... where are my manners? I guess I was off in some other world ... Nancy, oh Nancy. Your sister is here.”

Coming out of the kitchen, Nancy said, “Well, hi, Nichole. I’m glad you could drop by. You’re just in time, can you stay for dinner?”

“You, uh ... ca ...” When Nichole noticed Nancy with that gleam in her eye, she used sisterly deduction and said, “Of course, I’d be glad to stay for dinner.”

“Oh, Nichole, you remember Tom Peterson, don’t you?”

“Of course. How are you, Tom?”

“I’m good, Nichole. How are you? Nancy said you were in your last year at nursing school?”

“Yes, and I’m fine.”

With their wedding album open on the coffee table to the picture of Tom and Nichole coming down the church aisle behind them, Nancy said, “Oh, we were just reminiscing a little before you came, Nichole. I found this picture of you and Tom coming down the aisle behind Rick and me. You looked so young then. Sit down for a couple of minutes while I finish in the kitchen.”

“Can I help you with anything, Nance?” asked Nichole.

“No, I’m almost done.”

Sitting next to Nichole on the couch, Tom turned to her and asked, “So, Nichole, when are we getting married?”

“I was thinking June 12th. Is that okay with you?”

“I’ll try to clear my schedule,” answered Tom.

“Of course, I’ll have to have my dog approve of you first.”

“I’d love to meet your dog, Nichole.”

“Dinner’s ready,” hollered Nancy.

As they stood up to go into the dining room, Rick approached Tom and said, “I tried to warn you, buddy. Didn’t I?” Stretching out his hand, Rick added, “Welcome to the family, son.”

After a delicious meal filled with lively conversation, Nancy said, “Well, if we all pitch in with the dishes, we can get out to the living room and talk about tomorrow. Rick, why don’t you clear the table and Tom, you can rinse while Nichole, you can put the dishes into the dishwasher. I’ll get the leftovers put away.”

With clean up accomplished, they moved into the living room. Rick looked around and said, “It would probably be better if we went back to the dining room table where I can spread things out.”

“Do you guys need some help tomorrow?” asked Nichole. “I’ve got a free day.”

“That would be great, Nichole,” said Rick. “Okay, I’ll give you the outline of the plan first and then we can fill in the details of who does what. Here’s the timetable. Tomorrow at eleven in the morning, Corky’s will shut down to the public for 2 ½ hours. At noon, we will start the pizza party for Scott. At 1:30, we will reopen to the public with a

special event offering free pizza. The special event will last until five ... I've got a whole checklist of things we have to get done, so we'll have to get an early start in the morning to get them all done. Hazel and the gang at Corky's are going to take care of all the food and service work. I've called our materials supplier and they're going to have provisions available on a minute's notice, because I have no idea what kind of a turnout we'll get. I've got a checklist for each of you, so we can divvy up the chores and so we'll know who's doing what. Any questions so far?"

"Nancy told me about Scott," said Nichole. "But what is this special event? I assume it's associated with what you're doing for Scott."

"Yeah, Rick," said Nancy. "You forgot to tell me about that."

"I know, I know. I apologize. The idea just came to me late this afternoon and you know me, the wheels get to spinning and my brain gets so focused internally that I fail to communicate properly to others, at least at first. We could just give more money to our fund at St. Matthew's and leave it at that, but what if we could get the community

involved. There are all kinds of things that could come up for this family besides medical costs. If we could get other people to pitch in where needed, then we could have a much bigger impact. We've never approached anything quite from that angle before so I know there might be a lot of improvising as we go ... on such notice, what could we do that would attract people, especially the college crowd? ... free pizza! ... we've got the apparatus at hand—Corky's Pizza.”

“I like it,” said Tom. “There are several points that might help in getting people involved. First, we need to keep the pitch low key, yet moving. Tell them about the family and Scott's condition and let that soak in. Second, we should keep whatever help we need broken down into small increments that are simple so someone that volunteers for a need isn't tied up for a long period of time. Third, continued incentives, like maybe more free pizza when they complete a chore, might prolong the interest and enthusiasm. I will supply the funds to keep the pizza rolling.”

“Nancy, Nichole, what do you think?” asked Rick.

“It sounds great, Rick,” answered Nancy. “We’ve all had various levels of experience at improvisation, so I think we can swing that. Just always keep focused on Scott.”

“I’m on board, Rick,” replied Nichole. “It sounds challenging, but exciting.”

“Okay. Here are your checklists. Nancy, you and Nichole should stay near Rachel and Scott. You can answer any questions people might have about his condition. If Scott gets tired, we’ll have a bed set up in the office where he can rest. Tom, I’m thinking you should man a booth that introduces people to what we’re trying to do and how they could help. I will try to stay on top of things overall with the facilities, staff, crowd control, and pitch in where needed with you guys. I’ve got some students passing out fliers all over the campus and I’ve gotten us a couple of spots on the radio.”

“Nichole and I will get with Rachel in the morning to learn all that we can about Scott and his condition,” said Nancy.

“I already talked with Rachel about what we would like to do, so she’s a little bit prepared and

you won't be springing something on her," said Rick.

"I'm going to focus on getting people signed up for future volunteer work when I can," said Tom. "That will include explaining exactly what we are going to do, what kind of volunteer work might be needed in the future, and how they can plug in. I'm also going to give information on St. Matthew's and what all they do to help people, including that special fund for those who can't afford the medical costs."

"I know it's getting late, so I think we should let this soak in, get some rest, and hit it hard in the morning," said Rick.

"Do you want to spend the night here, Nichole?" asked Nancy.

"No, I should get home and take care of Hans."

"Oh, that's right," said Nancy. "I forgot about him."

"Well, good night, all," said Nichole. "I'll see you in the morning."

“I’ll walk you to your car, Nichole,” said Tom.

After Tom and Nichole walked out the door, Nancy turned to Rick and asked, “Well, what do you think?”

“I think this is going to be a great event.”

“No, I mean about Tom and Nichole,” said Nancy.

“Honestly, Nance, I do think they’d make a great couple, but just give it time and don’t get too pushy.”

When Tom came back into the house, Rick handed him a small piece of paper with the words “Bongo’s Beef Sticks for Dogs” written on it.

“Bongo’s Beef Sticks for Dogs? What is this, Rick?”

“That, my friend, will get you instant approval from Hans, the German Shepherd.”

Saturday came and went like it normally does for people all over the world. At that small grain of sand called Corky's Pizza, they played games, won prizes, garnered smiles, listened to a band, watched a magician, introduced a young boy to a community, and most of all, they ate lots and lots and lots of pizza.

As Rachel got Scott ready to go home, Nancy walked over to her and noticed the tears flowing down her cheeks.

“Are those tears of joy or sadness, Rachel?” asked Nancy.

“Some of both, I guess.”

“What are you thinking, Rachel?”

“I'm tired, but amazed. Amazed that all these people would come out today for Scott ... he is my precious son, Nancy, and I have had him for so little time. Sometimes I don't understand why God has allowed this cancer to happen to him.”

“That is a tough question, Rachel. I do know that God intervenes sometimes in the lives of his people. We don't know why, when, or how. Only God knows that. In His wisdom, he created

humanity with a free will. If nothing bad ever happened to us, we would most likely start thinking we don't need God and that would be far more deadly than anything we experience here on earth. If you have taught Scott about the Lord, then I am absolutely sure you will be with him in eternity. As far as the time he has left with you here ... well, I probably don't need to tell you ... love him every day you can. And if anybody ever tries to tell you they know why Scott got cancer and somehow, you are at fault, don't believe them. They don't know what they are talking about. When God calls your little boy home, know that Jesus is waiting there to take him up in His arms and he will no longer have cancer. In the meantime, Rick and Tom are going to do everything they can to get you the best medical help possible. Tom's brother is a great Pediatric Cancer Doctor and they've got a fund to take care of the expense. Be with your son and know that we are standing right beside you as God would want us to do. If St. Matthew's can give your son longer to live, thank God for them, and continue loving him every day you have with him."

Burying her head in Nancy's shoulder, Rachel sobbed. Nancy just held her for as long as she needed.

“Thank ... thank you, Nancy ... I love you guys, and I am so grateful for all you've done.”

“Okay, Rachel. James, the driver who works for Rick, will take you home. Rick, Tom, and I will pick you and Scott up on Tuesday and take you to St. Matthew's. Make sure you have everything with you from that list I gave you. If you have any questions or just want to talk, give me a call, okay?”

Joining Tom who was sitting at a table, Rick said, “Well, my friend, can I buy you a pizza?”

“You're buying?” asked Tom.

“Yes, I am.”

“House super special?”

“You got it, my friend,” answered Rick. “Hey, girls, you want some pizza?”

“House super special?” asked Nichole.

“Yes, sister of my love.” Walking into the kitchen, Rick saw Hazel and asked her, “Miss Hazel, do you think you could round us up four house super specials?”

“Oh, I think I could persuade Jason to keep the oven hot, boss.”

Going back to the table where the others now sat, Rick sat down and said, “It’s kind of funny. Pizza surrounded us all day and we never had time to eat any.”

“How many pizzas did we give away, Rick,” asked Tom.

“The final total came to five-hundred thirty-four, not counting these last four. How did we do with volunteers?”

“Two-hundred fifteen gave us their names and contact information,” answered Tom. “I really didn’t think we would get quite that many, but people seemed to be moved.”

“Well, I think it was great,” said Nichole. “A moment to remember.”

“I agree, Nichole, but right now I need to visit the little girl’s room,” said Nancy. “Do you want to come, Nichole.”

“I’m right behind you.”

“Rick, I had started to ask you something the other day before all this came up with Scott and Rachel.”

“Go ahead. Ask away.”

“We’ve done a few of these charitable things over the years and it’s always seemed to click. I was wondering if you would consider ...”

“I’m sorry, Tom,” said Rick. “I’ve got to get something out of my briefcase. I’ll be right back.”

When Rick got back, he laid out some paperwork in front of Tom.

Tom looked at the top page and said, “Peterson and Paulson, Incorporated? What, uh ... how did you know I was going to say this?”

“I’ve been carrying these incorporation papers around in my briefcase for over two years. I figured you’d eventually get around to it.”

“You’re incredible, my friend. But why Peterson and Paulson? Why not Paulson and Peterson?”

“Peterson and Paulson just rolls off the tongue easier.”

“You’re sure?”

“Absolutely. We can hammer out the details later and then I’ll get my attorney to file them next week ... welcome back, ladies. Tom and I have just entered into a business venture this very night in the hallowed grounds of Corky’s World Famous Pizza Emporium. It’s called Peterson and Paulson, Incorporated. Would either of you two lovely ladies care to join us in this venture?”

“What exactly will this venture be doing?” asked Nancy.

“Exactly the type of things like we did this afternoon. Helping people, but on a little more formal basis.”

“I’d love to, Rick,” replied Nancy.

“I would be honored to join you guys,” said Nichole. “Hmm, but ... I ...”

“Why the hesitation, Miss Nichole?” asked Rick.

“Well, uh, it’s just that your venture is named Peterson and Paulson, Inc. and my name is For-ester.”

“That won’t be a problem, Nichole,” said Rick. “Once you and Tom get married, it will be two Petersons and two Paulsons.”

Everyone looked at Tom and he said, “June 12th, right?”

“Oh, you remembered, Tom,” said Nichole. “How romantic!”

“Of course, we haven’t talked about a dowry yet, Nichole,” said Rick. “What do you have of value?”

“A dog.”

“That’s a good start, Nichole,” said Rick.

“What about that red Ford Mustang you drive?” asked Tom.

“Oh, of course, Tom,” said Rick. “We’d have to include the mustang.”

“It’s sounding better all the time,” said Tom.

“Do I get a say in this?” asked Nichole.

“No,” said Rick. “This is man-stuff.”

“Only thing is, I haven’t been approved by Hans yet,” said Tom.

“Piece of cake, my friend,” said Rick. “Just remember what I told you.”

“What did you tell him, Rick,” probed Nancy.

“I’m not at liberty to discuss that,” said Rick.

“Oh, he probably told him to buy some Bongo’s Beef Sticks for Dogs,” said Nichole. “He knows that Hans loves them.”

“What about it, Tom?” asked Nancy. “Is that what he told you?”

“I, uh ...”

Already keeping secrets from your future wife, Tom?” asked Nichole.

“I, uh ...” Looking at Rick, Tom said, “Counselor?”

“I am advising my client to change the subject ... quickly,” answered Rick.

“All right, then,” said Tom. “A toast to Peterson and Paulson, Incorporated.”

“Peterson and Paulson, Incorporated,” said the group, in unison.