

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU SAY, IT'S WHAT YOU DO

The morning dew had settled thickly upon the vehicles parked outside his motel room. He walked back into his room and grabbed a towel to wipe down the windows of his rental car. A seemingly innocuous activity that provided him with a clear view of the parking lot. Little things always caught his eye—the angle of the sun, the number of vacant parking spots, the cycle of the traffic light at the exit of the motel. Things that had little meaning to the average motel room occupant so early in the morning became an integral part of Travis Sawyer's surroundings. Those who knew him admired his vigilance in always knowing his surroundings, always looking for an out, and always knowing his options. Some days his very life depended on those observations.

This day, though, such concerns had little bearing, for no one could have followed him. No one knew he had come to town. A quick walk to the office to check out and he would be on his way.

He drove out of the motel parking lot and headed west on Highway 19. He kept his eyes peeled for an old warehouse about two miles down the road on the right. Travis had built a reputation within the agency for being able to see things that others couldn't. According to his source, the owner just wanted to get rid of the building. With a detailed description of the building exterior in hand, he immediately recognized it sitting amidst overgrown vegetation and a potholed parking lot. He saw no real estate signs anywhere, so he waited back at the corner of the road where he could have a view of the whole setup.

About fifteen minutes passed when a dark-colored limo pulled up in front of the old warehouse. He watched for a few minutes, studying those who got out of the car. Then he pulled his car into the parking lot and parked next to the limo. He got out of his car and walked over to the three men standing outside the limo.

The huge chauffeur stopped him and told him to turn around.

“I’m gonna have to pat you down, sir,” said the man.

“Okay, no problem,” said Travis.

“He’s clean, Mr. Benson,” the chauffeur said to the man who had gotten out of the back of the limo.

“Mr. Sawyer, our friend spoke very highly of you,” said Mr. Benson. “I’m glad you could meet with us today.”

“Thank you, sir. Can we look inside?”

“I like this guy, William,” Mr. Benson said to the other gentleman. “He doesn’t want to waste my time. You got the key, William?”

“Yes, sir, Mr. Benson,” answered William.

William walked over to the door and inserted the key when the door creaked open by itself.

“It appears to be open already, sir,” said William.

“I can see that, William. You and Henry check it out.”

William and Henry entered the building and after about five minutes came back out.

“It appears to be clear, boss,” said William.

“Good. Good. Let’s go inside. Henry, you stay outside and keep an eye on things.”

The three men walked around the first floor without saying a word. Travis studied every corner and every doorway. Finally, Mr. Benson broke the silence.

“I see you have a strong power of observation, Mr. Sawyer. Our friend said you did. Look, here’s the deal. This old building has been in the family for fifty years. It had its heyday, but now I’ve got no use for it. You’ve got two acres of ground with it and very flexible zoning. Fifty G’s takes it all.”

“Well, the price is certainly doable. I ...”

Before Travis could finish, a shot rang out. Then two more shots came, and the three men ducked behind some crates with more bullets slamming into the wall behind them. Henry came into the building with his gun drawn, but the fireworks drove him to a position behind a short wall.

Travis scanned the second floor and got a visual on three shooters positioned to keep them pinned down indefinitely. He saw a set of stairs to

his right and two piles of old pallets between him and the stairs. When the shooter on the right took a moment to reload, Travis made a dash to the first pile of pallets. He could just see that shooter through the slats of the pallets. When the shooter paused again, Travis ran behind the second pile of pallets. Since no bullets slammed into the pallet piles, he felt he had gone unnoticed in his position. The second-floor overhang covered the stairs, so a couple of quick steps and he would be able to climb the stairs and get onto the second floor without being seen. When he reached the second floor, he saw that he had about thirty feet between him and the shooter. He could safely get about ten feet closer unseen, but the last twenty feet stood wide open. Grabbing a short section of an old board at his feet, he took aim and threw it like a tomahawk. His throw hit the shooter's left elbow dead on, and the shooter dropped his gun. Traversing the last twenty feet quickly, he immediately applied a choke hold on the shooter and felt him go limp in his arms. He picked up the gun and checked the shooter's pockets for more clips.

Travis had to move to his right behind an old desk to see the second shooter. Apparently so

focused on firing below, the second shooter had not noticed the disabling of his comrade. Taking aim at a point just in front of that shooter's bent knee, Travis let loose three rounds. The shooter became so startled by the bullets whizzing in front of him that he dropped his gun to the first floor below. Travis found a short section of old mechanics wire in the corner and used it to bind the guy's hands behind his back. He then pushed the second shooter along the rail until he stood about twenty feet from the third shooter. Firing two rounds at the shooter's gun barrel proved enough to get his attention.

“Lay your weapon down or say a prayer that my aim is a little off,” said Travis. “What's it gonna be?”

“Okay, man,” answered the shooter. “I'm dropping it.”

With the shooting stopped, Mr. Benson and William peeked out from behind their cover.

“It's all clear, Mr. Benson,” yelled Travis from above.

William and Henry ran up the stairs and collected the shooters, while Travis went back down to Mr. Benson.

“Friends of yours, Mr. Benson?” asked Travis.

“Noooo ... I’m impressed, Mr. Sawyer, but not surprised.”

“What do you mean?” asked Travis.

“Highly decorated Green Beret. Then the CIA. Now a preacher.”

“Ah ... I see you’ve done your homework.”

“I like to know who I’m dealing with,” replied Mr. Benson.

“About the warehouse ...”

“Here’s the deal, Travis. First, you call me Frank. No more Mr. Benson.”

“Okay.”

“Second, with what just went down, I’m giving you the warehouse, free and clear. Third, I’m kicking in a 100 G’s to help you renovate. Again, free and clear.”

“Uh ... that’s very generous ... uh ... Frank. Are you sure?”

“I’m sure as I’m standing here, which I wouldn’t be if you hadn’t put your life on the line.”

“Well, thank you very much, Frank. I’ll make sure we spend the money wisely.”

“I know you will, Travis. When you’re done, I might even come and visit on Christmas.”

“Well, you know you’ll always be welcome. What about these guys? Are we calling the cops?”

“No, we’ll take care of them, but relax, we’re not gonna kill ‘em or anything. We’ll find out where they came from and send them back alive and well.”

“Good.”

“Of course, they may suffer a little embarrassment in the process,” said Mr. Benson, with a sly grin.

“I appreciate that, Frank. In the end, God will deal the final hand.”

“Another thing. I’ll put the word out that I no longer have any interest in this building, so you

shouldn't have any more of their kind on the premises. Unless, of course, you put the fear of God in them, they mend their ways, and they join your flock.”

“You never know, Frank. You never know.”

With all the legalities and permitting finished, the building for Epiphany Lutheran Church began its journey. The people who made up Epiphany Lutheran had been meeting for almost a year prior to the start of building construction. Travis emphasized the point often that Epiphany Lutheran Church was the people and not the building. One of his early flock happened to be Jason Harris, a fellow Green Beret and now owner of a construction company. With what they had faced together as teammates, Jason and Travis had no problem working the plans down to only what they needed for the people to follow Christ and the Spirit to grow within them. It was much like what they carried with them when they went into the jungle—only what they needed to survive and accomplish their mission.

Jason's construction company did all the heavy work to make the building structurally

sound. The flock of Epiphany got together every Saturday for six months to finish the cosmetic work on the building, restore the parking lot, and landscape the grounds. At one of the last work parties, someone who had made deliveries to the old warehouse when it was operational made a comment to Travis. He thought it somewhat prophetic that if the history of the concrete and wood from the old warehouse could be personified, they could say that the building had its own epiphany when it became Epiphany Lutheran Church.

Though the interior of the building still had lots of room for construction projects in the future, the third Sunday of May allowed the doors to officially open. Even with the lavish expenditure of extra thick padding on the folding chairs, they still had a couple of thousand dollars left over from the anonymous (at least to everyone but Travis) seed-money donor. Of course, there weren't any stained-glass windows, any gold communion ware or collection plates, any elegant carvings, or an expensive pipe organ, but there was the word of God and a group of people who believed following Jesus should be a way of life. The people knew who sat next to them on those folding chairs, and they cared

about each other. They had no fear or reticence in welcoming anyone that came through the door. The flock were indeed a most fortunate lot. Not only did they have a shepherd who taught them to know and understand their mission, helped them to keep their priorities in order, and survive in a sometimes-hostile world, but they also had an old warehouse that gave them the wherewithal to do many things where others could only offer the words of a noble mission statement.

As with most undertakings of this nature, mistakes are inevitable. Epiphany Lutheran Church made one very serious one that required them to dip into their contingency fund. They were forced to buy another hundred folding chairs. The ones they had were always filled.