

LAST WEEK'S STEW

With his wife, Mary, out of town for the weekend at the Women's Missionary Conference and with the kids at his parents, Pastor Schmidt suffered through having to fend for himself for a couple of days. His suffering clustered near the hours of 6:00 AM, noon, and 6:00 PM. Coincidentally, he usually ate his meals at these times.

At 7:00 PM on Saturday night, his prayers remained unanswered. He had given very specific instructions to his wife to pass the word discreetly around before she left of his impending condition for the weekend. It proved small consolation that most of the other men in the congregation could also be suffering. He always had the option of going down to the bowling alley and grabbing a sandwich, but the humility of such an action gnawed at his pride. He thought he would save that as a last resort for Sunday night in case the subtle appeals in his sermon fell on deaf ears. So, he found himself staring at the contents of the refrigerator, pondering the meaning of life. Sometimes women just didn't understand the deeper facets of life. To them, the contents of a refrigerator loomed as just

another chore. To a man, it stood as sustenance to fight another battle.

He finally gathered the courage to look into a large, covered dish toward the back of the bottom shelf. The contents looked vaguely familiar; it appeared to be last week's stew. As he calculated the complexity of this selection, he cast his eyes toward the microwave. Yes, the stew had a good mix of the essentials necessary for survival. A quick glance into the freezer confirmed that there was still ice cream available to cap off the meal. He opened the cupboard, pulled out a medium-sized bowl, and filled it with a good portion of stew. Looking at the bowl, he decided he needed a bigger bowl, so he emptied that bowl into a larger bowl, added another couple of scoops, and put the dirty, medium-sized bowl in the sink. Then came the decision of how long to nuke the stew. A logical approach would be to start at 30 seconds, then test it. After nine such trial-and-error cycles, he concluded it was warm enough. After consuming the stew and a double serving of chocolate ice cream, he felt proud of himself. Yes, he could survive if he had to.

As the evening wore on, the stew seemed to cause him a little digestive distress. He could not

get to sleep, so he got up, went into the living room, and turned on the television. With the amazing technology of satellites, they could get five-hundred channels even in a small country town. After browsing four-hundred and ninety-nine channels, he hoped the last one would have something worth watching. Channel 500 featured Professor Lawrence MacDonald and his traveling classroom. This evening's episode took the viewer into a little-known small town in upper North Dakota, where the professor prepared to lead a tour of the Red Plains Quote Museum. The museum occupied a building that originally held a combination barber shop and saloon. When the barber passed away and the county went dry, the community felt it needed to do something about all the wisdom that they would lose without those two establishments. So, they formed a committee of former patrons to preserve the educational heritage of the town in a manner that would be worthy of national recognition. Thus, a quote museum arose from the ashes of the barber shop and saloon. As you can imagine, such a display of quotes would have to cover a wide variety of subjects with diverse levels of understanding.

Pastor Schmidt felt the show held more promise than anything else he had seen, so he set down the remote and opened his mind. Professor MacDonald opened the show standing in front of a brick building that sat on the town square. To the professor's right, Arnie could see several signs in the window. One said, "Haircuts 25¢". Another said, "No credit, except for Harley Davis". The last one said, "No horses served". As the camera panned the inside of the room, Arnie felt as though he had entered another era in time with the old-time barber chairs and the rich dark wood and gilded décor of the bar still in place. A long hallway showed that several rooms held special significance.

Professor MacDonald, dressed in a bow tie and tweed jacket, then took his hand carved wooden pointer and directed the camera to a sign above an ornate statue behind the bar that said, "If after a nominal time at the bar, you get the feeling that you are covered all over with gold paint, it's probably just a gilt complex."

Pastor Schmidt thought it a humorous, yet astute observation of man when he gives himself to strong drink.

For the next hour, Professor MacDonald led the tour through one portal of enlightenment after

the other. The illumination and the fame of those quoted merited a great deal of respect from Pastor Schmidt. The founding committee's claim that all those quoted had at some time in their history actually been physically present at the barber shop or saloon merited a great deal of skepticism from the theologian. His doubt of the latter grew out of the fact that the quotes ranged from Martin Luther to Mark Twain to Yogi Berra. But the claim did not detract from the wisdom presented. It merely added a stroke of authenticity to the ambiance. Professor MacDonald deferred the balance of the program to merely pointing his hand carved wooden pointer at each quote in rhythm to classical background music.

As the program drew to a close, Pastor Schmidt began pondering the sampling of quotes presented. He concluded that the women and the more sober-minded citizens of the community had a greater influence on the selection of quotes to include in the museum than the founding committee. Perhaps that's why the committee of former patrons of the barber shop and saloon remained steadfast in their singular claim that all the authors uttered the quotes while on the premises. When Professor MacDonald ended the show, he urged

viewers to tune in the next night as he probes the philosophical and theological wit of Bullwinkle the moose and Rocky the flying squirrel.

Pastor Schmidt survived the weekend without any serious health issues. At 1:00AM the next night, he found himself in front of the television set tuned to channel 500.

When his wife came out of the bedroom, she asked him, “What are you doing? It’s one o’clock in the morning.”

“Just having a little of last week’s stew and watching an educational program.”

As she bent over and gave him a kiss, she said, “Well, I love you dear, but I’m going back to bed.”

“Good night, dear,” he said. When she was out of sight, he murmured to himself, “Sometimes women just don’t understand the deeper facets of life.”