

CHIT CHAT CAFÉ

Pastor Schmidt had to go into town to pick up a couple of things for the church office. Unfortunately for him, the office supply store sat next door to the Chit Chat Café. It wouldn't due to pass by a repository of potential sermon topics on such a fine morning. When he walked in, Randy Atwater loudly congratulated him on his recent pickup truck acquisition.

“Hey, Pastor,” said Billy Trumbel. “Heard a good one the other day ... a man knocked at the pearly gates and asked if he could come in.

“What's your name, my friend?” asked the angel.

“Arnie Schmidt,” said the man.

“No, I'm sorry, I don't have an Arnie Schmidt with a reservation. How is it you've come to be here?”

“Well, I'm a pastor and I made the mistake of suggesting we change the date of the Annual Women's Rummage Sale in my announcements on Sunday.”

“Today is Sunday, Pastor Schmidt.”

“I know.”

“Is that an umbrella wrapped around your head, Pastor?” asked the angel.

“Very funny, Billy,” said Pastor Schmidt. “Very funny. You’ve obviously been drinking too much coffee.”

One of the first things you notice when you enter the Chit Chat Café is a sign hanging from the ceiling. It is a quote from the Cowboy Cookbook by Ken Beck and Jim Clark.

“Take a pound of coffee. Add water. Boil for half an hour. Throw in a horseshoe. If it sinks, add more coffee.”

That sign probably says more about the wisdom exuded in the Chit Chat Café than anything else. Maybe that’s why it’s there.

Pastor Schmidt sat down and waited for a waitress. He picked up a copy of the Cedar Crossing Gazette that was on the table. Sherry Costello, the waitress on duty, soon came over to his table.

“Good morning, Pastor Schmidt,” said Sherry. “What can I get for you, today?”

“I’ll take a cup of coffee and a cherry danish, Sherry.”

“I’ll be right back, Pastor.”

Sherry returned shortly with Pastor Schmidt’s order.

“Here you go, Pastor. Black like you like it.”

“Thank you, Sherry ... Say, how is your brother?”

“Well, it was touch and go for a while, but we think he’s going to make a full recovery.”

“If you ever need anything and Pastor Bennett’s out of town, you give me a call, okay.”

“Thank you, Pastor.”

Pastor Schmidt picked up his coffee and took a sip. Then he opened the paper and took a bite of his cherry danish.

Before he could start reading, though, Sam Young, sitting at the table next to him, said, “Did you read this in the police blotter, Pastor? A thief broke into the police chief’s house and stole his

television. They apprehended the suspect, a Darryl Hanson, soon after. The police found that the suspect had left his phone on a charger in the chief's house ... don't you love it?"

Pastor Schmidt smiled and shook his head. He did make a habit of checking the police blotter regularly in case anyone he knew might need a visit. First, though, the front-page headline caught his eye.

Oak County Still Case Not Yet Solved

Sheriff Lackmeyer of Oak County says that federal and state officials have not abandoned their search for a still up on Rockford Mountain. The officials narrowed down the search to that area because of evidence of numerous cattle near the base of the mountain running and frolicking around the pasture for no apparent reason. The most plausible explanation given by the sheriff for the unusual activity of the bovines centered on the belief that somewhere up on the mountain, the still owner, either accidentally or on purpose, spilled the contents of the still into the creek that fed the stream flowing down the mountain. Hampering the investigation has been the apparent lack of any noticeable

activity over the last two months. There have been several other theories suggested by members of the community, especially those patronizing the Bottom of the Mountain Saloon and Grill, but law enforcement officials have declined to comment on them. When interviewed by our Jess Harper, reporter for the *Gazette*, the owner of the famed Saloon and Grill, Sonny Borden, mentioned that his sales have shown a remarkable spike of 80% in the last two months.

Pastor Schmidt thought to himself, “That sounds an awful lot like something those two guys who came into church trying to sell squirrels would do. No, it couldn’t be.” He took another sip of coffee and glanced up at the television over the counter. WPCG reporters were on the scene of a serious fire in Hedrick’s Corner.

Reporter: We are coming to you live from Hedrick’s Corner, where a raging fire has just destroyed a gentleman’s home. I’m here with the poor owner right now. Mr. Chambers, this fire has totally destroyed your house. You’ve lost everything

you ever had, including your pets. How do you feel?

Victim: Well, Bob, I feel pretty good, although my lumbago has been acting up lately and all that draft from the fire has stirred up the pollen. Pollen allergies can be brutal, you know. But it must be tough for you, too, having to come out here and broadcast remotely and all. I'll bet you'd rather be back at that nice comfy TV station.

You could hear a "cut" in the background, just before they switched to a commercial.

Pastor Schmidt went back to his paper. He came to the page on government news. As a concerned citizen of Cedar Crossing, he felt bad that he hadn't been able to attend the last town council meeting. He was glad they had it covered in this week's paper. He read through the minutes until he came to one item he felt might interest the church:

"Councilman Dobbs, you have a proposal?" asked the mayor.

“Yes, Mayor. I feel it is my duty to make a motion that we repeal a law that is currently on our books.”

“And what law is that, Councilman Dobbs?” asked the mayor.

“I propose that the council repeal law 13-46 passed in 1948.”

“Forgive me, Councilman Dobbs,” said the mayor. “But I don’t have that law in front of me. What does the law say?”

“The law states that it is illegal to eat an ice cream cone within fifty feet of a church on Sunday.”

“We have a motion on the floor to repeal law 13-46. Do I have a second? ... Okay, a second. All in favor of repealing 13-46, raise your hand. Okay, the motion passes unanimously. Law 13-46 is no longer valid.”

There wasn’t anything else of importance in the minutes. Pastor Schmidt noted that they adjourned the meeting at 9:45 pm, and that all in

attendance enjoyed some ice cream treats from Dobbs Ice Cream Parlor afterwards.

The tables are close enough in the Chit Chat Café that you can easily hear a conversation from a nearby table. Pastor Schmidt overheard Ronnie Dawson and Eddie Folsom talking about Rupert Johnson.

“Hey, have you seen Rupert lately?” asked Eddie.

“No, I haven’t seen him in a long time,” answered Ronnie.

“Where do you think he’s been, Ronnie?”

“I don’t know,” answered Ronnie. “I haven’t seen him since that day he left here to go buy his wife a birthday present.”

“What was he going to get her, anyway?” asked Eddie.

“He told me they were having a sale on deluxe broom, mop, and trash can sets at the hardware store.”

“Oh, well,” remarked Eddie. “He’ll probably show up one day ... if he’s still alive.”

Pastor Schmidt glanced up from his paper to see a welcome face standing at his table.

“Well, hi, Tom. Please have a seat.” Pastor Schmidt caught Sherry’s attention and pointed to his coffee cup and then to Father Tom. “I haven’t seen you in a while.”

“Yeah, I’ve been busy. Real busy, but I got tired of my own coffee, so I thought I’d stop and get something with a little more body to it.”

“Having trouble with a topic for this week’s sermon?” asked Pastor Schmidt.

Sherry set down a fresh cup of coffee for Father Tom.

Taking a sip, Father Tom said, “Hmm, that’s good coffee.”

Pastor Schmidt smiled and said, “Well, you’ve come to the right place.”

Pastor Schmidt and Father Tom chit chatted for a while, comparing theological and congregational notes, so to speak.

“Ah, the quote of the day,” said Pastor Schmidt, reading from the paper. “It’s from Peter

Marshall, ‘If a man is not willing to stand for something, then he’s likely to fall for anything.’”

“Pithy, even if it’s from a Presbyterian,” said Father Tom, while winking at Pastor Schmidt. “Did you ever read his book, *A Man Called Peter*?”

“Yes, I thought it was very good, although it’s been a long time,” answered Pastor Schmidt. “I think I’ll dig it out and read it again.”

“I wouldn’t mind rereading it again either,” said Father Tom.

“Do you still have your copy?” asked Pastor Schmidt.

“I’m not sure,” answered Father Tom.

“Well, if you don’t find it, let me know and you can borrow mine.”

“Thank you,” said Father Tom. “You know, I don’t have any idea why I’m thinking about this now, but somebody told me a rather humorous story a while back.”

“Okay, I’ll take your confession now,” said Pastor Schmidt.

A priest was called to the home of one of his elderly parishioners who had just been robbed. As they waited for the police to arrive, he did the best he could to console her, even reminding her that at times we must forgive those who have done us wrong. When the police officer got there, he began questioning the elderly woman.

“Do you know anyone who would want to do this to you, Mrs. Smith?” asked the policeman. “Do you have any enemies?”

“No, I don’t have any enemies,” answered Mrs. Smith.

“How old are you, Mrs. Smith?” asked the policeman.

Beaming, she said, “I’m ninety-nine years old.”

“That’s a long time. In all that time, you’ve never had anyone you might consider an enemy? That would be highly unusual.”

“I don’t have an enemy in the world.”

“That’s quite admirable, Mrs. Smith. How did you manage that remarkable achievement?”

“Oh, that’s easy, honey. I’ve simply outlived them all.”

“That’s a good one, Tom.”

“Have you got a sports section there, Arnie?”

“Yeah, sure. Here you go.”

“Thanks, Arnie. I like to read ‘Dan on the Outdoors’. Do you read that one?”

“Sometimes.”

“Here you go, Arnie. Dan reminds everyone that deer hunting season began last week and to be sure and practice gun safety ... this is kind of funny:

“There are rumors that Sheriff Tyler and his two deputies over in Bates County wanted to go deer hunting, but they had a problem. The two prisoners they had locked up still had a month to go, so they took the prisoners with them on the hunt. The sheriff’s wife volunteered to tend the camp while the men went out for deer, because she said it’s easier than trying to clean up after them when they get home. When the first day ended, the dejected hunters returned to camp with nary a deer. At least

Evelyn, the sheriff's wife, had a nice warm meal cooked up for them. They knew they had one more day to try again before they had to get back to law enforcement business. So, with full confidence in their abilities, they headed out for another day in the woods. When the second day ended, they trudged back to camp, even more dejected than the first day, for they had no deer. As they walked into camp, they noticed a big pot over the fire. That pot contained deer meat. As it turns out, after they left in the morning, a deer wandered into camp and Evelyn shot it. Now neither the sheriff nor his deputies will confirm nor deny the report. The prisoners, with being released three weeks early from their sentence, are not saying a word. This reporter is on the fence about whether I should pursue the story any further or just let it go. My better judgment suggests letting it be."

"Let it go," said Arnie.

"Amen," added Father Tom.

"Hey, Tom, did you see that new sign Harvey put over the window behind the register?"

"No."

It took God six days to make the world. I can make your eggs in five minutes or less.

Harvey, The Cook

“I didn’t know that Harvey was so theologically minded,” said Father Tom.

“Yes, well ... speaking of time, I better get those office supplies. My secretary is probably wondering where I am.”

“Really, Arnie. You don’t think she knows where you are?”

“Come to think of it. She did ask me to bring her a cup of coffee. I think I’ll take one to go for myself, too. Do you want one, Tom?”

“I’m not quite ready to go yet.”

“Well, I’ll tell Sherry to have one for you when you go, and I’ll cover it.”

“Thank you, Arnie.”

“Next time, Tom.”