

EPILOGUE

The Present

Rob scanned the crowded classroom. He had them. All eyes were on him and their awestruck expressions indicated they might be hungry for more. "People naturally turn to religion and community and family when other values they hold dear are brought into question. It happens today and it happened in the '60s.

"Those who lived during that decade did a lot of things wrong. We were selfish. We were wild. We made mistakes.

"But we also had the good fortune to experience some of the most profound and significant advancements in civil rights and cultural progress of the millennium. We fought for all citizens to have the right to vote. We worked for equality in the workplace, in the government and in the home. We gave everyone, women, Afro-Americans, Hispanics, gays, a voice. We started the internet. We stopped an unjust draft and a pointless war. We put a man on the moon. It was freakin' awesome!" he said.

The class burst into applause.

It is the end of the semester, and Professor Robert Franklin has just wrapped up the last lesson of the course he teaches to college freshman every year—*America in the 1960s*.

As he reaches his office, he finds his brother Tim leaning against the door. "Bout time you got here," Tim says, glancing down at his wristwatch.

Rob drops his briefcase and gives his brother a bear hug. "I am so sorry. My lecture ran late. You know how I get caught up in that stuff."

"Yeah. I heard the applause from way down here," Tim says. "Go well?"

Rob nods and unlocks the door. He and his brother cram into the tiny office. Bookshelves line the walls. Books are stacked high on several chairs. More books are

stacked high on the floor. Even Rob's desk is covered with books.

"Have Mom and Dad arrived, yet?" Rob asks.

"Yeah. Karen and Becky are making them comfortable at your place," Tim replies. "When I left, Dad was resting and Mom was helping make some incredibly delicious-smelling dinner." He pauses in thought and then adds, "Mom and Dad are getting old, Rob."

"I'm glad they came."

"They wouldn't miss this for anything."

Rob smiles. The Franklin family has come together for the baptism of Rob's first grandchild. "Stephen and my daughter-in-law are ready. Let me tell you, this is the smartest kid—"

"I've heard that before," Tim says, waving him off. "I've been in the ministry for almost forty years, you know."

"Time flies."

"If I had a nickel for every "smartest" baby I've baptized..."

"You'd still be a poor minister," Rob jokes.

"Like this is the lap of luxury?" Tim teases back, poking at a teetering pile of history books.

Rob shoves some files and papers into his briefcase and they squeeze through the office door again and out to the parking lot. Rob drives them to his house where their families are waiting.

"Is Larry going to be here for the baptism?" Tim asks.

"Of course. He and his wife will be flying in from Atlanta later this afternoon," Rob says, maneuvering around a bicyclist. "He's Stephen's godfather, you know."

"It's going to be a fun weekend."

"I forgot to tell you," Rob says. "Larry found Coach Bridges on Facebook."

“Your basketball coach?”

“Yeah. He’s been the principal of an elementary school in Wyoming since he left Springlake. He retired a couple of years ago.”

They sit in silence for a few minutes as they pass through modest neighborhoods, soaking up the sun through the Toyota’s moon roof and basking in the comfortable silence of brotherhood.

“You know, I can’t give that final lecture without stirring up a lot of really powerful emotions,” Rob says as he wound through the back streets. “Those were good days, weren’t they?”

“The best,” Tim said.

“You ever wonder how things would have turned out if one or two small things hadn’t happened the way they did?” Rob asks.

“It all fits together, though, doesn’t it?”

“Yeah, I suppose.”

“Everything that happened led me into the Ministry, and I think it’s why you got your PhD.”

Rob and Tim burst through the back door to a warm and enthusiastic welcome. Rob kisses Karen hello, waves to Becky, and then hugs his frail mother. His dad comes out from a back hallway, rubbing his eyes and welcoming his sons with a hug.

“Is Stephen here yet?” Rob asks Karen.

“They arrived ten minutes ago. They’re in the living room.”

The family gathers quietly around the crib. Rob puts his arm across his son’s shoulder.

“Yeah,” Tim whispers. “That’s quite the baby,” looking into the crib.

“That’s the best looking Franklin baby since I was born,” Rob whispers back.

“And you were the best-looking baby since I was born.”

“Would you boys stop being brothers for one minute?” Karen asks.

The family moves into the dining room and everyone takes a familiar seat at the table. A tall, slender candle burns at the center of the table.

“I see you remembered the candle,” Stephen says.

“Of course,” Rob says. “We always light a candle for your namesake at family gatherings. It reminds us of Rev. Stephen Phillips.”

Eventually, they all move back into the living room to wait for Larry and his wife to arrive, and long into the night, they reminisce about old times and old friends.