

# 12 LITTLE STORIES TO RID THE WORLD OF BIGOTRY

SAMPLE

A BOOK BY



FRANK SOTZIK

AUTHOR OF WORDS OF  
EXPERIENCE (THE FREE e-BOOK)





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*Based on a work at [www.wordsofexperience.com.au](http://www.wordsofexperience.com.au).*

If you like my electronic books (e-books), please inform a friend to visit my website (below). As well as my e-books for sale, there is one which can be downloaded for free. This is called *Words of Experience* and is available to help young people, especially if gay, with common areas of concern. My website also has a blog with a number of posts that may interest readers. It includes the early history of this project and marketing of my first e-book.

[www.wordsofexperience.com.au](http://www.wordsofexperience.com.au)

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***Dedicated to all people who wish to change the world for the better.***



**Frank Sotzik**

**AUTHOR**



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## Acknowledgements

This is my second book, but just as for my first (*Words of Experience*), I am most grateful and sincerely thank my relatives and friends for proofreading the manuscript of this book. Without their help, typographical errors and poor wording would have gone unnoticed. Thus without this effort readers could cringe. Of course, some may cringe anyway! Heartfelt thanks also to these people and many others for suggesting ideas and useful points during the writing process. Warm thanks go to Jonathan of Bizweb Design in Perth (Australia) for arranging the beautiful cover design and formatting of this e-book. In addition, I wish to thank Aisha of Sadhana Consulting in Perth (Australia). Aisha orchestrated a wonderful marketing campaign for my first e-book to make it available to many people worldwide, which developed into an ongoing project. Her help and enthusiasm made all this possible. Aisha has also encouraged me commit to writing further books. Last but not least, I wish to thank my readers, whose support and eagerness make me want to keep writing books for them.



## Introduction

This is my first fiction book and my second proper book. My first (free) book is called *Words of Experience* and is non-fiction. It concerns the experiences of myself and others, mainly with respect to being gay and related issues. For more information about these topics or myself, please download *Words of Experience*. This e-book is entirely different, in that it contains a collection of little stories which are imaginary and cannot be construed to be reality. Any resemblance to real people is unintentional. However, other than for pure entertainment, the purpose of this e-book is to help change the world into a happier and fairer place for all to live in peace and harmony. As ambitious as this may appear, I believe it is achievable if enough people want it and believe this can happen. The possibilities which fiction allows can help bring this about, I am sure.

The original e-book was centred on areas of importance to young gay people. In that sense, this e-book is similar to the first. Throughout the stories in this e-book, the theme of the reality of lives of gay people can be found. However, I provide a broader perspective of human romance and attraction in this e-book. Imaginary characters are presented as I think they usually occur in real life, not being only totally gay or totally straight but mostly somewhere in between. Moreover, this fiction book contains bisexual, gay and straight characters. Therefore I am hoping that my readers will find the world reflected as it truly is, but in an optimistic manner. Of course, there are dark plots and much drama is included. However, this is necessary to ensure that this e-book is tremendous fun!

Bigotry is anything but enjoyable and all the short stories in this e-book address aspects of it in a humorous way. No offence is intended. Without addressing unreasonable prejudice in the fashion in which it occurs, I cannot see how I can help make positive changes in the world by writing fiction. Unless people can see where the problems are and gain insight into them, they are likely to remain. Of course, I think most people are inherently good, to make a sweeping statement. Therefore, without further ado, I launch into my e-book of short stories. Enjoy!





## **“Who Dares to put Words into My Mouth?”**

It was a sunny day in a small city. The warm rays of sunshine beamed down on two little churches on top of a little hill, with a pleasant view of Hilltop city. There were a few clouds in the sky and a gentle breeze. It was the sort of day on which one could feel glad to be alive.

The two churches looked the same in terms of their architecture and general size but in fact they were very different in a number of ways, as we shall soon see. Both churches were built in the 1960s, about fifty years ago. They were of medium size for church buildings and rather stylish in a dated sort of way, with various geometric shapes distinguishing the flat slabs of concrete making up the structures, such as around the irregularly shaped tinted glass windows. Rather than tall pointy steeples, as one would think church buildings should have, they had sloping roofs which made one think of steeples. Perhaps these were compromises by the architects with the intention to make the buildings church-like. Both buildings were painted in cream colour, somewhat pale yellow. One notable difference between both church buildings was the cross on the roof above the entrance to each building. The Roman Catholic church, St. Mary's, had a painted grey steel cross with narrow bars and a circle where the bars crossed, slightly austere and in true Catholic style. The Protestant church had a large brown wooden cross of two thick beams but rather elegant looking, albeit a little rough. Lightning conductors adorned the top of the roof next to the crosses, as protection against “acts of God”. Hilltop Grace was the Protestant church. It had been Baptist for a number of years but Hilltop had had other Protestant denominations in the same building in the years past.

Hilltop was a small city and a little sleepy. Started-off in the gold rush days, there were still relics of grand old buildings in the style of the late 1800s, such as large old hotels of which the city boasted several. Although Hilltop was far from the sea, it had been built around a small creek which had been dammed by early miners, so nowadays there was a small river which flowed through the main city below the hill with the two churches and a small lake where locals liked to go canoeing and swimming when the weather was hot. There was a disused old railway station with rusting tracks. The town had a history museum for the goldmining days and two World Wars which had claimed the lives of a number of young people from Hilltop in the past. There were no large skyscrapers but the main street had a number of prestigious-looking office buildings. There were suburban houses around the main city area for about 10 kilometers in all directions. For entertainment, there was a big cinema which also doubled-up as a theatre and a roller skating rink. In addition, the city hall doubled as a night-club on weekends. The cinema had been struggling to stay open in recent times because of DVDs and movies from the internet but theatre performances helped the staff keep the doors open.



At night on weekends, the inner city below the hill came alive with neon lights of different colours, red, blue, green and yellow. Traffic noises and shouting could be heard, usually nothing violent but just general merrymaking. The sound of dance music could be heard faintly from a distance from the city hall where mostly young people gathered to enjoy themselves. There were fast food outlets and restaurants, predominantly Chinese and Italian but also others. The hotels of Hilltop were full at night on weekends, with many cheering and happy locals. Overall, the mood of Hilltop residents was friendly. In some respects it was like a large country town.

On Sundays, in the morning and evening, the two churches of Hilltop had a reasonable number of people attending each of them. Overall, a very mixed crowd of worshippers gathered for the services at St. Mary's and Hilltop Grace. There were young and old people, those who were reasonably well off and those who were not. On the surface, differences between the congregations were not so clear but on closer examination, there were contrasts between the worshippers at St. Mary's and Hilltop Grace.

Father John Michael was priest of St. Mary's. He had a warm and jovial character, laughing often when spoken to and punctuating his statements with amusing comments and smiles. He had been dedicated to the priesthood ever since a young age but now was in his late 50s. Fr. John was tall, slim and slightly hunched. He liked to wear checked shirts and jeans but at services on Sundays wore the traditional black clothes with white Roman or clerical ("dog") collar and priestly vestments, white or different colours depending on the festival days of services. In these respects he was very traditional.

Fr. John was an intelligent man but had always wished he had had a better education. His own parents had been poor labouring people who were pious and had always wanted their son to be a man of God and so it was only natural that he trained for the clergy as an adult. Fr. John took a keen interest in many things, including those of the spiritual realm, such as the paranormal. He was well aware that the Catholic Church was even called in to conduct exorcisms, even in the present day. Fr. John was especially interest in Sufism and the sayings of Rumi the Sufi. He also liked to dance.

The pastor of Hilltop Grace, Pastor Thomas St. Paul, was a very different person from Fr. John. Even physically speaking, as Pastor Thomas was short to the same extent that Fr. John was tall. He was also slightly overweight but tried hard not to eat too much. Pastor Thomas liked to wear formal clothes wherever he went. He had a beard, whereas Fr. John was clean-shaven. Church rules did not require Pastor Thomas to wear a special costume to conduct a service, so Pastor Thomas wore his usual clothes but perhaps a shade more formal than he would otherwise wear. He was a very disciplined man and would often talk about sin, even during the week when he was not conducting services but just talking with others. Unlike Fr. John, he





was not a very sociable man and did not really like people. Pastor Thomas had few interests and did not have much of a sense of humour. In fact, he often complained when someone made a joke, saying that it was in poor taste. A notable pastime of Pastor Thomas was watching team sports on television. If there was not a live soccer or football match taking place he would often watch a video of one, part of a reasonably large collection of them. He could be fired-up to anger over a careless or inappropriate decision by a referee. It would not be correct to say that Pastor Thomas had a temper but he was generally an unhappy man.

Pastor Thomas had wealthy parents who were agnostics, in that they neither believed nor disbelieved in God. He was inspired to take up the ministry after a car accident, when he suddenly realised that his life was finite and was fearful of death. He decided that the Bible contained the secret to life after death. Pastor Thomas was not one to believe in ghosts or other-worldly beings and had no interest in supernatural things. He had been a pastor for many years and was now in his late 60s, so about 10 years older than Fr. John.

Lately, discord had been introduced into Hilltop due to gay marriage, which was a popular topic for discussion in the local newspaper and on television. Hilltop did not have a gay bar or night-club, as such. However, there were a number of gay people in Hilltop who had “come out” publically and the city hall had one night of every month which was “gay night”. This was the first night of the month, a clear date so that young straight people did not go there by mistake and take offence. On these nights gay people flocked to the city hall to dance and make merry. It was not uncommon to see men dressed as ladies, “in drag” with puffy wigs, sequined dresses and high heels, as they made their way to the city hall for gay night. Overall, the city folk of Hilltop were tolerant of such sights, although children were apt to giggle before being told off by their parents with a comment that it was rude to stare.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the congregation of each church responded to the differences in styles of the preachers in charge of their flocks. Pastor Thomas St. Paul gave sermons on the Bible in the old “hellfire and brimstone” style, where every little moral misdemeanour that a person could make could be deemed as sin and punishable by death. Human vices and weaknesses were paraded in front of his congregation every Sunday to make it clear that God did not tolerate any such wickedness. Not surprisingly, when gay marriage became topical, talk about the outrage of this became usual on Sundays at Hilltop Grace.

“The Lord made men and women in his image to have children and populate the Earth, not engage in all sorts of evil vices”, he said. “Especially wicked are the homo-sexy-you-alls” (homosexuals), he said, in his southern US drawl. Pastor Thomas had been a student at a Bible college in America many years ago and stayed on for a few years to work in a hardware store before starting to preach. However, the time spent there had left its mark in the thick accent in which he spoke. It was especially



noticeable whenever he said the word “homosexual” because he drew it out for emphasis and effect in front of his flock when preaching. Doing so could make the wickedness seem even more deplorable. Therefore, one can imagine how his congregation were fired-up for action right when gay marriage was polarising the community; over whether fairness and human rights, or God’s plan for His creation and human triumph over immorality were at stake.

Fr. John Michael always preached love and mercy at St. Mary’s. To him, Jesus was compassion and forgiveness in person. He had been uttering his message to his parishioners from the pulpit on Sundays for years. Just as for Pastor Thomas, it was not without effect on his flock. So great was the influence of Fr. John that two people in his congregation had changed their lives dramatically 10 years ago. Susan and Bob were happily married Catholics who had wanted to have a child to complete their happiness ever since they started dating, a full year before they were married. They had decided not to have sex until their wedding day to do the right thing by the God they both worshipped through the Catholic faith.

When they discovered that they could not have children because of a medical problem for which there was no cure, they were mortified. They had to restrain themselves not to give in to guilt or fault-finding. Neither of them wanted to blame God. To give themselves hope and comfort they planned a trip to Lourdes, in France, for which they saved diligently. They knew of miracles which had been worked through the power of Mary, mother of Christ, to those who had faith and went to Lourdes. There people would bathe in the spring at the famous grotto where St. Bernadette had a vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary over 150 years ago.

On return to Hilltop, Susan did not fall pregnant. However, three months after their return from Lourdes Fr. John gave a memorable sermon from the Gospel of Matthew about how whatever anyone did for the very least in the community, that person did it for Christ Himself. That night both Bob and Susan had the same dream. In the morning they looked at each other in surprise, when they discovered that they both dreamt of the same things. Neither Susan nor Bob were very wealthy, both having contract work to pay the rent and make ends meet. Bob was a carpenter by trade but had an injury when he was young and couldn’t work long hours. Susan did sewing and dressmaking but was never formally trained and only took on simple jobs.

Both Susan and Bob were humble people who did not ask for much. They said their prayers together every night before going to sleep and thanked God for having found each other to be happy with together. Susan liked knitting and praying the Rosary. She found turning the wooden beads over was soothing and reciting the prayers in a rhythmic way seemed to transport her soul into a blissful other world. From this magical space she would return feeling at peace following her devotional practice. Bob liked to sing, whenever he got the chance. It gave him joy. Just like Pastor Thomas, he liked to watch soccer on television. Bob also liked to read fiction books from the local library, whenever a good soccer match was not on television.



In their dream, Bob and Susan had seen themselves dishing out soup to a long line of people at night, who came from all parts of Hilltop. So there it was! That was the inspiration for the soup kitchen which they started a decade ago to look after the poor in Hilltop. Bob sold all the investment bonds which he had kept for his retirement so they could live their dream and both of them served soup to the poor for three hours every night, no matter whether there was rain or fair weather. Such was the power of the preaching of Fr. John.

The preaching of Pastor Thomas against the evils of homosexuality and how it should be resisted by God-fearing folk greatly influenced two single parishioners who went to Hilltop Grace on Sundays. They were Helen who was a local policewoman and Toby who was a painter. Helen was usually quick to tell the new male recruits at the station to stop chatting to each other, lest someone think they were gay. If she saw a man acting a bit effeminately on her rounds in the city, she would often single him out for a searching, especially if he was with other men. Helen was not timid. Toby also had a similar dislike for anyone who seemed gay or not acting as he thought a person should. If he saw someone like that in the streets he was quick to call out something insulting. However, Toby did not like to be noticed when doing this. He was less courageous than Helen. Both Helen and Toby had a dislike of lesbians, whom they called "dykes". When they went to church on Sundays they felt righteous and this good feeling made them want to go to church regularly.

One day Pastor Thomas gave a particularly moving sermon about how gay marriage was wrong and against the natural order, ordained since days of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis. Afterwards, Helen and Toby thought that they should do something to stop the evil from growing. "Aha," said Helen. "We should protest against gay marriage in the centre of the city where there were many people passing each day."

"What a good idea!" said Toby. "If there were enough people from our church representing God, we would influence people about the evils of gay marriage for sure."

"I can take leave from work at lunch times," said Helen. "We could stage a protest every day of the week starting from Sunday in two weeks' time."

"Great!" said Toby. "I could make some big signs, mount them on pickets and paint some slogans on them."

"Good," said Helen, "I'll start asking around at church to see who will join us."

From this little conversation, a large protest movement started which was to last several weeks, more than the week which had originally been intended by Helen and Toby. Although the majority of the parishioners attending Hilltop Grace approved and even welcomed this enthusiastically, not all were in favour.





Ruth and her daughter Amy were among the small number of people attending Hilltop Grace who disagreed. Ruth was a rather conservative woman. She disliked the idea of going against the teachings of the church. Ruth had a part-time job as a librarian at the library in Hilltop where Bob would often borrow fiction books to read. Ruth and Bob were on friendly terms and liked to chat. Ruth was married to Peter who worked as an engineer for a mining company which had an office in Hilltop. Although Peter had done field work for a number of years, he now had only administrative duties. Peter was useful to the mining company because of his many years of engineering experience. Peter was a rather strict man who did not speak very much, unless he had too, of course. He was earning well and liked to play golf. He was proud of his ability to provide so well for his family, financially.

Actually, Ruth was more interested in spiritual matters than her husband Peter. Before she became a baptised Christian she had read widely about different religions. Ruth was not only a librarian by profession, it was a passion. She really liked to read. This was a big reason why Ruth and Bob were on such friendly terms when they met in the library. Ruth liked Buddhism with its emphasis on peacefulness and non-violence but it was the personality of Jesus which attracted her to Christianity. She admired his courage and humility in the face of opposition. Peter, on the other hand, was less inclined to take spiritual matters seriously. Indeed, he considered many arguments in Christianity illogical. Perhaps this derived from his analytical training as an engineer. However, his attitude was that Christianity was a religion ideal for families. After all, God was a father, Jesus was a son and Mary was a mother. It was just that she was a virgin, one small point which Peter thought was illogical. Anyway, he thought that if he and his family went to church regularly, then his marriage was more likely to be happy and his daughter was more likely to turn out alright. This made Peter a fully committed Christian.

Amy was a very thoughtful and shy child. Even though she did not say very much, she had a lot to say. She was curious about the world around her. Amy loved her parents. She liked to draw and do puzzles. Any puzzles would do, whether they were jigsaw puzzles or ones which needed much thinking. God and her parents would often feature in her drawings. She liked different colours and if she drew the sky it almost always had to have “em”-shaped birds, a yellow sun with thin pointy rays and a colourful rainbow. Amy also liked to draw cats, which always had four legs, whiskers and triangular ears, no matter which position they were facing. Amy’s parents doted on her. Even though Amy was shy, they tried to get her to speak more. Perhaps this was one reason why Amy was nervous about speaking.

The Sunday night at dinner after the anti-gay protest preparations were becoming big news at Hilltop Grace, Ruth and Peter were discussing it at dinner. “You know darling, I don’t know whether God would like something like this,” said Ruth.



"I don't think it matters what God would or wouldn't like," said Peter. "Pastor Thomas and the Church need our support. After all, we are like one big family and we must do what everybody there wants."

"That's just it," said Ruth. "I'm sure not everyone wants this. Let's ask Amy what she thinks. Amy, do you think your parents should protest that gay people should not marry?"

Amy said, "The pastor says a man should only marry a woman but God loves everyone, so doesn't that mean it's not good to stop men and women marrying whom they love?"

"There! See!" said Ruth.

"That proves nothing," said Peter. "Amy is just a little girl."

"Mummy, why are gay people not like other people?" asked Amy.

"Well, honey, they are probably born that way. Therefore, they have no choice," said her mother.

"Oh..." said Amy and then was silent.

On Sundays at St. Mary's, Fr. John did not usually say very much about homosexuality. Indeed, he felt a little bit uncomfortable talking about it. As by Catholic tradition he was never married he was actually rather nervous whenever topics about sex arose because he had feelings just as normal human beings but no easy way to express them. Fr. John had always been attracted to women ever since his early teenage years. However, his devotion to the Catholic faith and the priesthood took precedence and he faced the prospect of never marrying like the image of Christ carrying His cross. It was just something he had to bear to practise his vocation as a priest. He couldn't recall having homosexual feelings but he sometimes wondered why certain paintings of Christ aroused an extraordinary passion and joy inside him beyond just devotion. He suspected a number of his fellow priests at the seminary of being gay during his years of training for the priesthood but he was too embarrassed to talk to them about it. After all, it just wouldn't be proper. It would be too confronting to other men he was close to. He often wondered if the priesthood made it easier for some gay men to avoid the pressure of their friends and family to marry women. However, he was convinced that most of his fellow priests felt the calling to serve God as much as he did, so that the vow of celibacy could just be accepted, regardless of whether love of a man or a woman was being forsaken.

One could be wrong in assuming that it was the caring attitude of Fr. John and his habit of preaching compassion which would have made most of his Catholic parishioners in favour of gay marriage, were the Church to grant it. Fr. John was not



against gay marriage himself but he thought that it was up to the Church to make the rules. Actually, there were two openly gay Catholics who regularly attended services on Sundays. Everybody at St. Mary's knew about David and Matt but nobody cared about them being gay. Indeed, it helped other people accept homosexuality well and caused many to question the position of the Catholic Church against gay marriage. David and Matt really loved each other and it was obvious to everyone. They were gentle and warm men.

Both David and Matt were open about being gay to everyone who knew them, although their behaviour would often prompt people who did not know them to think they were gay. Both David and Matt would frequently flap their wrists about and speak in high-pitched tones. They would often purse their lips or pout and place a hand on one hip and stare intently at each other. "Well, puh-leez!" was a popular expression for them. Matt was a law student at the time that David was still working as a fireman in Hilltop, which is how they met. Other men at the fire station would often be rude to David and call him insulting things. If it were just for that, David might have remained with the fire brigade, as David was a dedicated fireman who wanted to rescue people. However, some of the antics of his workmates put David's life at risk on occasion. Perhaps the macho culture at work was to blame. David felt he couldn't live up to that. Therefore he knew that he had better leave one day. David gave the one month's notice which was required to leave his job. Then one week before he was to go he burst through the door of a burning apartment on the fourth floor of a building and rescued Matt. They fell in love, started a gardening business together and the rest was history, including Matt's law studies.

The friendly nature of David and Matt could well have helped the congregation of St. Mary's to warm towards gay people and be sympathetic to issues such as gay marriage. However, there was one incident which really brought everyone at church to their side. It was something no one at St. Mary's could ignore.

Philip and Lucy were very popular churchgoers at St. Mary's. They hardly ever missed a service. If there was anything which needed to be done for the church, they were the first people to volunteer, whether it was selling raffle tickets at the church stall or anything else. If someone was in hospital, Philip and Lucy often volunteered to visit the sick or injured person and bring something nice after having a collection for him or her during a Sunday service. Philip and Lucy were totally devoted to St. Mary's. It was like home to them and the community of worshippers respected them for their dedication to their local church.

Philip and Lucy had two children, Jane and Simon. Jane was gifted at maths, which was very obvious to the teachers when she was in high school. Simon was a talented musician who could play the guitar and keyboard instruments. He played rock music on the electric guitar with his band after school and occasionally played the organ in church when the regular organist, Mrs. du Maurier, was absent. Simon





had a wonderful knack of playing the music for church hymns, which made them especially delightful to listen to and he played Bach fugues with true feeling. One day Lucy was crying in church because Simon had an overdose of heroin and had to be rushed to hospital. If it were not for the other members of his band who knew first aid resuscitation, he would have been dead before the ambulance arrived.

Apparently, the other band members did not know about Simon's drug habit. It is just that they all stayed overnight at the house of Philip and Lucy one night. During the night someone from the band woke to hear a strange sound like someone struggling to open a door. He had to get up to go to the toilet. On pushing the toilet door open he found Simon with closed eyes, bluish lips and not breathing. Next to his right hand was a syringe and needle and a belt was wrapped around his left arm. A silver tablespoon made a metallic plinking sound when it fell off the toilet seat while Simon was being moved to commence resuscitation.

After his recovery, Simon readily admitted to his drug habit when questioned by the band members, Philip and Lucy. He said that he had tried heroin only a couple of times at the suggestion of someone and got hooked. Simon was upset because he did not know how he could stop using heroin although he had only used it for a short while before the overdose. He explained that he had gone through most of his savings already but suffered terribly whenever he went for too long without a hit. In tears, Lucy spoke to her friends in church about it, so the word spread quickly and soon everyone at church knew. No one attempted to have Simon charged with anything, including the people attending St. Mary's. All were sympathetic but nobody there knew how to help Simon except Matt, David's partner.

It turned out that Matt's mother had been a heroin addict, who had been in and out of rehabilitation. Over the years, Matt had many conversations with drug counsellors and understood his mother's suffering and the problems of overcoming an addiction only too well. His mother eventually died of an overdose of heroin while she was alone at home. It was something from which Matt had never recovered, especially after all those years of rehabilitation. Matt advised Simon how he could get help and had many practical suggestions. For several weeks it was the biggest gossip at St. Mary's. However, everything went well. After some unpleasantness but with a great deal of love and support from others, Simon managed to kick the habit. The contribution of Matt to Simon's recovery from heroin addiction had never been forgotten by the congregation of St. Mary's. Consequently, Matt and David were well-accepted by everyone at church. Moreover, no one at St. Mary's hated gay people. Indeed, they were all for gay rights, including gay marriage.

Well, the day arrived for the protest by Hilltop Grace against gay marriage. A couple of dozen people had arrived in the main mall of the city centre at lunch time on a Monday bearing signs with homophobic slogans, along with many supporters who were there just to shout. There were a few signs to celebrate their Christianity. One



sign read “Jesus is Lord”. Another had the words “God saves”. However, most of them made reference to the evils of homosexuality. “Gay Sex is Sin” read one sign. “God Hates Fags” was written on another. There were numerous variations of hateful messages. Pastor Thomas led his group of protesters with a red megaphone to make his voice sound louder.

Many of the people of Hilltop who were passing by the protest looked confused or irritated at the sight of the gathering. Some stopped to stare. Most passers-by just walked more quickly. However, there were some people who stood close by and yelled “hear, hear” or “amen”, or similar phrases of encouragement to the protesters. People who seemed in favour of the protest did not really seem to have anything in common. Some were young and others were old. They appeared to be from all walks of life. The only common feature was that they seemed to be in the minority. Most of the Hilltop residents who viewed the spectacle just seemed to want to get away from it and say nothing.

Bob happened to pass by the protest and saw Ruth, his friend whom he often chatted to while she was at work in the library, among the protesters. He looked astonished to see her there and approached and spoke to her. Bob had to raise his voice to be heard above the megaphone and the shouting of the protesters. Ruth appeared to be embarrassed. Bob said, “Why are you doing this, Ruth?”

She said, “Homosexuality is a sin and I am here to protest against gay marriage. Unless we stop this we don’t know what can happen next.”

Bob said, “Ruth, gay people are just people like everybody else. They feel attracted to others and look for love. Why spread hatred, not love like Jesus?”

“The Bible is clear on sin and anyway, I have to support our church and Pastor Thomas.”

Bob said to Ruth, “I cannot explain why one should not take the Bible literally about everything but Jesus taught love and God sent his Son out of love. What you and the other people at this rally are doing is wrong. I’m sure God wouldn’t approve.”

Pastor Thomas overheard Bob and asked him to leave. “Get away Mr.,” he said. This lady is doing the Lord’s work. We are here to stand for God’s righteousness.”

Bob said, “You have no right to do this. God would not want it.”

Pastor Thomas said, “Move along now. If God does not want it, then he can say so. Read the Bible. It’s there for your salvation and all you have to do is believe.”

“I’m already a Catholic and go to St. Mary’s. Ruth knows me. My wife Susan and I run a soup kitchen to help the poor and needy. We do that for God.”



"You Catholics are like those who worship idols, with your prayers to images and statues of saints," said Pastor Thomas. "You don't need to be Catholic to be saved and good works don't count."

"I do it for love! It's not just about salvation," Bob said.

Pastor Thomas said, "We're here to stop sin. God would not want gay people to marry. Gay sex is dirty and homosexuality is wickedness."

"God might punish you," said Bob and walked away.

"Well then, let's just see Him do it!" shouted Pastor Thomas, as Bob was already a short distance away.

That night Bob told Susan about the protest. They discussed it and thought how strange it was to have such a protest in Hilltop, which always seemed so peaceful. They also thought about the fact that the people going to St. Mary's and those going to Hilltop Grace never really got to know each other. They wondered if everyone at Hilltop Grace was so much against gay people and gay marriage.

When Sunday came, it seemed as if everyone at St. Mary's had seen or heard about the protest. Many people came to talk to David and Matt, to offer words of comfort. David and Matt did not seem to be too upset but they said they were worried that people might try to harm them. They said that they were a little surprised about the anti-gay rally because they knew that there were a number of openly gay people in Hilltop. Occasionally they had gone to the monthly gay night at the city hall and seen a reasonable turn-out there. David and Matt hoped that other gay people in Hilltop would not be harmed because no one could help being gay. It was like skin colour or choosing to write with the left or right hand. Being gay was something one just had to accept. Therefore, it was nothing gay people could stop. This left them open to the risk of harm.

David and Matt had talked about getting married if the law was changed but they didn't think it would happen. When it started to be in the news, they got very excited. Now they were concerned because the protesters did not only want to stop gay marriage, they wanted to stop people being gay, which was impossible.

That Sunday, Fr. John addressed everyone at St. Mary's. "We all seem to have heard about the anti-gay protests," he said. "Jesus never taught to meet violence with violence. I hope that no one here does any harm to his neighbour. Even though we do not want the protests to continue, we must trust in God and not use force against the protestors."

"What shall we do?" someone from the congregation called out.

"Let's hold a prayer vigil," said Fr. John. "All who wish to can attend a special prayer session after Mass every Sunday night. We can take the matter to God in prayer."





From that Sunday night and for the next two weeks St. Mary's was packed full of people for the prayer vigil. They lit candles and stayed two hours after each service to pray and in silent contemplation. Nobody who attended found it burdensome. Instead they experienced it as uplifting and being at the prayer vigil left them with a feeling of peace and that God cared.

On the third Sunday that the prayer vigils were being held at St. Mary's, it was Pentecost. The anti-gay protest had been running in the centre of Hilltop for about three weeks. There was a good turn-out at Hilltop Grace that Sunday night for the Pentecost service. After the rallies it seemed that most of the congregation was fired up to do God's work on earth. They had gathered eagerly for the service, so all the pews were full of people. The beginning went well. Then it came to the first reading from the Old Testament on the Ten Commandments. "A reading from the book of Exodus, Chapter 20 verses 1 to 21. 'And God spoke all these words, saying,...' "

Everyone listened intently, except for Amy. She seemed a little bored with the long reading. "...you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox,..."

"Mummy, what does covet mean?" said Amy.

"Shh, Amy!" said Ruth, not wanting to be noticed. "It's rude to talk in church. I'll tell you later. Just listen for now."

The reading continued, "Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die--' "

Then it happened! The church building shook suddenly and violently and then the shaking halted almost as quickly as it had started. The man doing the Bible reading stopped and was quiet and motionless, sticking his head between his shoulders and looking upwards. Some flakes of paint fell off the walls and plaster fell from the ceiling. There was a sound of some rubble striking against glass with a tinkling sound. The lights went out. It was like an earthquake starting but it was different, strange and frightening. Someone in the church screamed. Then there was a sound like the howling winds of a hurricane, just that it was different. It sounded 1,000 times fiercer, yet it was not deafening to the ears. It was as if the sound was coming from inside people's heads. A golden light filled the room, much brighter than the lighting in the church before. All this took place in seconds, yet it seemed like an eternity. Time had slowed down.

Then He spoke, in a thundering voice which was terrible to hear, "Who dares to put words into My mouth?" His voice carried a sense of doom as if one was about to die. One felt infinitely puny in the presence of a tremendous power. God continued, "I am



the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Yes, the one from the Old Testament and the Father of Jesus whom you claim to worship. For a long time I have watched you with great patience but now I am moved to anger and cannot contain myself any longer. You assume that you know all about me and that I do not challenge you over whatever you think, say or do, yet I know all and see all. Now I am here to challenge you.

"I have seen you make bold claims in My name, putting My name on your tiny signs, as if your words were Mine. 'God hates fags', you proudly display. Now God is here to hold you accountable; yea, the God you spurn in your heartless bodies. My people are like sheep and at My bidding I can gather them together. My Son Jesus came so that none of My sheep would be lost and it is people like you who killed Him. If you were there when He walked on earth you would have proudly done the same, too scared to stand up for Him against the church leaders of his time but not too scared to dish out wickedness upon the meek. Oh yes, I accepted His death as a sacrifice for those who believe it but He came to call people to the light, not to start churches of darkness, divided against themselves. All people are My people. That is everyone and who would dare number them or list them as blacks, Asians, Jews, Moslems, women, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender people and so on. I need no such list. Those who cannot live in peace, like you, I would gladly cast out where there is much torment and gnashing of teeth.

"Men and women, you call yourselves. Ones whom you do not like you do not deem human. My anger is roused against arrogance like this. Where were you when I was born? Did you look at the clock when time started? Know that I am beyond time, being eternal. Where will you be when I breathe my last? Would you have the patience to wait till time finishes? Answer Me if you dare!

"Space cloaks Me. Universes are my adornments. They are born, grow vibrant, rich and full of galaxies, stars and worlds, then are dissipated like dust in the wind, only for others to form. Do you know how far they reach? Can you go around them and look at the view? The galaxies and their stars and worlds are endless. Where is your tiny planet among them and how significant are you? Answer Me if you can!

"Holy people such as prophets have attested to My existence and the Way for aeons. When they meet with people like you they are mocked, silenced, cruelly punished, tortured or destroyed. These are people of peace, totally harmless and just too full of Me to keep themselves from speaking out. Which religion might you ask? Know that I need no religion. All religions refer to Me. Who has Me no longer needs a religion and can be content to rest in Me. All else is just idolatry, taking the place of My invisible and formless Self. Yea, the same Self in all religions. Oh, you might need something to see or grasp so as to worship. If you cannot cling to something you might feel lost. Who is in Me is never lost and many have lost



themselves in Me and feel the peace and bliss of it. Such people you would scorn as countless others have done before.

“Nature always speaks of Me, yet you are deaf to it. You talk of creation but have no interest in understanding it. You like to make trouble where you can. Evolution is an evil teaching for you, even if it is not the whole Truth. You want people to follow what does not make sense because it is your way, to make yourselves feel good. Where is your feeling of awe at how I create? Do you want to learn how? No, you are far from Me.

“All living things depend on Me. I give life and I take it up when the allotted time has passed. All beings depend on Me to sustain life moment by moment. Look at the mighty lion, once the source of enjoyment to those who would see Christians thrown into the ring to be torn apart, amidst cheers of onlookers. Many kings and empires throughout history have taken the image of the lion to symbolise their earthly rule till it ended, in each case power that has long been all but forgotten. Beasts like the mighty lion cry out to Me when hungry or in pain. Can you answer them? If you tried, would they listen? Not only them, but consider the gigantic dinosaurs, who roamed the land and seas in ages past. Just like the mighty lion, they cried out to Me, they who are now but fossils in your museums. Can you lead them about like a house pet? Answer Me if you dare!

“All prayers rise up to Me. Countless beings clamour day and night on account of their needs and desires. Your little prayers are counted among these. Can I ignore the beings of My creation? Should I not do what is best for all of them, in the way that only I know how? Do not think that those whom you have wronged do not call out to Me. I listen to all of it in such a manner that you could never understand!

“As Christians, you are supposed to be My spokespeople. You are meant to be guardians of My eternal light, needed to guide people who are lost as if they would not know left from right, night from day. You are meant to show leadership and give counsel so that others might rediscover Truths for themselves, as to say, ‘This is my right (or left),’ or ‘It is day.’ Such simple things you can make difficult. By not being examples of what love really is, you wreak destruction. How so, you might ask?

“War upon war has raged on this planet. Sometimes they are little ones and at times in the past they were big, involving many nations. Do not think that I did not feel for everyone who suffered. When you do not show people what love truly is, then you ally yourselves with the destructive forces in the world. Yea, the same forces which cause wars and keep them going. So many wars have been fought in My name. Is this what you want? Do you want a chance to fight so as to prove yourselves worthy of something? Know that I can laugh at false pride. ‘Our bombs have no equal,’ some think in silence. Atomic power, atomic bombs. There are forces and energies which you could scarcely imagine, orders of magnitude more powerful than those in





the nucleus of the atom released in a chain reaction. Were I to show you to reveal them to you now, you would say they were indescribable, so removed are these from anything you know of now. How would you handle them if available to you? Would you be pleased that the whole world would now have almost unlimited energy from your technology and to enjoy life on this planet, with no more starvation; or would you be pleased that you could destroy the enemies you taunt and enrage?

“Of false pride humanity seemingly has no end. ‘Oh, our medicine. Oh, our science,’ some people think smugly. They hardly realise that many doctors and scientists are in awe of Me, in Whom lies the answers to so many of their medical and scientific questions, so many not yet even formulated. In days past I was equal to the herbs used to treat the infirmities of the sick, at least in the hearts of humble people who led peaceful lives. Now people have need of me no longer because of their medicine and their science. Can you yet feed all humans without killing animals and harvesting crops? Can you heal all common illnesses? Then where is the reason for all this false pride? Were you to follow Me for long enough, then humans could do just that. Rather should they follow you and finish themselves off in wars before they get the chance. Should I not destroy you first? Answer me if you dare!

“You claim to like the Old Testament so much, yet it speaks of Me and I am here now. What does the book of Genesis mean to you now, in this age where even children know of the evidence for evolution and man and woman are made out to be equal? It said that you were to look after all creation. Do you do that now, or show due respect to it? No, not so. Do you feel sorry for the life that was taken if you eat? No, you do not. If you say grace, do you do it because you will have a full belly, or do you really care? You can search your hearts and minds for the answer. I am the God Who knows all hearts and minds, which is why I say these things to you now. Even here in this church, not all are like this. However, you know who you are and to whom this applies!

“The book of Genesis was used to justify slavery of black by white people, for descendents of Noah’s son Ham were cursed by Noah to be servants of his brothers. Imagine the wickedness of using the Bible for that! Not only that, early on when anaesthetics were already available they were opposed for difficult childbirth by quoting scripture from Genesis where Adam and Eve were banished from the garden of Eden, ‘...in pain shall you bring forth children.’ Imagine the wickedness of using the Bible to do that!

“In Genesis, woman was made because man needed a companion. Do you always treat her like one? There are those for whom no opposite can be a companion, gay and lesbian people. Are they worthy to have companions too, or does this not fit into your interpretation of the Law? The Law was given to prophets like Moses, so that life could be good for God’s people, not to cause strife and hurt others. I now



address your leader, Pastor Thomas. Did you not say, 'God would not want gay people to marry.' Tell me! Yes, speak!"

Pastor Thomas could feel a force pushing him forwards in front of the congregation, still speechless with awe at the presence of God. "Yes, I said this," replied Pastor Thomas looking apologetic but with anger in his heart. "However, I meant no harm--"

"Silence!!!" thundered God, cutting him off. "Your heart is cold. I know your heart. Why did you not think I could say what displeases Me?" Answer me!

"That is not true," said Pastor Thomas, eager to save face in front of his congregations, many just staring with eyes and mouths wide open.

"You liar," said God. "You said that if I did not want something that I could say so, to a kind person who challenged you recently. Yet deep within you thought that I would never speak. Even now, there is anger inside your heart but not love. Why did you think this?"

Pastor Thomas was afraid now. Anger had turned to fear. As a man he could not fight now, only run. Yet there was no escape and here was God, the One Whom he had professed to serve. Now Pastor Thomas knew it was best to be honest. "Sorry, Lord," he said. "I only thought of how righteous it made me feel to follow your Laws, as they are written in the Bible. Love does not have rules written clearly but I feel good about teaching others to obey the rules in the Old Testament. I feel good about it because I am sure that I am righteous by keeping them."

"I can see that you understand now. In your heart you know that only love is supreme. There are many heavenly worlds, not just those in the physical plane. After death the souls of the departed go to live with likeminded souls, as each was during his or her expired life, if such souls are not reborn into a physical body. Should a person live without love and choose to act in hatred, after death he shall be with likeminded souls. There need not be a fiery furnace of hell, with a devil holding a pitchfork! Sharing eternity with such unloving and hateful souls is sufficiently like hell.

"Are you now humble of heart or should I smite thee, Pastor Thomas?" spoke God, softly now, like a gentle breeze.

"I am sorry," said Pastor Thomas, truly willing to follow God and try to be loving to all people.

"That is good," said God. "You speak the truth from your heart. I will not destroy you but should you turn back and put words into My mouth I did not say, this is what I will do." A thunderbolt came through the roof and struck the marble pulpit behind which Pastor Thomas always gave sermons. It was intensely bright, much more than lightning as seen on earth, yet its brightness did not blind the eyes. It was if it was seen inside the mind only. The thunderbolt vaporised the stone with a tremendous



blast but like an implosion. Not even ash remained. There was a strange smell of ozone, like on a stormy day with a great deal of thunder and lightning.

At this point the whole congregation, including Pastor Thomas, heard “ahh” voices like the singing of a choir of angels. The sound was indescribable in terms of its heavenly sweetness. It was music like no other on earth, something they would never forget. After a few minutes of this, the sound and the golden light which had filled the church faded. Following only a second or two of darkness, the electric lighting returned to Hilltop Grace. Things seemed to be back to normal, just like a usual Sunday service there, except for the absence of the marble pulpit. However, the hearts of everyone who had been there that Sunday night were moved by the experience of God. Many people were not the same.

Ruth turned to her daughter Amy and asked, “Why were you so quiet? Weren’t you frightened by everything that happened?”

Amy said, “No. There were three angels which floated next to me. They had beautiful long wavy golden hair and sweet faces that shone with a bluish-white glow. They had wings as white as snow. They said not to worry. They said, ‘Daddy’s anger will only be for a short while but His love lasts forever.’ They comforted me, so I was not frightened.”

Her mother was astonished and said nothing.

The next day there was no more anti-gay protest. Indeed, there were never any more in Hilltop. The congregation of St. Mary’s felt that their prayers had been answered. The sudden cessation of the protests in Hilltop caused quite a stir among the locals in the city. Yet people who had seen God when He came to Hilltop Grace that Sunday night did not feel comfortable in talking about it. It was like a closely guarded secret, too personal to gossip about. However, many things changed.

Pastor Thomas visited the soup kitchen of Bob and Susan. He gave them a big donation of money. Pastor Thomas apologised for what he had said to Bob at the protest, to put him down for serving others. Some people from Hilltop Grace volunteered to help Bob and Susan run the soup kitchen. They were pleased to have help because it got very busy sometimes.

With full support of the churchgoers at Hilltop Grace, Pastor Thomas arranged that their church hall should be used for a gay dancing night, every two weeks after the monthly “gay night” at the city hall. Simon’s band were invited to have regular gigs there, paid for by Pastor Thomas and some of the people who went to church services at Hilltop Grace on Sundays. Gay marriage eventually became law after much debate in the national press. Would you believe it? The first gay marriage in Hilltop was performed by Pastor Thomas at Hilltop Grace. The whole congregation were invited and all visitors cheered loudly when both husbands kissed each other. Happy ending!





## The Merciful Heart

Anthony was a politician in the conservative party which was currently in power, having been recently re-elected to government for a second term. He considered it as his duty to prevent change. It was a way of maintaining the social order which he saw to be important to prevent the ills of society creeping in. It was a typical working day in his oak-panelled office. Anthony was sitting at his nice solid mahogany desk, a small selection of papers strewn over the green leather inset lining the working surface of his desk. A shiny brass desk lamp was located at the right hand corner. A photo of him and his wife stood at the left hand corner of his desk. Behind his desk and above his head, where anyone entering the office could see it, was a picture of himself in a graduation gown receiving his Bachelor of Political Science Degree from Harvard University. He had left USA more than 10 years ago but still had fond memories of his time at Harvard. Portraits of well-known members of his political party were strategically placed on the walls of his office.

It was 9:05 am. The phone rang and Anthony answered it after a pause of 10 seconds, "Hello, Anthony Drew MP speaking."

"Hello, it's Chris Murphy," the man at the other end of the phone line said. "It concerns the new branch of our chain of department stores. You might remember me from the last time we spoke a few months ago. We are in trouble because the entire new store was built without a building permit. Our profits are unusually large this year. If we make a small donation to your party's fund for you to take care of, will you do us a favour? Will you overlook the need for a building permit and talk to the relevant authorities?"

"Of course, Chris," Anthony replied. "I'm a friend and I know you'll help us out too. Today I'll speak to my contacts. You have nothing to worry about."

"Thanks Anthony," replied Chris. "I knew that I could count on you. Good bye."

After this conversation Anthony made a few calls to contacts of his in the building industry. He quickly sorted out the problem of the unauthorised department store building for the owner, Chris. Anthony was an efficient man. He never hesitated to solve a problem immediately, when he knew that it would not take long. Anthony was also a big believer in doing favours. A favourite saying of his was, "One hand washes the other."

Anthony spent the rest of the day working on ads for the good work that his political party was already doing, now that they had been re-elected. Advertising to help win



the campaign was not enough. One had to be sure that the public would fully support the aims of his party.

Firstly there was a series of ads which showed him shaking hands with rich and powerful people. One of them was a wealthy businessman who was known to give large sums of money to universities, in order to offer good postgraduate study programmes and conduct medical research. An ad such as this required decisions on many details. There were a number of photos from which to choose the best one. He settled on one showing the two men making clear eye contact and with a firm handshake. His smile was particularly charismatic. One could see Anthony's shiny white teeth. The pose inspired confidence. Good impressions were important to Anthony, personally and in politics.

He had to choose a caption for the photo. The media relations staff had provided him with several alternatives. One version stated, "Anthony Drew, MP. Always doing what is best for voters." Another version had the same quotation but instead of "voters" had "citizens", which was better because it implied benefits for people who did not vote for him as well as for those who did. A different message was given by the version which stated, "Anthony Drew, MP. Showing leadership." None of the captions seemed to convey the meaning Anthony had in mind. Therefore, he wrote inside the neat rectangular comments box on the form for approval for the ad, "Don't use sample captions. It will be, 'Anthony Drew, MP. You made the right choice for all citizens.' "

In his usual fashion, Anthony worked hard all day without a break. It is true that he liked to leave the office early but he made up for it with sweat and strain. He had skipped lunch, something he usually did. It was not just to get more work done. It was also to enjoy his dinner more when he got home, ravenous with hunger. He liked deep-fried potato chips and would eat them as often as he could. Anthony also liked his food extra salty. He did not take too many tea breaks with the staff, mostly only just enough to keep up morale, lest they did not see him surface often enough. Mostly he phoned for coffee in his office. Anthony loved coffee. He drank several cups at work which kept him going. Anthony had given up smoking the previous year due to advice from his doctor. Anthony had been smoking a pack per day since he left high school.

At the end of the day in his office there was a knock at the door. It was Tim from media relations. "Hello, Mr. Drew. I'm here to collect the ads you have reviewed."

"Just about time, Tim," said Anthony. "You guys are so slow. If I call you to pick up the ads you should be here straight away."



"But that was only 10 minutes ago," said Tim.

"Don't answer back. Just listen when I speak to you. I've seen you chatting up the ladies in the corridor a few times before. If you know what's best for you, you'll do what is needed on the dot and work with a smile. Have you got that?"

"Yes," said Tim, whose hands were sweating. Tim looked down at the red carpet with the diagonal gold-coloured lines. He needed the job because his sister had been uninsured and was undergoing expensive medical treatment for cancer. Everyone in the office knew that, including Anthony. It was hot gossip. Tim collected the ads and the stack of forms for the ads and left quietly.

At 4:50 pm Anthony got up and left his office. On his way out he spoke to Ms. Prim, his secretary. Her desk was positioned strategically outside Anthony's office, in order to deter people who had arrived without an appointment, except if they were members of the press or other people useful to Anthony.

In her usual manner, she was seated very stiffly at her computer keyboard typing away. Anthony gave her a lot of work to do and it kept her very busy but Ms. Prim was always very loyal. She typed quickly and worked efficiently, just as Anthony did. Although she did not laugh or smile much, Ms. Prim liked to be flirted with. She was 35 years old and had never been married, even though she had had a few boyfriends in the past. Perhaps they did not think she was fun to be around, even though she was quite pretty, with her long blonde hair and deep green eyes. She liked wearing earthy colours, especially with a reddish hue. Today she had on a wine red jumper and a long light brown dress with frilly edges. She wore thick black-rimmed spectacles but they suited her. They gave her a studious appearance. She was a bit lonely and looked forward to office events. Ms. Prim always made a fuss over the preparations for the annual office Christmas party.

When she saw Anthony exit his door, she wanted to talk. Ms. Prim liked Anthony. She admired his efficiency and his dominating manner made her fantasize about being held close by him sometimes. Although Anthony wasn't handsome in the classical sense, he looked strong and manly. "Hi Anthony," said Ms. Prim. "I haven't seen you all day, buried away in your office."

"Well, I had a lot of work to do." said Anthony, looking at his thick gold-rimmed Rolex wrist-watch. "You know how it is. You're always busy yourself."

Ms. Prim so longed to hear a compliment on how efficient she was. However, it was not given. She decided to try to elicit a compliment by giving one to Anthony. "My, I really like your red tie. Is it new?"





Anthony was always nervous about flirting with Ms. Prim. He knew it would help keep her loyal but he was a married man. Anthony loved his wife. It made him happy to love her although she did not really love him. Anthony knew this but did not want to face it. He would rather pretend that she did. Flirting with Ms. Prim would make him feel disloyal to his wife and would be like a slippery slope to a separation from her. Anthony liked the company of a woman but tried not to get close, so as to avoid feeling disloyal to his wife. He knew Ms. Prim wanted a compliment on how pretty she was but did not want to start flirting.

Anthony said, "No, the tie is not new. It was a gift from my wife on our last wedding anniversary. Anyway, I'm in a hurry to play golf before it gets too late. I had better go, Ms. Prim. Thanks for your compliment. You are so kind."

Although it was a polite reply, this is not what Ms. Prim had hoped to hear. In her mind they were sitting on the grass with a view of the ocean, a picnic lunch on a checked blanket beside them. Anthony had reached over to put his arm around her. She had dropped her favourite novel and--.

"I've got to go, bye!" said Anthony, as he waltzed out the exit into the street.

A feeling of loneliness overtook Ms. Prim at that moment and she sighed. Then she quickly went back to her work. Ms. Prim often put in overtime at work. Of course, she had to do so because of the large volume of work it took to keep up with Anthony. However, she would have done it even if unasked. Working hard made her forget about loneliness and feel useful, almost like being needed, something Ms. Prim craved.

Within half an hour of driving, Anthony had reached the golf club. He took out his bag of golf clubs from the car boot. He removed his tie, folded it neatly and placed it in the boot and slammed it shut. Anthony walked through the golf club doors, past the glass cabinet full of impressive-looking trophies and spoke to his golfing buddies, who had left their workplaces to meet at the same time. They exchanged pleasantries about the day and then went out to the green to play.

Anthony had been playing golf for years. Although not greatly overweight, it was something he did to try to keep his weigh down. He knew that exercise was healthy, so he was sure that he better do some from time to time. Although he didn't like exercise that much he found that walking cleared his head of negative thoughts. Slowly walking on the green was helpful, as his working week did not permit the time for long walks. He also found that walking helped him breathe. Strangely, within the last few years Anthony had felt suffocating feelings while sitting in his office. They were usually mild but on rare occasions they were so bad that he wondered if he



should not call an ambulance. Walking on the golfing green seemed to drive the air into his lungs and make him feel refreshed and made the suffocating feelings go away.

Today at the last golf hole, something did not feel quite right. He was not sure what it was. He was just aware of some general uneasiness. At this point when he stood in front of the ball on its little plastic tee and was about to tee off, Anthony noticed that he was sweating. After his final putt, just as he sank the ball in the hole, he felt a strange squeezing feeling across his chest and a peculiar sensation down his left arm. However, this cleared quickly as he and his golfing buddies walked slowly to the club rooms. Anthony said goodbye to his golfing buddies and went home to his wife.

He reversed his black Mercedes-Benz car up the long winding drive and opened the garage door by remote control. After parking his car and removing the bag of golf clubs and his red tie, he went inside. Anthony lived in a grand-looking house in a leafy street of such houses. He liked small luxuries in life. His salary as a politician was quite high and Anthony liked money. It was not just what money could buy but money itself. He liked the feel and smell of money. In a sense, money made him feel that life was worth living even when it sometimes did not feel like that to him. Not only did Anthony like money, so did his wife Vivian.

Anthony walked through the front door of his home and went into the living room. His wife Vivian was sitting down reading a book. Vivian was an attractive woman in her mid-thirties, with a good figure and fine features. She had light brown hair and was fair-skinned. Vivian knew he was coming home because she had heard his car going up the drive. In fact, she guessed well before then because he was fairly regular in his comings and goings, as well as most things in general. Anthony greeted her and she responded without getting up or even raising her eyes from her book. "Hello, how are you darling?"

"Fine, honey dearest," said Anthony. "The book you are reading is different. Have you already finished the last one?"

"Oh, yes," said Vivian. "You aren't very observant. I finished it three days ago." Vivian often put Anthony down in little ways, even when she did not need to. Annoyingly to Anthony, she would often be mocking or tell little jokes about him when they went out with friends. He would not have tolerated this from anyone else, let alone at work. However, he accepted it from his wife and now even seemed indifferent to it after they had been married for almost 10 years. They had no children but neither Anthony nor Vivian wanted any. "Our wedding anniversary is coming up in a couple of weeks," said Vivian. "What are you going to get me?"



“Sorry, I haven’t been thinking that far ahead,” said Anthony. He loved his wife deeply but was not good at planning for special events. In fact he did not care much for them, anyway, although he liked going to the theatre or the opera. “Maybe I can buy you a nice new evening dress to wear when we go out,” he said.

“Have you thought of taking me somewhere nice for the weekend?” said Vivian. Vivian liked fashion and travelling. Anthony did not care much for travelling. He felt comfortable at home. He thought that the best part of travelling was coming home and sitting down in a comfortable chair. As he often took some work home with him on weekends, he usually preferred not to go far if at all. He did not do too much hard work on the weekend but just small things to keep himself busy, like preparing speeches or a policy document. When they travelled on a weekend or a holiday they always stayed in expensive and flashy hotels. They both liked this. “I’ll think about it,” said Anthony, preferring not to make a commitment to travel plans.

Vivian thought about making a sarcastic comment but decided against it. She was worried it might put him off travelling somewhere for a weekend. “Come on darling, let’s have dinner,” she said.

Vivian was a good cook and enjoyed cooking. She always cooked tasty and nutritious meals for both of them. Although she indulged Anthony in his liking for deep-fried potato chips, she avoided eating too much of them. One reason Vivian liked cooking was the knowledge that good nutrition was a key to keeping her good looks. Another was that she was a very sensuous person. Healthy natural foods appealed to her senses. She liked perfumes and had a keen sense of smell. Anthony often bought her perfumes because she liked them. When she was cooking she liked to smell fruits and vegetables. She adored the smell of tropical fruits like mangoes and pineapples. She liked Italian cuisine, especially. When chopping capsicums, tomatoes and fragrant basil, she enjoyed the scents and savoured the beautiful reds and green, the different textures and curves of the vegetables. Cooking was an activity she enjoyed and that she knew would benefit her and her husband.

Being a sensuous person, she also enjoyed music and sex. While cooking she often liked to listen to music on her iPod, or the CD player if she was in the mood for older-style songs which she already had on compact discs. Rhythms or a strong beat appealed to her sensuous side and her passions, while the melodies spoke to her soul and enhanced the beauty revealed by her senses while she was cooking. She did not focus on lyrics much. Often she did not really identify with them. Perhaps it was because she was getting older and the latest music represented a youthful culture. Anyway, she did not like to think much. She preferred to feel. Although Vivian did not really love Anthony, something she did not wish to admit even to herself, she did enjoy sex with him. She probably enjoyed it more than Anthony but





on matters of sex and sexuality who is to judge? Anyway, it was something they did not talk about. She would not have dreamt of having sex with another man. She was loyal to Anthony. She thought that made her a good wife, something of which she was proud. Vivian did not think that Anthony was as handsome as other men but she liked his looks. There was something about him which was strong and manly. What was more important was that he was hers and to Vivian ownership of things was

very important. She knew that if she kept cooking well then he would keep a nice body and she could continue to enjoy sex, it being there whenever she needed it. For after all, he indulged her desire for sex whenever she wanted it, even after he'd had a busy day at work. She never thought of life without Anthony. Perhaps she took him for granted in a way, but then again, she was looking after him in the ways she thought mattered most.

Anthony was not a sensuous person like his wife. She knew this very early on, around the time they met. They were both in their mid-twenties at the time. It was at their local conservative party club. Both Anthony and Vivian were members. Anthony had done a degree at Harvard University in USA, which she knew was one of the finest universities in the world. Anthony never hesitated to let people know about it. He longed to continue his career in politics and she could sense his passion for this. Anthony had already been making spectacular progress in his early career for a number of years. Vivian had joined the political party club to hunt for a husband. She was not the slightest bit interested in politics. Frankly, it bored her, at least inasmuch as she understood politics. She was sure that if she could secure Anthony as a husband then he would be successful, with a good wife behind his success. All other people in power would see this and support the couple. Then they would both lead a life of luxury, something she liked because of her expensive tastes. Even though Anthony and Vivian were very different in terms of their preferences and personality, Vivian couldn't see how this would matter. She thought that they were a team in all the ways which mattered. Vivian was not fond of Anthony and although she had grown to like him somewhat since, she did not really love him.

After a delicious dinner, Vivian put the dishes in the dishwasher and tidied-up the kitchen while Anthony watched the late news. Then they kissed each other and went to sleep. The alarm clock woke both of them brutally the following morning. Vivian got Anthony ready for work and brushed some lint off his suit with a special velvety hair brush. She made a comment questioning how he could manage to keep up appearances at work and in public if it wasn't for her. Then they waved to each other, as Anthony drove away to the office to work.

Anthony looked at the morning paper just after sitting down at his desk. On the front page was headline news, "University Students to Protest Anti-gay Policies of Ruling



Conservative Party". Anthony remembered giving a public speech on the anti-gay policies of the party not long ago. He personally did not mind gay people, although he had only ever been attracted to women. He did not understand why some people were attracted to the same sex, whether male or female. Yet even if gay people had no choice about which sex they were attracted to, which he doubted, Anthony believed that marriage was something which should only take place between a man and a woman for the purpose of having children, even though he and his wife had chosen not to have any. He was not a religious man but he disapproved of gay rights, not just for gay marriage. Anthony fully supported the position of the conservative party to which he belonged, indeed with great enthusiasm. He did not care if gay people did not like that. They were in the minority, anyway, so they should be outnumbered if they complained.

Anthony thought he would teach the student protesters a lesson. He phoned a friend of his in the police riot squad. Anthony knew his friend was homophobic, more than Anthony himself. He suggested that the police officer should get some mates together and yell out homophobic insults at the students. If the students took the bait and fought with the people yelling insults, then the riot police should appear with tear gas and rubber bullets to discipline the protesters for staging a so-called violent protest and to make them stop and leave. Anthony told him to keep their conversation private.

Anthony had been sitting at his desk for about an hour when he received a call from the police, totally unrelated to the conversation with his friend in the police riot squad. It was relating to a matter involving Chris Murphy, the owner of a chain of department stores he had spoken to only yesterday. However, this concerned something a little bit shady which Anthony and Chris had discussed a few months previously. The policeman did not suspect that Anthony had done anything wrong, nor did his questions or tone of voice ever suggest he was suspicious of something. He was just making his enquiries where paperwork did not seem in order and the police had been contacted by a government department to investigate matters. None-the-less, Anthony found himself sweating to an unusual extent. He also felt a similar unpleasant sensation in the chest which he had felt at golf the day before. Anthony quickly finished talking to the policeman and hung up the phone. He sat quietly for a few minutes and the sweating and unpleasant sensation went away. He thought he had better ask Ms. Prim to check on a letter he had sent to Chris several months back. Anthony got up, opened the door and stepped out to speak to Ms. Prim.

"Did you keep a copy of a letter to a Mr. Chris Murphy which I dictated several months ago?" Anthony asked Ms. Prim. He added, "You might remember that I had asked you specifically not to keep a copy."



Ms. Prim replied, "You know I always do as you ask, so I did not keep a file copy. However, I remember that I still have the dictation microcassette tape recording you used for the letter. You might find a record of the letter there but that was a long time ago. You have dictated many letters since then, so there would be many microcassettes."

"Please find the recording," Anthony said, starting to sweat again.

Ms. Prim walked a couple of metres to her set of filing cabinet drawers, opened one and pulled out the requested cassette tape within seconds.

"Wow, you are so efficient!" Anthony said, much relieved.

"Just as efficient as you," Ms. Prim replied with a wink. However, the filing cabinet drawer was jammed open and Ms. Prim could not shut it.

"Anthony, please push the drawer shut. You are stronger than I am."

"Sure thing," he said and gave the drawer a big push. It slammed shut with a metallic clang. Just as it did so, Anthony felt a terrible pain in the chest, which radiated down his left arm. He couldn't breathe and cried out just before he fell onto the carpeted floor, unconscious.

Anthony opened his eyes. He was in bed in a hospital ward. The last thing he remembered was pushing the filing cabinet drawer and the terrible pain. He remembered nothing else. A man was speaking to him, standing to his left at the bed. He introduced himself as Dr. Priestly. He was a much older man, tall and thin. The doctor had a very serious expression as if he were used to seeing ghosts and had forgotten what it was like to laugh. His hair was black, woolly and messy but was going grey around his temples, just above the ears. Dr. Priestly was wearing a long white coat, with a stethoscope hanging around his neck. He was wearing glasses with thin gold rims, looking like half moons, which he peered over.

"We're glad you made it," Dr. Priestly said with an attempt at a dry smile. "When the ambulance your secretary called brought you in, we did not think you would recover. You have had a massive heart attack. The paramedics in the ambulance attempted to jump start your heart with a defibrillator but could not do it, so just continued cardiopulmonary resuscitation until you arrived at this hospital. We ran some tests. We have some bad news. Your left ventricular ejection fraction is well below 30% and your heart muscle is badly damaged. We don't think you are going to live more than a couple of weeks unless we do something." Dr. Priestly paused.





"Well, what can you do about it?" said Anthony. He was aware of an unpleasant sense of uneasiness, like he had felt on the golf course before but more noticeable. He also noticed that talking made him feel breathless, although he assumed that he would be on oxygen. He was attached to various plastic tubes and there was one under his nose. Anthony was quite alert and what the doctor had said was a shock.

"We could give you a heart transplant but there are some problems. We are short of hearts to transplant into patients like yourself and there is a waiting list--" Dr. Priestly was cut off by Anthony before he had even finished his sentence.

"Don't you know who I am?" said Anthony and gasped in some air.

"Yes, Anthony," said Dr. Priestly, for the first time using his name. "Please let me finish. We ran a number of tests to check your suitability for a transplant. We normally prefer to give a heart for transplantation to younger and fitter patients because they are more likely to survive in the long term. However, most organs and tissues for transplantation need to be matched for tissue type so that the body's immune system won't reject them. If there is no good match, we can still do an organ transplant if it is urgent for survival. To do this we rely on using drugs to suppress the immune system, preventing it from rejecting the donor organ.

"Blood tests have revealed that you have a rare blood disorder. We also found that you are resistant to the more useful drugs we can use to suppress your immune system. Unfortunately, this means we can only transplant a heart which is a really good match, which only occurs in one out of 100,000 to 200,000 people. There is some good news, Anthony."

"What is that, doctor?" asked Anthony, brightening up a bit.

"This morning a body was brought in which had been freshly killed. It was of a young man who died an accidental death. We checked his identification, firstly from his driver's licence and he was on a bone marrow donor registry, so we have his tissue type on file. His tissue profile matches yours almost exactly, so the medical staff I have spoken to have no hesitation to transplant his heart into your body. There is a catch, however."

"What catch?" said Anthony, opening his eyes widely.

Dr. Priestly continued, "His mother is the young man's next of kin. She is on record as being a Jehovah's Witness, so she might not be willing to let us use her dead son's organs for transplantation. We have already phoned her. She wanted to know who the heart was meant to be for. We gave her your name because you are well-known and then she said that she was sorry but did not wish her son's heart to be



taken. She may have something against you but I would not know what. Maybe she didn't vote for you! It could always just be her religion. You know how some people hold irrational beliefs. Anyway, we have arranged for a driver to take you to where she lives, so that you can talk to her. Maybe you can persuade her to give you her son's heart. Your life depends on it, I am sorry to say."

Anthony looked puzzled and a little angry. He was used to getting his way. He changed the subject. "Why am I in a big room full of beds instead of a private room? I have good health insurance and deserve a private room."

Dr. Priestly spoke, gravely, "You ought to be more grateful, Anthony. We were the nearest hospital and your condition was so serious that the paramedics in the ambulance were wondering if you were dead already. We are a struggling public hospital and there was no empty private room because we are overfull and have too little funding from the government. It is unwise to move you from your bed but if you cannot persuade the young man's mother to give you his heart, you have no hope of survival beyond a couple of weeks. It is best that you meet her to talk face-to-face." He then said goodbye quietly without a smile and walked away.

Just as he was leaving, Ms. Prim arrived with a pretty bunch of yellow flowers, glorious like the sunshine. "I just came to visit. How are you feeling, Anthony?" she asked, looking very concerned.

"Not so good, I'm afraid," Anthony replied. "The doctor just gave some news which was hard to take. Thanks for the flowers."

"I've got some news too. I don't know if I should show you this now but you need to see it," said Ms. Prim and looked unusually serious. She took out a folded newspaper from her red handbag and showed it to Anthony. He got a shock when he saw that he had made the front page headlines and he had some trouble breathing. The title read, "Anthony Drew MP Caused Death of Young Gay University Student". After a long pause he continued to read. It turned out that the very policeman who was his friend had leaked news to the press after someone was killed. The policeman had followed instructions given by Anthony over the phone. Students were at a protest against the anti-gay policies of the conservative party to which Anthony belonged. After a riot broke out due to interaction between members of the crowd and the protesters, riot police arrived, firing tear gas and rubber bullets at the student protesters. As a result one young gay university student was accidentally killed, so Anthony's friend in the police riot squad spoke up to avoid responsibility. It had been difficult to explain how the riot squad arrived so quickly and the man had told the other police what to do. The results made headlines.



Anthony felt bad. This was obvious to Ms. Prim. "I don't judge you," she said. "I just had to let you know for your own good. It might be better that you find out from me than someone else and you have to find out, sooner or later." She looked sorry and genuinely sympathetic. She respected him as a man and was prepared to stand by him. Ms. Prim chatted to Anthony for a little while but it was obvious that he needed rest, so she said goodbye and left.

Anthony woke up the following morning to see Dr. Priestly at his bedside again. "We spoke to the young man's mother. She is willing to see you and we have arranged transport for you to where she lives at 2 pm this afternoon. You can be moved to her door in a wheelchair and we will provide a portable cylinder of oxygen and equipment to make it easier to breath. Our driver is a trained paramedic, so you would be in good hands."

Anthony was relieved and thanked Dr. Priestly, who then left looking a little more positive than when Anthony had seen him the day before. Time passed very slowly and Anthony was eager to meet the woman. He assumed that her objection might be religious because he had heard of Jehovah's Witnesses refusing blood transfusions.

The time to leave had arrived. Getting Anthony into the vehicle for transportation was a little complicated but soon he was underway. The driver spoke very little. Anthony noticed that they were heading to a very poor area of the city bordering on some slums. Within 20 minutes they had arrived. The woman Anthony had to see lived in a small one-room flat near the top of a tall block of apartments. They took the slow lift to her flat. Anthony was seated in the wheelchair with a cylinder of oxygen strapped to the back of it. A small tube was positioned under his nose to release oxygen slowly. The lift was disconcertingly noisy, making rumbling and grinding sounds on its way up. It stopped abruptly at the 22<sup>nd</sup> floor. They made their way to Room 224. The bell was not working so the driver knocked.

A small woman with thick glasses who looked as if she was in her 40s answered the door. She thanked the driver as he wheeled Anthony in. She was wearing a greyish dress with small pink flowers. The flat was very clean and tidy but quite bare. The grey carpet was badly worn and the white paint on the wall was peeling. She introduced herself as Karen Chalmers and asked to be called Karen. There was a small white plastic table in the room with three chairs. Karen had made a pot of tea in an attractively-shaped brown teapot and there were three white cups on differently coloured saucers, small chips at the edges of them. She asked if they would like a cup of tea. Anthony and the driver nodded and kept silent. Karen poured out three cups of tea, the steam curling upwards from the cups in the slightly cold room.

Looking intently at Anthony seated in the wheelchair Karen said, "Dr. Priestly from





the hospital told me what has happened to you. He said you won't live for more than a couple of weeks unless I allow them to take my only son's heart."

There was an awkward silence and then Anthony spoke, "Yes. He is right. Please let me have your son's heart. Dr. Priestly said that you were on file as a Jehovah's Witness, so we thought your religion might not permit an organ to be donated."

"Eric was my only son," Karen said. "My late husband and I were very poor and spent most of our savings so that Eric could go to university. He was in his third and final year of a Bachelor of Arts Degree. Eric was very bright and loved to read and act in the student theatre club at the university. He was passionate about studying arts subjects and my husband and I wanted him to do what he most enjoyed and get somewhere in life, unlike both of us. Eric was gay and he was killed in the riot you were responsible for having started, according to the newspaper. When I went to the shops to buy bread, cabbage and milk, I saw the headline. Eric had only just died. It made me cry. I bought the newspaper and read the report at home." Karen looked as if she was going to shed a tear but remained composed.

This also made Anthony feel upset and a tear trickled down his face. He had not thought that the one dead person who had a matching heart which could save his life might have died as a result of what he did. A number of thoughts went through his head. He doubted that Karen would give him the heart and he would have to die. Anthony also wondered what he could say to her, if words were possible. He felt sympathy for Karen for the loss of her only son. Anthony said, "I am genuinely sorry for what I did and offer my condolences to you. I understand that you may not wish to forgive me. I suppose your religion is not the only reason you do not want me to have your son's heart."

Karen said, "My religion is all I have to live for now. My dear husband and son are both dead now. Jehovah's Witnesses are not forced to avoid giving organs to medicine. People of our religion are more concerned about giving and receiving blood than organs, anyway. It is really up to people who believe to decide for themselves, although many people don't want to give or receive organs. I could give the heart to the doctors but it is hard for me to do. So many memories are locked up in my son's heart."

"Why would your religion make things difficult for some people?" Anthony asked tactfully. He was genuinely curious.

"There are parts of the Bible which say that one is not to consume blood and some people think that giving or receiving organs is like participating in cannibalism, as if one were to eat human flesh."



Anthony tightened his lips and nodded, then looking down. He breathed deeply and asked, "Do you hate me?"

Karen paused thoughtfully for a moment before answering. "No, I don't hate you, even though I don't approve of what you did. In fact, I don't even understand why you did it. You did not kill my son on purpose, even though what you did looks like an act of hatred, I have no right to judge you. I used to hate more than I do now, although religious people are not supposed to hate. My son was always so cheerful and happy. He seemed enthusiastic about everything. He was not hateful to any extent and probably could not see why people were, even if I could. Through him I gave up hatred of others, something which I long remember tying me up at times, even when I knew it was not good."

This left Anthony rather thoughtful. "Then why not give me the heart and let me live?" Anthony pleaded.

At this point Karen's phone rang. She picked up the receiver from the wall and answered, listening. "Speaking," she said. "You what...? Yes, your husband is here. The hospital arranged for him to come and talk to me." There was a brief pause. "Of course you can come up and meet us." Karen then turned to Anthony and said, "Your wife is just outside. She is about to take the elevator to meet us. She will be here at any moment." Karen listened to the phone for a moment and then said, "Goodbye Vivian."

There was silence in the room for about a minute and then there was a knock at the door. Vivian walked in looking a bit flustered, as if she had been rushing. Karen offered her a cup of tea and she accepted. Karen went to a small low cupboard and brought out a glass and another chipped saucer. She poured tea out into the glass for Vivian and pulled the only other chair in the room to the little white plastic table. Karen motioned her to sit down.

"It is hard to tell you why I don't want to give you the heart, sir," Karen said. "Do you have any children of your own?"

"No," Anthony replied. "My wife and I do not want any." He cast a brief glance at Vivian.

Karen frowned at this and paused to think. "Our son brought me and my husband so much joy. It helped bind us together in love during our marriage. I have so many rich memories of Eric. I gave birth to him at home, not in a hospital. We had a midwife come in to make sure nothing went wrong. There he was on the table we are sitting around, a little bundle of joy rapped in a ragged bath towel. From then on our lives



were much busier. It was hard to sleep enough many times but having Eric around filled our lives with joy. We watched him grow up. There were problems but I wouldn't have wanted it any other way. It is hard to explain this to people without children of their own. Giving away his heart is like getting rid of so many joyful memories, when I have so little joy left in my life. It is hard to explain why I don't want to do it. It is just that I cannot bring myself to do this."

Vivian cleared her throat a little and spoke, rather unemotionally, "Please Karen, give my husband your son's heart, so that he can live. I have never thought of life without my husband."

"I do understand that you want this," said Karen. "I will try to tell you how I feel. When I come home now, it is to an empty flat. There is no more laughter. I do not ask my husband what he wants, nor my son Eric. I cook for one. In fact it is hard to cook when I know that nobody is there to appreciate it."

At this Vivian reflected for a moment. She had taken Anthony for granted and not thought what life would be like with him gone. Even though she did not really love him, she imagined now what it would feel like to come to an empty home. She would miss doing little things for him, like brushing the lint off his suit. Perhaps the reason she did not love her husband was that she never thought love was important and she lived life without letting it into her soul. Vivian said, "My husband is not a murderer. He did not want to kill your son on purpose, I am sure."

At this Karen looked concerned about something and said to Anthony, "In the newspaper article, I read about what you did to start a riot and what you said against gay people in the speeches you gave. Why do you hate them?"

Both Vivian and Karen leant forward in their chairs and gave Anthony full attention. Anthony replied, "I don't hate gay people. Really, I do not mind them. It is just that I think it is wrong to put a same-sex relationship or even just sex between two people of the same sex on the same level as a man with a woman. If society allows it and legitimises it through gay marriage, then things will get worse for everyone, I am sure. Therefore, I oppose what gay people do but do not hate them. That is the honest truth, really it is."

Karen asked Anthony, "Do you understand what it is like for a gay person, a man or a woman who is gay?"

"No, sorry I don't," said Anthony, feeling a little guilty about having done things which affected gay people without really understanding them. Deep down he still thought that gay people had a choice but he was worried that he might die for his beliefs





now. This was a challenge to the self-righteousness he had felt about his own opinions.

Karen said, "My son Eric was the first gay person I really learnt to understand. I suspected he could be gay since he first went to high school but did not ask him or talk to him about it until he was 18 years old, a couple of years ago. My husband was still alive at the time, before he died in an accident as a passenger in someone else's car. Eric tried to kill himself and failed, ending up in hospital. It was an overdose of some old medicine I had kept in the cupboard but threw out later, realising the danger in keeping old medicines that others could take. I only kept them because I am poor and thought I won't need to buy more if I need them again.

"Eric came out as gay to me and my husband a few months afterwards. Both my husband and I loved Eric and believed him when he said that he had tried to be different but couldn't help being gay. We said we would help him do whatever he thought was right. Eric longed to do a Bachelor of Arts Degree and become an actor. We wanted to help him do it and go to university. Alas, Eric cannot do this now. Eric made some gay friends and through him and his friends I started to understand what things were like for gay people. Eric never found the right man and did not have a boyfriend. I am so sorry about that. He longed to find one but said it is hard to talk to the men he liked. He did not know if they were gay or not and they might have become angry if he had asked. He said that when he went out to gay night-clubs or bars with his gay friends most other men he met just wanted sex. The ones he thought might be different at university were men he did not know if he could approach. That is what discrimination does, even when it does not directly hurt gay people. It can keep them isolated and lonely." Karen was a little tearful and fell silent.

Vivian decided to be fully honest with Karen. She could see that Karen was emotionally affected and reluctant to part with her son's heart. This heart was a loving mother's last chance to control something which symbolised her son's happiness, the sole remaining source of joy that was in her world before her son was killed. Vivian understood selfishness well from her own life's experience and knew that Karen would be justified in not wanting to part with her son's heart to a man she knew to be uncaring and indifferent to the feelings of gay people and perhaps many others. Vivian knew just how indifferent much better than Karen, she was certain.

It was a courageous moment for Vivian but whatever lack of fondness or genuine feeling she had for her husband, Vivian knew that he must remain alive for her to be happy in a life of luxury and surrounded by admiring friends and members of the public. Vivian leant forward, casting a deep gaze at Karen and said, "You are our last hope to keep my husband Anthony alive. What I am about to tell you, I have told no one, not even my husband. Please do not misplace my trust in you." Vivian took a



deep breath and continued, "I have never loved my husband." Anthony was shocked to hear her admit to something that he had known for a long time but did not want to address. He started to have some trouble breathing but managed to calm down.

Vivian emphatically tried to explain herself to Karen, "From the moment I met Anthony just over 10 years ago, I knew he would be good for me and I would be good for him. He was a good catch of a man. I knew he would bring me happiness. He was certain to be respected and wealthy. I craved that. I did not worry about whether or not we were compatible or if he would be happy with me. I thought only of myself. I did think that I would bring him more success. I had good looks and I know just how a strong husband and wife team can be valued in society. They are raised up just the same way that gay couples are cast down by society. You would know that. It happened just this way. We became wealthy and successful. I did not think that this would be threatened until Anthony's massive heart attack. The doctor said he has a rare blood condition and that they cannot use drugs to manage a bad match like they can with a number of other patients.

"You might now think I am begging for a continued life of luxury but I am not. Please listen to my words. If you cannot help my husband live, I will not have to chance to learn what it means to love him. I know that he loves me but I have never felt the same. Perhaps we were too different for me to understand and identify with him. Whatever the reason, Karen, I know from talking with you about the love you felt for your husband and your son and I want that same love in my life. Not only was fondness for my husband missing but I did not value fondness for children either. I am hoping that my husband and I may have a more loving marriage and I want children to be a part of it. I want to explore a side of myself I have neglected and denied existence. Surely you can understand how I would want that, Karen. Please allow my husband to live. If you do and we have children, the only thing we can do in return is let you be our friend, so that your son's heart may live on my husband. If we have children, I hope that you may babysit for us as if you were an honorary auntie or grandma. Please don't let a part of me die which I have never really allowed to live, Karen." A few tears came to Vivian's eyes but she resisted crying. She did not want to put on a show for Karen and felt really undignified baring her soul. However, deep within herself she knew that no matter what Karen decided, Vivian would feel better about herself if she was honest.

At this point a mosquito landed on Anthony's arm. He moved his free hand to strike and kill it but changed his mind and stopped, letting it draw blood. He wondered why he should make the creature die when his own life lay in the balance. Karen noticed him restraining the urge to kill the insect and was thoughtful. She spoke to both Anthony and Vivian, looking at each one in turn. "Vivian has spoken wisely. You are lucky to have such a wife, Anthony, who is honest to the point of risking the loss of



your trust and respect. All she wants is for you to live and herself to be happy. Even you, Anthony, now can care for a life which is not your own in a way you did not before.

“I will let the doctors have my son’s heart to save your life, so he can live on in you, Anthony, just as your wife asked. My religion as a Jehovah’s witness does not forbid me to act according to my own conscience and give up an organ for surgery. There is just one condition. It should be just as your wife wanted. You must both have children, so that she can experience the joy of motherhood, just as I did. When you do, I want to be a friend so that I can see your happy family and know that my son did not die for nothing. If you won’t stay with your wife or don’t agree to this, Anthony, then my son’s heart will remain in his body when I shall shed tears at his grave, just as I was going to do before this meeting of ours. The choice is yours, Anthony. Please tell me if you agree.”

Anthony had never been so stunned in his life. He had not expected all this. He knew there would have to be changes in his life if he agreed to Karen’s terms. “I agree to all you ask Karen,” he said. “You are merciful and the heart of your son is the merciful heart. I want to change to become more caring. Please be our friend and let us keep in touch.” A few tears rolled down his face from his eyes.

Karen turned to the driver, who had been patiently sitting in his chair at the table, saying nothing. She said, “It must be embarrassing for you to hear all this.”

“It’s OK,” he said raising his eyebrows and with a strange expression on his face. “I was a night-shift taxi driver for a few months before I took this job with the hospital and trained-up with them. I have heard the most personal and incredible things but always knew that I was not to interrupt. I was normally just the driver, treated like a wall or other object, not expected to notice the conversation. It was as if I never heard anything. I am glad things are working out for all of you.” He then looked more relaxed and smiled. They all said their farewells and departed.

The operation turned out to be a success. After a period of rehabilitation, Anthony could return to work. He remained in the conservative party but initiated some new policies with the support of his political colleagues. He worked together with the United Nations Organization towards a peacekeeping force of the army, navy and airforce involving his country’s military. He himself went to areas of conflict to oversee the military and to make sure that officials would not be corrupt and serve to keep the peace. He understood corruption well from his own past and knew how to stop it. Whenever he felt weak-spirited, he thought of the merciful heart beating inside him. Anthony also worked with his country’s secret intelligence service to develop a new program against terrorism, which became well-known and respected





in other countries too. Arguing persuasively with his own colleagues, he set laws in motion which paved the way to legalising gay marriage. He publically apologised for his previous remarks and said that he had to move with changing times.

Vivian discovered a new happiness and fulfilment she had not known could exist. She became a mother of twins, a boy and a girl. Together with Anthony, she showered her love on them. As they grew up, they got to know “Auntie Karen”, who would babysit whenever Anthony and Vivian went out to the opera, the theatre or other engagement. This helped Karen manage with the grief for her son and husband which never disappeared. However, she knew that her son had not died in vain and his was the merciful heart that lived on and changed lives.

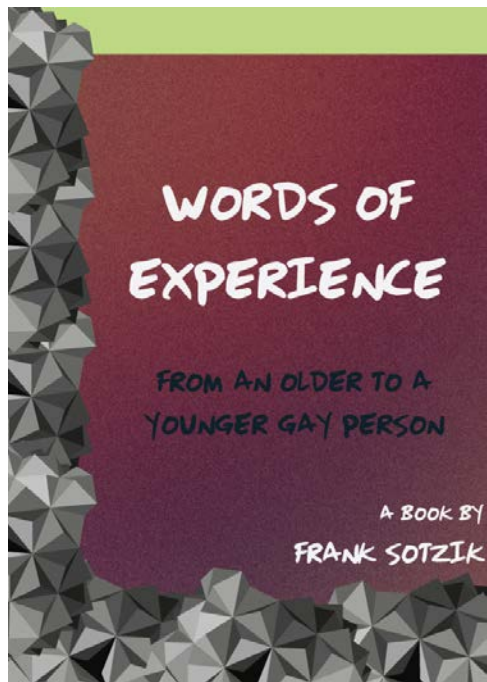
SAMPLE



## Words of experience: from an older to a younger gay person

Frank Sotzik, 2014

This e-book is available to download for free at [www.wordsofexperience.com.au](http://www.wordsofexperience.com.au)



This e-book is concerned with choices in life and careers. Many aspects of sexuality and gender identity are discussed. The spectrum of sexual orientation is explained, from gay through bisexual to straight. Experiences of the author and his taxi passengers on night-shifts are presented (with their consent). Experiences of the author with biomedical research and university lecturing are included, where this is helpful. Although issues relevant to young gay people are featured, relevance of this e-book to all young people is intended.

### Selected topics:

- Being gay and careers
- Coming out
- Dating
- Intimacy
- Relationships
- HIV and safe sex
- Bullying and use of social media
- Alcohol, tobacco and other recreational drugs
- Physical health, pregnancy, diet and exercise
- Mental health and suicide
- Religion and being gay
- Evidence against being gay by choice
- The gay community

