

THE LAICIZATION OF FATHER PATRICK FLANNIGAN

Pat and I had been together for almost ten years when we were outed to the world. I'm pretty sure the world already knew, but it came as a shock that anyone would go to the Church officials and lodge a complaint - and a canonical criminal complaint at that. It was 1968 and most folks just didn't care about stuff like that anymore, or so we thought.

Pat came home one afternoon while I was grooming Buddha, our puppy. He looked haggard. I greeted him with my usual "Hi you." He just looked at me and walked through. 'Uh-oh' I thought to myself. I laid the scissors down and placed grateful Buddha on the floor. He hated grooming. Isis, his sister, scampered over and proceeded to sniff all over Buddha. The oil from the freshly shorn fur interested her.

I stood in the doorway, watching Pat disrobe, and waited for whatever it was to hit the fan. Pat and I had grown so close that I could read him like a book. He was always up and cheerful, but this was not up, or anywhere near cheerful.

He glanced at me, then walked into the bathroom to shower. He definitely had something on his mind. Ordinarily I would have asked him if he wanted some company - in the shower. No, that's not completely true. Usually he would invite me to shower with him. You would be surprised at how clean I am these days.

But at this very moment, inviting myself to shower with him did not seem like a good idea. So, I kept quiet and went into the kitchen and began making coffee. My instinct told me we were going to need it. And I was right.

He finally came in, all scrubbed, slippers, and wrapped in his robe. He shuffled over - and kissed me on the back of my neck and moved away.

"I prefer it when you are naked and swe-a-ty." trying to get a rise out of him.

It didn't get the rise I had hoped for, but he did come back -- put his arms around me from behind and rested his chin on my shoulder. I waited and then quietly said, "Well . . .? Let's have it."

He let go and turned to the kitchen table, "I'm going to lose my job. They're going to kick me out."

"What are you talking about?" I placed the cups on the table and poured the coffee.

"Dear sweet adorable Bishop O'Leary called me in today and told me someone had lodged a complaint against me - against us. A criminal complaint. Can you believe that?"

“What criminal complaint?”

“Celibacy, breaking the vow of celibacy.”

“And that’s criminal?”

“According to Canon Law - yes.”

“But that’s not entirely true. You may have broken the physical part but not the spiritual part. I think you are stronger spiritually now then ever before.”

“Why did I know you would say that? He chided me.

“Because - after ten years of ravaging my helpless body and loving me beyond all human comprehension, we have become opposite ends of the same stick.

“Stick?”

“Well, I couldn’t think of a better word. And hey, being a smart-ass is my job, not yours.”

He laughed and beckoned me to come to him which I was anxious to do. I sat down in his lap. “Do I really sexually ravage you?” he asked with an impish smile.

“Yes you do, and I love every minute of it. Hey, wait a minute, I know who made this complaint.”

“Who?”

“My mother.” trying to lighten the moment.

“What?”

“My Dad said she turned fourteen shades of green when she read the telegram.”

"You actually sent your mother a telegram about us?" he giggled.

"Yeah, well it was kind of an inside joke between us. Guess she didn't think it was so funny."

"I guess not." Pat looked at me. "You do the strangest things sometimes."

"Yeah, I know . . . like falling in love with you."

"That's exactly what I mean." He laughed and pulled me closer. Thank God he was coming out of his blue funk. I hated seeing him like that.

"O'Leary told me there will be a preliminary investigation. If necessary, the results will be reported to the Cardinal -- then a trial, and then out."

"I can't believe this. . ." and I couldn't.

"Oh yeah - believe it. The process is called laicization."

"Lieah. . . what?"

"Li-ah-ce-zation. I've seen it happen before. It takes months, but in the end you're out. But I don't care Geno. I have you and I can always get work outside. And then we don't have to pretend any longer."

He had more degrees than Carter has liver pills so getting work would never be a problem except for one thing - he would absolutely hate it. God, Church and the people in it were his life. Pulling the plug like that - he would go right down the drain - and me along with him. I did not like this at all.

"But Pat . . ." I implored.

"I'll survive Geno - we'll survive this."

"No, you won't. The Church is your life. You'd wither and die out there. Is there nothing we can do to fight this?"

"I don't think so. The least I can do is go gracefully." His resignation to this idiocy shocked me. This was not the Pat I knew so well - who would give his life for the Truth he believed in. He took my hand and kissed it and added, "We can go gracefully together."

He held me even closer. We just sat there clinging to one another. The only comfort we could manage at a moment like this. But my pea sized brain began to hum. "Are we going to need a lawyer"

"Not unless I fight it."

He slipped back into thoughtfulness again, "If I did fight it, I guess I would need a lawyer. But I don't know where we would find one for something like this, let alone be able to pay for it. They will provide a canon lawyer. A stranger who probably wouldn't give a tinker's damn."

"Well, I care and I, my fine feathered friend, have an idea." It was an epiphany - it had to be -- to get us out of this mess. But I conceded that at the moment -- a light bulb going off in my head would have to do. "Oh yes, indeed, a very good idea. I'll be right back."

I disengaged myself for Pat's lap and went into the study, got my address book out and made a phone call to an old friend - Aaron Baumgarten in New York. He was a New York Jew and a brilliant attorney - the combination was awesome - he was awesome. And with that baritone voice of his - geez Louise.

"Ciao - Aaron? C'è Geno. Sì, è mio amico. Come stai cara? I'm going to need your help - big time."

It took me about half an hour to explain what was going on. That magnificent brain of his got right in step with our dilemma and my fears were assuaged.

Now to tell Pat. "Grazie, Aaron, non avete idea che cosa ciò significhi, Patrick e me. Vista su martedì. Ti amo mio amico. Salute."

I almost danced back into the kitchen with my news. Pat was looking at me as Patrick, not Pat, and he was also squinting at me, which got my immediate attention.

"What?" I asked.

"You were speaking Italian. You told me you couldn't speak Italian."

"No, I didn't." He was referring to our very first encounter when he asked if I know the meaning of my Italian name. "I just didn't answer you."

"Why, for heaven's sake?"

"I just didn't want to say it out loud so I pretended I didn't know."

"You rascal. What else are you telling me that you don't know but that you do know." he asked playfully.

"Not much." I smiled sheepishly.

"And who was that on the phone you were telling our life story to?"

"That was Aaron, Pat, we have a lawyer. He'll be here on Tuesday. When you meet him you'll understand that our worries are over with. Oh, boy, I can hardly wait for him to get here. Bishop O'Leary and his investigators have no idea who they will be dealing

with." I sat down in Pat's lap again. "There is nothing to worry about. And -- he will do it pro bono."

"Oh really." he queried and waited.

"He owes me."

"For what?"

"Just a little something I did for him -- a very long time ago."

"How little?"

"Pat! -- It was nothing."

"How nothing?" I was beginning to think he was jealous. And I liked the idea.

"Are you jealous?"

"No, well, a little. I know you had more experience in . . . well, you know then I did."

"Not to worry." I was a virgin then. Yeah, I know - hard to believe. I simply told his wife that he was with me on a particular evening - playing pool, when he actually was not with me." He was looking at me even more quizzically. "Hey, that bitch would have killed him and me if she had found out what he was up to."

"Lucky me." Pat declared.

"Why?"

"You wouldn't be here if she had killed you."

"Oh, yeah, that's right. Funny you should think of that." I smiled and kissed him on the end of his nose. "And I have every intention of staying -- just in case you wondered."

"What else did you tell him?" Hummm . . . I sensed the jealousy again.

"Well, let's see. I told him I has having an unbelievably hot erotic love affair with a gorgeous Catholic Priest."

"And .. ?" he continued to prompt.

"What do you mean and . . . ?"

"And? He was focused. Ok, I'll play your little game.

"Annnnd - that when I got off the phone we were going to have hot, sweaty, noisy sex to celebrate."

"You didn't?" he exclaimed.

I milked the moment and paused long enough to watch the astonishment come over his expression. "No, I didn't. But don't you think it's a good idea?"

Pat laughed, a sign of relief, and then he stopped cold and protested, "We're not noisy."

"And a good thing to. Poor Mrs. Clausing downstairs would have a heart attack if she knew what was going on up here." I looked into his eyes - our noses touched. "It certainly gets my heart rate going cha cha cha."

Pat drew me into one of those kisses I had now gotten used to. I could feel his body relax - thank God. I learned to take in a breath before we sucked face.

He had never heard that expression before and got a chuckle out of it, using it whenever I least expected it - mostly in Church. He'd whisper, 'Hey you, voglio succhiare affrontare il mio amore? Along with a shameless grin. Music to my ears nonetheless. He'd say it in Italian just in case someone overheard.

I often thought, thankfully, that he had someone now with whom he could suck face. I remember how lonely he had been before we crash landed on my foyer floor so many years ago.

Aaron arrived the following Tuesday. Pat and I met with him at his hotel where he explained exactly what he was going to do. He had talked with the Bishop and gotten permission to work with the investigators the Bishop had appointed to do the preliminary investigation - which was to begin the following week.

"The Bishop is bound by Canon Law to permit our observation of the investigation. We knew it and so did he. What we didn't tell them is that we have other investigators investigating them."

Once the preliminary investigation began Pat would no longer be able to give homilies in the Cathedral. He had to work fast. The word had gotten out and spread like wild fire throughout the congregation.

Pat decided he would announce his departure to the congregation during the next homily. And that was to be the following Sunday - four days away. He disappeared into

the study and did not come up for air until Saturday evening.

“Ready?” I asked.

“Yes, I am.” his old confidence was back again.

Sunday morning dawned bright and breezy. It was a beautiful Spring morning - perfect for what was about to transpire.

Pat, dressed in his formal clerical Priest's attire, stepped up to the pulpit and greeted his parishioners in his usual cheerful warm welcoming manner. The cathedral was packed - standing room only. They knew and were waiting. You could cut the anticipation with a buzz saw.

He read a verse from Scripture and then gave his homily. I don't think anyone heard a word of it. They were waiting for the axe to fall and finally - it did.

In a confident voice, “This will be the last time I will officially be able to stand before you and speak to you, from the depths of my heart, about the principles we need to embrace every moment of our lives in order to experience the presence of God.” the audience gasped.

Pat paused a few seconds and then continued. “You undoubtedly know the charges that have been leveled against me - against us.” He looked over to me.

I have been charged with breaking my vows of celibacy. This is true, but only partially true. I have broken the physical aspect of this vow - the burden was too great for me to bear and it was undermining my spiritual intent. I have not, however, nor will I ever break my vow spiritually. I am and will remain faithful to Christ, in mind, heart, and will.

“My intent to fully embody Christ the way I am supposed to - is not complete. My partner says I have, but I am not certain.”

He looked intently at the audience. “Yes, my partner -- right over there - Geno Benedetti.” He pointed right at me. “You all know him.” And then he proclaimed to the world, “He's the man I fell in love with 10 years ago. And he has never left my side since we prayed together that first night we were together - for God's blessings and guidance. His love and support has strengthened my spiritual intent beyond my expectations. The relationship has illuminated and forced me to grow closer to God and the parishioners I serve. If that's a sin, you have a sinner standing before you. A big one. You be the judge.”

And then he stepped off the cliff, “I am not and never have been -- objectively disordered, as the Vatican would have you believe. I am just me the way I have always

been -- day in day out, month in month out, year in and year out. “

I could see some of the audience from my vantage point. They all knew. They all bloody knew. And it was obvious they didn't care about this 'big sin'. I think my jaw dropped open I was so shaken.

“And he argues with me when I fudge about not having fulfilled the embodiment of Jesus Christ. Can you believe that?” He grinned at me from ear to ear and just shook his head.

Someone stood up in the back and shouted, “ I believe you have embodied the Christ Brother Pat - God bless you -- and Geno,” he added. There was that classical moment of total silence as it sank in; and then one by one they began to stand and shout their agreement. The outpouring was breath taking. Pat certainly looked like it took his breath away. He was hanging on to the pulpit for dear life. No one expected this.

Pat finally raised his hands, beckoning for calm and quiet. “Thank you. Thank you so much. What a gift.”

And then the next thing happened that no one was aware of except Pat and me. My friend Aaron Baumgarten got up, turned, and addressed the congregation in his usual loud and commanding baritone voice.

“Brother Pat is not going anywhere -- if I have anything to do with it.” Aaron scanned the audience. No one moved. I think everyone was holding their breath for the miracle that was about to unfold.

“I'm a lawyer. And a damned good one.” He paused, daring anyone to refute him. “My law firm and I are going to fight this nonsense tooth and nail. We may not win, but we will create headlines across this beautiful land of ours and we'll 'out' the hypocrisy that binds this church to the dead past.

“But I'm going to need moral support and it's going to have to come from you folks. Am I going to get it?”

A woman in the back stood up and shouted, “You got it from me Mister. Just tell me what you want me to do.”

The silence was deafening again as people processed what was going on. Then, one by one they stood and soon the whole congregation was on its feet and stood in utter silence -- giving their combined support and approval. The love that was pour out of the lot was shocking to me. The air in the chamber was filled with Divine perfume from the Imprisoned Splendor that was escaping everywhere.

“I’m going to need your names and contact information. You may be called to court to testify as to the value of this man -- they wish to shove under the carpet.” Applause began slowly and grew until the whole building seemed to shake.

Aaron went up to Pat and embraced him; and then he did something neither of us expected. He came over to me and practically dragged me over to Pat’s side.

“Now stay there Geno - that’s where you belong.” and he walked back and sat down. The audience roared.

When I glanced at Aaron, though the tears welling up in my eyes, I could tell he was feeling pretty good about himself. His debt to me was being paid off very nicely. Very nicely indeed.

The congregation broke loose and came forward crowding around Pat and me and Aaron. It was dazzling. I think I could have floated out of the cathedral with no trouble at all.

As we moved out of the Cathedral, Pat spotted the woman who had initially risen in his defense. He went to her, “Hi.” She smiled up at him. “May I know your name please.”

“Yes, of course. It’s Marge Claybourne. And I think you are the cat’s meow.” They both broke into laughter and hugged one another. The day would not have been complete without that encounter.

The preliminary investigation went into effect and Pat could no longer give services in the Cathedral. His presumption of innocence was in effect but he was on what some would call administrative leave.

Interestingly enough, however, nothing had been said about his impromptu Saturday afternoon meetings in the auditorium. They weren’t official. We weren’t sure if they forgot to prohibit those meeting or not. So Pat went ahead and prepared for the next Saturday afternoon.

The auditorium was packed to the rafters. I felt sorry for the priest who was assigned Sunday homilies - that church would probably be as empty as my grave. And it did turn out to be that empty. The parishioners were sending a simple but very strong message to the powers that be.

Pat reveled in the support. He grew strong again and gave forth, from that heart of his, lessons on Truth that I had never heard from him before.

Aaron’s young colleagues arrived less than a week after his announcement in the Cathedral. These four young men were his own investigating team of young lawyers.

Their charge was to watch everyone involved and document everything.

He met with Pat and me and explained the process. "I'm pretty sure we can kill this whole thing in the investigation stage. I've studied the laicization process. It's riddled with assumptions that God has approved their actions and their laws. I'd like to see them try and prove it in court.

We don't want to get to the point of filing charges in court. We want to stay away from dealing with Canon Law. It could get messy and long. Our aim is simply to publicly 'out' them for their hypocrisy.

"So, there it is boys. I'll get back to you as soon as we have something solid to move ahead with."

I got up and threw my arms around Aaron, "Grazie Aaron. Non avete idea."

"Hey, after seeing you two together I have a pretty good idea what's at stake here. I gotta get going - ciao." He embraced Pat and was gone.

I looked at Pat, "Well . . ? "

"As I have said so many times before, you do the strangest things sometimes. I didn't think you could pull this off."

"Well, it's not a done deal yet. But I know this guy. He won't miss anything. If there are any dirty linens hiding in a closet somewhere, these guys will find them."

The news media got wind of what was happening and ran with it. The first thing they did was corner some of the parishioners. 'He's the most deeply spiritual person I've ever met.' said one, 'He finds a way to make you feel God's presence -- as my pastor, as my friend. Isn't that what a relationship should be?'

But one parishioner confronted Pat with "Well, I guess you'll be pushing the gay agenda in both schools now." But, when asked, could not tell Pat what the gay agenda was to which they were referring. Pat told this unenlightened person that the only agenda he ever pushed in his life was the gospel of Christ.

At one of the meetings in the auditorium Pat stressed, "There's a passage in Scripture that God said to Jesus, 'You're my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.' I believe God says that to every person be they male or female, straight or gay -- you all are God's my beloved children." And then skillfully added, "And don't let a priest or a bishop or a pope dare to tell you otherwise."

On another occasion Pat told his audience about his aunt. "As she lay dying, she cried

and told me she was a lesbian. 'I'm so afraid I'm going to hell,' she said. 'That's not how God works' -- I literally yelled it at her."

Then he grabbed the Gospel and held it aloft before the audience. "This is either the good news for everyone -- or no one." and added, "That includes all gays and lesbians, including those in attendance right here today; and which also includes me and my partner, Geno." The audience just sat there transfixed.

"Okay folks, that's it for this afternoon. Thank you so much for being here. I always feel so much better after spending time with you. I hope I'll see you next Saturday. Good Afternoon."

No one moved. No one got up. They just sat there. 'Holy Crap.' I thought. 'What's this?' And then I remembered the first time I attended one of his meetings all those years ago and how mesmerized I had been by this man of God. If I had not made such a fool out of myself that day, I would probably still be sitting there myself. He hadn't lost the touch that endeared him to so many.

Pat always had a way of asking just the right question to make you look deeper within yourself - deeper than where you thought you could possibly ever go. He was a master at this technique and used it generously whenever and wherever he could.

There wasn't a person in the room who had not realized how blessed they had been to have Father Patrick in their lives. I realized that every day and gave more thanks than I can remember for the privilege of living with and loving this man - this truly man of God.

That night, after we had prayed together and climbed into bed, I confessed to him. "I felt so insignificant this afternoon while you were talking to the crowd. You were so in the Spirit of God as you spoke. I could not help but think that you deserve better than me." There I went again, apologizing for being there. I have such a knack for lameness.

Pat grabbed me violently and turned me around. He was really angry this time. "Don't you ever think or say a thing like that again. Do you hear me?" and waited. I nodded and then he enfolded me in his arms. "Oh Geno, Geno, without you I would not be what I am today. Don't you know that by now? I can't imagine breathing without you, without your love. Even when you're so silly - like this." He pushed me away and turned over.

Well, I certainly got a rise out of him that time though it wasn't intended. I just moved closer until our backs touched and I drifted off to sleep - chastised by this godly man - and happy as a clam.

Aaron called and scheduled a meeting with us for that very afternoon. He said that he

had accomplished his goal. When the agreed upon time arrived, the door flew open and Aaron and his boys sauntered in. Pat and I held our collective breath -- waiting.

Aaron sat down and looked at us grimly. And then that shit-eaten' grin of his spread over his face, "I think we got 'em." he glowed.

"We're meeting with the Bishop and his advisors tomorrow morning. We've investigated the four complainants and our conclusion is that they lied. If necessary we'll haul the complainants in and have them give affidavits under oath. That should scare the bejesus out of them for starters.

Our guys are prepared to play good cop bad cop with them which should utterly confuse them even more. I don't think that it will be necessary to go that far but we will if necessary. If it is necessary, and fails, we have an Ace up our sleeves which should do the trick. We don't plan on using it unless absolutely necessary."

"The Ace Aaron?" I implored.

"Oh yeah, the Ace up my sleeve. Well, my friends, it appears that your Bishop has been a very naughty boy and it's on tape. His playmates were smart enough to tape all of his visits - without him knowing it. And they are for sale, but that is no problem." He winked at me. I knew what he meant - the debt. "It turns out that your Bishop is gayer than a Mexican wedding. And it's not pretty. I saw him doing things that surprised even me." His eyebrows went up as he smiled. "He's a dirty old fart and if necessary I'll nail his ass. But I'm hoping that a few gentle hints in that directions will open his eyes to the benefit of dismissing all allegations against you."

"When you say dismiss. Will there be written documents to that effect?" Pat was concerned about the validity of the dismissal.

"You bet your ass. There will be signed documents. Oh, gosh - sorry Father."

"No, no, that's okay. Geno says worse than that when he gets into one of his New York states of mind."

"Hey!" I objected, but acquiesced, "He's right Aaron. I revert sometimes."

"So, when do you think we will know?" Pat moved to the edge of his chair.

"It should be in the bag by tomorrow afternoon."

Aaron got up along with his boys. We all said our farewells and they were gone.

The next morning went by painfully slow. Noon came and neither of us even thought

about food. The clock was ticking but not fast enough. It was four-thirty before the phone rang. We both jumped up. I told Pat to answer it.

"No, no, you do it, I'm too nervous."

I picked up the phone and listened. I gave the appropriate 'yas' and 'oks' and the final "You're kidding? -- Jesus! Are we going to see you. Ok, I'll be in touch." and I hung up. I quickly turned to Pat, "We're off the hook!"

Pat rushed at me, grabbed me and lifted me off the ground. I could hardly breath. When he finally set me down, "But there is one thing." I said as solemnly as I could.

"What?" Pat looked stressed, which is exactly the reaction I wanted. "The Bishop has agreed to get a dispensation from celibacy, for you, from the Pope."

"Holy shit." came out of Pat's mouth. I had never heard him say that word before - my bad influence I'm sure. "But can he do that?"

"Evidently he can. Knowing Aaron, he probably put the thumb screws to Saint O'Leary before he agreed. You know what that means don't you?"

"Yes, I do. We can be legally married. But can we do it in the Cathedral? That might be a problem."

"I would imagine there will be no problem. Aaron said the paperwork would be in our hands this evening with all questions answered. But I'll be in touch with him in case there are more questions."

Pat sank down into the sofa. He literally collapsed out of relief of this burden. He just looked at me and smile that beautiful smile.

"You know my friend," I began in my most seductive tone. "You really need to know how to relax more."

"Are you trying to seduce me - again?" I just smiled.

"Hey, it's the Italian in me." I giggled, "That's what we do."

The paperwork arrived and all of our questions were answered as Aaron predicted. Elation is hardly the emotion we experience that night. It was finally over.

Pat returned to his work as Parish priest as if nothing had happened and I resumed my life as before. That first evening together we reflected on what had happened and thanked our lucky stars for the outcome. And then we got on our knees and thanked

God for our lives together and in sparing us that possible tragedy.

Now we could plan for the next event - our wedding.

The news of our vindication spread like a tsunami. We could not go anywhere in public without folks coming up to us with congratulations. The one thing we did notice is that no one seemed to know about our wedding plans. So, we decided to keep it to ourselves until one of our astute friends came up to us one day with, "So, when are you two going to exchange vows?"

The date was finally set, plans were made, the marriage license was purchased including the purchase of wedding rings.

The ceremony was to be held at 11 a.m. on Sunday the First of May. That was the date that Pat and I had committed ourselves to each other over 10 years earlier.

The cathedral was packed. We decided that there would be no attendants or music. It would just be God and the two of us going down that aisle; and the alter boy who would carry the single flame lantern attached to the crucifix -- representing the Spirit of God.

When the moment came I asked Pat, "What do we do, hold hands?"

"I guess we can do anything we want."

"How about if I walk four paces behind you?"

"Come here you silly thing. Let's just walk slowly down the aisle with our arms touching. We can hold hands on the way out. Ready?"

"I have been -- for a very - long time my friend."

Pat was dressed in his clerical collar and black suit. I was in a white tie black tuxedo suit. We each wore three small red carnations - again to represent God and the two of us joined together by a pink ribbon.

And so we began another journey, one that would publicly and legally join us together for the rest of our lives on this earth. I thought of that miracle I had danced around the first time I ever laid eyes on Pat - the miracle which I thought would never happen. So, once again, I was wrong, but joyfully so.

As we stepped forward, someone rang a small bell. The audience quietly rose and turned to us.

I think I could have danced the whole way up the aisle without touching the floor, but instead decided prime and proper was the way to go. Half way down the aisle I changed my mind and turned around and began blowing kisses in all directions.

Poor dismayed Pat wasn't quite sure what to do. Finally he grabbed my arm, put it through his and we proceeded forward. You could hear the audience whispering with glee. They were delighted and charmed with both of us. I smiled and nodded in all directions. This was going to be my family also.

We arrived at the altar, paused and then knelt while the priest offered a prayer. Pat's hand and mind were intertwined. At one point I looked down and could not tell his fingers from mine. A good sign I decided. The priest finished his prayer and turned to us. We rose and faced each other and began speaking the vows we had chosen.

The altar boy had quietly come to the side of the priest with a small red pillow bearing our golden wedding rings which glittered in the Cathedral lights. When we had finished our vows to one another, the priest gave the rings to us and we placed them on our appropriate fingers, and then we looked to him.

"By the power invested in me," he began, "I am delighted -- simply delighted to pronounce you wedded to one another. May God's blessings be with you forever." And he just grinned from ear to ear.

Pat turned to me, took my face in his big hands and kissed me on the lips. The audience went nuts. We joined hands and slowly walked back down the aisle and into our new life. My sardonicus muscles were stretched to their limit by the end of the day. I just could not stop smiling.

The reception was held in the School Auditorium. We stayed for almost two hours performing all the traditional things newly married couples perform.

The first ones to dance, however, was to be handled a little differently than the usual. A lot differently. Pat and I decided to scrap the traditional ball room dance. Instead, a choreographer friend of mine, Vivian Pickles [not the actress] was enticed, no she was blackmailed into teaching us a simple dance routine to a quickstep version of Mir Bist du Schoen - sung by Diana Ross and the Supremes.

But it was the challenge for her career. Athletic ball, basket ball playing, marathon runner Pat - had two left feet. He tried so hard and finally got it - we hoped. I finally told him to relax - I would cover for him if he lost the beat - we were going to have fun no matter what.

Pat and I changed into close fitting black satin trousers with wide red cummerbunds, white blousy silken shirts, and pattern leather shoes - with red socks.

The music for our dance was cued and we dashed out from the dressing room and absolutely wowed the audience with our soft shoe quickstep routine. Half way through our routine several small children broke away from their parent's grasp and ran out to join us. Pat and I had not expected this but joined in the fun. We each picked up one of the kids one at a time and danced with them. Then more kids and finally grown ups came out of the belchers and joined as the music came to an end. It turned into a hugging love fest. Folks poured down from the belchers and surrounded us.

The wedding cake was rolled out, we cut it together with our left hands and fed each other a small piece. Then we toasted each other and the congregation with apple cider - no alcohol at this reception. There was cold salmon and fresh strawberries which I barely had a chance to taste.

We eventually bid a fond farewell to our loving friends and left for our honeymoon in, you guessed it, Yosemite National Park, for several days of hiking. We even slept out of doors next to some of those big trees Pat had wished to do on other visits. I behaved myself and we had a wonderful rest viewing the stars and the Universal creation bestowed upon us by the Divine.

The years have passed quickly, but the struggle of straight and gay priests and gay people in general continues. Why? is always the mysterious question that comes to mind.

Changes are coming but too slowly. Understanding the phenomenon of homosexuality continues to remain in the closet which is also mystifying. It is so simple, and quite a natural occurrence in the evolution of our souls.

Pat and I have played a small but important roll in those changes since we were vindicated from the harsh and antiquated rules of the Catholic Church. But there remains more to be accomplished - much more.

Salvete,
Geno Benedetti