

# MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH FATHER PATRICK FLANNIGAN - A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

by Geno Benedetti

Father Patrick Flannigan passed away last week. He was 82. There was nothing of note about him or his passing - a good man who fulfilled his duty as a Catholic Priest. He was greatly loved and will be missed -- for a while, and then forgotten as so many others have been forgotten before him. But not by me.

I was with him the day before he passed. He was quite lucid at the time and we spoke of many things. Before we parted he said, "Geno, heaven will be a little lonely without you." and I replied, "Not to worry my friend, I'll be along one of these days myself." I kissed his hand good bye, looked deeply into those tired eyes smiling up at me, and then I left him.

Walking away from the love of my life was the most heart wrenching and profoundly difficult thing I had ever had to do in my entire life. The ache within was almost unbearable. But he wanted it that way. He wanted to spend his final hours in meditation and prayer to the illusive God he spent his whole life searching for. How could I possibly refuse him. I knew he loved me deeply, but his love and longing for God was stronger. I hope and pray that in passing from this life he found the atonement for which he was seeking.

His remains were cremated. The ashes were given to me in a plain metal container. He would have appreciated the simplicity of the urn. I would have preferred one of solid gold encrusted with precious jewels surrounded by figures of heavenly angels lifting the urn toward heaven. Granted, a bit dramatic, but that was how I felt about this man.

I kept his ashes with me for a few days until the weather forecaster mentioned that the Autumn Santa Ana winds were coming in from the desert and it would be unusually warm in the city for a few days. Pat sometimes talked about the spiritual qualities of large bodies of water. So I knew he would be pleased with my plan.

The next day I asked a friend to drive me to the Golden Gate Bridge parking plaza. We walked toward the center of the bridge on the east side of this magnificent structure. I asked my friend to wait as I walked the final few yards to the exact center, where I paused at the rail and gazed out into the Pacific Ocean. This was a perfect final resting place for Pat's remains.

I could feel the bridge swaying gently in the breeze as I opened the urn which held the ashes of my beloved friend, and slowly spilled them into the warm winds and watched as they carried Pat's remains, along with my tears, out to sea.

And that was the end of it - peaceful and calm. But that was not how it began sixty years earlier, at least not for me.

My name is Geno Benedetti. Please join me as we step back through the years, through the decades to the place where my love affair with Father Patrick Flannigan began.

It was if a thunder bolt struck me right between the eyes the first time I laid eyes on Father Patrick Flannigan. He could not have been more than 26 years old, tall, slender and too good looking for his own good, or so I thought at the time. His white skin was almost luminescent. But he was Irish so why not; and those rosy cheeks. Short cropped brown hair topped his well shaped head. But I needed to get closer to check out the color of his eyes.

I had just turned 22 and was on my way to setting the world on fire. Little did I know the futility of that endeavor.

Father Flannigan was fresh from the Notre Dame Seminary and raring to fulfill his duties at St Dominic's. In the few months he had been there he had already established a reputation of dedication to his parishioners. Young and old alike loved this young man - especially the young girls of the congregation. But he was a priest so their hopes, dreams, and fantasies would come to naught.

He did not care to be called Father Flannigan - he thought it too formal; and he felt he was not experienced enough for that title. He preferred the less formal - Brother Pat. He wished to be one of the flock - not just its overseer and caretaker; and most everyone was happy to accommodate him. Folks just found him a joy to be around. And so did I -- but all for the wrong reasons.

As a gay man, I also had a few fantasies of my own about this good looking man of God. First of all, and to my profound disappointment - he never even noticed me, or so I thought. Nevertheless, I could not help but admire his love for everyone he encountered - it was genuine and from the heart. I often wondered how he got that way. No one else I knew, young or old, including myself - especially myself, exhibited such selflessness.

He was athletic - played baseball and basket ball; he loved children, adults, and old folks; and he held unofficial and informal classes on Saturday afternoons, expounding the principles of the Catholic Religion.

I assumed he also loved animals of all kinds -- I thought of Saint Francis. Could this be a reincarnation of the famous Saint I often mused. Probably not, but he seemed to be running a very close second. And he could also run - like the wind - any marathon that came up - he was in it. I liked to hike but I didn't care much for the running thing.

But I would go to the running events just the same to see him half naked and his body in action. My fantasies about Brother Pat began to grow and flower. I knew they would never bear fruit. A perfect waste of my time I suppose, but I was single with no prospects of a partner in view so I clung to my high hopes of a miracle happening. Not desperately mind you. I just kind of danced around the possibility.

I wasn't particularly interested in the classes he conducted or what he was expounding. But curiosity did get the best of me. Well, that's not completely true. In fact it's not true at all. It was a chance to observe him up close -- try and figure out who he was and why I was so attracted to his unavailable man of God? I wanted to do all this without being obvious -- an art I thought I had mastered. As it turned out, and much to my embarrassment, I wasn't very good at it.

So one Saturday afternoon I decided to drop by and watch this beautiful man perform. I was in for a big surprise. He was articulate to a fault, obviously well educated, knew the subject matter forward and backward, and he knew how to expound it in a way that even idiots like me could understand. I was curious about him before -- now I was intrigued. Where I expected that intrigue to go was beyond me at the time. Oh yeah - let's not forget the illusive miracle.

At the end of the class he called for any questions. I raised my hand too enthusiastically -- before I realized I didn't even have a question. He called on me immediately. I stammered. He broke the ice by telling me I could put my hand down which brought a round of laughter. My face must have turned beet red - it certainly felt hot enough.

"So, my friend, what is your question?" he asked. My mind was a total blank and then out of nowhere came, "What about celibacy?" which got a few giggles out of some. But Brother Pat was cool and laughed along with the others and then turned his attention to the answer.

I can't for the world of me remember a word of what he said. All I could think of was that he was talking to me. We had eye contact and I was mesmerized. His eyes were green or hazel - I wasn't close enough to be sure. The whites of his eyes were clear and brilliant. And the lashes - long ones below the eye brows which were thick and on the verge of being bushy. The forehead was high and clear - not a wrinkle, the hint of a 5 o'clock shadow against his brilliant skin and a jaw just strong enough to accent his masculinity. Of course, he was perfect and just the type of guy that would fall all over themselves for someone like me - a dumb gay dago. But I was adorable, or so my mother tells me, once upon a time. I think I was three when that happened.

Then the class was over and people were getting up and sauntering out, I knew I had to get out of there as quickly as possible before I did something really stupid.

I made it out to the front hall and was heading for the door when I heard, "Excuse me." coming up behind me. 'Oh Christ' I thought. 'It's him. Please God make him go after someone else.' God didn't. The voice was after me.

"Who me?" I stupidly lied. "Yes, I was just wondering what prompted your question on celibacy. I thought maybe you might be interested in joining the priesthood."

Now he was less than three feet away from me. Jesus, what do I do now. I was sure my knees were shaking and I would soon collapse and fall at his feet. "Oh no, no, no, no - nothing like that, I was just kind of curious. And your answer was perfect," I lied again. I hadn't heard a word he said.

If I had to lie to a priest once more, I was certain the earth would open up and I would go straight to hell. And his eyes were green with little brown specks.

"Well, if you ever change your mind - let me know."

"I will -- I will. Thank you. I promise. I will." I lied again but nothing happened.

"By the way, what's your name?" "Ahhhh, it's -- Geno." I haltingly replied, "But 'Hey you' will get my attention." At least my sense of humor had not failed me. The look on Brother Pat's face did not quite agree.

"Geno?" he asked. "Yes, Geno, Geno Benedetti." I answered. "You can call me Geno." God, could I get any more lame than that.

"Or, Hey You." he added and smiled as if he knew something I didn't know.

"Yeah, well, you know . . ." it was getting more lame by the second. Please God, get me out of here.

Brother Pat finally, and thankfully, turned away. I resumed my path to the exit door with added vigor -- breathing was becoming difficult - my heart was pounding. Thank God he didn't stretch out his hand to shake mine. I would never have survived it.

And then the voice from behind me came again. "Hey you!"

Oh God . . . I turned around. "Just wanted to see if it worked." he laughed. "Hope to see you next Saturday." and he was gone.

He hoped to see me next Saturday . . . I definitely could not go there again - what a jerk he must think I am. I continued to beat myself up the rest of the way back to my apartment.

I placed a porn DVD in the changer hoping that would take my mind off of my afternoon blunders. But it didn't. I kept visualizing Brother Pat and me doing some of the things the bloody actors in the film were doing. Geez, what is wrong with me?

I turned off the TV and put leashes on Max and Mable, my Schnauzers, and went for a long walk - which helped - a little. I met friends on the way and began to regain some of the composure I had so deftly left sloshing around on the hallway floor in front of this man of God.

I told my friends what I had done that morning which opened a whole Pandora's box of one liners. The best one came from Hank, "Hey, maybe you can corner him in the confessional and show him a good time." I laughed at the remark but my vivid imagination took me immediately to the confessional and a whole scenario unfolded of what might happen. Oh God, I was certain the Devil himself was waiting around the next corner, quivering with anticipation to harvest my stupid soul.

Several weeks went by and I didn't see Brother Pat again. So, I thankfully thought the whole thing had passed over and I could go on with my life such as it was. A week later I found out that it was not over and, once again, I was wrong.

I was working out at the local gym with a pair of dumbbells when I heard, "Hey you." coming up behind me.

Oh Geez, it's him. I turned and greeted him "Hi Bother Pat." Oh my God, there he was in front of me again. But this time he was half naked and sweating. Now I could even smell him. I backed up. I don't think there was an ounce of fat on that man's body and it glistened in the gym lights. I hated that, and I hated being there in front of him. His sweat soaked tank top clung to his pectoral muscles and abs like a second skin. I could even see the outline of his nipples and I really hated that. And I was about to hate what he was going to ask me even more. 'Please God, make him go away - forever. I promise I'll be good. At least better.' But he was still there - sweating, and I could still smell him.

"I've seen you here a couple of times and was wondering if you would be interested in being my workout partner? I really need a spotter on some of the things I like to do. -- Interested?"

So, what was I supposed to do - say - NO, I don't want to be around your sweaty, beautiful, smelly body any more then I absolutely have to. "Hey, yeah, that sounds like a great idea." another lie. Is there a door to hell around here somewhere so I can just get it over with?

"That's great. I'm finished for the day. How about next Tuesday?"

“Sounds good to me.”

“Do me a favor and call me Pat while we’re here.”

“Hey, I can do that.”

“Well, I’m headed for the shower - you coming?”

“Oh no, I have a few more reps I want to finish”

“OK, See ya.” and he was gone, sweat dripping off his body, soaking his tank top and those shorts, running down his legs into his socks and . . . Oh God, where are you Satan - get me the fuck out of here. My knees were really shaking. I had to sit down and compose myself. I made sure he was out of the building before I left. I could not take another encounter with him that day - naked or clothed.

The connect between my brain and my mouth was obviously not working very well. I distinctly remember thinking NO NO NO I don’t want to be your workout partner. And yet my mouth went right ahead and said just the opposite. Now what do I do?

Oh yeah, like the heavens were going to open up and give me the correct answer. God, his angels and anyone else up there had obviously abandoned me and were probably just watching and having a good laugh - at my expense. So, I guess I was on my own.

I decided I was certifiable and would just check myself into the nearest State Home for the Bewildered and live out the rest of my life in peace, quiet, and blessed singlehood. I had heard that somewhere and thought it very appropriate under the circumstances.

He probably would have found me and would want to know ‘sup man? I finally calmed myself down and decided that I would just have to rise to the occasion and do it. I’ll be his spotter and just ignore him. Or, I could kill myself and then I wouldn’t have to worry about it any more. I decided against killing myself because -- because, because -- becaaaaause -- down deep somewhere in my lonely self I really really wanted to see him again. Oh, blessed Jesus please forgive me. I know this is probably a very big sin but I can not help my stupid self.

Next Tuesday arrived faster then I had anticipated. Way faster. And there I was -- working out - over him - under him, and next to him, and smelling him. I finally decided this is what hell must be like - everything within licking distance but not close enough to get in a good lick.

The workout session mercifully ended and then there was ‘the shower’ that had to be

dealt with. I managed to get through that by keeping my back to him - I was in and out and dry and clothed and ready to disappear when I heard it again, "Hey you. How about let's get some coffee somewhere?"

I wasn't quite sure I liked how he said the 'Hey you' all the time - was he rubbing it in that I was a dork? "Oh that sounds great. Just what I need." -- to spend more time with you face to face. But at least he would have his cloths on. Now, if I could only throw an overcoat over my imagination I would be just fine. Everything would be jake - peachy keen. This definitely was not working out according to my fantasies.

I kept hoping I would get hit by a bus and run over several times - or more - before we got to the café but that didn't happen. So, I decided to just ask him a lot of silly questions about himself and avoid talking about me. That worked for about 60 seconds before he took over the conversation. Now I had to invent more lies. But I was getting good at it. They just popped up whenever they were needed.

We met twice a week for several months and I got used to him - sort of - and the routine and didn't feel quite so intimidated any longer. He was friendly but not personal which suited me just fine. And I liked the idea of working with someone in the gym. I was beginning to look a little more buff then before which was good. Well, maybe not that good. I was getting some interesting stares from a couple of guys in the gym. They definitely were not putting cloths on me.

Acting straight with Pat all of the time was beginning to wear on me. I'm not a flamer but I do like to wise crack a lot. Couldn't do that with Pat. Had to watch everything I said - I wasn't really having any fun. But how was I to get out of this without making a fool of myself - again. And even worse - hurting his feelings. That would really have been awful - an eternity in hell awful.

Several more weeks passed uneventfully thank God. And then his conversation with me began to change. It was no longer totally friendly - personal was sneaking in and I didn't like it.

Was he looking at me differently then before. I couldn't tell -- primarily because I avoided eye contact with him as much as possible. I didn't want him to see me as I really was or what I was thinking and feeling toward him.

Yeah right. Like he was too obtuse to notice. Oh God why is this happening to me? I'm not a good person, but what I'm going through should be reserved for Jack the Ripper - not me.

Then one morning while we were having coffee after our workout -- he was unusually quiet. Too quiet - something was about to happen and I didn't think I was going to like it. And I was right, for a change.

He began hesitantly - at first, "Hey Geno, I was thinking of taking some time off and going up to Yosemite for some hiking. I've never been to the top of the falls. You mentioned that you liked to hike. How would you like . . ." There it was! - an overnight stay in the wilderness with this man - never gonna happen!

I stopped him in mid sentence, "No, no, you mustn't do that. You're wrong - I don't like to hike. No, No," I paused and made a fateful decision. "I can't do this anymore Pat. I'm sorry. I have to go." I got up and almost ran from the restaurant.

Jesus, what the fuck have I done now, but I couldn't help it. I had let myself fall in love with this man -- this beautiful, fat free, smelly man of God. I had to get away from him once and for all - no more pretending. It was over and it was going to stay that way God damn it! I'm in control of this situation now. And that's the way it's gonna be - period! Yes, of course I was in control. My bozo mentality had almost convinced me of that.

Weeks passed and I didn't see or hear from Brother Pat. I screened my phone calls, avoided his classes and church services. I just didn't want it to happen any more. I was miserable - Jesus was I miserable. I must have been nuts to get into it this far. He probably figured it out by now -- I was a magna cum laude graduate of the sociopathic school for idiots, and that I needed to be avoided at all costs. Where the hell was my guardian angel. I kept listening for the Death Watch Beetle under my floor boards but even they were avoiding me. And once again, as usual, I was wrong.

When the knock at the door came one afternoon I knew who it was and my heart sank down threw my shorts into my shoes. I wasn't expecting anyone. Perhaps, I hopefully thought, it was a neighbor wanting to borrow a cup of sugar.

But then the voice came from the other side of the door. "Geno, are you there?" It wasn't the neighbor after all. It was Pat. "We, need to talk." "No, we do not need to talk," I replied to myself. If I don't make a sound perhaps he will think I'm not home and go away. Wrong again. "Geno, I know you're in there. I saw your car outside." He obviously was not going to go away so I might as well answer the door and wait for the trap door to open and mercifully take me away into the flames of hell which I so richly deserved.

I cracked the door open, "Please go away, I can't talk to you any more." At that moment I do believe I could not have been more pathetic. Turns out that I could be more pathetic - a lot more.

He pushed the door open, walked in and slammed it shut. I just stood there, his face less than two feet away from mine. He was six inches taller than me which made me feel even more - oh yes, more pathetic. And he looked angry, very angry which



frightened me. I said nothing - just stared at him and waited. The tears began to well up in my eyes.

Maybe he was going to beat me up. That would be okay. No subterfuge then. I would pay for my sins and that would be the end of it. My wounds would heal and life would get back to normal again.

I closed my eyes and began to sob. Jesus, I had not cried since I was a child and I could not control this. I managed to get an "I'm so sorry." out between the sobs before he grabbed me and began to kiss me like no one had ever kissed me before.

Then the earth did open up and swallowed me whole. I was in shock. My knees gave out immediately and we both fell to the floor. I unraveled -- all the longing for him I had stored up inside exploded.

What the hell was going on - was he beating me up or making love to me. I could not tell the difference at first. He was bigger and stronger, so there was no way to escape - even if I had wanted to.

Max and Mable heard the commotion and came dashing in from the other room, jumping on us, barking and licking us. I was certain the gates of hell would open now and swallow all of us for what we doing. But they didn't. That would probably come later.

It was getting dark when our passion finally subsided. I looked over at Pat who was looking rather silly with both dogs sitting on his chest staring at him. He didn't seem to mind, so I guessed he loved animals also. I wondered if there was anything he didn't like or love.

"I'm sorry Pat." I began sheepishly.

"For what?" Pat replied somewhat surprised.

"For being so classically pathetic before."

"No you weren't. You were beautiful Geno. You are beautiful. When you ran out of the restaurant, I felt like the floor had been ripped out from under me. At that moment I realized I was in love with you, and had been for a long time. But when you fled like a wounded animal I wasn't sure how you felt. Then when I saw you standing in front of me, falling apart, I knew I was home at last. And I crash landed.

"On top of me." I finished his sentence.

"Yeah, I know - sorry about that."

“But you were right.” “About what?” he asked. “We do need to talk.”

He laughed, gently pushed the dogs onto the floor, grabbed me again and held me so close and tight I wasn't able to breath. “Not anymore we don't.”

We were nose to nose. His eyes were inches away from mine - much closer then I had ever anticipated. They blinked, I blinked and then I pushed him away and stood up. “Yes, we do. This cannot be happening. We cannot do this.” Then I realized we were both fully clothed - that certainly had never happened to me before.

Pat got up and agreed, “You're right. And I am sorry. I shouldn't have done this you.”

“Oh, you're sorry now. You pushed your way into my home, scared me half to death, swept me off my feet, stuck your tongue half way down my throat and now you say you're sorry. Well, isn't that just peachy.” I turned away so he wouldn't see me smiling and walked toward the kitchen. Pat followed with Max and Mable trailing - tails wagging.

He sat down at the table and said nothing. Max and Mable settled underneath the table next to his feet. They liked him. Well, I did not like it - not one little bit. I fiddled with the coffee maker and finally came out with, “What in the world made you think you could do this to me? I never said or did anything to lead you on.”

“Of course you did.” he countered. I turned and stared at him. “You weren't obvious but I knew almost from the first time I talked with you. Celibacy - call me Geno and Hey You. Come on.”

“Oh Geez.” and turned away to the coffee maker again, completely embarrassed that I was still breathing air instead of the fires of hell. How could I have not known? That's what really irked me. Mr. Obvious at work indeed. Still looking at the coffee maker, “Why didn't you discourage me? It would have been so easy for you.”

“I didn't want to.” came his soft and humble reply. “You have no idea how lonely I've been. When I saw you and heard your name. Do you know what your name means?” I didn't, and said nothing. “Geno means God is glorious, and Benedetti means blessed. I almost kissed you right there.”

“So, how did you know the meaning of my name?” “I'm a priest, I studied Latin and Italian in seminary.” “Oh” I said for lack of anything more intelligent to say.

Lonely? “I don't understand how you could be lonely. You are so involved with everyone and everything at church?”

“I won’t deny that, but at the end of the day when I go to my room for rest, I’m alone. Everyone else has their family and friends to interact with. But not me. I have no one. No one -- to be close to.”

“What about God? Aren’t you supposed to be close to him -- in tune with the Almighty or something like that?”

“Yes, but that’s a work in progress and I keep wondering if it will ever be accomplished in this lifetime. I finally came to the conclusion that I couldn’t do this by myself. I needed someone by my side to help me through. And when I met you, well, I hoped that we might possibly have something together. The more time I spent with you - I just knew, and my confidence to do something about it grew. I guess I was wrong.” He paused. “Was I wrong?”

“I’m not that religious, Pat. You know that. You need someone more in line with your vocation - not me.”

He came back a little stronger, “But was I wrong?” and waited.

I didn’t say anything - I just moved my head a little to let him know that he wasn’t wrong. “But what about your career. What if people find out what you’ve done? What we’ve done. Holy Crap, you could be jeopardizing everything.”

“I know, I know, I know. But I was jeopardizing it anyway. I couldn’t think of anything else but you. I cursed and prayed that it would go away but it didn’t. My parishioners began to ask me if I was okay.”

I could not believe what I was hearing. It looked as if Heaven had abandoned him also. “But you never let on in all the time we worked together.”

“I know, I know -- it was difficult. Sometimes almost impossible. During our workouts, I could smell you - your sweat. I could smell you. I was inhaling you into my lungs. It was almost unbearable.”

I could not help myself then. I began to laugh so hard I thought I would cry.

“What are you laughing about?” “Sweat” I blurted out. “I could smell yours to, and it was driving me nuts.”

“Oh my God, I never thought of that.” was his surprise answer.

My laughter subsided and I giggled, “I was tempted to steal something of yours that had sweat in it. I know that’s sick, but I wanted something of you to take with me.”

The expression on his face dropped. "What?" I asked.

"I have a confession to make." He, this priest, was about to confess to me? Oh God, what will it be - door number 1, door number 2, or the third one marked THIS WAY TO HELL YOU JERK. I just looked at him and waited.

"I did steal from you - one of your tank tops when you were still in the shower."

"What? Yes, of course. Come to think of it I remember when it disappeared. But it never dawned on me that you had taken it - never in a million years. Do you still have it?"

"Yes." "Well, I want it back." I told him in gest - "With or without my sweat. Preferably without."

"Ok." he agreed and got up and came over to where I was standing. "I will give it back and I will keep on giving as long as you are accepting."

Oh Geez, my knees started to go again. I backed into the counter and held on for dear life. That sounded like a proposal to me. I wondered if that is what he meant.

I interrupted his advance, "But first, I have a confession." his face was almost upon me. "Which is?" he prompted. "I'm having unclean thoughts." He drew back an inch or two. "Oh really. Anyone I know?"

"No, you don't." Oh, he wants to play, that's great. "It's the grocery clerk over at Safeway."

"Oh, is that right. What's his name?"

"What makes you think it's a him."

"Just a wild guess." he pulled me into one of those kisses I wasn't quite used to yet.

As I came up for air, "His name is . . ."

"I'm also having those kinds of thoughts." he interrupted."

"Yes, I know. Is that a banana in your pocket or are you just happy to see me?"

He backed away in laughter. "Yes, it's a banana." Changing the subject, "Are you still going to spot me at workouts?"

I paused and then conceded, "Yeeees."

He moved in again, "Wanna take your pants off now?" He DID have a sense of humor - thank you God.

"Noooo." I laughed. "Here - coffee - sit."

The coffee had finally brewed and we drank cup after cup until it was dawn. The conversation got far too serious for me - I was too overwhelmed to concentrate. The mountain of problems that faced us weren't solved by any means, but there was no need to pretend any longer. Thank God for that.

And then he asked me to kneel in prayer with him. I said, "What?" in disbelief.

"If you're willing to start this journey with me, let's begin the right way." He rose up from his chair and knelt down in the middle of my kitchen floor -- and reached out for my hand. Oh my God in Heaven - was this really happening? It was. Apparently the illusive miracle I had been dancing around was about to come true.

I don't even remember getting up off my chair or kneeling down in front of him, but suddenly I was there with his arms around me. He kissed me on the cheek and then took both my hands into his and began to pray, "Dear Father, bless us on this journey .

"I didn't hear another word, my heart was so full it seemed to burst open. What flowed between us in those few moments was electric - beyond words. I never felt so close and dawn in by another human being in my life.

"Amen." Pat had finished his praying and looked up into my eyes. "Amen" I whispered. I don't know if it was physical or spiritual love but it was flowing from Pat like a rushing river and almost knocked me out.

I remember looking down at Max and Mabel resting quietly along side of us. "You're witnesses you two." Then I raised my eyes to Pat's. "Yes, they are. They certainly are." he agreed. He kissed my hands again and helped me to my feet.

I know it sounds absurd, but before that night ended I had married that man into my soul. Of course, I didn't tell him about it. But I did it and there was no question in my mind about what I had done. If anyone ever found out, I knew there would be consequences but I was determined no one ever would find out about my personal vows or the fact that I was one with this man of God - come hell or high water. He didn't say a word but I just knew he felt the same as I did.

And yes, we did consummate our relationship that morning with no cloths. But you will have to use your own imagination for that scenario. There are certain personal things I intend to keep very private thank you very much.

But I will tell you that the rooms were filled with the scent of roses. Pat used to tell me that when you finally make contact with God and step out of the way, the imprisoned splendor escapes and leaves a trail of perfume behind. There was a lot of perfume floating around that night. And I'm pretty sure I heard the flutter of angel wings - could have been demon wings. But no, they were the other kind - the good kind.

By now I had finally gotten over the fear of roasting in hell on an Ikea stainless steel spit for several or more eternities. And even though the pathway we were to follow was not going to be strewn with rose petals, we were going to be together. We were no longer alone.

With the first rays of morning the reality of what we had done began to set in. He had his duties to perform to his congregation and I had to continue on with my life as if nothing unusual had happened. We both agreed that it would not be easy but nothing worthwhile ever is. Max and Mable knew what had happened but they weren't about to tell anyone.

Max was now sitting on Pat's foot. I wonder if I ever had a choice in this matter. I appears I did not. I finally realized that all of Heaven had not abandoned either one of us. I for one, had been too damned resistant to the calling from within. But that was over - all behind me, behind us. Had to get used to using 'us' from now on.

The ensuing years were like a physical, mental, and spiritual roller coaster. One horizon after another challenged Pat in his duty to God and the Church and to our relationship.

The worst one was the day we were outted. Not viciously by any means. The ensuing battle with the Church and its rules was not to be believed. But in the end we not only triumphed but set a new standard that had never been seen before in the Catholic Church or any other church for that matter. But more about that another time.

We survived them all and grew even closer together than before. When I say 'we' I mean God, Pat, and me - with Max and Mable trailing behind, wagging their tails.

And we did make it to Yosemite - many times. It was the only time we could be out in public and not worry about what people thought. Just two guys hiking up the falls. We could touch and pull each other up over the rock formations without a second thought. Three grueling glorious hours up the falls, through the mist of the falling water and then reaching the top and resting while we took in the glorious view. I didn't think anything could top that. And then the decent to the floor of the valley below to food and rest. We hardly spoke at all - it just wasn't necessary.

Pat wanted to sleep out in the open next to a big tree but I convinced him that staying

in a cabin would be a little safer - especially with me around.

Our everyday life was quite different. It was still the 60's. The abuses within the Church had not come to the forefront yet but we knew about them. So we had to be careful. I'm not sure if anyone knew or guessed about us. If they did, they never let on. When physical or spiritual love envelopes you there is an undeniable glow - you just can't help it or cover it up. And I was glowing. Oh boy was I glowing.

My mother noticed and remarked, during one of her visits, that I looked so happy - was I in love? And then the standard question, 'When are you going to get married son? You're not getting any younger you know?' 'Yeah Mom, I'll send you a telegram when that happens.' She would just laugh. Fortunately she lived in New Jersey so I was relatively safe from her prying eyes except for her visits.

I was not a particularly devote Catholic and often thought Pat should have chosen someone more attuned to the principles of the Church. But he disagreed with me each time I brought the subject up. He told me that I was a ray of light that gave the proper perspective to Truth. I finally realized that I had been apologizing for being there. So, I stopped and tried to become the support he needed for his journey.

I soon became attuned to his needs both physically and spiritually, remaining close when needed and at a distance during those other times. He returned my attendance to his needs with a devotion that oft times staggered me and encouraged me to become more than I was.

In looking back over the years, over the decades, it has become clear that I was the one who benefited most from the relationship. His insight and devotion gave me direction without being directed. It taught me the benefits of selflessness which I had seen in him from the very beginning but which so obviously lacked in my own life.

I discovered the difference between physical love and spiritual love from his example day in and day out. He never wavered in his love which flowed from him in all directions. He was like a beacon of light over the rest of us who were drifting to and fro on the misty flats below; and when he complained about his lack of union with God, I disagreed with him. The little self of Father Flannigan had disappeared years ago but he could not see it. He was the epitome of deity itself but he could not see that either, and would argue the point. Perhaps the search for God will never end for any of us. But Pat reached a plateau not reached by many others. A goal only dreamed of by the rest of us mortals.

His journey of discovery is far from over I'm certain. But I dare to hope that I may continue at his side if at all possible for as long as possible.

I took one last long look out into the Pacific, then joined my friend in our journey back

to the Bridge plaza parking lot. As we drove away from the Golden Gate Bridge, my thoughts lingered at the center of that bridge and the view of the Pacific Ocean, the last resting place of Father Patrick Flannigan, the Priest, the man with whom I had the most amazing and remarkable love affair.

I chuckled a little when I thought of Pat standing there with me on the bridge. He would have made the sign of the cross and probably said, "Dominus vobiscum ." And I, the smart ass that I am, would have turned to him and said, "Illegitimi non carborundum." And we both would have had a good laugh.

The laughter. Oh yes, it was the laughter we had together - that was the glue that sealed and bound our unorthodoxed union for all those years. I wondered wistfully if it would ever really be over. I guess I will find out one day - and soon, I am hoping.

Salvete,  
Geno Benedetti