



*Frank and Marcia Olsen are forced to battle a Colombian drug cartel in order to rescue their kidnapped son, Robert. At the same time, Frank Olsen must evade capture by agents sent to arrest him and prevent his eviction from this Amish town.*

## **Circle of Friends: Murder in an Amish Field**

By Arthur McNamee

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# *Circle of Friends*



MURDER IN AN AMISH FIELD

Arthur W McNamee

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## Introduction

On a very warm day in July 2006, two large black hawks carefully circled the spot below. Their high-pitched squawk rang out for miles around, as they continually swooped down toward the ground but just above the corn husks standing in the deserted field beneath them. In the way that they flew and peeked into the tall reeds, it was obvious that something or someone now hid within the green fields below. Occasionally, and depending upon the direction and strength of the blustery wind, they observed the blood-stained tips on the corn stalks or the lower blood-stained splatter marks closer to the ground. To any casual observer, it was obvious that their presence served as a beacon to warn others of the oddity of this place.

It was not as though the local terrain possessed any particular eccentric affinity over the neighboring areas. On the contrary, this 230-acre farm was remarkably similar to all the farms that existed in the outskirts of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and within Lancaster County. The entire area contained meadow upon meadow of small corn and wheat farms, pig farms, dairy and produce farms. All of it serviced the nation abroad and the small-town communities that surrounded them.

Granite Lake was one such hamlet that lay between Philadelphia and Lancaster. Its 530 inhabitants were composed mostly of local Amish farmers, woodworkers, and artisans who still maintained the traditional religious customs of their ancestors. These were “Old Order Amish” Christians, living without modern conveniences. This expanse of farmland was at the heart of Pennsylvania Dutch Country and was an accurate snapshot of our nation’s simpler past.

Except for daily buggy rides given to curious tourists, who made daily pilgrimages to view this forgotten land, seldom did Granite Lake experience any high commuter traffic. Their streets were very quiet during the day and night and the only noise infrequently heard were the sighing of disgruntled plow horses in the fields. It was a peaceful place,

filled with God-fearing peaceful citizens. When not working on their farms, or in their small local shops, they prayed and attended religious and social functions on a regular basis. It was a community where everyone knew everyone. It was full of townfolk who helped one another.

The children, when time and money permitted, ventured out beyond the community to the nearby cities and their local attractions. Many visited Hershey Amusement Park since it was only a short distance away. While at the park, they purchased and ate finely made chocolates. They enjoyed and experienced a more boisterous atmosphere, which they seldom experienced at home. It was not as though they did not have fun at home. They often did, but it was without the sensual perversion associated with our modern urban culture. While there, these youths took it all in before they departed to the small hamlets of their simple existence.

Although Marcia and Frank Roberts were outsiders, and not Amish, the local folks seemed to have accepted them within the Granite Lake community. There were those who openly protested allowing them to live and work there, but after they had done their best to blend in, they heard nothing but silence from most of their detractors. Besides, although Granite Lake remained exclusively Amish, several “English” families dwelt within this community along with them. It was not as though Marcia and Frank were the only “English” family who now mingled with these people.

Like those around them, the Roberts daily toiled on their small farm and brought their produce to the local market at least once per week if not more. As was customary, they gave the Granite Lake community leaders about ten percent of their produce before they sold the remainder at the local market. In this way, they contributed to the many food banks set up to feed the needy in this small town. The small vegetable stands in town sold the surplus if needed. Granite Lake was a very self-sufficient community, which rarely, if ever, needed assistance from the nearby urban communities or its urban population. These Amish citizens took pride in their ability to stand alone within America’s huge melting pot.

Granite Lake had its own hospital, which sat in the middle of the small town. It had one bank, several small furniture stores, several woodworking and crafts shops, two carpenters, two one-room schoolhouses, a textile and fabric store, a funeral director, an old-fashioned pharmacy, and a very large general store. It was the hub of this small town and carried almost anything this community needed if not found in the other local shops. In fact, Efrin Beiler, this town's mayor, owned and operated a crystal and glass-blowing shop in town. He was also their glazier. When not making crystal objects, or replacing window panes, he tended to community business.

To ensure that no one person obtained too much power while serving in this office, the community elected a new representative every four years. In fact, the rules stipulated that no elected official could become mayor more than once in any given twelve-year period. This rule also ensured that no elected official could create legislation or put into law things that they might personally benefit from while out of office and while seeking reelection. They held the town meetings in Tanner Manor, which was still equipped with its original signal bell from 1832. It was once Jonathan Tanner's residence. He was Granite Lake's first mayor. Mr. Tanner resided there between 1832 and 1840. Thereafter, each succeeding mayor resided there during their mayoral term.

Since the Old Order Amish did not believe in constructing town halls, they held their community meetings at Tanner Manor. It was a small residence by modern standards, but at some 2,500 square feet, it was a much larger residence than those that existed within Granite Lake's small village. It was a small town whose citizens were honest, hard working people.

Granite Lake's children attended school during the day and helped on their parents' farms. State law dictated that these children attend at least eight years of elementary school and one year of vocational training before they ventured into the real world. Most helped their parents on their farms and continued in their footsteps after they were gone. Others learned the crafts of their fathers and continued in those professions as

well. Although they had free time, they often spent it in the presence of their parents and families. Since they had a very long day, they often went to bed very early. Much of what they ate came from the farm they owned and worked on and from the fruits of their own labor. In fact, “barn raising” events were social gatherings designed to provide assistance to those in need.

During those events, the local carpenter instructed the local men and boys on various tasks they needed to do to erect the barn. Most times, by mid-meal, the carpenter, men, and boys had the structure framed out, and they completed its roof by the end of the day. The Amish wives and women prepared simple dishes to feed those who participated at this event. Everyone pitched in to help thy neighbor, and even the smallest children helped in some small way.

They buried their dead in the same modest way in which they lived their lives. Caskets were unadorned and of very simple construction. There were no flowers, long winded sermons or music. Gravestones were simple and were functional at best. Nothing about their ceremonies smelled of conventional or modern urban custom. Simply put, they revered their death as they had in life. There was no room or time for the ornate. In this community, and as a measure of religious practice, there was no room for personal displays, whether in life or in death, of personal accomplishments, or of personal wealth. Here, all were equal both in the eyes of God and to each other.

In the five years that the Roberts have lived in this community, they have become accustomed to their sedate and dark clothing and their simple customs. Marcia found it especially hard to adapt to the clothes that Amish women wore in the course of each day. It was very hard for her to accept the subservient lifestyle of the typical Amish housewife within this small community. Although within the privacy of their home they enjoyed a measure of equality among themselves, as far as outward appearances were concerned, Marcia displayed the prototypical subservient persona as exemplified in this town.

Although they had long days and short nights and the daily work was hard, it was a very stress-free existence. There was no fear about what might happen tomorrow. There was no fear about living or existing alone and not having the resources to make ends meet. In short, this simple communal lifestyle and the genuine concern of its citizens for the needs of others was all one needed to get through one's day. There was a serenity here that neither Marcia nor Frank had ever experienced before. She had never experienced it within the opulence she was accustomed to while at Casa Gaglione, and Frank had never experienced it while they resided at their four-bedroom expanded ranch in Garden City, New York. To all outsiders, it was simply indescribable.

Granite Lake did not have any local police department, and crime was not an issue in this community. Those who lived there did so with the intent of living peacefully with thy neighbor. They handled skirmishes civilly and in accordance with their local laws and customs. Seldom was outside help needed, but on rare occasions, the Philadelphia or Lancaster police departments were called to assist in any trouble that befell this peaceful hamlet. Now was such a time.



## Chapter One

The local folk strolled into Tanner Manor in regular intervals. The town meeting was set to start at 7:30 p.m., and the bell had been ringing for less than one minute as the last Granite Lake citizens meandered in to attend this impromptu meeting. If nothing else, Granite Lake citizens were always prompt. This meeting was going to start shortly, and the Roberts scampered to their seats.

Frank Roberts sat near the front of the room while his wife, Marcia, sat more toward the rear of this tiny hall. At six-foot-two inches tall, with a protruding narrow chin, broad muscular shoulders and receding blond hairline, Frank Roberts was an imposing figure at these proceedings. He still had a chiseled physique for a fifty-six year old and appeared remarkably well preserved for someone of his advanced age. His placid gaze was transfixed on the Elders before him.

His wife, Marcia Roberts, sat nervously toward the back of the room. Periodically, her lips quivered a little as she squirmed in her chair to see what was happening up front. She was a short and slender woman with a prominent chin. Her black hair displayed streaks of gray running through it. She was a pretty woman with slightly noticeable crows feet wrinkles at the corners of her eyes. At fifty-three years old, Marcia still had plenty of good years ahead of her; however, it was clear that the best years were now behind her.

As was customary, the men and the town's Elders took their places at their seats toward the front of the meeting room, and the women and children occupied the remaining seats toward the rear of the room. Since all outside work ceased at dusk, the entire town's population showed up for this meeting except those who were either sick or incapacitated. Overall, about 160 Granite Lake citizens out of 530 residents attended this meeting. They jammed into the large living room and foyer as best they could, while some even stood toward the entrance to the front porch and some spilled into the home's large kitchen.

Efrin Beiler sat at the head of the large rectangular table in the front of the living room, along with the other six town Elders. These men were descendants whose families settled this area about 174 years ago. They were very influential in the affairs of the town and often carried the deciding vote in communal affairs.

For the most part, whatever Efrin Beiler and the other six town Elders thought, they all thought as well and, most often, agreed with them. Seldom was there much dissension within this group or within the community. The Elders in attendance were John Lapp and Eric Stoltzfus, whose ancestors were the town's first carpenters. They too had continued in this noble profession. Amos King was the town preacher whose great-grandfather once helped injured Revolutionary soldiers who were then under the command of General George Washington.

There was also Samuel Fisher, who was the great-grandson of Daniel Fisher, who was another local farmer. Samuel Fisher had left Granite Lake while a young man and became a successful orthopedic surgeon in Manhattan before he retired and returned to his Amish roots. At present, he was Granite Lake's only doctor. He spent his own money to erect its small but serviceable hospital. When he was not one of the presiding Elders, he was the town's physician and local historian.

Both Efrin Beiler and David Beiler, his younger brother, had ancestors that had arrived in America on the *Mayflower* and whose ancestors ended up in Pennsylvania at the end of the Revolutionary War. David Beiler was the town's blacksmith. He fixed all the farm equipment along with providing maintenance and servicing to the fleet of buggies found in town. Lastly, there was Zachary Dunn. His descendants were general laborers who had arrived in this area in the early 1830s. His descendants suffered religious persecution in Germany at that time and fled to the United States.

Among the town Elders, Zachary Dunn was the most boisterous. By far, he was the most suspicious by nature and questioned everything. However, he had learned to keep his feelings in check within this very

trusting community. In fact, he was the Roberts' utmost obstinate detractor when they arrived in this small town. Frank now observed the same nervousness in his demeanor as he sat in his chair at the table. Efrin Bieler commenced this meeting. His loud and squeaky voice drew his attention. As was the case in most events within Amish life, there was very little fanfare even at these meetings. They were simple and short and possessed little to no pomp and circumstance.

“Brothers and sisters, we gather here today to discuss the events of yesterday at Brother Roberts’ farm.” Efrin said this very softly and in a way as though he intended to direct his statement to the audience. He was a great orator in his own right and highly respected by everyone. For a man who barely stood five-foot-three and weighed, at best, 130 pounds, with gray hair and beard and eyeglasses, he did not look much like a typical mayor. Yet, he was very good at his job. Things always ran very smoothly under his watch.

“Sergeant Davis of the Lancaster Police informed me yesterday that they uncovered the body of Joshua Poole on Brother Roberts’ farm yesterday afternoon. They informed me that he had apparently been murdered since he had been shot in the back of the head.”

There was a brief pause as many of the women and children began to grieve for this loss to the community. Frank Roberts listened as the din quieted down, and Brother Bieler began to speak again. However, he felt somewhat uncomfortable, as some 160 pairs of eyes now seemed focused on him and had turned toward his direction.

“Now, brothers and sisters, before we start pointing fingers at any members of our group, we should reflect upon what we do know and see if we, as a group, can come to some logical conclusions.”

Before Efrin Bieler could continue further and quell any possible animosity toward the Roberts, Brother Dunn rose up from his chair at the table to begin his rant.

He was a tall and lanky man with a long dark beard, eyeglasses, and a narrow chin. He parted his long black hair in the middle and always wore his black felt, wide brim, low crown, and narrow band hat to all social functions and in public. Above everyone else, he was the proudest of his Mennonite ancestry. In comparison to them all, he was the town “pest,” and most of the other town members did their best to tolerate him. Yet, despite his unpopular personality, many respected his ability to watch over the community and warn of what he perceived as impending doom. He was sort of a nervous watchdog, and many in the community, if nothing else, respected him for that.

“Brother and sisters,” he started in his usual loud voice, “I told you five years ago that we should not have allowed Brother Roberts into our community. We knew very little about him then, and apparently, from the turn of events at his farm yesterday, we can conclude that we know even less about him now.”

Brother Dunn became very animated as he wandered about the room in a slow, yet deliberate gait. It was obvious to Frank that Brother Dunn’s mannerisms and comments had stirred up the assembled crowd. It was obvious to him that he was somewhat successful in planting some seeds of doubt in the minds of those in attendance.

He observed many scowls and frowns on the faces of those who listened to what he was saying to them. Brother Dunn’s fervor and comments to the assembly reminded Frank of the Salem witch trials of the late 1600s.

Annie Loftus, distant cousin to Eric Stoltzfus, had heard enough from Brother Dunn. Her great-grandfather was a brother to Eric Stoltzfus’ father, but the family line of male descendants had died several decades ago. As a woman, she had no rights in the ancestral Elder line, even though her family had been in this community nearly as long. She was a spirited, outspoken, and extremely forceful woman who cared more about truth and justice and less about customs. She could not stand Brother Dunn’s deliberate attempts at smearing another member of the community without as much as a single word of proof.

“Brother Dunn,” she started in her very pointed way. “You have not offered a single word of proof for the accusations you have registered against Brother Roberts. Certainly, even in the urban courts of Lancaster, this would be at least a fundamental requirement afforded the accused.”

There was a commotion in Tanner Manor as citizens alike began to whisper among themselves. Brother Beiler banged the gavel on the table in an attempt to restore some semblance of order. The crowd was more upset about Annie’s deliberate outburst than anything she might have said. For in this society, women seldom spoke in public and certainly never addressed the Elders. To put further salt in the wounds, it was sheer blasphemy to mention anything involving urban life outside this community. Her reference to the evidence of proof required in urban courts did little to endear her to her brothers and sisters in this town.

However, for the most part, Annie Loftus did not care about convention or her stature within this community. She was a strong and principled woman who loved her God and her neighbors equally. She was not afraid to speak her mind when she observed injustice and cared little of the consequences of her actions when injustice was involved. She knew that her community would one day forgive her for her blasphemy and knew that she could not stand by and just say nothing.

Brother Dunn continued. He seemed unabated by Annie Loftus’ comments. Again, he began to work the room.

“Sister Loftus seems to have forgotten her place in this society, I’m afraid, and I and the other Elders will certainly do our best in the upcoming weeks to assist her.” He said this in a flippant manner that angered Annie Loftus even more. Before her daughter could stop her from speaking, she addressed the crowd once more.

“Brother Dunn, you least of all should be so judgmental, for you too do not stand on such high ground!”

There were several snickers heard from members of the congregation who knew that Brother Dunn was merely a general laborer with very limited skills and that his home sat at the bottom of the west side valley, which often flooded in the spring. There had been many a day when he and his family spent hours sweeping out their home from dried dirt and mud from receding, ankle-high floodwaters.

Brother Dunn prepared to address this personal attack, but Efrin Beiler decided to put a stop to the bickering.

“I think it best that we address what we currently know and render conclusions solely based upon that,” Efrin started. “I ask that Brother Roberts to address this committee and provide whatever support he can on these events.”

Again, there were 160 pairs of eyes staring at the Roberts. Frank could tell, from the quiver in Marcia’s lower lip that she felt very uncomfortable at these proceedings. To deflect attention away from her, he decided to stand up and address the crowd.

“Brother Beiler... Er, I will reply to any questions or concerns you might have. My wife and I will do anything to help this community.”

There was now utter silence in Tanner Manor. The tension was almost intolerable in this tiny room. No one made any noise, and some whispered in order to hear what they said up front.

“Brother Roberts,” Brother Beiler began again, “most of us are not accusing you or your wife of anything. It was not our intent to bring you here to accuse you but to come to some understanding of what happened on your farm. Therefore, in the spirit of cooperation, I ask that you provide us with candid answers to our questions so we, as a collective group, can come to some understanding of this thing.”

Brother Beiler turned the meeting over to Brother Tunnis. He was the town lawyer who once lived in Sacramento, California. Thus far, he was

Granite Lake's only Amish convert. He came to Granite Lake and this Amish settlement looking for a simpler and a more carefree lifestyle. At Granite Lake, he handled most of the real estate and legal affairs for the local residents. Since there was no need for courts, he spent most of his practice dealing with matrimonial affairs, wills, and community legal matters. Brother Tunnis was a stout man, with a long white beard and bald scalp. He weighed some 250 pounds and was the largest man in this community, and at seventy years old; one of the oldest. He had a non-sense approach to all that he did and today was no exception.

“Brother Roberts,” he started in his slow and deliberate way, “did you ever have any business dealings with the parents of Joshua Poole?”

“No, none to speak of.”

“What about Joshua, any dealings with him?”

“No, but he often liked to play in the west end of my farm on occasion, that's all.”

Amos Tunnis mulled over Frank's response for several minutes before continuing his questioning. It was as though he had gleaned some tidbit from what Frank had said.

“You said that he liked to play on your property on occasion. Why was that, Brother Roberts?”

“Well, our farms were divided by US Route 23, just outside of New Holland, and he often went on my side to play baseball when he was not attending to his father's fields. “

“Baseball?”

“Yeah, he would get a stick and a small rock and hit the rock through the field. Sometimes, if the rock was big enough, he tried to chase it as it sailed through the air.”

“Why did he do this on your property and not that of his father’s?”

“Well, if he did this on his father’s farm, he would know, from the trampled wheat and corn stalks, that he was clowning around and not doing his chores. Since I did not mind, he frolicked on my farm instead. Sometimes, if he spent too long out there and it got late in the day, I helped him work his fields so his father did not know what he was doing, that’s all.”

“Where did he learn to play baseball?” Brother Tunnis asked, somewhat startled that a member of this society even knew how to play that game.

“When my son, Robert, was younger and living with us on this farm, I used to play baseball with him on the rear forty acres of our farm...away from the roads closest to the town and most of its citizens. Joshua used to come over and watch us from time to time. In fact, he even participated in some of our games when daylight and time permitted.”

Brother Beiler silenced the crowd and the din, which developed because of this revelation. Samuel and Rebecca Poole sat mortified within the audience as they listened to these revelations about their only son. They did not have any idea that he loved baseball or any of the other urban games that he secretly played behind their backs.

As shocking as this revelation was to those attending, it did nothing to get to the reason behind this apparent murder. Amos placed his right hand on his long white beard and mulled Frank’s remarks some more, as he paced back and forth in front of the room. It was several minutes before he spoke again.

“Sergeant Davis said that they found a small pile of Colombian cigarettes on the road behind your farm. This same road divided your property from that of the Pooles. He further stated that based upon the number of cigarettes found and where they were found, that it appeared to him that whoever was sitting in a vehicle there was waiting for someone.”



Efrin Beiler banged the wooden gavel on the table as the noise, again, escalated to above a peaceful whisper. The local folks appeared restless as they sat in their seats.

“He’s brought trouble to Granite Lake, I knew it!” Brother Dunn chimed in before Efrin Beiler could stop him.

Amos Tunnis continued along and ignored Brother Dunn’s comments as though he had said nothing at all. He was not a man prone to pointless speculation or supposition.

“Brother Roberts,” he continued. “Can you think of anyone in Colombia who might be looking for you? Do you have any enemies there who wish you or your family harm?”

It was not until Robert Tunnis mentioned Colombia that it occurred to Frank Roberts that his past might have caught up with him. It never occurred to him that his Colombian contacts could ever find them in the United States. It never occurred to him that one could connect his past to Joshua’s premature death. All of a sudden, he felt responsible for the death of Joshua, although he could not understand why. It sickened him to think that he had anything to do with this innocent child’s death. Brother Tunnis’ sharp voice invaded his morose reflection.

“Do you need me to repeat the question, Brother Roberts?”

“No, no. I heard you the first time,” Frank said as he straightened himself up in front of his chair and gave his wife a fast glance before he spoke.

“We haven’t been completely honest with you, and for that we are sorry. We never intended any of the harm which has now befallen Joshua’s parents or any of you.”

The local folks became very boisterous, and Brother Dunn led them along with his hostile sentiments against both Frank and Marcia Roberts. There

was little that Frank could do to turn the tide in their favor. He merely sat there resigned to their fate.

Brother Tunnis had seen and heard enough from Zachary Dunn. He had needlessly incited the crowd and he just could not stand that. He ordered Brother Dunn to sit down or he threatened to spend the remainder of his night filing sanctions against him. Begrudgingly, Zachary sat down in his seat and said nothing further for the moment. He listened as Amos continued in his dialogue.

“Brother Roberts...I think that it would be in your best interest and that of the community that you tell us all that you know. It is the only way that we can assess our situation and plan a response.”

There was not a sound within Tanner Manor, as Frank Roberts cleared his throat to address this inquiry. Those folks seated in the rear seats strained their ears to hear the proceedings.

“Brother Tunnis and the other members of this community,” Frank started, as he looked into the crowd from his seat up front. “My wife and I are not Mennonites and do not belong to any Amish sect. Our last name is not Roberts but Olsen.”

Brother Beiler did not like what he heard so far and decided that he did not want the children or the women exposed to any more of this. Especially since he did not have any clue about what Frank might yet say. He dismissed all the women and children, except Annie Loftus, who enjoyed immunity since she was a direct descendant of one of the town’s founding fathers. Besides, they all knew that she would not agree to leave voluntarily anyway and he felt it was much easier just to allow her to stay.

The Elders and the other men sat there as Frank Olsen explained everything to them. How the US Marshals office placed them within the Witness Protection Program. How they provided them with completely new identities. He explained how he had served as a government “snitch” and as a drug dealer in Bogota, Colombia. How he did this in order to

avenge his brother's unjust execution and to have the true killer brought to justice. He explained how Title 18 Chapter 209 Article 2 was very specific on what charges were permissible under the US/ Colombian Extradition Treaty.

He explained to them what he ultimately had to do to get Fred Carlton charged with drug trafficking in Colombia and ultimately extradited back to the United States. He explained how both Marcia and he were shocked that anyone might find them since they had been so careful to blend in and not to draw attention to themselves. Their genuine concern for the congregation and the trouble they were now in was evident on their troubled faces. They all, except Brother Dunn, plainly saw sincere sadness and concern in the Olsens' eyes.

On this particular occasion, Frank could not help but reminisce about the unpleasant events that led up to his brother Tom's death. Each morbid tidbit festered within his brain and deeply bothered him. He was not now or ever able to let it go nor did he ever want to. Hatred bubbled inside him again today, as it had done so many times before against those who had caused his pain. A silent tear caressed his cold cheek as his mind once again relived those horrific and unfortunate memories...

Tom looked extremely nervous and agitated by the time he arrived to visit him in jail. He was forty-five minutes late when he finally arrived. Tom's lawyer, Jason Reynolds, had already come and gone by the time he got there.

Frank hastily walked up this jail's rear path. He observed Tom pacing back and forth within the community meeting room. He looked like some caged animal removed from its mother in the wild. It was a large, cafeteria-type room with many old tables and benches. It had a very large rectangular picture window, which gave the inmates their only outside view of the free world.

"Tom, what's up?" he said quickly and with great concern.

Tom looked straight at him. His haggard and tired appearance was unusually disturbing. He was very pale, even paler than he had seen him before over these past fifteen years. Frank found it hard to believe that this was his biological twin. Prison life did not agree with him, although he had done his best to survive in that jungle. Frank now saw sheer terror in his eyes and little of anything else. He seemed terrified, yet somewhat resigned.

“Jason said the judge denied my appeal. He said that there ain’t much else he can do to help me....”

He stuck on the last syllable as though it was a final realization that this gig was up and that the game was finally over.

Frank had to sit down. He pulled up an empty bench and sat down, and found it now especially hard to breathe and swallow. He kept wondering—no, more like lamenting—how life had gone so terribly wrong. He tried desperately to make sense of it all.

“What about all the new evidence we uncovered and all the subpoenaed records?” Frank shouted out in bewilderment.

Tom explained how the judge had dismissed the introduction of any new evidence, citing fifteen appeals already filed at the taxpayers’ expense over this old death row conviction. He explained how the only way he would now avoid execution would be by somehow obtaining a governor’s pardon. He explained how unlikely this was now upon current public sentiment and the Governor’s past track record in this regard. Tom spoke for some time at an almost frenzied pace. Yet, Frank scarcely heard a single word. His mind just kept racing along in a collage of past events both good and bad. It was as though someone opened the floodgates of a straining dam after some horrendous storm. It all gushed out at once, taking a blind path in every direction. Something Tom said caught his attention.

“If I don’t get a reprieve, they’re gonna fry me on August 25th at 2:00 pm. Christ...that sucks! “

As far back as Frank could remember, he never once ever saw his brother cry. He was like the Rock of Gibraltar and was never prone to emotion. Thomas Norton Olson never cried and that was that. But on this day, things were different. He cried as any newborn baby would when rudely slapped as an introduction to the new world. It sent shivers up Frank’s spine as he listened in perturbed silence. He never forgot that day.

His brother’s trial was short. The public defender, Jason Reynolds, did his best to protect him with the limited resources at his disposal. He did his best, but in the end it just was not good enough. The Olsens were poor but proud people, never wanting of any charity, gifts, or handouts. As a family, they always made do with what they had. Whatever was to be was to be, and they never whined about outcomes that did not meet their liking.

Often, Mr. Reynolds worked on his brother’s case during his lunch hour and late into the evening, even though a mountain of public defender work piled up all over his cramped desk. The incriminating evidence was overwhelming against Tom, even though they both knew deep down that Tom was innocent. His brother was not capable of the heinous crime committed against the fifteen-year-old schoolgirl from Lynbrook. There was no way that he could have committed both rape and murder. There was just no way.

Frank remembered sitting in the front of the courtroom and close to the jury watching the tall and well-dressed Mineola prosecutor build his case as if he was erecting a house of cards. He watched as this attorney weighed and measured each piece of evidence carefully and with the precision of a surgeon. In the end, he erected a very strong castle that was completely impregnable by the defense.

He spoke about motive. He spoke about opportunity. But most of all, he spoke about circumstantial evidence, and there was much. There was the

testimony of Justin Blake, who swore he saw Tom entering the backyard of the deceased residence about fifteen minutes before this crime. There was the testimony of George Thompson, who owned Thompson Hardware and who testified that he sold Tom a Barlow pocket knife on that day that perpetrated this horrid crime. There was the testimony of Sergeant John O'Keefe and Sergeant Pettalla, who arrested Tom at the Lynbrook train station as he attempted to board a train heading to Queens. They testified that Tom was wearing the exact color sweat jacket and blue jeans described to them by an eyewitness.

But most of all, the most damaging circumstantial evidence in the prosecutor's possession was the surveillance video taken from the Roslyn Savings Bank lobby at 315 Merrick Road, Lynbrook. This camera pointed out toward the street from the lobby. It easily picked up the stores on the north side of the street, as well as some dark alleyways adjacent to private residences. One such residence was that of the O'Toole family that lived at 5 Olive Place. It was one of the older homes lying on the block behind the north side stores. The video clearly showed either Tom or someone who looked remarkably like him jumping the perimeter fence of the O'Toole residence and walking east past the bank at a fast pace. Frank would not have believed it himself had he not seen the video with his own eyes. He recalled turning toward the jury immediately after viewing the video. The expressions on their faces told him what he already knew. This trial was over. No additional evidence was required, although plenty more followed. If a single picture could paint one thousand words, that video spoke millions and none of the dialogue was at all beneficial to Thomas Norton Olsen.

In the months, years, and appeals that past, Jason Reynolds had amassed much additional information as new and compelling evidence, which shed new doubt on his brother's conviction. There was the testimony of Jane Kildrew, who stated that the perpetrator had a missing middle digit on his right hand. She was Betty O'Toole's best friend who was hiding in the O'Toole garage when she heard Jane scream. She caught a glimpse of him when he ran across the backyard and toward the fence. She failed to

testify due to her emotional instability and her age. All references to the missing digit were stricken from the record.

There was the testimony of the forensic pathologist who found hair and blood samples that did not match Tom's blood type. As this was 1975, DNA testing and corresponding medical testimony was still not yet permissible in courtrooms around the country. There was Dr. Jay Purple and his staff nurse, Jane Pullman, who confessed under oath to willfully forging birth certificates for monetary profit. But all these things did not matter. It was all over. The people again spoke and a pound of flesh was demanded now from justice's next victim. And, as far as the trial judge was concerned, if it sat like a chair and looked like a chair, it was a chair and nothing and no one was going to tell him otherwise. Justice moved swiftly in Judge Spencer's courtroom, and he had the statistical data to prove it.

Tom Olsen never once whined about his misfortune, and never once professed anything other than his absolute innocence. He was forty years old with no girlfriend or family since he had spent most of his adult life in jail. As far as how executions go, Tom's was uneventful. He did not jerk back and forth. He did not strain against the straps. He just sort of rolled his eyes toward the heavens, in silent prayer, while dark sweat streamed down his perspiration-soaked head and face. The head plate fit very snugly against his forehead and he winced only slightly from this pain. The voltage used was horrifying as flesh burned in many places across his covered body. One could see deep circular burn marks on his exposed hands and ankles. And in the end, ringlets of smoke, which emanated from him, rose to the top of the room and formed intriguing and yet unexplainable patterns, until at a moment's notice dissipated in thin air. A sweet sense of him still lingered in the air overhead, until the stale filth of inhumanity pervaded the room once again.

Frank recalled how Tom's death had such a profound effect on his entire family, especially on Abigail, his fragile mother. The frozen memories locked inside Frank's mind escaped their entrapment once again and flooded his thoughts with a million vivid images.

When Frank entered his mother's room, he saw a dozen long-stem red roses sitting in a vase on the windowsill, which meant that he had missed Aunt Sally once again. She brought and left them there weekly, in the hope that this pungent smell would revive her sister and bring her back to her. He entered the room only to see that at least on this day her prayer still went unanswered.

Frank noted that his mother lay in bed with a dozen pillows behind her head. Her gaze was placid and fixed on the ceiling of this tiny room within Walmont Sanitarium. He saw her in this state every time he came to visit her over the past six years and ever since his father's untimely death and Tom's execution one month later. Although the doctors provided long-winded technical jargon on her condition, the truth of the matter was that the stress of it all was just too much for her frail mind to handle. The doctors diagnosed her as suffering from severe traumatic shock, which had now left her in a semi-catatonic state. She seldom spoke or made any noise whatsoever.

As Frank always did during each visit, he read his mother several chapters of *Sleeping Beauty*. He knew that it was one of her favorite stories and was one that she had often read to Tom and him when they were children. He had hoped that the words of this story might trigger some sort of cognitive response or reach deep into the recesses of her troubled mind. She often stirred a little, but nothing to the point that signified external recognition or true perception. It saddened him to observe his mother lying so motionlessly in that bulky hospital bed and not being able to appreciate the delightful passing of a beautiful day, the fragrances surrounding her, or the warm rays of the rising sun that filtered through the cracks in the drab hospital curtains. It angered him to see her age before his eyes and know that he was helpless to do anything for her. It angered him in the realization that her suffering and his suffering were merely the result of a misidentification that had forever changed the fortunes of two unbeknown families.

His mind wandered back to a long-forgotten conversation he had once overheard between Aunt Sally and his father. Being only four years old



at the time, Frank only remembered that it was a very heated argument that wound up with a lot of shouting and screaming.

“There’s nothing to it, Sally. I told you that,” his father snapped as he put his briefcase down and loosened his tie.

“Ya didn’t even check, Paul. Why didn’t ya even check?” Aunt Sally continued. Her voice seemed to grow louder and louder.

Paul paced the living room floor. He looked tired and hungry from a long day at the office as a loan officer at Chase Manhattan Bank. Frank recalled that his father was not in any mood for Aunt Sally’s antics. He just paced back and forth, hoping that she would just shut up or maybe leave. But, she did not. Aunt Sally just kept going on and on until he just could not stand it any longer.

“Look, the doctor said that Abigail had twins and I believe him. Why should I doubt that? She had twins, I’m telling you. Now stop it.”

He said this very sternly, but it did not abate Aunt Sally in the least. He recalled that she continued in her usual obnoxious way.

“Abigail said she wuz carrying way too high for only twins. She...”

“I said enough about this! Leave me alone!”

With that, his father stormed out of the tiny Brooklyn flat and onto Nostrand Avenue. He recalled that Paul walked the city streets for some time alone and only returned when he was absolutely certain that Aunt Sally was gone.

Aunt Sally was merely looking after her baby sister, who once confided to her about her fear of missing children. However, over some time, both Aunt Sally and Abigail completely abandoned their concerns and never brought it up again.

As it turned out, Frank discovered years later that his father did in fact sell two of the offspring to a wealthy couple residing on the north shore. They agreed to pay him some \$50,000 for the offspring, and the whole affair was handled without a paper trail by their hospital pediatrician. In short, Paul was afraid to raise quadruplets on his meager bank salary and felt more comfortable in assuming responsibility for raising twins. He accepted the money as a means to secure his children's future. Frank found several notes to this effect, and outlining this secret transaction upon his father's passing, stuffed them in a cardboard box and on the second shelf of his bedroom closet.

Frank could never bring himself to judge his father for what he had done. Certainly, on the face of it, it appeared wrong and unforgivable. He just could not know for sure what he might have done under similar circumstances. Was it better to raise two children or risk losing four children through foster care or outright adoption?

Yet, regardless of what choice was ultimately correct, his father's decision forever changed his family's fortunes and, for that, Frank was then and now deeply saddened.

Frank regained his composure and quickly dismissed the unpleasant memory to focus once again on the proceedings at hand. The body language of the Elders appeared troublesome as he noted many frowns and scowls from those in the group. Several of them turned toward his direction as they huddled in private. He could not hear what they were saying and did not have any idea about what conclusions they might reach. It all seemed very unnerving to him as he silently stood before them, awaiting his fate.

The Elders and these men did not like what they'd just heard. What troubled them most was the revelation that the federal government's Witness Protection Program had somehow found a way to infiltrate their religious faith's inner circle. Although none of these men appeared prone to hysteria, Frank read some reservations in their eyes as he told them

their story. It was as though they now found some truth in Brother Dunn's earlier concerns about them.

From what he now knew, Frank was certain that his Colombian past had caught up with them, but he still did not know who now searched for them. There were so many candidates that the choices were endless. Frank repeatedly racked his brain but could not come up with any suitable suspects for immediate consideration. He was now also concerned about how his present admissions might affect his membership within this community. Although he and his wife strove to obey all the Amish laws and customs, and tried their best to assist and support Granite Lake's community, they knew that their revelation was too much for anyone to bear.

Nervously, the Olsens waited in silence while Efrin Beiler and the other six Elders huddled together and conducted a private discussion. It was a good fifteen to twenty minutes before they concluded their private meeting and turned toward Frank's direction to address him.

Brother Tunnis motioned with his right hand for Brother Olsen to come over to the group. They sat some twenty wooden benches away from him. Frank slowly headed in their direction as his mind fumbled to come up with a compelling rebuttal to their assertions if needed. As he got closer, Frank clearly observed the grim expressions on the Elders' faces. Brother Tunnis got up from his chair to address him. He stood near the head of the rectangular table.

"Brother Olsen," he started, glancing at the other six Elders as he spoke. "First of all, we do appreciate your honesty. We realize that it must have taken much for you to tell us all that you did."

Some of the other Elders nodded in agreement while others scoffed at this remark. Brother Dunn led the charge for the sentiment concerning the latter. He sat at the large, rectangular table and was absolutely speechless while Amos spoke, although his facial expressions did most of the talking

for him. By the manner of his silence, it was obvious that he was merely abiding with the stern instructions from this small-assembled group.

“Second, you and your wife have become valuable members of our community, and have become respected friends to most. These events are as shocking to us as they are to you.”

Amos Tunnis stopped speaking and headed to the table for a glass of water. Frank watched him as he took several fast sips and put the glass back on the table. Somehow, although he did not yet know why, Frank sensed that Brother Tunnis’ mood was about to change. He braced himself for what he feared might come.

“Brother Olsen,” he continued, “we have great concerns in allowing you and your family to dwell among us. In some respects, we feel betrayed, although we do realize that this was not entirely by your doing. Nevertheless, we do not know what to expect from all of this. We do not know how your trouble might affect any of us or what additional problems it might cause us due to any continued association with you and your wife.”

Brother Olsen did not really know how to respond to his comments or if he should respond at all. He feared that anything he now said might ultimately hurt their chances since he had not yet heard anything that condemned them. He opted to remain silent.

“Frank...we have decided that even though this situation involves extreme risk to the members of this congregation, we would not be very good Christians if we turned our back on a member of our community who was in need. We realize that as we are at risk, so are you.”

Frank felt a sense of relief as his neck and shoulder muscles relaxed a little because of the comforting news.

“But, Brother Olsen, there is the matter of protecting this community while monitoring this situation.”

Frank Olsen nodded in agreement, as he looked into Brother Tunnis' eyes for clarification.

“We think that it is best that one of the Elders assist you with any ensuing police investigation. We understand that their presence is necessary to find the underlying cause of all this, but we would like to keep their involvement in our lives to a minimum. One of the Elders will see to it that you, the police, or anyone else receives whatever assistance or resources needed to resolve this matter in a timely fashion. For now, anyway, we would also like to keep your interactions with the other members of this community to a minimum as well. In this way, we can further minimize these intruders' impact on this community since the other citizens would not be in a position to provide them with any useful information. For the time being, we are going to ask that you relocate to another abandoned farm on the other side of town.”

Although Frank understood the reasoning behind their argument and request, he had some difficulty grasping the logistics of it all.

“But what about my crops...they are ready for harvest? Who will deliver them to the market and to the Granite Lake Food bank?”

He was concerned about receiving some reward from the fruits of this year's labor and was concerned about his annual contributions to the community's food reserve and profits. After all, this was a small community that relied heavily on the hard work of its members.

“Don't worry, Brother Olsen, we have devised a plan to divide the reaping responsibilities among the other farmers. They will bring your crops to market and will pay you your fair wage and give the food bank your usual ten percent.”

Frank was genuinely happy that this was taken care of but worried that those who worked on his farm ran a risk of being accosted by the intruders or even worse.

“Brother Tunnis, my wife and I appreciate all that you planned to do on our behalf. However, since these intruders do not know what I look like, wouldn’t the other farmers be similarly at risk?”

“You’re right, and that’s why we have decided to randomly alternate the reaping schedule from day to day and from week to week. In this way, anyone who is watching will not be able to determine whose field it belongs to or be able to determine who is working the field at any given time either.”

Although this proposal seemed to solve this problem, Frank still had some concerns about his relocation. He was concerned about how it might affect all of them.

“Brother Tunnis, when relocated, won’t this move be common knowledge anyway?”

Brother Tunnis must have anticipated this question since his reply required very little thought.

“Brother Olsen, there are several abandoned farms within this community which lie many miles apart. Since we do not own automobiles, it would be extremely difficult for anyone to pinpoint your location within this community. We have decided not to tell the other parishioners of your whereabouts. It is the primary reason you need to consult with the Elder assigned to assist you should you need anything.”

Who was being assigned to assist them was the only remaining question? Amos, again, anticipated the next question and responded before Brother Olsen had a chance to speak.

“Brother Dunn has volunteered to assist you in your crisis. He has agreed to provide you with whatever resources or assistance you might need. However, if he should determine that you have not been truthful about what you have told us or that you or your wife have been doing anything which would jeopardize this community or the lives of its members, he

will have complete autonomy to have you expelled from Granite Lake. Understood?”

Frank shook his head in agreement toward Brother Tunnis as he studied Brother Dunn’s face. He observed a smirk on Brother Dunn’s face, which ran from ear to ear. Although he did not utter a single word, that smile had already accused him and condemned him as swiftly as any words could. Frank thanked them all and headed toward his new home.



*Frank and Marcia Olsen are forced to battle a Colombian drug cartel in order to rescue their kidnapped son, Robert. At the same time, Frank Olsen must evade capture by agents sent to arrest him and prevent his eviction from this Amish town.*

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