

The Big Recall

John Charles Miller

©2006

At 11:15 AM on Sunday, April 16, 2017, God pushed the wrong button and all of the televisions on earth were raptured to Heaven. It actually was the correct button. A series of buttons lined the right edge of his desk; two had been rewired as a practical joke by two teen angels. It really was his intent to rapture the humans of earth, but these two kids had switched the wires under the desk, such that when he did his rapturing, televisions rose from the surface of Earth, not humans.

Yes, there really was a button on the desk for rapturing televisions. God had intended using it to punish couch potatoes. He was an environmentalist and an outdoors sort of guy and it angered him to see folks slouching about doing little with their lives. God knew who the couch potatoes were. Television was fine and often essential; He didn't want to bother regular folks who used them in a sensible non-addictive manner.

So, there I was, Ronnie Storms, recently arrived in Heaven, watching all these television sets and fragments of televisions careening and spiraling through the void, banging into each other, whipping power cords around and landing on Heaven's floor with resounding WHAMS, shattering to pieces. A battery-operated one was still working, with a Southern Baptist preacher in Memphis ranting and railing at his congregation.

Down on Earth the folks in Tampa, Florida looked up at a nearly cloudless sky and wondered where in hell the thunder was coming from. Of course, these were the environmentalists and outdoors folks, and those who had skipped church. The couch potatoes looked at the tables and entertainment centers

where their televisions had sat and then looked up at the holes in ceilings and roofs, mouths agape, onion dip-covered chips held unmoving in front of faces, beer bottles knocked over.

“Ok, last guy in cleans up the mess,” said God, looking at me. *Whoa, fine with me!* I had only made it past St. Peter because he was checking out some young babes who had just arrived. *Old lecher!* I wasn’t going to complain about the assignment. He didn’t see me sneak in; the lines were so long following the usual weekend accidents and other events claiming life. But, what a pile of debris! It would take an eternity to clean up.

Like most Hillsborough County Commissioners, I had performed my duties in a questionable and often very capricious manner. Thus, when I had a life-ending heart attack while gawking at the *Mons Venus* nightclub I knew where I was going. I was a gatecrasher, an “illegal,” and didn’t belong in heaven.

“Move a little faster,” said St. Peter, “This place has to be in perfect condition. No slackers here!”

I stayed bent over and tried to work with my back turned to him as much as possible.

“Do I know you?” he said, bending over and peering at me from under big white bushy eyebrows.

His glare almost made me confess, but I had seen a quick flash of the other option, so I kept my mouth shut, sort of mumbling into the television fragments that I had in my arms.

“Pete, come over here. Check out the wires under my desk. Something is wrong. Humans were supposed to be raptured, not televisions.”

“Yes, Sir. No problem, I’ll get right to it.”

St. Peter soon confirmed the cause. “It appears that the wiring is reversed between the button for rapture of humans and the one for televisions.”

“What! Can’t your electricians do anything right? Jeez! Oops! Shouldn’t have said that! So many humans say it that it keeps running through my head.”

“Sir, this is not the wiring of our electricians. Come under here with me and take a look. See the other buttons? The wires are permanently soldered to the clips on those buttons. But, these two have been cut, switched and reattached with electrical tape.”

“Yes, I see. Get your men on this right away. I want to know who is responsible for this! And, have that guy clean up faster.”

I stayed bent over, scooting about picking up the glass, plastic, electronic components and wires. Eventually St. Peter got some others to help and seemed to forget about me. Together we pushed the wrecked televisions into an enormous pile from which we could hear the Memphis preacher droning on and on, from a small battery-operated portable way down at the bottom.

After everyone left I stood there alone. *So, where to stay? What to do?* So far I hadn’t seen anyone I knew; guess my buddies went to the other place.

“Hey, you. Get out of that suit and get a white robe,” said a big broad-shouldered angel. “It makes you look like a politician, not our kind of people.”

“Where do I get one?”

“At the end of the street is a robe shop. They’ll fit you.”

In a short time, I stood out on the street with a plain white robe and sandals. I had a halo as well, but it was a bit floppy, like it knew I wasn’t quite right. *What am I going to do here?*

Most folks just strolled about humming hymns or chanting psalms. *Boring!* Yet, I knew I had to fit in or I would be going to the other place. I began to stroll along with a small group, some with tiny little wings sprouting from holes in the back of their robes. *How do they get the robes off when the wings get real big?*

My mama had been a strong churchgoer and used to sing the old-timey church songs of the South, so I generally knew how the music and words went. I really got into it, swaying and clapping hands and all that.

A timid voice at my elbow interrupted my spiritual efforts. “We need to talk to you.”

Turning I saw two small young angels. They looked frightened.

“We know who you are. We saw you sneak past St. Peter.”

I could feel the heat coming. It was all over.

“Ok, call him over. I’ll turn myself in.”

“No, we need your help. You were a politician; we heard what that big angel said about your clothes. You know how to handle problems and how to work up deals.”

I had no idea what they were talking about. “What? My help? You guys have no idea what trouble I’m in.”

“The rapture buttons. We switched them for laughs. Now St. Peter has called the cops. They’ll find out that we did it. We have to do something!”

What to do, what to do? I could turn in the kids, but then they would squeal on me. If I helped them, I would probably get in big trouble. That would be the last of me in a white robe and sandals, unless

Something kept going through my mind, a saying of some sort. Yes, I remembered it, but it made me nervous to think about it. I was really out of practice with the subject. So, I said it to myself, *Honesty is the best policy*.

In the robe shop, I found my old suit in a pile of discarded clothing. Yes, it did make me look like a politician.

Walking back to the entrance, I saw God and St. Peter with a group of what appeared to be blue-robed policemen. They turned and looked at me.

“And, why are you dressed up like that?” said St. Peter. “Where is your robe?”

“My name is Ronnie Storms and I am representing the individuals responsible for performing the rapture buttons switch. I would like to speak on their behalf.”

“There is to be no representation of any sort. Whoever caused this situation must face punishment.”

“Actually, there is someone who deserves greater punishment, and that person would like to receive the punishment due the guilty parties.”

“What? How big is this gang of troublemakers?”

“There is no gang. It is I who must be punished. And, I am willing to accept punishment if you will forgive those who fouled up the rapturing.”

“Why you?”

“When you were being distracted at the gates, I quietly walked past you and into Heaven. You must send me to the place that I deserve.”

“Why, I have never heard of anything like this!” said God. “Distracted you Pete? What was it?”

“There is no reason to talk about that. Please consider my offer on behalf of the two young angels I represent.”

St. Peter looked at Ronnie, with a wink. Saying to himself, *He scratches my back, I'll scratch his. I can work with that.*

Turning to God, St Peter said, “I am willing to accept his offer if you will.’

That’s what happened. Ronnie was quickly prepared for the other place in a bright red jumpsuit and put on standby until the down elevator was in operation. The two boy angels were given a strong lecture and assigned to a “cloud scrubbing” work force.

Later, over imported Celestial Seasonings tea and guava pastries, God smiled and took in a deep breath.

“Looks like that problem is over with,” said St. Peter. “And, it seems to have worked out for the better.”

“Yes, rapture of the televisions forced humans to spend more time thinking about their purpose in life. Oh, not all of them are going to church, but they are spending more time outdoors and cleaning up the environment. Let’s delay the human rapture. In fact, remove the button for that purpose,” said God.

“What about the television button?” said St. Peter.

“Oh, rewire that one as a blank. When I get angry I’ll just keep pounding on it to get it out of my system. If I hit it hard enough it will sound like thunder. This human rapture stuff was a bad idea anyway; it would get too crowded. And, it wasn’t my idea anyway. I read it in a book and thought it might work. Well, you see the mess it made.”

“Those two boys. I’ve got them hard at work. Any further punishment for them?”

“No, boys will be boys. Let’s just keep them a bit scared for a while.”

“What about the guy who snuck in?”

“Pete, that’s your problem. If Mr. Storms snuck in, probably others have gotten past you also. He’s an *illegal* but seems to have some skills we might need later. We are a growth operation you know. Send him back down.”

“Down? That’s sort of out of the ordinary isn’t it?”

“Let’s give him a second chance.”

The next thing I knew someone was fitting me with an oxygen mask, placing me on a stretcher and hauling me off to a hospital in Tampa. I recovered and became a County Commissioner for five more terms. I was never sure whether it had been a dream while I lay unconscious on the nightclub floor, but I wasn't going to take any chances.

During my period in office, I made every effort to support candidates who were responsive to the needs of the Public and who were ethical and honest, as well as not fomenting anger and prejudice and hatred toward others. There's a statue of me in front of the new Ronnie Storms County Administrative Center.

Oh, my second death was also a heart attack. I had joined a homeless persons care group founded by one of the Mons Venus girls who had become a nun. I collapsed while volunteering on the soup line.

My job? Well, they still hadn't done anything with that small asteroid-sized pile of broken televisions. St. Peter said, "Do something with it." I had no idea what to do. I first spent most of the time singing hymns and sorting through the mess while considering what to do. St. Peter eventually showed me a hand-waving re-constitutional technique that sent metals and plastics and glass back to the very locations on Earth where they had been extracted.

It's a nice life. I enjoy it. However, my back is a bit itchy as my wings are beginning to sprout.