

A Bridge
Across
Time

Dan M. Appel



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DEDICATION

To my parents, Mel and June,
who lived the ideas
written about in this book in such a positive
way that I adopted them as my own and dedi-
cated my life to sharing them with others.

CHAPTER 1

That has to be the dumbest, most idiotic, far-fetched, legalistic claptrap I've ever heard of!" Alex Bowen spat the words through clenched teeth.

Screech. He pounded the brakes. Another red light.

He sat at the stoplight fuming, his fingers lashing the steering wheel like an angry cat's tail. His day at the office had been frustrating enough. And now this traffic. Every slow driver in town had chosen the same moment to head for home.

"Doesn't anyone take driver's ed anymore?" he muttered.

The day had started badly and gone downhill from there. And then Clark Hanson had wandered into Alex's office an hour before quitting time with his crazy request. It was a fitting end for a horrible Thursday.

"Why on earth is this planet inhabited with such obstinate fools?" Alex asked himself. "And why do they all have to work for me?" It wasn't fair, especially now when he desperately needed a good draftsman on the payroll.

The traffic light flashed green. Alex stomped the accelerator and kept mumbling. "Is it too much to ask that my employees conform to some kind of reasonable workweek? What makes one guy think he's so special?"

Alex had founded Bowen and Associates 10 years before. Now they had grown into one of the largest, most aggressive architectural engineering firms in Georgia. He was proud of their track record. They had a reputation for getting the job done, even if it took weekends and long nights to finish. Alex hated missing deadlines.

True, the schedule exhausted his employees and left little time for his family. But he never demanded anything that he wasn't willing to do himself.

Alex knew how to work. Years ago he had boarded a bus and ridden away from his home in little Ellijay, Georgia. Back then he had nothing. Nothing except firsthand knowledge of hard work. Nineteen years on the back end of his daddy's mules taught him that.

While growing up he spent his summers working from first light until it was too dark to see a furrow in the cornfield. Winter meant chores, school, more chores, and then schoolwork. Kids in Gilmer County grew up believing they could do anything if they put their minds to it. And Alex had.

That's what upset him today. Why couldn't everyone have the same dedication to getting a job done? He'd lost his best draftsman a month before, and the extra work meant long hours of overtime for everyone. This week he'd hired the ideal man to fill the opening. At least, the guy seemed ideal at first. And then this happened.

Wheeling into his driveway, he stopped the

car and thought for a minute. Why, of all times, must he deal with a distraction like this? Just when he'd signed the contract to engineer the twin towers for Bill Eckroth.

Marching into the house, he tossed his windbreaker into the front closet and stomped toward the kitchen to find his wife.

"You look cheerful tonight," Melanie greeted as she turned a steak on the kitchen grill.

"Sorry, Mel. It's been a bad day." Alex shook his head. "Where are the kids?"

"Out back setting the picnic table. They decided they wanted to have one more picnic before fall sets in," Melanie said, nodding toward the back door. "Would you take the salad out? I'll bring the steaks and we'll be ready to eat."

"Sure thing!" Alex reached across the counter and gave her a kiss. "Sorry I'm such a grouch. Boy, those steaks smell great!"

"Thank you, sir," Melanie smiled. "Now if you'll get out of my kitchen and have a seat at the table, you might find out that they taste good, too. I marinated them in Schillo's special sauce."

"All right, I'm outta here," Alex laughed and picked up the salad bowl. "Anything else I can carry?"

"Nope, just your appetite. Now git!"



"You know, Melanie, I've got a real problem," Alex told his wife as they washed dishes after supper that night. "I think I told you about

Clark Hanson, the new draftsman I hired on Monday. He's the best I've ever had. He's quick, he's precise, and he knows computer design like he invented it. Whoever trained him did a fantastic job, and Clark must have had plenty of talent to begin with."

Alex reached behind Melanie's back and swiped a chocolate-chip cookie from the big cookie jar.

"There's something else," Alex added. "He's just a nice guy. Bill Eckroth called the other day, mad about something as usual. Clark happened to take the call."

"Poor guy," Melanie commented. "Bill's mouth is pretty bad even when he's not mad."

"Yeah, but Clark just ignored it and treated him as though he was our most important customer. Later I ran into Bill at city council. He couldn't say enough about Clark."

"That's a first!" Melanie pulled a gallon of milk from the refrigerator, filled a glass, and handed it to Alex. "Have something healthy with those cookies," she winked.

Alex dunked his cookie and put the glass down again. "Everyone likes the guy, Mel. I don't even have to worry about customers overhearing when he tells jokes—they're usually funny, but clean enough to tell your grandmother."

"So what's the matter?" Melanie asked.

"I may have to let him go."

"But you need him!" Melanie exclaimed. She stretched to set her mixing bowl in its place

above the cupboard. "I'll never get to see you if you keep doing so much overtime. What's this guy done?"

"Nothing! It's what he wants to do." Alex picked up the towel and started drying a yellow pitcher. "He comes into my office just before quitting time and asks for this Saturday off. He wants all his Saturdays off!"

"Maybe he has some kind of family problem."

"No, but get this. He says he goes to church on what he calls 'Sabbath.' According to him, the Bible says to work six days and rest on the seventh."

"Doesn't he realize he'll put the whole office behind schedule?" Melanie asked.

"That's not the problem." Alex finished drying the last of the dishes and tugged the red apron over his head. "He's willing to work Sundays to make up the work. In fact, it sounds like he could use the money. He says he'll be glad to work whenever he can."

"There you go, problem solved," Melanie declared.

"But Mel, if I make everyone else come in, I can't let him off. Even worse, he's brand-new. If I let him take the day, everyone will say I'm playing favorites. I've met some fanatics in my life, but this guy takes the cake!"

"Didn't he mention this on his application?" Melanie questioned.

"Yeah, but I guess I overlooked it. He apolo-

gized for not saying something sooner this week. He said he just wanted a chance to prove himself first.”

“And has he done that?”

“Sure has. We caught up on a month of work this week.”

Melanie frowned as she wiped the sink and hung up the towel. “You don’t have to keep him if you don’t want to. He’s still on probation. And if you do keep him, that’s your business, isn’t it? As long as he works Sundays, why should anyone else complain?”

She flipped off the kitchen light and followed Alex into the living room. “But something else bothers me,” she said.

“What’s that?” Alex sighed, kicked off his shoes, and leaned back on the couch.

“Alex, you’re a Sunday school teacher. Your daddy was a Sunday school teacher. You know your Bible. Why didn’t you just show him that Saturday’s the wrong day to worship on?”

“I tried. I said something about Sunday being my Sabbath. He smiled and said he understood, but then he added that Saturday is God’s Sabbath according to the Bible.”

“It’s in the Bible?”

“Yeah, I thought he was nuts. I asked him where in the Bible. He quoted Exodus 20:10, where it says, ‘The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God.’ He nodded toward my calendar and said the only day God asks us to worship on is Saturday, the seventh day. He says the