

Chapter 12: Mr. Gene

Chris got up early to help his dad begin working on the front porch. When they were pulling out the bushes Sunday afternoon, their neighbors came over to meet them.

A young man in his twenties, blues eyes and brown hair, and his pretty young wife, came walking up to the front porch as they were struggling to pull out what was left of the roots.

“Hey,” the man said as he and his wife walked up to shake Bob’s hand, “my name’s Gene Gertz, and this is my wife Nancy.”

Bob wiped his hands and shook their hands, “nice to meet you,” he said, “this is my oldest son Chris.”

“We live next door, but we were out of town when you moved in,” he explained, he looked at Chris and introduced himself, “the kids call me Mr. Gene and my wife Ms. Nancy,” he shook his hand and Nancy patted Chris on the head.

“Heard you moved here all the way from California,” Mr. Gene said.

“Yep,” Chris replied, “San Diego.”

“I used to live in Oceanside,” said Ms. Nancy, but I grew up in PB.

“Really?” Chris said surprised, “we lived in PB on Thomas Avenue.”

“I lived on Wilber Street,” Ms. Nancy said, “then I met Gene at a conference when he came to San Diego,” she said and kissed him on the cheek, “and that’s how I ended up back here.”

“Really?” Bob said smiling, while he put his shirt back on.

“Come on inside,” Bob said as he opened the front door, “we need to take a break anyway.”

“We didn’t mean to stop you from your work,” Gene said.

“No problem,” Bob said as they walked into the kitchen.

“This is my wife, Lorene,” Bob introduced her to them.

“So nice to finally meet you,” Lorene said. “I’ve heard good things about you from the neighbors.”

“That’s nice,” Nancy said. “We just got back from Scholarship Camp in the mountains.”

“What’s Scholarship Camp?” Chris asked.

Bobby came in from the back yard and they introduced him to them just as they were about to explain Scholarship Camp.

“It’s a kid’s camp,” Mr. Gene explained, “it’s a camp for the top kids that excel in our program called AWANA.”

“What’s AWANA?” Lorene asked.

“It’s a Christian club for children that teaches them about God and the Bible and how important it is to live your life for the Lord through obeying His Word,” Gene explained.

“You learn about God through completing a handbook that includes Scripture memory and other fun things, then you are rewarded for your hard work by receiving awards for your uniform,” Ms. Nancy continued.

“If you complete your handbook during the club year, you may qualify to go to Scholarship Camp?” Mr. Gene looked at Chris, “what grade are you going into?”

“Goin’ in sixth,” Chris said.

“Well,” he said as he rubbed his chin, “if you work hard and finish two handbooks this club year, you could qualify to go to Scholarship Camp!”

“Cool,” Chris said, then looked at his mom and dad, “can I go?”

Lorene and Bob looked at each other to see how they would respond, “well,” Lorene said, “that sounds nice.”

“Can I go to Scholarship Camp too?” Bobby jumped in to ask.

“What grade are you going in Bobby?” Ms. Nancy asked.

“Goin’ in third,” he said.

“Not until you’re goin’ in the sixth grade Bobby,” Mr. Gene said, “sorry, but there’s other things for your age group, such as Awana Olympics, Grand Prix, Bible Quiz, and the annual scavenger hunt!”

“Why don’t you boys come and check it out,” Ms. Nancy said, “it runs through the school year and the first night is next Wednesday at Liberty Baptist just down the street on Todd’s Lane.”

The boys looked pleadingly at mom and dad.

“Well,” Lorene said, looking at Bob for approval who gave none, “I guess so,” she said, not sure if this was a good idea, but thinking they seemed nice enough.

Lorene and Bob didn’t go to church, so they weren’t too sure about this, but couldn’t think of a reason to say no.

“That’s great!” Mr. Gene said, looking at Chris, “can you run fast?”

“Sure can,” Chris said.

“Me too,” Bobby said.

“Ok,” Mr. Gene said, “we’ve been looking for some fast runners for our Awana Olympics team. The tryouts will begin in a few weeks,” he said as he and Ms. Nancy said their good-byes, “we have company coming over, so we need to run, but I’m sure we’ll talk again soon.”

“Welcome to the neighborhood,” Ms. Nancy said as they walked them to the front door.

“That sounds fun!” Chris said, “thanks mom and dad.”

“Yeah thanks!” Bobby agreed.

The next morning Chris and Bobby couldn’t wait to tell Davey and the guys the news about them going to AWANA. Chris ran around to Davey’s back door and Davey and Junior were sitting on the porch playing with their slingshots. Chris ran up to them and said, “Guess what?”

“What?” Davey asked as he took aim on a tin can sitting on the fence with his slingshot.

“We’re goin’ to AWANA on Wednesday!” Chris said with excitement.

Davey let go of the slingshot and the rock hit the can dead on and knocked it to the ground, “Really?” Davey said, “Billy and me go there too.”

“We met Mr. Gene and Ms. Nancy yesterday,” Chris explained, “and they told us all about it and invited us to go.”

“What about you Junior?” Bobby asked, “do you go there too?”

“Nah,” Junior said looking down, “my parents probably won’t let me go.”

“How come?” Chris asked.

“I don’t know,” Junior said still looking down at his slingshot as he adjusted it.

“We’ve invited him before and they said no,” Davey explained. “But, maybe they’ll let you go if your mama talks to them,” Davey suggested looking at Chris, “if your parents are letting you guys go, maybe they’ll let Junior go too.”

“Let’s go ask mom now,” Bobby said looking at Chris.

“Ok,” Chris agreed, “come on Junior,” and they all ran back to Chris’ house.

Before going into the house, they sat on the porch to talk about what they were going to say to their mom.

“Ask mom what?” mom overheard them say as she walked down the back steps to the garage.

“Mom,” Chris asked, “could you talk to Junior’s dad and see if he’ll let Junior go to AWANA with us next week?”

“Why do I need to talk to him?” mom asked.

“Because Junior doesn’t think they’ll let him go,” Chris said.

“Oh,” mom said, “well, I guess it can’t hurt,” she said, “ok, I’ll pop over later and talk to them.”

“Thanks ma’am,” Junior said with a big smile, and all the boys ran off together to play.

Lorene knocked on Georgie’s door and Marilyn yelled, “come on in!”

Lorene walked into the kitchen while Marilyn was cleaning up.

“I’m almost done here,” Marilyn said, “sit down and I’ll pour you a cup of coffee.”

“I already had enough coffee today,” Lorene said, “but thanks.”

Marilyn sat down at the table with her cup of coffee, took a sip and said, “it’s so, so nice having you all next door,” Marilyn said as she reached over and gave her a hug.

“I know,” Lorene said, “I didn’t think you and Georgie would *ever* get together.”

“As much as you tried,” Marilyn explained, “one day we saw each other at the store and we chatted for almost an hour,” she laughed as she remembered their meeting, “he asked me over for dinner, and the rest is history.”

Marilyn reached over and put her hand on Lorene’s shoulder, “We had so many great times at Jeff Davis and Bethel didn’t we?” Marilyn recalled.

“Oh yeah,” Lorene agreed, “remember the time we went to Becky’s pajama party and we walked to 7/11 in our pajamas?”

“Yeah,” she remembered, “we sure did go to a lot of pajama parties back then?”

“Yep,” Lorene smiled as she remembered those times, “actually,” Lorene said, “I came over to ask if it would be OK if Junior goes with the boys Wednesday night to check out this AWANA club?”

“I’ve heard about that club from the neighborhood kids who seem to love it, but let me talk to George about it,” she said, “he’s not much for religion, but it would be good for Junior to hang out more with Bobby and the other boys,” then nodded and said, “I’ll let you know tomorrow.”

“OK,” Lorene said, “thanks,” as she got up to leave, “we’re gonna have to check out that Bingo game place you told me about,” she remembered, “when’s the next game?”

“Next Thursday night at the Catholic church,” Marilyn yelled back.

“OK,” Lorene said as she walked through the living room to the front door, “I’ll put that on my calendar for sure.”

Lorene went home and Bobby was sitting at the kitchen table eager to find out if Junior could go.

Mom walked into the kitchen and saw Bobby and Junior sitting at the table waiting for her to return. “His mom said she’d let me know tomorrow.”

Bobby looked at Junior who looked down as though he thought their answer would be probably be no, “thanks mom for trying mom”, Bobby said.

“Yeah,” Junior said, “thanks ma’am,” and they both walked slowly out to the back door.

Bright and early the next morning, Junior came knocking on the back door to see Bobby.

Lorene opened the door and said, “come on in Junior.”

“Daddy said I could go!” he told her, “where’s Bobby?”

“Great,” Lorene said with a smile, “he’s in his room.”

Junior walked into Bobby’s room, “I can go!”

“Coo!” Bobby said.

“Yeah,” Chris said when he heard his announcement, “Davey’s parents told us to be at their house at 6:15 sharp., so meet us over there ok?”

“OK,” Junior said, “I’ve always wanted to go,” he continued, “I heard about how much fun it is from all the guys, but didn’t think my parents would let me go,” just then their mom peaked in to see what all the fuss was.

“I’m sure you can thank my mom for that,” Bobby said.

“Yeah,” Junior agreed, and gave her a hug.

So, everything is all set. Davey, Billy, Chris, Bobby, and Junior were looking forward to going to AWANA Wednesday night.