

## Introduction

**T**he stories in this book are set in the bar of a western Idaho town where a broad cross section of conservatives, liberals, and moderates live in restless harmony. You choose the town. It could be any of the towns between Homedale and Lewiston. I chose western Idaho for the setting, but I could have selected any state in the Pacific Northwest. I know well both the landscape and the people of western Idaho because I lived in Lewiston for three years and worked in the Hells Canyon region of western Idaho and eastern Oregon off and on for more than four decades.

Several chapters are based on conversations I've overheard in bars, coffee shops, and restaurants. I heard two while on rafting and jetboat trips through Hells Canyon. The remaining stories are included because the topics are of interest to me and, hopefully, will be of interest to you. The bar, town, characters, and stories are fictional.

The time interval for these conversations is the late 1990s and the first few years of the 2000s. America is involved in Middle East conflicts, global warming is making headlines weekly, and the idea of an intelligent designer is worming its way through school doors, pushed by school boards made up of religious fundamentalists.

Frank owns, manages, and tends the bar. He recently paid off the loan and burned the mortgage contract. Frank is probably the most trusted man in town—he never gossips or tells anyone what he hears. Because of that trust, he knows more about the town and its people than any other resident. Frank's wife died a few years back. Her death left

him with three children, the youngest of whom is a teen-age daughter. His two sons have already left home. He lives with his daughter in a cottage near the school.

Some would say that Frank is handsome, with curly black-and-gray hair, hazel eyes, and thick eyebrows. He exercises regularly and is in decent, but not great, shape. Women are drawn to him because of his physical features and personality. He genuinely cares about people and their welfare.

The chapters are based on conversations between Frank and his customers and on conversations among the customers themselves. Strangers often drop by and bring experiences and opinions to the conversations. You'll find that Frank is somewhat more liberal than some of his customers and has a nice way of drawing them out in order to hear an opinion. Most bartenders have an innate way of doing that.

I have been uncertain for some time about where I stand on some of the controversial issues that are included in this book. Your beliefs, biases, and prejudices may be challenged by the conversations. Mine were.

