

# PART II

## Is Faithful...



## 14. Furball Partially Exposed

**(FLASHBACK 2006)** The night we sat down to innocently watch *Shop Girl*, I had no idea it would trigger an avalanche of memories that would force the furball to dislodge and explode out of me. The furball was ignited with passion and static electricity! All the tangled pieces were pregnant with repressed emotions and intense charge. Each piece vied for my attention and wanted to give birth to the poster child for post-traumatic stress disorder.

A cacophony of memories crowded out the thoughts in my mind. There were scenes from the early days of my relationship when I came home to the phone call from the girl from his math class. Then there were the deeply disturbing layers to the bizarre and deeply troubling circumstances around “the affair” (which, out of respect for his privacy, I will keep vague). Additionally, all the side-swipe comments, put-downs and looking at other women that led to the scenes in the pastor’s office both before and after the airport mania, trying to shed light on the mess only to be mocked and more alone in my pain.

The heat from the blaze of converging memories was searing. The more unzipped and unraveled I became, the more he looked back at me with numb, blank, checked-out, empty eyes. There was a dark presence in the room and atmosphere of our union. It was eerie. The deeper I grieved, the blanker he became.

At one point I saw that same little smirk on his face that I saw at the airport when he corrected me that he had looked only twice, not three times. The blankness followed with the smirk chaser, made me want to immediately leave his presence and find comfort in my aloneness, holed up in our bedroom. I felt way more alone and scared in his presence. It was beyond eerie.

The absence of compassion stirred a terror in my soul, the origins of which, must have come from my childhood, when I watched my father beat my mom and sister. The same man who I was left home alone with when my mom went to work and my sister went to school, was fun, loving and playful one on one with me. My dad, who I adored and seemed to adore me, transformed into a horrific, furry, monster when my mom and sister came home.

After he would brutalize my mom with physical and emotional abuse, he would have that same blank, eerie compassionless stare in his eyes. Like my husband, he would look at other women in her presence (plus my dad had multiple affairs).

In the haze of the blue TV screen light, in our living-room that crisp fall evening, I experienced that familiar feeling of being in the presence of something very dark and evil. In-between the silent spaces of reliving past memories, a breeding ground was being fertilized. Very quietly, very insidiously, the enemy of my soul crept right in like a locust in the night.

## 15. Now what?

The eeriness remained and hovered over our home. There seemed to be an emotionless man behind the blank eyes that looked at me in passing. I couldn't be in the same room as him, let alone the same bed, anymore.

The spirit of who he was in the airport, (delighting in telling me his straying eyes weren't three times but only twice with that little smirk on his lips), haunted me, and I no longer knew who he was or could trust who he might become. He had become "the enemy" and I couldn't sleep with the enemy and expect to get any shut-eye, could I?

I stayed locked inside a huge wall of protection that seemed to crumble most evenings, once it got dark outside. I would huddle up in a little ball in front of the fireplace and sob and sob and sob and sob and sob. It got so bad that I couldn't keep it together in front of Holly anymore.

Something extremely precious to me had died and though I didn't understand all the things I felt, I did know I was deeply grieving and this was a huge death/loss process. And like the death of a loved one, the tears have a life of their own.

I was held captive to the momentum of the pain of the loss and it seemed like weeks passed with endless release of emotion. The hairy-scary furball had been the finger in the dyke of the damn of my deepest fears, hurts and terror. With the furball up and out of there the water could rush forth. It felt like I was going to flood the living-room.

November turned to December and I was dreading the whole holiday season.

I remember adamantly saying that if he put me down that Thanksgiving in front of his family (like most holidays) I would not be going with him to make the annual pilgrimage down to Los Angeles to his father's house for Christmas.

Sure enough, the put down comment came over Thanksgiving when he made some slamming remark saying: "Who do you think you are, the food police?"

He overheard me passionately sharing with his sister my thoughts about soy and GMO's (genetically modified organisms).

I showed him my research and then he backed down and said he could see how I concluded what I concluded. The subtle thing that made all the difference in my heart was what he didn't say. He never could apologize for tearing me down. Never could say: "I'm sorry for being rude and hurtful to you with my words."

Writing my book (*RawSome Recipes*) got me in the habit of constantly researching all types of topics to do with diet, health and nutrition. That was my playground. I felt totally disrespected when I heard the tone of voice that accompanied his hurtful words.

That was all I needed to fold my arms across my chest and say I would not be going south to L.A. that Christmas. I was focused on how unloving he was toward me, yet again.



Knowing that there were rough waters ahead to negotiate, I decided to host a Beth Moore Bible study called: "Believing God." I invited several close friends not knowing if anyone would take me up on it since we were in the thick of the busy December holiday season.

**(FLASHBACK)** My first entry in my journal was on Dec. 1, 2006 in response to a question from our Beth Moore homework. The question was: *"What are the biggest challenges before you right now?"*

This is what I wrote:

**Believing God...**

*"The biggest challenge I have before me right now is ... my marriage. I am so weary from all the years of woundedness. So many unmet desires, unmet hopes, unhealed wounds because of abuses heaped on top of old abuses. The lack of head and heart, connected authentic remorse and repentance coupled with devaluing and the absence of the ability to show a love that wants to bless and build up, leaves me beaten down.*

*My challenge is to press in and die to self, to love my husband the way Christ would have me do despite the past. To forgive and move forward 70 times 7 ... To keep my eyes on Jesus not on my husband. To do the work of a warrior and to never give up running the race. My flesh wants to give up, wants to throw in the towel, wants to find someone new and start over.*

*I am at war with my flesh and my soul in that I am freaked out about ever doing anything to walk outside of God's will, yet the never-ending thorn in my flesh has become a stabbing pain again that begs for relief. My flesh feels very weak, lazy, flabby, and has no desire to press in - just wants to quit."*

The next homework question was: ***"What are the deepest desires about those challenges?"***

My journal response:

*"To be honest ... my deepest desire is to have a truly healthy, healed, loving, supportive, awesome marriage. This seems impossible with (I am going to use a pen name for him since I no longer can say the words "my husband"... ) Willie.*

*So my deepest desire is to have that with a new Godly man in a way that is safe and totally within God's grace and blessing. In other words so that somehow I could be blameless in God's sight and without having to work outside of God's will to get this.*

*I feel guilty for even wanting this. If I were a saint, I should want to have that with Willie, right? I should want to see us healed and whole. But hang on a minute ... I have been dreaming this all along.*

*So if I could dream about deep desires (which I feel like is almost taboo to do) my desire would be that the challenge would no longer be a challenge because*



*somehow God miraculously worked out all the obstacles and gave me amazing strength and vitality in the process of setting me free.*

*Oh and in the transition, until I was able to unite in a wonderful God-centered marriage, God would provide everything I need to survive, thrive and be more than a conqueror in Christ. I desire that this would happen soon so that I could still have many, many, many years ahead to make up for the years that were eaten up by the locusts.*

*It is my desire about this challenge that this would come about in a miraculous God way, so that I would be completely free to go forth, as would this new husband, so that neither one of us would be in any way violating scripture or our relationship with God.*

*Part of the miracle would be that Willie and Holly would transition amazingly well and it would be so clear that God's hand was in the process. My deepest desire is that that Holly would know, love, honor and cherish God with all her heart and that she could be set free and healed from all of this."*

After I wrote all that, I was relieved and felt guilty at the same time. Relieved to have permission to let myself dream and be honest with what exactly were my true desires. Guilty that I wanted that more than anything else. Relieved that somehow because the question was asked as part of my homework, I felt permission to dare to dream and go there. Guilty that I was not a "Beth Moore" Godly woman who would lay it all down and die to self.

When I re-read what I had written ... I could see the shape and size of the deep desires I had in me to have something I had always dreamt of but never truly had. Knowing full well that I may never get to have my dream, it still felt wonderful to dare to dream and acknowledge my longing.

The next time I sat down to do my "Believing God" homework we were directed to Isaiah 54:

***"Do not fear for you will not be ashamed. Neither be disgraced for you will not be put to shame for you will forget the shame of your youth and will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore. For your maker is your husband. The Lord of hosts is His name. And your redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. He is called the God of the whole earth. For the Lord has called you like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit. Like a youthful wife when you were refused, says your God. For a mere moment I have forsaken you. But with great mercies I will gather you."***

My entry that morning on Dec. 8 read:

"Wow! Reading *this* scripture (as it just so happens to be our homework today) is no accident! I take great comfort that God knows my pain. I am camping out on ... *"with great mercies I will gather you."*

For the next couple of days I pondered what mercies God was going to show me. I felt an expectancy in my soul and a knowing that God was going to reveal something to me. It had been such a long dry desert for so long, it was exhilarating to feel the stirring. I had no clue as to what. Everything seemed to be on an *"a need-to-know basis."*

**(FLASHBACK)** In the evening of Dec. 11, after Willie and Holly were sleeping, more grieving tears surfaced to clear the way for a deeper longing. I longed for the Lord to reach out and touch me somehow. To soothe my restless soul that didn't know why there was still so much pain and weirdness around all the deep feelings and memories that kept rehashing over and over in my mind. I needed to be consoled and the only thing I knew to do was to keep going over the scenarios like a detective trying to discover the missing clue.

There were puzzle pieces missing and the picture just wasn't clear to me. All I could go on was my feelings, and I knew that was a slippery slope! Yet there was something deep within me that could not rest until I understood. But understand what?

A stray thought crossed my mind. I remembered the time we all watched Oprah when Amber Fry was on and I heard the list of bullet points concluding the show pointing toward traits of those men who have a personality disorder. She also used the word "sociopath" to define who Peterson is.

It was late, quiet, and the words *sociopath* and *personality disorder* were knocking around in my head. So I typed in those words in a Google search.

This was my entry in my journal the next morning:

"Wow ... What is the opposite of shock or similar to it but with less disbelief and more relief?

That is how I feel.

I went on the Internet for three hours last night and read all I could find out about sociopaths and psychopaths. Finally after all these long years

of grief, abuse, feelings of "crazy making" with the communication and behaviors that go along with that ...

I am baffled that not one of the multitudes of therapists I consulted ever came right out and told me. Stunned that even though I had four years of psychotherapy training I have never been able to put the pieces together. How did I miss the words and understanding the definition all these years?"

For the next couple of days I was digesting all that I had read on the net. I felt like a wife who was told the news that her husband has a terminal disease. I knew that without Christ he would not be able to be broken and go through true restoration. He cringed whenever I mentioned Jesus' name, so it seemed highly unlikely he would opt for a personal relationship.

I was deeply troubled in my soul and needed to talk with someone who was a Christian and yet understood the intensity of those with "personality disorders." My lifelong friend from high school, Katelin and her sweet husband Ted, came to mind. God is so amazing how He gives us what we need when we need it.

Katelin and I had been bad girls together, back in the day, at Beverly Hills High School. We hung out on the corner and smoked cigarettes together.

(Can you believe it? Junk-food eater, party girl, smoker turns into Christian, eat healthy, holy roller! Now just tell me how does that happen?).

We totally lost touch with each other sometime after I went to the Alice Cooper concert in eleventh grade! Right before our thirty-year high school reunion we had reconnected via reunion.com! Here is the crazy part ... Like me, we were raised by "Jewish parents" who got divorced before we left home.

Of all people, my Jewish, wild-child friend got saved not long after high school. Not only did we discover that we were both believers, but get this ... we had also lived in the same town for the past eighteen years and never once bumped into each other!

She also knows Dan and Lynn as their kids all went to the same elementary school. When we discovered all these amazing facts we quickly made a lunch date and included Lynn in on our reunion.



## 16. Seeking Wise Counsel

It was mid-December and amidst the seasonal festivities Katelin and Ted made time for me to come see them. Katelin is a trained therapist and her knowledge about personality disorders combined with her Christian faith made her the perfect friend to seek prayer and counsel with. So off I went to Katelin and Ted's house. We talked, I cried, they prayed, from 9 p.m. – 1:30 a.m.

Katelin stood firmly on the solid ground of scripture. "God hates divorce." I understood her heart.

Ted listened with discerning ears and admitted that when he met my husband he felt a deep, defensive hard heart. He said that there rarely was a man he couldn't get to warm up, with his easygoing manner and ability to befriend most people. But when he met Willie, he said he felt his self-absorption and coldness.

Ted prayed with deep sincerity that God would reveal His will and plan for me. I felt his covering and how they stood together in the gap for me. I sought them out many times for wise counsel and prayer and always felt their love and desire for God's will. Ted's prayers that night were powerful and were a salve to the lonely achy place in me that felt the burden to make a huge decision on my own.

I felt the comfort of knowing God would answer one way or the other and now it was left in His mighty hands. It was up to me to believe.

## 17. Journeying In Journaling



**This deep and power version of Adele's song, *Hello* is sung by an amazingly awesome singer and captures the essence of how I felt when I wrote these entries below.**

**[CLICK HERE](#) to hear this really awesome song.**

The next morning I wrote in my journal:  
Dec. 13 , 2006

*"It comes down to I'm believing God is who he says He is - my father, my husband and provider. He can do what He says He can do. And I am who He says I am. In Isaiah 54 He tells me I will not be ashamed nor disgraced and that I will forget the shame of my youth and that He is my husband and that He has called me.*

*I believe, Lord, that if I remain in you that you can make all things possible and that you tell me to come to you if I am weary and to give you my burdens. I'm trusting you, God, as my father, husband and provider to make a way where there is no way - to either redeem Willie, heal him, save him, and restore our marriage, or for you to protect me from further abuse and to sever the bond and escort me to safety. I'm waiting on you Lord.*

*Your word says: "With great mercies I will gather you. "You promise that with everlasting kindness you will have mercy on me. And that your kindness will never depart from me. You also promise that great shall be the peace of my children. (Will I have more children i.e. stepchildren? If yes, I trust your peace upon them too!)*

*You promise that in righteousness I will be established and that I will be far from oppression and that I won't be afraid/fearful and far from terror. It will not come near me - you promise. God you say that my righteousness is from you and that it comes from my faith, which I believe you will continue to give me from everlasting to everlasting.*

*He who began a good work in me is faithful to take it to completion. Lord God I confess I haven't believed that there could be real resolution in my marriage.*

*I pray for your help to overcome this doubt and the strength to believe in faith that you can do it and I can do whatever is required for that outcome, if that is your will, through abiding in you. The God of the word is mighty to deliver us. He has the power to deliver us.*

*My God is going to deliver me. He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Thy will be done as it is in heaven. Amen!"*

Dec. 14, 2006 journal entry: "Just sitting here feeling like I need to do or say something to Willie to try and find resolve ... But instead I opened the Bible to:

*Mathew 7:6 "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces."*

*Dear God, please help me to not speak, unless it is your prompting or leading. Help me to keep flexing my spiritual muscles to keep giving you all of it. I do not know what is best concerning Christmas (whether I should go to Los Angeles or stay home). I'm asking you to show me very clearly what your will for me is in regard to this. God, I'm looking to you to fill me. Thank you for the peace I feel at the moment, the calm. It is hour to hour the waves and ranges of emotions I am feeling. Father I beg for the fruit of the Spirit and believe that you can fill me with peace, patience, kindness, goodness, self-control. Especially SELF CONTROL!*

*Just got prompted to open the Bible again and opened right up to the same page, next paragraph.*

*Mathew 7:7 "Keep asking, seeking, knocking and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened..."*

*If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him. Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."*

*I am who God says I am. I am His child and his bride. I know God loves me, is for me and wants to bless me. I seek you to resolve my marriage. I beg you to either save our marriage or give me your blessing to be free to go. I'm trusting you, God, to work out the how, who, what, when and where of it. Just keep leading me a step at a time. I want to walk the way of peace."*

Sat. Dec. 16, 2006

*"Dear God, I know that asking you to stretch my faith will mean growth for me. I pray to grow in grace. I pray to look back over time and re-read these pages and see what amazing miracles have transpired.*

*I do not want to keep landing back in the same old stuck places. I want to be free to fly for you Lord. I mean really fly and to be used by you in a mighty way to impact others for your glory. I believe you are for me. I believe you have wonderful things for me and if I give all my worries and concerns to you, you will lead me one step at a time with grace. I pray that you would make me whole and re-new my youth. I believe you haven't taken me out this far to take me back again. I believe you are who you say you are. I need to just keep daily walking in faith with that. Please help me to keep my eyes fixed and focused on that.*

Your word says:

**Mark 9:23 "All things are possible to him who believes."**

*After reading Hebrews 11:3 I am inspired to believe that my healed life either in this marriage, life on my own, or in a new marriage is made by God out of what is invisible or not seen to me now. I am walking in blind faith waiting expectantly and knowing that God, my redeemer, has a plan that is to help me prosper, though I cannot see or know it now.*

**Hebrews 11:3 "The things which are seen were not made of things which are visible."**

**Note to self:** We are created for God's pleasure and our faith is what pleases Him most. Well, maybe also our desire to be in relationship with Him above all else!" Oh I get it ... whether I stay in this marriage or am single or remarried, God needs to become my primary relationship, always.

Wed. Dec. 20, 2006

*"God, your word says that if we had as much faith as a mustard seed ... a tiny grain of true faith rooted in submissiveness to God is effective. Prayer is key. If I could have what I want, my heart's desire would be to be in a new healthy marriage and free of all entanglement with Willie. I want the*

*absolute best for him. I also pray for his salvation and for his happiness and health, and yet I don't want to be his wife. I so pray to be released and to be able to move forward in effortless grace – anxiety and fear free completely. I pray to be so covered that all of my safety and financial needs would be completely met.*

*Today I don't feel any desire whatsoever to stay married. I don't feel sad even. Maybe numb ... just so completely burnt out from years of emotional turmoil and abuse. I would like to have lots of space from him. I would like to be totally satisfied with my alone time so I don't need to fill it with people and stuff, but to enjoy my life with you and live it even more fully. I would like to live so that I wake up full of expectancy and rekindle the joy of living each day led by the Spirit and in wonderment with all that is good and sweet about life.*

*I would want Holly to stay whole, intact, and very loved and cared for every step along the way. I would want her to transition with the utmost ease and grace so that nothing about this change/separation would be traumatic for her and that actually there would be wonderful, positive gains.*

*I stay largely because of her and because of my obedience to God and the fear of the unknown. I give you that fear and claim that you are always concerned about me.*

*This is my hope:*

*Regardless of whether my innermost dreams come true, I believe you can do amazing miracles and that you will redeem me, heal me, free me from this oppressive marriage. All things are possible through Christ who strengthens me. I wait expectantly to see your hand of mercy move. Deliverance will be a total act of God not by my strength, nor by power, but by faith. Not by works on my part but by mustard-seed faith and God's grace. The God who parted the Red Sea can work BIG miracles in my life!*

*Ever so slightly I am sensing a silent strength in me where I am not weepy and afraid. It is new. It occurs to me several times like a faint impression that I can go about this very differently than ever before. That despite my circumstances I can find daily joy in God and let that strength carry me forward!"*

*"When I remember you on my bed I meditate on you in the night watches. Because you have been my help, therefore in the shadow of your wings I will rejoice. My soul follows close behind you. Your right hand upholds me. But those who seek my life, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth... the mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped."*

Dec. 22, 2007

*"Today I received an impression to read Psalm 92. It says:*

*"My horn (strength) you have exalted like a wild ox. I have been anointed with fresh oil."*

*The source of vitality is from God. Thank you God so much for the measure of power, strength and vitality you have given me. May it just continue to grow and flourish!*

*Just felt impressed to read Psalm 63:*

*"My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness. And my mouth shall praise you with joyful lips."*

*Hmmm... shall be satisfied/shall praise you. I look so forward to this and wait eagerly*

*God, I wish Willie no ill will, nor harm. I do not want revenge. I just feel deeply battered and wounded in my soul. Forgive him for he knows not what he does. I just pray to be released from the bondage of our marriage. "*

Dec. 24, 2007

*"This is Christmas Eve morning. Willie left for L.A. at 6:30 a.m. with a really bad cold. Holly chose to stay home and has the sniffles. Since I wrote last, both Willie and I have researched and concluded he has behavior that fits the description for narcissism. It was Willie who gave me a 12-page print-out with words and sentences he highlighted that clued me into this being mostly the personality disorder that describes his behavior (coupled with major passive aggressiveness). My search began with the word sociopath, but this information he gave me seems to fit more. I sure have been getting quite the education on "personality disorders."*



*At times it is overwhelming to take in all this information. Other times I cannot even begin to describe the relief in my soul. For twenty-eight years I have lived around behavior and attitudes that have seemed odd and confusing. I have felt myself disjointed and as if I was constantly knocked off-center. Yet there was this driving force in me to find truth and to try and understand all the craziness. Finally. Finally there is some light on a very dark profile that has kept me distracted and scrambling to find my footing. **Many times I have had great anxiety, deep sorrow, self-doubt, and tremendous uncertainty and fear.***

*I have felt so alone in this journey. When I have tried to describe to other married friends how difficult it is, they can only understand from a very superficial place. It has taken me all these years to detect and understand this. From what I read, narcissism is incurable without a miracle, basically.*

*I am shifting into: "God forgive him for he knows not what he does." It is not my job to fix or heal him. Only God can do that. It is a huge thing for me to bear the burden of all that I know and am discovering. God, thank you that you hear my cries and that you care about what concerns me."*

## 18. The Spirit of This Christmas

Holly chose to stay home with me, and despite coming down with a bad flu, he chose to drive south to L.A. I was glad for the space. With the space came some quiet. With the quiet came time to pray and seek the Lord. It was Christmas Eve. Holly had gone to sleep. I stared into the computer screen. It was in the mode where the screen is all black with dots coming at you in three dimensions making you feel like you are looking out into the universe. Do you know the one? It is very mesmerizing. The dog scratched on the glass slider wanting to go out and I snapped to and decided to check my emails before shutting down the computer.

One new email, with the heading Silent Killer of Christian Marriages in the subject line, caught my attention. Recently delivered via hyperspace, this email was from a friend who was also in a difficult marriage and knew my struggles. (Click the link above to read the original pdf of this in its entirety.)

It was already really late and the next morning would be Christmas. I had to pull it together to be there for Holly. Dan and Lynn were going to take Holly and her best friend, Megan, and I somewhere nice for a Christmas dinner. The five of us ... Dan and Lynn without their girls, and me with mine (Megan is very

much like a second daughter to me), but without my husband. Two broken families, with the same Father. How does God do what He does interweaving us in His perfect timing?

I was just going to glance at the email and go to bed, but as I began reading I got sucked in because it stated that God can bring healing, however BOTH must be willing to do what God has called them to do. No matter what a woman is willing to do, the marriage can NOT BE HEALED unless the abusive partner is willing and able to:

“change his beliefs and his behavior, bringing significant resolution to emotional pain from his own life, and grow in character.”

As I read on, I was elated to see in black and white, right there on my screen, how abuse in a marriage creates oppression, personal disintegration and pain. Clearly it stated this does not create safety or well-being and as such, expecting a woman to remain in such an oppressive environment is counter to Scripture. God places great value on those whom He has called and abuse is not ordained or sanctified by God. (1 Chronicle 16:34; Psalm 6:4; 139:13-18; John 3:16; Romans 5:8). It went on to say allowing an abuser to continue in his destructive ways, is to enable him to continue in sin and destruction. Those who don't stand up to the abuse, enable it.

“Finally, abuse places a woman in a relationship in which she is unequal to her husband. She becomes an object to satisfy the abuser's dependency and his need to continually act out unresolved hurt and pain. The victim is a means to an end.”

My eyes leapt down the page to find that The Westminster Confession of Faith acknowledges adultery and abandonment as two grounds for divorce. When I fell upon these words I felt like I had been given the keys to let me out of prison:

“When abuse exists, and the abuser refuses to change his attitudes and behavior, he has in fact abandoned his wife. He has chosen to serve himself instead of carrying out his marital obligations to love, honor, and cherish her. ”

I could finally see and agree with the view (as stated in this article) that in effect, by defiantly choosing to neglect marriage vows, the marriage covenant is broken ... This gives a woman “the right to file a legal suit.”

There was more (and I highly recommend you look this article up on the Web ... [Silent Killer Of Christian Marriages](#)).

Finally someone was voicing what the furball had bottled up in me. These words uncorked a knowingness in my soul that I had tried so long to express. In essence, this article warns that unless pastors and counselors discern the subtle and convoluted dynamics of emotional abuse, woman will continue to suffer in silence being victimized first by their husbands and sadly then by the church or naive community.

I sat there by the fireplace, stunned by what I had just read ... so many converging thoughts at once. It became so clear how God only gives us bite-size pieces on a "need-to-know" basis.

Less than two weeks earlier I had written in my journal how I sensed a stirring and a great need to understand the missing pieces. Within the context of the article I had just read was buried a treasure chest filled with what I had been seeking.

The gift God gave me that Christmas was revealing to me parts and pieces I never could understand and making me strong in Him to accept and know His will for me.

The night we watched *Shop Girl*, and I relived so many haunting memories, left me like a tongue that keeps going over a rough spot on a tooth. I just never seemed to be able to stop going back to one question:

"Why would he go to the appointment with the pastor trying to work on our marriage, hear how much it hurt me that he looked at other women, and then only days later do the icky airport mania scene?"

These words from the article were the salve I never got:

"The community will probably be unable to see past the charming ways of the husband. People will often respond in a scrutinizing or critical manner toward the wife or reject her altogether. Many may give the husband a supportive ear **instead of holding him accountable. This behavior inadvertently encourages him to continue his abuse.** Abusive men draw energy and self-justification from people who listen in silence. When the crowds disappear, the wife becomes the target of his increased anger."

Wow! I burst out crying in joy, in pain, in gratitude, in amazement, in relief, in outrage, in pity, in anticipation, in being set free from something so ensnaring, so crazy-making.

All these feelings at once, created the most cathartic weeping. But I did not feel alone. I felt the deep love, comfort and presence of the Trinity like never before. I was able to receive the gift God was giving me. The greatest gift of all ... His presence.

I woke up that Christmas morning and sensed God's presence immediately. I fumbled for my glasses, pen and journal and wrote:

*"Thank you God for reaching me so personally. Thank you for the timing of that article last night. What a huge gift to receive on Christmas Eve. This is the confirmation I have been looking for all these years concerning being free to divorce in God's will! I feel confident now that I am released.*

*Now, for the first time, I feel free to leave. I am leaning on you God, to handle all the details. If I don't live in this house anymore, where will I teach my RawSome workshops and give massage? The house is finally all done (we did five remodels and because I was married to an architect, I had the perfect gourmet kitchen designed especially for my workshops). I can't imagine not getting to live and work here anymore. And, you know my fears about feeling safe where I live and living on my own being a single woman (I was raped by a neighbor when I lived alone as a twenty year old).*

*I would love to live with solid Christians as neighbors or roommates. I pray that instead of loss and grief you would embrace my life with peace and wonderful new possibilities. I turn to you to make all the pieces fit. I wait on you to show me who, what, when, and where. Thank you God for ordering my steps."*

Two families with shattered dreams went to dinner at a fine restaurant to eat a meal together and celebrate the birth of Jesus. Limping along in our shattered lives, Dan and Lynn have shown me so much love and kindness.

At the end of the evening, after Holly went to bed and I gathered up all the wrapping from the presents we opened, I sat quietly by the fire and reflected.

Willie had bought me stacks of presents and even given me several hundred dollars additionally to go clothes shopping. Never had he showered me with

more gifts. In his absence I found that the best gifts are not the presents or food but being in the presence of God and those we love.

I savored the gift of having authentic fellowship with Dan and Lynn and the girls around the table that night at the French restaurant. Best of all is the joy of the Lord, despite the circumstances and despite our fallen selves. He is the supreme gift!

In the name of the one who goes before us. In the name of the one who came and walked amongst us. In the name of the one who goes ahead of us and waits for us. Thank you Jesus, for making a way where there seems to be no way. Amen.



Click The 2 different Links below to hear:

1. [There's No Fear In Love](#)

2. [Click here to hear WINGS](#)

This is deep soaking music I played over and over during my healing days...And especially that Christmas night when I received the gift of being set free.

## 19. Enquiring Minds

My friend Kira and I originally met at a New Age gathering and once I became a Christian I avoided connecting with her because I couldn't bare the rejection of one more friend. After I gave birth to my daughter, I heard she had given birth to a son. I just had to go visit her.

We were both blown away to find out that since we had last met, God had touched both our hearts and our lives in much the same way. Our beliefs had mysteriously moved away from the New Age thinking we had subscribed to, and transformed into, of all things, similar Christian/spiritual understanding! Sadly once I became a Christian, so many people who were all about,

"tolerance," "equality" and "acceptance" for everyone and everything, could no longer "accept" me.

To find that Kira and I could absolutely relate and understand this phenomena in and of itself, was such a relief. People we were getting to know in our new faith-filled Christian world could not understand what it was we valued from our New Age days. Equally, our mutual friends we knew from our New Age circles couldn't understand why we would opt out to be a part of something they thought was "narrow minded" or "dogmatic."

When I tried to leave Willie when Holly was 6 and I got poisoned by paint, my friend Kira tried to leave her husband then as well. In the line-up of parallel paths, oddly enough, around the same time we got back together, she and her husband did too.

Years passed. Our kids grew older. She went to seminary and moved to Michigan with her family. Days after Christmas and my continued discovery of my husband's "personality disorder" I called Kira to talk about all this.



I was particularly interested in her perspective about the article on *The Silent Killer of Christian Marriages*. She knew my story well. Since she was now a "seminary graduate" we could dissect things through a deeper biblical lens.

The cycle had come back around for her marriage as well and on the heels of my discoveries she was finding

new clues and puzzle pieces to her own bizarre marriage tale.

We rolled up our sleeves and started digging on the Internet and passed back and forth interesting articles and books we discovered on the topic of personality disorders. After sharing the article with her about *The Silent Killer of Christian Marriages*, we discovered new words to add to "personality disorders" and "narcissists" to express our collective experiences.



“Verbal and emotional abuse.” Some part of me had known those words, as this clearly described what I had lived through and witnessed regularly as a girl growing up. This marriage dynamic had many of the same toxic overtones, only there was no outward battering going on. This was silent, dark and seemed driven to annihilate all connection or goodness. I had an understanding about that being the dynamic in my marriage, back when I tried to leave when Holly was 6 and I ended up getting poisoned.

It is perplexing to me how I could have known it; in part, in waves, in a felt sense, in an insidious way, yet not enough to really gain clear understanding, strength and momentum.

Women with husbands, boyfriends and dads who were “verbally or emotionally abusive” seemed to magnetically find me. They showed up on my message board constantly in the next months to come. One right after the other with a cookie-cutter version of what I had highlighted that I could relate to from the books and articles I was reading.

Our stories were so very similar. It was heaven to not be alone anymore. To actually have words to put to all the craziness and not be in isolation trying to understand it all, was beyond an answer to prayer. It was as though I had lived so much of my life alone in a dark closet, searching for the string to turn on the light. For decades I had been scrambling to find a tiny cord attached to a light bulb, so eventually I could find the knob, and find my way out of the dark aloneness in the closet.

I became obsessed with hunting down articles, books, people who had been through this ... anyone and everyone I could find on the net who could share pieces of the mystery and validate what I had always felt and known.

I truly felt like a prisoner who had been kept in an isolated cell in the darkness with barely any food or water. I was starving for this understanding, validation and connection.

The authors whose books impacted me the most were:

1. Patricia Evans: *The Verbally Abusive Relationship ... How to Recognize It and How to Respond*
2. *Verbal Abuse Survivors Speak Out* (by the same author)
3. Lundy Bancroft *Why Does He Do That?*

4. Dan Allender and Tremper Longman *Bold Love*. I cannot express how grateful I was to have these resources and to then get to share them with others.

These writings made me thirsty to keep embracing the truest and purest soul food – God’s word. Every night I went to sleep reading Psalms. This was how I fed and quieted my soul.

Kira and I spoke daily, prayed and read chapters of the books together or would shuffle articles back and forth through internet hyper space.

I stumbled from site to site collecting words, sentences, paragraphs, articles, and put them in an electronic file. I read the collage of information over and over to remind myself not to forget who and what I was dealing with.

I was a verbal and emotional abuse archeologist on a dig on the net. There were days when I was absolutely astounded with what was unearthed. Word artifacts would surface depicting expressions and behaviors we (many women I had spoken with) had experienced in our toxic relationships.

On an internet dig ([www.tigressluv.com](http://www.tigressluv.com)) one afternoon I stumbled on a random site that had more words that released another huge round of tears of relief. These words helped to validate and articulate what I had found to be so unexplainable.

***EWV! The Water Torturer! (Killing Me Softly With His Words!) by Tigress Luv***

*“This man knows how to get under your skin. By remaining calm and level-headed to make you look crazy. When arguing he will often have a **superior or contemptuous grin on his face**. Uses a low, calm, steady voice to impose his psychological superiority over you, and often mimics you, laughs at you, or insults you.”*

This writing nailed it so well saying he:

*“Accuses you of being abusive and out of control once he drives you to the brink. This man's tactics are difficult to recognize and identify.”*  
***He is oppressive and stifling, cynical and cocky.***

I was over the moon with delight when I uncovered the contemptuous grin on his face thing! There it was ... the famous smirk that had haunted me! And the oppressive, stifling, cynical, cocky behavior all mentioned under the glorious

label of “*Water Torturer*”. Who knew? I never loved a label more than that! Uh-oh ... here I go again, disqualifying myself for wearing the WWJD bracelet! I continued reading the insight of this woman’s experience and the more I read the more it sounded very similar to mine. She talks about how disconcerting it is when a woman can sense something is terribly wrong, yet has nothing concrete to label it or evidence to prove what she has experienced. Unlike a battered woman there are not scars or bruises to show. How can you prove someone is trying to drive you nuts? How can you convey that without sounding like it is you who is the slanderer or abuser?

*“If you confront the Water Torturer he acts like he doesn't know what you are talking about. To friends and even your children, it looks like he is so laid-back and calm (low key) and that you blow up over nothing.”*

I especially liked reading the definition of projection where the toxic, abusive man takes their own unresolved issues and flaws and projects them on you like you are the living movie screen of their crazy ways. They twist and confuse their behavior and instead see it in you. They treat you as if you were them, doing that behavior. They take on all the same offense and outrage, as if you are the perpetrator and they are the victim. They flip-flop it. It is a twisted, crazy mess.



**(FLASHBACK)** The New Year came and went. I hardly looked up from reading to notice the clock ticking and the date changing over from 2006 to 2007.

The more I read this stuff the more I rolled around in it. I camped out on it, bathed in it, swam in it, ate it, drank it, slept with it, slept on it, took it on, ran with it, and became one with it! I was all over this stuff ... big time! In real time, only a couple of weeks had passed since all this information unfolded and unraveled the threads of the furball.

All this stuff was making me dizzy. I had spiritual vertigo and I was smack in the center of reeling from all the years of long-suffering and disappointment. As I pondered all of this in the psychological and emotional graveyard of my mind, I was a victim to my unfulfilled dreams and a husband who I could never, ever get to “get it.” The pressure to get him to get it was horrific. I knew if he didn't

get it, I would have to go. Seriously entertaining thoughts of ending my marriage reminded me of times I have tried to be brave enough to look at my life ending. What would physical death really be like? Even the thought of looking into the face of such things brought me to the edge of my emotional cliff. In two words ... scary stuff!

With all this new information I was reading and trying to assimilate, I knew I could no longer stay stuck endlessly treading the emotional water of such toxic turmoil anymore. When I imagined staying married, I imagined psychological and spiritual drowning. Surely it seemed like death if I were to stay.

I was extremely torn because, despite all the insanity, I loved my husband and felt deeply bonded to him. Yet, I felt as though he had a terminal, contagious disease and if I stayed I would die with him. It felt like I needed to get out in order to save my own life and that I was powerless to save his. Maybe similar to being in a burning building and knowing that entering in the next room to get the other person out would kill us both because there was way too much smoke to overcome. So the clear and obvious only choices were to get out just in time to save myself or go in the other smoke-filled room and die with him. And then there was Holly to think about.

I became anxious. When I imagined leaving, I experienced panic. How would I be able to take care of myself financially and all the logistics of finding a safe place for Holly and I to live and places to do my work? How would I be able to afford a home and places to do my work? Little waves of familiar panic attacks began to emerge. I knew I would be paralyzed if those panic waves grew. I had experienced major jolts of panic attacks when I left him before (when Holly was 6). Back then the panic attacks were so extreme there were times I couldn't leave the house or drive.

Gulp ... I was desperate not to go there again. I needed help and intervention as much as I needed the air I was breathing.

## 20. Loaves and Loaves of Bread

Two friends of mine were volunteering at "The Healing Room." They assured me this was a safe Christian place I could go seek confidential prayer support and encouragement for anything in my life that needed healing (physical or emotional). With the flood of adrenalin coursing its way into the racetrack of panic attacks, I was all over the concept of the Healing Room! You bet I was!

As I drove to the Healing Room, tears streamed down my cheeks. I cried and spoke out loud to God. In the sanctuary of my car I confessed my fear regarding leaving my marriage and the huge unknown of how I would be able to provide for myself.

"I want to do your will and am so afraid to walk outside of your leading and your timing. I want to know that I can truly go and have your blessing. I am afraid to do the wrong thing. I know you hate divorce and yet I think you have given me all this information for a reason. What if this is really spiritual warfare just trying to destroy our family? I'm confused and very scared. What if I leave and can't take care of myself? What if ... what if ... what if ..." all the way until I landed in the parking lot.

The waiting room at the Healing Room felt similar to that of a clinic. There was a range of folks coming and going. Some clutched Kleenexes. Others came with kids or spouses to cling to. I sat alone, heart racing, adrenalin coursing, filling out the paper on the clipboard. It was short and to the point. I was to state what it was I wanted healing for.

I simply said I wanted clarity and healing about my marriage and next steps. The receptionist took my paper (as she did with all the papers from people who found their way there) and placed it face down on a small table in the "Healing Room." Two *prayer warriors* entered the room and were told they were to pray for "a woman."

The paper remained face down on the small table as the women prayed and waited in silence until they had leadings or promptings from Spirit. Once they sensed they had been given a word or vision they shared with each other, prayed some more and then I was invited into the Healing Room. At that point we were introduced and they learned my name.

The first woman to speak was probably in her late twenties. She said she got words. "Value me," was what she heard.

The other woman seemed quite a bit older than me and said she saw a vision of loaves and loaves of bread falling from the sky. They both received the impression that it meant "plentiful provision."

I shook as I wept and as they stuffed tissues into my palms. We stood huddled in a prayer circle and through my tears I told them I had not been valued in my marriage.

They both said they had left emotional and verbally abusive marriages. We discovered we all had the common experience of having times where we wished we had been beaten. That way, at least we could have shown someone, anyone, the scars from the blows.

The next morning I wrote in my journal about my experience at The Healing Room."

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"Not sure what I make of all that. I have issues trusting what is truly from the God versus deception disguised as the light."

## 21. Southern Comfort

On my drive home from the Healing Room, I concluded that I needed to get away from the horrible oppressiveness that had landed in our home. I needed one-on-one time alone with God. I fantasized about a quiet, safe place to go and seek Him. My old stomping grounds in Hawaii seemed like a likely place. So I typed in: "Christian women's spiritual retreat, Hawaii" into my search engine just to see what might come up. Up popped "Body, mind and soul Christian women's spiritual retreat in Comfort, Texas!" Comfort, Texas! How bizarre was that?

This was the mission statement on the site where this special women's retreat was posted:

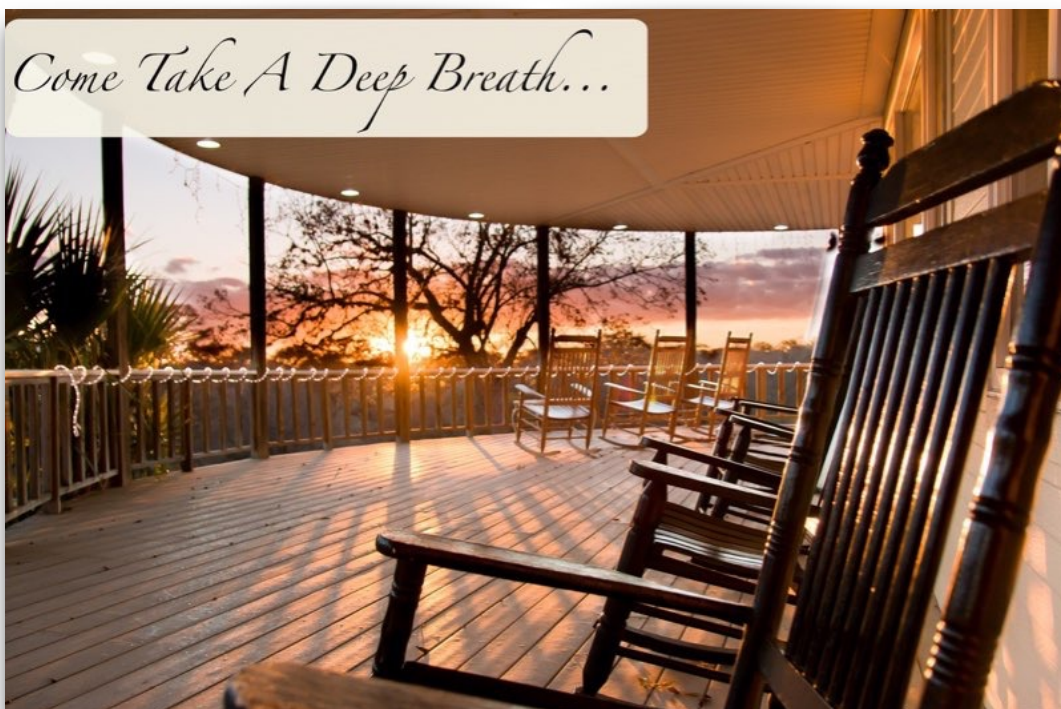
Lamb's Tale is a soul care ministry which is helping believers live out of the heart God gave them.

"The ministry which came to be known as the Lamb's Tale was birthed in November, 1996. Basic to its vision is the conviction that we need stillness to be able to "hear" our own hearts and also from God.

Because the cares and busyness of life often hinder us from sensing God's presence, the Lamb's Tale seeks to offer safe, quiet places that give Him room. Our hope is that many will encounter Him there and know the compelling goodness of His exquisite love. In such places, we are beckoned to drink more deeply of God's grace, to mourn those things that break His heart, and to discern more clearly His accompaniment as we follow His lead.



For it is in the stillness that God gives His sons and daughters better glimpses of how He has interwoven their own life-stories with the on-going story of Jesus, the Lamb of God – the Lamb's Tale."



That all sounded so beautiful to my restless soul. I could absolutely see myself rocking in those chairs on that delicious sun-drenched porch. And located in Comfort, Texas, nonetheless! Who writes this script? Was that God or what?

I was compelled to call and find out more. I spoke with the woman who was leading this retreat and found out she was a doctor specializing in women's health issues.

I told her I had written a book on healthy eating and by the time we hung up she had ordered a case of my books for the retreat and I was signed up to attend (and even enlisted to do a food demo).

In less than a week I was off to Comfort, Texas! Yee-ha! There is something so wonderful about that Texas hospitality! A warm and welcoming Christian sister was at the airport to greet me. On the drive to the *Haven Retreat Center*, I found out that my new friend (driving) and Doctor Suzi (the head of this retreat) had trained with Larry Crabb in his skills of "soul care." We talked about how impactful his book "Shattered Dreams" was. She was an instant sister.

It didn't take long for me to warm up to the group of ladies who had gathered for this retreat. Even though I was having panic attack surges and heart palpitations it was a safe place for me to be the unraveled mess I was because several of the women in the group had also been in abusive relationships and through the process of divorce.

They had that look of: "We know exactly what you are talking about ..." It felt like a giant slumber party with my sisters in Christ.

At one of the sessions, Dr. Suzi talked about some of her experiences over the years in her medical practice. I was particularly stirred when she said she noticed that women who were abused and were not heard and who could not express themselves often were prone to heart disease. The next day she gave us a full exam and blood workup.

Dr. Suzi said I had the beginning signs of arteriosclerosis! My main symptom was pulsatile tinnitus, which translated into me hearing my heartbeat throbbing in my ear when I lay down. This seemed to be happening most nights since the furball ejected and especially when I was filled with panic. And all I thought I had to do was eat healthy and exercise! It just goes to show you that you can eat one hundred percent spot-on, organic, raw, vegan - and still cook yourself with stress, fear, bitterness, unforgiveness, anger, or any number of toxic

*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones."*

emotional stews. Hearing that news freaked me out a bit. I went back to my room for a little "quiet time."

Ah, yes, I needed alone time with God to renew my mind. I looked up my all-time favorite scripture Proverbs 3:5-8 :

I noticed it didn't say eat raw, vegan and juice and this will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones. I starred at:

*"Do not be wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and shun evil."*

I prayed, *"Please reveal the depth of what you want me to know from those 'sharper than a double-edge sword,' words."*

Somehow, despite the coursing adrenalin and panic attacks, I managed to fall asleep. I remember lying there that night thinking I was never going to fall asleep and then, next thing, I found myself bolt upright. This time the adrenaline was coursing because of the horrific image from the dream I had just fled.

**(FLASHBACK)** In the dream there was a corpse in the back of the trunk of a car. The corpse had a mouth guard in her mouth and then tape wrapped around her mouth and head, to make sure she was silenced. It was a shocking image to dream. I realized that corpse was me in the dream! Before I could take my next breath I was sitting straight up in bed with my heart pounding. The dream was so disturbing that I never made it back to sleep. I listened to the clock tick, my heartbeat pulsing in my ear, the big old farmhouse crackling and the gentle dripping of light rain trying to morph into snow, that cold January 2007 morning.

When I could stand bed no more, I crept downstairs and found Dr. Suzi sitting by the fireplace having a quiet time. Everyone else was still tucked away. We were both still in our jammies. I told her about my dream.

"Robyn I think you are about to find your voice," was her response!

What a relief that she framed it that way! She spoke into my life in a way I couldn't imagine at that moment. All I could sense right then was relief! I knew if I stayed in my marriage and no one heard my cries I would be like that corpse. I was ready to find my voice! I was ready to find life!

## 22. Plank Eye (or Trying To Capture The Dragon)

Flying back home from Comfort, Texas I knew what needed to happen. But before anyone went house hunting I went to get two items I had discovered while at the Haven. First on my list was music by Sara Groves that we had listened to in-between the spaces. The lyrics of several of her songs (especially *Just Showed Up For My Own Life* and *It's Going to Be Alright* from her "Add To The Beauty" CD) became anchors grounding me in new thoughts filled with strength and passion. Also I was sent home with an assignment to read *Bold Love* (by Allender and Longman).

These words from *Bold Love* penetrated my soul in the most piercing way and addressed the dark evil presence I had felt the night of *Shop Girl*. I highly recommend this book and particularly read pages 236-237:

*"An evil person, regularly and masterfully, portrays his motives and behavior as innocent. He is deceitfully gifted in making the victim of his abuse feel like the perpetrator of the harm."*

I could definitely relate to every word I was reading. Especially the part where they said that when you try and expose the abuse, it all gets flipped around. So many times I was portrayed as being hypersensitive, insecure, "a rager," or even accused of being an accuser! The twists and double-back-flips are endless with those who have a seared conscience. They will do whatever they have to do to portray they are the real victim, misunderstood and falsely accused. Lies are as fluid as water. *Bold Love* goes on to say that when an evil person's methods are exposed...

*"the eyes of an evil person may look straight into yours with an unflinching strength born of an absence of shame."*

The next chilling bit I read acknowledges how a mind lacking conscience shows no mercy for cries for help and is not stopped by threats of shame. The power of the evil person: *"lies in its coldness and hardness."*

Yikes, these next words describing how a person who is shameless operates to avoid exposure, helped me understand why I had felt so unsafe in his presence. It was what I was trying to tell others but I didn't have the words or way to explain what I had felt.

*"But a person can avoid the experience of shame if he can put out the eyes that see inside him. When his accuser is blind, he can escape the gaze that penetrates his soul. For that reason, evil almost always works to shame the other. Shame works to blind the eyes that expose."*

This book was an incredible salve. It addresses things that no one wants to talk about yet things I had experienced that brought me years of grief ... Tactics to confound the wise and make the innocent seem like the abuser. The authors say an evil person uses arrogance and mockery to avoid being shamed (Proverbs 21:24)

*"Mockery may take obvious forms, such as biting sarcasm and vicious cynicism, or it can be much more subtle..."*

**(FLASHBACK)** When I read those words about mockery, many flash back scenes ran through my mind of times he had said biting words to put me down. The most recent was: "Who do you think you are, the food police?"

Often, he and well-meaning others, would tell me I had a hard time forgiving and letting go. Inside of myself I would go over and over things because I didn't want to forget and slip back into the denial of what I couldn't name or put my finger on. Otherwise it would all slip away and I would rock myself back to sleep in the distortion of a very toxic relationship that I would hope would get better, if only he would just get it! I would play over and over in my mind toxic scenes and cruel sentences because I was trying to capture the dragon. I knew he was there, but he was way too large for me to handle on my own. I went at the dragon as an ant with a butterfly net, trying to use my words. I was addicted to getting a blind man to see and a deaf man to hear.

I read in *Bold Love* on page 281:

*"The temptation to create conversations that are designed to get the fool "to see" is stronger than the most addictive drug known to humankind. The temptation must be resisted, fought, and fled from, however, or else the fool will trample over the pearls spread before his cloven feet. "*



I was so focused on him, I completely lost sight of my own insidious addiction. The plank-eye thing. I hate when that happens!

It seemed like a matter of life and death for me that he understood, had compassion, felt remorse, and showed signs of true repentance. Without that, it simply was too threatening to my soul. I needed him "to see" as much as the alcoholic needs a drink to stop the shakes. Reading that this need is "*stronger than the most addictive drug known to humankind*," gave me a hint of the size and shape of my own depravity. In the quiet recesses of my mind, I could just barely admit to myself that I was more than compelled ... I was driven/addicted to needing him to "get it."

This awareness motivated me to have as little contact with him as possible. I saw a glimmer of how I kept setting myself up to being trampled. I needed to make a break from this crazy cycle and come up for some long needed fresh air.

## 23. Sage



A close friend invited me to go with her to an open house to check out a manufactured home in a park across the street from her condo. Being a single mom of two, with only her 17-year-old left to finish up her senior year, she was thinking of downsizing.

As we walked into the park we were greeted by several open-house signs. I was surprised to find how

lovely the grounds were at this park. As we meandered around the small village of the homes there, I felt a sense of peace and safety in this well-cared-for community.

There was a house "for sale by owner" that was painted the exact **sage-green color** as the house I was currently living in with Willie and Holly. Aside from some Zen-type landscaping, the exterior paint was the final sign-off on our home, after years of redoing and makeovers. All those phases of remodeling (we did five) were the only thing that we had and did in common besides focusing on Holly. We put lots of time, money and focus on redoing our home

and making it look gorgeous, yet inside we were living in an illusion. Odd how once the remodel ended, so did our marriage.

We had picked out a green but on the eve of the painter coming to apply it, my eye noticed something better. On the way home from the store, I was grabbed by a house with the lovely sage color. "That is the exact color I have been looking for!" I couldn't imagine having the painter come the next morning and proceed with the other green color when this existed! I had to know the name and formula for this one!

I knocked on the door and the woman of the house, who had picked this color, answered. She kindly sent me home with a small sample can that she scrounged up from her garage. Wow, what a gift! I left the sample can for the painter the next morning and went off on a class field-trip for the day with Holly.

I remember being so excited to hurry home and see the new painted exterior! When we drove around the corner to pull up to our house, it was shocking turquoise! It was screaming fiesta, margaritas ... turquoise! Not at all the restful green that went with my healthy-eating workshops or tranquil massage sessions which were held within the walls of our home. No, this color was all about being loud, festive, and out there! Yikes!

Back to the house where the can came from, we discovered she had accidentally given us a sample of a color they tried and didn't like! So we paid the painter once to paint it shocking turquoise and again to transform it to restful sage.

All this to say that I LOVE a house painted in this color sage, because it didn't come easy, and, now, I have an even deeper sense of appreciation for its hue! With time I can see the lesson of sage, all over the place in my life. The things that have been a struggle have taught me more about Love. The greater the struggle the more I learn about who God is and how the challenges have been worked together for good.

When my friend and I entered into the home, for sale by owner, painted the same color sage, I felt an amazing peace right away. Once inside I was stunned and wowed by how lovely it was. From the open floor plan, high ceilings, skylights, stainless appliances, Corian counters, lovely designer paint colors throughout, crown molding, combo of sage tile floors and sage plush carpet all the way to the fabulous master suite with a soaking tub and walk-in closet with lovely private backyard through the sliding glass doors.

The whole vibe of this little sage home was calm, tranquil, lovely peace! My friend went around the corner to view another home and I stayed there and talked with the owner. As she spoke I realized she seemed very familiar. Or was it that we just had so much in common? I was trying to put it together. She had a little white dog with the same name as my daughter ... Holly. My little white dog's name was Wesley.

She was living there as a single mom with her daughter who was a couple of years younger than mine. We discovered that we had both read the same books on verbal and emotional abuse and how our relationships had crumbled behind the weight of years of emotional battering. And then it hit me. I knew this woman. I had massaged her when she was pregnant with her daughter. Her husband was our electrician and my husband had designed their home years and years ago! So bizarre.

I could so see myself living in her home. It was light and soothing, and felt extremely safe there. And the peace. I craved the peace. Amy said it had been a lovely landing place for them and with all the amenities there it felt like a retreat or like living at a resort. Besides a lovely community center with a pool, sauna, and Jacuzzi there was an exercise facility.

Being in her home gave me a vision of what was possible. I could actually see myself there. It was uncanny how all the colors of the interior and exterior matched the home and furnishings I had. It just felt like it was my home.

I regrouped with my friend and found myself exhilarated. We were there looking for her and I was swept off my feet with this new desire that fell out of the sky as likely as loaves of bread. What were the chances of this house being mine? That was February.

Moving into a manufactured home in a trailer park where I would be pinned in to neighbors, hand-shaking arms distance away, seemed like a stretch, given the custom, lap-of-luxury house I was leaping forward out of. But something about the sunny and peaceful feel about the little sage house beckoned me. I kept imagining myself living there.





The pictures above of the outside and the kitchen of our family home show how the colors both inside (same light yellow in both kitchens) and outside (both exact same shade of green) were the same as the little sage manufactured home (shown below).



## 24. Moving Forward

March was near hell living in such toxic tension. Holly started getting so many headaches that the school nurse wanted us to get her checked out. I wrote in my journal how Holly said how uncomfortable she felt living in the tension: I said something like, "At least there isn't a lot of violence and yelling or anyone getting beaten up (like how it was in my childhood)." I was astounded by her response. "We are getting beaten up on the inside!"

Her words echoed through my head and landed as a huge weight on my shoulders and in my heart. She started to threaten that if things didn't improve around our house she would be spending weekends at her best friend's house.

On the morning of our 21st anniversary I woke up from an ugly, painful dream. Willie had raped me using the handle of our stainless steel frying pan. The handle was smooth so I didn't feel it nor did I remember him doing it. My journal entry read: March 8

*"Today is our 21st anniversary. That image from the dream haunted me all day. What a long, painful, tension-filled season this is. I am seeking you for a safe, beautiful, affordable home. Father God, I believe that you have a plan for me and that you will lead me far away from this pain, oppression and abuse.*

*I pray to walk in your timing and in your will.*

*Thank you God for providing just what I need when I need it. Thank you for all the wonderful friends you have provided for me. I so appreciate those you have given me who understand. Thank you for bringing me this far, this fast, since I began writing this journal (on Dec. 1)."*



A one-bedroom cottage owned by a client of Willie's came up for rent right across the street from Holly's best friend. I remember praying in my journal that God would make the transition easy for Holly. If I could have dreamed up a perfect transition for her, this would be it! My heart rejoiced with God's goodness and attention to detail.

The day Willie moved out I was scheduled to teach a RawSome Recipes mini workshop at a women's conference at my church. As I was scrambling to get my ingredients and supplies together, he was going through cupboards and silverware drawers dividing up glasses and utensils. How was I going to make it through this women's conference? What a twilight zone experience for me to land at church having to pull it together to present to a roomful of church ladies. This day of all days, my mate of 28 years was moving out of our home.

I was scattered and in dire need of prayer covering. Bonnie was the next of many gifts God provided. Never having met each other, she had volunteered to be my assistant for the day. God had handpicked her, no doubt. Bonnie had been married and divorced twice to abusive men, and was no stranger to emotional and verbal assaults and the fall-out from those blows. She knew exactly how to pray with and for me. She told me how she had bought a manufactured home in a park and how she loves her life with God as her husband and couldn't be happier with her cozy, peace-filled home. Hmm ...

## 25. On The Market

I carried on the best I could, knocking around our big remodeled house without him. I still cried a lot ... especially on nights when Holly went and stayed at his house. My marriage had died. It was as though my husband had died only no one showed up with the casserole dishes. Instead, God kept showing up as my husband and provider.

First I got a call from a mother-daughter team who run "Fresh Prep Kitchens." They provide the community with a wide range of fresh, prepped ingredients that people assemble into recipes that they take home and either freeze or warm and serve. They had heard about my workshops and wanted to know if I wanted to be a resident chef and instructor as they were planning on expanding with a Culinary Center for education and hands-on classes.

Next, God provided a massage position for me at a sweet day spa right up the street from that manufactured home painted that lovely color, sage. Both opportunities came in the same week and handled my concerns about where I would be able to do my work if we sold our house.

He moved out in April and by June we were ready to put the house on the market. Both work locations opened up new possibilities. Teaching at Fresh Prep meant I had way more exposure and free publicity. Working at the spa I was partially funded to go to Arizona and get special training to do LaStone

Hot and Cold Stone massage therapy. God just never ceases to amaze me. Truly I am in awe of Him. His mercies go on and on.

My new “boss” at the spa became my new sister in the ex-wives club. We had left our husbands at almost the exact same time. We shared war stories as her ex was also wired extremely similar to my ex. Many Friday nights after work we went down town to catch a bite to eat and catch up on divorce proceedings. When it all came down, my divorce was finalized 24 hours before hers!

The work transitions went as well as Holly’s transition being shuffled back and forth between two homes. Almost immediately she and I grew closer and closer and her headaches disappeared. It was fabulous for her to have Meg just a stone’s throw away, across the street.

The house went on the market right when the prices began to drop. After two insulting offers and a strong dose of reality we accepted an offer that was \$60,000 less than we had hoped for. The potential for more price reductions was very likely. It seemed wise to get out while there was a way, even if it was a reduced way. That was better than no way. The momentum to keep moving forward was definitely escalating.

Ten months had passed since we watched *Shop Girl*. I had consulted with two of the top lawyers in town and was shocked to find out how little I would be getting through the court system and how much it would cost me to hire a lawyer. We had tried to go the mediation route and in just one session it was a stupefying fiasco. It was clear now that somehow, this marriage was coming to an end. Both lawyer and mediation routes seemed like blocked entries to the final exit.



A combination of curiosity, a deep desire and drive to find a new mate, spurred me to check out a Christian dating site. Several people I knew had had success on the net, including my sister-in-law who was engaged to someone she met on eHarmony (after ending her second marriage).

It seemed like my lifelong goal was to have a better life. One that was shared with a Godly man who I could laugh with, grow with and feel valued by. A man I

could trust and respect and shower with my love. I dreamt of how amazing it would be to be in a relationship of mutuality instead of one of power struggles and put-downs. That was my heart's desire, and out of the ten month void a sense of urgency got whipped up out of thin air.

The sand was rapidly slipping through the hour-glass of my life, almost as fast as the flesh on my body was slipping south. The wrinkles on my face and neck were exposing that I had now entered into my fifties! When the wind shifted to autumn and Holly went back to school, a new breeze kicked up in the changing season of my life. The wind of desire swept me off and suddenly I felt ready to dip my toes into the dating pond. I hadn't been single since I was 22. It had been almost 30 years since I had gone on a date! Yikes.

Even though my marriage was not technically final, I justified to myself that it was OK to have a peek. At first, more than anything, I was curious how it was for other Christians going through divorce after long-term marriages. I wanted to connect with others who were on this very strange trip. I signed up for a free ten-day trial.

We were attracted to each other's smiles right away. Mark and I became instant buddies. He lives down under, so that was a wonderful safe first mate to make! Markie Sparkie is my nick-name for him, or Sparks, for short. Very early on he took me under his wing and showed me the ropes around the dating site.

Markie had been in a marriage almost as long as mine, had three kids and was five years down the road from a brutal divorce. Markie and I are very simpatico. I loved that he could chat as long as me and has not only a heart of compassion but a heart of gold. He also has a heart very inclined toward God.

Early on I knew we were to be friends, not lovers, and that was just so perfect for where I was at. It was amazing to make such an instant friendship with a brother who was half way across the globe.

## 26. Great Expectations

(Written Oct. 6, 2007)

Days after meeting Markie, I met Brad. It was what he wrote on his profile that made me take a second glance. I noticed he lived in the San Juan Islands, but had a daughter in my town. He sounded like a safe one to send a quick email to. I wrote and told him how his words were comforting and had a wisdom that spoke to my situation.

He IMed (instant messaged) me back ... Wow, I was communicating in "real" time with a "real" male humanoid! Yikes, thump, thump, thump, thump! How scary and exhilarating. I had never "IMed" anyone before ... I'm embarrassed to say that we ended up chatting online for five hours. Five hours straight! Well, except for one point I was starving and told him to hang on while I went to grab a bite to eat. I sneaked in a potty break, and when I came back he asked me if I was making a roast! How could someone I just meet "online" make me LOL (laugh out loud), engage me for that many hours and make it feel like only moments? I was hooked! I felt like I was 12 again!

The next night we spoke on the phone, voice to voice. Gulp! When I knew we were going to take a quick leap and let go of the net and jump to the phone, I began pacing. I had never been a pacer before. I paced all over the house making a pacing track in the cross-sections of the carpet. It was the craziest thing. I was so out of my element. I was scared, positively goofy and making jokes that cracked myself up! That's how nuts I was! As funny as I thought I was, he was hysterical and totally egged me on. I hadn't had that much fun in a really, really, really, really, looooooong time! Something about knowing he lived really far away made it feel safe for me to let my spunky side loose. On the flip side of being punch-drunk, it also felt really safe to talk about the hard parts of my marriage as Brad could relate and seemed to have a mirror experience in many ways. We went from hysteria to mania as we shared our strange, scary, sad tales till the early hours of the morning. The next day he sent me an e-card over the dating site to tell me he had only gotten one-hour's sleep before waking to go to work!

We spoke hours every night for the next five. On the fifth night he called to tell me he was on his way to Tahoe to close up a shop where he had built yachts until he and the business were transferred to the San Juans. "Since I will be driving all the way down there, what is another five hours to come there to meet you and visit with my daughter?" He just sprung the concept on me!

This was all way too quick for me to find any comfortable footing. I was slipping and falling into a wonderful fantasy of what it would be like. It was one thing to flirt with him over the net and then over the phone wire(less) but in real time, face to face????!!!!. "Let's pray and see if God opens the doors for me to come down there. If it is meant to be then my work will finish quickly and I will be able to carve out the extra day to come down there."

The next day I graduated from being 12 to high school mentality. Little waves of panic and excitement alternated through my solar plexus. I visualized

various scenarios of our first meeting. Those thoughts were being crowded out with: "What to wear, who will do my hair" thoughts.

I wore my phone like a piece of jewelry that day, letting it dangle all over me in the hopes it would ring. Silencio ... all day long. Nada. Not one little ringie tone. Nada.

*Day rolled into night. I couldn't eat a bite. When the phone finally rang it gave me a fright!*

It was 10 p.m. and at that point, I was so messed up I was making up rhymes in my head!

*Finally* that quirky ring tone on my cell ... It was Brad: "I jammed all day, practically nonstop so I could finish up and now I'm in my truck heading ..."

(Long pause. The emphasis is on LOOOOOOOONG pause.)

My heart was in my throat ... "I'm in my truck heading ... *SOUTH* to see you!"

I practically fainted but decided not to go there because I didn't want to miss out on his fabulous sense of humor. We talked on the phone the entire time he drove. Five hours later he was checking into a hotel only a few miles from my house! We said goodnight sometime after 3am.

Nobody slept a wink. Nada. Not one wink!

Since I wasn't officially "divorced" yet, we decided to meet at a beach south of town first thing in the morning and eat lunch out there. Chances were very good I wouldn't bump into anyone I knew.

He brought along his little white dog and I brought mine. That's how I recognized him waiting for me in the parking lot. I was so excited and nervous, I had a ring of sweat under my armpits the size of a swimming pool.

When I got up close and personal, a wave of confusion hit me. He didn't look like I had imagined from the photos he had posted. In fact I could hardly see much resemblance to what I had pictured in my mind. I was more confused than disappointed. I was trying to have the real live Brad fit into one of the four pictures I had studied so intently.

My initial greeting words that tumbled forth were: "Were those really pictures of you on the net?"



I thought I had been deceived and what he saw was disappointment. It was a crash landing that neither of us could see coming. It happened so fast that the crash was a huge, sudden shock. The rush and chemistry were gone.

Thank God we had those little white dogs because they came in way handy as ice-breakers! I was très disoriented. So I kept telling myself to focus on the dogs.

I felt terrible because he had driven all that way and paid to stay in a hotel. He wasn't who I had dreamt up he would be and I (no longer the giddy, frisky teenager) wasn't completely sure who the heck I was anymore, either.

I gave myself an inner talking to: "OK Robyn, you need to be gracious here and go to lunch with him and just get to know him." We awkwardly walked the beach with the dogs until the lack of sleep and food hit me like the waves crashing up against the rocks in the distance. I felt geeky and like I wanted to crawl out of my skin. Except, suddenly *I had to eat*. I was famished. Everything else had to take a back seat. It was still too early for the restaurant to be open. We fumbled around with the dogs some more and got them tucked away in our cars.

Finally, they let us sit down at an outdoor table while they did the last-minute preparations before opening. We were at a Mexican restaurant and this was one time a margarita might have made sense had I any inclination toward booze for a buffer zone. Not an option for this señorita.

He was very gracious and once we settled into the picante sauce and chips and downed some lemonade, I began to feel revived. With a little presence of mind restored I excused myself to el baño (the bathroom) and prayed that God's presence and will would reign.

From that point forward we both seemed to relax and let go and just enjoy the moment. I inhaled the food while he talked and talked and talked, more than any man I had ever met. He came from such a completely opposite life from mine. He was raised dirt poor in the middle of a large city as a Golden Gloves boxer. He and his brother were inseparable and always the best of friends. He told me the most unusual and phantasmagoric adventures he and his bro got into on the streets of their youth.

The shadow of the valley of death threatened Brad several times including when he got in a terrible collision and was violently thrown out of a car because he wasn't wearing a seat belt. The shadow of death descended for



real and as a final blow one night when his brother was found dead after a car accident that flung his car off the edge of the road. By the end of lunch we had covered a range of life's journeys and I was exhausted and relieved.

We left the restaurant almost two hours later and he walked me to my car. I cried and apologized for my disappointment. "I had no business flirting with you on the phone before I had even met you. I am so embarrassed, I acted like that as a Christian. Can we take the pressure off about being more than friends and just back up and establish a friendship?"

Again, he was more than gracious. He prayed a beautiful prayer and then we got in our cars and caravanned our way back to the freeway. He headed one direction and I went the other. From that day forward we spent every night on the phone for hours and hours, like nothing had ever been any different.

Brad listened to all my pain, fears, and upsets and constantly prayed with and for me. He sent me many words of encouragement always focusing on God's word and His attributes. I felt that he respected my boundaries and focused on being a brother in Christ. Since he was many steps ahead of me in the divorce recovery process, he could shed some light on the dark path before me. We quickly grew very close.

## 27. Let Go, Let God

By the end of September the house was in escrow. Brad prayed and encouraged me through the loss and endless rounds of grief. There was so much to let go of. He understood. Rounds of documents and disclosure forms to sign made it real. I was beyond myself and overwhelmed with so much to do. They wanted a quick escrow, which meant I was in a panic about where I was going to live. Brad prayed.

Much to my surprise and delight, the little sage home was *still* on the market. I had first seen it in February. All those months she had never gotten one offer. "I always felt like this was your house," she told me when I went by to see it again.

"I felt that way, too." She accepted my price and we had a verbal agreement until we could figure out how to do the paperwork ourselves and write up the offer. We were trying to co-ordinate her move out with the close of escrow on our home. That was only a month away. Brad prayed.

Markie Sparkie stepped up his support and a couple times even called me long distance from Aussieland to pray live on the phone with me. Our friendship continued to blossom as well.

"Markie Sparkie, is that you?"

"Oh Robi, it's great to hear your voice, darlin. No worries mate, it's all good. God is in control!" He would reassure me when I would whine about my fears.

God used Sparks and Brad as pillars of faith to prop up my weary arms.

Time was racing forward and in a matter of a few short weeks we would be out of there, bada-bing-bada-boom. Only a few humongous hurdles and ugly details to deal with. Willie had taken the least amount possible of furniture and accessories necessary to set up his little cottage.

I was delighted when he took our bed. The first thing I did when he moved out was buy a new bed frame, a top-of-the-line Beautyrest (it was time to find that elusive beauty, rest) mattress and chick curtains. You know, chick curtains ... lacy and feminine and delicate.

There was no way the remaining houseful of furniture and stuff could be crammed into the little 1,200-square-foot, glorified box that was going to be my new domain. Just the thought of dismantling the cobweb-infested (which meant there were big hairy spiders out there) garage, full of mostly boy stuff, sent me into a panic attack.

"Hello Willie, we absolutely have to have a garage sale next weekend."

"Nope, can't," was his response. "What do you mean can't. We have to. There are only a few weeks left and there is way too much stuff for me to deal with here on my own."

"Nope, can't. I'm going to San Francisco next weekend." I was sputtering and fuming and agitated and incredulous.

"You need to come over and go through the garage with me and weed out what you want to keep and what you want to sell."

"OK, OK," he said, just to get me off his back.

I was so angry I could have spat fire. Instead I sat down on the cold, cracked, concrete floor of the garage and sobbed enough tears to put out a forest fire.

I practically lived in the garage at that point. I spent hours and hours in there, trying to focus and make decisions about what could stay and what had to go. I fumbled around looking for my phone. It had accidentally gotten packed in one of the boxes. I wiped my nose and tears on my sweatshirt, pushed my greasy hair out of my face and called Brad. Brad prayed.

Girlfriends kindly stopped over when they could and helped me box up stuff and it all got organized in piles in the garage. Lynn came over and volunteered to pack up all the photo albums and framed family shots to spare me that grief. So thoughtful!

Willie showed up a day or two later (at his convenience) to find me frantically sorting through boxes in the garage. No time to lose. The garage sale was only a few days away and there were mountains of things to sort and price and then display.

"Willie, you simply have to help me do this garage sale thing, this weekend. This is your stuff too."

"Nope can't."

"Why can't you go to San Francisco another time? It's not fair for you to leave me here stuck having to deal with everything all by myself."

"Well, Robyn," he said as he puffed himself up, "I have a *girlfriend*." That felt like yet another one of his silent punches.

"Oh," I said, as I scrambled to my emotional feet. The garage reeked with that spirit of entitlement. The one that thinks that whatever he wants to do has priority, no matter how that affected me or anyone else.

It got stinky all right. "I've been seeing someone, too" (if you call that lunch with Brad "seeing" someone).

In that moment I was so grateful for my connection with Brad. His daily phone calls and prayers supported me through some really rough spots and spared me from falling into the pit of despair. Brad was not about to allow me to enter into any pity parties. Not on his watch. Hence he would go to great lengths making me laugh with his nightly phone-time comedy routines. I could have easily spiraled into the pit of depression being left to deal with the garage sale while he went off with his new girlfriend.

When I told him I was seeing someone, he literally seemed quite surprised for a moment; taken aback! As if me saying that took some of the punch out of his proud announcement that he had a *girlfriend*. As if my words were the pin that popped his inflated, arrogance balloon. I have to admit that I truly got pleasure out of seeing him get deflated. I was sooo resentful I felt driven to verbally punch back. There was no yelling. No loud hurling of words. Just this thick toxic air that could be sliced with our "tit-for-tat" tongues.

He poked around the garage and it was obvious he wanted to leave the minute he got there. He went through his toolbox quite disinterestedly and pulled out a few items. He sorted things in two piles. Some to take with him and some he wanted me to "keep on the side."

*On the side! What for, and why was I supposed to do him any favors?*

He just expected me to be A-OK with his agenda.

"No prob Willie ... I'm here to serve you and handle all your junk for you while you go off and have a fabulous, chill-lax weekend with your *girlfriend* in San Francisco while I work myself into a stress monkey."

That was my internal bitter conversation that was cooking me on the inside!

He was distracted and smitten and had his mind elsewhere. He was very detached to his stuff and any sense of responsibility for his share of ownership in the house or its contents. He was useless. I blinked and he was gone.

Once again the familiar ... abandoned to take care of business while he went to pursue his desires. I think what shocked me most was how little he cared about anything besides getting out of town to spend the weekend with his *girlfriend*. Everything didn't matter and got pushed aside, including Holly. More tears as I fumbled for my phone. I called Brad. Brad prayed.

Two days later was the eve of the mother of all garage sales. Friends showed up like a troop of ants out of the woodwork. Brad's prayers were being answered left and right. His prayers were absolutely a lifeline. I was such a tangle of emotions, I needed prayer morning, noon, and night. I was just too frazzled to find the words to pray. Although, despite who I was, God faithfully showed up to carry me as I slipped down the emotional rapids.

My (married to each other) friends, Shelly and Steve (who I adore), are professional garage-sale aficionados. They somehow tuned into my desperate



need to make sense out of chaos and swooped in with flea-market-size folding tables.

My brains were scrambled eggs as I walked around looking for a pen that was behind my ear. I had to give them power of attorney to mark prices, especially on the big stuff like our armoire or the precious rocking chair I had nursed Holly in. That stuff was way too painful to price. Someone else had to

step in and take charge. Shelly was perfect for the part. "We know set-up like the back of our hands."

I don't even remember asking anyone in particular to come help. It is a blur how they found out. I must have told them, but somehow, my friends Leah, Paula, Joy, Janeen, and Robin also all showed up that day to help me get prepped.

At the end of that Friday I was in many shattered pieces - clinging, saying goodbye to the many things we had collected over the years. Every item in the house was up for scrutiny. So many memories attached to all that stuff. I remember going through a similar process when I left him when Holly was 6. That was a mini version; a dress rehearsal. This was the real deal. It was all so surreal. I watched from the sidelines (as if my body and spirit belonged to someone else) in disbelief that I actually had enough courage to follow through and walk away from him, for good.

At the close of the afternoon and what marked the official beginning of the weekend, much to my surprise, Willie drove up. Wow, better late than never. Had he really reworked his plans to go to San Francisco to come help? Could this be? A change of heart?

He looked deeply shocked and grieved. He had come to tell me that our dear friend Rob had died a sudden, unexpected death. Rob was married to one of my lifelong best friends, Mindy. Rob was also an architect with an amazing gift

in his field. He designed award-winning, magazine-cover-type homes. We moved back to Hawaii when Willie graduated from architecture school so he could work with and learn from Rob. We were at each other's weddings and they were probably the couple we were closest to in the whole world. We had major history together. In the midst of boxes, price stickers, heaps of trash, and an almost completely prepped garage sale, I collapsed on the cold, cracked, concrete garage floor and wept about the loss of our friend Rob.

Willie stayed long enough for us to reach Mindy on the phone and express our grief and concern. We looked at each other in stunned silence. That put things in a completely different perspective. A few tears rolled down his cheeks and there was a moment of silence. Then he backed his car out of the driveway and drove off to his weekend in San Francisco. I called Brad ... *again*! Brad prayed.

## 28. Sold Out

Morning came way too soon. The sharks were circling our driveway eager to chomp down on a good deal. Some came as early as an hour before doors opened.

I called Brad. He prayed for a successful sale and that we would sell out and that God would bless me beyond measure.

People kept coming nonstop the entire day. All kinds of people showed up. Neighbors, friends, carloads of families, folks on bikes, some just passing by. It was amazing to watch all the different types of people and the insanity of the psychology of trying to score a deal. Sometimes I just gave the stuff away. I was determined to get rid of it all.

Still reeling from the news of the death of our friend, our stuff didn't have as much of a grip on me anymore. Since Willie didn't seem to have any interest in his stuff, I priced all of his tools and set them out for sale. They got scooped up instantly, except for the random ones he asked me to "set aside."

One of the pastors from my church stumbled upon the sale and when he learned that this was a "divorce/distress sale" he asked if he could pray with me. I was grateful for those prayers. I hung on every word.

A little while later a random "customer" interested in my bar stools asked: "Is this a happy sale?" "Oh yes." I instantly replied. "I'm thrilled." As he and I talked about the bar stools and how they were exactly what he had been praying for,

we discovered we were both Christians. Then the walls came down. He said he felt the spirit of oppression as he walked from room to room looking at the bigger pieces of furniture for sale. "Well, I'm actually getting a divorce after 28 years," I confessed. He instantly felt moved to pray for me. Again I hung on every word.

Late morning, there was still a constant stream of activity. I excused myself to catch the phone and let Holly and her best friend Megan, along with my friend Paula, keep watch. It was Amy, the gal who was selling me the house.

"Robyn, I have some hard news to tell you. I have gotten an all-cash offer and another offer is on its way this afternoon. I need to consider these." Her words felt like the jolt of a huge earthquake. I instantly felt nauseous. First the blows from Willie, abandonment and the news of his girlfriend; then our friend dying, and now this.

A million thoughts caved in on me at once. I was to be out of my house in three weeks. Where was I supposed to go and what about all my stuff? I could barely make it through the conversation. We had a verbal agreement but nothing was in solid writing yet. We were going to do it right after the garage sale. We had the escrow company all lined up and dates for me to move in and the movers all scheduled.

Progress had gotten slightly delayed for various reasons, but certainly not derailed. I was in shock and then absolutely terrified of letting go of my house to then just free fall into nothingness. She had me over a barrel and she knew it.

That was all I could take. I was hysterical with grief. I had no more protective layers. No reserves or ability to hold back the flood of emotions as the damn of despair, loss upon loss, jolted me. My world was crumbling and I could only walk into the garage long enough to mumble to the girls what had just happened.

The bewildered garage sale shoppers looked up for a moment and then got back to the order of their day. I fled to the back of the house, closed and locked the door and crumbled on the carpeted floor. I curled up into a tight ball and rocked as I sobbed, hands tucked in upon my chest. I felt the most helpless I had ever felt. There was a knock on the door. It was Megan. She wanted to come in and pray for me. How sweet and precious was that amidst all the pain? By the grace of God, I was able to take in her loving kindness. Another, deep, bonding moment with Megs.

Yet again, I called Brad. Brad prayed a covering over me, and my home. He was completely confident that God had it all under control and that no matter what the outcome, he assured me that it would all work out. He reminded me to give all my worries and concerns to the Lord. His words were used to keep me sane in a time when the floor seemed to be falling out from under me. I was on shaky ground and could barely stand up to function.

The peace of God that transcends all understanding, miraculously settled on me. I had read those words in scripture, countless times. In that moment they became three-dimensional. I called Amy back and begged her to have a meeting with me at the end of the day. With faith the size of a mustard seed, I went back to face the garage sale.

People kept coming all afternoon. I have had garage sales since I was in my twenties. Never in all those experiences had I witnessed anything close to this. This thing was truly the mother of all garage sales. Items kept being “exactly” what people were looking for. By three o’clock only the dregs were left. A man who had been there in the morning came by with a truck and offered to take what was left to poor families he knew were in need. It just blessed him to do that and he was delighted to take every single thing out of my garage, including odd scraps of wood and metal for an artist he knew would make a sculpture from these things. He also took all the old paint cans and more challenging chemical items to recycle or dump. Everything! The garage was empty and spotless when he drove off. Surely he was an angel sent by the Lord.

With some hugs and more prayers from Megan and Holly, I pulled it together to go meet Amy. We met in the backyard of the little sage house, in a small storage shed she had used for bodywork sessions. We had our powwow in there. I sat cross-legged on the floor and literally cried and begged her, as a single mom, to take pity on me. I had to come up with \$12,000 more dollars to match the supposed, all-cash offer.

She wanted me to have the house and expressed how hard this whole thing was on her. She made it about her. She also said it was important to her who she passed the house on to. For all those months the house sat there with no offers. Both of us felt that this house was meant to be mine. How odd that this weekend, right before entering escrow, two offers came in. It made me want the house even more! This time we signed legal paperwork (and we were in escrow first thing Monday morning)!



I tried to ask details about the other offers. She said one was from a neighbor's brother. After all was said and done and I got to know that neighbor I asked her about her brother's offer. She said there was never an offer. Just a very casual comment about him wondering how much the house was on the market for. Wow ... I was gutted.

## 29. Cha-Cha-Cha-Changes...

With the garage sale behind me, and the house deal sealed, I could now wrestle with the thought about whether to fly to Hawaii to be at Rob's memorial. There was quite a bit of cash in hand from the garage sale; way more than I had expected. Instantly my next steps became apparent.

My flight out was less than 48 hours away. My return flight would bring me back three days before the movers came to whisk my houseful of remaining items off to our new abode. Holly-girl went to stay at her dad's, Wesley-dog went to the kennel and I went to Kona.

It wasn't until my seatbelt was fastened on the plane that I could breathe a normal breath. I needed the flight time to decompress and regroup. It was time to switch gears. Curious timing, this trip to Kona. Actually, perfect timing, really.

Hawaii was so foundational to my relationship with Willie. We met in Kona when I was 22 and he was 27. I was teaching aerobics classes and he was building a sci-fi house in the jungle, on a lava flow for Terence McKenna. According to Wikipedia, Terence Kemp McKenna (November 16, 1946 – April 3, 2000) was a writer, philosopher, and ethnobotanist. He was noted for his many speculations on the use of psychedelic, plant-based hallucinogens, and subjects ranging from shamanism, the development of human consciousness, and novelty theory.

Willie and his buddy Pedro often needed a break from slamming hammers in the jungle and would make the long trek down the lava flow to town. They used to come to my aerobics classes to meet women! One day I bumped into Willie at an intersection and he asked if he could stay at my house to catch an early flight to Maui to see Bob Marley and the Whalers. "Only if I can go with you!" was my response.

From that point forward, we were an item. We moved in together a few months later and quickly decided to move back to California so Willie could begin the hurdle process towards his degree in architecture. We picked Sebastopol,

largely due to our connection with Terence, whose main residence was there. We lived there long enough for Willie to get some general ed stuff handled at the local city college before stepping it up at the University of Oregon in Eugene.

We met in Kona and then moved back to Kona six years later, once Willie finished school. When the thought of moving back to Kona, so Willie could apprentice with Rob, was on the table for discussion, I was conflicted. I had already moved from Kona to California then from California to Eugene, Oregon. Each time we moved I re-established my work and friendships. Starting over meant re-building my aerobic and massage clientele. Initially Eugene was all about the U of O architecture program, but much to my delight, it didn't take me long to love my life there.

When thoughts of moving back to Kona came back around, I was reluctant to pry myself loose yet again without a marriage commitment. So I did what I would never advise anyone to do ... I gave Willie an ultimatum to marry me. Proposals and ultimatums are mutually exclusive. Therefore, I never knew the joy of being asked and being valued.

There was no ring to symbolize the joyous intent to wed. Once we were married, the ring to celebrate the union was a cheap ring I picked out with a zirconium for a diamond. Not long after the wedding he stopped wearing his ring. It was an obvious statement, really. "You can get me to marry you, but you can't get me to be emotionally committed to you."

A couple of weeks before he had "the affair" I could sense him slipping further and further from any meaningful connection with me. I knew he was attracted to this "friend" we had made in Kona who had recently moved there from the town I was still pining for, Eugene. That was the main thing we had in common with her and her husband.

Three months after we met them, he got murdered and stuffed in the trunk of a car! We were with her the night she found out! Not long after that I noticed all kinds of chemistry going on between them. It made me really uncomfortable so I brought it up to both of them. "Yeah, I'm attracted to her, so what? Haven't you had any attractions to people since you've known me?"

She said, "Oh you are just insecure."

Once again he wanted to make another major move. This time from Kona back to Santa Cruz because he thought his long-term prospects would be greater

there (he was right). I didn't resist as much this time because life in Kona felt insular. He proposed that we move into the downstairs of Lisa's house to help her with her rent (now that her husband had died) and to help us reduce our rent to then save money to pay for air tickets back to the mainland for a job-scouting trip.

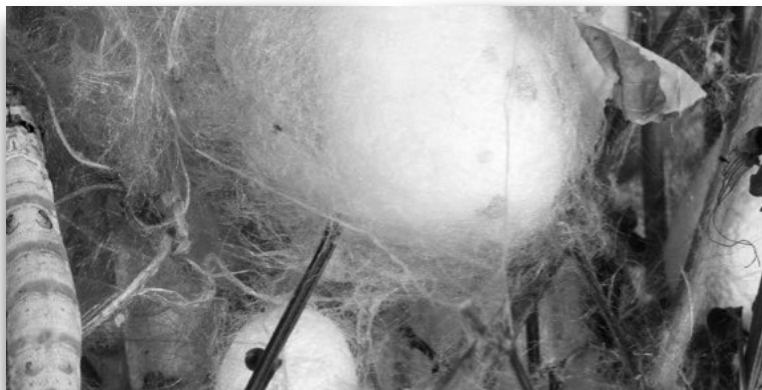
**(FLASHBACK)** Lisa and I had planned a trip to Scotland to go to the famous New Age spiritual community, Findhorn. From there I was going to fly to London to visit family for a week and then catch up with Willie on the mainland. This meant there would be a week they would be at the house alone.

The weekend before she and I headed off for Findhorn was my birthday. I could tell he had detached from me and could care less. I felt really threatened by the attention and straying eyes I noticed going in her direction. So in an attempt to rope him back in before we left town, I made weekend getaway plans at a resort for my birthday.

"You don't need to get me anything for my birthday present. I just have one request though. When we go to dinner Saturday night, can you please just wear your wedding ring? *That* can be my present." I felt really pathetic having to request that.

On Saturday night I slipped on my wedding dress (a dress that was not so traditional so I could wear it for other occasions) and took extra time to do my hair. Sitting across from him at the dinner table, he had a blank look on his face. There were no presents or a card to acknowledge it was my birthday and no ring on his finger either.

I was so absolutely crushed, I lost my appetite for dinner. I felt stupid for wearing my wedding dress and humiliated to my core.



The most gnarly, tangled piece forming my furball was a piece I was told by "her" after the "affair." This was the huge unresolved chunk that was enmeshed with the other chunk of furball that had to do

with the confusion of why he would look at that woman at the airport after our big deal counseling session with the pastor. These were the two chunks of furball that had knitted themselves together that fall night while watching *Shop Girl*, and refused to go back down like they always had in the past.

OK so here it is, the piece that tortured me to no end ... the piece that I could not lean on my own understanding to sort out, and the piece that I hid from many. When I did feel safe to disclose this chunky monkey-on-my-back piece of furball, it usually brought forth a gasp!

As the story goes ... and after I put the pieces together from her and him, each night she would invite him upstairs to "hang out." She would make him dinner, they would go for moonlit walks, and stay up talking late. Finally on the last night, they made arrangements for him to take her to a resort for dinner.

As they were getting ready he said: "Let's pretend we are married and I'll go downstairs and put on my wedding ring!"

*She told me this!* Later he confirmed it.

If they had just had wild and crazy sex I could have wrapped my mind around that, as painful as that would be. But this was so out of what I could imagine and bear. He still maintains that after dinner as they were passionately kissing on the beach and trying to decide whether to check into the hotel, that they roped it in. Only God knows. And yes it was a very long time ago (we were all in our 30s) and needs to be put to bed forever, buried in the psychological graveyard once and for all. But before we move on, I just want to say that for years and years I was made to feel bad and wrong for talking about this. Like I was the bad person for telling anyone about it. Never mind what he did. It was "my bad" for telling! I don't write about it now in vengeance. I speak about it because it is part of the story and what happened.

Technically, he felt he didn't have an affair. Kind of like "I did not have "sex" with that woman" means Clinton didn't break his marriage vow of honoring and cherishing his wife. Who writes the rules on this stuff? Since when does passionate kissing (which prostitutes say they don't do because it is too intimate) mean that isn't sex? Since when does being emotionally intimate and kissing another and having to hide what you are doing and sneak around and lie and twist the truth mean you aren't having an affair?

Who says that an affair is only an affair if there is intercourse? I just want to know who makes the dividing line and definition on all of this. Angry, enquiring minds want to know! You bet I was angry.

The more he lied the more "psychic" I got. It was crazy. You know how the Bible tells us we become one with our beloved? Well, the more he lied the more I could see in vision what happened. I could actually close my eyes and see what clothes he was wearing and I could see an image of her standing over the sink rinsing pasta she had made for dinner. I didn't want to see or know any of this stuff. I didn't want to believe that this was true. This was my husband who I loved and had committed my life to.

What was I supposed to do with the information about him wanting to wear our wedding ring and pretend to be married with her yet with me he didn't wear it and "forgot" to wear it to my birthday dinner? The trauma of facing all that was too much for me. I had to integrate it in pieces and without his willingness to truly deal and come clean, the furball began to form and grow and grow and come up and down and up and down over the years.

I felt like I was carrying around a terrible huge secret. I felt ashamed and overwhelmed, frightened, and devastated. And even now as I tell this story I feel guilty because I know a good Christian doesn't keep a record of wrongs. I know that love covers a multitude of sins. I know we aren't supposed to talk bad things about others, turn the other cheek and all ...

Sometimes I feel like it is taboo to speak up and say what happened. For all those judging, I may not be a "good" Christian but I know I'm an honest one! I just know the bow doesn't tie up neat and tidy for all those folks sitting in the pews on Sunday. I bet there are many who really need to talk about what has happened to be able to see how far God can transform them.

The trip back to Kona for Rob's memorial service actually became more about letting go. Returning to the place where Willie and I had met, got married and where he had "the affair" was a part of a huge sandwich of letting go. The top slice was all the craziness of letting go of the house and my life as a family and all the contents that went along with that. The filler in-between was what lay ahead of me in Kona: more revisiting of memories, places and people from our past - yet another layer of emotional and ethereal letting go. The bottom slice was also yet to come, as I returned to face the actual move from "our" home to "my" new one, as well as complete all the rigmarole that was required to be "legally divorced."

I rented a car at the Kona airport and entered into the long, humid line of cars all trying to head back into town. Wow, the traffic had quadrupled since I was there last.

Mindy had no idea I was coming. I planned to just show up and offer my heart and hands anyway I could to be of help or support. I secured a spot at our mutual friend Leslie's estate. Along with Mindy, Leslie was my best friend when I lived in Kona.

Leslie is a sharp tool in the toolbox of life. She just has this way of coming out smelling like a rose, despite whatever rolls her way. This woman has an innate sense of knowing how to apply herself and make huge, dreams come true. I mean really huge dreams. Somehow she developed the business smarts and scrounged up enough bucks to go into the export/import business. She made treks to Bali and scooped up all kinds of treasures that the well-to-do of Kona just had to have to complete their estates. Leslie was always well manicured and has a really fun wit about her.

On one of her buying trips to Bali she scouted out a Balinese man, many years her junior, to help her sort out the logistics of locating, moving, packing, hauling, loading, shipping, and unpacking huge Balinese pieces of furniture, pottery, and miscellaneous artifacts. Later he became her younger lover and, eventually, her sweet husband. Leslie-girl had dated a range of men but as the years passed it just seemed she was going to forever remain single. She just couldn't find a man to keep up with her until she met Maday. After they married she tried to get pregnant and by the time she was almost 50 she reverted to plan B. Respecting her privacy I will skip ahead and say she gave birth to the most gorgeous baby girl, they have named Wayan. She has dark round eyes set amidst big fat round cheeks. She is the absolute happiest and quietest baby I have ever met.

It had been a couple of years since I had seen Leslie so I had never met either of her lovers before. As I drove through the Balinese gates into her gorgeous Hawaiian property, I was instantly transported into mini Bali-land. Wooden carved statues were majestically set along the tropical walking paths that led to their main living pavilion as well as two other thatched-roof traditional guest houses.

The pungent aroma of wild ginger and the way the dirt smelled after a steamy, rain shower combined with the cooing of the local birds, revived my old love for the islands. I felt like I was home again; back on the shores of a distant land

that had nurtured me along a necessary growth pathway of my earlier life. Seeing Leslie with Wayan at her breast just made my heart sing! Leslie sent Maday to the car to heft my huge pink suitcase up the incredibly steep hand-carved steps, up to the thatched-roof guest house that towered high above the ground like a tree house. He carried my suitcase up high sometimes using his head to support it. I could tell this guy had lots of practice hefting and schlepping stuff! It was a magical place to land and take refuge from all the craziness I had just left behind.

As I sat on her bed while she nursed, we caught up about the joys of her marriage and the horrors of mine. She gave me her best advice concerning men. "Never marry an American man!" She had the well-kept secret of success concerning what to look for in a foreign man. I took mental notes.

It was a lovely gift to spend the week with them and to snuggle up with their beautiful baby girl. Forgot how much I love the smell of babies and how healing it is to be in their innocent presence. I started each day walking along the coastline amidst the lava rock. I had the perfect cardio trail with the blue, blue ocean splashing up against the rocks, just minutes down the hill. It was the perfect way to blow out all the toxic thinking I had left the mainland with. Instead I put my little round earphones in my waxy ears and tuned into the great praise songs I had downloaded on my mp3 player.

The first time I drove up to see Mindy, I wasn't sure how I would find her. Her front yard was a parking lot of family and friends' cars. I slipped inside the house unannounced and unnoticed at first. "Oh girlfriend ... thank you soooo much for coming," said my lifelong friend as she moved in to hug me. I slipped in and out of the house all week. There were more than enough helping hands. Amidst all the company I was grateful to have some very special one-on-one moments with my dear sister friend.

One such time was in the afternoon a few days after the memorial service. All the details of making that come together were behind her. We had sat at her dining-room table a few days earlier, pouring through photos of the past. We were attempting to make a life collage for the memorial. We came across some fun photos from our sordid past. The same week I met Mindy when I was 19, I met my new boyfriend Richard. At the time, Mindy was 23, barefoot, and pregnant. Oh, and single! I was so excited to tell my new best girlfriend about my new best boyfriend.

"Is he six foot one and has blond hair and is a surfer?" she asked? "Yup."

"No way...!!!" "Way."

"Richard is my ex-boyfriend," she had said laughing.

The three of us had many fun escapades together in those wild and crazy days in Laguna Beach (I had moved there to go to college).

When I was Richard's girlfriend he was a single dad with full custody of his son Jay. Jay must have been about 7 at the time. Richard had some mysterious business dealings and sometimes he would just disappear for a day or so. On one of those random business trips, he left Jay home with the surfer roommate. I dropped in to find the young Jay abandoned and neglected, like a house pet left home without fresh water and food in its bowl. I scooped him up and brought him to my house until his dysfunctional dad returned from who knows where?

So on the afternoon Mindy and I were sitting on her couch (post memorial) we talked about the photos we found of us with Richard! We laughed at how young and zany we all were.

"Guess what?" she said as her head was starting to clear ... "You are never going to believe who works as a bartender just up the hill."

"Who?" I asked, so excited because I knew this was going to be great! "Jay!"

"NO WAY," I said, almost out the door. "Way," she said grabbing her keys!



It was just days before Halloween. The bar was decorated with tacky velvet spiders and cotton-candy type webs all over. Neon beer signs welcomed us through the door. She told me Jay had won some type of local award for concocting a signature martini or was it a margarita?

Oh my gosh! There he was, the little Jay-man, behind the bar. Only he wasn't so little and he had really turned into a man!

"Jay-man! Wakie, wakie. You aren't dreaming! Flash from the past!"

He recognized us right away. We were like two decrepit old aunties crawling out of the Halloween woodwork! Now this is the part that stunned me ... (as if



he hadn't skipped a beat and it was only yesterday), he looked me in the eyes and said:

"I want to thank you for coming and rescuing me that time my dad left me."

Tears instantly welled up in my eyes. I had completely forgotten all about that. And he was only about 7. I was looking out of what felt like ancient eyes into the soul of this man's eyes. We had had a connection and bond all those years ago. How magical to get to see each other now. I felt like I had just gone swimming with a dolphin or something!

We went and sat down at a table so he could fill some drink orders. Mindy and I were squealing and laughing like we were 20 again. Jay came over with his cellphone flipped open and said:

"My dad wants to talk to you!"

Instant reunion! We took turns talking to Richard, who was always a player and great for classic one-liners. Once a player, always a player.

When Richard heard about our status, Mindy now a widow and I on my way to divorce land, his choice comment was:

"You girls are prime real-estate!"

We just shook our heads and laughed. Some things never change!

## 30. R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Every night I would climb the carved steep steps to the guest-house amidst the trees at Leslie's. I felt like a princess up there. Being on baby schedule, they went to bed early, which gave me sweet alone time up in the tower. There was no electricity up there and only a potty chamber. It was primitive and elegant at the same time.

I slept in a honeymoon bed that had a wedding veil of gauze all around it to keep out the creepy-crawlies. It was tranquil and lush and magical up there. Every night I would climb into the wedding bed and talk to Brad for hours. He would make me laugh and laugh. We would talk and talk and talk.

Just being in Kona brought forth so many past skeletons. He would patiently listen and add compassionate comments. And of course he would constantly be praying throughout our conversations.

On the eve of the last night I was on the island, I climbed the stairs to the haven of the guesthouse amidst the trees. The air was windy and thick with humidity. The clouds moved quickly across the sky, playing hide and seek with the full moon. As this trip was winding down and I once again was going back to face more letting go and the hugeness of the move ahead of me, Brad prayed: "Lord I pray that you would reveal yourself in a very personal way, so Robyn can know just how much you love and cherish her."

The next day I went about saying my goodbyes to friends, land and sea. Goodbye to memories of meeting, marrying, and my past life with Willie there. I even happened to walk right past the jewelry store where I had bought my own wedding ring. One more memory to say goodbye to.

By dinner-time I was feeling quiet and reflective. I decided to celebrate the end of my old life and the beginning of my new life by taking myself on a dinner date. Ironically, I brought along a book I was reading by Joyce Myers called *The Confident Woman* and asked for a table for one, at O's, (my then favorite restaurant in Kona).

Head held high, what the heck, I ordered the three-course special. After all, this was a celebration date so I gave myself permission to order anything off the menu I liked! I enjoyed every bite, down to the last licking of bread scraping up the remaining sauce on my plate. I didn't feel at all like I was dining alone. I remember many lonely dinners out sitting across from my emotionally unavailable husband. In that moment, in that place, I felt like I was sitting across from my true husband, God. I felt Him there celebrating with me.

The restaurant was rather slow. I noticed the waiter paying a lot of attention to a pregnant woman sitting at the bar. She must have been his wife because he escorted her out to the parking lot. I waited for him to return to ask for my check. I was in no rush – just savoring the moment and the peace I was feeling. I paid my bill and as I almost got to my car the waiter ran out after me.

"Excuse me, mam." I figured I must have accidentally left my credit card there. He was obviously nervous and fumbling. "Ah ... mam, I have something I think I am supposed to tell you."

I was confused. "Yes ..." "Well-uh, I feel like I am supposed to tell you that you are a woman of dignity and well ... *you are to be respected* (he said that last bit with very heavy emphasis).

I was dumbfounded. "Uh-what?" I couldn't believe he was saying that to me. This time when he repeated himself he was way more emphatic and confident.

"You are a woman of dignity and you are to be respected." The words landed like a bull's-eye directly into the center of my heart. "You have no idea what those words mean to me. I am just ending a 28-year marriage and my husband didn't value me."

He responded, "God told me to tell you that."

"Are you a Christian? I asked incredulously.

"Yes, I am, and God prompted me to tell you that and I was hesitant at first. I used to be a man that didn't value my wife because that is how my dad treated my mom. Then I became a Christian and God got a hold of me." I was deeply touched. Beyond words ... I couldn't wait to climb back up into the tree house and nestle on the wedding bed and call Brad. Just the night before, he had prayed that God would show me how much He loved me. Wow. It couldn't have gotten any more personal than that!

## 31. Divine Divorce

Flying home the next day it was Halloween and surely I was on cloud nine! I kept hearing him say: "You are to be respected!!!" What a concept! Loved that!

I arrived back at the house just in time to see a few ghosts and goblins parading through my neighborhood. Holly came home with a pillowcase full of candy.

"Holly-girl! I wasn't sure if you would be here. How did you get here?" "Oh dad and his girlfriend brought me up to the house."

Then she proceeded to tell me how while I was on cloud nine flying home, he had toured his girlfriend through the house. Those words hit me as if I was kicked in my solar plexus. It had been six months since he moved out and by now I had transformed the place into my personal living space. I was flabbergasted at the thought of him taking her through my bedroom, my bathroom, my kitchen. I was outraged and ready to take the plunge into the pit when I remembered what the waiter had said to me ...

"God told me to tell you ...you are a woman to be respected."

I was so mad and I called him and blasted him: "I can't believe you toured her through the house without at least asking my permission or giving me any warning. I will be moved out of her in a few short days and the house will be sitting here vacant. You could have brought her here then."

"Oh just grow up and get over it!" was his heartless response.

Wow! I was shocked. I could have imagined him saying: "Oh I didn't realize that would have offended you. Sorry about that ..." But I really and truly was shocked at how heartless, insensitive and cold he was.

It was such a huge gift from the Holy Spirit to have those words the waiter had spoken to me, etched into my mind. Once again I experienced the blows of disrespect yet God's love and value for me eased the pain, like never before.

Brad prayed me through the last of the packing and right on through the move.

The movers showed up right on schedule and within two days everything was unpacked and put away. All art was hung on the wall. Cable was all hooked up. I was back in business. As I moved from room to room in my cozy new house, I couldn't believe how easy the move went.

Brad and I continued to speak to each other for hours every day. On the weekends four to six hours could pass in one conversation! It was amazing! Sometimes I would tell him I had to go soon and then an hour would pass! Brad missed his calling as a stand-up comedian, but night after night, he practiced on me. What therapy to laugh that much amidst so many teary days.

As the days drew closer to Christmas I proposed an idea. "Brad we have gotten so close. Holly is going with her dad for Christmas. Would you like to come down here and spend some days together in real time?"

"Well ... I could come down there and help you build out your storage shed." We made plane and hotel reservations for him to be here for five days.

Once the house sold, Willie and I had been trying to hammer out our settlement. Things went from bad to ugly. We could not converse about anything without animosity and power struggles.

I went back to consult with one of the top lawyers I had met with previously and just by sheer accident found out we were scheduled for a court appearance in a week's time! Supposedly when Willie had filed for divorce several months earlier, this information was told to him and apparently came in the mail to us. It didn't register for either of us, until the lawyer pointed it out.

We missed our turn and had to sit through several other cases. At one point, the lawyer I had consulted was going to bat for his client. He seemed to have great rapport with the judge. This lawyer had a fabulous batting average winning most all of his cases. I leaned over and whispered into Willie's ear.

"See that lawyer up there? See how much the judge listens to and respects him? That lawyer is one of the top lawyers in the county and wins most all of his cases. Oh yeah, and that lawyer ... that is my lawyer!"

I think that put the fear of God in him! The judge had us go back and file some technical papers. After we walked out of the courtroom, Willie suggested we go directly to the office of the woman who we filed our divorce with. She would be able to help us push the necessary papers and avoid the long line outside the courtroom. I excused myself for a moment and called Brad and asked him to pray.

When we arrived at her office, Tiffany was on the phone. She was a spunky woman with a can-do attitude. After Willie introduced me, she said she had read an article that the local newspaper had done about me regarding my book. She said she really enjoyed reading that and sort of treated me like I was a mini celebrity.

We began airing our dirty laundry in her office as we tried to get dates and paperwork sorted out. In the most amazing way she seemed to pick up on our dynamic by osmosis. And in even more of an amazing way she was able to convey to me that she had been in a marriage dynamic like ours. For whatever reason, she felt inspired to offer us her services.

"I would be willing to help you guys through your divorce. I can mediate with you and I think we can knock it out in one session. I would be willing to do that for \$300."

Immediately Willie was up for it. I think he looked at the threat of that lawyer we had just heard in the courtroom and the cost of battling it out in that fashion compared to this option. I liked her immediately. We agreed on the spot to

give it a try. She sent us home with paperwork to fill out to prepare for our meeting.

I owe that woman BIG TIME! God used her in a mighty way. Truly, by a miracle, we banged out a final deal in the course of four long hours with Tiffany. We were only on her schedule for two hours. In the middle of the first hour, her client who was scheduled after us, called to cancel. This opened up her schedule so we could ride it on out.

It literally felt like God was parting the sea so I could walk on through to freedom. At the conclusion of the session, she had legally documented everything. It was a done deal and she was the clerk who would hand-deliver it to the court. It was finished! So our divorce settlement cost us \$300.

I got just about everything I asked for as well as medical coverage for the next five years. That would have cost me many thousands of dollars had I gone with a lawyer. The divorce was final and would show up on the books technically, Jan. 2 (for tax purposes).

Willie walked me to my car. It was the oddest thing. He gave me a little peck on my cheek and literally said: "It has been nice knowing ya," and turned and walked away.

It was so trivial and light. What a strange sense of humor. I couldn't believe I had spent twenty eight years loving this man and trying to the best of my ability to get through all this hurt and betrayal and pain to have it end with: "It's been nice knowing ya!"

I had to remind myself again, this was precisely all part of why I had to keep moving forward. I got in my car and turned on the ignition. The Christian radio station came on with the start of the car playing a song whose lyrics were: "I am free to love, I am free to live ... !"

I felt such incredible waves of gratitude. I turned the motor off and was compelled to run back upstairs and thank Tiffany. I could barely contain my appreciation. "Thank you sooo much! I can't believe what a gift you are!" I hugged her and wanted to kiss her feet! Or wash them or shine her shoes or something!

"You know I have never really done that before but I just knew I could help you two. I've also never seen so much peace in the room with two people getting a divorce."

"Well, that was the power of God," I said, because that was the absolute, honest truth!

Then she said: "So much of my job is really hard and stressful and not very rewarding. But every once in a while I can sense I can be of help and this was one of those times and makes what I do so worth it."

I left her office and prayed and thanked God and wept all the way to the grocery store. I had to run into Trader Joe's to pick up a few dinner items. I could not wait to get home and call Brad and celebrate what God had done!

Just as I was heading in the front door, I mean exactly at the same moment ... Willie was heading in too! How weird was that? It was so strange. He grabbed his shopping cart and I grabbed mine. Within hours we were officially divorced and had turned into strangers. He had his cart and I had mine and we were free to fill them however we so desired without consulting each other.

"Have a nice life." "Yeah, you too!" we said awkwardly to each other as he headed down one aisle and I went down another ...

## 32. Surprise Christmas

Only three days until Brad would arrive. As the days were drawing closer for his arrival, I noticed some interesting mixed messages coming from him. I was growing more and more attached to him and was very eager to see what it was going to be like to spend real-life, face-to-face time with him. Based on his past relationship history he had major issues around rejection. And although I don't feel free to share details, I will say the man he had been all those months suddenly transformed into someone else, that night on the phone. He crossed a line with me in a way that came out of left field. As if possessed, he began talking very erotically to me. I tried to divert him but he was hell-bent on getting a fix of some sort or another. I was like a deer in headlights. I had never experienced anything like this. He was so unlike the prayerful Brad I had spent hours getting to know.

I sensed he sabotaged our relationship. I think he was afraid of true intimacy or afraid I was going to reject him once I spent one-on-one time with him. God only knows. It was definitely scary behavior way out of control and out of my league of understanding. All I know is it got really weird and the long and the short of it was his trip south to spend Christmas with me was off!

From that point forward he refused to talk with me. I got a deeply disturbing email filled with self-loathing and shame. He sounded like an incredibly tortured man. There was no processing or way to work things out or come to completion ... Just one huge lopping off. Like an invisible wall came slicing down separating our daily connection into no connection, whatsoever, ever again! Finito. Finished. Done. Over. Just like that!

I had no choice. He wouldn't answer his phone or return any emails. I had to go cold turkey. Wham ... Felt like I got smacked upside the head, out of nowhere. I sat on my couch reeling. If I were a cartoon character, there would have been stars and tweets swirling around my head.

I called up my two closest girlfriends, Roslyn and Sharon and brought them up to speed. They were both concerned that I had already gone on a Christian dating site and met someone, when my marriage wasn't even final yet. They felt that I was in no shape to be dating and who knows what scary dude I might attract and subject Holly to, given the shape I was in after my marriage.

They were absolutely right to have those concerns. I was a tangled mess and hungry for connection and validation combined with a strong longing to find what I had never had.

Sharon wrote me an email and said she was concerned about the choices I was making. She seemed angry and upset with me and would not return any emails I sent her. Another wall slammed down separating our once close connection to no connection. Bam ... Just like that. More cold turkey!

I sat on my couch the entire day after Brad and Sharon stopped talking to me. I just stared out into space except for random e-mail checking to see if either had changed their minds. Two days passed. No emails or phone messages. On the third day when I went to check my emails there was one that said "you have mail." I had three days left until my subscription with Christian Mingles (the dating site I met Brad on), would expire.

It was a guy named Jim from Mt. Shasta and I forget exactly what he said. Something like he enjoyed reading my profile and he also likes to live a healthy lifestyle and something or else other. I scanned his profile. He had also been in a long-term marriage, twenty-something years. He had photos posted of himself in a wet-suite with his surfboard, one of him at the Grand Canyon and one of him cross-country skiing. And he said something about him being a really "transparent guy" and how honesty really mattered to him.



I wrote a brief response back acknowledging his email and before I knew it, we were chatting email to email and then IM to IM. He seemed very honest and relaxed and low-key. I started running circles around him with my typing speed. Out of nowhere I had a million questions I wanted to ask him.

"How has it been for you on this dating site? How many woman have you dated from here? How long have you been divorced? Was your ex a Christian ...?"

He was painstakingly slow hunting and pecking his way to respond. It was frustrating for both of us. Finally it just made more sense to get on the phone and chat.

"I am in no shape to be talking to anyone." "Oh really? How come?"

"Well, my marriage of 28 years died a year ago November but it won't be official until Jan. 2 (about two weeks away). And besides that ..." I told him the whole Brad story.

"He was supposed to come here and spend Christmas and help me build out my shed. Now he isn't coming and my daughter will be with my ex and I will spend my first Christmas all alone." I was feeling way sorry for myself.

"Well I am in between jobs and there is so much snow up here I wouldn't mind getting out of town. I am a contractor and I can help you build out your shed."

"No way. I don't even know you!"

"Well you can call some references. Here is the phone number for my ex-girlfriend. We are still really good friends. I am finishing up a little side job at her house. Also here is the number for my old neighbors who lived next door to me while I was married. Let's just pray about it."

Hmm ... I thought after we hung up. He sounded very sincere and I sure could use the help on my shed. It would be nice to have some company for Christmas. So I called his references.

"Jim, like I said ... I'm in no shape to be in a relationship. I am only interested in friendships at this time. And you would have to stay at a hotel."

"Sure that is fine." So he showed up the day before Christmas Eve.

I was preoccupied with missing Brad and the rejection from Sharon. I was thinking this could be a long couple of days ahead of me. What if he was totally boring or weird?

His ex-girlfriend assured me he was very safe and a nice guy and that he did excellent carpentry work. So at the very least he would be helpful. I really didn't expect much and to be honest, I was pretty low-key about the whole thing. I was feeling kind of frumpy and didn't have much juice or desire to pull it together. I wore my jeans and a plain long-sleeved shirt with my gray zip-up fleece jacket. No make-up. Just plain old, what you see is what you get, why bother ... me.

I just wanted this whole thing to be as relaxed as possible. I was hoping I could simply make a safe new friend, get the shed thing handled and have a decent Christmas. That would be great. Period. Just get through this holiday season and get on with the New Year, sort of thing!

When his white truck drove up I went out to greet him. After my experience when first meeting Brad, I wasn't sure what to expect. I started to get nervous. I liked him the minute he stepped out of his truck. Much to my surprise Jim looked better in person than he did in his photos. That really caught me off-guard. In his photos I saw he had a bald top and graying bottom. In person it was actually a pleasant surprise. I had really enjoyed the sound of his voice over the phone. I liked it even more in person. All of a sudden I was feeling awkward and geeky. I was fumbling around. Tripping over myself, I explained:

"If I were a cartoon character I would be Mr. Magoo." It didn't take me more than ten minutes to prove my point. I was touring Jim around my house and then took him to see the shed he was going to work on. We hadn't been in the backyard for five minutes when I said:

"Ew, what smells?"

I looked down and I had stepped in puppy poo! Great ice-breaker! Jim immediately got on it. He scraped it off and hosed my shoe down!

"Just call me Miss Magoo!"

"Hey, want to go for a walk along the boardwalk down by the pier?" It was a gorgeous day.

"Sure."

We found a parking spot near the lighthouse and he came around and opened the car door for me. Couldn't remember when someone had done that.

We strolled and I asked a million questions. He seemed calm and sincere. "Hey, do you want to go mini-golfing?" I asked.

"Sure, that sounds like fun."

It was *really fun*! Surprisingly fun! I know this sounds crazy but he had his shirtsleeves pushed up toward his elbows exposing the most lovely, manly, silky, hairy arms. Something about that was really attractive. I just filed that away somewhere amidst the answers to the questions he was giving me.

"Can I take you out to dinner tonight?" "Sure!"

I even put on a little make-up before we headed out. Not only did he open the car door for me every time I got in or out, but he also pulled the chair out for me at dinner.

"I could get used to this!"

We had a relaxed, pleasant dinner at a local fish house. We came back to the house and he left shortly for his hotel.

"See you in the morning. Sleep well. Thanks so much for driving here and for dinner."

"Wow, that went well," I thought to myself as he drove away. Better than I had expected.

The next day was Christmas Eve. After breakfast Jim unloaded his tools and began building me shelves and storage compartments in my shed. I made plans for us to go to Christmas Eve dinner with my friends Louise and Tod (the same Louise who had led me to the Lord). They were now only three blocks away and ever since I had moved, they came over all the time. After dinner we were going to go to a candlelight service at church and then on to a resort by the beach for dessert.

At about four Jim decided a little nap would be nice before the evening ahead of us. He went to lie down on Holly's bed. I lay down on my bed and stared at the ceiling. All of a sudden it hit me. Willie and Holly were down at his dad's. That was where we had Christmas most years, especially when his mom was still alive. They were there with Willie's three sisters, two husbands, one

boyfriend and nieces and nephew. I missed all of them, particularly the kids. Tears welled up in my eyes and my heart felt heavy and deeply grieved.

There was a strange, unfamiliar man in the next room. All of a sudden I missed my family terribly. I missed the safety of the familiar. I missed the tradition and known. The pain was searing. Oh that grief thing. It has such a life of its own. Just when I thought I was over it, bam it would hit me! I heard puppy stirring, so I hurried to follow him so he wouldn't jump on the resting Jim. He could see I had been crying.

"Would you like a hug?"

Holly has a mattress on the floor. I practically dove into his arms. More tears welled up.

"It's OK to let those tears out," he said gently. "Would you like to cuddle?" he asked politely.

I nodded my head yes. I was really, really feeling it! Deep sadness, like death. Being comforted seemed like a primal need right then. Jim felt really safe yet very unfamiliar. So we lay there like spoons. He wrapped himself around me like a human body shield protecting me from the waves of pain splashing up against my heart. He rubbed my back with the most compassionate touch. I melted like butter and began reciting a new mantra that uncontrollably uttered forth.

"Yum, yum, yum! Yum!"

Not in my wildest dreams could I have imagined that he would have had such a deliciously nurturing touch. The most nurturing touch I had ever felt. What a complete surprise! A very sweet one at that!

I didn't want to ever get up from that spot. Alas it was time to dress for dinner and meet up with Louise and Tod. Reluctantly we untangled ourselves. I felt like I was pulling myself away from a deeply, healing, therapeutic session. Jim was soft, open, willing and compassionate. All the while being gentle and respectful. Sweet, very sweet!

We had the most, lovely Christmas Eve together. By midnight we found ourselves outside by a blazing firepit at the resort hotel we went to for dessert. The two guys were playing guitars and we all sang Christmas songs.

It wasn't a white Christmas, but it was a magical one. Christmas day was the most peaceful one I have ever had. I don't remember anything about food or much about presents but I remember snuggling and talking, talking, talking about everything until the wee hours of the night. Sometimes we would just be still and quiet too. I think this part of a relationship is one of the most precious parts. Since there is no history yet, there are no wounds. Each one is still entering into the dance solo, open, vulnerable, soft. We could feel the preciousness of the moment and we clung to it forsaking sleep.

It was as if we were in a bubble. No phones ringing. No family dynamics. No getting caught up in the ritual of the holidays with any strings of have-to's attached. We were removed from all of that. He was falling and so was I. The endorphins were racing. I was bound and determined to keep the lines straight between us. However, there was no way we could help ourselves from many cuddle sessions.

"Yum, yum, yum," was all I could say as I melted away and drifted in and out of sleep.

### 33. Death of A Friend, Death of a Friendship

The pull between us was so strong that after five days Jim said, "I can't imagine just driving off and living six hours apart and having just a phone relationship."

"I can't either."

Since he was in-between jobs and nothing was holding him in Mt. Shasta, he decided to move to be close to me so we could have a chance to really get to know each other in real-life time on a daily basis.

My bachelor friend Bill, who is a doctor, has a gorgeous, big old house. He was once married to Holly's best friend's mom. He kindly agreed to rent Jim a room until he could find something else. Since he was looking for work anyway, it seemed like he might have a better chance fishing in a bigger pond than up there in Mt. Shasta.

In less than a week of meeting we were in his truck going up to Shasta to pack up his cabin. I wanted to go with him to see who he was in his environment. The night before we left, Louise called and was insistent that I meet her at a local coffee shop. She wouldn't take no for an answer.

In the most loving way (she should give lessons on this), she let me know her sister-in-Christ concerns. Coming fully prepared, she had actually gone out and bought me a DVD called *Kiss Dating Good-bye*, and suggested we watch it more than once! She wasn't thrilled to hear that I was going with him up to Shasta. I never felt judged, just loved and cared about. Her words were bold, but given in the spirit of love. I appreciated her sisterly concern.

Jim moved in with Bill and spent much of his time looking for work locally. It was lovely to have him close by and to continue to get to know him. Time was rolling forward as seasons of life were shifting dramatically. Whereas December marked the bliss of new beginnings; February brought unexpected closure, finality, and death.

**(FLASHBACK)** Not long after the affair, Willie and I moved back to California. We were invited over to Willie's cousin Les' house for dinner. His wife Vera had just had a baby. When we went to knock on their door there was a plaque that said: "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord." Being fully entrenched in the New Age, I remember being really put off by that.

Over the years, Vera and I became more than family. After I became a Christian our relationship took on a much deeper dimension and we were beyond in-laws together, we were now sisters in Christ. Every Thanksgiving the extended family of close to thirty, would meet at Aunt Bea's (Les' mom) house. Being that Vera and I were from the outside looking in (in-laws) to the core family members, we processed the group dynamics together sometimes in prayer sometimes in passion. As our bond grew, I felt more and more able to open up to her with my story and pain from my marriage. She was the only family member who knew all the details. She was faithful to pray for me and often called me to go walking.

Early January, I got a caring email from her wanting to know how I was doing since selling the house and moving. We hadn't gone walking since the divorce was final and she wanted to catch up. Just weeks later she was dead! Unthinkable. She was young, healthy, thin, and vibrant. My friend, sister, confidante; so sudden, so shocking, so incomprehensible. She had an aneurysm and heart attack. Within days she was gone.

First Rob died in October and now Vera. It is an odd thing for me when people die. It is as though the space they occupied in their body here on earth is now permanently vacant. Like they have been sucked out in space through a black hole taking them to an invisible vortex. And once on the other side, all that

remains is their empty space back on earth. And of course the memories. So many flooded into my mind the morning I got the news she died.

Her death made me look at my own mortality. I felt my fears and vulnerability about being single, alone to face sudden illness and hardship without the connection of family. Grieving Vera brought up my grief of letting go of the entire family I had been a part of all those years. In the days leading up to her death, I found myself on the phone with many of those family members. When I called Willie the morning she died, to tell him the news, I was out of my mind with grief and despair.

"I miss our life together as a family. I am so sad about our marriage ending." I sobbed and convulsed in waves of grief. He was detached, distant.

Those words echoed in my head all day and slammed the door shut to my nostalgic feelings or any regrets. After the blow of that phone call, Jim was right there to hold me as I sobbed into his shoulder.

Of all days, I was scheduled to do my first live TV appearance as a guest on a local access show. How on earth was that going to happen? I could barely stop crying to be able to eat breakfast. Jim prayed and helped me round up all the ingredients I needed to take to the studio.

The one redeeming thing about having Vera die on that day was there was absolutely no room in my emotional basket to entertain thoughts of being scared in front of the camera. None of that mattered in comparison to the death of my friend. What was blundering on a TV show?

Aside from huge puffy eyes and having a really bad hair day I could not have been more pleased with the calm of the spirit upon me as I went through the motions of being present with the interview and food demonstrations. The peace of God that passes all understanding was made three dimensional, yet again.

Two of three of Willie's sisters came and stayed at my house for the weekend of the memorial service. When Friday night rolled around the sisters headed out to have dinner with Willie and his new girlfriend. It was all so peculiar. Seeing them again and being on the outside of the circle was hard. I wanted back into the known. I wanted my role back in the family. But that had all crumbled away.

The morning of the memorial, the sisters went to meet Willie and his girlfriend for brunch. As the time drew near to enter the sanctuary for the service, I felt

the searing pain of my aloneness. Where was I supposed to sit? Should I sit up front with the family? Do I sit by myself alone in the back? I wanted to sit with Holly but she had gone to brunch with the rest of them. I was completely clueless. I sat in my car in the parking lot and was overwhelmed. Eight hundred people came to her memorial service. I was paralyzed by my grief.

I waited and waited to find the courage to go in and face the finality of it all. As I walked in the sanctuary it was dark and there was a slide show of Vera's life up on the screen. The song *Come Away With Me* by Norah Jones was playing.

Somehow I fumbled in the dark and was led to a seat in the row behind Willie and Holly. He barely acknowledged me out of the corner of his eye.

Images of Vera flashed on the screen. There were so many pictures of family gatherings with all of us; ones of us in the early days of parenting and all the way until the present time. Watching scenes from her life I was also watching and saying goodbye to scenes of my life. Right there in living color on the big screen on stage. I sat in the pew alone crying from the depths of my soul aching for my husband to comfort me. But he was no longer my husband. He was only an arm's length in front of me but he was not there. Everything in me was yelling: "This is so wrong."

Vera. I just couldn't believe she was gone too! I sat there alone, shattered.

All the familiar family I had spent the last twenty Thanksgivings with came. Some didn't even know we were divorced. Others I never got to say goodbye to. The letting go and death was on so many levels.

There was a moment at the reception where I was walking briskly past the table where Willie was sitting. I was hurrying, taking a shortcut to catch a cousin before he was heading out the door. Willie reached out and grabbed my hand, in reflex. He pulled me in close to him. I started sobbing. He stroked my hand with such a tender touch. It was electrical. So confusing. I wanted him to wrap his arms around me, hold me and tell me he missed me and to grieve with me. He stood there silent. I felt tormented inside. Such conflicting feelings. The grief was so overwhelming and the pressure of family members' eyes on us was too much.

The pain was so intense it was bursting out of me. In sheer survival mode I bolted out the side door of the reception hall that led to the parking lot. I leaned up against the building wall and eventually slid down it to crouch up in a ball, head bent down to the ground and let out uncontrollable guttural sobs. I



ached and ached and was surprised by the sounds coming out of me. I felt so alone.

I wanted Willie to run out the door after me. I wanted us to have a private moment of all weapons down. Just heart to heart compassion and comfort. I wanted the comforting, soothing touch of Jim to be coming from the heart and arms of Willie. I still wanted the dream to come true. The dream of my husband valuing me ... Loving me ... Being remorseful and wanting to truly reconcile. I wanted him to want love more than anything else. I wanted true love to carry us through all the ugly past. I still wanted that fantasy to be real. And at the same time I was facing the death. I wanted the love dream like I wanted Vera to come back. Neither was possible. I felt utterly lost; like a child looking for her tribe. I was no longer a part of the family inside the reception hall. There I was on the outside. Alone.

Despite what my girlfriends who had rejected me said ... I was so grateful for my relationship with Jim. Yes, I entered into that relationship way too soon. I did everything they say not to do at the Divorce Care classes. There was another death happening in my soul; the death of being able to keep it all together. Doing the right thing because the friends thought so or the experts said so. All I know is that Jim was a huge gift during those very painful days.

After the memorial, he was there waiting for me with his arms wide open. He rubbed my back and massaged my neck. And he stroked my hair. Truly I don't know what I would have done without that human kindness and touch. My husband was gone. My two closest girlfriends rejected me.

And now Vera was gone too. God used Jim, Louise and her husband Todd, to love me, care for me and comfort me. I am so grateful for each one of them.

A couple of days after the memorial I was still deeply processing all the feelings and emotions stirred in me. Especially the confused feelings I had associated with Willie's touch that day. He reached out to grab me and touch me. Yet he held back anything more. No words. He didn't come outside with me to reach out in private. He held back. I always wanted more from him. Wanted the wall of his pride to come tumbling down. He held back. I had to keep reminding myself to see who he really was. Not who I wanted him to be. But his touch was so luring. Like he wanted the connection and yet he held back.

I walked around in a fog of loss and couldn't focus on much. Routinely, that morning, I checked my emails and was broadsided when I opened one from

Willie. He had sent me an Internet page of a hotel room he was planning on taking his girlfriend to in Italy to celebrate her fiftieth birthday! Wow! I couldn't believe it! But then again ... there was the pattern I had lived with for so long. The abuse cycle.

Over and over in our marriage there was this pattern of feeling close, open, loving. Wanting to trust again. Wanting to believe there was hope. I would let down my guard and wham out of nowhere he would slam me. I felt like such a sucker every time. I so wanted it to work. Still wanted it to work. A foolishly, hopeless romantic at heart!

I emailed him back and said: "Why did you send me this?" Instead I wish I had said ...

"Don't tell me, let me guess. You sent that to me by mistake?" Sure enough that was his response!

Even though it was so predictable it still made me feel so off balance. It was either, "Oh I forgot or that was a mistake, or I didn't say that, or I didn't do that."

Being able to show that email of the hotel room to Jim was another healing gift of his presence. Finally someone else could witness the blows. I so used to wish he would beat me so I could show someone the bruises. Jim could feel the swelling of the bruises on several occasions.

If he intended to hurt me and got pleasure from my pain, he succeeded.

I had always dreamt of going to New Zealand and Australia for my fiftieth birthday. For as long as I can remember those two countries beckoned me. We had talked about it for years. When it came down to it, we were finishing up our fifth remodel on the house and there was no room in the budget for such a major trip. It didn't cost anything to dream about it. But after Vera died, I realized that now was the time to live life to the fullest and not put anything off. From the small things to the big dreams.

My first Internet buddy, Markie-Sparkie from Australia was soon to be married and was only living in Sydney for a few more weeks. Also in that window of time, my favorite cousin would be in Melbourne visiting his fiancée. I just couldn't pass up the opportunity to visit both of them in a land that was calling me to its shore. I heard the call and I had to answer. Rob and Vera's deaths put many things in perspective.

Jim was absolutely up for the adventure. A few days prior to leaving I called my best friend, Roslyn, to let her know, even though I knew she was upset with me and my choices. I didn't want her to call my house and speak to the friend house-sitting and hear secondhand, that I had gone off on such a major journey with Jim.

She was outraged and let me know how "betrayed" she felt.

"I thought I knew you ... Maybe you are the narcissist, not Willie." She said in a tone of condemnation that seared my soul.

Anything I tried to say in response was immediately shut down.

"The sad part is you have no remorse and you are trying to make excuses for your ungodly behavior."

As she continued to literally yell at me I had to interrupt her. "Roslyn, I'm going to have to hang up now."

I was stunned when she told me she felt betrayed by me. Betrayed? That seemed so odd in that what I was doing was not directed at her personally. I could understand her feeling deceived or disappointed or let down. The whole thing felt like I had become her child and my behavior was now being judged and scorned and somehow became about her??? It was all so very peculiar.

We had been the best of friends for the past 19 years. Never, not once, had we even had the slightest disagreement. I could never have imagined having to hang up on her! Understandable that she was upset with me and felt the need to hold me accountable. She had spent countless hours counseling me through my difficult marriage. She was honest with sharing with me the burdens of being single and often would tell me to stay married if there was any way possible. She also tried to give me the heads up on what it was like to be single and date as a Christian. She had offered me much wisdom and advice and maybe felt betrayed by my lack of following her guidance. Hard to say for sure.

Recently when I was pouring over my journal entries I found one dated January 13, 2007:

"Had a nightmare last night that Roslyn and I were fighting/power-struggling about my marriage. Woke up with scripture pouring forth: *If God is for me who can be against me. No weapon formed against me can*

*prosper. Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.* These sentences just kept repeating over and over in my mind. I love that the Spirit is interceding for me."

Wild to find that entry the other day and realize I wrote that exactly a year before I hung up on her. I sense a thread weaving itself here. Hmm ...

## 34. Traveling New Ground

As I was packing, the book *Shattered Dreams* leapt off the shelf and jumped into my suitcase. I also brought along *Eat, Pray, Love*. Within three weeks of deciding, we were boarding the plane. In-flight I began re-reading the New York best seller by Elizabeth Gilbert. It is her memoirs and spiritual journey after her divorce ... Reading her experiences from her Buddhist perspective planted the seed for me to want to share mine from a Christian perspective. Days into the trip I found myself juggling her book and *Shattered Dreams* (which I was also reading for the second time).

It was quite amazing to land in Auckland; to really be that far from home. Far from all the familiar images from my past and there ... into the future I had dreamed about for so many years. Amazing to actually be there, out of dream/vision life and into the three dimensional form.

Not sure why exactly I had such a deep desire to go to New Zealand and Australia, but it seemed woven into the fabric of my soul as part of my destiny. So I was excited to discover what treasures were to be found there. Was it going to be a place, a person, a thing? What Lord, what? I always thought I would be there with Willie.

I had so looked forward to getting away from all the pain of loss. I thought that magically as I boarded the plane I would be transported, like a Disney ride into Fantasyland or Frontierland. I think I was hoping for a big distraction. The last thing I thought I would experience there was deep searing grief. Almost as soon as we got on the plane, my heart split in two. I missed Willie reaching out to hold my hand on take-off like he always did for 28 years.

Just days before heading out, Jim and I had experienced a sense of deep closeness and almost out of nowhere he pulled back and was detached. He had done that in minor ways a couple of times since we first met. On this occasion, it was simply way too much of a reminder of the pattern I had with Willie.

Red flags were flying and flapping, hitting me in the face. Walls up, I confronted him, coming from that defended hurt place from my past. It was too late to cancel the trip. "OK, well we will take the trip and make the most of it as friends and when the trip is over you can go your way and I can go mine!" Jim seemed surprised yet willing to take a look at where he was coming from. His protective wall was up too.

We arrived, their time, 6 a.m. I was all confused about sleeping and eating and even where exactly I was. After checking into the hotel, we found we were too wired to sleep, so we walked in the hood. My mind kept trying to make comparisons. We were in a very local area and I found myself thinking I was in Hilo, Hawaii. The air was balmy, warm. Wild chickens pecked their way in neighboring yards.

As we crossed the busy streets and watched the local kids, dressed in their school uniforms, scramble to school I felt like I was in London. We got back to the hotel in time for breakfast, which consisted of eggs, bacon, and spaghetti that had that sauce that comes in the cans of Spaghetti-Os. Never had spaghetti for breakfast before!

The next day we picked up our Jucy (spelled just like that) camper van. This was to be our home for the next two-plus weeks. It had a tiny toilet shower combo that separated the sleeping platform with a curtain. We had a fridge and even a stove-top. There was absolutely no room to move around. The twin couches

made into a double sleeping platform. Jim slept on his side in his sleeping bag and I stayed tucked up against the window facing away from him on my side.



My walls were up. We never even held hands except to cross the crazy streets. I just could never figure out which way to look, with them driving on the opposite side to us.

**Jim jumping in the Jucy van**

## 35. Mysterious Awakenings

In a little over two weeks we covered head to toe and 1,500 miles. Every day was a new adventure and hours spent together on the open road. It's true there are more sheep there than people. The scenery was stunning. All the miles and green hills and gorgeous vistas were extremely serene and healing to my parched soul. When we were based at our daily camp I would alternate reading from the two books I brought depending on my mood. As we spent hours driving and traversing the landscape, I had vast amounts of time to reflect, process, and grieve my past. Many miles along the way I would nestle up against the car window and mist up the glass with my muffled sobs.

Sometimes the pain of letting go was so intense I would need to run to a public restroom to vomit out the tears. The intensity of the pain was like an invading bug that needed to be purged. It was as though I had an emotional, spiritual, soul-wrenching viral infection that had taken a hold on a deep level and had me down and out. Unable to focus on anything other than getting the bug out of me, there was no place to hide. At the campgrounds I would take advantage of the hot showers to let those tears flow unhindered. The hours and long gaps of silence on the road with no distractions created a brewing ground for the grieving bug to grow and fester and eventually come pouring forth from the belly of my soul.

The shower was my refuge spot. I could make noise, snuffle, snort even, and not always be so undone in front of Jim. The more wretched grief I purged, the more memories and flashbacks would surface. All the facets of the furball and remaining loose strands came forth to be expelled. Jim endlessly listened to me while I wretched out the details of what caused the deep searing pain inside the bowels of my soul. He was so patient and seemed to be in a supernatural bubble of not being fazed one bit by my unzipped behavior.

Not only had my past been unpacked, the contents were strewn about on the unconscious highway of my soul. One morning, I woke up out of deep sleep from a dream sobbing and sobbing. I was trying to come up for air as I came into the conscious awareness of being in the camper parked on New Zealand turf. The guttural sobs caused me to heave. Jim rolled over and held me with such sweet compassion. It was a Sunday morning and we had planned to go to a local church service. We had picked out the church the night before. I attempted to pull myself together. Already exhausted before the day got started, I tried to stuff the contents of my raw soul back inside of me.

Fragile and vulnerable we set off for church. When we arrived a tad late, we found no cars in the parking lot. "Hmm ... this is strange. It is Sunday, right?" I asked Jim. "As far as I know. Let's check their sign for church service times." It was a little after nine and the sign said nine. "There is another church around the block. Let's go there." Jim suggested. I just wanted to go crawl in a hole somewhere. I still couldn't remember all the contents of my dream and why I had been so grieved when I woke up. I was far from center.

When we drove into the next church parking lot we had the same experience. Then we began to wonder if their clocks had moved backward. In some ways I was relieved because if anyone: the door greeter, a woman in the ladies room, an usher, the pastor... would have asked me how I was, I would have crumbled and wretched on the spot, cutting loose my oozing aching soul all over them. It would have been ugly! Thank you God for sparing me.

I could barely keep the grief zipped up as we headed to find a breakfast spot. As we strolled the outdoor mall we stopped to ask some locals if there was some type of time change. No they assured us. Just a normal Sunday ... We couldn't figure it out. Back to the twilight zone only this time I wasn't alone!

"What is the date?" I asked Jim.  
He had to stop and think about it. "March 8th."

And then it hit me. I knew why I had woken up sobbing. This would have been our twenty-second wedding anniversary. Why the church parking lots were empty is a mystery to us, still unsolved!

Just then my cell phone rang. It was a terrible connection, but I could hear Holly's voice in the cellular long distance. She just had a small window of time to connect with me before starting work. I was so broken yet so happy to hear her sweet voice. I pulled it together to make the connection and our phone connection died. I called her cell three times but no luck. I waited hoping she would call me back. There was something troubling her that she wanted to tell me. Finally I decided to call Willie's cell, knowing she was in the car with him when we spoke, hoping to catch her before he dropped her off at work.

"Hello." He answered.

Darn, I had just missed her.

There was an awkward silence. I was raw and vulnerable. Just hearing his voice opened the flood-gates. I broke.

"I am so sad about our marriage ending. Do you know today would have been our twenty-second anniversary?"

"Oh I guess it would have been." I was overcome with sadness and continued with "This is so weird to be here without you. I always imagined we would be here as a family."

I was pathetically fumbling and vulnerable. Desperate to cling to the past and what might have been I said,

"Is there anything in you left that would ever consider reconciling?"

"I should never have married you. I didn't value you. If you and Jim have a good thing going I would say keep moving forward. We just have too much past history and baggage. It is so nice to start fresh with someone new."

And he concluded by saying, "I'm going to make someone a great husband someday."

I lost all sense of emotional balance at that point and responded, pleadingly:

"I didn't stay up all those late nights processing for you to make someone else a great husband."

When I hung up the phone I let the tears rip. I paced the outdoor mall, tears flying and found a little alleyway where I could burst with sobs in an attempt to then breathe and pull it together. Pain-stained face, puffy eyed, I walked into the coffee house where Jim was waiting patiently. He could tell by my face, I needed his comforting touch.

Back in the Jucy camper I clutched tissues and sucked on lemongrass mints as Jim negotiated the narrow roads on our daily trek in and amongst more gorgeous landscape. In-between tears came rounds of memories and layers of verbal regurgitations. Jim listened as I processed all the loose bits that knocked around in my unresolved head. I felt so tortured and haunted by the cascading flashbacks that pried loose visceral feelings deep in my solar plexus. Feelings so deep and primal, I craved the comforting arms of a loving mother. I wanted to be rocked and held. It wasn't my own mother I longed for.

From collected pieces of the puzzle-work of my childhood, I have gathered that she never really wanted to be a mom. One time she told me she only had kids "because that was what women were supposed to do back then." She also told me how disappointed she was when I came out female not male. No



breastfeeding, bonding for this girl! Two weeks after I was born, she went back to work and work, work, work she did. Being that we lived in South Africa, my mom hired, as she put it, "a tribal woman" who had several kids of her own. If anyone rocked and held me, it was Margaret. Traversing the New Zealand countryside that day, a deep longing to be nurtured in the arms of another mother surfaced.

At a rest-stop out in the middle of nowhere I asked God if He would give me a solid Christian woman, somewhere, soon who could pray with me. I needed relief from all these deep emotions and didn't want to keep laying it all on Jim. When we bunked down at the campgrounds of Lake Taupo that night I read the last bits of *Shattered Dreams*. God used that book to minister so deeply to my soul, especially that night!

Tourism is a major business for the area of Lake Taupo, attracting over 1.2 million tourists per year. The fact that the lake is the largest fresh water lake in Australasia, and approximately the same size as Singapore, made it a 'must do' stop on our whirlwind tour of North Island. (Most people don't know that New Zealand consists of two islands.) The town of Taupo is popular for events like the annual Lake Taupo Cycle Challenge in which cycling enthusiasts cycle around the lake, this usually takes about 4-10 hours depending on the cyclist.

We found a parking spot close to the tourist information center. Jim headed there and I headed off to find a bookstore. A few short steps around the block, I discovered a Salvation Army bookstore that seemed to double as a counseling center of sorts. A friendly woman named the same as my daughter, Holly, in her early sixties greeted me in the aisle. It wasn't long before we found ourselves in the whirlwind of a very serendipitous meeting. By divine appointment, only moments after meeting, we were swept up into conversation that quickly unearthed that Holly had also been in a marriage with similar dynamics to mine. Her husband had an affair as well and she went through many of the same types of shattered life hopes and dreams as I had. She could not have been a more perfect person for God to put in my path that day.

She listened, understood, and best of all prayed. Only hours before at a rest stop, I had prayed for a woman to pray with and there we were standing in the aisle of this tiny Salvation Army bookstore ... praying. I shared with her my desire to be able to one day speak out about all these things we had gone through and learned. Being fourteen years down the spiritual line from the point of her divorce, Holly had much maturity and wisdom in her words and

prayers. She prayed that God would use me to write a book to speak to other Christians concerning these things.

Her words were a soul salve sending ripples of God's love and care through her to me. When we were done praying I asked her if she could recommend a good book to me. I told her I had just finished reading *Shattered Dreams* and asked her if she had heard of it.

"Funny you should ask," she said as she reached up and pulled a book down from the shelf.

"I was just going to pull this book down and suggest it."

This was a tiny bookstore with only a few shelves of books way out in the middle of a vast ocean on an island called New Zealand! She handed me the next book written by Dr. Larry Crabb after *Shattered Dreams* called *The Pressure Is Off*. We exchanged email addresses and I was off to find Jim.

After the "Holly prayers," stuff in my inner realm seemed to shift. I read *The Pressure Is Off* every chance I could for the remainder of the trip. Again God used Crabb's writing to be the mouthpiece of what it was He was stirring in my soul. Deep resorting and shifting was going on, as if the hands of the master surgeon were deep within the belly of my soul straightening out the twisted bowels loaded with toxic goo. Finally my spiritual and emotional guts could settle down a bit.

## 36. Unfolding

Jim and I still maintained our autonomous positions as we spent our remaining time in New Zealand. Sometimes we would land in a city and he would go his way and I would go mine off to explore at our own pace and in our own way. We would meet up later and share our discoveries. I liked and needed my alone time to sift and sort as well as to just get lost in a New Zealand boutique or even time at an Internet café to connect with folks back home.

The only time we would get physical was when I would launch out to cross a busy road and forget which way to look for oncoming cars. Jim would instinctively reach out and grab my hand and whisk me to safety. Once on the sidewalk he would promptly drop my hand and we would be back in our soundproof body booths. There were the times he held me when I cried, but mostly we were flying solo next to another flying solo.

We flew solo from New Zealand to Australia in that I don't remember really connecting much on that flight. Once we got to our hotel in Sydney we relaxed a bit. We were both so ready to have more personal space after spending a couple weeks in the tiny space of the Jucy. Our room had a set of bunk beds and a queen size bed. Ahhh!!! Finally space to spare!

Markie Sparkie, my first Internet buddy, was there to meet us at the airport. He turned out to be a fabulous host. Markie and I talked nonstop, nattering away like old-time friends who hadn't seen each other in person in years. It was just so natural and comfortable. He was just like I imagined him to be. Warm, caring, and a deep thinker. He enjoys talking from the heart just as much as I do

and can stay up into the wee hours of the night if engaged in stimulating conversation. We were cut from the same cloth and we left Jim in the dust.



Jim and Markie  
Sparkie In Oz

After two days of this Jim started to act what almost seemed like jealous. Although

I doubt he would say he felt that way, exactly. Somewhere in the mix I noticed he was starting to soften up and be really open towards me. Just when I was starting to feel trusting and open, I felt him pull away and withdraw. Ughhh! There it was again. The same dreadful pattern I had had with Willie. His emotional withdrawal made me angry and I let him know. We locked horns and quickly he did not want to "process." I just couldn't go there with him. So he walked out of our room and down the hall in a huff and I just let him go. If that had been Willie I would have run after him, begging and pleading and trying to get him to understand me because I had felt so misunderstood or not heard or whatever the heck it was that made me feel compelled to go running after him for. But with Jim, I just dug my heels in and let him go.

I went off without him to meet up with Markie. We had a glorious day and I was glad Jim wasn't there so Markie and I could roll up our sleeves and dissect life and all its crazy bits and try and make sense of our shattered marriages and where that left us in this present moment, in his glorious town of Sydney.



We hiked up on the cliffs above the famous Bondi beach, dodging rain clouds and stopped at a sidewalk café for lunch. Markie was like a wise sage that day and I wished I had a tape recorder or a pen and paper at the very least. He too was blessed and mystified by the flow of wildly wise words pouring forth from his own mouth! We talked and

prayed and laughed and yes, I did have some tears too!

In the afternoon Markie took me "out back" in his Jeep and we went bombing through the terrain, splashing through huge mud puddles. We four-wheeled our way through craggy terra firma and everything in me got shook up and it all made me laugh and laugh and laugh. I had never had this type of



recreational therapy before, but I highly recommend it! Mud covered the Jeep and splatted all across the windshield and only reinforced what fun it was to let it rip. It reminded me of being on the Indiana Jones ride at Disneyland. (Markie filling up post out-backing it!)

When Markie drove off after dropping me back at the hotel, he left a trail of mud behind him. As I climbed the stairs to our room, I consciously decided I was not going to let the weirdness between Jim and I get in the way of this wonderful



mood I was in. I felt refreshed, renewed, very heard, valued, cared for and blessed. Markie, who was engaged to marry Kate (a woman he met online shortly after we met), was a safe wonderful friend and he was such a lovely blessing.

I was just glowing appreciating what a gift Markie was and how perfect the timing was to know him and to be here in living color with him. Lovely to come half way around the world and to have such a warm, compassionate, kind, man, in the midst of my healing process. Yet another blessing to be thankful for. Not that Markie didn't have his own wounds and blemishes, but being able to share those with each other as friends, along with our mutual faith, was definitely a healing thing.

I needed to know and be in relationship with "safe" men. I also needed to know that there are men out there who are capable of talking about matters of the heart and soul and able to be fully present and emotionally available.

Jim was hanging out in the room when I came bounding in. I was pleasant but detached and still glowing from the fun of the day. Jim was warming up from the glow.

"How was your day with Markie?" he asked.

That's all it took to get me animated and I was off and running recounting our adventure and especially child-like when telling about the four-wheeling mud-trekking.

Jim completely caught me off guard when he interrupted me and said: "You are soooo attractive to me right now!" Totally surprised and almost speechless I said: "Really, why?"

"Well, your excitement, enthusiasm and also the fact that you didn't chase after me and then continue to harp on me like my ex-wife would have done. I like how you let it go and went off and had an adventure and you are back happy and content. That is so attractive to me."



For the rest of our time in Australia we were close and cuddly. Our walls both came down and we had a blast. Those were sweet, precious adventure days and all too soon came to an end.

We got home just in time to celebrate two birthdays. Jim's was three days ahead of Holly's seventeenth.

The next few weeks Jim devoted most of his time trying to get a job somewhere within commuting distance from where I lived. No such luck or was it by divine plan? Finally he moved to Ashland, Oregon to take a good-paying job.

For the next five months we talked on the phone once if not more daily and either he came down to me or I flew up to him every 4-6 weeks. As we got more and more comfortable with each other, little red flags continued to wave. And much as I hated to admit it, there began to emerge several similar issues and patterns that I had experienced in my relationship with Willie. Ughhh!!!!



Once back from New Zealand and Australia, I finished up the last morsels of *The Pressure is Off!* After thoroughly devouring and digesting that book it became brilliantly clear to me that my close friends (married to each other and who I spent lots of time with post-divorce) Tod and Louise would equally eat up the depth and provocative concepts outlined in this pivotal work.

Shortly after they consumed the book we all decided to apply for Crabb's School of Spiritual Direction. I just felt magnetically drawn to it and even though I didn't have the funds to attend, I just knew, as a fact in faith, I was meant to go there. So I wrote a letter and asked if they ever gave any scholarships. A few weeks passed and I didn't hear a peep back. Louise came over one morning and we started to imagine what that training would be like. In order to participate, it was required that students read *Shattered Dreams*, *The Pressure is Off*, and *The Safest Place on Earth*. I had fulfilled most of my assignments already by reading the first two while in New Zealand and Australia.

There were too many signs pointing to this being a Godly destination along my journey. There was a weaving taking place by the master weaver and his artistry was beginning to be recognized. First my friend Lynn had given me the book *Shattered Dreams* after I shared with her the pain of my marriage when we returned from Dallas. Then I was divinely deployed to Comfort, Texas where I was in a retreat led by folks trained by Crabb and encouraged that I was about to find my voice. Next to follow was reading *Shattered Dreams* for the second time in New Zealand and encountering Holly, who recommended *The Pressure*

*is Off*, as if she knew it was a reading assignment for the course ahead of me! (I mean what are the chances that one copy of that particular book just so happened to be sitting on the shelf in a Salvation Army bookstore in New Zealand?) And now it felt as though I was being moved closer to the source of something God was using or doing through Larry Crabb.

Louise and I were eager to hear if they had received our applications so we decided I should call. Crabb's assistant, Andi, answered and seemed rather harried and hurried. I explained who I was and asked if they ever gave scholarships.

"No I'm sorry we don't," she said rather curtly. I was just about to hang up when she said: "Wait a second are you the woman who wrote the raw food cookbook?" "Yes I replied ..."

"Oh, that is a different story. Actually we have a full scholarship for you!"

I have had this feeling a couple of times before. It reminded me of when I felt prompted to see the Wagners in the hospital and I just KNEW I was going to go in their hospital room.

When I dialed the phone and even when I was about to hang up, I just KNEW somehow, some way, God was going to make a way for me to go to The School Of Spiritual Direction.

Andi explained: "My friend was standing here when your application came in requesting a scholarship and when we read you wrote a book on healthy eating she said she would be willing to fund your way in exchange for us to fly out and learn from you about healthy eating!"

I was so ecstatic that Louise was standing right there to celebrate the moment with me!