

CHAPTER TWELVE
The House of Tragedy – A Mountain of Hope
by Judith Ingram

Ever since we moved into our new home, life went through some of the most challenging experiences I had ever encountered. Before my own near-death experience, my oldest daughter came close to losing her life. To keep things in order of events, I need to start from there so I can move forward to the next chapter.

Before what we went through with Dani, we had been living in our new home for a couple of years when one morning Lea and Karey were getting ready for school when Karey ran upstairs in a panic, telling me something was wrong with Lea. When I dashed downstairs, I found her lying on the floor curled up in a ball. She was crying in massive pain. At first, she tried to hide what the problem was until she realized she was in serious trouble. She finally confessed that she was pregnant. I knew then I needed to get her to the hospital. Karey took Dani to school and she went on to school herself. I had called her boyfriend to come quickly. I was too frantic to drive so I asked him drive to my car to the hospital while I sat with Lea in the backseat. All the way there, Lea kept passing out in my arms, going in and out of consciousness. I was scared out of my mind. I kept thinking of the last time I held her in my arms while rushing to the hospital after the dog had bit a chunk of her lip off when she much younger.

When we reached the ER, they rushed her in and told us to wait in the waiting room. What seemed like forever, the doctor came out to tell us she had an ectopic pregnancy which had ruptured, and she was internally bleeding. The blood had reached her shoulders, he told us, saying if they hadn't got to her when they did, the blood would have reached her brain and she would have died. He said she had lost so much blood that she needed a transfusion. At that time, AID's was still a major concern, especially since my close friend had recently lost her sister to the disease. But this was a life-or-death decision and I had no time to waste. I quickly signed the consent form and I prayed, and I prayed for years that the blood was not contaminated. Thank God, it wasn't!

That next year Lea went from being girlfriend to a wife. We had a very nice wedding ceremony and reception at the local park, where her great grandmother had traveled from California to attend. Since her husband had joined the military just prior to their marriage, and shortly thereafter the two of them had moved away.

Her husband was sent to San Diego, and two years later they returned home. I still remember the day when Lea called to tell me she threw her birth control pills away because they decided to have a baby. I'm sure that must have been a scary decision for them, it would have for me after what she went through, but all I heard in her voice was joy and happiness.

Lea was in her final months of pregnancy when they returned home. When we got the call that she was in labor, we rushed to the hospital. I sat by her side, holding her hand trying to help her through the pain. It wasn't long thereafter she gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, making me officially a grandmother at thirty-four... just two months shy of turning thirty-five.

Like a roller coaster, life was up and then it was down. I don't remember the exact timeframe. I remember the experience. I had received a call from John's work informing me he had been injured and they were flying him off the mountain to the hospital. He didn't give me any details, and I was worried sick as I rushed to the hospital. I learned there that his eye was severely jabbed by a branch while cutting timber. When he was in surgery, I feared he would lose his eye. His brother had lost an eye many years earlier in a car accident and I'm sure John feared the same for himself. Even after surgery, we really weren't sure if he would regain full sight, but Thank God, again, he fully recovered. It seemed the only one who didn't experience some kind of tragedy while living that house was Karey.

What could have been a very terrible tragedy, yet, on an emotional, mental level it was quite terrifying, was the day I was playing ball with Dani in the backyard and the ball hit the side of the basement foundation. When I went to get it, I noticed gravel had crumbled out. I kicked what I thought was concrete and a big hole opened up, with gravel falling to the ground. I walked around the house and kicked more areas, the same result. I realized, most frightfully, that the entire foundation was not solid, but was just gravel and sand hidden behind a thin layer of some kind of substance. Our house was located on a hillside with a half basement, and the height was over six feet on the backside. I immediately contacted a contractor to come and take a look. His words were enough to cause panic.

When he saw the situation, he knew it was vital to resolve the issue as quickly as possible. Within days his crew showed up and began to secure the house, with what looked like stilts on jacks. For days after they knocked all the foundation out. Inside the house it felt unstable, although the man said it was perfectly safe. At times we could feel the house rocking, and the girls were very nervous. In our living room we had fish aquarian tanks along two walls from 20 to 50 to 150 gallons, and once in a while we could see the water rolling slightly. We walked around like we were on pins and needles. It wasn't until the new foundation had been laid that we could take a breath of relief. My mind had conjured up so many scary imaginings, as minds do, thinking of all that could have happened if I hadn't found what I did. With our house being on the side of a hill, it made it much scarier.

One day my oldest brother called asking if he could come up and stay a couple of weeks. He was going through a divorce and needed to escape for a while. When he arrived from California a few days later, he spent most of his time down at the tavern. One late evening when he returned, we were sound asleep when we heard a loud crash that woke us up. When we jumped out of bed and ran downstairs, my brother was already outside. I barely saw a car speeding away. When we looked around, we discovered my brother's car had been side swiped. It was too dark to really get a good look at the car that disappeared into the dark, but I knew it must have paint from the hit and run on it. My brother was really upset, so the next morning I took my him to drive around town, hoping to find that car. Amazingly, we did find it, and only a few blocks away. We were able to call the police and report it, though he wasn't going to be able to have it repaired until he got back home.

That wasn't all that happened. When my brother decided it was time to head back home, he loaded his car with all his stuff the night before, planning to leave the next morning. I hate to

admit it, but I was counting the hours. I love my brother, but his stay during that time was mainly spent down at the tavern getting drunk and staying high on pot. I realized he was trying to numb his pain, but it really was time for him to leave. The next morning, however, brought disappointment and shock. The very large, huge oak tree that was in our front yard, where his car was parked under, had a very large branch snap off and landed right on top of his car, putting a good size dent in the hood. Because of that, he remained another few days. He didn't seem too bummed about that because he was able to go on a deer hunt with John ... though they came back empty handed.

After Danielle went through the horrible demonic experience, we got her a kitty. About six months later when I arrived home from shopping, I was pulling into the driveway when the cat darted in front of the car. I felt the front tire roll over it, as I heard it scream. I panicked and put the car in reverse to back up, rolling over it again. I realized that wasn't a good idea, but my mind was hysterical and I wasn't thinking straight. The girls were at school at the time, and I was glad about that. I wouldn't have wanted them to see such a horrible thing. Immediately, I turned the car off, quickly getting out to see the cat, who was still alive and flipping around, crying, screaming loudly. I ran as fast as I could to the neighbor's house, pounding on the door, praying someone was there to help me. Thank God, the man was home. I was panic-stricken trying to tell him what had happened. The man grabbed his gun and ran with me to the car. He told me I should go into the house, and a minute later I heard a gunshot. Thankfully the man did what I could never have done, put the cat down, and he also took the cat away. When Dani was worried that her cat never came home, I had to tell her that it must have run away.

That experience reminded me of my own disappearing cat when I was about twelve, when Pursy never came home and my dad told me the same story. Later in life I learned my dad got rid of it because it was using his well-manicured flower gardens as a litter box. And I really loved that cat.

When I think about all the things that happened in that house, the memories are most unsettling. Yet, at the time, I didn't really think about that. And just when I thought all the turmoil of life had come to an end, and we could put the past behind us, it was the quiet before the storm ... where the reality that life was never the same became a bigger challenge. That time came when I began to research Christmas in hope of finding the true meaning, the meaning I grew up with, that had become so far from that ... and, sadly, it unintentionally ruined everything because I discovered something very unexpected.

It had been five years since we had moved into that house. After all the demonism stuff, the near-death stuff, the book stuff, and all the tragedy stuff in between, there was still one thing that continued to disrupt us, and that was John's brother stuff. Ever since I met John, his brother was his best friend. They did everything together, and I was left out most of the time. I was jealous, I suppose, and resentful as well. Before we got married, I felt his brother thought of me as competition for John's attention, and as long as he was his drinking buddy, he had John at his side. His brother was divorced then, having custody of his two children, a boy and girl, close to Dani's age. After we got married, it didn't really change things much, as I hoped it would.

While John and his brother spent nearly every weekend on their sixty-six-acre property cutting firewood, building roads and ponds, and just hanging out together guzzling beer, I began to resent that place ... as I resented his brother. They had purchased the land about five years before John and I met, and it was some kind of a dream between brothers to build a life there. Occasionally his brother took his kids with him to the property, but John never took Dani. I remember the day when John came home and told me about a horrific accident that had happened that day. Apparently, his brother left his kids in John's truck, where he had it parked on the dirt driveway going down the hill, while him and John were cutting and loading firewood. The truck bed was full of firewood when the kids were messing around inside and managed to pull the gear-shift into neutral. The emergency break didn't hold because of the weight in the bed and the truck started rolling downhill. John said they both took off running trying to catch it but couldn't. He said they could see the kids bouncing all over the place, with firewood smashing into the back windshield as the truck hit ruts in the road and finally veered off road into the brush, ending up hitting a tree before coming to a stop. Just the thought made me glad Dani wasn't there too. The kids were ok, just bruised a little, but pretty shook up. The firewood cracked the back windshield, and the tree smashed the front end of the trunk. It was a miracle the kids weren't injured more.

Though we had got married before moving into that house, it didn't change things much over the years, until his brother decided he wanted to sell his half investment. His brother had got re-married and his priorities had changed. I was glad, yet, we didn't have the funds to buy him out. His brother went to his father to see if he would buy him out, but his father didn't want to get involved. After convincing John that we needed to just sell the entire property, he was deeply disappointed. To me, it was relief. I hadn't really ever spent any time on that mountain myself and had no attachment to it. It had been the cause of many fights between us, to be honest.

A close friend of mine had got her real estate license so I contacted her to list the property. One Saturday afternoon on a beautiful sunny day we met her out there to show her around. She wanted to take pictures, bringing the listing contract along for us to sign. We walked around nearly the entire land, climbing the hills up and down the paths until we came to a resting place. It was the first time I had seen many parts of the property, and as we tread through the trees, I began to feel something unexpected. As the three of us sat gazing out to the amazing view, it suddenly didn't feel right ... it didn't feel right to sell the property. Inside I heard the voice screaming, "Don't do it!"

When my friend began to go over the details and terms of the listing, I spoke up, saying that we needed to talk about this more before signing anything. John didn't say a word, looking at me in a puzzled way. When we were driving home, I told him I felt it would be a big mistake to sell the property, and asked him how he felt about selling the house instead. He was quite surprised, knowing how much I didn't even like it. Of course, he was very happy about the idea, and when we got home, we talked about building a house. For the next few days, we talked over some ideas on what to do, and after weighing all the pros and cons, we decided it would take too long, and cost too much to build ... as he was talking of doing most of the work himself. The thought of us all living in an RV for who knew how many years it would take with his exhausting job,

didn't sound like a very good idea. We finally decided to sell the house and purchase a Manufactured home. I immediately began looking for our perfect house.

We knew our plan would be a lot of work, but we also knew it was what we should do. We soon began to get the property ready. We spent weeks doing most of the work ourselves renting the equipment needed to dig ditches for electrical and water lines. We had hired a Well Witcher who came up from Grants Pass to walk our property and find us the best place to drill. We walked along side of him until he got to place where his rods were moving wildly. He said that was the place, telling us we would get an artisan well, less than fifty feet under. The day the well drillers came, I brought my lawn chair and sat there all day under the shaded trees, for hours and hours as they drilled 100 feet, 200 feet, 250 feet and only found $\frac{3}{4}$ a gallon a minute.

At that point, they stopped drilling telling me they didn't expect it to get any better. The man felt so bad for us that he offered to go another 50 feet at no cost. I took him up on his offer with the hope we could get better. It didn't get any better. We ended up having to have a huge concrete holding tank put into the ground. The total cost of it all was close to \$9,000 for our water system. The well was located over 100 feet downhill from the home site, so the water had to be pumped up to the house. John dug the trench and I helped him lay all the piping. To get our electric lines in his brother and him trenched out over a $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of line to the nearest pole, which went through our neighbor's property, requiring their permission and repairing their fence.

After finally finding our perfect floor plan, we put the house on the market. I had looked at dozens of Manufactured homes, some located sixty to seventy miles away. When I would find one that I liked I would take John to see it. After many tours we finally found one that both John and I approved. We were able then to get a land/home package mortgage and pay his brother off. We hired a guy to level the spot where we wanted the home place with an amazing panoramic view. The timing was perfect because when our house had sold, our new home was ready to move in. The year was 1990 ... a new decade, a new beginning, a mountain of hope, and just then my book was published and for sale. For a while I did a lot of promotion, even doing a book signing at Barnes and Noble Bookstore at our local Mall. The local newspaper sent a journalist to our home who wrote up a half page story on me and my book. Eventually, I had to put the book down and get on with other life challenges.

When our house in town had sold, it was the strangest thing. The people who bought the house that we had tried to buy five years earlier, and we were forced to move, were the same people who bought our recent house. They had two children back then and two more since then. They needed a four-bedroom house. When I saw them at my door with their realtor, we were both surprised. It was kind of funny, actually, having such an unusual coincidence like that ... or was it?

At that time, Karey and Dani were the only girls still living at home. When Karey graduated in 1991, she enlisted into the Air Force, where she spent the next nine years. John had built a chicken coup and we filled it with laying hens and one rooster, adding a few turkeys. We then bought two cows, where I name one Betsie Lou because I considered her a pet. We even got Dani a horse, Felica. It was an older horse, as we didn't want one too wild. Dani spent every free

moment with Felica, and although she could do everything to care for her, we quickly learned that Dani was allergic to Felica's horse hair. So, every time she went riding, I did all the brushing. I loved spending time with Felica, and occasionally I would go riding by myself. Felica was just so sweet, and well trained. Dani joined 4H with a friend from school, participating in horse shows at the fairgrounds. Down the road was a horse boarding and riding arena where her friend, Sara, had her horse boarded. Dani would ride down there and workout with her for training. And since Sara's mother owned a two-horse trailer, she would take Dani's horse with Sara's horse to the horse shows at the Fair Grounds, where I was so proud of her winning several ribbons. I met another mom who was totally into her daughters riding and showmanship. The outfits she bought her daughter were beautiful, compared to Dani's. I made comment on her daughter really captures the attention. Her daughter was a little bigger than Dani, and she kindly offered to give me some outfits her daughter had outgrown. Dani was thrilled. She looked so cute out there performing in her sparkly bright colored attire, with cowboy hat and boots.

I remember the day I got a call from a neighbor who had land on the backside of our property. He said our cows were over there and had broken the fence. He said it wasn't the first time he chased them back and repaired his fence, and he was very upset telling to come right then and get them. It was a rainy day and I asked if he could wait until my husband got home, but he was exhausted trying to chase them himself, and they were getting farther in. So, I went to get Felica, only putting on a bridle. I hoped on and started through the trees. It was a bit tricky, but I took my time and I found them and herded them back to the barn. The man said he'd put a rope across the fence until John could mend it that next weekend, which was only a couple of days.

It wasn't long after that when we bought another horse, one that hadn't been broke yet. John thought he could do the job, along with his bull rider buddies. We used to go to the bull riding events to watch his buddies get ripped up while sitting with their wives, who looked like they were terrified. John wanted to give it a try, but I managed to talk him out of that, most firmly. We put the new horse in the smaller fenced pasture to let him get adjusted. I went out many times to talk to him, but he didn't seem interested. I don't even remember his name.

The day the guys were going to saddle him up at the nearby corral, John and I walked him down. As I watched his buddies get tossed to the ground, John gave it a try and also got bucked off. About then, I said I wanted to give it a try. I thought he would be kinder to me. Boy, was I wrong. He took one half a spin around the corral and threw me hard into the metal bars. I was mighty sore for quite a while. After that, he never did calm down and we finally sold him, never getting another. Felica was enough.

Eventually, John bought a used caterpillar tracker (CAT) so he could start logging some of the timber, and with his brothers help, a lot of truckloads of logs were taken out. We decided to send some logs to a man who ran a small mill and had him mill us enough lumber to contribute to building a large barn. Life was full then with lots of activities, although it was a lot of work. Once we had paid his brother off, and he had no interest in the property, things between us got better. After he got remarried, I really liked his wife, and we spent many times together having dinners and such. John seemed to be the happiest then, and Dani was happy too because she got to spend more time with her cousins.

There was a deep thorn that still remained in our life, a thorn that eventually, slowly torn John and me apart, a thorn that began long before, during and after Danielle's sexual abuse case. John was always a strong family bond person. So much so that I felt he put them before Dani and me. He saw the change in his folks, the distance they put between them and Dani, and we had fights over him not standing up to them to defend his little girl. It pained me to see the way they treated her, the way they were not affectionate to her as they were with their other grandchildren.

It may have related back to the sexual abuse case, but it escalated over Christmas. I could take the negative energy over the Christmas issue, but I could not take seeing the hurt in my little girls' eyes when even his mother felt uncomfortable giving her a hug, or when Dani would find out her cousins had stayed with his folks on vacations and holidays, but she was not invited. It really hurt her to hear the stories the other kids talked about going to grandma and grandpa's cabin at the coast. How they got to ride the boat because there were no roads to drive in. John and I took Dani there once when we went visit them on their vacation and spent the weekend, when the other kids weren't there. I think that helped her not feel so left out.

The whole unfairness of it became unbearable for me, to the point I stopped going with him to visit his folks, keeping Dani with me. I refused to attend family dinners, holiday get togethers, any activities at all. This was upsetting to John because he felt he had to choose, and every time he chose his family. As Dani got older, she made her own decision to go with John, and I didn't make an issue of it because regardless of how his folks felt, she enjoyed seeing her cousins ... who knew nothing and had no problem with her. However, John could not accept that I wouldn't attend family gatherings, saying it made him look bad.

I never took such action when I had to endure his mother's unacceptance of me. She had voiced her mind in the earlier days when we were just dating. I was a woman much older than her 'favorite' son. A woman with three children, and no chance of her ever having a grandchild from him. I was not her choice of a daughter-in-law, and it was obvious to both John and myself. But I didn't let that affect me to the point that it affected me with Dani. I was a protective mother ... he wasn't a protective father ... but then she really wasn't his, even though he legally adopted her.

His mother's disappointment had always been like a dark cloud over our head, but I always tried to make the best of things for John's sake. That stopped after years of watching what was going on with my little girl, and having to endure it alone. To her, they were grandma and grandpa, and since my folks lived in California, she didn't see them very often. So, it broke my heart, especially when she asked me one day why they don't love her. How does a mother respond to that? I wasn't going to lie to her. But as she got older things got easier, yet to the very last day, I still refused to attend any family gatherings, ruining the holidays for him, as he always voiced.

When John complained about his broken-down body, having worked over a decade or more in the woods, he seemed to start drinking more. He'd put away a couple of cases of beer himself every weekend while working with his brother on the property, as well the countless beers he consumed during the week. It was mandatory that I always had enough beer available for him, and I learned that lesson when I didn't. By then the logging had ended but the firewood selling continued. When his brother moved to Washington, I hoped his drinking would end, but he only

continued on with his crew, staying late after work to drink with the guys and coming home half drunk. Upon several occasions over the years I accused him of being an alcoholic, in which he would get very angry and deny. One time he quit drinking for a week, saying that proved he wasn't an alcoholic.

Life was just going along as it did. Since John left so early in the morning, I was the one who fed and watered the chickens, turkeys and cows, along with helping Dani care for Felica, as well as our golden retriever Buddy. I kept up the house clean, paying all the bills, doing all the shopping, and cooking all the meals. I always packed John's lunch every night, doing loads of laundry. I had to haul firewood in from the woodshed, and keep the stove going in the winter, so as to keep the power bill down. In the summer months we had a garden, and Dani would help me tend to it.

Every hunting season John would be gone for days and always came home with a deer. He would cut the meat off the bone in chunks and I would cut it up into steaks and roasts. We bought a smoker and I started making jerky. The one thing I didn't like was the rooster we had. He was mighty mean but I really didn't have to go into the fenced area as John kept the water bucket filled. He knew I was afraid of that rooster. But one hot summer day I saw the bucket was empty, and after feeding the chickens I attempted to go into the fenced area by myself. I kept a close eye on him as he stared at me, waiting until the bucket was full. As I started to walk back toward the gate, he suddenly came running at me full force. I started running, and just as I turned around to see where he was, he flew up to my face to attack me. In full panic mode I instantly wacked him hard with my empty water jug. He went flying to the ground, rolling in the dirt, while I began to run again. I was almost to the gate when I turned around again and he was running at me in full force, flying up to my face, and I wacked him again as hard as I could. He went flying to the ground while I just barely made it through the gate. My heart was pounding. I was so mad that I wanted that rooster dead.

When John got home that evening from work, I was so upset that I was standing at the door when he came in. I told him what happened, and then demanded he kill that damn rooster right now. John immediately got his gun and went down the coup. I heard the gun go off and then saw him holding it by the neck heading back to the house. He wanted me to cook it after he plucked it, but I told him not to bother because I wasn't going to cook it. He then went and buried it. From then on, I have not like roosters.

As life continued on, getting worse in time, John's drinking was causing problems for us. To him, I was the one causing the problem. I had ignored what I knew from the day I met him, but I didn't call him on it until one day I did. And whenever I did, it would cause a fight. There were times he was so angry that instead of hitting me, he would punch the wall while pinning me against it, and his fist would be so close to my face I could feel it. Sometimes he would grab me, and hold me so tight it hurt, then shove me off. It was frightening but he knew if he ever hit me, I was gone. I made that absolutely clear. In time it seemed to get worse and one Friday night, when Dani was staying at Sara's for the weekend, it was very late and John still wasn't home. I had dinner ready, as usual, and tried to keep it warm, but I waited and waited and waited until I finally I called the shop to discover he was still there with the crew. One of the wives got on the phone and told me I should come get him because he was in no condition to drive. When I

arrived, I saw many of the wives there with their husbands, and it looked a like a big party had been going on ... one he didn't invite me to.

On the way home we fought about me embarrassing him by coming down there. When we reached the driveway up the hill, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of way to the house, he told me stop so he could take a piss. I told him we were almost to the house and he could wait. He got so mad he grabbed the wheel and I hit the break. When he got out of the car, I locked the doors, yelling through the window that he could just walk the rest of the way. I hoped he would cool off by then, but instead he started yelling and calling me names, so I started to drive off and that's when he started kicking the side of the car with his heavy steel toed boots, which freaked me out because it was my brand-new car, so I took off fast.

When I got to the house I got out and unlocked the front door but was afraid to go in, so I went back to the car and locked the door. When he got to the house he went inside and I could hear him yelling my name before he came back out and saw me in the car. He ordered me to get out or he would break the window. I got out and ran into the house. When he came in, he approached me, swaying and ranting, calling me foul names. When I tried to get away from him, he grabbed me, forced me to the living room floor and pinned me down with his body over the top of me. I tried to struggle as he ripped my jeans open, literally breaking the zipper. I continued to fight him, but he was a strong man, over six feet and I knew I had to surrender. He yanked my jeans and panties down to my knees and thrust himself into me. When he was done, he got up and stumbled to the bedroom, took off his boots and fell into bed, passing out.

I was shaken to the core. I got up and pulled my jeans back on and went into my office room where I shut the door, in the dark, and curled up on the floor crying. I felt raped ... I was raped. I cried myself to sleep on the floor remembering all the horrible things my first husband had done to me, who also was a John. When I woke up the next morning he was still sleeping, but when he got up, he didn't remember a thing. I told him what he had done to me and he didn't even apologize, he just said he didn't remember.

I suppose it was then that I knew things were definitely over for us, although I tried to make the best of it. Something had been dying inside me for a long time, and that push me over the edge. The only thing that kept me together at that time was I had met a friend online and we began to communicate with each other, a friendship that had last for many, many months. My friend, being a very educated and extremely interesting man, had given me a sense of enjoyment, something that lacked terribly in my empty life. My relationship with this man was something I kept secret from everyone for a long time, not because it was any kind of an affair, as it was far from that, but because I didn't want anything or anyone to ruin the special moments we shared. This man became like a lifeline, an escape of sorts, until one day he very kindly said he had to go because he had a lot things he had to get done. The day he said goodbye I felt as if I had lost a dear and special friend. It hurt and I was very sad for a very long time, but I have many wonderful memories of many fulfilling conversations. It's an experience that I have written in detail about called A Spiritual Mystery because indeed it was and is.

I realized then just how dead my spirit felt, and how I had been living in denial by escaping my reality. I suppose, time and again I thought I could find other ways to bring contentment, and I tried very earnestly to do so, but the truth was, my life with John was coming to an end ... I just didn't know how to bring that truth to termination. I just couldn't find the justification I needed in everyone else's eyes as they all thought John was so great, and I knew I would be the one persecuted. But then two incidents happened that made it possible for me make the hard decision. One reason it was so hard to break up our family was because of Dani. I didn't want to uproot her life as I had uprooted my other two girls lives so many times. I believe that is why I stayed so long. But when I saw how he began to treat Dani, that was the line he should have never crossed.

As she got older, he began to treat her like a boy. He would ruff her up trying to wrestle with her and she would cry because he would hurt her. I tried my best not interfere but one day I couldn't stand by and watch him pin her down, calling her a baby because she crying saying, "Daddy, you're hurting me," over and over again. I finally spoke up and yelled at him to stop, stop hurting her. When he got up, pushing her aside, he said he wished she was a boy. I saw the look on her face, and it crushed me. I don't know why he started treating her that way, but I had had enough of it. When he got up, he said in a mean voice that I always defend her, that's why she's a big baby. That not only hurt her, but it hurt me too because I did protect her as a mother should. After that, he seldom touched her again, and after that he seemed to not have much to do with her.

The thing that finally gave me the strength to do what I had to do, was one Saturday night when John came in late from cutting and delivering firewood all day. I had dinner ready and, on the table, when he arrived. When he sat down to eat, he was very quiet, and I assumed it was because he was exhausted. After dinner he took a shower and put on clean clothes, then fell asleep on the sofa watching TV. I was in the kitchen cleaning up when the phone rang. When I answered, a woman asked for John. Her voice seemed upset and, at first, I thought it was someone he had sold firewood to. I went over and woke John up, telling him a woman was on the phone. He took the phone and said hello. As I was walking back to the kitchen I heard her loud voice, an upset and angry voice. I could see John holding the phone as he turned away from me not saying a word. He sat there frozen, and after a few minutes he hung up, never responding to the woman ... not one single word. When he hung up, I asked him who was that. He simply said, "Wrong number." I didn't press any further, knowing he was lying and hiding something.

That something disturbed me, and I was convinced he was having an affair. Every weekend he would leave to deliver firewood and be gone for hours longer than he should. When asked about that he would make stuff up, like he stayed to help some old guy stack the wood, or the place he delivered to was way out in the country. I later discovered that the woman who called was someone he was supposed to meet after he finished delivery all the firewood, but he had fallen asleep, and she was not happy about waiting around for him to show up. I learned this truth from a wife of one of the logger guys who knew the woman. She may also have been mad that I answered phone, not realizing he was married. I couldn't hear the conversation. I just knew it last way longer than a wrong number. I never confronted him about that, but it was what gave me the

justification to do what I knew I had to do, knowing I had no proof to accuse him, knowing had I accused him things would have not ended well.

One day, when he was complaining again about his tired and worn-out body, saying if he continued to work in the woods it was going to kill him, I came up with a plan. His brother, whom had moved to Washington and was working in construction, had asked John several times to come up there and go to work with him. But John was insecure about quitting his job, using the finances as his reasoning, which was a valid reason. I decided to take my real estate friends' suggestion that I should get my license. She thought I would be really good at that, and I was up for the challenge, and highly motivated.

I spent every free moment studying hard for the exams and when I passed and got my license, I went to work in the same office as my friend. My first month I had a big sale, enough of a commission to cover a month of bills. This allowed him the opportunity to quit his job and he left for Washington to start a new life in what he thought was in preparation to bring us up there to live. He was living with his brother and his wife, and seemed really happy.

He would come home on the weekends to get the house and property ready to put on the market. I continued to let him believe I would take care of all the real estate stuff and get the property sold, in an effort to move to Washington. But I knew I was never going to move to Washington. I had already decided that. I knew I would be moving back to California, back to where my family was, my mom and step dad, my real father and my two brothers. I knew my dad wasn't well. He had emphysema really bad and was on full oxygen.

On New Year's Eve John wanted me to drive up to Washington and party with his two brothers who both lived close together, with their wives and their friends. The thought of a drunken party wasn't something I wanted to spend with him, and I struggled for days on how to handle that pending confrontation. When that day arrived, I sat home alone all day, dreading what was going to happen when I didn't show up. Dani was staying at Sara's so she wasn't home. All day I just couldn't bring myself to call to tell him I wasn't coming. I was afraid of how he would react. As the night arrived, and was getting late, he called, and it was obvious he was already drunk. When he asked where the hell I was, why I wasn't there, I told him I wasn't coming. He went into a rage, asking what the fuck is going on. I couldn't say a word, I was afraid to speak. He then asked me, surprisingly, if I wanted a divorce, which told me he had already had a feeling about that. All I could say was yes. His next response was if I was going to make it easy or hard, asking if I was going to take him for everything. I assured him I wouldn't do that. He yelled saying he was driving back to straighten this shit out, and I told him not to come, or I would leave. I had never heard him so angry before that I was actually fearful for my life, yet so thankful he was so far away.

I did find out later that he tried to leave but his brothers had stopped him. His brother's wife later told me she knew if John had come it would not have been a good thing. I was grateful his brothers managed to hold him back. He did come that next weekend and he was civil about it. We sat down at the kitchen table and worked things out on the divorce issues. I told him to take what he wanted, and that I would be fair on the house settlement once it was sold with a 60/40

split, giving him the 60 percent profit. I felt that was only fair since he had the property before he met me. I told him I didn't want any child support, but our mutual attorney said the State required a minimum amount. Since we weren't going to fight about anything, we hired an attorney to represent us both. I know his anger was because he was hurt, even though I'm sure he sensed things were leading down that path for quite some time.

Once he took all his personal things, including various furniture, the next step was to deal with the animals. John hired a butcher to come out and slaughter the cows on a weekend he would be there, which they did in plain sight by the front pasture. Dani saw one cow hanging upside down from the cable on the truck and ran to her room crying. I couldn't watch Betsie Lou be slaughtered. It broke my heart. I wish Dani hadn't seen such a horrible image. For the longest time she refused to eat beef, not even a hamburger. We sold the chickens and gave her horse away to a nice family with a young boy who was ill with incurable disease. He had always dreamed of having a horse, but his mother told me they could never afford one. So, Felicia was a true gift to him in his last dying months. They lived in the country on an acre, and when we delivered Felicia, the look on that boy's face was priceless, and his thankful hug was wordless.

The only things left to do was sell John's boat and the property, but I was willing to leave the boat for John to deal with. John had bought the boat sometime back, and we had enjoyed it a few times at the reservoir doing a little water skiing, and some fishing. When the property finally sold, things began to move pretty fast. The day after it closed, I rented a U-Haul truck and my friends came to help me load it. I had everything packed and ready to go. I parked the truck at my daughter's place, where Dani and I stayed a few nights before hitting the road. When my friends saw the boat, her husband said they wanted to buy it but he wouldn't have the funds until Friday, and could come get it Saturday morning. That next Saturday, on the day before we left, I met my friends at the property to pick up the money for the boat, and found her husband putting the two tires back on the trailer, which I had told them were flat.

While my friend's husband was fixing the trailer and getting it hooked up to their truck, she told me a very freaky experience her and her daughter had when her husband had left to take the tires to get repaired. She said while they were waiting for his return by the boat, which was about seventy feet or so from the house, they heard a strange noise coming from inside the house. When they went to take a look, she said the closer they got, it sounded like scratching on the door, like something was trying to get out. When she got to the front door it was so loud that she thought maybe I had left a cat inside. Her daughter said it really sounded creepy, and scared her. My friend told me they ran back to the boat. She said I should check it out. Just then the boat was hooked up and they drove off.

I thought it very strange because we never owned a cat. When I went inside, I left the door open while I walked around, but there was nothing. I didn't feel anything strange either, but all the same I said a prayer, then locked the door and walked away. I have no idea what that was about, but after what all we had been through, it didn't shock me. Perhaps there was a spirit living there all along. Perhaps I set it free ... perhaps it followed me as I left that mountain of failed hope.