

CHAPTER EIGHT

The General Manager - Vail, Colorado 1980-1983

by Judith Ingram

Leaving Camas Valley, Oregon in 1980 was a tremendous challenge. It felt like the girls and I were just settling down from our Earl escape. I did feel sad for him, but I could not go down that dark path any longer. Our relationship had lost its glow a long time before we left. All the little things, and big things, they add up. There's really too many to mention.

It was such a blessing for us to live on my brother's five acres. It was peaceful and quiet. The girls weren't too thrilled we had to live in an RV again, but we took what life gave us. My sister-in-law, Sharon, had a boy the same age as Lea Ann, and the three kids played together a lot. I got the girls registered into their new school, which wasn't much bigger than the school they went to in Alta, CA. Camas Valley was even smaller.

One day when I was at the gas station market, I saw a posting on the board for a Teacher's Assistant position for the Special Ed class. I decided to put in an application, and that led to an interview, which led to being hired. It didn't last long before school was out for summer vacation.

As I got to know the owner of the only restaurant within miles, he hired me to help in the kitchen, and cover the waitresses' days off. I used to sit and have coffee with him, after the place was closed. We talked a lot about life and the future, and a little about our past. Ben was very educated, and career driven. He was focused on his future ... and he wanted me to help him build it. He said I had tremendous potential that he didn't see too often in people. He remarked that I just needed someone to teach me things of the business world, and I was eager to learn. There was no spark between us in any sense other than it felt good to have a friend who wasn't interested in a relationship.

One evening, as we sat talking, he told me he had been wanting to open up the back of the place and build a video game room. He realized the kids around had nothing to do during summer break, and it would provide entertainment for them, as well as make money in the process. I thought it was a great idea and agreed to help set it up and run it. The only reason he hadn't done it before was he had to run the restaurant and couldn't do both.

It was exciting, and challenging. Once it was done, the kids flocked there, and I often took the girls with me to work. I learned all kinds of things during that project and felt really good about life. Then he decided to keep the doors open until 2:00am on Friday nights for adults only, and opened up a bar. The video room was closed to under 21 at 9:00pm and turned into music, dancing, and drinks. Together we bartended and cleaned up.

Ben would take me down the mountain to pick up supplies. He showed me how to do bookkeeping, and purchase orders. We spent time at his home office, which was just behind the restaurant. One night, as we sat side by side, I leaned over to kiss him. We had been drinking wine and I had been wondering if he had any interest in me, in a physical sense. The move was quite awkward, and one I didn't attempt again. It really was obvious he wasn't interested in

going to that level. In a way, I was kind of thankful, it meant he appreciated me as a person, at least that is what I told myself.

In all the time Ben and I spent together he had never made a single advancement toward me. He used to talk about being a loner, about his childhood, and his dreams. One day we had a talk about relationships and he expressed that he liked me very much but it was important that we build a strong friendship before we could take it to the next level. I was impressed with his thinking, unlike any other, and it drew me closer to him because it was what my heart was seeking - a man who wanted to know me and not just lure me into bed. It felt like I had finally met a man who was looking at me in a deeper way.

Time went on and things remained the same, although he did finally start holding my hand. I could see things progressing, as slow as they were, and my heart was hopeful. Things in past had always been fast, too fast, so taking it slow was a challenge but it made everything clearer for me to take time and really get to know someone first. I'd always heard of two people becoming best friends, falling in love, and living happily ever after. I was hoping for that fantasy, I suppose, despite my brother and sister-in-law had never liked him, and they had been living there years before me. I just figured they must not have known him the way I did. I pretty much ignored their caution.

During the latter part of that summer the girls spent several weeks of their vacation in California, as they did every summer at their grandparents. While they were gone, Ben sat down with me one evening after work and said he was thinking of going out to Wyoming and Colorado to look into some jobs running a resort. He said he had the experience, the college and university degrees in business and finance, and it was always his dream to do that. He said the restaurant was burying him, and he was behind in taxes, on the verge of losing the place. He was hoping the addition he added, the game room and bar, would get him out of his dire situation, but it didn't help enough. He was looking at a foreclosure, and was ready to bail. As we talked, he asked me if I would consider going with him. I said yes, without hesitation.

He closed the restaurant and we took off. We traveled across country staying in motels, and he always got a room with one queen bed. I was hopeful that the trip was going to advance our relationship, but even sleeping in the same bed he never touched me. We drove to Wyoming and he put some resumes in at various places. We waited around a day or two while he did interviews, but nothing was happening there so we went on to Colorado. He got an interview at the Lodge in Vail, and as I sat in the lobby while he went in for the interview, he soon came out with a big smile. The man who did the interview came over and introduced himself and shook my hand and welcomed us aboard. It seemed Ben had landed the General Manager's position. When we got back to the motel room, he told me he had lied to the guy, telling him we were married with two girls because they were looking for a steady family man type. He asked me if I would move out there and live, saying my girls and I would have a good life. He held my hand and gazed into my eyes telling he was in love with me, he just needed to take it slow. We hadn't even had sex at that point, and had only kissed a few times ... tight lipped smooches, which was kind of weird, but by then I figured he very unexperienced. He did tell me once he only had one girlfriend, when he was at his university.

I was both overjoyed for a new and wonderful life, and fearful of making a huge mistake. I asked him if he thought he could open up to me and share an intimate relationship because even though I was impressed that he didn't jump my bones, it had been over six months and he hadn't shown any physical attraction. He assured me that if I moved out there with the girls, things would be different. And the night before I left to go back to Oregon to get my things, and pick up the girls in CA., he held me close in bed for the first time in an attempt to be intimate, but he seemed stiff and uncomfortable as if it was his first time. We actually tried to make love but it didn't really go that far. It was, I suppose, just enough to give me hope that things could grow deeper if I just gave it a chance. I felt a strong bond with him that I never really understood. I don't know why I didn't see the signs, they were right there. He needed me, and I suppose I needed to be needed.

While he stayed there to get started working, I drove back to Oregon to sell my RV, and pack up my belongings to move again. When I took off that early morning from Vail, I drove all the way to Auburn, California without stopping, except for filling up the car and drive through food places. I just kept driving when I should have got a room and slept, but I was alone and kind of scared on that long trip and I just wanted to get to Auburn where one of my closest friends, Shari, still lived.

When I arrived, she was waiting for me and came rushing out to the car. When I went to step out, my legs were like rubber and just folded under me. I had to grab the car door before I fell down, and she helped me walk into the house. I learned then that that wasn't a good idea to drive so long. But the worse part was coming through the Sierra Nevada mountains and almost falling asleep at the wheel. I caught myself a few times starting to close my eyes and it freaked me out. It was pitch black outside, nowhere to stop, no towns, so I opened the windows, turn on the radio, tried to rock to the beat and kept a cigarette burning just trying to stay awake.

I spent a couple of days in the area with my girls before heading to Oregon. When I got there, I packed all my stuff and loaded a small Uhaul trailer on the back of the car, which required the UHaul guy to install a hitch, then I headed back to California to get the girls. When I got there, their grandpa was concerned about the trailer I was hauling so he went to check it out and discovered the hitch they hooked to the bumper was about to fall off. When he showed me, I freaked out, thinking of what could have happened climbing those mountains in Oregon if it had come off, or what could have happened on the way to Colorado if he hadn't seen that. It was quite a natural thing for their grandpa to check that kind of stuff since he was in the dairy business and did a lot of hauling of equipment. He took the car down and had the correct tow hitch bolted on. The next day the girls and I were off to Vail, Colorado.

They were very excited as I told them about the new life that awaited us, and I had brought some brochures I collected at the lodge to show them pictures. On our travels I took it slow and enjoyed the trip back. I stopped at various places along the way like parks so the girls could play after being cooped up in the car for so many hours. I tried to make it a fun trip for us, although by then I was really getting tired. When we crossed into the Colorado State line, there was the biggest rainbow I'd ever seen stretched from one side of the road to the other, and I thought it was a sign that this was the life blessed for us.

When we got all settled in, we were living in a fully furnished penthouse apartment, which wasn't all that much really, but it had a great view of Vail Mountain. Ben started me working at the front desk, giving me more and more responsibility as time wore on. The girls seemed happy at first, but then Lea began to get depressed. Ben and her didn't get along and she was so unhappy. Her attitude began to cause problems between Ben and me and I kept trying to get Lea to straighten up but she finally asked me if she could go live with her grandparents. I thought she was trying to be a trouble maker, she never did like any of the men in my life. I also thought she was jealous of her sister Karey because she loved it there and was learning to ice skate. I was so happy that Karey became friends with a girl a little older, who was training for the Olympics. She even gave her a few of her outgrown performing outfits. But Lea seemed to have no friends, no life, and she was having a difficult time at school. She wasn't getting the attention she needed, and I wasn't being sympathetic to her. She was resentful that I always took Ben's side. We sought counselling for her at school, but that didn't help either.

I thought she was angry because I spent so much time working, and I thought she hated Ben because he was trying to be her dad in a firm way. She made things so miserable for all of us that I finally agreed to let her go. We drove her to Denver and put her on a plane. I just wanted her to be happy, but I wanted to be happy too. Happiness didn't come however, and I realized later I was blaming her, yet, it wasn't her fault.

Time kept going and nothing was changing between Ben and me. He seemed to work every waking minute. Up early and out the door and in late and drop to sleep. It went on and on like this until I couldn't take it anymore. The lack of affection, even a good morning kiss, was seldom. In bed he was like an ice cube most of the time, having sex upon rare occasion ... he was always too exhausted. I felt deprivation so deeply it was unlike the spiritual death of the past. My entire being was so depleted, so empty and worthless is what I felt. Even the flirting from other men didn't give me any lift. I had opportunities but I'm a faithful person. I tried to talk about the problem many times but he could not talk. I even addressed the issue that perhaps he was impotent, but he assured me he was not. It began to weigh on me to the point that I called my mother and cried to her about it, saying I felt like was dying from lack of affection. She scolded me dreadfully saying I had a good man who was giving us a good life and I shouldn't be complaining that he doesn't touch me, and reminding me that my complaint had always been that was all men wanted, so to stop complaining and find ways to make myself happy.

So, I kept going the best I could. I went shopping a lot and bought nice clothes to help appease him because he wanted me to look the part. I got my hair done professionally, on a regular bases, and wore makeup. I turned myself into the image I thought he would desire. But all it did was make him pleased to see my image reflecting better on him, after all, he was the General Manager of a first-class lodge in a highly popular ski resort on Lionshead Place. I played the part but I really did enjoy my job, meeting people from all over the world.

I did try to make the best of it, the best I could. My job as the Reservation Clerk taught me a lot. It was a busy place. We seemed to go through Social Hostesses quite often, and it was my job to hire them. When one would quit, I had to perform the duty of the Meet and Greet parties the lodge provided. It meant ordering all the food and drinks, setting things up, and playing hostess

... as well as cleaning up afterward. I enjoyed those times. But mainly I answered the phone and took reservations, and checked guests in and out. The girls liked to hang out with me, and Lea even helped with filing, before she left. In time, Ben made me overseer of housekeeping. I monitored their job performance and handled any issues they had. But the head house keeper did most of the work.

The lodge had a nice indoor pool, and a very nice lounge that offered some tasty dishes. Tourist would wander about, going into the few shops off the lobby. I had the opportunity to engage in lots of different conversations. It was quite a worldly educational experience. Other things I enjoyed were taking runs to Denver to pick up stuff for the lodge. They were quick trips while the girls were in school. We both loved wandering through antique shops, and one day I found a beautiful old buffet that Ben bought and had shipped to Vail. He would take me shopping for clothes at very nice stores ... and we always had a good meal.

A few times we took trips around Colorado to see the sights. One of the most interesting places was in Colorado Springs at the Ghost Town Museum. The girls really enjoyed that too. When we went to Leadville, it was the oddest thing. I felt as if I had been there before. As we wandered around the old town, the feeling just grew stronger. The strange is, I discovered later, was Leadville was in Lake County. I was born in Lake County, California. We also took a trip to Breckenridge, another fantastic ski resort. There were many other places we visited on our travels. Boulder was also a very interesting place, it was really beautiful. Looking back, life wasn't all that unpleasant, I managed to find ways to be happy and content, sex just wasn't part of it. That was the sacrifice I had to make to give my girls, and myself, a good life, I supposed - it's what I told myself for three years ... until I could not go on missing the one thing I needed most ... his affection and physical love. I realized then, your children can only give you so much of that, but it just doesn't go as deep as two people in love should be. And it wasn't about the sex - I had long become numb in that area, and I really didn't know if I would ever feel that again.

One day I began to see this guy hanging around in the lobby like he was waiting for someone. The moment I noticed him, he disappeared. Shortly thereafter Ben suddenly had errands to run and took off. This became a regular thing where he was gone for long periods of time. I didn't connect the guy in the lobby to what was happening until one day I followed Ben. He walked to a nearby cafe that had large windows so I was able to see him go in and sit down with that guy. I watched awhile as they talked, and then I went back to the office, thinking he was just having a conversation, perhaps it was just business of sorts. I didn't think anything of it in a strange way, and I never asked him about it. After that I never seen the guy show up in the lobby again. My thought was that he may be having an affair, but when I saw he was with a guy, I figured I was just being paranoid ... although the thought crossed my mind there could be something else going on. But I shook that thought off right away.

It was more than a year later when one day I told Ben we had to have a talk, and I expressed to him my deep feelings about the loneliness I felt. I asked him again, why couldn't he be intimate with me. Was there something wrong with me, something distasteful about me. I had to know what was wrong, and I wasn't going to accept his silence any longer. That's when he made the suggestion that it might help him if we were to have a child. He said he thought a child would

give him back those feelings he lost as a child himself, it could help him get back in touch with his affectionate side.

I started to think that maybe this would help him, and maybe it's what could bring us closer. At that point I seemed willing to try anything. I felt like a starving person who would eat worms if that was all there was. I look back now and can hardly believe that I was that needy because I'd never been that needy before. No one had ever taken me to that low of a level in that way. Sure, I'd been to the point of so much emotional pain I wanted to die, but I'd never felt anything so lonely in my life as I did then. A loneliness that I can barely describe. The only word I can think of is emotionless.

When we made the decision to have a baby it lifted my spirits, it gave me hope again. I thought he would reach out to me and I waited for that moment each night. When days went by and nothing happen, I brought it up by asking when did he want to have a baby, because that took having sex. He said he was working all that out. I asked what was he working out, and he said he was charting my cycle for ovulation and had the dates for the month that I would most successfully conceive – the month was October. I thought it was a bit strange but I also thought he must be serious about it.

I waited for those dates to arrive and for three nights I waited for him to come and make love to me, and for two nights I went to sleep with great disappointment and sad tears, then on the third night he came to the penthouse early, immediately taking a shower. I could hear him in there talking to himself, but I could not make out what he was saying. I only know it made me feel strange. Then he crawled into bed, performed the act, and rolled over and went to sleep. I was frozen, I was sick inside, I didn't know how to respond. It was awkward, it was cold, it was like all business. It was done.

Now, I had to live with it, make the best of it, and hope for better days when the baby came. When Lea found out I was pregnant, she finally came back, and I was so glad she did. We bonded ever so closer after that. My girls were what always kept me going. I did continue to work until my last month, until the doctor said I needed to stay off my feet ... in which Ben had to hire someone to take my position. It was a very difficult pregnancy and Lea was such a big help to me, as was Karey, though she was much younger.

My brother Johnny had also come from Los Angeles then. He just showed up one day and surprised us, but he wasn't alone. He had another guy he brought with him from LA ... a lover of sorts. My brother was gay but I had only seen him once with another man, but this guy was not like him at all. He was a cross-dresser and would dress up like a woman, then go to the lounge every night in drag and sit at the bar. It was embarrassing to Ben and he wanted the guy gone. Johnny had first told us that he and the other guy were on their way to see this man's family in Kansas and would only be staying a few days. He said he had to get out of LA because everyone he knew was dying of AIDS. Thank God, he never got it. After a week had passed Ben offered him a job at the lodge, but he had to agree to send the other guy on his way. Johnny agreed to stay and Ben bought him a bus ticket to Kansas and drove him to the bus station. Ben gave my brother a place to live in the lodge and hired him as the maintenance man.

When the day arrived that I went into labor there was a terrible snow storm outside, nearly a blizzard. Though the hospital wasn't far, it took a long time to get there. When I got to the hospital, they said I should return home until the contractions were closer together, telling me it could be hours. I told them I wasn't leaving out of fear that I may not get back due to the storm. I told them I would sit in the waiting room if they didn't check me in, so they checked me in ... and thank goodness they did! It wasn't about an hour when the whole delivery process began ... it happened so fast.

When they took me into the delivery room and got me all situated in the birthing chair, it was so unlike the delivery beds I had with Lea and Karey. It was something new at the time, and I was told there were only two of those type of birthing chairs in the entire US, and one in Europe, if my memory is correct. It was, all the same a strange new experience in childbirth. Ben and the girls were at my side until I was taken to the birthing room, then only Ben was allowed in. The girls were waiting with excitement.

The moment they strapped me in, the baby was crowning. At that point we still didn't know if we were having a girl or boy. Just as the baby's head popped out, and I was ready to give the final push, the doctor - in a panic - immediately demanded me to stop. "Stop, stop, stop" he shouted, "we have a problem." I held back, suddenly refraining from the force of pushing, scared and confused, "What's wrong?" I pleaded. He began to scramble about while nurses came running in and out, and then he told me they had to run a blood test to see if the baby had blood poisoning. He explained that she had digested her own waste in the womb and they had to be prepared for a blood transfusion before full delivery. He described the greenish brown junk coming out her nose and mouth, which he said indicated that my water had broken some time ago.

I laid there, holding Ben's hand, praying my baby was going to be alright. Shortly thereafter he got the call that it was okay and he told me to go ahead and push. I felt her body gush out but there was no sound, no crying, no wailing like my other girls, like babies are supposed to do. The instant comfort a mother hears at the first scream was void. I heard them say it was a girl as I saw them rush her over to a table, but so many people were around her I couldn't see anything, I only heard all the noise of a suction going on and on, trying their best to retrieve her. I thought my baby was dead and my heart sunk, then I heard her make a noise, and another whimper, and then a cry, then a wail, and then my heart was relieved.

She became my miracle baby.

The days and weeks and months begin to pass and Ben wouldn't hardly even hold her. He seemed disappointed in some way, saying he had expected her to come later at the end of the month ... according to his calculations. She was born on October 11th, 1982. I didn't pay much attention to his remark at the time. He tried not show his disappointment but I knew he was expecting a boy, and so much so the entire crib set and all the clothes we bought were blue and yellow. I hoped for a boy too, but I was just as happy to have another girl. The way Danielle got her name was he had 'Elyse' in mind, but it didn't feel right to me, so I looked in a baby book of names and Danielle just leaped out at me, so we named her Danielle Elyse. Though all through

her childhood she was called Dani. It wasn't until she got older that she didn't want to be called Dani any longer. Kind of like me being called Judy all during my childhood and wanting to be called Judith.

Prior to becoming pregnant I had taken ski lessons. Ben and I would go down the small hills because I was too afraid to go to the top. Three months after having Dani, I wanted to start skiing again. I took a few lessons to get warmed up before Ben and I would ride the gondola to the top of Vail Mountain. Although I was terrified, I really wanted to do it. Lea watched Dani that day as Ben and I headed to the ski shop to get fitted up. Getting on the gondola was easy, but as we approached the top - and I was supposed to jump off - I froze in fear for a moment after Ben had leaped off. I heard Ben yell, "JUMP," and I realized I had to do it now before the lift went around and back down. I held my breath and leaped, glided a few feet before coming to a stop. As we slowly started off on our way, I was doing so well, going faster and faster, feeling confident and having fun, until I hit a mogul and went flying up in the air, at least fifteen feet or more, and coming down crashing hard. My right arm was underneath me and I could feel my thumb had taken the worst impact, although my entire body hurt. I was in excruciating pain.

The only way down was up, and I cried while struggling through the snow all the way up to the gondola. Ben carried all the equipment and helped as much as he could. I think I was in shock, in survival mode to have made it back on the gondola. Too bad cell phones hadn't been created yet. That was a long trip to the hospital. I suppose it was a good thing I didn't break any bones, but I sprained my thumb so severely the doctor wrapped it up and told me not use that hand for two months. After that, I've never skied again.

It was very difficult to take care of a three-month-old, but the girls were very helpful, especially Lea. I think this bonded them much closer because of it. After a month of struggling one-handed, I couldn't take it any longer. I couldn't properly take care of my baby, and I was breast feeding like I had with my other girls. I missed bathing her, as I watched Lea do the task. Changing diapers was no easy job either. Then there was the cooking, and shopping, and all the other daily chores. I had to take that wrapping off. Although I took it slow and easy, the healing took months longer, and even after decades, my palm around the thumb never healed completely. Something the doctor had warned me about, but I really didn't believe him.

It wasn't long after that when something very strange happened. I was down in the lobby at the time, visiting with the new Reservation Clerk, and while standing at the counter gazing out the window facing Lionshead Place, watching the folks walking around in the snow paved paths, three men came walking into the lobby. They quickly glanced at me as they focused on their way around to the Ben's office. Something about them seemed off. Ben's office was connected to the front desk where I was standing and I could hear the conversation. They informed, not introduced themselves of who they were and what they were there for. I heard the one man say they were from the Las Vegas corporation, sent to relieve Ben from his position. I heard the one man tell Ben to remove his personal things and vacate the office, telling him we had 24 hours to vacate the penthouse. Ben then told me to go on upstairs and he'd be right there to explain things.

I was upset enough about what happened, but I became furious when they turned off our phone, and shut down the private elevator to the penthouse. Several hours had passed before I realized what they had done, and like a mother lion protecting her cubs I stormed down the flights of stairs and to the office. The two body guards were standing at the door stopping me from entering. While trying to catch my breath, I shouted loudly to the man sitting at Ben's desk to let me in. The man waved his hand to the guards and they let me pass. He was well aware of how angry I was, and I went on to shame him that he would be so cruel, when I had a three-month-old baby and two daughters that he would just throw us out in 24 hours, turn off our phone so if there was an emergency, we couldn't even call 911. I told him he was mean to shut down the elevator and make us all walk down the stairs, when my girls have to go to school. I said that and probably more. I really was mad as hell.

Well, he said he was impressed with my courage and so he gave us 72 hours to vacate, and he restored our phone service, but he shut the elevator down between 6pm to 6am. It took the full 72 hours but we did it, with Johnny's help. He too had been fired. My brother is known to be revengeful, and he was pretty pissed at what they had done, so he went down to the fish store and bought some raw fish heads. When he told me what he was going to do, I asked him not to. I didn't want make things worse. He said, "Fuck'em." So, as we were leaving after our final trip of hauling boxes, Johnny lifted a panel in the ceiling of the dining room and threw those raw fish heads up into the rafters. I have often wondered how awful that must have been.

Ben rented a beautiful, very large house in Avon, and Johnny came along with us. Ben wouldn't tell me why he was fired, but I knew it had something to do with company funds. He really rarely ever spoke, and Johnny stayed in his bedroom all the time, so I had the girls to keep me company and occupied. After a couple of month or so, it was feeling terribly empty inside, and if I hadn't had my girls, I would have left a long time ago. Each day felt like I was dying more and more. Ben hadn't changed a bit, he still never touched me, he hardly held his daughter or even played with her. I could see even he was becoming depressed. It's like he just withdrew, not even looking for work. As time drifted on, I knew I had to make a decision and I made it. That environment was toxic for all of us, and I told him I couldn't go on like that any longer. Things weren't going to change and it was making me dead inside and life was screaming to be lived.

Ben did what he knew was the right thing to do. He didn't fight me on it at all, he actually helped, both physically and financially to move us back to California, where I wanted to return. I thought I could hookup with old friends. I didn't really know anyone in Oregon, and I didn't want to go back to my other brother's property. I wanted to go to Auburn, a place that held a lot of good memories. Ben found us an apartment and got us settled in, then he returned to Avon, Colorado.

The girls and I were living there doing well when he showed back up about six months later. This is when he told me what happen in Vail. He said he had found out dealings about the corporation and was conspiring with another guy at the Las Vegas offices to expose them or pay a huge amount to keep quiet. He said the other guy had threatened to go public and ended up dead.

He also told me that before we left the penthouse, he managed to cash a very big company check before they had removed him from the company account, and after he had moved us to California, upon his return to Avon, he'd been arrested and charged with embezzlement. He had to go through court and straighten all that out before he could leave, trying to prove the funds were retroactive pay promised to him by the dead guy. Apparently, he had been promised a pay raise that hadn't gone through and was months owing. It must have all turned out because he made it to my apartment in California. He asked if he could stay a few days and rest up before continuing on his way back to Oregon. I couldn't turn him away after he had paid the first two months of rent and deposit for us to live there.

I kept thinking, after he told me all that stuff, how much danger he had put us in and I worried that they might be watching him and I didn't want him to stay around there much longer. He said he was going back to Oregon when he first arrived, but then wouldn't leave. He slept on the couch for night after night, and then he began to search the paper for a job. I told him I didn't want him staying there and to move on to Oregon. He got upset and threatened to take Dani and leave, and just as we were having this discussion something very unusual happen to Dani. Lea had been her bedroom with Karey when she went to check on her baby sister while she was sleeping. When Lea came running out into the living room holding Dani in her arms, yelling, "mom, mom, something is wrong with Dani," I ran over to her and took Dani in my arms. She was like a rag doll, like she was dead, but her eyes were wide open staring lifeless, and her heart was beating so I knew she wasn't dead, but she was not responding to anything. We rushed her to the hospital.

All the way there she was still not responding, but as soon as we got to the emergency room and started running for the door, she woke up suddenly startled and began to cry. She was frightened as to what was going on, but I was so relieved, yet, still very worried. They did all kinds of test and couldn't find anything wrong. This gave Ben reason to stay around longer and I had to take Dani for some other special tests at a special facility where they performed a Electroencephalogram (EEG) putting wire sensors all over her head that was hooked up to a machine to watch her brain waves. They had me sit alone with her in a room and try to put her to sleep, which wasn't an easy to do as she was pretty scared. After a long while, she finally dosed off a little but then they wanted me to wake her up and make her active. After that they took her to a room where they gave her electric shock treatment, and as I stood listening to her to scream in such a horrendous way I had never heard that it frightened me so much I wanted to scream, "STOP." It was horrible, and again, nothing showed anything wrong with her.

As time went on, I had to take her to the doctor several times for checkups, but nothing like that ever happened again, and Ben was getting a little too comfy there by then. When we learned that she was okay I asked him to again to leave, and again he threatened to take her. We got into a huge fight that ended when I called the police. They came to my rescue and ordered him leave, and stayed until he had left. I was glad the girls were in school and didn't have to experience that awful moment. When they got home, they were glad Ben left, and I was so glad for so many reasons. Just knowing he had got involved with what he deemed 'the mafia,' I was really glad he was gone. I thought about how I had confronted that man at the lodge, and how things could

have gone so much different. But it made sense, the way they came in and took over, the way the body guards stood blocking the doorway. I felt their power, I just had no idea of how powerful they were.

A few months later Ben called and said he had got a job, and had rented a three-bedroom house, asking if I would come back to Oregon. At first, I didn't consider such an offer after what he pulled, but he seemed sincerely wanting to spend time with his daughter, regretful of how he had acted. He was as nice as could be and offered to pay all the expenses. Well, after some time I realized there wasn't anything holding me to remain in California. I thought it would be different there, but it was lonely. My friends were all busy living their lives, and we had really grown apart. I had got a job selling Herbal Life products, and was doing very well, but as my business grew, it became more time consuming. Lea ended up watching Dani and Karey a lot of the time, and I was feeling guilty about that. And, I truly missed Oregon. I figured I could run my business from there and maybe do even better.

I was enjoying selling Herbal Life, having parties and meeting lots of people, signing many up under me and growing a very large downline. One of the VIP's from Los Angeles made a special trip to meet me. He took me to lunch and expressed how impressed he was of my fast-growing business, top sales person of the month, he said. He offered me to come to LA to speak at a Herbal Life company conference, and as tempting as that was, I couldn't leave my girls.

I was first undecided to make the decision to move back to Oregon, wondering what I might be getting myself into, and it took a while before I was ready to make a final choice. I suppose that decision was made after a horrible thing happen with the old lady next store. On that horrible day, there were two teenage girls going around the apartment complex knocking on doors, trying to get into someone's place. I was told they were asking for a drink of water, or to use the phone, something that someone would let them in. Thank God, they never made it to my door. But the old lady next store let them in for a drink of water, and shockingly they stabbed her to death, with the old lady's own knife. Her son went to pick her up that morning for a doctor's appointment and found her. How sad and sickening. The girls were caught, and it was all over the news. They had a diary they wrote in, expressing their joy of stabbing the old woman. It was scary and horrifying. It was enough for me to accept Ben's offer.

Ben and I made arrangements for the move, with the understanding that we would be roommates raising his daughter, and he wouldn't interfere with my raising of Lea and Karey. Karey had no problem with the idea, but Lea wasn't happy about it. I assured her he would not have any say over her, and she finally agreed to go. So, the girls and I were headed back to Oregon. I suppose I had a compassionate heart for him in a way. I felt sorry for him that he couldn't show love. We didn't have any hatred toward each other, and I forgave him for threatening to take Dani because I realized that he really did love her and she was probably the only person in this world he had. I gave him all kinds of understanding and forgiveness, but in my heart my true feelings were for Dani. I didn't want her to grow up without a dad, so I tried to make things work for her sake. In time things only became worse, more horrible than I could have ever imaged.