

CHAPTER FOUR

Into Bondage by Judith Ingram

In life there are many ways in which one is living in bondage. Mine had been religion. As I got older, I refused to use that term and preferred spiritual ... but truthfully, it is still religion, and calling it something else doesn't change that fact. Either way, the power it can hold over one's mind and soul, is the nature of its bondage. It can and it does capture an entire being, holding hostage the very spirit it claims to give freedom ... and yet, it can also break the chains that bind you.

I didn't comprehend this truth until the end, when I was finally able to escape from the guilt and duty of that imprisonment. There are many ways of being imprisoned, none greater than misconceived religious doctrine, I must admit, knowing all too well. But there was another kind bondage I was about to discover.

There I was, preparing to waddle down the aisle and say, "I do." The day of my wedding had arrived, after a weary and exhausting week of preparation, cleaning, and decorating for a handful of guests whom were my mom's church associates, as well as a few of their personal friends. The only friend I had was Rosie, and she was my Maid of Honor.

Under the circumstances, a small gathering in our home seemed more appropriate. John and I would have been fine with a quick ceremony at the courthouse, but it was the Christian tradition and there was no escaping that ... as there was no escape from what that day would bring.

I hadn't seen John all day until he showed up 30 minutes before the ceremony with his Best Man, both looking buzzed from bud and brew. It was his only friend in attendance, too. John seemed quite ready to put that ring on it, and seal the deal. I, on the other hand, was more relieved it was almost over, than bubbling with joy. I felt near ready to collapse. At six and half months along, my belly looked like triplets. My back hurt massively, and my feet hurt dreadfully. I kept thinking how nice it was going to be to relax and rest in the car on our drive to Santa Cruz. That's where we decided to go on our honeymoon, after my folks surprised us with a used car as their wedding gift. It sat in the driveway for days decorated with, "Just Married," painted on the back windshield, with pop cans tied to the bumper, and bright colorful ribbons just waiting to flutter in the wind.

The ceremony and reception didn't last long, and we were soon departing, with rice flying everywhere as we drove away. We didn't get too far down the street before John removed the clinging and clanging of cans against the blacktop, removing the ribbons, and off we went on that three-hour drive for our three-day journey.

I wasn't aware that he had stashed a case of beer in the car, in which he guzzled several on the way... adding worrisome stress to what I thought would be a relaxing trip. It was pleasantly silent for a while, until he started ranting about his folks refusing to attend his wedding. The car swerved a bit as he unleashed his fury, and I couldn't help offer to let me drive. He demanded he was fine, telling me to grab him another beer. I refused to

abide him, acknowledging he already had enough to drink, asking him to wait until we got to the motel. That set him off like a firecracker, demanding I get it, saying it was my duty as a wife to do what he says, or he'll stop the car and get it himself. His tone, his attitude had frightened me, fearing what he might do if he stopped ... I handed him a beer.

It was at that point I realized what he meant when we exchanged our vows, and upon 'the kiss,' he whispered in my ear, "Now you are mine." In that moment, his words had given me a sense of comfort, until his words revealed their true meaning. It became evermore clearer what he meant by them, when we had stopped to use the restrooms at a roadside rest stop. I tried to encourage him, insisting that he let me drive ... pointing out that he had too much to drink. We argued in the parked car, when he then boldly commanded me to never tell him what to do because he'll do as he goddam pleases, and I'll do whatever he pleases too.

He won the argument. I spent the remainder of the journey in quiet stillness, pretending to be asleep. I hoped he would pass out when we got to the motel, as I had known him to do now and then.

Finally, we reached the motel late that night and I could hardly walk up the stairs to our room. John grabbed everything we needed and carried all the luggage in, dropping it on the floor, popping open a beer. The first thing he wanted to do was take a shower, and he wanted me to take it with him. The first thing I did was kick off my shoes and lay across the bed. I was too tired to even stand another minute, so he took one by himself. He must have been in there a long time as I had fallen asleep. When he bounced into bed, I felt his hands and body rubbing and humping my backside. Half asleep, I tried to nudge him away, and when that didn't stop him, I tried begging him to understand how I felt - totally exhausted. When he wouldn't stop his forceful advances, I promised, "In the morning," ... "Please," I pleaded with him, but he had no compassion, only a selfish desire.

In his frustration and anger over my refusal, he jumped out of bed and began to rant that it was my wifely duty to fulfill his needs. He yelled, "I own you now!" I argued with him, calling him a selfish bastard to try and force me, in my condition. His red face was nearly the color of his hair, he was uncontrollable. "I'm going to consummate this marriage whether you want it or not," he voiced in a deep tone that gave me shivers. "You're my wife now, and you will do as I say!" he demanded, again. "Your damn Bible even says so!!"

It occurred to me in that moment it wasn't about the sex ... at least not solely. When he climbed back into bed, I surrendered, and let him have his way, though I hated it with a passion, sickened inside. While I laid there like a dead person, I tried to focus on the child within, seeking comfort to where I could escape. When he was done, he rolled over and passed out. I laid there in tears feeling emotionally and physically engulfed in pain and agony, with deep sadness and disappointment, until I finally dozed off to sleep. The next morning, he didn't remember a thing, at least he said so. And when I told him, he didn't

seem to show any regretful, nor apologize. Yet, it's been a memory I have never forgot ... the feeling has never ceased the disappointing scar of a little girl's broken dream.

That next day we went for breakfast, then to the Boardwalk. I wasn't in a happy mood while we were wandering about. John wanted to ride the roller coaster. I tried my best to convince him it wasn't a good idea, being pregnant and all, and when that didn't change his mind, I reminded him from previous conversations that I hated and feared roller coasters. In his cleverly boyish way, he maneuvered me to get buckled in.

Feeling nervously frightened as we flew round and round, way up high and sharply down, twisting and flying in the wind, I began to panic and scream 'STOP,' over and over, but the more I screamed the more he laughed ... as if the delight of seeing me helpless at his mercy thrilled him. Just when I thought it was over, a sense of relief briefly set in as the roller coaster came to a halt, and as people got off while others got on, I waited for my escape. Just then, John gave the man more tickets to take another spin. "No, No," I pleaded to the man in a desperate state, feeling a panic attack of fear I had not known since childhood, and yet the man took the tickets and moved us on. As the roller coaster started off again, I closed my eyes and prayed. I didn't scream or cry because I refused to give him the pleasure. His laughter did cease when he realized he could no longer frighten me.

I was furious after that, and the rest of our honeymoon was ruined for me. For John, he just stayed high and buzzed on weed and drink. I couldn't wait to get back home. The next day we drove around sightseeing, eating out, and spending the remainder of the time at the motel. John drank a lot from morning to night and was too wasted to have sex. Frankly, I was utterly relieved, but he certainly was ready in the morning, and I didn't resist. The last thing I wanted was another fight. Suddenly, I felt trapped. My fantasy was shattered, and all I could think of was, I could change him in time through the power of the Holy Spirit. I felt it must be my purpose to bring him to the Lord. I felt the devil in him and it was my belief, as a good Christian wife, to remain strong and faithful. The vows I took were until death do us part. It was then, that the burden put upon me suddenly became clear, and I clung to my hope evermore.

When we returned home, John moved into my parent's house, right into my bedroom. He was always on his best behavior. John was so angry at his folks that he quit his position working at the dairy. My dad had got him a job at the railroad on the day shift, and we were soon able to get into our own apartment. I was very excited to move out of mom and dad's house. It felt more real as an independent, rather than dependent on them. The thought of being a homemaker and mommy brought hope back into my soul. We had only been in our apartment for about a month when I went into labor in the middle of the night. Unfortunately, someone had stolen all of our gas and the car wouldn't start. He was so mad he shouted like a crazed animal cussing in anger, as his words echoed throughout the complex that no one seemed to notice. I panicked and called my dad. He came right over and took us to the Sacramento County Hospital ... about a half hour drive.

I asked my dad why mom didn't come. I really wanted my mom there with me but dad said he told her to stay home, she didn't need to come in her condition since she had just gone through surgery to remove a thyroid goiter. As soon as we reached the hospital, and I was securely in a bed, I felt totally alone and abandoned when my dad took John off the get coffee, leaving me for hours at a time. I laid in that hospital bed trying to survive the waves of pain growing more intense to unbearable. I had screamed so loud and for so long the nurse came in to tell me I had to be quieter because I was disturbing the other patients. I was never offered anything to help me get through the ordeal, but grabbing the bars on the back of the bed and squeezing with all my might, is what got me through each contraction ... and I never did quiet down as the screams grew louder and louder.

John had come to see me only a few times for brief moments, returning to the cafeteria to sit with my dad. He didn't go through it with me, and I didn't see his face again until it was all over and I was in a private room. I don't remember seeing my dad after I was taken to the labor room, nor after the birth when I was put in a private room where I would stay for three days.

While in labor, the nurse came several times to check on me to see how close I was getting, and she kept telling me I still had a while to go. On one of her check-up's, she had given me an enema, telling me to hold it as long as I could and setting a bedpan next to me. As she was leaving the room, she said she would be back in a few minutes while I begged her to stay. "You'll be fine," she mumbled as she disappeared and my fear grew more intense with every second that she was gone. When her few minutes had long passed, and a contraction came on, I could hold it no longer. Struggling in pain and desperation, I tried to put the bed pan under me but I couldn't. I pushed the call button repeatedly and began to yell very loudly "Help," but no one came soon enough, and I messed in the bed. It was so horrific the nurse was upset. She instructed me to go take a shower while she changed the bedding. She handed me a towel and a clean white gown, but no one helped me to get there. She pointed and said, "The shower is down the hall on the left, you'll see the sign," and off I waddled in embarrassment.

I managed to slowly make my way down the long hallway to the shower, staying close to the wall for support, hoping someone would help me, but no one was in sight. I was scared and in pain and all alone. After I managed to take the soiled gown off and step into the shower, I grabbed the bar with one hand while adjusting the water with the other, hanging on for life. Suddenly, another contraction came upon me and I found myself crumbling to the floor in a curled position, while the warm water washed over me. After bearing through it, I began to scream, "HELP," but no one came.

In a panic, I moved as quick as I could to wash up, get dressed, and get back to my bed before another contraction came. Swiftly, I moved down the hall nearly hugging the wall hoping to make it, but just as I could see the doorway to my room, I felt the wave coming on and I froze. Thank God a nurse was close by and she helped me through the pain, and got me back into bed. When the worst of labor had come upon me, I didn't think I would make it ... I so weak. No one had prepared me for child labor, no one told me not to push with every contraction, and I had pushed and pushed through every wave. One nurse

made a comment that I should conserve my strength and try to relax, but those words fell on deaf ears as my hands grasped tightly those bed bars, with expanded lungs wailing, until nearly collapsing right to the very end.

As they pulled me from that bed onto a gurney, all the way down the hallway to the delivery room the waves were coming and going every few seconds, as I screamed and screamed. Then, I felt them shifting my body from the gurney to the delivery table. They strapped my arms down while securing my feet into cold hard metal stirrups. At this point I just had no strength left to push and it seemed the pain had ceased and everything around me faded. My mind seemed to sink inward into a state of surrender, as I heard what sounded like an echo shouting, “push, push, push.” I remember my left hand squeezing something extremely tight, so hard in fact the nurse told me later I squeezed her hand so hard it went numb. For a brief moment I felt I was in a dream, and suddenly I awoke, and gathered every last ounce of energy I could for one last push. It was a push so massive I broke every blood vessel in my face ... a purplish red face was the result for quite some time. And in that final burst of energy my baby girl was born. When the doctor placed her warm, moist and soft fragile body across my tummy, the most amazing feeling consumed my whole being. A feeling I had never known ... and tears of joy welled up within.

It wasn't until later I realized the damage to my face when I was able to look into a mirror. I was horrified, and it was a lesson I learned to never repeat with my future childbearing. But in that moment, that brief moment, I wasn't aware of anything except my tender baby lying across my tummy. Those few seconds were something I knew I would never forget, as they quickly carried her away. Instantly, the sound of her cry brought a deep sense of relief and contentment that made the horrible experience nearly forgotten – and surely, completely forgotten in time.

It wasn't until the next morning, however, they brought my baby to my room. They said I needed the rest, but all I could think about all night was my baby and how much I wanted to hold her in my arms. The moment they brought her to me was the most wonderful moment of my life. I was in the hospital for several days and John came every day to see me and the baby. He seemed happy too, a proud papa he was ... handing out cigars. At his insistence, prior to her arrival, he had already picked the name he wanted for our child, and it didn't matter if we had a boy or a girl, the name was going to be either Lee Joseph or Lea Ann ... I had no say in that, although I was in agreement all the same.

The day John took me and Lea Ann home, we stopped at my folks to show my mom and dad their new granddaughter. One look at her long narrow feet, with slender toes sticking out of the blanket, the first thing my dad chuckled was, “Look at those skis.” My mom was delighted to hold her first grandbaby. Soon thereafter, we arrived at the apartment where her home awaited with a pretty bassinet next to our bed. It was a few weeks before we ventured out to take her to see his folks, as they never made an attempt to come see us.

As new parents, it was very difficult right from the start, particularly because she suffered from terrible colic ... keeping us both up most of the first night ... then night after night after night after that. There wasn't much the doctor said we could do about it, saying she'll grow out of it. But it was causing us both to bicker, and one night John picked her up from the bassinet and carried her into the nursery room, where her crib was already set up. He placed her in the crib and shut her door. He couldn't stand her crying next to our bed any longer, and he wasn't going to wait another minute to relieve his sexual desire. It had been weeks since I let him touch me before the birth, and it had been another two weeks after the birth. By then, he was fed up with masturbation.

While my little baby cried and cried in the next room, I tried to fend him off. He completely ignored the fact in which he knew - straight from the doctor's mouth - to refrain from sex for 4 to 6 weeks. He called that bullshit, and insisted I fulfill my wifely duty. When I tried to appeal to his rational mind of the risk that I could hemorrhage, he showed absolutely no concern for me, as he continued to force himself upon me, against my pleading. He thrust himself so hard inside of me that I cried in pain, and even while I bled, soaking into the bedding, he didn't roll off until he had been released from what he deemed as his suffering.

After he finished, I immediately cringed to the bathroom and began to drop large blood clots in the toilet. I was very scared I was going to hemorrhage, while I was doubled over in sharp stabbing cramps. As I moaned in pain, I could hear him snoring in the other room while our baby cried in another ... feeling helpless to do anything in that moment. Finally, Lea Ann had stopped crying, and all I could think of was how I needed to lie down and elevate my legs. When the blood clots had finished passing, I managed to make it to the couch and lie down with pillows under my legs. I contemplated on if I should go to the emergency room as the waves of pain came and eased.

Eventually I fell asleep until Lea Ann began to cry again. I breast fed her on the couch while she drifted back to sleep and I was able to put her back in the crib, while John still snored. I remained on the couch with elevated legs until the alarm went off for John to get up early the next morning. I hadn't passed any more blood clots so I figured I was going to be okay, knowing I needed to take it easy and stay off my feet as much as possible.

That morning, however, John and I didn't speak a word, nor did we hardly looked at each other as I sat with Lea Ann on the couch, cuddling her in my arms. He got a cup of coffee, and then grabbed the lunch bag I had ready for him in the refrigerator, then he left for work. He knew what he did, the soiled sheets left evidence of that, and perhaps he didn't care, perhaps he felt ashamed. I only felt anger and belittlement, and when he had returned home much later in the day, I told him that was not going to ever happen again. I warned him if he ever tried, before I was ready, I was going to stay at my folks. I took the risk of backlash, but he gave me none ... perhaps it was just too gross for him, perhaps he felt badly.

Having a colicky baby is a mother's nightmare, as I discovered. It wasn't just at night that she cried for hours while trying to burp her, rub her tummy, rock her to sleep, it went on all day and all night off and on for weeks. At one point I thought my mind was going to snap into insanity. At least John got to escape during the day, and I tried to make his nights less sleepless at my own sacrifice. The lack of sleep, stress, and mental torment had driven me to the edge.

One day, I felt the only sanity I could find was to go outside and close the door, sit on the steps of our upstairs apartment, and plug my ears for just a moment of peaceful quietness. In that moment I wanted to run and never return, but I was then consumed with guilt for having such horrible feelings and thoughts. I continued on doing the best I could, and in time things finally smoothed out when Lea Ann was over her colic ... and we all had fully rested ... it seemed the worse of it was behind us. Things between John and I got better, and there was once again hope.

It took a while for his mother to come around to fully embrace her grandchild. It took time, I suppose, for her to get past the feeling of disgrace. By then, Lea Ann was months old before she really showed much affection. His dad, brother, sister and granny were all overjoyed. They showed much affection, especially granny.

It took time, years actually, for his mother to fully warm up to Lea Ann, but once she did, it didn't take long for her to start manipulating us regarding her upbringing. She saw the lifestyle we were living – a simple, almost hippy environment - and her attitude was one of concern. Her obvious need to provide her granddaughter with only the best, was her way of taking pride in the family's image.

Once her grandmother came to fully embrace Lea Ann, she was quite spoiled thereafter – she lacked for nothing during her early childhood years. It was a bit challenging to find balance between his mother's society lifestyle and our simple environment. She knew John wasn't making the kind of money to provide for what she felt Lea Ann needed, but neither of us wanted our child to grow up spoiled ... and in time, we saw that was a growing issue. John especially didn't want his daughter to grow up to be a rich snob, the way he perceived his mother to be. The situation was far from harmonious, but it didn't become a big issue until many years later.

When Lea Ann was about six months old, I tried to go back to school, back to that building at the fairgrounds to finish my education. John's work time had been changed to evenings, and so he was able to get several hours of sleep before I had to be at school. That would give him enough awake time to take care of Lea Ann. After I had pestered him, he reluctantly allowed me to go back to school ... but that didn't last long before he demanded I quit. He couldn't handle taking care of Lea Ann during the day. The feeding, changing, crying and tying him down, wasn't working, so he started taking her to his mother's most days. After a while she began to complain that it was too much for her and granny to have her all week. She insisted he take care of her most of the time, and occasionally bring her over, in which he then began to demand that I quit school and take care of her myself.

That's when he started sitting in his car at the fairgrounds waiting for me to come out at lunch, and try to get me to leave, and many times I had to leave because Lea Ann was crying for me, reaching her arms out while locked into her car seat. His harassment soon became overly stressful for me to continue, especially when he began to accuse me of cheating on him with one of the guys in my class, because he saw me talking and laughing with him one day. When I realized John had been stalking me at school, things started to get intense with his jealousy, leaving me with the only choice I could see ... I had to give up on my education.

I gave up a lot to save our marriage, to keep our lives happy and fulfilled. Until then, things were going along fine, but his possessiveness was beginning to smother me. Soon, I felt the Lord's presence once again, and perhaps things would have continued on the way they had, taking his abuse, if I hadn't taken that step to return to the reading my Bible. It had been a long time since I had read my Bible, and I was feeling empty inside. I felt I needed to turn back to my ways and focus once again on my faith, which had always brought me contentment and peace. I needed my spirituality to come alive ... I needed to feel the Spirit's guidance, because I was feeling lost. I felt such darkness surrounding me, to where I could no longer see the light.

Something had changed in me and that caused something to change in him, and it was not for the better. I had forsaken my faith for my marriage, at least in the delighted eyes of John. I secretly harbored hope I could turn him from his dark ways, and I certainly tried. But time revealed that John would never see the glory in Christ Jesus, and any utterance of His name sent him into agitation, boarding disgust. The division between us began to grow deeper.

One drunken day, John unleashed his wrath on me when he found I was reading my Bible. He told me then that he never wanted to see that piece of shit in his home again, and commanded that I never teach Lea Ann that crap. He warned me if he ever saw a Bible again in our home, he would destroy it. Being that it was the Bible I had from childhood, I hid it away to protect it. Over the next few months, I grew depressed with the situation, while I read it during times he was at work, always fearful he would catch me. I began to feel a need to escape from him, somewhere, anywhere, and I then prayed and prayed for help.

A friend from my school days had contacted me out of the blue. Dawn had moved to Los Gatos, California after her mother passed away. She said I had been on her mind for months and was wondering how I was doing. She knew a little of my life with John and seemed concerned for me. Her call was a prayer answered. When I told her what was going on, she not only invited me to come stay with her, she insisted, convincing me it was the Will of the Lord. I was scared, of course, how John would react, so I didn't tell him I was going. I left while he was at work, and I made everyone who knew my plan swear they wouldn't tell him where I was.

My mom let me take her car, knowing it was only for a week or so, and as I drove away, with Lea Ann strapped into her car seat, I felt a sense of freedom I hadn't felt for so long. But in the back of my mind the thought of John haunted me. When I arrived at her rustic cabin in the trees, I was filled with such an overwhelming sense that the Spirit of the Lord had led me there. For several days it was absolutely wonderful, just me and Lea Ann, and my savior friend Dawn. Then it turned into a nightmare.

John convinced my mom that he loved me so much, crying and carrying on about how he missed me and Lea Ann, expressing how it hurt him that I left him without notice ... although I had left a handwritten note. Apparently, my mom tried to keep my whereabouts from him, but she had a soft heart and was gullible enough to fall for his great performance ... the same performance he pulled on me many times as I too had fallen for ... and she told him where I was.

It was barely noon when I saw John pull into the driveway and my heart raced with fear. I asked Dawn to watch Lea Ann while I went outside to approach him. He was acting very nice, trying his best to convince how sorry he was, even going as far as to say he would be willing to change his ways, and accept the Lord into his heart. He begged me to come home, and once again I fell for his act. Dawn tried to convince me to stay but for the sake of my family, I felt I needed to go. Perhaps this was the breakthrough I had waited for.

I went back to him that day, and a few of months later my dad was being transferred to the state of Washington to oversee the new construction of railroad cars. So, my parents had moved away, giving us a chance to have a real home. We were still living in the apartment upstairs across town when they invited us to move into the house, to keep it up while they were gone, as they intended to return in a year. I was thrilled to move back into my family's home, but it changed everything for us. It wasn't long after when John avoided our Bible reading sessions – which they weren't that often – and I knew he really wasn't ever into it. That plan didn't last long before a new plan came into existence, a plan that involved not only taking drugs, but dealing them as well, and it all started when a high school friend of John's - who was in the Army stationed in Germany - had sent us a cuckoo clock.

The cuckoo clock was gutted and stuff with hash. Until then, John and I were potheads, nothing stronger than that. I started smoking pot long before Lea Ann was born, as John had introduced into my life. We smoked a lot of hash after that, but things developed from there into stronger drugs, after John started selling the hash to guys at work. In return, he was buying quantities of hard drugs from them. The next thing I knew, he was bringing home LSD, mescaline, cocaine, and PCP. Before long we were the biggest drug dealers in town, and John was on a roll. Cash was pouring in, and I must admit, I did become just as involved in enjoying the perks, too.

With my folks gone, we had to rely solely on John's folks to watch Lea Ann on weekends, so we could venture off and have some fun. By then she was over a year old. This was a time we spent going to concerts, getting stoned, and having a wild time. We attended indoor and outdoor concerts, seeing the likes of The Grateful Dead, Janis Joplin,

Santana, Jefferson Airplane, The Dobbie Brothers, Journey, Jimi Hendrix, The Eagles, The Doors, and so, so many more ... we were having a blast. John never liked dancing, but I just loved it. The crowds were huge, and everyone was always high and showing lots of love. It was a time of being free, we were flowing with the times ... times of the hippy movement ... it was a crazy time to be alive. I remember the feeling of breaking rules, going barefoot and braless, proudly wearing second hand clothes and no makeup ... a free spirit from society's judgement and religious condemnation.

I saw life differently - larger than the picture I had known - and it changed my perspective from what I came to view as religious bondage to spiritual freedom. I shut my Bible and opened my mind to experience another reality ... one that taught me deeper truths, and showed me a clearer vision of the unseen world.

We had met a lot of new people, some were couples with children, others single, a few drifters, and life seemed full. Most days were a normal week, work and home life, but we always seemed to fill our weekends with some activity or another. We took Lea Ann on many trips, camping and traveling. The older she got the more we included her in our outings. She was always the joy of everyone's company. My most vivid memory is the trip to the Sahara Desert.

John enjoyed having parties and inviting new people over, some I had never seen, and with a built-in swimming pool in our backyard, our home was the perfect place for parties. This was probably the best time John and I got along, staying high seemed to make us work, until I started feeling that we needed to stop.

After one weekend when Lea Ann was at her grandparents, and John had gone off with a buddy to make a deal in the Bay Area, I decided to take some Orange Sunshine and trip for the day. I had had some of the nicest and most spiritual trips on acid, I felt comfortable being alone. Nature had always reached out to me and I found myself feeling one with it ... communicating with it. I felt closer to God than ever, when my mind was free from the restraints of this world. Of course, I had heard stories of 'bad trips' before, but I didn't think it would ever happen to me, until it did.

I remember sitting in the living room for what seemed timeless, as the hours passed. I began to feel bodiless, I was only aware of my mind, and it was sealed in a box where I could not escape. I felt entombed, and paranoia set in. All I could do is chant over and over the thought "Let me out," echoing for hours begging within my mind. I was mentally imprisoned in that state for over 8 hours, and when I finally came down, I swore I'd never take acid again, and I never did. I remember hearing John's voice trying to snap me out of it. He kept repeating "It's going to be ok, it will wear off," he said, as he laid me down on the couch where I remained until the nightmare had passed. It was a huge wakeup call.

After that, I wanted out, but he wanted to keep going, saying I was just being paranoid. I was paranoid for good reason, a few people in our circle had been busted, and something

inside me was screaming a warning, but John's operation began to grow even bigger, as he took more trips to the Bay Area, returning with lots of different drugs, some he was told came straight from Timothy Leary's pure LSD, a rare find.

John had no problem selling every last pill or bag of weed he got his hands on. He was buying pot by the pounds, and we would weigh up ounce baggies to sell, as well as filling capsules with power. Our house became a revolving door day and night with drug buyers, which the neighbors must have taken notice. My paranoia insisted that John change the way he did business ... meeting in other places. Occasionally, he did business at home with his most trusted dealers working for him. They were put on notice to never bring customers to our house.

Then late one evening one of our dealers came by and talked John into walking down the street to meet a new contact of his, some guy out of Los Angeles, who wanted to buy a large stash of pot. He swore the guy was cool. John came into the bedroom where I was getting ready for bed to tell me he was going with Todd to meet a new buyer. It seemed odd to me since he usually didn't meet with our dealer's buyers, but I didn't think much about it. Todd had told John that the guy wouldn't make the deal unless he met him, but Todd did the deal himself that evening, selling him an ounce of pot. The man indicated he was interested in buying several pounds. When John returned home, he was almost excited at the prospect of putting together a big deal like that. The guy seemed to really impress him.

We didn't hear any more about it after that, and I had completely forgot myself. I think I was relieved more than anything. I felt we were getting in too deep. John must have sensed that I was getting cold feet, so one night just before going to bed, John went into the closet and got the bag of cash that he had been storing. I didn't know there was so much.

He started tossing the bills into the air, handing me a stack, and we both were rolling in it lying in bed. It was so funny we laughed, continuing to throw it up in the air. It was in that moment that John said that it was time to buy a new car ... at least new to us. It was time to trade in the old car my folks got us and step up in style. The day we purchased our car, we both felt like kids driving around town showing it off. Lea Ann had fallen asleep in her car seat, and when we arrived home early that evening, and I put her right to bed in her crib.

It was nearly dark when we heard the doorbell ring. When John opened the door, there stood the guy from LA, with a woman standing beside him. I heard the man apologize for coming so late, explaining that Todd had given him our address. At first John said it wasn't cool, and I didn't think he was going to invite them in. They guy apologized again, assuring him everything was cool. For some reason, John felt it was ok and he invite them in. They both took a seat in the living room, smiling and being friendly. I sat down on the couch where the woman was seated, while John and the man sat down in the recliners. They were both much older than either of us, and I felt uncomfortable in their presence. John and the man talked business, and when John mentioned we had other

things available, the man became very interested. He wanted to see what we had. Proudly, John got up and headed for the bedroom to get the drugs, and I followed him. I tried to get John to not sell them anything, but he was sure they were ok.

I took my seat on the couch as John handed the man a bag of powdered mescaline, which we were going to fill capsules for selling. The man asked how much the bag was, and as soon as John told him, he stood up, reached into his pocket and pulled out a handful of cash, counting out the amount. John was standing next to him as he reached out for the money, and within a flash of a second, as John took the cash in hand, the man slapped handcuffs on him. It happened so fast that my heart stopped for a moment in fear, and I leaped to my feet. The woman quickly stood up asking me to turn around. She then put handcuffs on me. The man then went outside, the front door wide open, and I saw him waving his arms. Suddenly, a flock of police cars, and unmarked cars came rushing in. Within minutes the entire house was filled with both uniform and plain clothes officers. I stood frozen as they took John into another room.

The woman took me into the bathroom and made me strip, then I put my clothes back on. I was worried about Lea Ann, and so she let me close her bedroom door, and instructed the officers roaming through our house searching for drugs, not to disturb her. They did search her room, quietly, and she never did wake up. They found all our drugs in our bedroom closet, along with a lot of cash, in which they took it all. They asked me where the cuckoo clock was, and I told them we didn't have it any longer, wondering how they knew. The woman kept me handcuffed on the couch while I waited for them to finish searching the house and integrating John. One policeman came out and said she could take the handcuffs off, informing her I wouldn't be arrested, as they marched John out the front door.

When all had finally cleared out, I was shaking so hard I could hardly make the call to John's folks. Immediately they came and got Lea Ann and I and took us to their house. The next day they hired a very expensive lawyer and John was released on bail to come home. Over the course of several weeks a decision was made by the court lowering his five felonies to one misdemeanor, with a year of probation ... and John was free. I asked John why they didn't arrest me and he said because he made a deal. He agreed to tell them who he purchased the drugs from, if they didn't arrest me, but he gave them the name of a dealer who had recently died of an overdose.

It wasn't long after that when my mom and dad were returning home and we had to find another place to live. My dad was furious that we turned their home into a drug house and wanted us out immediately after John's arrest. My mom, however, convinced him to let us stay until they returned. We did find a rental house, sort of in the country, and a new life began ... drug dealing free. But for John, it became more than that, as I saw him slip into an addiction on what was called 'Reds'. These downer pills made him crazy, and with his drinking, he passed out a lot, which was better than his meanness at times. It was incredible that he made it to work every day. We had no friends, really, we didn't do much then. We hardly even spoke to each other. By then, we weren't doing so well, as I didn't want to be around him when he was like that.

I tried to keep Lea Ann from the strain of things by getting her involved in fun activities, like making sand candles, or gardening, or spending time at the park. By then, she was about two years old and seemed like a happy little girl. I tried my best to keep reality from her, as life was very miserable for me, and she was my only joy and savior from the horrible existence I felt stuck in.

John's work shift had changed to midnights when he became involved with some new guys at work. He started spending more time away from us, and mostly came home to eat and sleep, shower and back to work. Months went by as I cared for my little girl, and just tried to focus on making a good home. She was all I had that gave me something to live for. It was peaceful when he wasn't around, but I felt like I was walking on egg shells when he was.

Then one day, the old friend who sent hash in a cuckoo clock, showed up at our home. Kenny had just got out of the Army. He arrived at a time I was in such need of someone, anyone who would show me kindness and appreciation. I was hanging on with a thread, and found myself turning back to my faith. Kenny was a lifesaver, his spirit brightened mine. He saw the condition John was in, and tried to pull him out, which in time he did ... yet, John backslid, and things turned for the worse.

Just when I thought life would turn around, my greatest nightmare was still in the works.