

# WITCHES, BLOOD, TREES

***"You are my hiding place;  
You shall preserve me from trouble;  
You shall surround me with songs of deliverance."* Psalm 32**

In May, the fifth month of the year,  
I was the fifth manager hired in 2000.

New managers, they came and they went and they went, "No! *Thank you!*"

One by one, my predecessors simply didn't come in for work one morning. No thankyou note left behind, just quick and dirty moveouts. It usually took the employer several days to find out that they had another vacancy - and the owner *never* knew.

Royal Greens was the property no one wanted but in order to get the owner's desirable properties they had to take on Royal Greens, too. Had I known this, would I have turned it down? Probably not. I kind of identified with this beautiful little community. Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder. The Greens part was obvious, we were surrounded by the greens of Gresham Golf Course. But *Royal*?

**"DON'T YOU KNOW I PLAN AHEAD?"**

Had I known what was to come, would I have taken it on?



Lots of managers came and went, but you can call me *MsManagement* and I don't quit. Red warning signs are bullet points on the Renovation Plan.

On my first visit, a manager from another property showed me around with warnings of who lived where and what threat they posed. Wonnnderful. "Ya gotta be careful of Mr. Rodgers, he's this huge guy who lives here when he's out of prison. One eye goes off sideways, the other eye looks straight atcha. He'll probably threaten you, he does that to everyone. He and his wife are mean and they *may* actually be dangerous, so just stay away from them." Words of wisdom and comfort.

"The Rodgers rent a portable washer and dryer on top of their rent. They pay their rent but they never pay for the washer and dryer, \$45 a month. We haven't collected *that* rent for the five months we've been here, and who knows before

that? We can't move them out because they pay their rent and - they *run* this property! So good luck with that. It's your job to collect the washer dryer rent they owe." Nice. *Neeeeext?*

"Oh, and if you ever get any mail for Rita Monroe, don't open it. It's for me. I get paid for being a confidential informant by corresponding with guys in prison. So, I go by Rita and that way they don't know who I really am." *Lovvvvvvvely.*



Royal Greens was a handsomely-built little property in dreary disrepair: 91 apartments in a cul-de-sac with a single entryway surrounded by a golf course. Lovely blossoming trees, a bright and cheerful sun and *litter*. The junk all over the grounds was annoying to say the least. Watch your step, dogs welcome here. The strong Columbia Gorge winds blew everything up whirling around, sending butts and boxes, wrappers and leftovers and grit high into the air.

And what amazed me was that my tour guide, *the manager*, just swatted her way through it and kept going. I had pockets full of cigarette butts and handfuls of litter after just a short walk, grabbing up everything I could. 'Always leave a place better than you found it.' I tried to maintain smiling eye contact with her as I secretly stuffed my pockets with the trash I collected.

"Here's one of the two garbage enclosures. I can't get the tenants to keep the lids down." Pointing to heaps of garbage outside the cans, she continued "And they send their little kids out here to dump their garbage. They're too short to get the garbage inside. *soooooo.*" Meanwhile I'm scooping out my pockets and throwing litter in the cans. Well, *kind of* in, the cans were all overflowing so the wind carried most of it away again. Oh, this *is* fun. Let's do *this again*.

This was my first interview. I was smiling and wiping my hands and she was harrumphing as she walked away from the problem. There's a fool born every day and I guess this was *my* day.

Back to the office to meet Jeremy the maintenance man. He showed me the three apartments 'ready for movein' which served as models. Un-be-lie-va-ble.

Strewn with open paint cans, abandoned dried out paint rollers and pans filled with cigarette butts, *filthy*. Bare, hot wires dangled from the ceiling. Broken windows had fallen *into* the living room as the sagging frames of these aging buildings no longer fit the windows. Garbage, more butts and animal 'debris' on the carpet. Smell!!!!-ly! I was speechless. Couldn't believe that they would let a potential new hire see this much less potential renters. No wonder the property had failed!

Why would anyone let this happen? Royal Greens wasn't a mystery and didn't need a

miracle. It just needed someone to care about it, who cared about its Residents. It needed Someone.

Couple of weeks later I was offered the job. The first thing I did was walk every inch of the property, picking up trash. Uooooofda. Residents came out to smirk at the new girl, which you could also interpret as smiling. 'Who is she?' Well, I was wearing the requisite black suit, the goldette name badge, and I was taking authority in my own little way by cleaning the place up. I waved at people and smiled then stooped over to pick up the next offensive bits. *This* was something new.

The lovely brick entryway was decorated with tattered, plastic, used car lot flags. Most of the color was long gone and that incessant gorge wind kept plucking off the triangles one by one. The wind, amongst everything else including crime, kept the residents moving, too. Moving *out*. I made a quick trip home to pick up a brand new American flag stored in the barn still in its box, then back to post the colors. I ran it up the flagpole and attached the line to the pole in several places with zip ties to slow down the vandalism.



The flag flew.

It was a new day!

I washed the entryway to the office and all the windows there, inside and out. I swept, I cleaned, I planted flowers, anything that pointed to the hope I had for what I saw possible. Vision Equity.

I walked through those three 'ready' apartments again and they were exactly unchanged. As a resident manager, I was required to move in but there was no danger of that anytime soon. Just tell me, what *had* been maintained over the last two weeks?



What emerged over those first months was that the maintenance man was part of the problem and the only thing he maintained was his drug traffic. He had lived onsite before our company assumed management, so he was the only person who knew the property. Knew the residents. Knew their buying habits because his wife had the same one. *And he held all the keys*. It was a neat little deal for him. Forget about renovations. Forget about rentals. Forget about changing 30 or more years of 'this is how we do it.' No one ever expected better.

With keys and secrets cloistered in his shell game switching between empty apartments, it was easy for him to keep the manager running in circles. And lots of fun. All he had to do was hole up somewhere until the office closed for the night and

then his drug business began. Little wonder no one wanted to live here outside of his circle of customers.

Except me, I did. And every morning I made my rounds of picking up garbage, smiling and waving as residents left for work – those few who worked.

I kept seeing what could be rather than what was.

Strategically, there was only one apartment home desirable to me. At the far end, adjacent the park to keep an eye on the kids playing, at the end of the cul-de-sac so I could keep watch over nocturnal goings on. There was only so much change possible when I gave up control all night every night and drove off.



Unfortunately, the current resident in that home had an unusual lease term of 18 months and there was no way my company would let me postpone moving onsite. *Resident* manager. The view from that place was beautiful: trees, spacious golf greens, a quiet pond, all against a backdrop of majestic Mt. Hood. Only one neighbor to the left, then open spaces. But, *occupied*.

The occupant, Randi, was a single lady with no ties anywhere and she loved her new home. She had waited months for this apartment and enjoyed a hefty move-in bonus plus rent reduction when she moved in – all of which had to be repaid if she moved out early. So, Randi was staying, phooey!

I really didn't want to move in anywhere else because I didn't want to move again for the rest of my life. My daughter was in a great private school within the six-mile radius I required and she had nine more years there before college.

Then wonder of wonders and Randi suddenly announced she knew someone in Florida and she was moving there *immediately*. She broke her lease and was gone in days. I grabbed our sleeping bags, toothbrushes, clothes, the Bible and our cat, and we were *there*; our furniture came in over the weekend. Being single has its benefits.

On our first Saturday morning, I slipped quietly out onto our patio to enjoy the sunrise. The sun rose beautifully orange and brilliant pink over Mt. Hood.

"Four!" *Whack*. Pop. The golfers rise early, too. Their golf balls make life interesting - *pop*. One cussing golfer pushed over the tiny two wires, the 'fence line', to retrieve his ball.

"Good morning!" I waved at him.

The cusser cussed and returned to the golf course proper and I returned to the view of the pond. And the growing sun. Fabulous.



Suddenly Virginia, our gardening neighbor, came running frantically across the shared backyards, frantic.

“Oh – I’m taking care of my friends’ dog for the weekend, and I think he killed a squirrel! He didn’t chew on it, it’s just lying there not moving. You’ve gotta help!”

Not knowing what I was supposed to do, I grabbed a large towel and ran following after Virginia.

Sure enough, there was a very large squirrel there on the ground with eyes wide open and it seemed to be watching us. I wanted to get him out of there before he was decapitated. I walked up to him, wrapped him up snugly in the towel and retreated back to the privacy of my peaceful patio.

You know what else gets up with the sun and the golfers and the squirrels and the dogs? Kids. Many, many little kids excited that now they could come and visit me at home! Oh, *joy*.

Smiling little faces and squealing voices wondered if the squirrel were really *dead*. How did *they* know? I tell you, if you want to stay on top of security, ask the kids.

"Is he dead?"

“Well, I don’t know. He’s not moving at all.” I was cradling him upside down like an infant. However: did you know that squirrels virtually stop breathing and their hearts 'hibernate' if you turn them upside down?

“What’re you gonna do?”

“Can we see him? Show us!!!”

“Come on, we want see ‘im.”

What with the kids showing up, I hadn’t seen him myself yet. I just held him as I sat surrounded by kids and hoping that nothing leaked out.



“Well, let me look first. You guys go stand way over there by the fence. And you have to promise to not talk, not a sound and be absolutely still. Promise?”

They didn't make a peep as they nodded their little heads up and down while walking way-over-there, eyes huge. Well, here goes.

Still on his back, I cautiously uncovered his face while tilting my head as far away as possible. I was sure he was going to spring out and demolish me. His one eye that I



could see looked like it might be seeing me, too, but still no breath and no motion. But no *blood*, and that was good. His mouth was wide open and he had four *enormous* yellow teeth.

One by one the children took turns tiptoeing by to get a close look at him as I rocked him back and forth. Well, what would *you* have done?

They buried him properly in a somber ceremony about two o'clock. Kept the kids busy quite awhile. Sorry to say, Chloe invited all of them in to use our bathroom that very first day, so convenient for them and all. Goody, goody. Quiet time off with a gaggle of kids.

Oh, and did I mention that the only road in and out of Royal Greens went right by the home of that man involved in murdering the boy up on Mt. Hood? Oh, yes. He was in prison but his associates lived right outside of Royal Greens and they *knew who I was*. Apartment managers see it all. Yes, I was the one who took the information to the sheriff which led to his arrest, but can we still be friends?



Back to the blossoms. With a clean entryway and sparkly office windows, folks started coming in. Best rental practices forbid using words like “safe”, “secure”, “good place for your family” when showing guests around.

Given this prohibition, I brought in things to decorate the office and convey the message: teddy bears, flowers, coloring kits to keep the kids happy while their parents rented, and so on. A happy parent is one whose child is being entertained while they fill out their applications – that was my job. I loved it.



Very quickly we had no vacancies. I brought more stuff from home to turn an apartment into a model as soon as someone moved out: floor lamps, rocking chair, another teddy, a comfy comforter. On the deck pots of flowers, packets of seeds and more pots, soil, a trowel and another chair. Couple of throw pillows, a blanky and some books, another floor lamp and one picture on the wall in the living room. A Thomas Kincade, Painter of Light. Hopefully Royal Greens now appealed to everyone, from grandparents to first-time renters with new careers.

A sudden and dramatic turnaround, a success. And all it took was a little Devotion, some Imagination and a Desire to give folks a good life. I knew Where to get these, every good and every perfect gift that I needed. Glad to have Connections because I'd need all the support I could find . . .

One of my residents, a single mom and wonderful woman, spoke as she wrote out her rent check, "It's been over two and a half years since my husband disappeared while camping on Mt. Hood and no one seems to care." My heart broke as she described the years of looking for answers, how one of her daughters had drunk straight bleach in a suicide attempt, the other ran wild.

After months of no news, one morning this woman's teary face filled the TV screen as the newscaster reported that the bones found in the firepit on Mt. Hood were, indeed, those of her missing husband.

There's nothing like a nice little getaway on Mt. Hood.

We all say the same thing, don't we? "I just never thought it would happen here." It does.

And clearly there were many signs that it was happening here. Early one morning, I made the call.

"This is Gresham police. What's your emergency?"

"Would you please send someone out here to Royal Greens? I think someone is manufacturing explosives here, but it could be drugs. I don't know. But I know *you'll* know.

*Really?*

An undercover detective came out and I showed him what I had found and whom I suspected.



An invaluable result of keeping the property absolutely clean is that any new trash in the morning stands out. It also provides a date and timeframe of overnight. Combine that with whoever just moved in, a new roommate, or a car in someone else's parking space, and likelihoods emerge.

Attached to the rental office was the centrally located laundry facility with a single bathroom.

In that sparkling clean bathroom one morning before opening was some very interesting debris in the waste basket: countless matchbooks separated from their covers with all the matchheads neatly trimmed off. OK, let's see, what can you use that sulfur for? Either to manufacture drugs or make something that goes ka-*boom*.



Two young brothers had recently moved into the next building over and their father had confidently co-signed for them.

So the detective saw what I had, made a couple notes and went his way. Very nice man. To this day I have his business card.

Couple days later he comes back, "How did you know?" and he paused, waiting for my explanation. "Really, how did you know?" He almost asked suspiciously.

Now, I could've said "I'm psychic" and he'd have gone with that, no problem. But I'm not psychic, I have a Friend who knows everything and shares His secrets with me, it's part of our love affair, sharing our secrets.

I said nothing - I know when to say nothing.

"Well, it was hard for *me* to figure out!" he continued. "Their arrests were as minors and their records are sealed, so it took awhile. They've been convicted of manufacturing illegal explosive devices, among other things."

Aw, shucks, and they were so clean cut and pleasant!


"But it's their sister living there who's the worst."

Sister? Never even saw her before they suddenly moved out - right after I warned them about the police surveillance. Just being helpful.

Every day something new. Keeps one fresh, doesn't it?



Public Information (Last Updated: 09/01/2010 10:22:44)



SID# 16425347

**Offender Name:** PHILLIPS, JEREMIAH EUGENE

**Age:** 32    **DOR:** 05/10/78

**Gender:** Male    **Race:** White

**Height:** 5'08"    **Hair:** Brown

**Weight:** 170 lbs    **Eyes:** Blue

**Caseload:** 17005 Angeloni, Roberts

**Location:** WARNER CREEK  
CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

**Status:** Inmate

**Institution Admission Date:** 08/15/2006

**Earliest Release Date:** 03/01/2011

Offense	County	Crime	Sentence Type	Begin Date	Termination Date
060132CR.01	HOOD	ATTEMPTED SEXUAL PENETRATION 1	Inmate Sentence	08/15/2006	10/06/2008
060132CR.02	HOOD	ATTEMPTED SEXUAL PENETRATION 1	Inmate Sentence	08/15/2006	-

Speaking of new and fresh, my company finally replaced Jeremy the maintenance man, who, as of this writing, I have discovered is serving a six-year prison term *for sexual abuse of minors*. Now, when his wife invited Chloe stay with her during office hours, why had I said no? Who do you think Whispers when *you* call it intuition? Nexxxxxxt.

Kreen showed up one day to introduce himself: smiling, polite, a very devout muslim convert and 'very experienced with all maintenance work'. What a relief! Although my company hadn't screened Kreen, the head office had hired him and sent him to me so he had to be an instant success.

Kreen selected the very first apartment inside our brick entryway on the top floor. "This way I can see everyone coming and going. I will be in control so you can just manage here." *Sounded* good, someone to count on. And that Friday evening, just after the office *closed*, Kreen pulled in with the largest UHaul truck available and six 'cousins' to help him move. How *nice* of them! And then they *stayed*.

A break in at the maintenance shop punctuated Kreen's first week.

Someone knew exactly what they wanted and exactly where it was. They took what they had planned on and then tossed the shop to make it real. Real *expensive* that is, but not very convincing. The only items stolen had been neatly hung on a pegboard wall while the worthless items tossed on the floor were in the next room.

Wasn't long before I heard some reports about Kreen singing really violent, dirty rap songs that everyone but I had heard. He told me he was working on getting a gospel recording deal. Let's see, Muslim-Gospel rock, really? His talk about 'whitey' and his view of America didn't match mine. But some of this was hearsay, and the rest I had to work with because my company said 'make it work'.

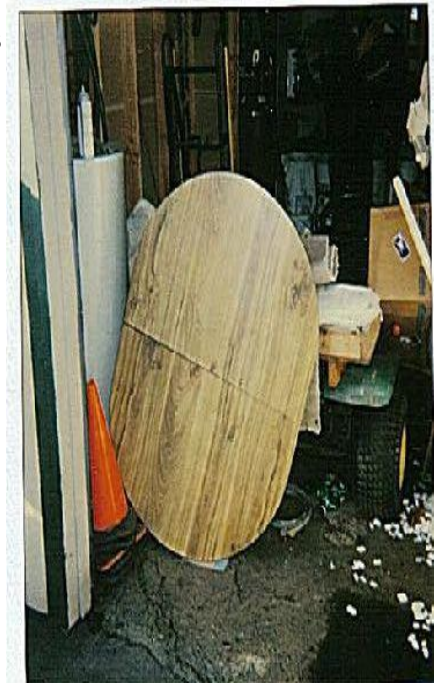


And to be fair, Kreen *did* paint. It was most obvious when his African American face was white the first day he tried spray painting.

His hands were full, to say the least, because so many of the new stoves that Kreen installed were lemons! He hooked them up, the wiring blew out, they were 'worthless', and Royal Green bought several new stoves, 'dumping' the lemons. Really? All you have to do is wire them in backwards and poof! Lemons. Kreen had a lucrative revenue stream selling brand new stoves.

I baked cookies for him and his girlfriend and encouraged him in his work – we all need encouragement. The days added up until spring 2001.

A charming young man showed up driving a nice, new Mercedes and needing a place right away. Beware the 'right away' part, it's usually to excite the rental agent about an easy rental and a distraction. Obviously, this guy was different: he and his wife shared an apartment with his mother and the two women didn't get along. At his wits end, Isam barely looked at the place, grabbed the application and ran.



Isam soon returned with his lovely young bride, Hana, their application, and lots of cash. "I told Hana what a great place this is from what Kreen said." (He knew Kreen?) His pretty wife didn't speak English, but Isam wanted me to meet her. Oh, so nice!

I faxed off the application for screening, the approval came back immediately, and they moved in the following day. Isam was so thankful and sweet that he often stopped in with a little something for me, flowers, fruit, baklava delicacies, something. Their apartment was right next door upstairs, *in* the office building. Isam kind of kept strange hours for a laborer working at a fruit and vegetable store, but Corno Bros. was a Portland icon and a very good reference. Corno must pay their employees very, very well for Isam to be driving that Mercedes.



His wife was invisible, caring for their new baby boy, Michael. Of course, Michael was brought in to meet the nice manager lady, but seldom did anyone see the wife. 'No English', Isam would say. Wouldn't bother me, I like smiling and making signs back and forth but she apparently didn't. Isam always took a moment to flash that smile on his way out and then I'd return to my duties.

I made my rounds posting notices for unpaid rents and amenities. Mr. Rodgers watched me making my way and flung himself through his open door as soon as I arrived. He backed me into the corner under the stairs saying "Aren't you scared of me?"



I reached out to him and took his hand and wrapped it in my hands. Both of mine weren't equal the one of his.

"Why, Mr. Rodgers!" I said, patting his hand, "why would *anyone* be scared of you?" I squeezed his hand, saying "I'm sorry I can't change this notice for you, you'll have to pay the \$315 rental on the washer dryer or we'll need to pull it out and rent it to someone else." Squeeze, squeeze, pat, pat, pat. And I meandered back to the office to avoid *running like crazy*.

Deliberately I opened the front doors slowly, turned back to wave at Mr. Rodgers, flipped the 'sorry we're closed' sign over to 'welcome'.

I got out the rent records and started in again.

Suddenly one of my residents ran into the office: "Quick, there's a man on the sidewalk down there bleeding all covered in blood!"

"Call 9-1-1" as I ran out, wondering why the resident came to the office rather than helping the man.



And I ran, shoes flying off and suit jacket flapping. It was Mr. Crook, old and frail, lying on the sidewalk. Lots of blood, lots, covering his face and the sidewalk. I didn't know

whether it was a gunshot or a mugging or what, and yes, I *did* know better than to move him.

But the sidewalk was too cold and the wind was freezing, so I put my jacket over him, knowing help was on the way. And, yes, I gently picked his head up slightly to warm him in my arms. And sang 'Jesus loves me, this I know' to pass the time.

Mr. Crook, you love Jesus, don't you?"

"Oh yes, I do!" he breathed.

Ah, he was alive. I heard sirens coming.

"Oh, Mr. Crook, I'm so glad" and I modulated to 'What A Friend We Have In Jesus'.

"I've always loved Jesus" whispered Mr. Crook and he smiled. He didn't know the words, though.

"Oh, yes!" and he nodded and immediately stopped shivering.

When Mr. Crook returned from his hospital stay he came by to thank me. "I remember you holding me, I sure hope my wife doesn't find out! You know, I thought I was already in heaven and the angels were singing to me. I was so cold .... I opened my eyes, and there you were, singing. Oh! I thought you were the angels and I was already in heaven." I am not a singer. See what a really bad bump on the head can do?

A few months later his two daughters came to pack up his goods and vacate the apartment. He had passed on, my lovely resident, Mr. Crook. And as his daughters went through the belongings, they traded remembrances of what a mean, sour, cruel man he was, and how they both hated him.

I tried to reconcile my impression of a dear, devoted, loving man with their versions. Of him. I asked which church he attended. They laughed, said he was nasty and scoffing when he dropped them off for Sunday school. He, himself, never went in.

Until that day on the sidewalk.



Things were getting a bit quieter as new residents moved in according to the new Vision. The long-time residents had experienced years of broken promises and they were making bets about how soon I'd disappear.

Problems were envisioned as possibilities, *good* possibilities. The isolated, wary Seniors were given a club, "Silver Service". We met weekly for Mickey Mouse bingo and cupcakes and gag gifts and laughed our fannies off.

Listening to their grumbling about kids running around with nothing to do but scream, we soon formed KidsKlub and our first activity was "Adopt a Grandparent". Each kid adopted one lonely, elderly person and did chores: take out the garbage, bring in the groceries, clean up the entryway, or whatever needed doing. I made pizza for the kids and gave out party favors and lo and behold, the kids quieted and walked with a sudden impression of their own value. The elders were no longer afraid to venture out, they had accomplices. It just *worked*.

We added "Royal Bloomers" to plant and tend flowers around the community. We added a "Royal Heirs" club for mothers with babies, they loved it! The "Royal Guards" were appointed to meet and greet newcomers and connect them with the Vision. I named our community watch "Know Your Neighbors", and effectively shut down crime. That, along with the morning trash collections. Royal Greens began to become the Vision, the city on a hill.

Back to accounting in the office, and that endearing Isam (whose wife couldn't speak English) came in on a confidential mission. He leaned close "You must promise me you will never speak about this to anyone.

## **RAK Report**

### **Royal Acts of Kindness-Kids**

Boy, the nerve of some people! raising such great kids. At our Easter egg hunt, kids walked in late after all the goodies had been found. Most of these kids weren't Royal Residents. But Brandon immediately gave away everything he had to these kids. And so did Dallas and Cassie and Derek and Trevor and every one of 'our' kids. Now *that's* Royal.



Reviving a lovely tradition, these Residents also honored our Seniors with handmade May Day bouquets delivered with greetings of "Happy May Day".





"My wife and I are having problems, and I need another apartment for myself, for a short time, not even six months. What do you have?"

We had only two: a two-bedroom home right next door to his own over the office, and one at the very far end, next door to me. He was interested in the home adjoining mine. This time he took his time carefully looking over the place inside and out, the surrounding neighbors, the back patio which ran out onto the golf course. Pretty secluded, pretty quiet.

He picked up another application although I told him he didn't need to apply again. I expected him to return shortly with the deposit money as before. This time he wasn't all smiles and he didn't return that afternoon to secure the apartment.

I was sad for him, for them as a family. Oh, dear. Back to accounting.

Then Mr. Rodgers filled the entryway. Then he filled the office, bending over the service counter, blocking an easy exit.

"Hel-lo! Mr. Rodgers!! What can I do for you?"

His carriage spoke for him even if one eye didn't look at me. He was enraged.

I maintained contact with that single eye as I reached into the

**Thank you,  
Royal Bloomers!**

**Invited to bloom here at Royal Greens,  
many of us planted the planters around  
the pool, and our homes, and around our**



**Neighbors'  
homes.**



**Everything beautiful in its  
time!**



**Take a stroll with us, as we appreciate  
these Neighbors, as well as their gifts . . .**

upper right desk drawer very slowly. My fingers found the red rubber clown nose and put it on my face.

He busted up laughing. "You're a bigger man than I am, Miss! Here's your washer and dryer money. Next month we'll pay it with the rent." And we were friends.

A young couple strolled down the center of our interior road. I waved and met them at the front door. We visited awhile before I showed them around. "My name is Wesley, but I go by Wes. My mother named me after some famous minister. And this is Sarah." *What's in a name?*

A gentle part of my community description included the 'Know Your Neighbors' activity: "Royal Greens is a quiet, secluded community where there are always a few folks just looking out their windows, Someone always sees everything," I said, pointing to the second floor windows. And first floor windows, too.

I offered them the upstairs apartment home in the office building or the one next to me.

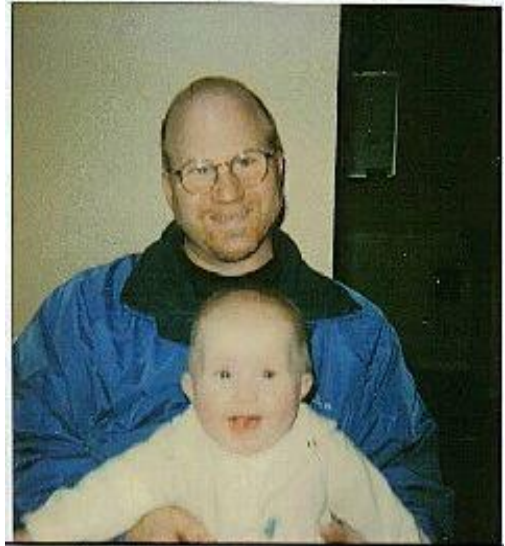
"Oh, that's the one we want, the one at the back," they gushed as they handed me their completed application. Where did they get the application form? Nice and neat, with the deposit. I insisted on showing them the apartment before I'd take their application fee.

I pointed out my door, their door, and our shared entryway. I pointed out their patio, my *adjoining* patio, and the peaceful, party-free environment. They were all lovey dovey and seemed to be quite familiar with the apartment. I wanted them to know that I cared about our residents and kept a watchful eye.

They didn't appear to be concerned about living next door to the manager as I offered them a six-month, nine-month, or one-year lease on our way back to the office.

"Oh, no, we won't be here for six months, we don't need a lease," Sarah giggled. Her partner shot that glance that says "Shut Uuuuuup!" and a jab to her ribs.

"We'll take the six-month lease," Wes said as we walked back to the office.





"It should take about three days to get the screening results back. As soon as you're approved, you can move in. You need to pay a full month's rent and the screening will determine the amount of deposit, if any, required."

"Other places are giving free moveins and no rent for 60 days!" exclaimed Sarah. She was, by the way, incredibly beautiful.

"We don't pay people to move in here. People who value what we value pay to move into Royal Greens," I countered.

"Listen, we won't be moving in until after April 6th." Wes said.

"We can't hold it for you. As soon as you're approved, you need to pay rent whether or not you move in at that time." (See what success does?)

"OK, we'll do it."

We shook hands warmly and then I watched them walk arm in arm leaving the property, then get into their car parked just outside the brick entryway. Odd. Why didn't they just drive in and park in the visitor spaces in front of my office?

Screened, approved a perfect 9 out of 9, 100%, the agreement signed and payment made the next day. Make this mental note for the next time you have applications screened: if none of the applicant's employer's phone numbers are listed in a phone book, or none of their rental references answer the phone with the property name, look more closely. Or get a screening agent who does and one which is not company owned. Regarding residents relocating from out of state, what good does it do to screen for criminal activity in one county? Anything less than screening nationwide is disingenuous. *Dangerous.*

I was glad this darling, well-mannered young couple would live next door to us. They understood quiet, they really *got* it. Problem solved, no gangsters moving in.

Never did hear back from Isam about that second apartment. Back to the rent reports.

The logic behind being a resident manager for me was to live and work without commuting for my daughter's sake. I was free to take her to and from private school.

Applicant Name: Eugene  
Spouse/Roommate Name: Sarah  
Building Name: Royal Greens  
Building #: 772 Apt #: #2084

**RECOMMENDATION**

☒ APPROVED  
APPROVED with First & Last Month's Rent  
APPROVED as Qualified Roommate(s)  
APPROVED as Qualified Co-Signer  
APPROVED with Qualified Co-Signer  
APPROVED with Additional Deposit of: \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
APPROVED as Add-on roommate  
DENIED: \_\_\_\_\_  
Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

The initials below represent that the following has been verified:  
☒ Bankruptcy ☒ Criminal ☒ Eviction

Just imagine her going to school with the neighbor kids after Mama the Mean Manager served eviction papers to parents. Growing up is tough enough.

She certainly had some interesting experiences but few friends onsite. Every resident seemed to have something private going on and didn't want their kids blabbing to mine. You know how kids talk.

Finally, a young girl her age moved in. The family couldn't have been friendlier or more gracious and they had such delightful accents. Charming!

Their application process went smoothly and they loved their beautiful home and view, absolutely no complaints. Their daughter, Alysia, was well behaved and the same age as my daughter. I was comfortable with Chloe visiting there, it was in the same building as my office. Just close enough!



And they appreciated Chloe, "She's such a guud girl. Ve're happy to heff her over."

Did I mention that the wife was related to Isam? Yes, same lovely voices and gracious warmth. They, too, drove a Mercedes and my daughter loved feeling important riding around in it. Short trips and seldom, but fun for her and Alysia.

Was I overly protective?

At our last community Chloe had also had a friend her age who visited her daddy in our building. What could be better? Her dad asked to go to church with us once and he liked it very much. He gave Chloe a way too expensive birthday gift, a toy cat with some kind of real fur, eerily lifelike.

Soon after, Chloe was invited to a sleepover at his place for her friend's birthday party with a couple other girls. I said 'no'. "The sun goes down and you are home." Oh, she was so mad! I took my punishment for days. Was I really over-the-top protective of my precious daughter? HIS precious daughter? For years I had only intuition with no proof - but now I do:



## Oregon Offender Search

Public Information (Last Updated: 07/18/2011 20:18:11)



**Offender Name:** VANGORDEN, LYLE

**Age:** 63 **DOB:** 04/1948

**Gender:** Male **Race:** White

**Height:** 5' 05" **Hair:** Brown

**Weight:** 170 lbs **Eyes:** Blue

[SNAKE RIVER](#)

**Location:** [CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTE](#)

**Status:** Inmate

**Institution Admission Date** 04/27/2004

**Earliest Release Date:** 04/21/2022

**SID#** 15266112

**Caseload:** 11006 Blankenbaker, Teri

### Offenses Names

Docket Number	County	Crime	Sentence Type	Begin Date	Termination Date
031035339/01	MULT	SEX ABUSE 1 NEW	Inmate Sentence	04/27/2004	01/21/2010
031035339/02	MULT	SEX ABUSE 1 NEW ATTEMPT	Inmate Sentence	04/27/2004	-
031035339/07	MULT	SEX ABUSE 1 NEW	Inmate Sentence	04/27/2004	-
040432133/01	MULT	SEX ABUSE 2 NEW	Inmate Sentence	04/27/2004	-

How much parenting is prudent and how much is overly protective? Most of us don't know until it's too late. But I certainly found out abruptly when her friend's daddy's face filled the 6AM news. He had been molesting both of his daughters and many of their friends all through the years. It's why he loved refereeing the girls' soccer team. "Indicted 55-year-old on seven counts of sex abuse in the first degree." PortlandTribuneOnline.com

I called this prescience 'intuition', but really, it was God's warning and God's protection of us. It was God. Listen to Him.

Thank goodness Royal Greens was a smaller community where I really knew the residents. Much better. Within eyesight. But the 'home at night' rule stayed the same and I rued repeating the day when I'd have to say 'no' as her friendship with Alysia grew.



Of course, Alysia, like every other kid, complained about her parents. Her mom, native of Syria and a naturalized US citizen, was married to someone else when they lived in LA. They had a baby but then the baby died. They got divorced after five years, then mom flew to Lebanon for two weeks and came back with a new husband. Alysia didn't know him and didn't really like it much, so Chloe heard lots of details many times over.

Alysia's mom, who was expecting a baby soon, would invite Chloe to go do errands with them and I usually allowed it. Ice cream, fun stuff, going to the mall and watching Alysia

buy expensive clothes. The things we couldn't afford. It is what it is! You're safe, fed, clothed, well educated.....pass the ice cream, please.

With April in view, I knew we were 100% occupied and soon there would be neighbors next door. Hope they really *were* sweet! I put special welcomes inside their first home together: homemade cookies, flowers, a balloon and a personal welcome note.

Then Wes and Sarah, our new neighbors, moved in and all went well. Quiet. Whew! I invited them to join us on Saturday afternoon at the first Know Your Neighbors picnic in the small park between our building and the next. I baked chicken all day long for the picnic and made potato salad forever, green salads, baked beans, jello somethings. I know the aroma was heavenly, but Wes and Sarah didn't show up to mingle with their neighbors.

What a great event it was! Babies, elders, singles, couples, hermits. I even snagged the repair man on a call at Royal Greens - wouldn't let him say no. Got his photo, too.

The picnic was particularly meaningful. Royal Greens was at the end of a two-block street and the property ended at this little park, bordered with a flimsy, two-wire, three-foot-high "fence" and then the golf course. It was the trade route for burglars and drug dealers who boosted stuff and sold drugs in the communities just outside Royal Greens then ran through, hopped over the wires and disappeared into the greens.

So, this community gathering of neighbors becoming friends made a statement: *it's a new day*. This corner is now *our* place for friends and families. We know each other's faces, we know who eats cake and who takes a pass.

Every day the Vision grew clearer, becoming visible to the natural eye. Neighbors who knew each other were reacclimating to smiling openly. The grounds were quite clean and tidy and residents planted flowers everywhere. It was no longer cool to be mean or grumpy, it was cool to be helpful and considerate. No honking in front of an apartment, no trash left behind in the laundry. Even pet owners had their own club, Royal Pets. Not a witty name, and this adventure flopped. Should've been Royal Pests.

Get this: one couple left for Hawaii for a week, leaving their black poodle dog home alone, black *puddle* dog. Brand new carpet with a hefty pet deposit. The neighbors alerted me to a dog's incessant barking. I summoned animal control who informed me that leaving your dog alone is illegal – did you know that?



The lady animal control officer came over and asked me what kind of dog she should expect.

“Oh, it’s a cute little thing, little black poodle! I feel so sorry for it!” I replied.

“Oh, man, I’m calling for backup. Large dogs are pretty cool, but little dogs really *are* dangerous, we call ‘em ‘ankle biters’.” Carefully, she opened the door. Little Blacky was no longer cute, he was ferocious and had bigger teeth than I would’ve thought. She slammed the door nearly on Blackie’s nose; she tried to, anyway. And she called for backup.

When the couple returned from Hawaii, they apologized but really, were furious - with *me*.

It’s never a straight line nor easy, is it? After long days, it usually took 30 minutes to walk the few yards home. Now that I wasn’t busy, everyone always wanted me to stop and talk. And I needed to build relationships. Once home, however, I became very quick at closing the curtains in order to get away. Bye bye, view.



The rewards were tremendous. Occupancy 100%, waiting lists of qualified new neighbors, bright, cheerful and smiley. Lest I become complacent, there was a new issue to confront. Next door.

It began with loud laughter in the parking lot late at night. My work hours immediately extended ‘til 2 AM. How then can you look your best at 8AM? Hint: don’t wear pajamas in the office, wear the suit, the goldette name badge and the smile.

Residents’ complaints left me no choice but to serve my new neighbors, Wes and Sarah, with a disturbance notice about their nightly noises. And the noises didn’t end when they got home, they came and went all night long, usually driving an old Ford beater truck. No longer so charming.

Then into the office came another kind of complaint: the middle-aged nurse who lived next door to me walked her doggie over everyone’s back yard and didn’t pick up the poop. That got a lot of peoples’ attention. It got *my* attention: what middle-aged woman, what nurse? What pet?

I asked Sarah ‘Who’s living with you?’



“Oh, that’s Wes’s mom. She’s not living here, she lives in Montana. She had to come to Portland for a very serious operation and we told her she can stay with us while she recuperates.”

“And the dog?”

“She keeps her on a leash. I’ll remind her to clean up the poop.” Sarah smiled at me, I smiled at Sarah. For just that moment we were friends again.

I heard that the next day would be the last of the sunshine with heavy rains returning the day after. My heart went out to the lady I’d never seen, Wes’s mother. So, I put my rocking chair and beech TV tray table on Wes and Sarah’s patio with a get well note to the mom saying I’d pick up the rocker that night. She’d really enjoy the bright sunshine! The view, the special tea bags in a pretty cup, some flowers and magazines. Just to sit and look at Mt. Hood would help her heal. But everything disappeared inside, never to be seen again. *Niiiiice.*



I hesitate to share these events, the confusion, the piecing together of clues and the tedium of terror. I share them with you to demonstrate my own frailty and God’s own faithfulness. His faithfulness will be your shield and your rampart. These events mix panic with Glory.

Did I mention that Wes and Sarah never used their front door or their glass patio backdoor? They came and they went through the windows. Through the bushes and into a window, exiting later out another window. The very few times they used the front door marked something out of their ordinary.

Another thing was the two really scruffy men who would pull in and park their battleship-gray panel van, beater, with no side windows, just those little windows on the rear doors. Then they’d get out and wait, leaning back against the van, arms folded casually, never saying a word. Even behind their aviator sunglasses I watched them watching me. Wes would come out then go back inside. Then they’d beat a hasty retreat out of the property again.



Wes tendered a maintenance request: the entryway closet doors, about seven feet long, made too much noise. And the bathroom fan was really, really noisy. His upstairs neighbor had already complained that the fan was always left on and made a horrible noise. How much do *you* run *your* bathroom fan?

Fine, they never exited the entryway but needed that entry closet to work silently. They didn't appreciate their upstairs neighbor complaining about their fan. For those few moments in a day? "No, we leave it on all the time."

Seeing too, too much weirdness, I called my friendly undercover detective. I listed their bizarre behaviors. Having been right each time I'd called him, he positioned an undercover unit in our parking lot.

As I handed Wes's maintenance request to Kreen, I told him to ignore the unauthorized car in a resident's reserved space. Very foolishly, I asked him to keep his eyes open, too, that police were onsite.

"Yeah, I saw 'em. I'll find out what's going on when I do this," he said, holding up the maintenance request.

When he returned with his familiar, big smile, he assured me "Nothing goin' on there. They just normal people. I fixed everything up." He sure did, he gave them the key to my apartment and:

Wes and Sarah stormed into the office, handing me their hand-written 30-day notice to vacate. "We're moving! We talked to the president of your company and told him you called the cops on us and he says we can go whenever we want."

Then odd things began to happen and not all good. Someone would run by and bang on my bedroom windows randomly all night. Former, disgruntled employees still living in the next building slept during the day and partied big all night, laughing and yelling from the porch "You *are* the biggest loser!" In the stifling heat our windows were closed but their taunts were still loud and clear, their jeering still hurt. My precious daughter tried to sleep hiding in my arms.

The blue, battered old Ford truck came and went between about two and four o'clock in the morning. No one had ever taught the occupants not to slam doors at night. Now I worked 24/7.

My birthday began on a perfect, brilliant Saturday morning day off! My birthday present to myself was having my carpets cleaned, and SpinKleen, Tom and Donna, came over. We'd known each other through work for years and it didn't bother me in the least to have them in for the perfect gift.

My other wow gift was a brand new chrome red Jeep bike still in its factory carton. A dream come true. I helped Tom, a big, strong guy, move the bike in its carton out onto the shared entry outside my front door.

I skipped on down to the office to check in, I had 90 minutes to spare before it opened. Delirious with the sunny birthday day, I enjoyed the comings and goings of my tiny world. That strange old gray panel van with the smoked out windows flew in and



only minutes later *flew* back out. The passenger stared at me, a strange blur at that speed.

I soaked up the birthday wishes. When I saw Tom begin to pack up, I walked back to thank them and see them off. What I noticed was that my brand new bike in its carton was gone. Gone off my tiny entryway.



“Tom, where’s my new bike?”

“Gosh, I don’t know. I’ve been busy inside working.”

I didn’t fall apart in front of him but I certainly spent hours wondering who on earth had the gumption to take that huge, heavy carton, chance moving it without detection. The only place it could’ve been moved to without any of the residents noticing was – right inside Wes and Sarah’s front door, two feet. The speeding gray van and the turnaround visit.

Well, Happy Birthday to me. I was so disappointed losing my beautiful red bike! Oh, well, and I put it out of my mind as much as possible. But *who?*

That evening I was driving Chloe and Alysia to a Saturday night service. The new baby had arrived, Baby Lily, and Alysia loved to get out of the house! My cell phone rang. I pulled over to dig out my cell phone.



“Hey, you lose a cell phone?” a man’s voice, gruff.

“No, I’m talking to you on it.”

“Well, I think it’s your daughter’s phone, 787-414-0044,” he laughed.

“Hang on.” I covered the phone, “Chloe, where is your cell phone?”

“I don’t know, Mama. I keep it in my lunch bag, but it’s not there.”

How did the man know whose phone it was? How did he even know I have a daughter?

“Look, meet me at the Stagecoach Inn tomorrow at 10 o’clock. It’s out on 201st and Sandy, you know the place? 10 o’clock.

I’d seen it, but are bars even open on Sunday morning in Oregon?

“Look, we’re on our way to church right now, it’s my birthday, and I don’t want to spoil it.”

"Well, meet me at 10 tomorrow and I'll sell it to you for \$20 bucks."

I put it out of my mind (not really) and continued enjoying my girls and the evening.

The next morning my phone rang just before 10 and I put off answering. I had a feeling that someone wanted to get me out of my place at a specific, planned time. Intuition. Strong Warnings.

"Listen, you need the money more than I do. I wish you could know the Lord, you'd be happy with or without my cell phone. God bless you. Bye bye."

"Chloe, where could anyone get their hands on your cell phone? Where did you leave it?"

"Ma-ma! I never even took it out of my lunch bag to use because I didn't want to lose one again. And the only place my lunch bag is, is in the back seat of the car."

That's right, that's where it always was. She seldom ate her homemade lunch which she herself made and packed. I knew she didn't always get that right, but even if she had, she wouldn't eat her own lunch anyway.

So, someone had gone into our car, gone into her lunch bag, found and took the phone but not the lunch bag. Now why on earth would anyone spend the time to rummage through her belongings, why not just take the lunch bag? Admittedly, we didn't lock our car. It wasn't a newer car, "nothing" inside to steal, and who would be brazen enough to vandalize the manager's car in view of everyone?

My insides were cold again.

It was time to open the office. I kissed my daughter then suddenly grabbed her hand, "Hey sweetie pie, you're coming to the office with me today!"



"Maaaaaaaama, no! Walk out the door and you can look right at me here at our door."

"OK, extra hugs then." And I sneaked a kiss in for good measure. You never know. And she skipped off with Alysia to play in the park, right at our doorstep.

IT JUST SO HAPPENED, Stephanie, a resident, came in to share with me her good news: she had a new job with Fred Meyer! Yay!! She'd clerked before, but now, much

of her training concerned loss prevention. “Yeah, there’s these guys who forge bottle refund slips and they’re costing Fred Meyers over \$120,000 a month! Man!! So, they are looking for them for sure! And they’ve been hitting the can-do machines in the middle of the night, taking all the money!”

Managing apartments is challenging under ideal circumstances. Move-ins, move-outs, touring new guests, lonely residents (which beats *angry* residents), rent reports and banking – well, the fun never ends! And now that the pool was open, add to these measuring pool chemicals and recording purity levels, sending screaming kids home, oh, it’s just *fun*!

The days ran quickly towards June and I didn’t see my neighbors packing up to move out. And our nights were from hell.

Then one day the bill for the stolen cell phone arrived. Now I had a concise record of the numbers called, the times and dates of calls, and the duration of each call. One by one I checked out the phone numbers. Someone had diligently called several adult foster care homes, and only those owned by Romanian-speaking people. There were a few long local calls and I wished I had the gumption to drive by those addresses – to what end? Any, anything to point me in some direction to defend ourselves, to protect my daughter. To know and be able to take some action.

Date	Time	Place called	WA
1 May 9	1:29 pm	BattleGrnd	WA
2 May 9	1:30 pm	BattleGrnd	WA
3 May 13	10:52 am	Vancouver	WA
4 May 13	12:00 pm	Vancouver	WA
5 May 15	10:42 am	Orchards	WA
6 May 15	11:12 am	Orchards	WA
7 May 16	12:22 pm	Orchards	WA
8 May 18	9:53 am	BattleGrnd	WA
9 May 18	12:43 pm	Orchards	WA
10 May 19	10:30 am	Mission	TX
11 May 19	10:31 am	Bakersfld	CA
12 May 19	11:18 am	Orchards	WA
13 May 21	9:01 am	Bakersfld	CA
14 May 21	9:02 am	Mission	TX
15 May 21	9:07 am	Mission	TX
16 May 21	9:26 am	Orchards	WA
17 May 23	10:49 am	Orchards	WA
18 May 23	10:49 am	Orchards	WA
19 May 23	10:56 am	Orchards	WA
20 May 24	11:10 am	BattleGrnd	WA
21 May 25	1:44 pm	Orchards	WA
22 May 25	2:53 pm	Mission	TX
23 May 25	3:31 pm	BattleGrnd	WA

Maybe someone needed a good place for their grandparent, so what?

*And someone made several calls to Mission, Texas, just over the border from Mexico.*

Pretty quiet, a sunny Sunday on May 20th. Well, there was one irritation when I saw all three of my neighbors, including the phantom nurse, *screech* down the interior roadway, really, had to be doing 45, no less. That was just another brick in the wall. But I’d never seen all three together before, and now together leaving the apartment empty.

After they passed the sunlight rushed in again and quiet resumed.

Until the phone call.

"Hello, I'm calling for Joy White. This is Washington Mutual calling." On a *Sunday*?

"This is she."

"Hello, I'm Frank Walsh with your bank's fraud prevention department. I hope you can talk for a moment, I called you at home and your daughter gave me your work number."

Chloe exploded through the office doors and her eyes were wild question marks.

"OK".

"Miss White, have you used your Visa card more than usual recently?"

"No, in fact I looked for it yesterday and couldn't find it in my wallet. I thought I'd just dig deeper after work."

"When did you last use it?"

"Well, at Lamb's Thriftway Market Friday after school. I thought maybe I left it there," I said, thinking back out loud.

"Did you use it at Burgerville a couple times?"

"No, we don't eat there."

"How about at Sally's Beauty Supply?"

"No."

"Java Internet Café, Oregon Liquor store, the 99 Cent store?"

"No, but all those businesses are just up the road in a strip mall." I was getting cold again.





"Did you buy anything at Fred Meyer in Rockwood?"

"No."

"How about Fred Meyer in Portland on Division?"

"No."

"Battleground, Washington?"

"No."

"Well, your card's been used 11 times in a day and a half, and we've closed your card out because of the unusual buying pattern, it doesn't fit your profile."

No kidding it doesn't. "Well, thank you!"

"The bank will reimburse you those charges, so don't worry about it. Altogether, it only adds up to just over nine hundred dollars. Not a lot, just lots of little purchases. Just enough times to trigger our fraud alarm system.

Exactly. Just enough to alarm. The bike and the cell phone in one sweet weekend. And now this. And what came next.

Monday the 21st of May and back on the job. Sorry to repeat myself, but it was another glorious day. And to my surprise, I walked the phantom, unauthorized, unidentified neighbor with a small azalea plant.

"Here, this is for you to say 'thanks'. You've been so sweet to us and we just wanted you to know, we appreciate you." She smiled as I took the plant and displayed it right there on the countertop.

"Well, how nice is this! Thank you so much, I'll think of your kindness every time I look at it." Oh, had I ever gotten it wrong, how mean of me! Meeting her, she was a really nice lady.

While completing the Monday rent reports, I called the bank and they faxed me a list of purchase locations and dollar amounts. *Crazy!* Mostly piddly little items with a few \$100 plus amounts. Then I looked up the merchant phone numbers and began calling





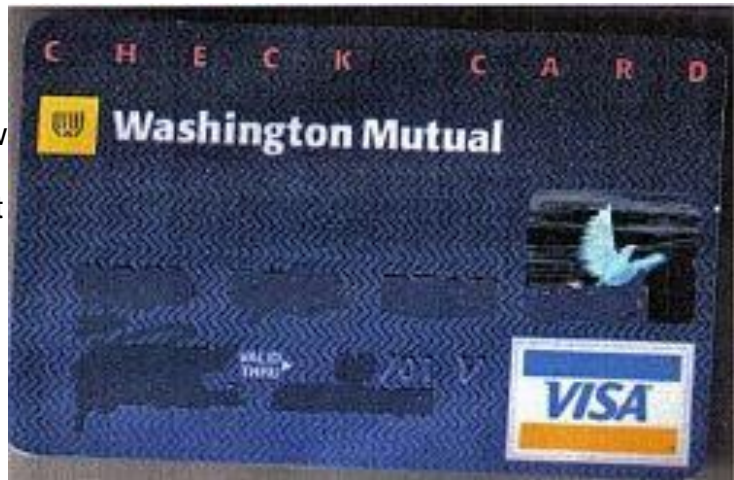
to see if anyone remembered the person using my card or the purchase: strike one, strike two, strike three.

All three stores barely said “no” before hanging up on me. Couldn’t care less.

After a long Monday, I walked home a little after 7PM with, of course, two residents who wanted to visit. As we walked near my front entry, I saw something sticking out from under the corner of my welcome mat. Its color was an unmistakable blue. I asked my friends to wait a moment, I wanted someone with me to witness whatever I was going to find.

It was my stolen Visa card.

“Joy, even with your name on it, someone had to know you and know where you live to return it to you at home. I work for a bank, I know that you can’t just call the bank and get your address. It’s someone who knows you,” Bonnie exclaimed. Her unpleasant expression froze as she thought about the implications.



Someone was sure on a campaign to, *what?* Distract me, confuse me, scare me. Someone wanted me tied up in knots for their own purposes. For the next few days, I studied the trail of printouts of the purchases made with my Visa (including a small azalea plant), and copies of the forged receipts, and visited those merchants close by. No one remembered one single little transaction in all their traffic. The bank honored the debts, so why should they care?

## CALL ON ME

The police? Whoever it was had shrewdly used my Visa across three counties, two states, too many jurisdictions and too little loss for the police to care. Three Freddies, three jurisdictions. I wasn’t getting anywhere. Fred Meyer Loss Prevention couldn’t care less. Did I mention that Wes worked at Freddies in Rockwood? Tuck this clue away for now.

## AND I WILL SHOW YOU

I admit it was a lonely time. No allies, no interest,

## THINGS YOU DON’T KNOW

*no way out of the terror.*

After the dead ends of nearby merchants, I broadened out on Tuesday, May 22. This was a desperate measure as it was hard to pry me away from the office. But the fact that someone had come as close as my front door, *that close to my daughter*, fired up my need to know.

It was only a four-mile drive to The Bead Source on Division street. If only I could find a morsel of information after all the 'can't help ya's'. At her insistence, I took my assistant, Avril. She salivated with curiosity so I allowed it, seeing it was her lunch hour, "but say nothing, not a thing, and be cool".

The Bead Source is a good store, quality and selection of beads, oddities, phony spiritual stuff, a lot like the old Haight but first class and beautiful. And the clerk, Cassandra, *did* remember. She *did* care.

"Oh, yeah, I remember them. The day before they bought anything just the girl came in and looked around a lot. After she left, I noticed some bottles of azalea oil were gone from the display.



"The next day she came in again and I watched closely but this time there were three of them: the girl, a guy and an older woman with a stethoscope around her neck. The girl bought more of the oils, things for incantations and spells. But they stole some really rare long necklaces made of tiny skulls, one ivory and one amber. Then they left, drove off again real fast. Of course, I remember them."

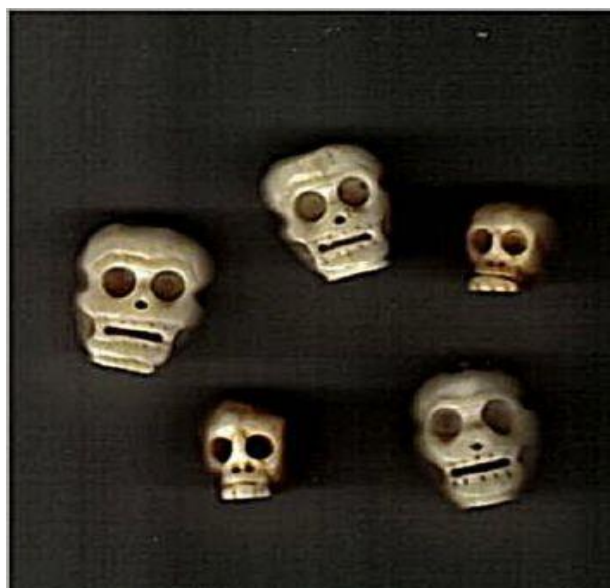
Cassandra, you're golden.

I explained that my Visa card had been used to purchase something at The Bead Source on Sunday and feared one of my neighbors was the thief.

Cassandra went on, "I've worked with beads all my life, and I've never seen beads or a necklace of tiny skulls. Those were very unusual. If you can get into their apartment and find those skulls, you'd know it's *them*."

"Thanks, Cassandra, for taking time with us."

But I still didn't connect her description. We got back in the car.



“Oh, well, it was worth a try,” I said.

“Joy! Joyyyyyy!!! That’s your neighbor the nurse, the stethoscope, the scrubs. That’s *her!* And that’s the three of them,” Avril yelled.

“What???”

“Joy, it’s your next door neighbors!” It took Avril’s breath away and I don’t have words for what it did to me. I remember leaden panic and being so cold.

Avril was energized, *this was better than reality TV!* Personally, I couldn’t wait to get back to work on monthly reports. Reports always added up perfectly and this did not. There wasn’t any way to haul those three back there, get an admissible identification and enforce anything. I would never under any circumstances enter their apartment - it’s illegal. I hadn’t ever seen the phantom woman dressed in nurse’s attire. Was Avril right? And what would it mean if she were? I still had no proof.

A significant Visa charge was the deposit on a UHaul truck for rental on May 23rd, the next morning. This being the next of very few options, I drove to the UHaul lot and parked in an inconspicuous place and waited to see who would show up. My chest was tight. It took everything to sit and wait to see. By noon, I went inside the office. The UHaul agent said the reservation had expired and no one had picked up the truck so I went away empty. Terror and I were close companions but never friends.

**“GO TALK TO SHAWN IN #17 – IT JUST SO HAPPENS, HE WORKS AT FREDDIES, DOESN’T HE?”**

I grabbed Shawn’s file and immediately called him at work, Freddie’s, way out in Hillsboro, where he was the head of *Loss Prevention*.

“Hello, Shawn? This is Joy, your manager. Do you have just a moment?”

“Sure, what’s going on?”

“Well, I don’t want to overstep myself with you, but” – and I briefly described the events, ending with a request to see the security video, if possible, for Sunday morning around 9:28:37AM at the Rockwood Fred Meyer. I wanted a look at the person using my Visa, was it anyone I knew?

“I’ll help ya! I love to bust scum bags. I’ll fax over the printout showing exactly what they bought. I’ll call my buddy at Rockwood and ask him to show you the tape for exactly that time.” Oh, his *bud-dy*.

Pretty soon the Loss Prevention Manager from Rockwood called me back, and suddenly he *did* care and not less. “Listen, no problem, we keep all the videos for at

least 90 days. But you need to get a police officer to agree to come with you and watch your reactions as you watch the video. Otherwise, your testimony isn't valid, only his is because he's trained to observe. So, all you have to do is get a willing policeman."

I had already tried, but the police had cared less.

Now I called over to my friend who works at East Hill Church and asked her if she had any friends or if we had any members in the Gresham PD. With 12,000 members or so, maybe.

But the problem didn't meet police requirements. Captain Ross: "I know you don't want to hear this, most people think we're here to be proactive and protect them. But we're not. We're here to enforce the laws after they've been broken, if you can prove it. Anything under \$65,000, a rape, a murder, or child abduction won't get assigned by the DA and won't get attention from us. Sorry, I can't help you."

### **I WILL SURROUND YOU WITH MY FAVOR AS WITH A SHIELD.**

But this time - "Hello, is this Miss White? This is detective Coon with Gresham PD. I understand you have concern about the use of your Visa. You want to meet me at the Rockwood store at 10:30AM? The Loss Prevention manager there and I work together a lot."

### **I WILL MAKE A WAY WHERE THERE SEEMS TO BE NO WAY.**

"Oh, thank you so much. I'll be there." Well, I got there before he did and spent a few minutes talking to the Loss Prevention Manager. He couldn't start the video until after the detective arrived, he knew his business.

It all seemed normal for a few minutes, but it mustn't have been, really.

Detective Coon arrived and introduced himself.

The video began.

Who was it? I held my breath.

Nothing.

Nothing,

nothing,

nothing.



“No, not that guy, no, not her,” I started to get



discouraged and disinterested and *then suddenly!*

“That’s her! That’s her! *That’s the lady living next door to me, the nurse!*”

“You sure *knew* her, I don’t usually get that kinda reaction. What’s her name?” and Detective Coon waited with his pencil in the air, excited.

“I don’t know.”

“What?”

“I don’t know. She’s an unauthorized and unidentified . . .

I looked at his face, he’d been pretty impressed with my dramatic identification until I couldn’t even come up with a name.

“Well, I tell you what. My notes are good. I’ll pass this along. You never know,” he said as he departed, shaking his head.

Au contraire – now I *do* know!

Perhaps nothing would be done but at least I almost knew who it was. I was pretty sure I knew why, too.

My mind’s eye pictured my three neighbors and finally, no terror. Many questions had been resolved. I didn’t know who the lady was but she sure wasn’t Wes’s mom and most likely there was a reason she hung out with those two kids.

Why did they come and go through the bushes and windows? Because the front door was locked and barricaded to slow down any nosey intruders.

And why on earth would anyone keep their bathroom fan going night and day? To air out whatever was going on, manufactured, in that bathroom.

Why was one of the three of them always on the premises at all times? It was a security measure for them to ensure no one ever entered the apartment in their absence.

Why did they dispose of their trash at the farthest enclosure and not the one right in front of their apartment? So that none of their trash would be associated with them in case of discovery. I once watched Sarah carry her garbage to the far enclosure. After she dumped the garbage and came back out of the enclosure, I smiled and waved at her. She did an about face, retrieved the garbage and took it all home again. *Awkward.*

The next day, a bumbling (sorry) GPD officer called on Wes and Sarah to investigate the use of my VISA card. He didn't tell me he was coming on property but went directly to their door. He knocked, he knocked again and waited. Oh sure, like they're going to open the barricaded door for *you*. Then he visited the office and told me that he had tried to make contact with them, but they didn't answer. Big surprise. And he had, he told me, left a sticky note on their front door along with his police business card, stating "Your neighbor says you stole her credit card. Please contact me."



Oh, wonderful! *Really?*

The incredibly beautiful young woman, tall and willowy, now followed me everywhere I went screaming the, well, *that* word and everything else non-stop. Residents ran to their windows to see what was going on. It was almost too much. *Could it get any worse?*

Yes.

On a warm Friday evening, Sarah knocked on our door as soon as I got home. She seemed so excited, she and Wes were going to watch rented movies at home. "Can I use your microwave for our popcorn? We don't have one." Who buys microwave popcorn if they don't have a . . . . microwave?

I was happy to say "Yes! Come right on in. We'll leave the door open for you." It's the little, inconspicuous opportunities for kindness which birth transformations. Who'da thought a microwave would open a door for Sarah's rebirth, for her to become a new creation?

She came and checked on her popcorn, retrieved it. Gosh, I was tired! Suddenly I couldn't keep my eyes open, couldn't even finish making dinner. I sat down on the sofa within eyesight of the microwave. I slumped over then laid down. I remember smiling at Sarah weakly as she peered down at me. My eyes just kept closing. Sarah kept smiling.

That Friday night, then Saturday, then Sunday morning I wasn't able to sit up without slumping right back to sleep on the sofa. Everything was so foggy that I didn't have any fear. Didn't know something was dreadfully, horribly wrong.

Hana, Isam's precious wife from Syria, walked into the living room late Sunday afternoon. The woman who didn't speak English had learned a few words "You are very sick. I am here to pray." She set a small icon of Christ on the coffee table and bowed her head. Unable to distinguish the timing of the event, I remember coming back to life. I remember sitting up and feeling happy. How nice of this shy little woman to come visit me, to sit there praying for me!



And I was well.

I can't say when I realized that something awful and then the unknown had taken place. Hana was gone, I felt fine. I was back in the office in the morning.

Please tell me, how did a reclusive young woman who seldom came out of her apartment and never ever spoke to others hear that I was sick?

My precious daughter was only a very cute ten years old and completely vulnerable. So now I kept her in the office with me after I picked her up from school, not out playing in the park right next to our home. People this brazen and this amped up could snatch her in an instant, the gray van departing before I even knew it.

*Could it get any worse?*

Yes.

Windows in this era of apartment buildings were removable from the outside with no tools required. Just push in, then up, then remove. Remember, our neighbors demonstrated this daily. And they were quick and quiet, at least when removing windows. We had a ground floor corner home with lots of windows and possibilities. For her protection, Chloe had moved into my bedroom for the duration and we'd hug very quietly, waiting for the banging on our windows that was sure to come.

Sometimes I felt I couldn't take the pressure. The only safe place was in His presence, so I'd tiptoe to the piano and worship gently in the middle of the night.

Many nights in the stillness I'd hear strange screeching and animals squealing, like a coyote killing cats or dogs. I asked the overnight golf greens maintenance man, José in apartment #24, if coyotes roamed here at night.

José had watered the golf course at night for seven years and knew 'everything'. He and his helpers played rodeo at night, racing their tractors and golf carts and whooping it up. As you can imagine, I knew José fairly well after a couple of sleepless nights and mornings populated with angry residents. José was a sweet guy, they just got bored night after night turning water on and off and on and off.

"No, no coyotes, but we keep finding dead animals out on the greens that have been cut open and their hearts and stuff pulled out. Chickens, cats, and stuff I don't even know what it was. They doin' animal sacrifices out here," José said, smiling and seemingly blasé.

"But don't *you* go out there at night," and then my nightwatch cowboy took off on his tractor waving his hat over his head. "Yee hah!"

A quiet knock on the patio door at 4AM during my near silent worship, it was Sarah. Sarah who listened to the hardest rock with vicious lyrics way too loud. "Joy, that's you?"

"Yes, Sarah." This was a different Sarah. Childlike, soft, sweet, seeking.

"I play the piano, too. But I don't know, when you play the piano, *it's just different*. It's like a spell comes over me, I feel so peaceful. I've never felt this before." Then she moved back into the night.

I was always back in the office by eight o'clock after my morning rounds of trash collection and greetings. By 10 o'clock it should have been nearly day's end, or so it felt. And just so you're not left with the impression that it was all horrid: Isam bounded into the office with a beautiful little blue dress on a hanger and zipped up in a plastic presentation cover.

"Here! This is for your daughter," he said. "Here, take it."

"Isam! Tomorrow is picture day at her school, and this is lovely. How can I possibly say thank you?" Blue and white gingham, girly, a white sailor collar with a flower. What a surprise! Ordinarily I didn't accept gifts from residents, but I just couldn't hurt his



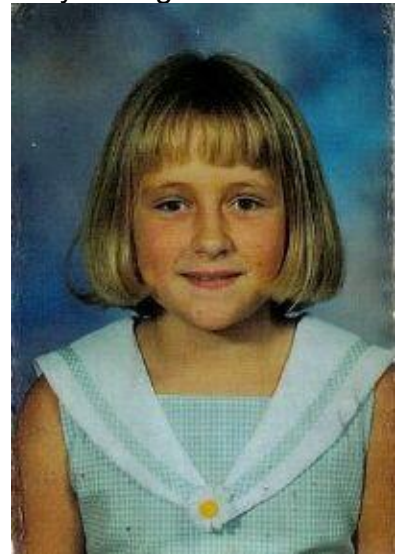
feelings. These folks from Syria had very different ideas and very strong customs of hospitality and how things work.

"I'm glad you like it. You've done so much for us so many times," bowing, he backed out of the office again, flashing that smile.

**BEFORE YOU CALL ON ME I WILL ANSWER YOU.**

Isam's timing was superb. I had neither the wherewithal or time, precious time, to take Chloe shopping. This would do perfectly, so thank You very much, Lord.

**FOR YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER KNOWS WHAT YOU NEED.**



Just as we were sitting down to eat, one of the residents came to warn me that the police were on the property, one police vehicle and one unmarked car, parked outside the laundry facility next to the office. Like no one's gonna see that?

The policeman watched me walk to his window before rolling it down. "Can I help you, Miss?"

"Hello, I'm the manager, can you tell me what's going on?" I asked.

"Well, then maybe you can help us. We have a report of a wanted felon staying here and we're looking for a way to get into that apartment. It's a woman, do you recognize her?" he asked, handing me the bolo with her photo.

"No, I don't know her."

"She's wanted for murder. Murdered an old man by hitting him on the head and robbing him. Is there any way you can get inside that apartment and see if she's there? If she is, and you can get her to open the door, we can go in."

"Yes, I can get inside. They'll talk to me."

"We'll wait here 'til you get back." Were these the same authorities who couldn't care less? Ah, this reached the level of murder and this was a real stakeout.

"I'll be back." And I went immediately to the apartment of interest. Don't take time to think about it. Afterwards, maybe, *but not before*. Run towards the battle.

Knock, knock, friendly knock at their door with my clipboard and the move-in walkthrough checklist. The two screened and approved residents were young exotic dancers. They were thrilled that I came to see if they were pleased with their new

home. I casually looked over the one bedroom, the living room, sauntered out onto the patio. "What a beautiful view!", I said. We exchanged some friendly chatter as they polished their toenails.

I turned the corner to make the perfunctory look around the kitchen, usually a careful inspection but not under these circumstances. Looking at the kitchen, I heard the entryway closet door quietly open. "Well, it's just beautiful, isn't -" and there she was. Stretched out the length of the couch, a third woman had appeared out of that closet. She smiled but she made me cold all over, a huge lizard there on the couch in the darkened living room.

"Oh, hi, I'm Joy" I ventured. And they introduced their friend who was staying there "only for a few days". Really? Maybe not even that long.

"Yes, she's in there. This is she," I reported back, looking carefully at the photo and running my fingers over the bolo again. Creepy.

"Do you think you can get *us* inside?" the cop asked as he and his partners got out of their cars.

"I'm sure I can. They need a vanity bulb and I can take it to them now."

Their apartment deck overlooked the pool, so I couldn't just lead the police straight there, out of the office and past the pool. They'd see us coming and be long gone into the golf course. So, I took the police out and around the first apartment building in the horseshoe layout and circled around all of the apartments, passing through the shared backyards. On such a beautiful evening, be assured that most residents had their patio doors open and watched the parade: the little manager lady with the goldette name badge, the big cops in their protective array, the mystery tour. No one called out to me and not a sound as we hurriedly sneaked around.



The last stretch was, indeed, a little tense. We had to sneak around from the backyard side of the end building, *my* building, and run crouched over to the front of *their* building. Then quickly down the length of the front of their building, staying close to it. We made it to their stairway and tiptoed up the stairs, flattened against the stairwell wall. Intense.

Knock, knock, knock, "Hey, I've got your light bulb!"

And that's most of what I remember. As the door opened, the police with guns drawn shoved me out of the way, screaming "get down, get down, under arrest" but I was already walking quickly back to the office to hold my daughter.

What kind of world is this, and what are we doing here?

And back outside the laundry adjacent the office, there was Sarah bending over smiling through the open window of the police car and talking to the policeman whose duty it was to stay with the vehicles. Somehow they knew each other very well. Sarah flirted outrageously and he was enthralled with her, she bending over in that pretty and flimsy little spring dress, those long, lovely legs.



Then it was all done and time for a little dinner. All in a day's . . .

But who had told Sarah there were police onsite? Ah, Isam lived above the office and the laundry room. Why were she and the policeman so friendly? Altogether, it was too much again to make sense.

By this time the blossoms had stopped blossoming and beauty was everywhere, the residents had planted flowers. We held a Royal Gardens contest and had five winners in different categories: a shade garden, vegetable garden, decorated garden and so on. The Royal Pests owners couldn't ever stop quarreling over dog poop long enough for their party.

The golf balls continued to pop! in the most unlikely places. If we had held a contest for them, there were many, many winners, according to the crashing of broken glass. Amazing: up and over one building to the building far across the property, and . . . another broken window. In my years there, only one brave and honest soul who antied up, confessing that he'd broken a window and paying for it. See, good guys still exist.

My daughter talked me into playing golf over there one time, or was it the other way around? Probably so. We got as far as the driving range in the driving rain. Huge pieces of mud flew into the air and that golf ball just sat there smirking. Golf won.



So, our days weren't all terror and neither were all our nights. I did everything I could think of to bring life to Royal Greens. After all, it is about people first that makes a property profitable. And the owner took this shift in priorities right to the bank.

During school breaks, I had a choice: either create dawn-to-dusk fun for the kids while their parents worked or, the kids would own the place! I harnessed (harassed?) our Silver Service folks into chaperoning. Again, it just worked. Everything just seemed to work.

Except for the day we opened the pool. All the kids were there, of course, and hot dogs, chips, punch, cake and ice cream. Some of the parents were there, too. Then out came Auntie Dufus giving a demonstration of why not to scream at the pool, why no roughhousing, and why no running! Of course, Auntie Dufus, with her black suit and goldette name badge, clown nose and floppy hat, wasn't watching where she was going and walked right into the pool.

I'd have done anything to make those kids, all those residents, happy, safe. They'd eaten a diet of 'so what' for so long that the regime change was remarkable in its effect. And in turn, they lived for the Vision of more excellent lives, together.

Yes, another fun activity was giving ownership to kids for different areas of the property belonging to *them*. No more weeds, no more litter, just lots of pizza every week to celebrate the winners. Clue: Learn to bake lots of pizza because everyone's a winner. *Everyone*.

Yet I juggled moment to moment with my three friends, Hope, Dread and Terror. For three months, night after night, day after day, hoping for the best, dealing with the evil. Is it overstated to call some of these events evil? On the receiving end, this went way beyond criminal mischief. And why such a prolonged, sustained campaign? So, *move already*. Because they had an end game. Because they knew people better than I did. Knew that no one would really care . . .

## I WILL BE WITH YOU IN TROUBLE

But they didn't know my God.

## BECAUSE YOU LOVE ME, I WILL RESCUE YOU

I wish I could write about how faithful I was, how I spent hours in prayer, how I never had a scared-to-death moment. How I started every morning joyously, how everything was light duty. No, none of that is true.

## EVEN WHEN WE ARE FAITHLESS, HE IS FAITHFUL.

Knowing that 'they' had planned on renting a UHaul truck for May 24th, knowing from our first meeting that they would be gone before their six-month lease term ended, and because they had given a 30-day notice long before, I waited as life presented itself. I tried to make it normal. Soon? Would they be gone soon? Would it be over soon?





I walked through the property fearing Sarah's next public attack. No wonder I was so fierce about overcoming evil with good. It is not to my credit that I didn't run away. I needed to provide for my baby, and *God made me stand*. Romans 14:4

I called my employer, the management company, "Joy, if you can't handle it, we'll get someone else out there who can." *Really?*

On the early evening of May 25th, a Ryder truck pulled up to Wes and Sarah's place. The UHaul rental was too hot to use. In that respect I still had the upper hand: I knew what I knew, and they did not know what I knew.

And swap, swap, swap, swap they loaded 'things' out of the apartment and into the Ryder truck. Very, very little was loaded *from* the apartment *into* the truck, some furniture was moved *from* the truck *into* the apartment. It added to the air of residency rather than moving out.

It was a very hot afternoon. Very hot. I walked back to my home and saw the unauthorized, unidentified woman carrying out one apparently heavy table by herself.

"Oh, here! Let me help!" I couldn't believe no one was helping her.

"I can do it," said the nurse, smiling a grimace with restraint to not laugh.

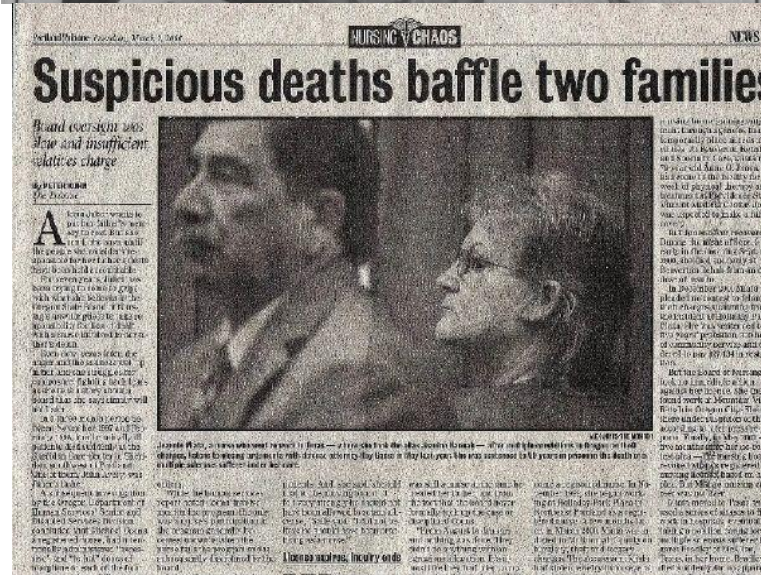
I wanted to help, it was way too much for her, especially in the heat.

I didn't know why she was laughing at me.

She carried the table on her back up the loading ramp and into the truck.

Altogether, I was thrilled to see moving activity going on. Moving more furniture in didn't make sense, but what made sense in any of this?

"Fear not" doesn't mean 'never feel fear' when it's *your* neighbor. It means: when your neighbor tries to murder you and you're scared to death, don't run. I didn't run. I stood my place, held my peace, because God, my God, already knew all about it:



<http://www.themonitor.com/articles/hannah-16320-bradley-death.html> Jeanine Hannah, 59, of Mission, was sentenced to 99 years in prison in 2005 for injecting Margaret Bradley with an overdose of insulin, a drug the 68-year-old McAllen woman had never been prescribed.

<http://www.forbes.com/forbes/2005/1212/156.html> (assisted living center) "was happy hunting for Jeannie M. Miata . . . After her conviction, [when she left Royal Greens in that Ryder truck] she fled to Texas, where she murdered a wheelchair-bound patient in her

care.

<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/metropolitan/3232702.html> (District Attorney) McPherson called Miata the **worst kind of killer**. "She has no mercy for the people she's working for," he said.

"Hopefully, we can keep her locked up for the rest of her life," McPherson said. "She's really bad, in my opinion. She's one of the worst."

The Oregon Board of Nursing restricted her license in April 2000, after a Multnomah County grand jury indicted Hannah on nine counts of burglary, theft and forgery at Holladay Park Plaza, an assisted-living and residential care center in Portland. Hannah was accused of stealing one patient's credit card and using it to buy about \$4,000 worth of goods. Another resident reported missing jewelry worth \$20,000. A 96-year-old woman had a diamond ring stolen.

There's more to this story. Why did Jeannie Miata flee to a border town right across the bridge to Mexico?

What did Miata do with all the expensive jewelry she stole? She couldn't pawn diamonds of that value and they're hard to sell.

How did Miata pick her assignments and her victims? I know. No one cared.

*Back to our story:*

I returned to the office so Avril could take off to pick up her son.

Alone in the office, I stood and watched my neighbors and their Ryder truck. I watched my neighbors who had had a perfect approval from our screening company get into the cab of the truck. Then the unnamed woman, the nurse, got in and fired up the truck. Driving consistently recklessly, she made a sharp left in the parking lot and drove right into a carport damaging the roof. Very quickly they stopped and got out, surveyed the damage, hopped back in the truck and sped out of the property. Their friend, Tyrone, followed in the car I had seen them drive on May 20th. Off they went.

Their front door was left wide open. The back patio door open, too. Walk softly. Closing up the office at 6:30PM and here comes Avril screeching in, both she and



her car. "Joy! I just saw your neighbors driving up Stark Street and waiting to turn left on Sundial – all three of them in a Ryder truck."

IT JUST SO HAPPENED, "so I turned around in the Home Depot lot and followed after them. I went up and down each street there and then all the way down to I84 and couldn't find them. So, they must have pulled into a garage right in there somewhere!"

Another interesting event, nothing more. I only wished that they had moved a little farther away if, indeed, they had moved close by.

Over the next weeks Wes and Sarah visited their apartment, always leaving the doors and windows wide open, never staying long. I wasn't the least bit tempted to enter their premises and it was a really good thing.

"Our" attorney finally issued a 24-Hour-Notice-For-Harm, for committing acts which are outrageous in the extreme:

You, or someone in your control committed an act which is outrageous in the extreme (which but is not limited to the following):

- a. Prostitution or promotion of prostitution, as described in ORS 167.007 and 167.012.
- b. Manufacture or delivery of a controlled substance, as described in ORS 475.005 but delivery as described in ORS 475.992(2)(B).
- c. Intimidation, as described in ORS 166.165.
- d. Burglary, as described in ORS 164.225.

"Joy, 24 hours and they're gone and you have the apartment back. It's that simple!" Really?

Here's news: did you know that there are attorneys who market themselves to people being evicted for cause? Yes. Such an attorney reads the eviction notices posted at the courthouse and contacts the people being evicted. Then he gives them a quick legal battle plan: You can not only beat your evictions but end up making the landlord *pay you cash* to move out! Oh, whoop-pee.

Here's one of his recommendations: put candy out in your apartment on the windowsills and wait for the ants to show up. Then ask maintenance to come in and get rid of the ants. If they don't do it, you gottem for habitability and negligence. If they *do* treat the area without first posting a warning 24 hours in advance on every door in your building that pesticide will be used, you gottem.

Speaking of "you gottem", you still have your problem residents. Nothing else changes, your problems are still there and your life and your child are still very much at risk.

"Notices are only as effective as you have the money and the police power to enforce them." So, they're pretty worthless. Then your property owner embarks on another set of court processes, all of which require time and times to respond.



Why hadn't "our" attorney prepared me with *that* truth? Truthfully, this attorney is a really great guy with a heart of gold who cared about me. But he's not God and only God knew how bad it would get - and how to protect me.

So, the matter was scheduled to be heard in court on June 30, and that's a long time to hold your breath. Meanwhile the random visits continued yet Wes and Sarah showed no concern about securing their premises. What had changed since they loaded something into the Ryder truck (but not their belongings) and took off?

Fearing what else I didn't see coming, the week before that court appearance I hid my daughter with an old friend, Chloe's Sunday School teacher from the past, and even I didn't know the address so if the bad guys questioned me, I couldn't tell them. It wasn't safe for her to be on the property until this ended. What a *sad* turn of events! These people stopped at nothing and by this time I had accepted the fact that the attorneys, the police, and everyone else just weren't able. Or couldn't care less?

And we all waited. Well, mostly I waited because no one else seemed to care.

An agreement was reached between "our" attorney and their attorney to make it worth their while to turn the property back over to the landlord. No kidding: we paid them to vacate.

(And just to underscore how egregious this was, I tell you this part: their attorney was later disciplined and suspended from practicing law for one year for criminal conduct and misrepresentation, among other things.) <http://www.osbar.org/publications/bulletin/05jul/discipline.html> See "Bowles"

June 30th, midnight, the apartment was turned over to the landlord.

My maintenance man, however, refused to enter the apartment. "It gives me the creeps, they're scary. You go and clean out their garbage, I'm not going in there."

Visible in the bedroom windows were lighted candles, burning. One was a black school bus candle, lighted and left on the wooden sill. That was eerie. From the patio side, I saw five more candles burning in the living room. It was time to enter to at least extinguish the fire danger. I found more candles left burning *inside* the wooden linen closet, *inside* the entryway closet



and *in every room*. I put out all the candles without touching them and locked up the apartment. 'Till midnight, then it would be legally ours.

Or 'mine' because no one else would go in.

Thank you, God, for sunshine.

The next morning didn't seem so spooky, just yucky: cat litter spread across the kitchen, dining room, and living room. Well-used cat litter. Most of the food had been deliberately taken out of the refrigerator and scattered to rot on the carpets, and some left rotting inside the unplugged, hot refrigerator.

But the bathroom was immaculate, shiny and free of any marks and fingerprints or signs of having ever been used.

And garbage, garbage everywhere: stolen mail from addresses on 8th street in Gresham, Fred Meyer Bottle Refund books, scraps of paper and receipts, a hand-written "House Share" offer for a home on 8th street, junk spread out, and a round 'CanDo' key for the can and bottle return machines' coin boxes at Fred Meyer stores.

The signatures in the Fred Meyer Bottle Refund book matched the forgeries on my Visa card receipts.

I called Fred Meyer Loss Prevention, again, and this time a very respectful man quickly showed up. I handed him the forged FM Bottle Refund books, a scheme that had cost Fred Meyer hundreds of thousands of dollars.

I turned over the 'CanDo' key.

"Lady, do you know anything about an old truck?" and suddenly I wasn't chopped liver anymore. Apparently, it was *my* neighbors who had made the nightly rounds and emptied the CanDo coin boxes at Freddie's.

"Sure, a blue and white Ford. It's Grampa Lind's truck, he's Sarah's grandpa.



"We've been working on this case with the Gresham Police for 18 months, and #&\*! You just solved it!" He took his evidence with him. I reminded him to take Wes's Fred Meyer employee badge, too. You're welcome.

Because they kept their apartment 'secure' with very few visitors, each piece of garbage might be important and nothing was random. One of four persons had to have brought in the item left behind as garbage. I cleaned up and lugged out can after can of debris. But some items I kept, along with Polaroid pictures of the scene.

I've seen worse moveouts but something told me this wasn't over. And *who* was the 'Ben Fritz' named on the baggage claim ticket from Florida to Miami?

The phone rang. "Hi, Sissy. How are you?" my Dad called to get the news. But this time, *he* had the news and rushed on, "You'll never guess what happened here! Someone put a pipe bomb in our mailbox and blew it to smithereens. Not much left of the mailbox, but I kept the pieces of the bomb."

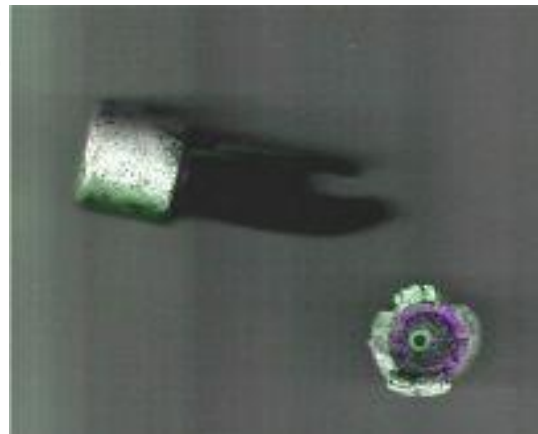
*"Really?!"*

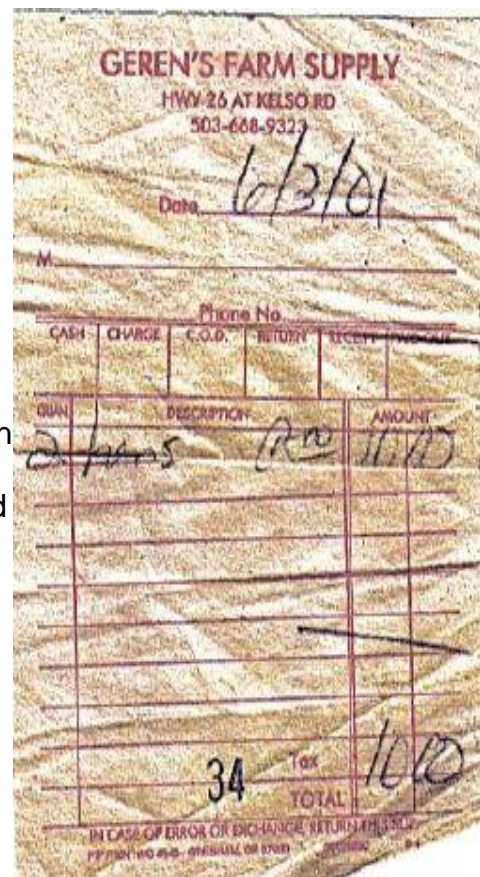
"I'm sure it's just kids, getting near to the 4th of July you know, but no one else got hit." But dad kept the pipe bomb pieces. It took several days to discover that on that same night, someone had burglarized the second house on our property. It took some planning and effort, too, the stolen tractor required a flatbed truck and a loading ramp rack to cart it off. Somebody had to have watched and prepared in order to get away with it. And it wasn't kids and had nothing to do with the 4th of July. Who had the nerve to do that?

And I was becoming weary.

Everything was insured so no one really cared to examine the significance of the event and life pushed on quickly.

I returned to sorting and removing debris from next door, interesting: the round CanDo key, the Fred Meyer Bottle Refund books, a receipt for live chickens from Gehren's Farm Supply (think animal sacrifice),







Why had they drugged her? What had she told them? There is no terror like this, none. My baby!

We had a really great summertime, every resident enjoying the Know Your Neighbor activities and new friendships. Now we picnicked together weekly and the residents brought the food; I just showed up and ate. Loved it! But the dread living in me didn't move out.

It was a whole new world at Royal Greens. After waiting 30 years, this property was finally the city on a hill. Not perfect but being perfected. The peacefulness was a great reward.

It was a very odd thing, then, that one evening, everything cruising along so well, but suddenly the peace was gone, at least in me. Eyes wide open, wide awake. To put me to sleep, I turned on the TV. What I saw I couldn't believe: naked adults cavorting, doing unmentionable things, staging a parade . . . Jim Spagg. This was tax funded, public programming. Nothing of this made sense, it was horrid.



<http://portland.indymedia.org/en/2004/05/287972.shtml>

"Painter, philosopher, clown, politician, nudist, and cable access firebrand . . . Jim Spagg's long-running late-night cable television show had a loyal cult following in Portland for years. Thousands of Portlanders of all types stumbled across intimate videotape of Spagg's genitalia while flipping through the channels late at night. His show also featured a never-ending supply of young women who danced naked . . . . Spagg himself, felt that he was really cancelled for airing . . . a graphic video of Spagg defecating on-camera"

And now sleep would never come.

Was this our world? "O, Father! This is how far we've fallen, You're going to judge this nation." I wasn't asking Him to judge us, I just feared we had it coming. For the sake of five, God will spare us.

Then I surfed on further, this was not *my* world.

Pretty soon the sun would be up with a whole new long day to tackle. But in my spirit the sense of foreboding I felt after watching that public TV grew. We had become something we were never designed to be – what would come of it? "O, LORD, how long?"



I found some sort of sci fi programming, looked like it should be from Japan but all the actors were speaking English. Their script was pretty outlandish but then, that's what makes it sci fi: a huge plane flying into a huge building. It looked so real.

The 'reporters' suddenly saw a second plane. Everyone screamed as we watched the second plane fly into the World Trade Center. It sure *looked* real.

September  
11, 2001.

I opened the  
office as  
'usual'. No one  
walked in the  
door, no one



called. Jeff, the new maintenance man, and I stayed glued to the TV in the laundry room adjoining the office. As did our nation, we watched the footage repeatedly, the reporters, the news of the Pentagon, United flight 93 crashing in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

"Jeff, the world just changed," I stated the *obvious*.

"Naw, this is just something on the news. Don't go doing things." Jeff is an awesome man who can fix anything and rarely misses anything. Usually, you can't get Jeff to stop moving but watching 9/11 live, he didn't move and he never looked away. He was simply aghast and didn't know how to fix this one.

Maybe *not* so obvious.

"Jeff, we need to lower the flag."

"Don't go doing things. It's not that big."

Despairing, about 3AM I walked down to the flagpole to lower the flag. Like folding the American flag which covers a coffin, it had to be done and I wept. In the privacy of my night watch, I could cry as the flag dropped lower.

Then as the that same black sky grew a little less black, golfers were out on the greens before sunrise. Golf must be a great escape.

As Resident Comforter, I needed to be professional, optimistic and strong to convey to the Residents and staff that everything in *their* world was under control.

I asked an advertising sales rep how she was doing and she looked at me thinking "what're you talking about, weirdo?" My guess was she was doing *her* professional best to be in denial.

I probed a bit, hoping to open her tin can so her trauma could come out and she be comforted. "Well, you know, how are you doing with 9/11?", I tried again.

"Oh, that's just something that happened and it's over with. The world isn't going to change." Sierra was a very young advertising rep and the perfume she wore that day was "Condescension", the aroma of disgust with a hint of pity and not subtle overtones of superiority, saying: "You're stupid." The dispersant wasn't alcohol, it was the world's atmosphere and in that atmosphere, the truth is not obvious. Or welcome.



I won't belabor reviewing the news and the developments, we all know them now. Most of them. OK, conspiracy theories aside, there are fewer questions about 9/11 now but more questions just keep coming with each new revelation. It will all come to light.

For months I think we all became news junkies: the Portland Seven arrested, the terrorists still alive being identified, their modus using box cutters, taking flying lessons in Florida, have all become public. The international drug dealing funneling monies back to fund terrorist activities. The terrorists' nations perhaps revealed, border security looming large, and the constant request for people to come forward with anything they might know continues. Everything was and is significant, so "contact us". "See something, say something" hadn't been coined yet.

And that box of abandoned garbage memorabilia stayed way up there in my closet. I knew there wasn't any way those items in the box that would be of interest: box cutters, a baggage claim ticket for a flight from Florida to Cincinnati, the residents from Syrian and Lebanon who lived here at Royal Greens and turned out to be illegal aliens, the drug operation next door, the stolen identities.

"How do they get these people get across the Canadian border without anyone knowing it? Without a single shred of paper?" an attorney for the Syrians residents at Royal Greens mused when he called me. He realized his error and quickly changed the subject.

I guess you need the backstory for the attorney ~



Midday in the office. There was tremendous noise sounding like a fight, actually like one person getting beaten, coming from Isam's second floor apartment over the office. It was bad. There was thumping. I made a rare call to 9-1-1 rather than handle it myself, asked for emergency assistance, suspected domestic violence. The operator said "Stay where you are until the police respond. Don't go up there by yourself," but I was already half way up the stairs with the phone in hand.



The screaming continued and another thump on a wall. I knocked. It got quiet. Isam came smiling and opened the door with baby Michael in his arms. The picture of a loving husband and father. He invited me inside, and there was Hana sitting very straight on a straight-backed, wooden, living room chair. Isam explained that the noises I had heard were Hana, she's very scared of cats and she screamed when she saw a cat walk across the balcony patio. Hana nodded her head.

Sure, that's exactly what happened.

The police came, made reports, and the money behind these people retained an attorney. It was the attorney's job to make nice and smooth things over with me and the police, lest anyone should figure out what was going on. (As was later disclosed, Isam's marriage to Hana in Syria was a sham and not legal, and he had brought her to America, she thinking she was married, to give him an anchor baby. Now he planned to take the baby from her and send her back to Syria, giving Isam an anchor to legally remain.) So that's about the Isam the Syrian's attorney.

Back to the box of memorabilia ~

Now, nearly three months later, with every added news revelation I considered those items anew. I commented to Avril "We have a perfect ten out of ten in what they left behind. All we need is a "terrorist" actually visiting them. And there wasn't one." There was Jeannie, (convicted felon, 'caucasian', 'murderer'), Wes (convicted felon, 'caucasian', 'drug manufacturing and distribution'), Sarah, (caucasian) who might or might not have a sealed record, and Tyrone, (African American, friendly).

"Yes, except for that *one* guy," she muttered.

"*What* guy?"

"The night before the Ryder truck, this guy walks up to see them. They had their front door open, which was really weird! And I heard them saying 'Hey, come on in, we're waiting for you!' They were really friendly but I don't think they had ever even met before."

Avril paused and so did I.

My mind tried to discount what Avril said; I'd lived through this long enough. But her description of the unknown visitor was far too detailed to ignore, right down to his new

brown and white spectator shoes, fresh haircut, brand new shirt just out of the package still bearing the package fold marks, and neatly pressed trousers, "looked like he just got outa jail and had a makeover.

"And he was Syrian."

Please, come on now, very dramatic and unbelievable, just tell me – how would Avril know the visitor's nation of origin? She was suggestible, excitable, and no more.

"I know because *he sounded exactly like Isam and Bassam*," insisted Avril.

*Oh, God. Forget about it. Move on.*

Which I did, with the exception of *first reporting everything to the FBI, ATF, GPD, DEA, SS, and Multi Agency Drug Task Force.*

Now I could move on, it was over. I had done my duty.

And, of course, I had also honored the chain of command. I had first called my supervisor, Joe, the Asset Manager, and told him about what I had found, what I' had seen, and that I was going to report it to the authorities.

"Forget about it. Just forget about it. Take that stuff you have and *throw it all in the garbage*. Not your problem. Just do your job."

"Joe, I'm sure it's nothing, too. But if I don't let someone know and I see another plane fly into a building, . . ."

Joe had already hung up before I completed the sentence but I knew I couldn't live with the excuse of "Well, I had to protect my job."

Was the problem Wes and Sarah, or was it with their parents and their world without values? Or was it with Joe and his parents, with only one value: money?

I do admit that I contacted those 'authorities' every way I knew. After some time, Homeland Security was created and I then contacted them, too.

I understand that the 'authorities' maybe couldn't acknowledge what they did with my information, for their own protection. Or maybe they didn't care and were doing nothing. Or maybe they couldn't let it be known that they were, indeed, following up on my reports. Until this appeared in 2003 *two years later*.

**"PORTLAND – Federal agents and local police say they have cracked a drug-trafficking conspiracy that stretched**

from Canada to the East Coast to Oregon with the arrest of eight people for distributing . . .

[Isam] “Sarkis is charged with four counts of knowingly distributing . . . drug operations began approximately in July 2001.

“Nahie Fares, who is Syrian born, blamed the U.S. government for the trouble. ‘You guys all think we’re in terrorism.

“(Sheriff) Guisto said ‘I think the evidence will bear out that it had nothing to do with the race of the people involved. **It had to do with this was a big time drug operation.**” More Oregon News | NWCN.com 07/02/2003

By ABE ESTIMADA and ANTONIA GIEDWOYN / KGW

PORTLAND - Federal agents and local police say they have cracked a drug-trafficking conspiracy that stretched from Canada to the East Coast to Oregon with the arrest of eight people for distributing a cold medicine derivative used in the manufacture of illegal methamphetamine.

A federal indictment charged Adnan Wahib Fares, 46; Nezar Ishak, 32; George Trad, 42, from Iowa; Shannon Paul Barry, 35; and Wendy Lynn Barry, 31, with helping manufacture methamphetamine. Arrests were made in Oregon and Washington.

The suspects obtained, transported and distributed pseudoephedrine from elsewhere in the U.S. and Canada into Oregon, the indictment charges. Pseudoephedrine, which is found in over-the-counter cold medication, is used to produce methamphetamine.

Two more local residents, Isam Sarkis, 33, and Antoine Yakhour, 53, were also arrested for their knowledge of the illicit activity, the indictment said. Sarkis is charged with four counts of knowingly distributing pseudoephedrine for the manufacture of meth. The indictment also seeks the forfeiture of property belonging to Sarkis that could've been used for the distribution operation.

Yakhour, and a Seattle resident, Ghassan Tassia, 49, were also charged with conspiracy to distribute pseudoephedrine.



The suspects involved in an alleged drug manufacturing ring. (KGW/Multnomah County Sheriff's Office Photo)

Again, I was alone without any ally but One. King of the Universe, the Only One you need.

My devotion to Royal Greens continued. Royal Greens was finally a desirable place to live in and to *not move out*. That should have ended this story until I retired there at Royal Greens happily ever after.

ENTRY	SECTION	ROW	SEAT	GAME
A2	101	S	19	3
LOWER LEVEL				\$127.00 \$95.00

**BLAZERS** VS. GRIZZLIES

WEDNESDAY - NOVEMBER 6, 2002 - 7:00 PM



883859568116

WEDNESDAY - NOVEMBER 6, 2002 - 7:00 PM				GAME
ENTRY	SECTION	ROW	SEAT	PRICE
A2	101	S	20	\$127.00 \$95.00

A badge of success came later in November, 2002.



The property owner called and offered two tickets to a Blazers game. I never watched a basketball game ever but my daughter used to watch basketball on TV when she was a toddler – she was thrilled that Mama would take her to the game.

Pretty good tickets, too! Right above the press box. Thank you, Bart.

Which is why I have a fix on the date when the next assault occurred.



"Hello, Joy?"

"Yes."

"This is Laurie at Eastside Christian School. Look, I took a call from the Walt Morey Middle School in Troutdale. They found some of Chloe's things in their schoolyard."

Not possible.

My daughter had never been near there. I knew that Alysia and her folks had moved into that neighborhood, bought a house and moved just before the death of their new baby, Lily. This I knew from other residents. My daughter and I had had no contact with the family outside of sending them a card with our sincere condolences on Baby Lily's death. I didn't include congratulations on obtaining a green card.

I immediately swept my baby up from school. I called out to Walt Morey Middle School and asked their secretary about her message to Eastside.

“Yes, we have your daughter’s things. We identified them because she wrote a letter to President Bush and told him her name and the name of her school.”

"It's mostly just, stuff, but we'll hold it for you to come out and pick it up if you're interested."

"Our maintenance man and the Troutdale policeman assigned here found her things when they went out to investigate. Our school was actually locked down! Kids and a yard monitor had seen people coming and going through a window," *who does that sound like?* "at a house right there by the big tree. The police went door to door to investigate for burglary, but everyone home answered their door and the other homes were secure.

Sincerely,

P.S- Adam's hand went through a window.

P.S.S- We pray for you.

I didn't spend any time with her in conversation. I grabbed the paper bag of 'stuff' and ran home with my baby. Did I even thank her?

Still silent, I began to unload the contents: five uneaten lunches, my (purloined) lipstick, a mirror, a hairbrush and the letter to President Bush.

How indecipherable that her letter would reveal to us the invasion, the theft, the assault!

And again, who in the world would steal things out of her backpack and not just take the backpack and run? There was a CD player in there and other things more fun to steal

P.S.- We pray for you.

than rotting lunches. But they had stolen her handwriting, her hairbrush, her clothing... and not the backpack.

And, again, what were the chances that we ever would have realized anything was missing – were it not for that letter to the President and people entering their home through a window?

"It just so happened."

Folks, get real here: either you see the outrageous, passionate hand of a loving and powerful and invisible God keeping close to us, or, you really *do* have an imagination and faith in good luck.

May I ask, why were *those* articles taken?

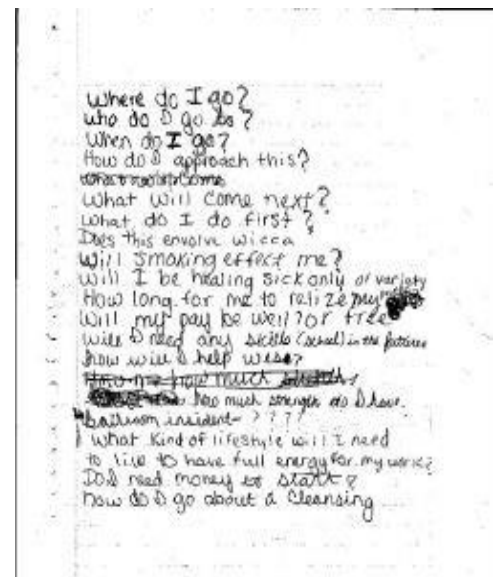
I know.

Do you?

Witchcraft, casting spells.

Wicca is described as 'the practice of receiving one's own power'. Not God's power, but her own. But if you read Sarah's note,

"Where do I go?  
Who do I go to?  
What will come next?  
WILL IT INVOLVE WICCA? [sic]  
Will smoking effect me?  
HOW WILL I GO ABOUT A  
CLEANSING?"



Please see what I see: She is searching, she wants to know where to

go, she wants to know what will come next, what to do first. She wants to know if sorcery or drugs will help her or hurt. She knows she isn't clean.

She feels lost.

Please have a heart for her to know God.

She offers blood sacrifices to get her there. She weaves spells which don't work. *She wants to be loved.*

And once again, after a year and a half, mysteries lived. Dread spooned with me as I tried to sleep, accompanied me on my morning rounds. We were still very close and they were still attacking.

And during all this, my company awarded me the "Top Shop Award" *and* I received an unprecedented 100% evaluation by an anonymous shopper.

I loved my life at Royal Greens. Royal Greens really deserved that 100% evaluation, what a difference! I call it 'Vision Equity', the value of believing then seeing. And the atmosphere was sweet, everything just worked.

One new resident asked me if I could recommend a church in the area. I handed her the community orientation information with banks, grocery stores, activity clubs, libraries, and churches. Then she, having no car and a crippling disability, asked me if I'd take her to one. She's my resident, my neighbor, and this is the friendly version of Royal Greens.

*She asked me to take her to church.*

So, we took her along to the next Saturday evening early service.

Following the service, she asked for a ride to the local grocery store, but not the one just down the street, the one in the next town over. Well, OK. Once there, Chloe accompanied her to help, and I shopped for the few things we needed. Nice end to a nice day.

"Mama! Mama! *They're here!*" Chloe screamed.

"Honey, who's here?" I had never seen my daughter in this state of terror. I grasped her shoulders and pulled her to me but she broke loose.

"Wes and Sarah, *they're here!*"





“Shhhhhhhhh, are you sure? We haven’t seen them in a year and a half.” I had never told Chloe that they’d moved only a few blocks away.

I was terrified.

Why?

Sacrificing chickens and other animals, casting spells to get rid of us, coming back after a *year and a half* to steal things from my daughter’s backpack!

And once you’ve experienced their furious hatred, their humiliating attacks in public, collected evidence from their garbage, it changes you.

Chloe took me by the arm and we walked with our two friends, Terror and Dread, towards the back of the store where she’d seen ‘them’. And yes, suddenly, I saw them. My daughter fell in behind me, hesitating as I walked up to them, smiling.

“Wes, Sarah! How nice to see you again!” and I *meant* it. Wes looked the same, Sarah had dyed her hair *blackest* black and I never would have recognized her.

Wes gave me a big hug and I believe it was genuine, who knows?

“Sarah and I got married and this is our baby, Fiona Rivers,” Wes said, pointing into the baby carriage at their three-month old baby daughter. Sarah stood stiffly and quietly, not knowing what to expect.

I talked to the baby and Fiona started laughing and smiling and that scared Sarah.

Wes was amazed: “I’ve never seen her laugh before! Wow, she just lit up! This is so weird.” We shared a measureless moment there in the meat department knowing that something Beyond understanding was going on.

I started to pray for Fiona and not with my understanding but in The Spirit. Both Wes and Sarah knew that something far more powerful than their plans and spells was at



work. Then Sarah's mouth turned up into a sneer which should have been a smile.

"Is this your daughter?" she asked, pointing to a frail, not well child near us. "You know, we've always been very close by, we never really left you . . . we live right over on 8th street." (I had never told Chloe this!)

Just then my daughter walked up and stood next to me. She was much taller, very robust, very pretty. Sarah began to take in Chloe's stature and her excellence ~ Sarah was shocked. Nothing had worked for Sarah including her spells. Standing near us, Sarah's demonic spirit seemed to wither in power.

I blessed them, then we parted ways.

"Your chicken blood didn't work, did it!" Chloe blurted out emphatically, no longer afraid. It's amazing that we could have such a meeting, have such fear give way to so *much love*.

We ate a lot of ice cream that night.

# They overcame him by ... The Blood of the Lamb

Revelation 12:11

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

TDCJ Home

New Offender Search

## Offender Information Search

Name	TDCJ Number	Race	Gender	Projected Release Date	Unit of Assignment	Age
JEANNIE MIATA	01305751	W	F	2103-10-22	MOUNTAIN VIEW	61

**SEARCH CRITERIA**  
Last Name: Jeannie First Name: Hannah TDCJ Number: null Race: null Gender: null

When I recently looked up Jeannie Miata aka Hannah's status, I was horrified to see her release date of 2022 - *only 11 years more? What happened to the 99 years?* The second or third time I read I saw it: 2103. Well, that's more like it! That's how we feel, isn't it?

*Hell is a long time to be wrong. That's what Jeannie's facing - eternity. Eternity without God because she refuses His grace. But as long as she's alive, she can still choose Jesus, and so can you.*

How does Jeannie think it's OK to murder patients for short-term gain as compared to living with Jesus for eternal gain?

The gunshot or the hot shot of insulin may take only an instant, but that's not where it begins.

It begins when no one tells a little girl that Jesus loves her, or she's been abused and rebels, or she has parents but raises herself. She thinks she has no value so she's out to get some. Or she goes to church and hears the law and says 'no thanks, I'm never going to be good enough!' Maybe no one ever told her that Jesus fulfilled the law for her, teaching us to cry out 'I need a Savior! Jesus!'

So cry out to Jesus for Jeannie, not because you're self-righteous, not because you're not a murderer, but because you know Jesus: His heart is to save Jeannie. Cry out to Jesus. So long as we have today, pray for Jeannie. Be not silent.

DID YOU SEE HIM? During these horrific years upon years of terror, nowhere have I recorded the long, awesome effective prayers that I prayed: for provision, for protection, for peace. I never rebuked, declared, commanded or prayed special prayers because I didn't know how to.

I am a child and I pray like a child talking to the Friend she trusts: Jesus, I love You. Oh, thank You for your protection! Thanks for all the grace to keep going. Please bless Wes and Sarah. I love You.

The only thing I know how to do is worship. And be thankful. Like a little kid, I keep it simple because I am simple. And of such is the Kingdom of God.

Jesus paid it all, Jesus does it all. Jesus loves you.

Amen and Hallelujah

## Couldn't See The Trees For The Forrest

I remember the first time I picked up the telephone and heard "Hello, Joy? This is Bart Samuels." 'George' as in 'Bush' would've been less stunning.

"Oh. Mr. Samuels! The Owner! Well, you're up there right next in line to The Lord." Had I written this as a script a thousand times I couldn't have outdone the real performance for being obsequious and *stupid*. I was trying to figure out why on earth he'd call me, how to express my gratitude for his call, and make sure that he knew that I knew that he was some-body. I threw the Lord in there because I suspected Mr. Samuels didn't think about Him much. And if this were the only conversation I'd have with him, I owed it to Mr. Samuels to help him focus on Someone far more profitable. Gotta love me.



There was a long pause, too long. I think we were both recovering.

"Joy, I need some measurements from you. Can you go to each of the units you have and get an exact ..."

I've been privileged to move in interesting circles in Europe, the Far East, and the Far Out. Being impressed by a person is unreasonable but not impossible and Mr. Samuels had made quite an entrance into my life. As the new manager of one of his apartment communities, I'd followed my boss, who was following her boss, who was following Mr. Samuels around the place with me being the caboose. It was fascinating watching the politics and fearsome watching Mr. Samuels slice and dice. He spoke to my supervisor as a cuisinart speaks to tomatoes being pureed and I hoped I was too small to remember. That was two years ago.

Our next meeting....in the midst of being all excited, believing I'd found a way to beautify



nasty, older 'units' without spending any money! See, nicer and nicer people were moving in and I couldn't face giving them what Royal Greens had to offer. On our "no budget for that", it wasn't even possible to clean them up much less fix them up.

Years of messy lives had messed up the woodwork. But wait! Using a kitchen sponge, stain varnish and forgetting my gloves, the woodwork trim was gorgeous. A home to honor which honored its Residents. So, I was walking back to the office in the rain, pretty doggone delighted, hands sticky and drippy with wood stain, curls dripping rain.

And here they came. Expensive suits, overcoats, shoes that didn't usually walk around in the rain and a stadium umbrella. Grinning ~ a good sign. One was the owner of my company, the other, the owner of the whole community: Mr. Samuels. I reached forth my hand to shake his and it shriveled back en route. Grubby, wood-stain-stained nails retreated under wet curls as I pushed hair out of my eyes realizing that I couldn't possibly have done any worse. "Uh oh, oh hello!"



The company owner: "I called and told Avril we'd be out today for our annual visit. Didn't she tell you?" More a recrimination than a question. He's Norwegian, like my dad, and they share a skill for turning any occasion into an indictment. Even the sun's afraid to go down at night in Norway, the Land of 'That's Not Good Enough'. (I adore my dad.)

Embarrassment has burned away most of this meeting's memories, but I do recall Mr. Samuels' kindness clearly. This was not the same man I'd seen the year before. He was nice, and he was nice *to me*. And ~ he was here for his only-once-a-year inspection, to see what I'd done to his property.

Oh, I could have made such an excellent impression had I known! Perfect nails, perfect suit, perfect hair. For days following this fiasco I prepared and rehearsed a redo like I'd prepared and practiced Hayden's Concerto in D Major: to perfection. Too bad it was too late. Flunk!

But Mr. Samuels had been gracious and encouraging. Kindness trumps everything and I elevated Mr. Samuels' importance again.

Then came the next visit and I had both a curtsy and a genuflect down pat. I was told that Mr. Samuels was coming out in two days for an inspection and he was 'really going to look around this time'.

It seems that our little village had been doing well 'recently', and a lot a 'important people' started dropping by. I heard an appraiser say "It's hard to believe this is the same place. We were out here five, six years ago, and I wasn't too happy to be called back again. It was awful, I was scared the whole time I was here and I couldn't wait to get done and go. *What a difference!*"

He was accurate in both evaluations. Drug dealing, crime and just plain low liveness had reigned at Royal Greens since it had been built. I myself had only moved in because (I had to, and) I couldn't control the criminal element without being onsite at night. An apartment was available suddenly right at the end of the driveway and we were there: watching every single car come and go all night. Out of need to know and out of absolute terror. My maintenance man, Jeremy, went wild because he was part of the cartel and had more than a job to lose. (He's doing six years in prison now.)



Every car that came in the driveway shone its lights into my bedroom window. I'd pop up, peek out, try to see who was doing what with whom. To whom. I took to walking the property, Listening, looking. I picked up every cigarette butt- had done since day one- and every piece of litter, examining each for importance. I thought of the bones of Greg White found at the bottom of the firepit on Mt. Hood. I thought of his precious children who still lived at Royal Greens and how long it had taken to identify the bones and know that Daddy wouldn't be coming home again. I had solved some major crimes and prevented even more by picking up litter. But sadly, no answers for the children robbed by their parents' foolishness.

By daylight I'd start cleaning up the two garbage can areas. It's amazing what people do. Then I'd wipe down each washer and each dryer, sweep the laundry room, mop the floors, clean the public bathroom, polish the glass doors. Race home to wake Chloe up and get her to school, then change clothes, back in the office before 9AM to make coffee, collect rents, settle disputes, and then out to clean up dog poop between the buildings, behind patios, in the bark beds, (pun).

Back to the office, careful about what I dragged in with me. Any calls?

Rush to open the model apartments, sweep the entryways, stairs, patios, turn on the lights, the music, flush each toilet, water the plants brought from my home to decorate-

Back to the office: any calls?

Ah, a death threat. Funny how people are. For their own good, I had encouraged some Residents to live elsewhere because drug dealing here would get them arrested. No gratitude. Back down to the park to plant flowers.

Out of the office at six or seven o'clock for dinner. Back just as soon as we sat down to eat because someone always needed something exactly then. I'd kept up this hectic pace of my own making for nearly two years.

So with Mr. Samuels coming to visit and two whole days advance notice, it was time to get things in hand! Yes, I was going after the things that had been wrong for thirty years. No challenge too ludicrous.

Yes, we can remove three tons of cement dumped behind the maintenance shed! Yes, we can unearth every puppy poop, every dandelion, every oversight, and we can overcome, to-da—y. We can superglue back together crumbling sidewalks, failing railings, and every less-than-perfect thing about our beloved...

*self-image.*

Somewhere over time it wasn't the apartment community that I was improving, but my self-image. Lots to do, and I needed more than Max Factor. I just knew that *this* time, I could do it.

Imagine my delight when our 'quality control' inspector walked in the day before Mr. Samuels' Day, and examined me in the midst of the preparations. Do you know what your Aunt Minnie would've done if out of town company showed up a day early? Not pretty, not nice.

I found myself being the caboose again, following Mr. Samuels-*the-Owner*, the president of my company, and the (new) supervisor around my little corner of the world. Mr. Samuels spotted a satellite dish on the roof: "What's *that* doing here?" Never mind that it had been there for nine years and I hadn't, it was my fault.

"Gosh, uh, I spend my time looking down, picking things up, and keeping things clean. I've never really took note of that on the roof." Just then his very expensive loafers squiiiiiiished, I cringed - guess I'd missed some. *Niiiiice*. Flunk. Not good enough.



But what a perfect picture of how to miss it, how to mess up: I was so busy "working" for God and the Vision, distracted and looking down to pick up trash, that I hadn't looked up to see His beauty.

I had lost sight of God, not completely but frequently.

God had never taken His eyes off me. He would interrupt my busy plans to reveal something critically important. He would talk to me. He would redirect my steps. He

led me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake no matter what I did. In spite of me, I succeeded.

As it turned out, Samuel's interest this time was in capitalizing on the recent increase in the value of Royal Greens. See, there's something called a 'gross rent multiplier', one of the factors which determines how much a property is worth. And evidently all those nutty things, like being kind when threatened, picking up litter, caulking someone's bathtub on a Friday night to show the resident that they mattered, had paid off. Without any capital investment or balloons saying 'rent here', the value of this little non-performer had increased about \$366,000 in just over a year. Hmmmm.

Flunk? Not good enough?

Maybe that message wasn't coming from them. Maybe it was coming from the caboose.

Well, one thing led to ten others and my beloved property was refinanced and repainted. Improved. I felt acknowledged by the fact that they spent money painting my property- it was mine by the way I invested myself in it. I craved stability and blessed assurance in an industry known for neither and an average employment tenure of just eight months. Before sunrise I'd be up working to please the god of Not Good Enough, dreaming of what I could accomplish if I lived in Norway.

The day came when I got this call: Bart is bringing his father, Forrest Samuel, out to see the property, to see the new paint.





*UuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuffDa.*

If I were impressed by Bart, (and I really was), then this was Bart to the 10th power. Forrest Samuels had built the place, so now I was trying to figure out how to bow and genuflect at the same time. I mean, I'm making fun of myself, but this is how I felt. This ~ if *I were perfectly prepared* ~ could be my 15 minutes of fame. *Security.*

I had stayed in place, stood my ground through death threats, burglaries, police raids, and break-ins into my apartment. No one else's, just mine. I had worked without

overtime, without vacation time, without weekends off: to make this a perfect place to live. I had a dream to make this place shine like a 'City on a Hill'. To be a great place where anyone could live safely, happily. And the end of the dream was that after investing myself towards this, I would be rewarded by having a place where I could live and work safely, happily, until I didn't live at all. Surely, *surely*, I could create a place of comfort and kindness and not of pain and live my life there. I wanted that world. Much of my service was about "I".

The day arrived. The entourage arrived.

Now, Bart Samuels is a fine man and he's *smart*, which I like a lot. I like smart. I'd grown to appreciate and enjoy him on his visits during the summer of property improvements. His father? Just like him. Little terse about his dislikes, maybe (remember Bart The Cuisinart?), but to me he was lovely. He was kind, he was solicitous. I dragged him off to 'see my vegetable garden', to get him away from the blueprint aspects of ownership so I could share the Vision with him.

To know that people are precious. Buildings are buildings, people are precious.

Mr. Samuels would suddenly stop being part of the conversation and he'd trail off and gaze upwards. Mr. Forrest Samuels kept looking up at the trees and I kept looking up to him. "I just can't get over how even the trees have grown. They're so beautiful. The trees, I'm just amazed..."

"You know, this place had always been a loser until you arrived. It just never made it and we were going to dump it. Sell it and get it off our hands. Until you arrived. And everything started working, and it'll keep working, as long as you are here. But I just can't believe how beautifully the trees have grown, how lovely they are."

My fifteen minutes.

My dream.

My agenda

My provision for my child.

My retirement plan.

My security.

I thanked the Lord for this gift to me, which, in this case, was simply blaming Him for the

way I'd overworked like a nutcase, gone way too far, taken way too many risks, because I was scared.

Scared of failure.  
Scared of the future.  
Scared of ending up broke.  
Alone.  
With nowhere to go.  
I had been running my

whole life.



The next morning was Saturday and it was foggy. The fog helped me slow down, come aside for 'quiet time'. Solemnly I determined to enjoy the day, starting with a great cup of coffee on my patio and a book and the view. That's what people do in order to not work, isn't it?

I stepped out in the grey chill to clean the glass top on the white wicker table. In all this time, the only thing that that wonderful white wicker set had done was sell rentals. It hadn't been enjoyed. I brought out the coffee, and a book: the Bible. Well, as long as I was supposed to take some time for myself, I might as well work in some brownie points with God. I settled in to practice what I preached and smell the roses, take in the view, and while away the...

Absolute fear that I hadn't done enough.

I hadn't really pleased anyone, been approved of, or accomplished anything. My gaze left the Book and lifted up to the trees. The trees were Samuel's favorite part and I'd never even noticed them. In six minutes, I'd had enough of leisure and started fussing at a spot on the table glass which wasn't there.

**"SO, HE LIKED THE TREES, DIDN'T HE?"**

"Oh, *he just couldn't get over* the trees, how *beautiful they are*, how much they'd grown since I'd been here!" Reassurance, confidence filled me again and I stopped wiping away at my insecurities. Not because HE was talking to me, because *Mr. Forrest Samuel* had talked to me.

**"YOU'VE WORKED SO HARD!"**

"I know! *I have*. I've worked as hard as I could, as well as I could!" Well, what do you know, HE had noticed.

**"YOU'VE WORN YOURSELF OUT!"** He said, **"BUT NOT FOR ME."**

I soothed myself thinking "It's about time I get acknowledged for all this," admiring the

trees but again not seeing them.

**“HOW ABOUT THOSE  
TREES?”**



I was lost in my appreciation of everything I had done.

**"HOW MUCH WORK DID YOU DO TO GET THOSE TREES TO GROW?"** Gently  
He broke in again.

"Pardon?"

**"I WAS ASKING, 'HOW-HARD-DID-YOU-WORK-TO-MAKE-THOSE -TREES  
GROW?' HOW -- DID -- YOU -- DO -- IT?"** He slowed down as if speaking to a  
child.

*His child.*

'I can't hear you!' I thought, as though He didn't hear what I was thinking.

We sat there together looking at the trees, letting the lesson sink into me. Without any faultfinding whatsoever, He continued:



"YOU DIDN'T DO A THING TO MAKE THE TREES GROW, DID YOU? I DID. TREES WERE MY IDEA," He was purely delighted with His creation. "JOY, ALL THAT YOU'VE ACCOMPLISHED, I HAVE DONE FOR YOU. "I LIKE TREES. HE LIKES THEM, TOO! THAT'S WHY THEY'RE HERE: TO ENJOY.

"YOU CAN STRUGGLE OR YOU CAN ENJOY, BUT I'LL ALWAYS TAKE CARE OF YOU."

"AND THIS MR. SAMUELS YOU'RE SO IMPRESSED WITH -- I TAKE CARE OF *him*, TOO."

"Your life shall be as a prize to you, because you have put your trust in Me," says the LORD. Jeremiah 39:18



"A person's steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand their own way?" Proverbs 20:24



So, with nearly three years of tremendous success, tremendous increased property value, tremendous fulfillment, I was happily settled into a sort of unpredictable chaos I called my life, Resident Property Manager. It would always be challenging and constantly changing but it was very, very good.

As I finished my monthly report and pressed 'enter' to submit, the entry doors of the office opened and two folks walked in: my asset manager, another property manager.

"Joy, you are terminated. Please give us your keys and vacate your unit within 24 hours."

That's how it's done.

In one pronouncement, one is both unemployed and homeless.

Management had decided to make an unannounced change because they wanted to sell the property at its increased value and it was standard to 'protect the property' by removing the *resident* manager from their residence.

Was it because the property was so stable and profitable that now anyone could take the keys and run it? True, and less expensive.

Was it because the property had increased in value so much that it was a great time to sell? True, too.

Was it because the Residents loved me as I loved them, and this wasn't going to sit well? True dat.

But why handle it this way, rather than taking care of me as I had taken care of their property?

I was, of course, crushed. My heart was in the people of this place, and the place, too.

I didn't rise up with full faith in God and shake the dust off my feet, excited about what He had next. No, I did not. And for about year I was less than a victorious mighty woman of faith, I was not. I was a puddle.

After this year of shock and disbelief, I faxed a letter to the owner (not the management company, the Owner, per above), asking "Why was I let go?"

"You are phenomenal, we've never had anyone do what you've done. We sold Royal Greens because you made it valuable and we could finally sell it.

"There was just one issue:

"You're a Christian."