

DON'T QUIT YOUR DAYDREAM!

Sherry L. Peterson

Copyright © 2019 Sherry L. Peterson. All rights reserved worldwide.

Copyright, Legal Notice and Disclaimer:

This publication is protected under the US Copyright Act of 1976 and all other applicable international, federal, state and local laws and all rights are reserved, including resale rights: you are not allowed to give or sell this Guide to anyone else.

This book is dedicated to all my fellow travelers, who are searching for personal growth, understanding and enlightenment.

Life is filled with a bounty of pain, love, and lessons.

Believe in the power of YOU and above all,

Don't Quit Your Daydream!

To my kids,
You are always the upside to my down.

CONTENTS

Prologue

Chapter 1	Here We Go Again	8
Chapter 2	One Brick Short	14
Chapter 3	Hair Pieces and Heels	31
Chapter 4	Surprise	51
Chapter 5	Divorce 101	58
Chapter 6	Post Traumatic Marriage Syndrome (PTMS)	64
Chapter 7	Unconditional Love	74
Chapter 8	The Tao of Self-Doubt and Self-Acceptance	81
Chapter 9	If It Hurts Don't do It	95
Chapter 10	A Monster on The Loose	103
Chapter 11	The Powers That Be	119
Chapter 12	Blast From the Past	127
Chapter 13	Pushing the Boundaries	137
Chapter 14	Don't Quit Your Daydream	151
Chapter 15	What is Happiness?	159
Chapter 16	The Power of Forgiveness	169
Chapter 17	Reflection	171

**"We're all broken...that's how the light gets in."
- Hemingway**

PROLOGUE

The minute Buzi Q. Jacobs came into the world, she was looking for a parade. She loved reading and writing but longed to be part of something inclusive.

Her wish came true when she met her husband, Stephen Rayburn. Finally, she was a card-carrying member of the Mrs. Club.

After having kids and leaving her career behind, reality set in. She had to confront the dysfunction in her childhood and the instability in her marriage.

Adultery, alcoholism, deceit, and illness touched her life in ways she couldn't have imagined.

While her friends have perfect social networking pages, wear two shoes that match and are blissfully happy, she feels like a failure.

Are her kids the only ones that screw up and is she the only one battling a rogue thyroid, depleted estrogen and a scale that lies to her?

Buzi's journey into self-discovery clears the path for gratitude, love, and self-acceptance. She comes to understand, that her fellow travelers share in the same human obstacles that define us all.

Believe in the power of YOU and above all,
Don't Quit Your Daydream!

CHAPTER ONE

HERE WE GO AGAIN

Everyday it's the same self-help tape playing in my head. You need to get it together, Buzi girl. Quit making excuses and do the work.

So, I finish my last bite of chocolate cake and sashay over to the torture device known as the scale. My hands start to sweat, and an all too familiar fear washes over me.

This must be what insanity feels like...Doing the same thing over and over, expecting a different result.

If I'm okay with the number I see, I guarantee my day will flow much better. Kind of like when you find a four-leaf clover, a penny that's heads up, or you see a shooting star. It's like that.

I've decided to execute a reprogramming of sorts. Maybe by writing about the ebb and flow of my life, I can reach some clarity and acceptance. You know ownership of the past. A cathartic release of the ups, downs and *sideways* in my life.

However, despite my lofty ambition, today may not be the day to start the healing process.

I happen to look down and reality hits me hard. I'm getting old and droopy.

My perky, nubile breasts have gone south. Between my boobs and blossoming stomach, I look like a percussion band, complete with a pair of maracas and a big kettle drum.

For God's sake, I'm a one-woman marching troupe!

All kidding aside, my self-deprecating humor needs to stop. This ritualistic morning mania needs to change and it's time for me to get real with myself.

My birth name is Buzi Q. Jacobs and I'm perpetually in a state of transition.

While marriage, divorce and children have kept me amused, I'm also a *writer*.

Admittedly, my life seems to be consumed by many, many words. I think I may need a support group.

Just like everyone else, there are things that bug me.

I don't understand how the toilet paper roll gets put on the wrong way, or why I'm the only one that can figure out how to unload the dish washer.

It's possible that sometimes my resolute vision of right and wrong, impedes my realities and sensibilities. Of course, that can be influenced by how bloated I am or how much wine I've had.

I feel short-changed most of the time and can't stand it when the cap of the toothpaste gets lost, socks disappear in the dryer, or my Tupperware lids go missing. Am I being too unreasonable?

Since I'm being honest, I'm not sure where I'd fit on a litmus test in life.

But just like everyone else, I'm trying.

If my internal dialogue was put on a movie screen, it might look like a loop of “The Bridesmaids,” or “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest.”

My logline would read: “A woman sinks into the depths of depression and madness, only holding on by her Spanx, misguided dreams and a scale that lies to her.”

These daily rituals and unscripted conversations that I have with myself are therapeutic sessions in lunacy and self-preservation.

I don’t know what to do with betrayal, love, heartache, heartburn, or that hostile weight meter of mine.

So...I write and sometimes it surprises me.

Like the discovery of an old cassette tape, I never know what emotion is going to play, until it presents itself on the page.

Is it wrong to find myself in a heap on the floor with a Care Bear and a brownie stuck in my mouth?

And just for the record, I’m not always this much fun! I’m also not angelic, nor do I have the need to be.

I know there’s a middle-aged bad girl inside of me just waiting for her *freak flag to fly*. (Say that ten times)

As I get older, I find that accountability or the lack there of is a pet peeve of mine.

It bothers me when the story isn’t straight, or we get accused of something we didn’t do.

If we protest too much and try to stick up for ourselves, it looks like we're deflecting, or hiding something. If we don't stick up for ourselves, we are hiding something...THE TRUTH!

Sometimes it would be nice to rewrite history, but that doesn't change the history that was written. The truth isn't a mechanical drawing on an Etch a Sketch.

Now that I'm ready to do the work, and exposing the inner Scrabble game playing in my head, I need to clarify one thing.

My legal first name is Buzi. Yes, just like it sounds. Boozy. Cue the laughter.

It was my parent's intention to name me Suzi, but something got lost in translation. My Mother never should have let my dad fill out the birth certificate.

I know she may have been a little tired from 48 hours of hard labor and an emergency c-section, but still...what was she thinking?

He and my Uncle Joe were completely blitzed when I was born. On top of that, admittedly and unapologetically, they share a bizarre, borderline psychotic sense of humor.

My Dad wrote, Buzi Q. Jacobs on the form. I guess I should be glad he didn't put down Floozy or Wino.

So, Buzi it was, Buzi it is.

Uncle Joe thought that was hysterical and has ribbed me about my name since I was a little girl.

He gave me a bottle of wine when I was born, and we cracked it open when I turned twenty-one. The birthday card said: To My Favorite Boozer. Always find the humor in life. It's the key to survival.

I think he may be right about that.

My sweet Uncle is a mess, but I love him dearly. He's just one of the precious cast members in my life, who contributes to my well-deserved neurosis.

There are so many legitimate, yet conflicting reasons I feel the way I do, and many people might relate.

Do you ever feel like everyone else has life figured out and yours is a lame practice run?

My friends who truly are fantastic people, seem to have perfect lives. They flawlessly, keep it together.

Their social networking pages read like impressive press releases.

I guess my kids are the only ones that screw up and I'm the designated patient that has relationship issues.

Most of the time, I feel like I'm cooking recipes with missing ingredients and a pilot light that's out.

And...if positive reinforcement is the key, then I'm screwed.

Those warm, fuzzy, *Little Engine That Could* feelings didn't exist in our home growing up. Being successful was a virtue we had to figure out on our own.

Truthfully, I'm amazed that my sister and I turned out as well as we did, because ... **hurt people --- hurt people.**

I've decided to lead my own intervention and chronicle my life events, because I know me better than anyone else and I need help.

I'm willing to accept my responsibility in defining the past. Being a member of the walking wounded isn't serving me well. It's not a pretty look.

I read a quote that says: "**When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.**"

Well, I'm ready to learn! Bring out the spiral notebooks, highlighters, and my big girl panties.

If I don't get **ME** figured out...I'm afraid I'll lose the sparkle, that's hiding under all these excuses.

CHAPTER TWO

One Brick Short

My husband, the dashing Stephen R. Rayburn, our kids and I are moving from Albuquerque, NM to Mesa, AZ. This time it's for a year. We're being transferred once again, to further his career.

Stephen is a marketing executive, and we seem to be casualties of his ambition.

Our son Harry is fifteen and our daughter Lilly Rose is fourteen. Those glorious ages when they think they know everything.

Each time we move, there's an obnoxious period of adjustment for them. I guess I should say for me too.

Stephen travels a lot and he's not here physically or emotionally. He's also not the spiritually enlightened type.

I'm the one that deals with their bad attitudes, smart mouths, and resentment.

The irony is that I get it and they have a right to feel the way they do.

We're like a traveling band of gypsies. That lifestyle is perfectly fine for some people but, for our family it's caused enormous stress and a level of insecurity.

The smartest thing we've done, is to keep this house as an investment property and rent it out while we're gone.

This is the first house Harry and Lilly lived in and from the ages of birth to seven years old, this was home.

Their sticky imprints, and Crayola, marks are everywhere. I love that!

Since that time, we've been transferred back and forth like ping pong balls, just trying to find our center and to establish that sense of belonging.

Thankfully, summer vacation is starting, and it will be a bit easier.

With these subsequent transfers out of state, the kids are always the newbies at school, and we've dealt with some bullying and exclusion.

My heart breaks for them. I guess these are the other hazards of Stephen's transfers.

I'm quite certain that my attitude has been greatly influenced by all these moves as well.

It adds to the commotion and colorful history, that Stephen and I both have contributed to.

Some might think I'm lucky, because he's a good provider and I'm able to stay home with our kids. I don't dispute that.

However, when there are other people involved in your marital bed...things become crowded.

His infidelities have shattered the sanctity of our union, but I'm not putting it all on him.

My ambivalent ability to put my foot down, has perpetuated this broken marriage for a while now.

I'm not a victim, but I won't take responsibility for his actions and bad behavior. It's daunting enough confronting my own life blemishes and imperfections.

I've been like many women raising children, who sometimes feel stuck. We've provided our kids with a certain lifestyle and many of us walked away from careers to have a family.

That's not a bad thing, but for me I realized early on that I couldn't have it all. It was hard to make everything work.

And like most of us, we give as good as we got until we change that narrative.

I grew up with a significant level of dysfunction, so my choices have been based on my self-worth or lack of it. Each lesson I learn doesn't come easily and there's usually a price to pay.

But to be sure, there are many beautiful aspects to my life.

However, I tend to forget that sometimes because I'm consumed by all the chaos, noise, and chatter.

It's hard to be objective when it's our story, and we're in the trenches dealing with day to day living.

I've discovered that my process to work issues out, is by confronting my feelings, acknowledging my shortcomings, and coming up with viable solutions to make things better.

Yeah, right. That's a load of **crap**. Who am I kidding? I'm not a living, breathing greeting card.

It isn't easy. I continually work on finding the silver lining and embracing my gratitude for each day.

The truth is, I'm angry about this move but don't have the time to dissect my feelings or wallow in self-pity. I need to get this house packed.

Thankfully, Arturo who we've known for fifteen years is helping me out. He lives in the neighborhood, is a handyman, and a friend to all of us that live in the cul-de-sac.

Arturo is a retired deputy sheriff, does charity work and isn't a weirdo. I can count on him. Most of the women in the neighborhood have a crush on this hot, Latin hunk of a man.

If I was being honest, maybe I do too. But the most special part is that he is my friend.

The area has been a great place for Harry and Lilly to grow up in. Most of our neighbors are wonderful people and I'm so happy to know them.

However, we have a Gladys Kravitz type named Sonya that always spreads rumors about everyone. She manages to get me riled up, like no one else can.

As the self-appointed neighborhood watch dog, she's in everyone's business. If you want to find out what's going on in your life, ask Sonya. If she doesn't know for sure, she'll make something up.

At any rate, today I need to focus on packing. Arturo is dropping the kids off at school for me. He'll keep their minds off the move, and I can get the final things done.

Just as I'm making progress and the end is in sight, meddling Sonya beats on my front door. I can hear her screaming, but don't know what she's saying.

As I open it up, the first thing I notice is she's wearing a trench coat and a lace nightie. It's obvious that something has her ruffled.

At first, I think maybe she's been drinking, because her words are garbled, she's a bit incoherent and her attire is suspect for sure.

"DEAD! HELP! SHE'S DEAD! HE DID IT! I SAW HER ON THE FLOOR! BLOOD ALL OVER!"

I gently (maybe harder) grab her face. "Calm down, Sonya. I don't understand what you're saying so I can't help you. Who's dead?"

"Viv. Oh, I loved her so much. We were like sisters. I need a drink. Do you have any vodka?"

Now my heart starts racing and I can feel my knees shaking. Suddenly, this got real, and I think she's telling the truth.

"What? Who killed her? She's dead?" Sonya's a mess and I give her a shot of vodka to try get her focused. "You need to tell me what happened. Did you call 911?"

She blurts out, "Viv and Arturo are having an affair. I saw him leave her house early this morning and he killed her.

“Sonya what are you talking about? Arturo wasn't over there he was with me.”

“Oh, my God Buzi, you guys are having an affair too?”

“No, what is wrong with you? Where did you see Viv at?”

“I looked in her kitchen window and saw her laying on the floor. It looks like there's been a struggle. We have a problem.”

My next questions were, “why were you looking in her window and again--- did you call the police? What do you mean **WE** have a problem?”

“Why would I call the police? I don't want to get involved and they don't like me. They've been at my house before,” she replies in a huff.

“Oh no Sonya, you find a dead body... you're in charge of calling the police.”

This chick is one brick short of a load. Maybe a few. I immediately hand her the phone, so she can be the one to deal with the men in blue.

My heart is racing, and my blood pressure has shot up like a helium balloon. I can't even wrap my mind around this.

Damn Sonya. Why did she drag me into this?

I know Arturo so well, but what if I somehow missed the signs of a mad man who has just taken my precious children in the car with him?

While Sonya's on the home phone, I grab my cell and call the school. They tell me the kids are safe and sound. I then call

Stephen hoping to get some support and to hear a little concern in his voice.

To coin Sonya's words and to irritate him most likely, I say "Stephen, we have a problem."

Anytime I start with we have a problem his breathing gets deeper. I can hear him gritting his teeth, and his nose starts whistling. I can tell he's not happy.

"What are you talking about Buzi, I'm busy? I have meetings all day long."

"Someone was murdered in the cul-de-sac," I reply.

"Really? You're not making any sense" he yells.

"Who's dead?"

"It's Viv!" I scream. "Sonya said they were involved and Arturo killed her. How could this be? He took our kids to school this morning!"

"Viv....Why would Arturo kill her? They don't really know each other and he's not her type."

Wow! What an odd response. He doesn't ask how his kids and wife are, and what would he know about her type?

"Sonya says they've been having an affair, while her husband's been out of town."

"I knew she was trouble!" he shouts. "Stay away from her." Again, what an odd reaction.

"Well, as I said she is dead, Stephen. So, I guess that limits our involvement."

He never really listens, but somehow manages to react. I guess he missed the part where I said she was dead.

“Buzi, did you call to see if the kids made it to school? Did you ding bats call the police? Did you call Arturo? Use your brains.”

Sometimes his condescending tone with me, makes me want to rip his tongue out and punch him in his face.

“Chill, Stephen. Breathe. Yes, I called the school, and the kids are fine. Sonya just got off the phone with the police and they're on the way.”

This was a useless call I'm thinking to myself.

“Stephen, I gotta go. Sorry to bother you.” His concern or lack thereof, never ceases to amaze me.

“Buzi, you've wrecked my whole frigging day. Real nice.”

Now call me silly, but his reaction is a little curious. There's possibly a dead neighbor, a murderer loose in the area and he's worried about his day?

“I hear sirens coming Stephen, I need to go. Don't worry too much. I'll lock the doors, carry a steak knife around, and continue getting the house packed.”

I wish I wouldn't have called him. The truth is, he's not invested in the kids or me. Mr. big man on campus has an expense account at work, wears the finest suits and travels all the time. He doesn't have any patience or a personal stake in the little people because he's checked out.

Sonya pulls me across the street, to see the freshly deceased Viv. We peek in the window and there she is lifeless and alone.

How could Arturo have done this? This isn't his character and he's been with me since early this morning.

Wouldn't I have picked up some signs if he had killed someone?

Hell, maybe this is symptomatic of how messed up I am? Maybe I'm the one that's checked out.

Thank God the police have arrived because it's all so creepy. It's also disturbing seeing Sonya standing here with her trench coat open, exposing her left enhanced breast and the rather large, red tuba she has tattooed on it.

The officers enter the unlocked front door, with guns drawn. When they get to the kitchen, they are shocked at the carnage they see.

Viv is sitting up tearing into a box of powdered donuts, that's exploded everywhere, while rubbing her bleeding, banged up head. She's confused why they're even there.

They lead her to the living room and place her on the couch. Sonya and I quietly stand by, shocked that she's alive and breathing. It must be a miracle.

"Ma'am, what happened, were you assaulted? Do you know who it was?" Viv giggles a bit.

"I wasn't assaulted. I'm hypoglycemic and fell. It happens all the time. Why would you think I was assaulted?"

Now all eyes turn to the geriatric Lolita in the nightie. Typical frigging Sonya. She always causes drama, but this time it was by far the most damaging.

The only funny thing about this moment, is that Viv the powdered sugar queen, is angry with Sonya and about to blow!

“Sorry,” Sonya says. “But I did see a man leave early this morning and he looked like Arturo. I was trying to be a good neighbor and help. I basically saved your life Viv. You owe me.”

Viv doesn’t deny someone was there and left, but she's sick and tired of Sonya’s meddling.

“Sonya, we all know that you have a crush on Arturo, and he won’t give you the time of day. You’re old, fluffy and those over filled lips make you spit when you talk. And...your perfume smells like, bug-spray.”

Oh boy, I’m speechless. That was low, but you go Viv, let her have it. Sonya needs to be called out on her interfering antics.

“Bug-spray?” she screams. “I’ll have you know I get this straight from Paris. You and I are like best friends, and you talk to me like this? See if I ever help you again. Next time you die, I won’t tell anyone about it.”

“Are you kidding, best friends?” Viv is all sorts of riled up. “Remember when you cut the roses down in our yard, so you could take them to your lover in the hospital?”

“I do and that's another example of how kind I am to people. It brightened his room right up.”

At this point the officers are over it. “Ladies, we need to go. Do you want an EMT to check that bump on your head?”

“I'm fine,” Viv replies, “but Sonya should be arrested.”

All of the sudden, we hear the screeching of a vehicle out front. I look out the window and it's Stephen. Maybe he does care.

His engine is steaming and there's smoke coming off his tires. He probably drove with his emergency brake on again. I meet him outside, hoping to see some real concern on his face.

Before anyone has the chance to tell him, that Viv is alive and well, he goes into a tirade.

“I've never trusted Arturo! Buzi this is all your fault. He's always around you and the kids like you're a helpless little lamb. Viv's blood is on your hands!”

Is this some messed up reality show? He knows the kids are safe and he's made it clear that he's busy at work. For some reason, he feels compelled to show up here and is overly concerned about Viv? What's up with that?

Before I can even find my words to speak, Viv runs past me wearing daisy duke shorts, and rocking a red lump on her forehead. Powdered sugar is all over her face, and an attached

faux hair piece, that looks like a squirrel tale, is hanging on the side of her head. She jumps straight into his arms.

Stephen looks like he's seen a ghost and we're all standing there stunned. This isn't a hello neighbor, I'm glad you're okay, kind of moment.

Make no mistake my Nancy Drew curiosity is in detective mode. There's more to this story. I might choose to have a blind eye for now...but I'm not stupid.

In the foreseeable name of alimony and child support, I grab my cell phone and take a few pictures of them. This would only be better if I had some popcorn and a drink.

Stephen literally pries Viv off him, like she's a leach and distances himself from her. "What are you doing Viv, have you lost your mind?"

She seems bewildered and hurt that he's so dismissive and non-caring.

Without missing a beat, he hops back into his car and leaves, just as fast as he got here. What was the point?

This Jerry Springer moment won't be forgotten, but now isn't the time for me to castrate our marriage. He doesn't care.

Stephen is always put out and a bit disconnected. He lacks in empathy, compassion, and most importantly, ownership.

Aside from the non-murder that just happened, here's a Stephen story I won't forget. A few years ago, I tripped on his bowling bag that was left in the middle of the kitchen and I broke my foot.

Stephen needed to help me at home and take me to my doctor's appointments. You know stuff your partner would do.

He acted like I asked him for his kidney. My wonderful husband told to build a bridge and get over it. If that isn't love, I don't know what is. His redeeming qualities are just precious.

In the spirit of fairness and truth, as I've already said, Stephen is a good provider financially. I know that he loves us in a strange, jacked up sort of way and life could be worse.

Worse would be, Arturo facing assault or murder charges because of dumb-ass Sonya. That would really be bad.

I feel horrible for even entertaining the notion that he could hurt or kill someone. He's gentle and thoughtful. This guy does the capture and release thing. If there's a spider on the wall, he picks it up and puts it outside.

What really scares me is knowing there are Sonya's in the world that set people up and stir the pot. She knows what she's doing. It's calculative, methodical, and feels somewhat criminal.

Now, I know I can work on being a better person, but my crimes to date are over-due library books and unsold Girl Scout cookies. It's not my style to set up homicides.

However, a girl can change her mind. I understand being pushed to the limit and I might be there right now. Stephen better sleep with one eye open.

Thanks to Sonya, my carefully planned morning is screwed up and I'm behind. The moving company will be here any minute and I need to figure things out.

There are several boxes left to pack and I just start throwing random things into them. As I tape the last one up and put it on the driveway, the bottom breaks.

An ornament falls out and shatters everywhere. It was from our first Christmas in this house.

An overwhelming wave of sadness hits me. As I crumble in a heap of tears, I feel this gut-wrenching kick to my spirit. What happened to us? I loved *us* for so many years.

We have such history here. It was the one place on the planet, where we knew we were home. This was our refuge from the storm and the cradle of our security.

We've lived here off and on for twenty years. Harry and Lilly learned to walk, talk, and bite here. We were optimistic about the future and excited to be a family.

I never would have believed in a million years that our love and commitment would be where it is now.

It used to be that with one glance, we knew what each other was thinking. When we held hands, a vibration seared through our bodies. I knew he would be my future...forever.

I didn't find out about his extra-curricular activities till we were together for several years. We were young when we met, and I had zero experience with guys.

Stephen and I started dating our senior year in high school. From the beginning we had a connection. I was a Cheerleader, and he was on the football team.

To see him move was a thing of beauty. He was adorable and oh so charming.

All the girls liked him and a few guys too, but for some reason he picked me.

We went on to college, graduated, got married and I had no idea that I wasn't enough for him.

As Stephen got older, he threw caution to the wind and made the foolish decision to abandon his vows.

His mom told me he suffered, a bad concussion in a car accident when he was a sophomore. They believe it caused some brain damage. The doctors said that as he got older, he might exhibit symptoms from that trauma.

He's had crippling headaches off and on since then.

His parents said his behavior changed after that and he became selfish, reckless, and non-compliant.

I don't know why I didn't pick up on all of this in high-school and college?

Maybe he was on his best behavior, I just didn't want to see it, or maybe it's true...love is blind.

Who knew that old childhood injury could affect his ability as an adult, to make rational decisions and in controlling his wandering, friendly, nomad of a penis?

He's also impulsive and has limited coping skills.

I try to convince myself that things haven't been so bad and we're lucky to have the meaningful memories this house holds for us.

How can you replace their tiny handprints on the walls and the cellular reminders that are etched into every corner?

The movers arrive. I'm feeling lost and sick to my stomach. I hope we get to move back here soon because nothing about this feels right.

Once again, it's time to toughen up and smile like a good little wifey. We wouldn't want people to think there was trouble in paradise.

I pull myself together and for this one last time, lock the front door and pull the trash bins out front.

The house is empty, and the moving truck is packed and headed to Arizona. All that's left to do is pick the kids up, get fast food and hit the open road.

I may have forgot to mention that Stephen's car is being shipped. It's only about a six-hour drive, but his schedule is just too busy.

He's meeting us in Mesa, via first class, while sipping cocktails up in the friendly skies.

Of course, we can't forget, that's how he racks up frequent flyer miles. Miles that only he uses for golf trips and the little vacations he feels entitled to.

He's darn lucky that I'm fully capable of delivering the kids and I to our new home. We're renting a beautiful house that has a pool and I hope it makes things easier.

Maybe a slower paced life is what Stephen and I need to get back on track. I don't even know if that's realistic. Who am I kidding?

In view of what happened today with Viv, I'm certain that Romeo has once again, defecated on our marriage.

Should he get a pass for being a good provider and a sub-par dad when he's here?

He travels most of the time but manages a fully booked social life when he's not working.

Stephen calls it networking, but I call it something else.

For now, it's important to me that I get to be home with the kids while they're growing up.

It would be a complete disaster if we both had jobs where we traveled and equally felt entitled to do whatever we wanted.

CHAPTER THREE

HAIR PIECES AND HEELS

We finally pull up to a beautiful ranch style house that might be home for the next year. The moving van is here, and I instruct the movers where to put our things.

While the kids are thrilled to be out of the car, I'm exhausted, sweaty and a bit overwhelmed. But it makes me happy to see them running around exploring our new digs.

Who really knows how long we'll be here? I guess we better make the most of it. People move all the time.

The thought hits me that this must be what it feels like to be a military family. You stay long enough to get settled and make new friends, then it's off to the next assignment.

We owe those dedicated families our respect and gratitude for sure. It's not easy raising kids anyway, but it's especially challenging, when you know you're always going to be moving.

Stephen isn't affected by the moves like the kids, and I am because his life continues just the way it's always been.

I get the kids enrolled in school, sports, activities, and set the house up. And for some odd reason, I manage to meet people who think I'm their babysitter because I'm not employed outside of the home.

That really makes me mad. It's right up there with the missing toothpaste caps, socks, and Tupperware lids.

Occasionally, I find some new friends that are on the same journey I'm on.

Their husbands travel, play tennis, golf, and network. Don't forget the expense accounts they have to enjoy fine dining, while we and the kids eat hot dogs, ramen, and macaroni.

I think the balance is off a little. The job description of a domestic Goddess is thankless and needs to be revised. We need a pay upgrade, benefits, and extra mental health days. Some alcoholic fruit drinks wouldn't be bad either.

It does get easier as the kids get older, but that's because they can now wipe themselves and use the microwave.

I try to teach my crew some valuable life skills, but they seem a little resistant. I guess I've made it too easy for all of them.

Ten days go by and there's no sign of Stephen. I've left messages for him, and his old secretary just says he's been in meetings. I learned long ago that she lies for him. Humm, I wonder why?

She did manage to get a big raise, which was awfully nice of Stephen. The woman can't type and answering the phone seems to be a struggle, but... some people are just lucky I guess.

While my wandering husband, doesn't seem to miss the pleasure of my company or his kids, I do have to admit that I get lonely. I miss adult interaction and conversation. I miss him too. I want the old Stephen back from our early days.

I was happy to meet our neighbor, Robin Huxley who lives across the street. Her two kids are about the same ages as Harry and Lilly.

She rings the doorbell and hands me a beautiful basket of homemade cookies, cheese, and a bottle of wine.

In the most perfect southern drawl, she says, “Hi, I’m Robin. I live across the street. I drink wine, hate working out, threw my scale away and I eat sweets. Welcome to the neighborhood.”

That was it. We instantly clicked.

“How nice, thank you. My name is Buzi.”

She did laugh a little at my name but kept it respectful. I invited her in, and we settled into our old comfy, worn couch.

The kids tore into the basket of cookies, while we drank the wine and ate the cheese. The usual chit chat ensued.

“How long have you and your family lived here, Robin?”

“Actually, we just moved in six months ago. My husband is in sales, and we constantly relocate. It seems like I just find out where I go for my pap smears and mammograms, then we move.”

We both laugh! “We have something in common then,” I say. “My husband Stephen is a marketing executive, and we move a lot too. I feel like we’re part of a traveling circus. We roll from one town to the next.”

I really like Robin. This feels like an old friendship. She has the greatest laugh and her blue eyes twinkle when she talks. She's also a real gal. We talk about our kids and our MIA husbands. The girl embraces her curves, and she cracks me up.

This is new to me. Many of the conversations I have with female friends, center around our weight and the hormonal changes we're going through. Even as we get older, we still feel insecure about our bodies.

Men seem to be more adjusted about it. I don't think they sit around and say, my weight has me so depressed.

But Robin loves who she is. You can see the confidence. She's an evolved and adjusted woman.

Even though we just met, it really is refreshing to have a friend that you don't compete with. She doesn't judge, she's a great listener and her sense of heart is amazing.

I've never met someone that cuts to the chase and is so honest about her life. I think we'll be good friends and so will our kids.

As the days go by, the house is unpacked, the electronic equipment works, and Harry and Lilly are getting along surprisingly well. We're finding our new normal.

We haven't heard from Stephen and I'm wondering if I should call in a missing person's report?

Unfortunately, he's pulled this before. It's part of his modus operandi.

I'll be darned. He must have read my mind. Magically Stephen graces us with his presence. I can smell new cologne on him and he's rocking a great tan. He looks around and says, "it looks nice, baby. What's for dinner?"

"Are you serious?" I ask. "We've been here for over a week and a half, without as much as one word from you. Where the hell have you been?"

"C'mon Buzi Q. potty mouth, you know I had things to wrap up in the Albuquerque office. I thought it would only take a few days. What's up with the attitude?"

"Attitude? I thought maybe you would've checked in to make sure we arrived safely and on top of that, you weren't returning my calls. I love the new tan you've got. You must have been really busy?"

"This is your job Buzi. I know you're fully capable of taking on these moves."

Once again, Mr. checked out, has missed the whole point. We never resolve the issues between us because he believes he's entitled to do whatever he wants.

This isn't my idea of a marriage and I feel like he's my third child. He wants what he wants, he does what he wants and expects me to be silent about it all.

Harry and Lilly hear his voice and join the conversation. They're very happy to see their dad. He grabs them and exclaims, "I missed you guys. Give me a hug."

You would have thought this man walks on water. Don't get me wrong, my kids don't need to feel the resentment I feel towards Stephen.

However, it makes me angry when they give him so many passes and I'm the one that's always here tending to every aspect of their lives.

Maybe when they're older, some kind of recognition will set in. Sometimes I need a hug too.

Now that he's home, I the dutiful little housewife, make him a plate of food because as he puts it, it's my job. I pour him a glass of wine and you have no idea how close I come to sprinkling soap in it, to give him the runs for a few days.

He hands each kid a twenty and tells them to go play on their X-Boxes, so he can spend alone time with mommy.

Spend alone time with mommy? I wonder if he knows they're fifteen and fourteen? Ugh! I just want to puke.

He corners me in the kitchen pawing my body and forcing himself on me. I tell him to stop, push him away and he gets mad. I don't care what he's feeling. I'm here to tell you, *NO* means *NO*! It doesn't matter if it's your spouse or not.

There was a time that I craved the warmth of his touch and the smell of his skin. His advances were welcome and encouraged. I loved his stupid jokes and how silly he could get. Being his wife and lover, completed me and I knew this was as good as it could get.

But Stephen doesn't understand that there are consequences for his actions and lack of accountability. I want to feel cherished and respected as his wife and the mother of his kids.

He treats me like a depository or a latrine, for his unbridled wants and needs. There isn't any real love or passion. What makes him feel like he can just roll in here whenever he wants and expect "mommy" time?

While he zips his pants up, he glares at me. "So, Ms. frigid, have you seen anymore dead bodies?"

"You know Stephen, give me time the night is young."

"FYI cowboy, it was complete bull that happened at Viv's. She ran into your arms, like you both were starstruck lovers and everyone saw it." Stephen rolls his eyes and laughs nervously.

"You're a jackass," I say while pointing my finger at him. "I may not know the full story yet -- but I assure you Stephen Rayburn, I'm on to you."

"Buzi," he arrogantly replies, "I don't want to be around you because you're crazy. You create these scenarios in your mind and then believe them to be true."

"You've gained weight, let yourself go and act like I owe you something. You forget that I'm the one that makes the money. But...if you think there's someone else out there that would want you...go for it, babe."

He looks at me with indifference and disgust then walks away.

I'm shocked that he said that to me. He never cared about my weight, as long as he was getting off and his needs were taken care of.

I don't want to give him the satisfaction of seeing me cry or just how broken I am, but I'm hurting.

The kids may not have heard or seen what's going on between us, but this is significant and symptomatic of how we no longer work. It makes me cringe. He does this hit and run thing. Cuts like a razor blade with his verbal banter, then takes off.

For Stephen, the conversation is over when you get too close to the truth. Nothing ever gets better because we don't communicate.

I'll admit I have issues and get insecure. Next to Viv, I feel like a hippo and I'm fifteen years older than she is. I'm not sure how to compete with youth and estrogen, so maybe I won't.

She can wash his dirty underwear, pick up after him and listen to him snore and whistle. We'll see how cute she thinks he is then.

The man is transparent as cellophane. Whenever he starts working out, tanning, and wearing new cologne I know he's on to the next conquest. He looks for a fight with me, as an excuse to leave.

The question is, why do I put up with it?

When Harry was a baby, Stephens best friend Colin decided he needed to clear his conscience.

One night he came to our house and didn't know that Stephen had told me he was out with him. Surprise!

Colin said, "I really like you Buzi and I think you have the right to know that Stephen is cheating on you. I can't cover for him anymore. It goes against my belief system. I really think you should divorce him."

Even though I had my suspicions, Colin's confession made me feel alone, scared, and used. And at that point I wasn't in a place to deal with it.

What's a new mother with a baby less than a year old supposed to do with that jacked up information? Maybe I was better off assuming I knew what was going on, then actually knowing.

I called my dad and asked if Harry and I could move back home for a while, so I could figure things out. He said, "No, Buzi Q. You need to toughen up and find your own path. God put you and Stephen together for a reason."

Well, if that didn't about push me over the edge. Did he have to throw the God thing in?

As it turns out, it was sage advice for the life that followed.

Stephen and I went to counseling, we worked on our marriage and decided to complete our application to adopt. It's something we always wanted to do.

That's when Lilly Rose came into our lives. She was two months old, born in Korea and the most beautiful baby girl, I

have ever seen. Lilly has added the greatest depth to our lives, and she adores her older brother Harry.

I guess my dad was right, this is our family that God put together and it's up to us to make it work. Peace at any cost.

NOPE, he wasn't right. I take that back. What a foolish, idealistic point of view this was.

It didn't take long before Stephen's playground antics started back up. This wasn't a God thing. This was a messed-up Stephen Rayburn thing.

Just thinking about it tugs at my heart. I do get a little melancholy thinking about our life together and the things we've recovered from.

But right now, I need to be present and finish my conversation with him. He doesn't get to treat me like I'm dirt on his shoes and then walk away.

So, while he spends about half an hour with the kids, I polish off a glass of wine and eat two packages of Cherry Pop Tarts.

Harry is staying at Robin's house tonight, so before he leaves, he hugs me, and I kiss him goodbye.

My little Harry knows I'm hurting...I wish he didn't.

"Watch the Pop Tarts, Mommo. You might have a major sugar crash."

I love this kid. He's such a mix of attitude, compassion, and insight.

Just as he gets out the door, Stephen comes out with an overnight bag and announces that he's going to spend the night at the office. He'll see us tomorrow for dinner.

The door slams, and our very familiar marital dance continues. I guess we won't be talking. God, he must think I'm an idiot.

Don't judge me yet people, I'm keeping score and not as stupid as I appear to be.

After he leaves, I grab yet another glass of wine and decide to call Arturo. I never spoke to him after I left Albuquerque and we knew he didn't kill Viv.

One of our old neighbors called and told me that his mom was sick, and he went to Santa Fe. I hope she's okay.

Much to my surprise, I dial his number and he answers. "Arturo, hi this is Buzi."

"I know it's you, I saw your name come up. How are you doing Buzi?"

Laughing and lightly buzzed, I reply, "Oh, living the life in Margaritaville. Searching for my lost shaker of salt." I laugh nervously...oh, why did I say that? "It's beautiful, but very hot here. Stephen didn't tell us about that part. I guess the pool should've given it away."

"I'm glad you guys are okay Buzi. I didn't hear from you and didn't want to intrude. What happened with Viv?"

“Arturo, first of all you would never be intruding. The thing with Viv, was so messed up. I’m not sure what you’ve heard?”

“I haven’t been back long enough to get the whole story,” he said. “Viv did tell me I was almost arrested for her murder.”

“Yeah, you can thank Sonya for that one. I’ll give you the short version.”

“Sonya saw a man leaving Viv’s house early in the morning, the day you took the kids to school for me. She claimed it was you and said you two were having an affair.

Being the snooper she is, while peeping into Viv’s kitchen window and wearing a nightgown with a trench coat, she saw her lifeless body on the floor.

As it turned out, Viv wasn’t dead she had a hypoglycemic attack, passed out and cut her head. I don’t know who the man was that Sonya saw leaving but it was crazy.”

Wow! I said that in one breath and feel like I’m hyperventilating. On no! *Hiccups* start.

“Sounds like it was crazy,” he said. “I could have been arrested for murder. After I dropped the kids off at school, I had to leave for Santa Fe. My mom was put in the hospital.

“I’m sorry to hear that. I owe you an apology Arturo.”
Hiccup. Hiccup. Hiccup.

He acts like he doesn’t hear the guttural sounds billowing from my mouth. I hold my breath praying they’ll stop.

“An apology for what Buzi? You’ve always been a good friend.”

“For a fleeting moment I bought into Sonya’s hysteria. But...in my heart, I knew you didn't do it. That’s not the Arturo the kids and I know and love.” *Hiccup. Hiccup. Hiccup.*

“Are you okay, Buzi?”

“I’m fine. I drank some wine and ate Cherry Pop Tarts too fast.”

“You don’t need to apologize. Viv is alive and NO we aren’t having an affair.”

For some strange reason I'm happy to hear him say that. Even though I already knew they weren’t involved.

He has too much integrity, and I don’t think he would be involved with someone twenty plus years younger than he is.

Of course, as men get older, they go for that young hide so who knows.

As much as I want to tell Arturo, I figured out that Stephen was the one in Viv’s house, it isn't the right time.

“Hey, how is your mom doing, Arturo?”

“She’s actually doing well. I was down there for a while but had to get back to Albuquerque. My Sister is taking care of her now,” he said.

“I’m so glad she’s better,” I reply, knowing how much his family means to him. They are extremely close and it's a beautiful thing.

I love that we're catching up. The sound of his voice makes me feel better about me in some strange way. Hiccups and all. I

wish I could tell him how bad my marriage is, but I can't. I need to figure things out before I make a decision that will affect all of us...*forever*.

It's hard to continue the conversation because my phone keeps beeping. Lilly is blowing it up. I can't get a few minutes to myself without having to deal with someone else's drama. At least my hiccups have stopped, so I can say goodbye to him.

"I'm sorry, I need to go. Lilly's calling on the other line. I better see what's up with her. Take care Arturo and again, I'm sorry for doubting you."

"Buzi, don't think another thing about it. Let's stay in touch and tell the kids I said hello."

"Will do," I say. "It's been really nice talking with you."

I click over to Lilly. "Hi Lilly, where's the 'friggin' fire. Why do you keep calling me?"

"Mom I can't find my retainer," she says with an attitude.

"Girl, you're just in the room next to me. This is nonsense. What do you want me to do?"

"I'm tired from looking through all my boxes. I'll bet Harry has it."

For the record, sometimes these kids drive me nuts and their logic escapes me. What would Harry want with her slimy, stinky retainer and why can't she figure this out?

I'm not happy that she interrupted my call with Arturo.

“I don’t think you need to worry Lilly. Harry wouldn't touch your retainer. You need to calm down and keep looking for it. Don't call me again. Bye.”

As I hang up, I can hear her throwing things around. I'm over it. The wine has made me sleepy and I'm going to bed. Maybe tomorrow will be a better day and Stephen and I can talk.

I yell, “I'm going to bed, Lilly. Don't ask me anything else tonight. Love you.”

Suddenly my bedroom door bursts open. “Mom, wait you can't go to bed. When are you going to the grocery store? Harry ate all the Pop Tarts!”

“Lilly zip it. I'm not doing anything else tonight. I'll go tomorrow. You need to get to bed too.”

She slams my door, then hers and I feel like I want to cry. Life sucks and I'm tired of it. It's bedtime for this inmate.

After a restless night, I wake up in the morning with a bit of a hangover. I don’t usually drink as much as I have been lately, and my mouth feels dry and pasty.

I'm very stressed by how Stephen and I left things. There's no doubt that this marriage isn't going to work. It's just a matter of time.

But I don't have the luxury of leaving like he does to process my feelings. I'm always with the kids or doing something for them. I feel locked up, trapped and empty.

Today is just like any other day. They left their grocery lists for me on the refrigerator and I need to motivate myself to get going. I have a lot to think about.

I make it to Food City Super Store and linger in the cereal section. What over sugared box should I get for the kids this week?

I glance down the aisle and see this petite blond, who looks lost and slightly familiar. As I get closer it appears to be Viv.

“Viv?” I call out. She spins around and starts running in these four-inch red heels, knocking everything down in her path.

I swing my cart into overdrive and cut her off in the produce section. She falls, skins her knees and a hairpiece that looks like a rodent, ejects off her head.

“Oh my God, it is you!” I exclaim.

“Don’t hurt me Buzi. I didn’t know what I was getting into.”

I flex my bare knuckles and give her the “Terminator” look. She crumbles and sings like a bird.

“Stephen and I have been having an affair the past year,” she nervously yells out.

“Well, that explains why we moved yet again,” I calmly reply. “This is part of his pattern.”

“Buzi, initially he told me you guys were getting a divorce, but just lived together for the sake of Harry and Lilly.”

“Okay well that isn’t true, but why did Sonya think you were having an affair with Arturo?”

Viv shrugs her scrawny and visibly shaking shoulders, while rubbing her bleeding knees.

“We both know who the mystery man was coming out of your house early that morning Viv.”

“It was Stephen not Arturo,” Viv blurts out. “That nosy Sonya made the whole story up and I didn’t really die. Did you know that?”

“Somehow I figured it out,” I reply while dropping my head into my hands.

Unbelievable. This chick is a nitwit, but I can see why Stephen’s drawn to her. He can feed her any B.S. and she's going to buy it. What an easy lay.

“Viv the most important question is what are you doing in Mesa, AZ?”

Innocently and out of left field she replies, “I really like these shoes, they make me look taller. What do you think?”

“Damn girl. Focus. What the hell is wrong with you?” I exclaim.

I’m not usually a verbally aggressive person, but Stephen and this idiot are working on my last nerve.

“I don’t care about your shoes. Why are you in Mesa? Don’t lie because I’m not sure what I’m capable of Viv.”

“I came here to get nail glue and to talk to Stephen. I need answers from him, and he won’t take my calls. He’s ignoring me.”

I stare at her in disbelief. This girl is beyond stupid.

“Answers? You had an affair with my husband, and you think you deserve answers?”

“Buzi, he just ended it. He threw me away. I left my husband and son for him.”

“Dear Sweet Viv, that’s what he does. Don’t flatter yourself by thinking you’re anything special. You’re just another score to him.”

“But Buzi, he said he loved me, and you guys were just roommates. He said you never even have sex.”

“Viv, it’s part of his act. He’s told that to so many women. He probably also told you that I was a bitch or a bad mother?”

“Yes, he did, but he told me he’s never had an affair. I was his first relationship since you decided to get a divorce.”

“Dummy, what would you expect him to tell you? Stephen is a runner. He’s always looking for something or someone to fill an empty space he has inside. But he always comes back home and talks bad about the women he hooked up with.”

Viv’s eyes fill up with tears and I almost feel sorry for her. I’m witnessing the moment it registers, that she means nothing to him. It’s pathetic really. I instinctively hug her, while tears stream down her face.

“I’m so sorry, Buzi. What can I do, to make this better?”

Now my wheels are spinning, and I quickly formulate a plan. “Why don’t you come over to our house tonight, for dinner? Stephen will be there and I’m sure he’ll be surprised to see you.”

I give Viv our address and as a fellow woman, I feel her true deep pain. She’s lost her husband and kid while getting duped by a man that’s a serial offender.

Stephen seems like he’s infected with some insidious illness he can’t recover from. I’m pretty sure there isn’t a cure for Dog-itis, and I don’t know if a brain injury could make him a womanizer.

The part that really enrages me, is that he exposes me to diseases. He’s taken my choice for a healthy body and vagina away from me. That’s a whole other issue.

Right now, I need to rush home, send the kids to Robin’s house for movie night and get dolled up.

A couple of hours later, everything is ready. Dinner smells great and I have a front row seat to see Stephen squirm. It’s almost showtime!

He arrives on time which is rare, and I smell good, look good and momma has got her groove back.

Stephen hands me some flowers and a big box of chocolates.

“Hon, I'm sorry about last night,” he says while grabbing my ass. You look great!” He kisses my neck, gropes the rest of my body, and looks at me like I'm dessert.

It is mind blowing how he thinks I'm sorry, is going to fix the things he said to me, let alone what he's done.

I play into it because I know just how good things are about to get.

“Honey, an old neighbor from Albuquerque is coming over for dinner,” I say. “She'll be here any minute. We'll pick this up later lover.”

Typical Stephen, he's so not interested in our conversation that he doesn't even ask who it is.

This time the alley cat is playing right into my hands. Karma's a bitch and she'll get you every time.

CHAPTER FOUR

Surprise

As I pull dinner from the oven and cut some watermelon up, the doorbell rings. I ask Stephen to answer it.

Standing before him is a brokenhearted, frail looking Viv. Her knees are covered in pink Disney princess band-aids and her squirrel tail hairpiece is piled on her head.

Stephen looks like he's seen a poltergeist and turns pale. His look alone will fill me with joy for years to come.

I stroll over still holding the knife and graciously ask Viv to come in.

“Stephen, say hello to Viv. You remember her?”

“Have a seat Viv, make yourself comfortable.”

At this point they both are looking at me like they're afraid of me. I throw the knife on a coffee table and smile.

“Viv you and Stephen catch up. I just need to pack his things. He's leaving with you.”

As I roll the final suitcase out, Stephen begins to cry.

“I love you Buzi. You and the kids mean the world to me. Viv didn't mean anything. It meant nothing!”

This is my defining moment. “It meant something to her you asshole! I've put up with your garbage for the past twenty plus years and I'm done.”

Now Viv starts to sob. I know I may have set her up, but I don't care. She'll never feel the way I do and now she can have him. I'm passing the torch. The love machine is all hers.

Stephen is down on his knees, pleading with me and I'm glad the kids aren't here to witness all of this.

"But I love you Buzi. You and the kids are my life," he says. "Everything I do, I do it for you."

I'm pretty sure he borrowed that from a Bryan Adams song.

I gently grab them both in a group hug and wipe the tears from their faces.

"You two belong together and you need to find a place to live."

As I kick his last piece of luggage out the door, I guide them both to the driveway, come back inside and lock the door behind me.

I finally have some backbone and found my voice. Stephen doesn't deserve the kids or me and I guarantee he's lost the best things he'll ever have in life. But this is hard.

My body feels shaky as I pour a glass of wine and melt into the couch. Tears start falling down my face. I'm crying because I'm free. I put up with infidelity, dishonesty, and disrespect for many years.

Initially Stephen truly had my heart, but he slaughtered it into a million pieces. It isn't a matter of *me* not being enough woman for him. *He* isn't enough man for me.

I went into this marriage thinking this was my happily ever after. It was a deep sincere love that I had for him.

But I've just discovered that I love myself more. No longer am I that young woman who's held hostage in a marriage, based on need and fear.

Now I need to be strong for my kids and figure out what we're doing with the rest of our lives. The good news is the renters in Albuquerque didn't move into our house, so I'm planning on going back home.

The day has been so long and I'm finally falling asleep, when at two a.m. the phone rings. I hope the kids are all right. Barely awake and slightly hungover, I answer it.

"Buzi it's me. Don't hang up."

I put the phone on the bed and lay back down listening to his nauseating, whiny voice. "I love you and the kids. Viv didn't mean anything to me. She's nuts and somewhat obsessed with me. You know where my heart is. I want to come home baby."

I say nothing. "Hello, hello, Buzi?" Then without hesitation I say, "wrong number" and hang up.

Reality hits hard at nine in the morning, when my doorbell rings. A process server asks me my name and hands me divorce papers.

That aging Romeo, screws around on me and serves me with divorce papers?

Not only is he filing for divorce, but custody of the kids he's rarely been home to raise. He doesn't know who their friends are, if their hearts have ever been broken or what their favorite color of licorice is. What a joke.

I immediately retain a great divorce and child custody lawyer of my own. James "Bulldog" Durbin is a powerhouse and never loses his cases.

He's in Albuquerque and can represent me because we haven't been in Arizona that long. We also were married in New Mexico and still own our home there.

I immediately call the movers and pack the kids up, one more time. This will be an easy transition.

Within a week we're back home and it feels so right. The kids are thrilled to have their old lives back and be in their own rooms.

Fast forward...

Months have gone by, and the divorce is getting messier by the day.

James Durbin is a super sleuth and goes for the jugular. He happens to find other real estate in Stephen's name, that he didn't disclose on his financial documents. Those assets totaled \$500,000.00 dollars.

Busted! Not only did the judge in our case hold him in contempt of court for lying on signed financial affidavits, Stephen, had to pay me \$250,000.00. It was half the value of the assets he was hiding, and I received custody of the house and the kids.

He also was ordered to pay child support and alimony for seven years. It was a victory for sure. The great Stephen Rayburn was knocked off his perch.

He immediately got transferred back to the New Mexico office and got a raise. They gave him a promotion too! The good old boy mentality is still alive and well there.

Wouldn't it be grand if I shared some of the antics these men are up to with their wives?

Would they like Stephen as much, if they knew he told me about all their affairs and indiscretions?

I guess it's not my business, as long as I get my *coins*!

I did negotiate a joint custody arrangement because I do believe their dad is important in their lives. Hopefully, Stephen will take this chance to get to know his kids and see how wonderful they are.

As in any good soap opera, Viv's husband divorced her. He was awarded custody of their young son. He got the house, and they still live in the cul-de-sac.

From what I hear Stephen and Viv broke up. But according to him, she's stalking him.

Stephen quickly moves on to another woman twenty years younger than he is. She's the total opposite of me in every way and maybe that's what he needs.

I've found an odd vindication in neighbors and friends saying he's lost his mind. They wish they had told me what he was up to long ago.

They've seen him at restaurants and bars with different women over the years and didn't know how to handle it. They didn't want to hurt me, and I understand that. I'm not holding them accountable for his actions.

In fact, I hold blame in this mess too. If I would have addressed all that I suspected, was told about, or suffered through in silence, this charade would've been over much sooner.

His best friend Colin suggested I get a divorce way back when and I didn't listen to him. So, who's the fool?

Even though Stephen has to pay child support and alimony, I still need to get a job. I want to get a job. It's been months since the divorce was final and it's time to move on.

Years before we had kids, I wrote for a local paper and did freelance work. I worked for a company called, Dupree Press, which now is an online publication. They said I could always come back, so I called them.

Thankfully, they've hired me back as a freelance writer. I will be doing pieces on varied subjects.

What a perfect opportunity. The kids are older and settled back into their old routines as well as a new schedule with their dad.

They're with him for the weekend and I need to get some work done.

The first article they ask me to write about is divorce.

How about that, I just happen to have some practical experience in this area.

I'll simply call the article, "Divorce 101."

I'm sure not everyone will agree with my point of view, but that's one of the hazards when you're a writer. I've learned to take criticism and if I can learn from it, I do. It's a process for sure.

However, I'm glad that Dupree Press always puts a disclaimer before any written piece, to avoid lawsuits or tons of derogatory mail.

I'm quite aware that I may be a scorned woman and my take on things, might be a little slanted. Lol.

CHAPTER FIVE

DIVORCE 101

DISCLAIMER: The opinions in this piece in no way reflects or represents the opinions of Dupree Press and its subsidiaries.

In high school I remember a course called Social Problems. The course was supposed to prepare us for marriage and children.

However, the subject they ignored or never brought up was divorce.

I'm quite sure that with the number of kids that I knew that came from broken homes, it was and is a most necessary subject.

Now, I'm not advocating to teach Divorce 101, but maybe if there's an awareness surrounding divorce, it will give people the fuel they need to make their marriages succeed.

Currently, divorce has reached epidemic proportions.

A disease of sorts that afflicts over forty percent of the households in this country and is still on the rise.

How can we stop it?

I don't have the answer to that, but I know all of us are directly or indirectly exposed to it.

On television we see a little boy crying because he couldn't go

to Father-Son night.

His daddy didn't live with him and just couldn't fit it in his schedule.

Then we see a little girl sitting on the porch waiting for her mom to drive up.

The momma she believes is her angel, never comes.

Then the sun sets and once again either a mom or a dad has to soothe the broken heart of their child.

It leaves devastating emotional scars, which follows them into adulthood.

Maybe if I had been more aware or educated about divorce, I could have gotten through my own experience with less confusion and pain.

I could have helped my children more.

I felt the loss you experience with a death.

It was a death. The death of an institution.

At times I felt like I was dying.

However, it wasn't due to any clinical diagnosis a doctor could provide.

How can you describe these feelings? You can't.

I suppose it's like childbirth.

You never know just how intense it gets, until you go through it.

Every time someone said, "oh you'll be alright" I wanted to strike out.

How do you plan for tomorrow when you can't get beyond today?

I felt like a camera that couldn't get into focus.

Even the simplest of tasks became major chores.

Every time I was in the grocery store, I'd cry.

I wasn't shopping for my little family pod anymore.
I wondered if there was life after divorce.
Would this pain ever go away?
We know the answer is yes, but that doesn't mean it's going to be easy.
Easy is sitting on our pity pots saying why me?
What did I do to deserve this?
It doesn't matter if we are the one dishing out the garbage in our marriage, or the one cleaning it up.
We're all part of the trash.
If we sit idle and do nothing about a troubled relationship, then we have to take the blame if things don't get better.
We've got two choices. Accept it or change it.
If kids are involved, it takes even more of an effort to end a marriage.
Our children want to cope and understand this awful transition in life, as badly as we adults do.
My kids have said that they must have done something wrong to cause the divorce.
It had to be their messy rooms, or because they didn't do their homework.
They can't grasp how you marry someone you're in love with, and then fall out of love with them.
Where does the love go?
It's as if it evaporates into thin air.
We don't always know the why's or how it happens to "consciously uncouple."
It's like someone takes an eraser and just wipes out a perfectly, good family.

I'm no expert, but I believe the past is relevant to the future.
It's our practical learning tool.

Hopefully, we learn from mistakes gone by and can apply this earned wisdom to all our relationships.

Take some time for your wounds to heal.

Get to know yourself better so you don't settle for something less than you are deserving of.

My divorce happened after twenty years of marriage and two children.

My moniker changed and just like that, I was no longer a Mrs. Friends you may have had when you were married, suddenly treat you differently.

They don't quite know what to do with you and the third wheel syndrome sets in.

Sometimes they think you're on the prowl because your single now, or they feel the need to set you up with someone.

It's either because they are blissfully happy and want you to have that, or the misery loves company theory.

It makes you evaluate how people perceive you and how your identity changes.

One thing that I realized after I got divorced, was that in our case we took respect and courtesy in the marriage for granted.

Things became too familiar. Too comfortable.

It took less energy to ignore the problems, rather than doing the work to make things better.

I'm sure you've all received some words of encouragement from your family about your divorce. I know I did.

Does this sound familiar, "Do you know what you're doing?"

Or “I don’t understand your generation.”

My favorite one was “back in our day we stayed together and made it work.”

Sometimes family members take the divorce as a personal insult towards them.

Do they really think we’d put ourselves through this hell, just to hurt them?

More than once, I wanted to scream, "can’t you see I’m hurting too?

What about how the kids feel?”

It’s easy to get caught up in our own emotions and overlook what the kids are going through.

I know I’m guilty of that.

Does anyone stop and ask them how they are doing, or who they want to live with?

How do we effectively deal with their sadness when we can’t deal with our own?

Where does that leave them?

It leaves them on the short end of the stick.

Wouldn’t it be nice if the two people that brought these children into the union, could reach some common ground?

The arrangement we agreed to in our divorce was joint custody, 50/50.

It takes two mature individuals who truly have the children’s best interests at heart to make it work, but it isn’t easy.

Instead of working together, many parents divide and try to conquer.

It tears our kids apart to be placed in the middle of the battlefield.

There's no way for them to get out or to win.
The middle always is and always will be...the middle.
Sometimes we feel anger at our ex-spouse, and we share those feelings with our kids.
It's too much information for them and not fair to pull them into our adult issues.
Sometimes we tend to over-compensate because we feel guilty about the divorce.
But buying our children off doesn't work in the long run either.
A new toy or Xbox game may occupy them for a while, but the novelty wears off.
If you really want to reach them, do it with communication, heart, and soul.
It doesn't cost a cent and it's the purest form of love you can give them.
Be kind to yourself and know that there is life after divorce.

Your Fellow Traveler,
Buzi

CHAPTER SIX

Post Traumatic Marriage Syndrome (PTMS)

My boss at Dupree Press actually loves the article. I'm so lucky that I'm able to go back to work for them and my schedule is flexible. I can do what I need to do with the kids, while earning a check.

The joint custody arrangement is working out okay, there are some issues, but now I have some *ME* time.

I've been concentrating on my job and the kids so much, that I haven't socialized at all.

Stephen seems overwhelmed at best and now sees how much I did when he was traveling.

Rumor has it that he and this last short-lived fling, has ended. Our children became too much for the much younger lady friend and she bolted.

I hope he takes the time to be alone with himself and the kids. He's always been afraid of being alone and that's why there's always been multiple women as back-up plans.

Anyway, the day is sunny and calm, and I really can't complain. The kids are with their dad, and I hear a tapping on my front door. It's Arturo.

We've talked on the phone a few times, but this is the first time I've seen him in months. I hope there's nothing in my teeth and my hair's okay.

As I open the door, I can't help but notice that he's even more handsome than before. How is that possible?

He's well-groomed and smells so good, you want to get in there and... **snack** on him!

Anyway, I'm so happy to see him. He was a good friend before we got caught up in the dead body fiasco and I've missed him.

I still feel bad about ever doubting his character. His integrity and loyalty through-out fifteen years of friendship has never wavered.

We share a close hug at the door and seem to fit. I love that hand and glove feeling, but better ask him to come in before my legs give out. He turns me into jelly.

I invite him in, open a bottle of wine and pull out some cheese and crackers. We sink into the old comfy couch and for this moment the world feels right. Divorce feels right.

Even though we haven't seen each other in a while, we're very tactile with each other, holding hands and sitting close. Our conversation is animated and flows. I like this.

"So, Arturo, I haven't seen you in months. How's life treating you?" I ask.

"It's been hectic, he says. You know my mom was sick, she had a heart attack and then we found out my dad has cancer."

"I'm sorry to hear that. How old is your dad?"

"He's seventy-five and is amazing."

“I remember meeting them and they were delightful.”

“Thank you,” Arturo beams. “They really are. They’re both retired now and love being together.”

“As it should be,” I reply. “I think being a couple when you really love and respect each other is the best thing going.”

“I agree,” he says with his perfect smile, big bedroom eyes and great dimples. Why is he single? Any woman would be lucky to be in a relationship with him.

Making love would be a gift not a chore. Even holding hands with him, would make you feel wanted and secure.

For some reason, while I’m looking at this beautiful, honest man, I suddenly feel pissed at Stephen. He took the choice of growing old together, away from me.

I stupidly blurt out, “I just can’t understand how Stephen threw a perfectly great family away!”

Oh, why the heck did I say that? Arturo is sitting right here present and attentive. Way to go Buzi!

He listens and is so sweet and understanding. “Well, I can’t answer that. I mean Stephen was a lucky man to have you and the kids.”

“Thank you, Arturo. I’m sorry for bringing him up. I guess I have unresolved issues. I think marriage should be a wonderful thing. Just like your mom and dad have. Would you ever get married again?”

“I would for sure. My ex-wife and I were married for ten years. I can’t say anything bad about her. We're still good friends.”

“You can tell me if I’m out of line Arturo, but what happened then?”

“We just grew apart. It felt like we were strangers just going thru the motions. Our friendship even suffered and that was the best part of our marriage.”

Hesitantly I ask, “did you want kids?”

“We did. Unfortunately, we had three miscarriages and it just wasn’t in the cards for us. She got remarried and has two boys though.”

“I'm sorry. You’re such a good man and if you decide to have kids at some point, you’ll be a great dad.”

“That’s really nice of you to say. Thank you. But I think I may be getting a little too old to become a dad.”

Suddenly, the conversation stops, and Arturo and I stare intently into each other’s eyes.

My whole body is tingling and I’m sure my face and ears have turned red. I had no idea, that I still have happy parts, that are alive and responsive.

We lean in towards each other and our lips just about connect. I can feel his breath on my face and the clean smell of his skin. This is too much for me and my left eye starts twitching.

Nervously I say, “Stephen has the kids for the weekend, and I haven’t heard from them. I hope he’s fed them.”

I see a confused, grin on his face, but he stays calm and responds to my random statement.

“That’s a good sign you haven’t heard from them. I’m sure they’re having a great time together.”

I feel so flustered and I’m not sure what to say now. This man drives me crazy, in a good and most unexpected way.

There really is a connection between us and being divorced is a game changer. We’re allowed to be adults and do whatever we want.

It would be so easy to touch him and kiss him, but I know this isn’t the right time. He deserves the best of me, emotionally and physically. I want to be able to give him that.

I pull away and shove a piece of cheese in my mouth. It’s best to redirect the conversation and my thoughts at this point.

“So, Arturo, how long were you in law enforcement?”

I already know the answer, but I love his voice and I don’t want him to leave.

Of course, he may want to since I’ve been acting like such a whack job.

But he’s gracious and doesn’t seem to be offended.

“I was a deputy sheriff for the City and County of Albuquerque for thirty years. I also have an EMT license.”

“Wow. That's impressive. I'll bet you've seen a lot?”

“I guess I have. All I know is there are people that have bad character and then there are people that have bad luck.”

As I pour both of us more wine, I realize I'm completely caught up in our conversation. It's easy and effortless. He truly listens to me. I could get used to this.

We're sitting close together, and his hand is resting on my leg. I have never seen such beautiful hands on a man. I can only imagine how great it would feel to have him love you.

Somehow, I get lost in his perfect teeth and plump luscious, lips.

I'm aware I shouldn't be staring, but this man is so gorgeous.

I feel like I'm in a trance. I hope I can form a sentence.

“I-- don't, I mean—what are we talking about?”

Arturo laughs, but not in a put down sort of way.

“Are you okay, Buzi? You seem a little distracted.”

“Me? Oh, I'm really good. Fine.”

He gently guides me back to the conversation.

“The world is so fast. It must be hard as a parent, not to worry about your kids?”

“As a mom, I worry about Harry and Lilly all of the time. I just want to protect them and keep them safe.”

“I’m not a parent, but I can understand that” he says. “In this age of social media, everything happens in real time and there’s so much to deal with.”

“Trust me, the kids have come home upset more than once because they were being bullied or pushed around.”

“How old are Harry and Lilly, now?” he asks.

“Harry just turned sixteen and Lilly just turned fifteen.”

“You had them close together!”

“It was challenging for a minute or so. When we got the call from the adoption agency about Lilly, we just knew she was ours.”

Arturo genuinely and with admiration, replies, “you’ve done an amazing job with them both. They’re really great kids.”

“Thank you! They love you Arturo and still talk about how much you did with them.”

He chuckles, “that’s because I took them for ice-cream. I sugared them up and gave them back to you.”

“Well,” I reply, “it was more than that. Stephen was gone most of the time and they needed that male influence. You gave them real attention and made them feel important.”

“Buzi would you ever get married again?” he asks.

“For sure. I want to get that experience right once in my life. However, I won’t go on dating sites, so marriage might be a lofty goal.”

Arturo smiles at me and says, “I think you’re a catch. I’m sure some lucky man will sweep you off your feet.”

I think he just winked at me.

“I’m ready to be swept,” I reply.

We both laugh and there’s a sweet nervousness between us. My heart is starting to flutter, and I can feel my body craving his touch. I haven’t felt this way in years. What is Arturo doing to me?

“Buzi I really should go. I have an appointment early in the morning.”

“I’ve really enjoyed this, Arturo. I’m glad you’re back in our lives.”

As I walk him to the door, he kisses me gently on my cheek. It’s completely innocent and respectful.

“Goodnight Buzi, I’m glad we did this!”

My legs are starting to shake, and I want more. This is somewhat challenging.

But the important thing about taking things slow, is that if this goes anywhere fabulous, we’ll know that it’s for all the right reasons.

I watch as he drives away and wonder if Arturo likes me the way I like him?

It’s a complete wonderful surprise, because when I was married, he was safe. Nothing would have ever happened between us.

I thought he was adorable and the nicest guy ever, but it feels different when you're both available.

My eyes are tired, my heart is full, and I need to get some rest. Dupree Press will be sending me another assignment early in the morning.

I close the drapes and can't help but notice, that the moon is shining more brightly than I've ever remembered before. This is what being present feels like.

The night rolls into the morning and I slept great!

Now I need to check my emails and get some work done. It's the perfect time, because the kids are gone, and I feel energized. Imagine that.

Well, it looks like my next assignment is on "Unconditional Love." What do I do with this?

It's kind of a vague topic but feels like it has to be about Harry or Lilly. They are the very reasons my heart beats and the closest I'll ever get to a pure, whole kind of love.

I'm not sure if unconditional love is realistic though, as life always comes with qualifiers.

You know, I think Harry will be the center of this piece, because he's the first glorious reason I got to become a mom.

I guess I'll write from my perspective as a parent and his reaction to my mothering or smothering.

As one does with their first child, we do it with our training wheels on. Everything is new and it's our first run at it. It is magical, wonderful, and scary all at the same time.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Unconditional Love

DISCLAIMER: The opinions in this article, in no way reflects or represents the opinions of Dupree Press and its subsidiaries.

From the day he was conceived he truly was a bundle of energy and love.

He kicked and stretched with the determination of an Olympic winner.

For the nine months that I provided womb and board, me and my basketball belly became involved in a wonderful love story. It was the purest form of love, between an anxious mom to be and her unborn child.

As nature would have it, my little man made an entrance into this world right at his expected arrival time.

It was a turbulent ride for nine months as I had pregnancy complications and then a bout with post-partum depression.

In the end, we both came through it all with flying colors.

Every day, I watched my little guy grow and develop. Just like a sponge he absorbed the complexities of life and loved to learn.

We went through the joy and frustrations of teething, crawling walking and talking. Of course, he hit all those milestones early.

The truth that rang out loud and clear through all of this, was that the love of a small child is the one love that truly may be unconditional.

Notice that I said, may be unconditional.

We know they have basic needs they want met and we have an obligation to meet them.

They're open and sensitive and haven't learned to play the emotional games we adults play.

When we were little, things were simple and our only requirements were to be fed, changed, and loved.

The world felt safe, at least that's the way it should have felt.

An example of unconditional love is an incident that happened with my eight-month, old Son, Harry.

He was sick and developed a horrible diaper rash.

One of our neighbors who thought she was the original Martha Stewart, told me to put baking soda on his bottom.

Don't ever do this!

Baking soda makes things rise and rise it did.

He had blisters all over his little behind.

Because his love was unconditional, he still loved me, hugged me, and knew my error wasn't intentional.

As he grew and found his way in the world, we found out that our Daughter Lilly Rose, was in Korea and the adoption we had hoped for had gone through.

Harry was only a year old, but we did our best to prepare him for a little sister.

We left him with his loving and capable Auntie BJ my sister and flew to Korea.

I didn't know if I could love a second child the way I loved Harry.

It concerned me, but the minute they put Lilly in my arms, I was

her mom, and she was my daughter.

The warm, over the moon feelings I had for him, were there.

The unconditional love that Harry had for me stayed the same, even when he had to share the snuggles and kisses with his baby sister.

He seemed to understand the struggles I was going through and allowed me time, to get a grip on being a mother of two.

His unconditional love was the vessel that made everything work.

Lilly has the best big brother ever and their bond is beautiful to see.

Today, Harry is older but still has the determination of an Olympic winner.

He allows his mom to be a dreamer and is tolerant of my many mistakes.

Your Fellow Traveler,

Buzi

Ding. Okay, my second article is done, and I've sent it. The next piece I get to write about is my choice. This may be harder than I thought. There are so many topics I have an opinion about or a visceral response to.

As adjusted as I'd like to be, I'm aware that I have major hang ups and Buzi Q. Jacobs, has much work to do on herself.

So...maybe I'll write about this aging, fluffy body of mine. I'm kind of an expert on that.

Politics is another hot topic, but I'll take that off my list because we each get one vote, and everyone believes their opinion is the right one.

Then there's gratitude. It's an important subject and one of those things we tend to lose sight of. I know I do. I could write about that.

I'm aware that I'm a little jaded and it's easy to dwell on the craters in my life, rather than focusing on all the blessings I have.

As I sit down at my computer, all hell breaks loose. The kids just got home from Stephen's house. They're loud and just dumped three bags of dirty laundry on the floor.

Stephen looks wiped out and almost overnight, his hair is grayer than I remember, and he's lost weight. I'm sure the kids have cut into his free time, and this has been quite an adjustment.

"Sorry, I didn't get around to doing their laundry," he says.

"No problem," I say with a fake smile. "I'll take care of it."

Harry pipes in, "Mom can you cook us something? We ate cereal all weekend."

His dad's eyes glaze over. He suddenly seems agitated and raises his voice.

"C'mon, you little asshole, you guys had McDonalds and pizza."

"Well...Dad, we're growing kids. We usually eat at least three times a day."

Stephen looks mad and I'm not happy he spoke to Harry like that.

Lilly the peacemaker interjects her two cents. "I love hamburgers and pizza, Daddy. They're my favorite foods."

Harry isn't having any of Lilly's brown nosing. "What a kiss ass, Lilly."

It surprises me and I jump in, "Harry, you don't talk to your sister like that."

"Yeah, that's great Mom. Did you hear how my dad talked to me? You didn't say anything to him."

Harry and Lilly both storm off and slam their doors.

Stephen stands there, mute like he's in a coma. That was one of our big problems when we were married. He was completely tuned out or absent most of the time.

When he did decide to join the parade, he screamed and threw his weight around. The little calm nest the kids and I had when he wasn't there, would turn into a battlefield.

Now he's standing here like he's in a catatonic state and it's getting on my nerves.

"Okay Stephen you can go. I've got this. Hello? Are you there?"

I turn him around and gently nudge him out the door and to his car. I'm not being a bitch, and this isn't a poor Stephen issue. He always feels put out, even if it is with his own kids.

He just doesn't get it. I know that there are involved and present dads out there interacting with their kids as much as the moms are. Stephen just doesn't happen to be one.

The shared responsibility of joint parenting is a shock for him. I hope it gets easier for him and the kids. Harry is sixteen now and I am worried about his male role modeling.

As sensitive as he is, I'm sure his dad's actions will have an influence on him. I'm aware that my choices will also impact Harry and Lilly.

I don't want them to be as screwed up as I am.

Then there's that nature, nurture theory. Can male asshole behavior be inherited? Will my constant dieting affect Lilly and how she feels about herself? I'm sure it will.

This darn weight thing has a major impact on my life. As I get older, I'm preoccupied with it, and I feel like my wheels are falling off. Why couldn't I have been blessed with a fast metabolism, or a body like Halle Berry?

In the past fifteen months I've gained 23 pounds and found out that I am the proud owner of a rogue hypo thyroid. My metabolism is like that of a turtle, I'm losing some hair and the fatigue is almost unbearable.

I'm sure that stress contributes to all of it. These pressure cooker lives we all live in, effects our health, relationships, and well-being.

Finally, the kids are quiet and in bed. I'm doing their laundry and it's time for me to work on my article.

They'll be going back to Stephen's in a couple of days because once again, it's summer break.

I need to get a jump on this piece, so maybe I'll have some playtime when they're gone.

Maybe, I will write about this middle-aged body of mine? Lord knows there is a volume of material here.

It's a real trip getting older, and your hormone levels deplete, like a balloon with the air sucked out of it.

Throw in these thyroid issues and I feel like I've lost control of myself. My Yin and my Yang have left the building.

There was a time when I had more confidence than I do now.

I also have lost my glasses, three times in the last hour. One of those times, I was wearing them. So...there's that.

There's a war going on within me, between self-doubt and self-acceptance.

I'm a mess and need to figure this all out.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Tao of Self-Doubt and Self-Acceptance

DISCLAIMER: The opinions in this article, in no way reflects or represents the opinions of Dupree Press and its subsidiaries.

Tao is the behavior that is in harmony with the natural order of things.

What does that mean and how does it tie into self-doubt and self-acceptance?

The Taoist belief is that a person takes action by changing themselves.

How do we feel about ourselves as we get older, our frame changes, we notice that our skin is less supple, and our eyes aren't as bright?

When we get older, our bodies change, because it's part of the natural order of life.

How should we feel about that and how do you change the process?

We know that our outlook, self-care and how we feel about ourselves, affects everything we do.

For some healthy and adjusted people, they don't focus on their size, if their hair has thinned out, or if they're in a wheelchair.

They're happy, productive, loved and most importantly have reached an enlightened state...*acceptance and self-love*.

Maybe self-doubt and self-acceptance starts from the reality

we're exposed to.

Is there really a natural order and can it be changed?

Do we always have to change to fit some societal standard?

My Mom was always on a diet when I was growing up.

The crazy thing is she didn't need to be and always put me on them with her.

I wasn't a big kid, and I was active, but somewhere along the way I started seeing myself as one.

The other day a friend and I were looking at old pictures.

There was a picture of us when we were ten.

Who was that girl standing next to her?

It was the craziest feeling. I knew it was me I was looking at, but I never remembered being that size.

I would have told you I was grossly overweight as a kid and much larger than everyone else, even though we all wore the same size.

This skewed perception of myself and the self-doubt continued into adulthood.

As I got older medical issues knocked at my door and it stirred up the old tapes in my head.

I started losing hair, gaining weight, and not sleeping.

As it turned out, it was from a crazy thyroid, that had to be removed. Once again, I felt like that little girl that was less than and didn't fit in.

According to the theory of Tao, was my reaction to the thyroid problem in harmony with the natural order of things?

Should I have embraced it lithely, believing that every change was just supposed to happen to me?

I think everyone might feel upset when their body is failing them.

What about when we go through menopause and our hormones fall off the chart?

Is our reaction to that in harmony with the natural order of things?

We know that it will happen to all of us, but how do we gracefully accept it?

There are some things we don't have control over.

How does the Tao of self-love and self-acceptance, affect our relationships?

When my marriage experienced infidelity, was that part of the natural order of things? Was it supposed to happen to test our commitment?

One of the teachings of Taoism is "going with the flow."

That can be hard sometimes.

I know I have all sorts of feelings about many betrayals, but let's be honest, I have issues with me too.

My husbands karmic debts aren't mine to carry, but they certainly have affected the flow of life.

Obviously, I missed the self-love part and put up with it for far too long. I just went with the unhealthy rhythm of things.

In a twisted way, I didn't know I deserved anything better. I just hung on to the order with which I was familiar.

Taoism teaches us to let go, and I'm trying to lighten up.

The world dumps on all of us, but how can we profess to have blessings in our lives when we don't honor ourselves?

We inflict more pain on our psyche than anyone else ever could.

The good thing that's come out of my enlightenment about self-doubt and self-love, is that I'm changing my internal dialogue.

I'm not quite there yet, but I know I'm a good person.

I'm loyal, compassionate and I have the capacity to love and forgive.

This current larger PDF file of myself, who's always tired and rocking less hair, doesn't change what I'm made of.

It doesn't take away from the essence of who I am.

I'm Buzi and I alone am enough.

However, I'm hopeful that my life partner will find me and love every inch of the fabulous woman that I am.

Namaste.

Your Fellow *Zen* Traveler,

Buzi

Ding. Assignment done and I've sent it.

I'm glad these articles are based on how I feel rather than statements that can be challenged.

Whenever I write these pieces, it forces me to get in touch with what was, what is and what will be. I feel like it throws me into a cycle of purging. Not literally throwing up but getting rid of those old tapes that have played in my head for years.

It gets boring playing the victim and being helpless. I'm sure to the rest of the world it gets old too.

Right after Stephen and I got divorced, I felt scared, yet strong and liberated.

For some reason at this current moment, I'm starting to crumble a bit. I'm turning into a Stephen, and I feel disheveled like he looks. Maybe, I look like he feels, and we share a sick psychosis?

I'd like to wave a white flag and call a truce with myself. Where is all this self-doubt coming from and why do I feel so inadequate? I can think of many situations, that rocked my confidence.

Let's start with piano class. When I was in the third grade, our school offered piano classes. While in that class, I couldn't sit still, and it was annoying the teacher.

I asked her if I could go to the rest room, and she said "no." I waited and waited, and I couldn't hold it any longer. I peed on myself and the floor. My cheap cotton dress was wet and stuck to my body like a velcroed, band-aid. My well-worn boots sloshed when I walked, and I felt ashamed.

She marched me to my home room and presented me to my teacher and the rest of my class. Kids laughed at me. I was horrified.

I was then sent to the principal's office, where she gave me two-inch thick, pull-up underwear. My parents had to wash them, and I had to return them. They also gave me a note that had to be signed.

You'd think I just committed a major crime. They should have put me in handcuffs and taken me away. I was a bad girl.

I guess back then, they forgot there was a child connected to the accident. The *Watergate* incident pretty much scarred me.

As my wrinkled and soiled dress dried, I rode the school bus home that day, terrified to see what my parents would say.

Back then they thought humiliation was the greatest teacher, and I do remember their threat that if I did it again, and didn't straighten up, I'd have real problems.

Somehow, I survived and made it to the sixth grade. I was thrilled to be in the color guard. We hung the flag up every morning and I felt so patriotic and involved. I especially loved it when they let me play the drums.

The first time I got to attach the flag and raise it up the pole, I messed it up.

At first, I couldn't understand why everyone was laughing, pointing, and taking away from such a beautiful moment.

As my eyes found their way to the top of the pole, I understood why.

I attached the flag upside down and disrespected old glory.

Was there anything I could do, right?

It took me awhile, but I recovered and moved on to bigger things...*student council*.

Since I was a little girl, the need to go the distance and make a difference, felt important to me. I longed to be a part of something that could rally change.

That probably stems from feeling hopeless, helpless, and non-important in my own life.

As I sit here, I feel like I'm wandering through a strobe light show. Where are all these random thoughts coming from?

These intense flashing moments from my life seem to be consuming me and the flood gates are open.

I seem to be going down an emotional yellow brick road, trying to get back home. Trying to get back to me. Where are you, Dorothy???

My kumbaya moment is quickly over, because Lilly runs into the house screaming like it's on fire.

“Mommy, Mommy, oh my God I need help!”

I rush up with her to the bathroom like I was an agile, young athlete. That’s what adrenaline will do to you.

“What’s going on kid?”

“Mommy, I think I started my period.”

I’m a little shocked. “Really, are you old enough to do that?” I reply.

“Mommy, I’m fifteen and a late bloomer.”

My gosh time has flown bye. This is one of those Kodak moments for sure. Is my baby really this old?

“Do we have any pads or tampons?” Lilly impatiently asks.

“We do, they're under the sink. Do you have any questions for me?”

“Mom, we learned about our period in school and most of my friends have had sex.”

“What? Who? You’re never going out again or dating till you’re thirty!”

“Mommy calm down. I’m not having sex, but when I do, I’ll let you know. Can you leave? Love you.”

She kisses me, pushes me out of the bathroom and locks the door.

As the door slams, I realize as dumb as this sounds, I didn’t see this coming. I’ve been so caught up in my own story that I haven’t realized how fast the kids are growing up. I don’t know if I’m ready for all of this and the sex thing.

No one told my sister or I about sex. Our Mom said that we would lose our virginity if we used tampons. She told us sex was dirty and it would be the worst pain we would ever feel.

The first time Stephen and I had sex I was sure he was trying to kill me.

My Mother’s words rang in my head for the longest time. Thank goodness she was wrong. Sex is a glorious expression of love and lust.

Yes, I said the other L-word. I may not have been a worldly type of girl, but lust is a marvelous thing.

Good God, I think I may be lusting for Arturo! I think about him all the time. He’s completely adorable in every sense of the word. I wonder if I’m staring at his lips when we talk? Hopefully, I’m not looking lower with a glazed over stare.

These silly little pheromones are a real thing and I better harness mine. Of course, I’d be open to having some adult contact. Who knows what could happen with some free time and a dose of estrogen?

Maybe I'll find out. The kids will be going to Stephen's for a few weeks, so this will be the new normal for all of us. I'm going to take advantage of the down time.

I hope he's ready for the hormonal changes in their lives. He'll be dealing with Lilly's new-found womanhood, cramping and attitude. It seems when her breasts started to develop, she became a little snippy.

Lilly usually has an even personality and I'm glad she wasn't silenced like I was as a kid.

It's horrible to not be heard and even harder to not have control over anything. Childhood for me was uncertain and scary.

My Dad was a great guy, except when he wasn't. He was an alcoholic and his family was his property. You never knew what climate you were walking into, until the tsunami hit.

As hard as it was, I always understood that he had a disease. As a little girl I was the one to clean up his vomit, watch his tears flow and listen to his stories about life. Our relationship was a bit co-dependent, but I loved him so.

He died when he was in his early seventies, and I miss him every day.

As hard as things were growing up, we had many adult years with him sober. He was generous by nature, a loyal friend, and he loved his family, the best way he knew how to.

His life wasn't always easy, and I understood that. After his death, Uncle Joe told us that their brother Clayton, who was

much older, really was my dad's father. What a surprise that was!

It's amazing the family secrets you find out about after someone dies. My Dad never knew about this curve in the family tree and maybe it wouldn't have mattered anyway. *Love is love.*

Our precious Lilly Rose was ordained through love and destined to be our daughter. I believe families are put together in many beautiful ways.

Lilly at this point, doesn't seem interested in who or what her biological roots are. We've always been open with her and believe that she should know about her Korean heritage.

We've taken her there twice. The area that she came from was depressed, economically poor and for many years, a war-torn and beaten down community.

I'm glad she wasn't around for that, but it's important for her to know the strong and proud heritage she came from.

We didn't go through anything as traumatic as a war and one can only imagine how tough that is.

However, when my sister and I were growing up, it felt like we were in a war zone of sorts, most of the time. The screaming, fighting, physical and emotional abuse is something you never forget.

I acknowledge that my dad could be a tyrant. Being a product of that environment wasn't easy and we always walked on eggshells.

We have abandonment issues because even if my dad was physically in the house, he wasn't present or he was edgy.

Kind of like Stephen was.

I'm sure the dysfunction while I was growing up, had an impact on my marriage and all my relationships.

I absolutely don't expect him to take all the responsibility on why we didn't make it. I figure if anything, we were a success story because we have Harry and Lilly. We are still a family and for that I am grateful.

I can't imagine living in a world without having them in it. They are the greatest gifts in my life, and I always want them to know that. I want them to feel loved and wanted.

So many memories from my childhood I'd like to forget.

Even this many years later, some of my emotions are still raw from that time in life. Instantaneously I can be brought to tears just thinking about them.

Life was debilitating at times, and I would never put my kids through some of the things my sister BJ and I experienced.

Genetically, I have a predisposition for the alcoholism, and I need to keep it in check.

I know that I desperately want to heal, and I don't want to be that scared little girl anymore.

As I work through the life script in my head, it feels like I'm writing my memoir and maybe I am. But this isn't my swan song and I'm not planning on leaving this planet anytime soon.

I just know that I don't want to be broken or in pieces anymore. I'm trying to figure out who I am, what I stand for, and the part I've played in things.

Writing helps me with that. It's therapeutic and I'm grateful that I have this outlet for personal discovery. There are certain things about myself that I need to validate, evaluate, and take responsibility for. I feel comforted by getting it out in words.

Even though Stephen and I couldn't go the distance, I know that I'm not a man hater. In fact, I love them. Most of them anyway.

In college there were a couple of guys that started rumors that we hooked up. It didn't happen. One of the guys cornered me and groped my body. He then spread lies about the encounter. He had been drinking, but that's no excuse. If that had happened today, with the "Me Too," movement, he could have had charges filed against him.

I love women too. I'm not a lesbian, but if I was that would be alright. I think females are exceptionally strong, smart, beautiful, and resilient. I've learned many lessons from my fellow *Sisters* and multitaskers. They keep things moving!

As much as I need to get this all out, following the emotional dots isn't easy. It's very clear to me that I'm broken and hurting.

I don't want my past to hold me hostage anymore from having a loving future. I want to be present with and wherever I am in life.

Like right now, my cell phone is ringing. Guess what? It's the undead Viv. She's called a few times the past week and hung up.

I have two choices. I can either ignore her or find out what the pitiful little thing needs. It's a slow day, so I answer it.

"Hello, Viv. I see your name on the caller ID. Don't hang up this time."

"Oh God Buzi. I hung up before because I'm afraid of you and thought you'd hang up on me."

"What's up Viv? I know you didn't call to exchange cookie recipes."

"Buzi, I've been in counseling, and they told me I have to apologize to the people I've hurt in my life."

How can I fault her for that? She's working through issues just like I am.

"Okay, I'm listening Viv."

"I want you to know that I'm sorry. I was wrong. I somehow got lost in my life."

"Viv, I'm over it. I might not forget it, but I do forgive you."

"Buzi, my husband and I are trying to work things out, so you and I might see each other in the cul-de-sac."

"Well, isn't that nice for you guys." I don't know what else to say to Viv. There's dead uncomfortable silence on the phone.

“Anyway, thank you Buzi.”

As I hang up the phone, I’m not sure if I’m going to cry, or if I should cheer for them. I think it’s wonderful when families work, and I don’t advocate divorce. It’s great that her husband wants to put their family back together. They also have a little boy to think about.

The deal is, I wasn’t married to Viv. Our vows weren’t broken or thrown away. I was married to Stephen, and he needs to shoulder most of the blame.

Viv took the bait, like so many other women did before her. She wanted to believe she was special to Stephen and found out how disposable she was. I know that was hurtful for her and a lesson she’ll never forget.

Beware ladies, an *alley cat* is...an *alley cat* and you can’t make it a *Basset Hound*!

CHAPTER NINE

If It Hurts Don't Do It

It's hard to believe how fast the past two days have flown by and Stephen just picked the kids up for part of the summer.

Now, it's time for me to do the real work on myself.

As I scroll down through the chapters of my life, I need to be honest with myself and admit that my relationship with Stephen was fractured the first month we were married.

Infidelity was an issue, but I ignored it. I wanted to hang on to the storybook version of us.

He wasn't ready for marriage and had no business being in this type of committed relationship.

I'm not sure I was ready either. I came to the relationship broken.

For a brief time, we went to marriage counseling. The therapist told us that once the fidelity is broken, it's broken for both of you. It doesn't really matter who broke it first. It's going to take the same amount of energy from both parties, to forgive and repair it.

Isn't that ironic? We're all on the clean-up crew, no matter who created the mess.

Well, we were able to move past it for a while. We had our precious Harry and Lilly and that part of us, was absolutely a gift.

However, his indiscretions kept rearing their ugly heads. His behavior didn't change, and he kept doing it.

I always tell my kids, "*If it hurts don't do it.*"

Stephen didn't get the memo. His actions hurt a lot of people repeatedly. Even though we've both been open about what happened, it's hard to recover from it.

I think I was officially insane, for quite a few years. Why would he change? I wasn't going anywhere.

An unemployed middle-aged housewife isn't exactly in demand when things fall apart. Truthfully, I didn't know how I would provide for the kids.

I have a college degree and I did work for years before we had them. But something changed with my self-worth after being a housewife, mom and not working outside of the home, for so many years. I felt less than, while Stephen had this full, whole life.

He was handsome, charming, worldly and could carry a well-rounded conversation.

I hung around PTA moms. Most of them were superstars that baked cookies, cut coupons, and took Zumba classes. That wasn't my skill set.

My roster was completely haywire with medical and dental appointments, sports, grocery shopping, the house, kids, and car repairs.

The days the kids were sick with fevers, strep, earaches, diarrhea and vomiting, Stephen wasn't around.

He used it as an excuse to be away from our little pod. He said he didn't want to get sick because he's the one that makes the money. How thoughtful.

I feel like I conceived these kids alone. I know his job has provided for the lifestyle we've created.

But being a housewife and staying home with our kids is equally as important. I just don't get a paycheck each week to prove what I did.

In this day and age, you need to be prepared to support yourself and your kids, when life changes happen.

Money isn't everything, but it makes it harder when you don't have any.

Fighting with bill collectors, not having the means to feed, cloth, and put a roof over your kid's heads is a reality for many.

It's like doing a dance with sharks. You're trapped in a big ocean and can't get away. They circle you till they break you down and then they devour you.

Just a side note and because I get off track, I have a major shark phobia. I won't even step into the ocean and cruises are off too.

I have one story on the high seas, and it happened when Stephen and I went on a cruise for our honeymoon. It was a disaster!

My doctor gave me patches and pills for motion sickness. Somehow, I ended up losing my eyesight for several hours. We weren't sure what was going on with me.

Thankfully, Stephen finally read the instructions and it said not to use both medications at the same time. It could affect your vision.

When I regained my sight, my phobia about sharks really kicked in. I knew they were underneath me in that deep water and terror, plus paranoia set in.

So, while I stayed medicated, motionless, and terrified in our room, Stephen was left to entertain himself. I didn't find out until many years later, that an affair happened on that cruise.

So much for the in sickness and health part of our vows. Poor love starved husband of mine. He couldn't even wait a full week of marriage before he spread his love seeds.

You never knew where he was going to plant a garden, because he was an equal opportunity, run around Romeo.

Early in the marriage we hung out with a couple that lived by us. The wife and I worked together for a community newspaper, so we carpooled.

Her husband worked nights and as I found out later, Stephen was a regular guest in their home when he was gone.

During this time, Stephen and I planned and were lucky enough to get pregnant with Harry. We were thrilled!

My carpool buddy and her husband hadn't been able to conceive for ten years. I really did feel bad for them.

Much to everyone's delight, when I was four months along, she also got pregnant. What a surprise!

Years later she told me she felt obligated to tell me that she and Stephen had an affair back in the day. She said, “he’s a disgusting jackass, and you’re a nice person. He doesn’t deserve you and I think you have the right to know.”

Here we go again. What a *load of crap*!

She was trying to ease her conscience and free herself from the burden of this secret. It had nothing to do with caring about me. I felt more dumped on and damaged than ever.

The admission from her, threw our marriage back into the sewer and off to counseling we went.

They moved away to another state and when Harry was 10, she sent me a picture of her daughter Quinn. I’m not sure why she did that--or maybe I do.

Quinn looks exactly like Stephen.

I asked him if he was the baby daddy and of course he said no. In my heart, I’m almost positive that Stephen is Quinn’s biological father.

As Sir Walter Scott wrote, “Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice, to deceive.”

At some point they both will have to answer to a higher power. We all will.

And speaking of a higher power, Stephen also had an affair with a church lady. Oh yes.

Stephen bounced from church to church.

He was looking for redemption but got so much more.

The church lady was teaching Harry and Lilly how to play the piano.

One day I'm driving Stephen's car and his bible slides out from under the seat, so I pick it up. As if directed by divine intervention, a letter falls out.

It's from the church lady who also happens to be the piano teacher and the daughter of the head minister at the church. In the letter she refers to me as a dragon and professes what a horrible person I am.

As you can imagine, this dragon was spewing fire. This time retribution was mine, *thus saith Buzi*.

I called the church and happened to speak to a very friendly Janitor.

I told him I needed the piano teachers phone number, because I needed to cancel my kid's lessons. Miraculously and without hesitation he gave it to me, and I contacted her.

Being passive wasn't an option this time, because I didn't want the church lady around my kids.

I'm not condemning people that go to church. My reference to her as the church lady, is to protect her, by not sharing her real name with anyone.

We had a very heart-warming conversation, and I recited the letter she wrote to him, word for word. I reminded her that I was Stephen's wife and if she didn't break things off, I would have to let the congregation know what was going on.

I also told her that I made a couple hundred copies of her letter, and I was going to put it on every windshield in the church parking lot. Attached to it would be the current family picture that Stephen and I had taken with the kids. Her dad the head minister was going to get his own personal signed copy.

She begged me for forgiveness, said she made a mistake and would never see him again. It scared her and Stephen both.

However, I think he was just concerned about the child support and alimony he would have to pay if we split up.

The church lady will have to figure out how she's going to live with all of this.

The sad part is that for Stephen, it was one more number crossed off in his black book. She probably was a nice person, who didn't get the truth from him.

He went to counseling alone for this indiscretion because it's his job to figure out why he keeps pulling this crap. It's my job to figure out why I keep putting up with it.

Three years after this all came to a head, the church lady wrote me a letter. She moved to Alaska, married a preacher and was pregnant with her first child.

The reason she said she was writing, was because when she and Stephen got together, he didn't tell her he was married. She was told I lived in another state, and never saw the kids.

I don't blame it on her, and I hope she has a happy life.

Again, I wasn't married to her and the marital contract that was once again broken, was between Stephen and me.

Maybe I should have done some research on who the piano teacher was. But I didn't. I was just happy that Stephen seemed to take some initiative and signed them up for lessons.

Harry and Lilly were little, so thankfully they didn't know what was going on and weren't pulled into the middle of it.

At this point I wasn't sure if our issues could or should be fixed. I needed to understand why I kept staying. At what point, do both parties quit hurting each other and the kids?

Stephen cries every time he screws up, or maybe gets caught and tells me he loves me. In some sick way, I believe he does. In some sick way...*I need to believe that.*

Ding. I just got my next assignment. They want me to write a piece or poetry for a small block of space about abuse.

It just so happens I do have something that was published some years ago and it might work for this spot.

As I'm looking through these old files, it's obvious that I was pulling from a dark place when I wrote them.

I truly feel such compassion for anyone that has suffered through any kind of emotional, verbal, sexual or physical abuse.

I guess that just about covers everyone. As human beings we hurt each other.

What a sad statement about humanity.

CHAPTER TEN

A Monster on The Loose

DISCLAIMER: The opinions in this article, in no way reflects or represents the opinions of Dupree Press and its subsidiaries.

“A Monster on The Loose”

My nights are filled with terror, there’s a monster on the loose.

No bars or chains protect me, I’m his victim of abuse.

He prowled the streets in darkness, with violence on his mind.

He didn’t care who paid the price, he took who he could find.

I screamed and fought for freedom, his strength it persevered.

I had no chance to win the fight, my destiny was clear.

He left me bare and beaten, his hands had left their mark.

My hopes and dreams were shattered by the violence in that park.

My life is filled with terror, there’s a monster on the loose.

No bars or chains protect me, I am scarred by his abuse.

Editorial:

My heart aches as I write this piece.

This story, these words belong to so many people.

I'd like to tell each brave survivor, I'm so sorry that you went through this.

It wasn't your fault, and you didn't deserve it.

Let's acknowledge the courage it takes to stand up and fight against abuse, oppression, violence, and bigotry.

Maybe then and only then can we make the world a better place.

Let your voices be heard because you matter.

You indeed are the champions.

Your Fellow Traveler,

Buzi

Ding. I sent it off to Dupree Press, but this assignment was a tough one. I hadn't read this piece since it was published over twenty years ago.

I'm not sure where I pulled from to write it, or once again, maybe I do. It had a profound effect on me then, as it does now.

One of my past therapists, thinks I'm blocking some trauma that has happened to me.

All I know is that it destroys me to hear and think about all the darkness in our world.

I don't want people to hurt, and it devastates me to even think of all the animals that are abandoned or abused.

How do we heal our planet? There are so many sick, scarring, and abusive things that happen.

So many people hide their pain, in the dark crevices of denial, or bury it in the name of survival.

I get it, but it makes me sad.

Immediately, I get a response from my editor Darby.

Buzi,

This is the most raw and insightful piece you've ever written for us.

I appreciate the editorial you wrote at the end.

You turned it into a message of understanding and gave a loving nod to their courage.

So many of us have the same story.

#DarbyMeToo

I certainly had no idea that this was her story too.

What a reality check for me. My stories aren't unique, and I at least have an outlet to be heard.

Through my job and the written word, I have a voice.

I want everyone to be heard, understood, and acknowledged for being the warriors they are.

It's so important that we share our stories, our truths, and our compassion.

I need to get my feelings out, so I can move forward and maybe be of help to others.

The past few years I've delved into every corner of my mind.

I feel raw, angry, exposed, used, and upset.

Where did the color go in my life? It's been said that color is an expression of our state of mind.

For years, I wore bright colorful outfits and I felt happy and alive.

One day it changed, and the world felt dark.

I found myself pulling away from my friends and isolating myself.

Truthfully, over the years I've become cynical. I don't trust people. I've closed myself off and given up on the notion that I deserve to be loved or that I will ever find love.

It's hard to get close to someone when you're jaded and so tired of people's lies, hypocrisy and dishonesty. The big thing is...*I'm sick of lying to myself.*

Now, I wear black outfits all the time, like it's my uniform and I'm in mourning.

It probably is connected to the weight thing, how I feel about myself and the loss of trust and relationships in my life.

I've had people say, "Why do you wear black all of the time? Do you like it? Isn't it hot?"

I feel like I'm sitting in a therapist's office. I believe they aren't saying it to be mean, but I don't say to them, "why do you wear your hair like that? Do you think it looks good?"

I smile through their arm-chair evaluations and wonder if wearing certain colors indeed is a diagnostic tool into the human psyche?

I think it might be. My life color wheel has proven that.

Once I was at a park and wearing this bright colorful outfit. It had flowers on it and my lips were painted with a pretty, magenta lipstick.

This little boy comes up to me and says, “Lady you look like a clown.”

I was horrified. My impulse was to say something awful back to him, but maybe he was right? I am a clown, and life is...*my circus*.

My life feels like a carnival of stolen moments and broken dreams.

I’m missing some valuable blocks of time because I’m afraid to remember or admit to what’s really holding me back.

Time is flying bye and I feel like I can't keep up with it.

You know what’s scary? The kids left with their dad a few days ago and I've lost all sense of time.

What have I been doing? I think I'm experiencing memory loss or blacking out.

I haven’t showered, there are pieces of crumbled paper all over the floor and my lips are chapped. I’ve survived on stale peanuts, wine, and dried-up Halloween candy from years gone by. Coming to terms with my own history is hard.

From the looks of me and this room, it's pretty dismal.

Every time I feel like I'm making progress, I slip back into the same old dialogue playing in my head. I feel like I'm trying to harness a ghost and I might be losing the fight.

How does our energy and focus get so scrambled and influenced by old memories that we can't change?

I can track every time I get caught up in the past. I'm riddled with self-loathing and pity. I'm a beacon of unstable energy and that's what I get back.

Maybe Stephen saw something so broken in me from the beginning, that he couldn't get in? That's a possibility, I guess.

I've always talked about honesty and communication like I was a master at it. I'm not and I can see from the pieces of my childhood, that I was broken at an early age.

God, I hope I'm doing a better job with my kids, than I got. I need to be present, more thoughtful, and aware in my life.

I also need some air, natural light in the room and opening a window will help.

I push back my curtains to see what it's like outside and I see Viv, her husband, and their little boy. Sweet, they're walking down the street, holding hands, laughing, and throwing a football.

Oh, and she's wearing those dangerous four-inch red high heels. I hope she has a supply of band-aids!

No matter how I feel about what happened, that's a beautiful picture seeing them happy.

Maybe that's why I put up with such an unhealthy marriage for so long? It was the fleeting beautiful pictures that gave me hope. As parents we want that for our kids.

Oh no! No, no, no. Viv just got hit in the nose with the football and she's down on the ground, moaning and bleeding.

My first impulse is to laugh--which I did. I know I'm awful. It's just that this woman is so accident prone. She probably still has powdered sugar in her ears and scars from her fall at the grocery store in Arizona.

I get it that sometimes things happen, that are just out of our control. Viv getting hit in the nose wasn't her fault. I hope she didn't break it or doesn't need stitches.

This is so odd and random and I'm not sure why I'm remembering this right now. I just had a flashback memory of something that happened when I was four years old and at the mall with my mom.

We stepped on the escalator, and I sat down like I had done many times before. No one said it wasn't allowed and there weren't any signs posted to that affect.

When we got to the bottom and the ride was over, it chewed my pants up and my buttocks as well.

Maintenance had to turn it off and people were stuck on it, until they disengaged me from the mouth of jaws.

Back then no one thought about the danger of letting your kid sit down on an escalator. Maybe I was the first rebel rider.

I had to get stitches in my torn up, bloody caboose. More scars that would stay with me for a lifetime. It's not even a cool story.

The point is accidents happen and we do better when we know better. My Mom didn't know it was dangerous for me to sit there. I know my parents did the best they could despite their difficult circumstances.

Along with his alcoholism, my mom was sick. She had the first of many open-heart surgeries, when I was two years old. It left a scar on her brain from lack of oxygen and caused her to have grand mal seizures when she got overloaded or stressed. It was the scariest thing to see.

I can remember the fear, as a tiny girl lying next to her, just listening to her breathe. In my little mind, I thought if I prayed really hard, I could protect her from having a seizure. "Please God, don't let my Momma bite herself or die. I'll be good, I promise."

I still recall the blood on her mouth and the blue color of her lips. My poor little Momma, she really went through some horrific things.

Most of the time she got sick when my dad was drinking. The fighting, and tension, was just too much for her to take.

We lost her shortly after my dad died. Two months to be exact. That's another story and it fuels the abandonment issues.

What a loss it's been, losing them both. It feels so current, yet it happened several years ago.

I miss the fresh Oil of Olay scent, her skin always smelled like and the notes of her White Linen, perfume she always wore. It suited her so.

She was so funny, and an angel on earth. I have never met anyone close to being the woman she was. Most everything she said came out with an accent and we couldn't help but laugh. It made things easier.

My mom told us this one silly story about my dad's drinking, even though it's such a hard topic for all of us.

She would water his gin and vodka bottles down to slow his alcohol consumption.

What she didn't know was that he beat her to the punch every time. He already drank the Gin and Vodka, filled the bottles with water himself, then bought more that he hid. She just assumed he didn't know they were diluted.

They both carried on this charade until he stopped drinking when I was eighteen years old, then they laughed about it.

After that, his beverage of choice became diet soda. He drank up to a six pack a day. For sure it was better than the alcohol and our precious Mom had less seizures.

He had dry drunk periods till the day he died and always threatened us that he was going to go back to the bottle.

I hated it when he said that. I prayed for his sobriety every day.

The hard part of his alcoholism was that he was a good man that had a disease. I know it probably doesn't sound like that, but he was.

When Harry was born, he truly became my dad's salvation. He adored him and Harry felt the same way. They were best buddies and even though Harry was a little guy, he loved to listen to the stories about his G-Pop's life.

My Dad loved old movies and when he retired, he watched them and the history channel around the clock. Harry was right beside him. Two peas in a safe, comfortable pod.

I'm glad he was around to meet Lilly Rose, too. He fell in love with her from the start. Lilly brought out a kinder, gentler side of him. It was a beautiful thing to see.

My Mom was called Me-Ma. She was an artist, a gifted painter and spent hours with Lilly teaching her to create. Both kids loved spending time with them.

Then there was and still is, their Auntie BJ, my funny and musically inclined Sister. They adore her and she feels the same way about them.

Her given name is Barbara Jo Jacobs, and everyone calls her BJ. You can imagine the razzing she's gotten.

Buzi and BJ, what were our parents thinking? My Dad and Uncle Joe must have been in on that signing too!

I have to admit, this stroll down memory lane, has been a real trip and this emotional recall is a wipeout.

My brain, back and legs hurt. I need some fresh air and sunshine. God, I feel old and stiff.

Ding...

That's Darby, she wants another filler piece or poem on anything. I'll do it later because I need to get out of here.

I quickly brush my teeth and grab headphones to listen to music. It'll feel good to take a walk, but I hope I don't run into someone I know.

I wouldn't want to scare them!

Oops! Just as I open the door, Arturo is knocking on it. "Hi Buzi, I was just checking on you, to make sure you're okay."

I can tell he's concerned and I'm happy that he cares enough to check on me.

"I'm fine. I've just been writing some articles for work. Come in."

"I've called your cell phone and it says the message box is full. I've also been calling your home phone and it's been busy."

"I'm sorry. I better check them both. I'm not sure what's going on?"

"I was wondering if maybe you'd like to go out to dinner?"

For one second, my impulse is to say no to him. I'm kind of horrified that he's seeing me so raw and natural.

I've been holed up in the house for days, so I'm sure I look totally cute.

I check the phones to see what the problems are.

"Gosh, my home phone is off the hook, and I had no idea I had all these messages on my cell. The volume was also turned way down. I'm sorry."

"That might be why I haven't heard from the kids either. I would really like to go to dinner with you, Arturo. Give me a second to get cleaned up."

"Okay, but you look great!" Arturo sits on the couch, and I turn the tv on for him. I take a quick shower to wash up and slap some makeup on.

I put a black sundress on and some heels. I feel like a desired, inspired woman and make my way back to Arturo.

"Wow. You're beautiful!" he exclaims. "I mean you always are."

His handsome face gets red and it's so cute to see him a little flustered.

"Thank you, Arturo. I've been locked up in this house writing for days and I know it's not healthy."

"I know you like cheeseburgers and pancakes Buzi. What's your pleasure?"

"I'm going for the cheeseburgers."

"Good choice. There's a new burger joint called, The Triple Threat. It just opened and is in walking distance," he says.

“That sounds good. I need the exercise, but I'm gonna put more comfortable shoes on then.”

I change my shoes and we walk arm in arm, talking all the way. We stop to look at a baby Basset Hound that's all alone and tied to a bike outside an ice-cream shop.

Arturo is the first one to go nuts over the puppy.

“Oh my gosh, what a cute little girl. Buzi, look at her ears and paws. What a face.”

She's all over Arturo and you can tell by looking at him that he's in love.

This melts my heart. I appreciate a man that likes kids, babies, and animals.

“Maybe one day we can get a little girl like this,” he says.

I don't know if Arturo realizes what he just said, but I like that he said “we.”

A boy comes out of the ice-cream shop, grabs his bike and off they go. She runs beside him with her ears flapping in the wind.

It's the cutest thing ever seeing how happy they both are.

“I love Basset Hounds. I want her,” I say.

“Well, I think that's something we can work on Buzi!”

Oh, be still my melting heart!

We arrive at the restaurant, and it looks, clean, crisp, and new.

“Arturo the restaurant looks really nice. I didn't even know it was here.”

“I saw an ad for it in the newspaper and remembered that someone likes cheeseburgers.”

“That would be me,” I reply. “My nickname when I was little was Wimpy you know the hamburger guy from Popeye?”

“I get it. I like that,” he said. My nickname was Strummer.”

“Strummer,” I say intrigued. “Where did that come from?”

“I played the guitar and sang a lot when I was kid. My Dad started calling me Strummer.”

We laugh and he gives me a sweet kiss on my lips.

“I didn't know you were into music, Strummer?”

“The more reason we need to spend time together. There's a lot you don't know about me Buzi.”

We get seated right away and I inhale a juicy, three-tiered, cheeseburger, aka The Triple Threat. It is so good, and I ate the whole thing! I don't even feel subconscious or nervous eating in front of him.

Part of that is because he's an adjusted man.

“So, Arturo what have you been up too?”

“Well,” he says, “I started tutoring kids in a reading program. They have some challenges, but I really enjoy working with them.”

He's so charming, that it's silly. For a man his age, he doesn't seem jaded or disappointed with life. I can learn a lot from him.

"You're amazing," I say. "You do everything with such purpose and heart."

"I'm the one that gets something from the kids. They're eager to learn and teach me about patience."

As he speaks, I notice just how sincere he is.

He's adorable. I did say adorable, right? On top of that he sings and plays an instrument. We have the same values and sense of humor. I'm crushing bad.

I want a Basset Hound and Arturo too! I'm, putty in his hands. He's everything I want in a man.

"I think you're awesome," I say, hanging on to his every word.

"How are your parents doing?"

"Still hanging in there. We just found out that my dad was misdiagnosed and doesn't have cancer, like we were told.

"That's great, Arturo."

I am so distracted just looking at him. He's even sexy talking about medical stuff and I know he knows I'm smitten with him. I think I may be drooling.

Arturo continues, “The hard part is that he went through a couple of rounds of chemo that he didn’t need.

He’s involved in a malpractice suit now, just to get the fees paid that his insurance wouldn’t cover.”

“Gosh, that’s awful” I reply, “but I’m glad he’s doing okay.”

As Arturo speaks, my phone vibrates loudly. Darby messages me and needs a short poem for a filler piece. I guess there’s no rest for a freelance writer.

Since we’re talking about his dad and malpractice, I might have a piece that I wrote years ago, that would work. I still remember it.

Now, Arturo receives a message, and needs to go make a phone call. He leaves the table.

I hope his parents are alright.

This is the perfect time to write my piece down, and send the file to Darby, while I wait.

Ironically, it’s called,” MALICE,” and it’s about malpractice.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

MALICE

DISCLAIMER: The opinions in this article, in no way reflect or represent the opinions of Dupree Press and its subsidiaries.

Should we challenge the code of the powers that be and a hypocritic oath, they swore we'd see?

Guiding our care in their capable hands, while yielding a sword we can't understand.

Not all will proceed with malice and gain.

Many stand tall and acknowledge their blame.

But a right can be wronged by altering the truth and healing and progress is muted by proof.

Once we are broken and can't be repaired, everything we've worked for is taken not shared.

Your Fellow Traveler,

Buzi

We've had some malpractice in our own family and it's a hard process to go through.

After listening to Arturo's dad's story, I know this is the piece I need to submit. I hope Darby thinks it's okay.

Ding... I sent it.

Gosh, I wonder where Arturo is? It's been quite a while since he left.

Maybe I just need to be patient. I'll just sit here and dream about him.

He makes me smile and my estrogen depleted body feels like there's an old-time revival going on. I'm pretty sure he feels something too, but I'm in my forties and he's in his fifties.

That's not old, but perception is much different than when we were in our twenties or thirties. I can't help but think about how relationships ebb, flow, or *crash*.

Stephen has a cousin; her name is Heidi and she's in her mid-sixties. I adore her. She is so confident. Anyway, she's dating a man thirty years younger than she is and they moved in together.

They're all over each other. Heidi says go for it, ladies. She's never looked better, felt better, and enjoys her life. Sex is a big part of their relationship, and he adores her.

My other friend, Rochelle, says all men are babies and they never grow up. After thirty years of marriage, she got tired of

her husband Charlie, being a dumb ass. He made decisions for the family that mainly benefited him.

Rochelle was the perfect wife. She dutifully let him rule the roost, until she had enough of it.

Now, she tells him when to jump and how high. Surprisingly, Charlie says he loves the change in her. He says it was boring having a spouse that was subservient and so dependent.

This new set-up works for them, and they are more in love than ever.

I'd like to get to the love stage with Arturo, but that might not happen. He sure has been gone a long time. Maybe he left me.

Suddenly, an ambulance pulls up front. My heart sinks. Did something happen to him?

A man is wheeled out on a gurney. Right behind him and walking upright is Arturo. His sleeves are rolled up and he's talking to one of the policer officers that's arrived.

After another couple of minutes, he comes back to the table.

"Buzi, I'm so sorry," he says. "One of the waiters in the kitchen fell and hit his head. He actually started seizing and I just happened to be standing there on the phone."

Now I kind of feel like a jerk for thinking he may have bounced out on me.

“Oh my gosh, Arturo! That’s awful. Thank goodness you were there,” I said.

I’m looking at this man with more admiration than ever.

Since my mom had seizures, it’s comforting to know that Arturo stepped in to help this guy.

We hold hands at the table and it's just so comfortable. As he leans in to kiss me, the dumbest thing happens.

I accidentally lose my shoe under the table and scramble to put my foot back into it. In the process I'm rubbing up and down his legs and crotch. He looks really surprised.

“Oh my God, I'm so sorry. I was trying to find my shoe.”

“Really, c'mon Buzi. It's okay. No problem.”

“No, I'm serious. See my shoes are a little big and they sometimes fall off my feet.”

“You don't need to explain. I believe you.”

“Look buddy, I've got more game than that, I assure you. You would know if I was getting playful with you.”

“Darn...I was hoping we were making some progress,” he says, while planting another kiss on me.

There definitely is sexual tension between us. All I know is that I don't want to blow it with him. I'm afraid if things happen too fast, we'll lose more than we'll gain.

“Let's get out of here. How about going to listen to some music or maybe we can sing at a karaoke bar?” he says.

“Karaoke? I haven’t done that in years,” I reply.

“Did you enjoy it before?” he asks.

“Kind of in a terrified, thrilling sort of way.”

“What’s that mean, Wimpy?” he asks.

“Well, here’s what happened Strummer, the last time I went. I was singing a slow, sweet Carpenter’s song. Suddenly, a fight broke out. I’m singing my heart out as chairs are being launched and fists are being thrown. After that, I pretty much just sing at home or in the car. I don’t want to incite any riots.”

Arturo laughs, “that’s funny. I wish I could’ve been there to see it.”

“Would you mind if we do a rain check? It’s been a busy week.”

“I understand,” he says.

“But thank you for dinner, Arturo, I really enjoyed it.”

“You’re welcome. Hopefully, we can do it again soon.”

Suddenly, my heart starts pounding and this weird sweating thing starts up. What is going on with me?

Why is this man so darn cute! I can hardly breathe when I look at him and can only imagine what sex would be like. I’d either core out or terrify him.

We walk hand in hand back to my house. This time at the door he gives me a passionate, lingering kiss on the lips and says goodnight. I think I’m falling for him big time.

The minute he leaves, the voice of self-doubt jumps into my head. Why would he like someone like me?

Although Arturo isn't that kind of man and hasn't done anything for me to question his motives, I feel insecure.

As I lock the door, Lilly calls. I'm excited to talk to her. "Hi baby! How are you doing?"

"Mommy, we tried to call you earlier, but you didn't pick up."

"I'm sorry. One phone was off the hook and the volume on my cell was turned down and my mail box was full."

"Daddy had to take Harry to the dentist. He chipped his tooth.

Panicked I ask, "Did he get it fixed?"

"They aren't back yet from the dentist," Lilly replied.

"Well, okay. Are you having fun? What have you been doing?"

"Swimming, going to the movies, shopping. Daddy's friend Emily is really nice."

"Wait. What? Daddy has a new friend?"

"Actually, it's his new fiancé," she casually says. "He gave her a big diamond ring."

My inner voice is saying, "Okay Buzi girl, watch how you handle this and don't act like the scorned, jealous ex-wife".

"How nice for daddy. As long as she's nice to you guys and you like her that's great!"

“Mommy I’m not a baby anymore. I know this must be hard for you.”

“Lilly girl, it shocked me for just a second. Daddy and I were together for a long time, and it will be an adjustment. But I’m glad your dad has someone to share his life with.”

“I know what you want to ask, Mommy. How old she is?”

“You’re too smart kid,” I reply.

“She’s, his age. I guess they went to high school together.”

“Huh, your dad and I went to high school together. Does Emily happen to have pretty blue eyes and a little mole by her mouth?”

“She does. She kind of looks like Cindy Crawford.”

My heart just falls to my stomach.

“I know who daddy is engaged to. I cheered with Emily in high school and she’s a great person.”

“Maybe you two can become friends again?” Lilly innocently says.

“Maybe we can, I say.”

“Well, I gotta go, Mommy. Love you.”

“Wait Lilly, I hear Harry. Can I talk to him?”

“No Mommy, he jumped in the pool with Emily.”

The truth is my heart is sinking a bit, because the kids seem to like Emily so much.

“Well...tell Harry I love him,” I say while choking on a tear.

I shared Stephan with so many women, but I’m not sure if I’m ready to share my kids.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Blast From the Past

Oh My God, Emily Beckenbolt? Everyone loved her way back then. I loved her. She was a lot of fun.

I wish I could think of something wrong with her, but I've got nothing. She was pretty, smart and a real nice girl.

I knew that she went to nursing school and married our high school quarterback. So, I guess we know they got divorced.

Why am I feeling some way about this? We're divorced. Stephen has a right to his own life. As mature and civilized as I'd like to be, I'm feeling a little snarky.

She's probably everything I'm not. I need to get out of my head. Maybe I'm everything she's not and he settled for her because he can't have me back.

Grow up Buzi Q, it's not of your business. Take your own advice and stay in your own lane.

Ding...

Lilly just sent a picture of all of them at the pool.

Emily is about my size and has extremely short pink hair.

Even though she's beautiful, she isn't what Stephen usually goes for.

He likes arm candy that's petite, lean and twenty years younger. It makes him feel young and virile even though he's aging, and his shape has changed, just like the rest of us.

When we went to our twentieth high school reunion, I was certainly larger than I was at the ten-year get together.

My hormones were rebelling, and my rogue hypo thyroid zapped all my energy. They had me on steroids, and I felt like a slow sloth.

This guy named Dwayne, who always was a complete jerk, came up to me and patted my stomach and said, "Oh, I see you have a bun in the oven."

I said, "Dwayne, I'm not pregnant, but I see your still obnoxious."

He slithered away laughing and thought it was hysterical. I was horrified, it really damaged me.

Imagine if someone walked up and patted your penis and said, "Oh, I'm sorry, is that all you're packing?"

A few years after the reunion, we found out that he went to prison for murder and child pornography.

I guess it wasn't a complete shock that he did this, but you have to wonder why. What happened to him?

He met his wife when we were in high school. Back then she was a quiet, lovely girl and at the ten-year reunion, she was pregnant with their fifth child. Their poor kids. What a complete tragedy.

This really makes me think about child abuse and endangerment. It makes my blood boil.

The thought of someone violating, touching, or abusing Harry and Lilly makes me enraged. I feel that way no matter who it's happening to.

Ding... Oh, Darby wants to know if I have a short filler poem I can send over?

It's for a section they have called "*Muted Voices*."

I do happen to have something I can send.

The piece is called "Nighttime Bandit."

Disclaimer: The opinions in this article, in no way reflects or represents the opinions of Dupree Press and its subsidiaries.

NIGHTTIME BANDIT

A faint cry echoed in the dark.

The shadow loomed into the room.

Can't see, can't hide, can't get away.

The nighttime bandit has come to make me
pay. If only I were big, I'd run or fly away...

Your Fellow Traveler,
Buzi

Ding...Okay I sent it. Done.

Damn, where does this dark stuff come from?

There are sections of my childhood that I just don't remember. Am I trying to forget bad things that happened, or is everyone like this?

I feel like I'm pushing emotional splinters out, from deep within my body. Why has it become so important to me, to evaluate and dissect every part of my life?

When I was a little girl, I loved my family but wanted to escape from my dad's alcoholism and the fear connected to my mom's seizures.

Surely, there was a mistake at the hospital, and I belonged to a show biz household?

For years I held on to the belief that I was part of the Osmond family. Imagine, the Donny, Marie and Buzi show.

I wanted to sing, dance and act. A true triple threat. I don't know that I had the talent, but I do know that I strapped those tap shoes on anyway and went for glory.

The motto that I've loved for years is: **"Don't Quit Your Daydream."**

It's carried me into adulthood, and I've relied on it whenever I need inspiration.

It's so sad to me that we lose the sweet innocence we had in childhood, where we believed if we could dream it, we could be it.

As adults our dreams seem to be more aligned with love, security, success, and good health. Along the way we've gathered losses, triumphs, and practical lessons, but where are the sparkles?

The great equalizer is that not one of us comes to the table without baggage.

My favorite quote came from Ernest Hemingway, "**We're all broken, that's how the light gets in.**"

If we collectively understood, we're all part of this thing called humanity, maybe we would get along better. It wouldn't matter what age, color, creed, race, or gender we are.

However, I'm well-aware that those unfair distinctions and discriminations exist.

It takes a lot of strength to march through life and we're all a little scathed from our journey.

My Sister BJ gave me this beautiful, framed phrase and I love it. I'm not sure who the author is, but here it is:

The Devil whispered in my ear, "You're not strong enough to withstand the storm". Today I whispered in the Devil's ear, I am the storm."

This should be our battle cry. We all need to love more, fight for our rights harder, and stand together for the liberties that should make us one.

I for one, am tired of the lack of explanations and the nonsensical way people in power approach things.

Does anyone else feel like we're relegated to the land, where all there seems to be, are questions and cover-ups with no real answers?

I've always been told, there are mysteries in life and in faith, that we don't dare question. We just accept things and don't rock the boat.

I want to rock the boat! I want to stand up and rock the damn boat! I don't want to be told how to think or feel. My childhood was filled with that.

How do we know what our options are in life, if we don't question what implications result from those options?

In my understanding, faith can be a religious term, or a much broader word for what we believe in.

I've read that faith gives us strength: the inner resolve to withstand turmoil.

While I understand some of that, how do we just accept things at face value, and remain unaffected, or undamaged?

Is it not okay to question our maker when babies are sick, people deal with loss, poverty, and indescribable pain?

How many people do we know, that profess they are devoted Christians, yet they have done horrible things for self-gratification or to get ahead? Can we question that?

Whatever we call faith, whatever we believe in, I think it comes down to our thoughts, deeds, and actions.

I believe that no one is perfect and there's always room for self-improvement.

However, my faith is personal, and it is *mine* and *mine* alone to decide on.

The early years of my life we didn't have choices. We were told what to believe, and it was guided by ritual and fear.

My sister BJ and I were raised in the Catholic church. We studied and learned about our religion and the scheduled sacraments we were going to receive.

Our First Communion was one of those special days for us. It's the first time a person receives the Eucharist, or bread which signifies the body of Christ.

I was around seven years old and remember being excited yet a little terrified.

Decked out in a white dress, socks, and shoes, I stood shaking, patiently waiting for my turn to receive the host.

The host is a thin wafer that always stuck to the top of my mouth, and I was sure I committed a sin by preying it down with my tongue. We were told we could not touch it, so there's no way I could dig it out with my fingers.

Anyway, right as we were lining up waiting for the big moment, a little girl behind me, passed out.

Thankfully, she didn't get hurt but she did manage to throw up all over my legs, shoes, and socks.

I was covered in yellow, slimy bile and eggs. This seemed to set the tone for my religious indoctrination.

After you receive communion, you then are required to start going to confession. I thought it was scary.

You sit in a small wooden structure that has a little window that slides between you and the Priest. It was dark and I was always concerned that I wouldn't remember what I was supposed to say.

One of the Priests yelled at me to speak up and asked what was wrong with me? He said I sounded like a frog.

I was an unstable, broken little girl and his comment crushed me. From that moment on, confession became a punishment. I didn't see the value in it.

My friends and I always told the Priest that our sins were "disobeying our parents." What other sins do elementary aged kids have to share?

When we got older, not one of us said "my sins are that I got drunk, smoked dope and had sex."

The reason my outlook on those experiences is important to note, is because a couple of the parish Priests weren't shining examples of living by the word.

Our neighbors across the street, were personal friends with one of them. On many occasions we saw him stumble off their porch and fall-down drunk. The smell of liquor was usually on his breath.

Once when my dad was on death's door from his drinking, my mom called this particular Priest to give my dad last rites. We were all so scared he was going to die. The Priest refused to do it because he said my dad was an alcoholic.

Thankfully, my dad pulled through that episode. After that, my parents were done with the tithing and the Catholic Church. That familiar twenty-five-year union no longer existed.

One of our other beloved Priests left the church for a divorced woman that had four children. They had been having an affair and she was a parishioner there. From what we had heard, they got married and were very happy.

I understand why I'm messed up about religion, churches, and faith.

When your leaders are breaking the rules, it's hard to agree with the sanctity of it all.

My favorite thing about church was the stained-glass windows. They were so beautiful and heavenly. The other thing was the donuts.

Every Sunday after church we got a big box of delicious baked goods. That was our routine, and it was special.

I no longer practice Catholicism, but I do believe that it helped BJ and I to survive the turmoil in our home, when we were little.

For sure, I especially was a mess when we were in elementary school and the structure of the church aligned me a bit.

I do respect people that have solid values and practice their chosen way to worship.

Many of our friends are deeply religious and maintain their faith in different churches.

They are wonderful, decent people and I'm glad that they have their faith and religion to guide them.

We all have the right to explore theology and the need to have something to believe in.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Pushing the Boundaries

When Harry was 5 years old, he started being less than truthful about little things.

If you said, “Harry, who ate the cake? He’d say, “Daddy did, I saw him.”

Only, daddy wasn’t in town to eat the cake.

Then there were the times that you would say, “Harry, who colored on your bedroom walls?”

Harry would say, “Lilly did it. I told her not to, but she didn’t listen.”

Now this happened even when we caught him in the act of doing it and Stephen and I both were a little concerned.

We spoke with our pediatrician, and he said that kids at that age start pushing their boundaries.

They’re trying to see what they can get away with and it’s perfectly normal.

Harry did outgrow it and eventually became a champion for the truth. He even told on me.

I didn’t want him to tell people that mommy was hiding in the garage eating candy bars and reading romance novels.

Eventually life balanced out and I ate candy bars and read, wherever, whenever I wanted.

Even with the dysfunction Stephen and I have had in our relationship, we've tried to shield the kids from most of our strife. They've turned out to be wonderful human beings and both have a good sense of right and wrong.

Sure, we've had some turbulence and tears, but we always take the time to be silly, laugh and have fun!

I believe laughter is the best medicine of all and it just makes you feel happy. Our bodies release wonderful feel good, endorphins and that's so important in life.

That's what I feel like when I'm with Arturo. We laugh and have so much fun, and I think I'm going to invite him over for lunch. I miss him.

The minute I dial his number, I start to panic. Maybe I shouldn't push myself on him. What if he doesn't feel the same way I do?

Well, too late, he answers his phone. "Hello Buzi, nice to hear from you."

"Hey Arturo, I was wondering if you had any plans today or were going to eat?"

"I'm just doing stuff around the house. At some point I was planning on eating."

"Good, then plan on eating lunch at my house."

"That sounds great! What time?" he replies.

“How about noon?”

“That works. See you soon Buzi.”

There’s something so sexy about how he says my name.
Who new Buzi could sound so hot?

Arturo arrives right on time. He brought a bottle of wine. I made sandwiches, cut fruit up and thawed out a cherry cheesecake.

The radio is playing 50's music and it elevates the energy in the house.

Out of nowhere, Arturo grabs me, twirls me around and we dance like we're teenagers.

My body hasn't seen this much action in years.

After a few songs, we're both sweating, laughing and a little out of breath.

“You really are full of surprises. I didn't figure you would be a dancer, Arturo?”

“Why because I was in law enforcement? I'm really pretty fun and have some great moves.”

“I see that. I've been underestimating you. You've been holding out on me,” I gleefully reply.

“You haven't seen anything yet, baby.”

I'm sure he's right. Arturo is the kind of guy that looks strait-laced and proper, but there’s a party going on in that beautiful body.

It's so much fun, spending time with him and getting to know who he really is.

"I need some water Mister Music, how about you?"

"That would be nice," he says. "I better sit down too. I think I threw my hip out!"

We eat, share the bottle of wine, and play 500 Rummy.

Some little kisses happen, we laugh a lot and oh my God, I want this man. The sexual tension is something I haven't experienced in years.

Stephen's the only man I've been with, and I don't remember it feeling this way.

Maybe it's because we're older and more experienced now. I don't know.

I only know I'm madly attracted to him, and this feels wonderful.

The time passes so quickly and before I know it, it's time for him to go.

We stand in a tight embrace. Our parts are happily hugging.

One small, little kiss and he's off.

I think he's gonna make me work for it. But, oh my God will it be worth the wait.

I've never met a man that's so easy to be around. Everything is so wonderful with him.

I wonder how Stephen and I missed this step?

Maybe it's because we went from hello...straight to the bedroom. We were young but didn't take the time to develop a friendship before we started engaging in sexual activities.

Don't get me wrong, there was a time I loved having sex with Stephen. But at some point, it got to be routine. I guess we both quit wooing each other and of course our communication skills weren't good.

Well, then there was, the repeated affairs that fanned the flames for me.

Arturo and I have a healthy history. We've been friends for fifteen years and if this is a love match, it's going to be a lovely bonus.

The truth is, I'm not sure I could breathe if anything sexual develops between us. He's just so adorable!

I love spending time with him, and I think the time away from the kids has been good for all of us.

But being alone with my thoughts is forcing me to have that internal dialogue that seems to be sabotaging me yet once again.

Why do I question everything?

Maybe I am too uptight. The kids always tell me that I need to chill out. I should probably listen to them. There isn't a template for life, and we need to mix things up.

Sometimes life happens and it's not in the order you'd expect it to be. I need to be flexible and if it's messy then it is. It's okay to be spontaneous and break some routines.

The kids and I do that. One of our favorite things is called Mary Poppins dinner. We start with dessert and sometimes we don't even have a real dinner. Just sweet, yummy treats!

That wouldn't have happened when I was a kid. Dinnertime was hell. There was either fighting, or that uncomfortable silence that made your tummy turn over.

BJ didn't like our mom's cooking and she used to go, "Buzi, look out the window there's a dog." Every time I fell for it, and she'd slide her food on to my plate.

The parental units didn't see her do it and they were sticklers for eating everything in front of us.

To compound things, our mom cooked the life out of food per our dads' orders. He thought it would kill bacteria. There was no moisture in anything we ate. It was the consistency of shoe leather and made it tough to swallow.

I spent hours at that table.

Truth be known, I wish I would have thought of the old food switcheroo move first. It was brilliant!

BJ was thin, beautiful and I remember sitting there in my tight Brownie uniform. The buttons were starting to pop, and the belt cut into my skin.

I would cry because I was full.

My gag reflex would kick in, my eyes would tear up and I would get the hiccups. That's when I heard the old classic threat, "If you want something to cry about, I'll give you something to cry about."

BJ got paid back though. When she did something our mom didn't like, she'd get a wet dishrag flung in her face.

I'm sure I laughed inside just to see some redemption for me and my ever-growing Brownie belt.

I understand some of the reasons I have an unhealthy relationship with body image. BJ and I both do.

One year for Christmas I gave BJ a dozen new dishrags. It was symbolic for both of us. We laughed and it did soothe some of the issues from so long ago.

As I'm taking inventory of the life and times of Buzi Q. Jacobs, I realize how much emotionally we had to stuff inside of us.

You couldn't express how you felt. Sometimes there was so much frustration from not being heard that you wanted to scream and cuss.

We didn't cuss because we would have sucked down a bar of soap, or a wet dish rag.

I started saying the F-word when I was 29 years old. I'm pretty sure I was a late bloomer. It feels so *good* to say it with freedom, intent, and emotion.

However, I do try to control my choice of words in front of the kids. But...sometimes you get pushed to the limit and just have to say it.

One day, I was checking out at the grocery store and this woman literally pushed me back, stepped on my well-traveled toes and stood in front of me. My credit card was still sticking out of the payment machine.

I said what “what the fuck are you doing?”

The people behind me, started clapping. This woman was completely clueless or just rude.

At any rate, her behavior was inappropriate and not appreciated. What is wrong with people?

BJ used to have some unwarranted outbursts and came off insensitive and clueless.

Thankfully, we found out why and she got some answers. At the age of twenty-one she was diagnosed as having Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It explained a lot.

From the time we were little, she went from being manic and somewhat hyper, to being sad and depressed.

She used to say that she felt like a rubber band, but no one knew exactly what that meant.

When she was finally diagnosed, they started her on medication and intensive therapy. It came out that she had been molested by a babysitter’s husband when she was 6 years old.

This horrific, messed up assault, threw her life into chaos and a series of bad relationships.

BJ dated a real nice guy named Richard for many years. He put up with her mood swings and always maintained a supportive and loving attitude.

One day BJ came home from work, and he was wearing one of her dresses. He also was wearing makeup and somewhere he found a pair of size 13 heels.

Much to everyone's surprise she didn't lose it with him. She just started laughing, but not because she was making fun of him.

BJ told him he was prettier than she was, and it explained why she was always missing her underwear.

They broke up, but today they are still best friends.

Richard performs in a local cabaret, got married and has never been happier.

He found the peace, love, and self-acceptance that I'm so desperate to find. I'm also a *hopeless romantic* and want to find my twin flame. My soul-partner. My ride or die.

When I look at the patterns in my life, I've settled most of the time. It's my fault, but how sad is that?

In the beginning Stephen and I started out being equal. Quickly that changed and I realized I was just giving in a lot. I was young, optimistic and in love.

We decided to start our family, but it really didn't take long before Stephen showed how chauvinistic he is. He really doesn't respect women and it makes me sad for our daughter.

What messages is she getting from him? How do we expect to get anything different from our partners or ourselves, when we act out from what we've known?

Stephen's family appeared to be the Cleavers, but they weren't.

His dad had affairs from the beginning of his marriage and when Stephen was thirty, he found out that he had a half-sister.

Surprise! Look what your dad just brought home, a *sibling*!

His mom stayed with his dad, and it became a non-issue.

They didn't discuss it as if it was a normal thing. She took care of the house, kids and got an allowance. They had pork roast every Sunday and you could count on that routine.

His mom was over-weight and his father never said anything about it. However, he never made her feel pretty and had other women to satisfy him, so why would he?

Stephen has always said, "why do you wear shirts when we have sex, and why do the lights have to be off?"

Looking back, it must have been hard for him. It also could have been a turn off. He's a narcissist for sure, but I was on a diet most of our marriage and had self-image issues.

At one point I lost thirty pounds and felt great. Suddenly, Stephen started bringing me boxes of gourmet chocolates and wanted to feed me. It felt like he was sabotaging all my hard work.

Maybe this was just my insecurity talking, or maybe he wanted to keep me over-weight, so I'd feel less secure about myself and he'd have more control over me?

The stupid thing is that I was in shape and perfectly fine. It wasn't until twenty years later that the hormone and thyroid issues kicked in, and I realized my perception of self, has always been screwed up. I think it's a body dysmorphia.

I don't know, but right now I'm tired.

RING, RING, RING!

Who is calling me this late? I don't recognize the number.

"Hello," I say in a less than friendly manner.

"Hi Buzi, this is Emily. I got your number from Lilly. She told me that you know about the engagement. I'm sorry to call so late."

"Emily...are Harry and Lilly, okay?"

"They're fine, Buzi. We're having a fun time. This is kind of awkward. I know we haven't seen each other in years. Umm, I'm reaching out because Stephen is sick. I know he'd be mad at me for calling but, he's been losing a lot of weight and hair. He's also been getting bad headaches. It's happened so fast."

"I've noticed some changes in him as well," I say.

"Buzi, I've been a nurse for years and he doesn't look good."

"Emily, has he gone to the doctor?" I ask.

“No. I’m sure you know how stubborn he is. I’m not sure what to do and I know the kids have noticed the changes.”

“I can tell you that he got a bad concussion in high school, and he's had headaches since then. His mom said he had a brain injury”

“Oh my gosh Buzi, that's awful. I know he needs to go in.”

“You just need to insist that he goes, Emily.”

“I'll try,” she says. He's pretty set in his ways.”

“Yes, he is. But just keep pushing him. And I want you to know I'm fine with you and Stephen being together.”

“I appreciate that Buzi. Life sure changes as we get older. I never thought I'd be divorced after three kids and twenty-three years together.”

“I didn't think Stephen and I would be here either,” I say.

It’s so strange that the future Mrs. Stephen Rayburn, is calling me for advice and that we're talking like old friends. I guess that's because we are. She has no idea what she’s in for. Stephen does what Stephen wants.

My only vested interest in this rodeo is that he’s my kid’s father and they need him. No, that's not entirely true. I don't want Stephen to hurt Emily either.

“Buzi, I know this is probably too much to share, but--- I’m pregnant and I haven’t told him yet. I’m afraid it might be too much for him to handle right now.”

“Pregnant? *Wow*. That's a surprise,” I say falling out of my slippers.

“Trust me, I’m shocked,” she says. “At the age of forty-four this is a change of life baby. I have three grown children and wasn’t planning on having any more.”

“Look Emily, I’m gonna give you some advice. Be honest with him and make him accountable. It took both of you to make this baby.”

“Thank you Buzi. I need to go. I hear Stephen coming. I appreciate you talking to me.”

“Take care Emily and congratulations on the engagement and the baby. Bye.”

What the hell! Do I look like Dr. Phil?

Stephen is going to lose his mind and I hope the kids will be okay with the news.

Ding...Darby just sent me a text. She wants me to write something about Daydreams and Goal Making.

I don't know if I can do this right now.

So much went into our relationship and so much didn’t work.

Am I qualified to give advice on goals and daydreams when I've managed to mess many of mine up?

Maybe some wine will give me the liquid courage to digest what Emily just told me and to get this piece written.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Don't Quit Your Daydream

DISCLAIMER: The opinions in this article, in no way reflects or represents the opinions of Dupree Press or its subsidiaries.

It seems to me goals and daydreams don't always intersect.

We start out optimistic and believe the hype, that we can be whatever we want to be.

But real life and adulthood seems to get in the way.

The question then becomes is it realistic to think we can have it all?

Is it a myth especially for women, or does it equally apply to men?

My friend Marty is a brilliant self-made man.

He knew from an early age that he wanted to be financially independent and start his own real estate firm.

He accomplished his goal and runs a successful and solvent business.

The other day he told me the greatest regret he has, is that he didn't have children.

His wife left him two years after they got married because every waking moment was dedicated to his company.

Now, he feels he's too old and missed that moment to have a family.

So, that is from a male perspective.

I may as well include myself in this equation.

I'm only speaking for myself and in no way represent all women.

Early on in my marriage, my identity was defined by my husband.

His career was the priority and the money I made was used for travel.

I know how lucky we were.

We also wanted to have kids and once that happened my journalism days were over.

While I was glad to be home raising our kids, it became clear that my job was to take care of our home and the children.

I smiled, joined the PTA and was part of the carpool group.

The outside world thought that our family was successful and together.

What a smoke screen that was and I need to be honest.

Our marriage was broken by infidelity, which we've both been very open about.

For years I kept the indiscretions a secret and carried on like any dutiful wife and mother might do.

But I know there's more that went into us not working.

There's a whole big piece of it that I'm responsible for.

As time progressed, I had self-esteem and health issues. Throw in hormonal changes, getting older, a rogue thyroid and I was lost.

My daydreams and goals existed in a small corner of my subconscious mind.

I'm here to tell you, **"Don't Quit Your Daydream."** They've carried us from childhood to adulthood and served us

well.

For every little boy or girl that said they “wanted to be a fireman, policeman, teacher, or a *writer*,” when they grow up, I’ll show you a roster of men and women that accomplished it. For every mom or dad that wanted and were able to stay home and raise their kids, I’ll raise a toast to them.

Then there’s the parents that pull double duty and work outside of the home, as well as taking care of that home and that family. There’s a population of single parents that manage to take care of all that and have careers and goals.

Speaking for myself, I don’t know that we can have it all.

What I do know, is that anything worth having, takes a lot of work.

In my opinion self-love and giving ourselves credit for doing a job well done is so important.

Let it nurture your daydreams and elevate your success to the highest level.

Your Fellow Traveler,

Buzi

Ding... Well, okay that’s done but as I push the send button, it really hits me what a fraud I’ve been. I talk a good game, but do I apply the rhetoric I fill the pages with?

I’ve been so angry with Stephen, and myself, that I present as a victim.

The many things that have happened in my life are just part of my story. We all have one and it's about how we choose to handle our life script, that defines us.

It's how we treat others and the dignity of our character that represents us.

I have a lot of thinking to do and more time without the kids to do it in. I'm really going to appreciate the space. It's not necessary that I always figure things out for everyone else.

Their dad is just as capable as I am, and I need to let him parent them.

Writing these articles is therapeutic for me. I feel a shift and as this new morning reveals itself, my attitude is changing.

I grab the scale I've been chained to and smash it to pieces with a hammer.

No longer will I be defined by the number on it. I've isolated myself for many years and drowned myself with excuses because of it.

Life is hard and then it gets harder. Not just for me, but for everyone.

I need to socialize, and I need to reconnect with people I truly care about.

If I've come off unapproachable or seem like I don't care, that makes me feel bad.

My intentions have never been to live a substandard, hermit like life.

Hopefully, I wasn't rude to Emily, and we can be cordial. Maybe even more than that. I really like her and do appreciate that she called me. That must have been hard.

I can see I missed a text from Arturo, while I was speaking with her.

His message is so sweet. "I'm just checking in on you. If you want and when you're not busy, call me."

Should I call him right back and invite him over, or am I being too eager?

Arturo truly is my friend. We've known each other for years and he loves the kids just like they love him.

I can't be afraid of how he may or may not feel about me.

I'm aware that my warped sense of self is affecting my choices and relationships. I don't want to blow it with Arturo.

Here goes, I'm calling him back, and I feel giddy like a schoolgirl.

He answers with, "Hey Buzi, I'm so happy to hear from you."

With a lump in my throat, I say, "hi, Arturo, how are you doing?"

"Real good, no complaints," he replies.

"I've been so busy with work. I'm sorry that I missed your text."

"No problem at all Buzi, I understand."

“Hey, do you want to come over for dinner or we could go do something?” I hopefully say.

“Thank you for the invitation, Buzi, but I can’t tonight.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I’m coming on too strong, Arturo.”

“No, you’re not! I would love to get together, but I have other plans that I just can’t change.”

“Well. Okay, have fun. Bye.” Click. I hang up.

What is wrong with me? I abruptly ended the conversation, after putting him on the spot. I don’t blame him for not wanting to get together.

Maybe I’ll eat my always handy, stash of dark chocolate and go to bed, because that’s how I learned to soothe myself.

As I take the first bite, I feel sick to my stomach. This is part of my dysfunctional pattern and ritualistic response to self-soothing.

Chocolate never paid a bill for me or healed my relationships and it certainly never cuddled with me or told me it loved me.

I know I can’t do this anymore today. My mission of self-discovery, on top of Emily and Stephens news has been too much.

My insecurities have wiped me out and it’s lights out for me.

After a few hours of sleep, I wake up in a cold sweat.

I had a dream that I was walking through a field filled with piles of feces and obstacles everywhere. My kids were on the other side crying, but I couldn't get to them.

This is nuts. I do need to see a therapist. I think this must be how I view my life. It's a shit show.

Do other people dream about this stuff? That dream really shook me up and is disturbing on so many levels.

Now, I need to get something for a headache.

As I walk into the kitchen, I see someone on my front porch. I stand paralyzed and I don't know where I put the phone.

My heart is beating out of my chest. What if they're trying to break in? The shadow then backs away from the porch. I get the courage to look through the peephole.

It's Arturo, walking away. What the heck is he doing?

I open the door just as he gets into his car and drives off. There's a beautiful bouquet of roses with a note attached.

Buzi,

I would have loved to see you, but I chaired a fundraiser for the Boys and Girls Club. Hope to see you soon!

Your Friend

Arturo

As his car lights find their way down the street, I have a decision to make. If this wonderful man wants to be part of my life and the kids, we would be so lucky.

I know that I deserve to be happy, and I wouldn't be settling just to have a relationship. You couldn't find a more decent human being.

The kids love him, and so do I. This is a no brainer. I need to quit sabotaging our potential with all my insecurities.

The smell of these beautiful flowers fills the air, and at this moment, I feel happy and hopeful.

Maybe I'm starting to connect the emotional dots that have weighed me down for so long?

Ding...Dupree Press just sent me a text about another piece.

Man, I've been writing more than I anticipated. But I guess it's one of those be careful what you ask for things, because they're doing me a favor. I need to make money. I can work from anywhere and this is what I went to school for.

They want me to write a piece called "What is Happiness?" I'm wide awake so I'll start on it.

First, I need to send a text to Arturo.

Arturo,

The flowers are beautiful! Thank you for being you.

Talk soon. Buzi

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

What is Happiness?

DISCLAIMER: The opinions in this article, in no way reflects or represents the opinions of Dupree Press or its subsidiaries.

What is happiness?

This seems like a broad and subjective question?

Happiness means something different to each of us.

For me it's a feeling.

I'm happy to greet each morning.

I'm happy when the world seems like it's in balance,
and family and friends are healthy, hopeful and joyful.

When I watch the news and something wonderful has happened
to someone...I feel happy.

I'm even happy when someone else wins Publishers Clearing
House.

Part of happiness is acknowledging the blessings bestowed upon
us.

Happiness to me, is waking up each day with gratitude.

Your fellow traveler,

Buzi

Ding...I'll send this one off to Darby. The one thing I love about Dupree Press is that they have a smaller online venue, and it reaches a specific audience.

They're known for their editorials and don't censor, discriminate or ignore the many voices and opinions out there that represent the people.

Ding...Oh, it's a message from Arturo.

Buzi,

You are welcome! Beautiful flowers for a beautiful woman.

Your boyfriend,

Arturo

God, I love this man!

He said boyfriend and I'm feeling things I haven't felt in years.

It's almost like, my body is waking up from a very long and deep hibernation. I want to hang on to this feeling.

This girl is having lewd and lovely thoughts about him.

I don't want to quit this daydream. It's mine, it's healthy and it's real.

The night passes quickly, and I can't wait to see him again.

It's so nice to feel wanted and to know that I have a special friend. Someone who cares about me, and I care about them.

This morning, birds are singing, nature is doing its thing, and a beautiful day awaits me. I need to get to the store.

I'm going to put energy out to the universe that I get to see Arturo today.

I want to be prepared just in case. I'll get wine, cheeses, olives, breads and yes chocolate.

As I walk into the store, I see an older homeless lady being bullied and pushed into a cart.

This pig of a man intentionally spits on her and starts laughing.

The look on her face is so sad that it brings me to tears.

I help her up and tell the man what a moron he is.

Obviously, he doesn't care, but it makes me angry how vile people can be.

The lady stands there quietly wiping her face and I tell her how sorry I am that he did that to her.

The truth is, I can hardly contain myself.

Tears are flowing from my soul. I'm crying for her and anyone else that has been abused by reckless deeds or unkind words.

Her response was from the purest part of ones heart and it amazes me.

She said, “I understand him. He must be in worse shape and hurting more than I am.”

I was taken aback by what she said and asked her how she could have such compassion for such an awful person?

She said, “Because, I used to be him.”

I hugged her and gave her fifty dollars and said, “thank you.”

She said, “thank you, for what?”

I reply, “because your ability to forgive has just taught me a valuable lesson. God bless you.”

I walked into the store a bit numb.

Forgiveness is such a necessary part of living and it’s impossible to live a happy life if it’s full of hatred and judgement.

When I walked out of the store, the wise and wonderful soul that I met was gone.

I’m so grateful that she crossed my path.

As I’m loading my groceries into my car, I hear my name. It’s Arturo.

Oh my God, it's kismet!

I feel like a high school girl on a first date.

The sound of his voice melts through any residual doubt in my mind.

We have a chance at a beautiful, loving relationship and I'm going for it.

As I turn around in my *mind*, I hear the song "When a Man Loves a Woman."

We run towards each other and every inch of his beautiful, muscular, bronzed body, glistens in the sun. I jump into his arms and almost knock him down.

We start laughing and I get loud, unrestrained *hiccups*.

What is wrong with me? I manage to screw up so many important moments.

"Buzi, you're one of a kind, girl. I love that about you."

Oh my gosh, did he just put the love word in that sentence?

OH NO. Another hiccup!

I guess it's better he sees what he's getting into sooner than later. I'm sure glad he has a sense of humor.

"Do you have plans for tonight, he says?"

"Hopefully," I said with a big smile. *Hiccup. Hiccup. Hiccup.* Oh, excuse me.

Arturo, says, "no problem. Are you up for a rematch? You kicked my butt in Rummy last time?"

"You're on mister. I picked up all sorts of goodies, just hoping I'd happen to see you. Why don't you come to my house about seven p.m.?"

“I’ll see you then,” he says. “Can I bring anything? Pepto Bismol, Tums, sugar water?”

I playfully hit his shoulder, “Nice. Just your sweet self and an appetite.”

He's a smart ass in the cutest way! I rush home, clean the house, and shower up. Tonight, I'm going to smell good and be up for anything. A girl can always hope!

Everything is ready when I get a call from Stephen.

“Hi Buzi, really quickly, I just wanted to thank you.”

“For what, I reply?”

“Emily told me that she called you and you gave her some good advice. You know me better than anyone.”

“Umm well okay... did you make a doctor’s appointment?”
“No, but we went to the ER last night and they did blood work. I have a thyroid problem. Mine is hyper and that’s why I’ve lost so much weight.”

“Well, it’s good you got some answers and can prepare for some big changes in your life. I understand congratulations is in order, daddy.”

“Emily actually found out she's not pregnant.” “My gosh, I’m sorry to hear that. What happened?”

“They think it was a false positive on the pregnancy tests. There is no baby. We both didn’t want more kids though. God they’re a lot of work.”

“So, you just figured that out, huh?”

“The kids turned out great because of you, Buzi. I admit that. My new therapist will be happy to hear I told you that.”

“I’m impressed you’re in therapy. You never thought it was important when we were doing it.”

“My way isn’t working for me. I didn’t know what I had, until I lost it.”

“Now you know, so don’t blow it mister. Emily is a lovely person and the kids like her a lot. I think she’s good for you.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to try it again, Buzi?”

“Not on your life, buddy.”

He laughs, and this is nice, but I need to get off the phone because Arturo will be here soon.

“Stephen, I need to go. I have a date. Take care. Bye.”

The doorbell rings and my legs start trembling. I have it so bad for him.

As I answer the door, Arturo hands me a cherry pie, a can of gourmet artisan coffee, and a kiss on the cheek.

Playfully I say, “yum! Let’s skip dinner and go for dessert.”

He kisses me on the other cheek and says, “I’m up for it if you are.”

As you can imagine, I’m telling myself, behave Buzi girl. Get your mind out of the gutter.

“Cherry pie. How'd you know it was my favorite?” I ask.

“Years ago, your kids told me, and I remembered you were drinking wine, and eating Cherry Pop Tarts one night.”

“Wow. Thank you. How thoughtful.

He smells so good and everything about him is so attractive.

As I put the pie and coffee down, he pulls me toward him and gives me a huge hug. I know for sure he's teasing me.

The buildup or prelude, to whatever happens is going to be worth it, because my body wants to play.

He gently kisses my lips, and it feels so right. I haven't been with another man, since Stephen and I got together in high school.

The remarkable thing is, now I have something to compare it to.

I'll take the more mature, grown up love any day of the week.

I'm okay with that because we're moving along, slow yet steady.

Fast forward...

We eat, drink, have the best conversation and I beat him at Rummy again.

The amazing thing is that I'm comfortable being around him. I feel confident in who I am as a person. It doesn't matter to him that I'm curvy. How refreshing is that?

As the night comes to an end, we share a passionate kiss. It was real; it was loving, and we both wanted more.

However, we didn't take it to the next level. We both agreed to nurture this relationship and take it slow.

Now, had I been a bit younger, this night would probably have ended up much different.

Buzi Q. Jacobs is growing up. I want the next chapter of my life to be written well, and to stand the test of time.

Arturo is my daydream, nightdream and anytime between dream. He's the real deal and this relationship needs to be nurtured and respected.

Ding...

Just as he leaves, I close the door and Darby sends me another assignment. The subject for this one is, "Forgiveness."

How ironic is it, that the homeless lady gave me such a valuable perspective on this very topic?

That encounter even encouraged me to speak to Stephen with a kind and listening ear. Things work better when we are nicer to each other.

I do believe Stephen is trying too, and he does feel sorry for the choices he made.

For the record, I'm glad he's in therapy. It sounds like he may have a loving, loyal, and devoted relationship with Emily. I hope it works out.

I'm going to start working on this article now, because I'm in a happy, positive place after spending time with Arturo.

While I know my articles certainly aren't high caliber journalism, I hope they come off as being human and people can relate to my journey.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Power of Forgiveness

DISCLAIMER: The opinions in this article, in no way reflects or represents the opinions of Dupree Press and its subsidiaries.

Today, I had the gift of speaking with an inspirational, wise, forgiving, and compassionate woman.

Being homeless was part of her story but it didn't define her.

She'll never know what she's given to me.

An ignorant, vile man spit on her and then laughed in a cruel, demeaning manner.

I yelled at him, seemingly more outraged than she was.

As she quietly wiped the spit from her face, I asked her how she could possibly be so calm about it.

She simply replied, "I used to be him. He must be in worse shape and hurting more than I am."

It got me to reflect on all the anger I've held onto in my life.

There are wrongs that I've felt needed to be righted.

But the anger and hostility doesn't serve me well.

It takes away from the ability and the power I have, to forgive and extend kindness and compassion.

Forgiveness illuminates the light we possess, and that light is necessary in healing our world.

As I come to terms with the roads I've traveled and the flaws I
have, I'm grateful to be me.
I do have the ability to love, to experience the responsibilities of
life and to forgive.
That makes me in charge of my destiny.
No longer wanting to live with regret, I forgive my past and
honor my future.
I am the captain of my ship.

Your Fellow Traveler,
Buzi

*Ding...*Sent. Another piece under my belt.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Reflection

Months have now gone by and there's been some resolution in my life.

I'm processing my story by confronting and slaying those darn dragons.

Sometimes we can't understand where we have been and where we are going, until we lay our history out and find out what the patterns are.

I can see that my self-esteem issues are symptomatic of that little girl who learned to self soothe, in an unhealthy way.

My relationships have been based on what I thought I deserved, rather than what I wanted.

When I got some perspective, I recognized that I settled or compromised most of my life. I turned my individual power over.

I heard the tapes repeatedly in my head that someone else wrote.

Write your own dialogue. Be the author of your life.

Don't be afraid to love yourself and to be loved.

Guess what? Fairytales do come true.

Don't Quit Your Daydream!

I married mine!

P.S.

*I've reclaimed my power as a woman. Never again will I love out of need, but desire.

*BJ went on to form a band called BJ and the Bandits and performs in Las Vegas.

*Stephen and I are doing great! He's one of my best friends and we harmoniously coexist as parents, thanks to Emily and Arturo.

*The kids are driving us crazy, just like everyone else's.

*As a wedding present Arturo gave me a two-year old Basset Hound named Carly. We got her from an animal shelter and love her dearly. He's the best dad ever!

*Dupree Press has hired me as a staff writer and I write the section called, *Muted Voices*. Ding!

*Oh, and one more thing. Crazy Sonya ran away with a tuba player. Go Figure.

Stay tuned!

"You've always had the power my dear, you just had to learn it for yourself."

-Wizard of Oz

A FINAL THOUGHT

This is a fictional book, woven with truths, but guided by imagination.

This story belongs to many people.

It's not meant to be a diagnostic tool or a therapeutic aid in self-discovery.

Abuse in any shape or form, is not okay.

For all the voices out there that haven't been heard, or are silenced by fear, know that you mean something.

The sum of our stories makes us more alike than different.

May all hearts unite in the healing power of...love.

Namaste.

Your Fellow traveler,

S. L. Peterson

"Don't Quit Your Daydream.
There is no glass ceiling.
The sky's the limit! "

Writers write...Writers write...Writers write...Writers write...