

Love. Move. Rize. in 2025.

“LOVE: The Roommate”

By Karen A. Sparks

DAY 4 Residential Therapy: *May 24, 2018. 935 days since my R&G left this earth forever.*

I'd never counted the days R&G when they were with me— why?

On October 30, 2015, they belted out worship songs from the backseat on the way to school. Before they got out of the car at the drop-off point, with hugs and kisses, we said our "I love you's." Rea laughed and did goofy poses, showing off her Halloween sticker-covered Converse she had worked on the night before. Grant put on his backpack and adjusted his TCU hat with a smile, after I kissed him. I told them I'd see them on Saturday at their game and pick them up on Sunday. Rea reminded me she had written it on her dry-erase board calendar in Mimi's kitchen. They walked into the elementary school and I never saw them alive again. That was the last day I told them I loved them.

By May of 2018, I'd been on my own in my studio apartment for just over a year, and it proved too much freedom for me. I'd lost all sense of hope and purpose. The pain, grief, guilt, and zero love I felt for myself had spiraled into a suicide attempt. I thought I was strong enough to move forward without therapy or programs designed to give me tools to heal, but I couldn't do it any longer. I fought with my parents and sister when they told me they loved me and had arranged for me to go to a highly recommended residential therapy program in Tennessee.

“How can you love me, how can anyone love me? I don't have anywhere to put the love I have for my children because they're never coming back! I stood over two graves and watched them lowered six feet under. It's all my fault! I'm not crazy, I'm a mom grieving her children. Now, you're uprooting me and sending me away-- I told you I was willing to go to therapy, but long-term in another state? What?”

My dad drove me eleven hours to the “residential treatment facility.” We hardly spoke the entire way, as 18-wheelers rushed past us. This was uncharacteristic of our relationship. I frantically texted, called friends for their addresses, and wrote them in a notebook because we couldn't use cell phones once we checked in. Fear overwhelmed me --was I going into "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest"?

Once we arrived, all I could muster when he hugged me goodbye was, "I'm sorry, and I love you." That was the *only* thing I could think to say to the man who held me on his shoulders as a child and who held me while I buried my only two children and his only grandchildren?

"God's got you, my darlin'," Dad whispered as he released me and drove away.

Four days into my 90-day residential therapy stay, and this place was nothing like I pictured. The rolling hills that surrounded us were tranquil and the farmhouse style facility was comforting. I was slowly adjusting to the "daily routine" and had even come to appreciate it. No roommate had been assigned to me yet. I was grateful to have a room to myself to grieve and adjust on my own terms.

Our rooms had two full-size beds, a nightstand in between, and shared bathrooms with the neighboring suite. I'd decorated my side with photos and letters from loved ones. The routine brought structure and purpose to my days and I was starting to relax. Every morning, I read some verses in my Bible and would go for a run in the woods before breakfast. Then on to therapy sessions, lunch, group sessions, dinner, and hanging out with the other residents. Cell phones were locked away in the main office, and there was no internet. During our free time, we watched movies, played competitive card and board games, read books, and spent time outside. Most afternoons I spent journaling and "doing the work." I still hadn't called my parents on the main cabin phone because I had to wait five days before any contact. I was looking forward to sharing with them that I was starting to see that this place may be good for me. "My room, my own space," was a good thing this time.

That evening, Glenn, a resident rep, met me in the main cabin to let me know my roommate had arrived and would be coming to our room any minute.

My heart raced and my stomach dropped. I'd been dreading this day.

"Her name's Amy," he said.

About that time I heard grumblings coming from the commons area. I turned around and there she was. I immediately knew. It's that gut feeling we all get. This was my roommate. A woman with disheveled hair, wearing black Ugg boots and what I think were her pajamas, was leaning over the coffee bar. I could tell from the wrappers in her hand, she was eating Starburst candy.

Sharon, along with a few other residents, was sitting at the table leaning back in her chair with her arms crossed, judging the woman. When a new person arrived, the

residents couldn't wait to hear the who, what, where, when, why— of which I was subjected to on my day one.

Okay, let's get this over with— I approached her slowly and introduced myself.

"Hi, I'm Karen. I think we're gonna be roommates."

She turned around and laughed a little through her nose.

A pack of Marlboro Lights fell out of her pocket.

I picked them up and handed them to her.

She looked me over with one eye closed, dug into her pocket, frowned sarcastically, handed me her empty candy wrappers, and quipped, "I've been told I'm a b****."

"Awesome, we'll get along great," I countered.

She watched me sift through the wrappers, "Not even one left for me?"

"This go-round's gonna be a doozy," she said, staggering down the hallway behind Glenn heading straight for my room.

"Wait...is she drunk?" asked one of the residents.

Sharon walked over, put her hand on my shoulder, "Yep, I saw her come in. She didn't even have luggage with her. I recognize that kind of drunk — this isn't her first rodeo. You can sleep in my room tonight if you're scared. I pay for the private room with a lock on the door."

I was still a bit shaken up. My anger and defense mechanisms had kicked in and I tried to show Amy I was strong enough to take her on. But, *I wasn't here for that!* I wanted to be alone in my room, stay in my routine, do the work, and *figure out how to stay alive*.

I remained in the commons area and talked with Sharon and Emily until it was time for "light's out". At 10:30 pm, I walked to my room with dread.

Thankfully, Amy was passed out on her bed with her hand tucked in a paperback romance novel. My motherly instincts kicked in and I gently removed the book, used a candy wrapper as a placeholder, and put the book on her side of the nightstand.

Then it hit me— this was the first time I had a roommate since Rea and Grant passed. We shared a room at my Mom and Dad's for twelve days after I filed for divorce and

left David. "Mimi and Pop" bought them bunk beds, and they shared the top bunk. It was going to be a new life for the three of us. We were going to be free of the monster.

I broke down and went into the bathroom, closed the door, and tried to cry silently, but I couldn't keep it in. I was shaking and prayed for I don't know how long.

"What am I doing here? I don't know if I can live with this complete stranger. I can't take this on, it's too much. How is this going to help me? I miss my kids. Jesus, please help."

I sat on my bed and held R&G's picture. I whispered to them that I was so sorry I couldn't save them, but that I was here to make them proud and I'm one day closer to seeing them in heaven. I kissed their picture and put it down. I cried into my pillow and I fell into a deep sleep.

That morning I woke up and reached for my glasses. Amy's bed was half-made. There were candy wrappers on the floor. Her book and cigarettes were gone and on my side of the nightstand next to R&G's picture was a pink Starburst.

Amy taught me how to "just be." She didn't overdo anything, she was just there, listening. She would read her books in our room while I would journal. And other times, she'd read and smoke outside, while taking in everything. There was such deep-seated pain and trauma in her life that she tried to cover up with her addiction. In and out of residential therapy programs, she'd gained wisdom. She did the work and you didn't cross her! Amy revealed herself to be a fierce protector of those in pain.

She was a sleepwalker who ate candy through the night. During my sleepless nights, I'd pick up her trash and guide her back to bed. Our friendship grew in love, marked by mutual respect for one another's space to heal with plenty of sarcastic jabs, tears, and laughter. God knew that we would be the perfect fit for that season in our lives.

When she left 45 days later, I was scared. I still had a many days ahead. Amy had been with me from the beginning of my healing journey and was a vital part of all the love I received from the people I'd met, other residents, therapists, staff, cooks, housekeepers, and groundskeepers.

On the day she left, she told me that when it was my turn to walk out of this place, the world would "slap me in the face." So, I need to take the time to love myself enough to continue doing the work, forgive myself, and find healing one step at a time. Amy told me she was ready to continue her healing path from home. She said her door was always open – and reminded me she would make time to listen over a cup of coffee while reading a trashy romance novel.

Journal Entry: No candy wrappers on the floor. My heart aches, but I know I'm loved, and I have hope.

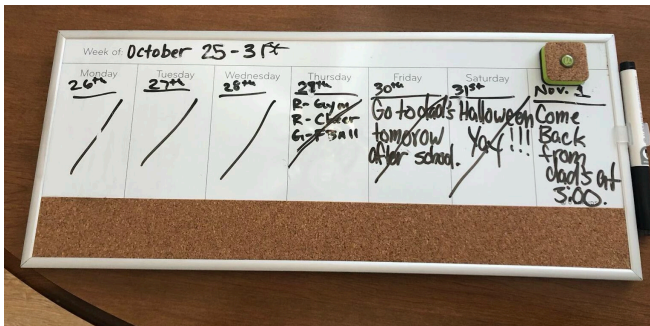
Proverbs 17:17 says, "A true friend loves at all times." I've been blessed with many true friends, and Amy, in her unique way and with her beautiful, bold heart, loved me through the beginning of my healing journey and she remains one of my dearest and most treasured friends to this day.

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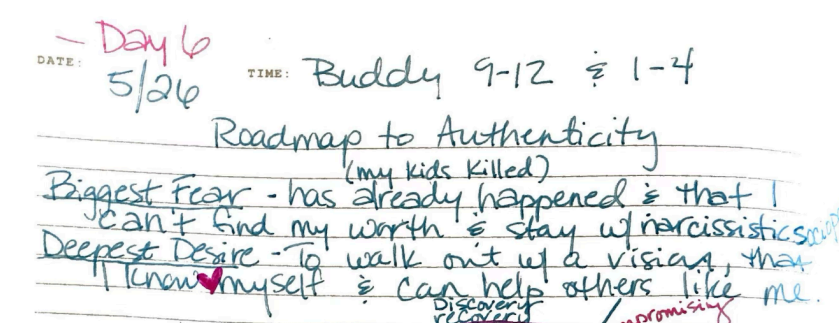
Me visiting Amy in 2023.



Reagan's calendar October 2015.



My journal entry in residential therapy DAY 6 in 2018.



LOVE HEALS. It can be easy. It can be simple. Sometimes, it's enough to "just be," with someone. Other times, we need to cheer one another on. Express it. Share it. That's why we exist – God created us to be love. Love can be painful, it'll break your heart every which way, but it is a force that can heal. I learned to love myself when I realized Jesus loved me. Without the incredible love of family, friends, and community, I would not be here today.

During residential therapy, God gave me the vision for The Great Root Movement and purposed in me to help others find hope, healing and purpose. Today, we're expanding!

You can be the LOVE -

Radical generosity awakens something profound in all of us. When someone feels lost and overwhelmed in darkness, you can be the reminder that there is a path forward even when it seems impossible. That's love—we are rooted in love, and there is immense joy in helping others find hope and purpose. God's love, mercy, grace, family, friends, and community saved me. The Great Root Movement's mission is to provide resources for hope, healing, and purpose.

We have just launched our **Love. Move. Rize. in 2025** fundraising campaign with a goal of **\$10,000**, and we need your support to achieve it.

You can be a source of blessings for others! Every dollar counts, and no amount is too small. Thanks to the generosity of TGRM partners, we have expanded our resource network, reached over 250 women, and provided multiple RIZE Scholarships for bereaved mothers, domestic abuse survivors, and others in need of help to attend restorative & therapeutic programs, therapy, and support groups. In the past few weeks alone, twelve women have reached out to us.

Additionally, TGRM has awarded over 100 high school scholarships through our Reagan and Grant Small Endowed Memorial and TGRM Scholarships.

Our fundraising campaign runs from March 5th to March 26th.

Together, we can reach our goal and increase our resources for those asking us for help. Let's continue to awaken and foster LOVE and hope in the lives of others!

Scan our QR Code to give.



Share or give via our fundraising link: <https://givebutter.com/TGRMLMR25>

Thank you!

Love. Move. Rize.,

Karen A. Sparks

President, [The Great Root Movement 501\(c\)3 Nonprofit](#)

Race Director, [Love Never Ends Trail Series](#)