

Chapter 8: Road Trip to California

July--August 2019

My lover lives inside the wall,
The one that's pale green.
My lover is as little as
An orange tangerine.

My lover likes to play with me
On days I never find.
My lover's love's impossible
But I love him in my mind.

I've been back in Mesa for about a month when Jewel phones me and suggests that we send a tape to the Dr. Jill TV show to see if she'll invite us on her program in LA. Psychologist Dr. Jill Barnett's daily show reaches a nationwide audience and I've been a fan of hers since my release from prison. My aunt got me hooked on the daytime series which airs just before All My Children. Unlike Dr. Roz in NYC who talks about a variety of topics, Dr. Jill's focus is on psychological issues among family members, in relationships or between friends or even co-workers. Her specialty is resolving issues of anger and resentment. What makes her program interesting are the emotional outbursts from her guests.

At first, I reject the idea because I'm generally opposed to psychologists and psychiatrists. For me, they impose degrading labels on patients who don't know any better than to internalizing those labels without understanding alternative and healthier ways to view themselves. It's all part of what I'm trying to say in my books and in my letters to women on death row. "Dr. Jill isn't Oprah's book club," I argue with Jewel as we video chat. "Why would she want to talk with me? With us?"

"Doesn't matter what we discuss," Jewel presses the issue. "Look, Aunt Lu. Both you and I have a beef with Tracy. You as her sister, me as the biological daughter she gave up. I

believe our stories would make a good episode on Dr. Jill and we're going to bookstores in LA anyway. It's a win win situation and if Tracy comes around and appears with us on the show, it'll be a slam dunk!"

"True, but I somehow doubt my sister will agree to appear on Dr. Jill in order for us to confront her. I've already made up my mind that I want nothing to do with her, ever. And it was obvious to me, when I stayed with her on the Oregon coast, that she never really wanted anything to do with me either. To Tracy, I'm just a bipolar ex-con murderer! Maybe she's afraid I'll kill her." My irony makes Jewel chuckle.

"Still," Jewel persists. "An appearance on Dr. Jill will give you scads of publicity for your books and for our foundation, if Dr. Jill agrees."

"I know, Jewel Anne. But what will you say to Tracy? Gee mommy dearest, why'd you give me away and why do you reject me now? Because I'm queer?"

"Just like you, Aunt Lu," Jewel jokes, making me laugh. Of course, Jewel is teasing me, just as I often tease her. We are that close. I can joke about her lifestyle, which I appreciate and respect to the moon, and she can joke about my past without fearing she will hurt my feelings or insult me. Because we never joke in any kind of mocking way because we love and trust each other implicitly.

"Seriously," Jewel continues. "I would like to see if Tracy will even agree to meeting us and if she does, whether she can really face the reality of who I am. A woman, her daughter, who is in love with another woman. If she can't accept my wife, well then, she can't accept my life. Let her say so on Dr. Jill. And if she is so ashamed of you, her little sister, even now, after all you've achieved since your release from death row and all the obstacles you've overcome along

the way, let her have the opportunity to directly tell you that you're a mentally impaired murderer!"

In the end I agree to the project and the girls come down to Mesa and we make a tape of our saga concerning Tracy Mahoney. Within a week of sending off the tape, the producers of Dr. Jill invite us to appear on the show if Tracy agrees to appear, at least via Zoom. They promise to give me time to mention my books and my charitable work of helping women on death row find mental clarity. From my social media posts about my trip to Tracy's beach house, the producers know all about my rift with my sister and suggest that Dr. Jill Barnet will help me and Tracy find some common ground for reconciliation.

To my astonishment, the producers later phone with the news that Tracy has agreed to meet us on the show but Jewel and I don't make any arrangements to meet with her outside the studio. We are estranged, after all, and I really don't want to see her in person anyway and I highly doubt that Dr. Jill will cure my sister of her flaws. Or me if it's me who has them. But I could be wrong. If I believe there's hope for death row women, and if I found my own redemption in life, the least I can do is give my own sister the benefit of the doubt. Once again.

After the fourth of July, in the brutal heat of Phoenix, Bev, Jewel, and I drive the RV with my six cats to a campground outside San Francisco. At least we are free from Consuela on this road trip and I swear to the girls that we're never again going to take along a passenger we know nothing about. We all agree that if we encounter another distressed woman, a victim of domestic abuse, we'll do all we can to find her the proper channel for help but that will be it.

We drive the Cadi into San Francisco to see Fisherman's Warf, the Garibaldi factory, and the Golden Gate Bridge and park. For the next week, we eat at a variety of restaurants and I go to a few bookstores for signings. We then drive the RV to the Central California Women's

Facility in Chowchilla where two of the eighteen women on death row have arranged for my visit. California has the highest number of women on death row in the US, perhaps in the world, next to China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Iraq.

After my visit with the inmates, I record another podcast while we travel south to LA for more book signings and our interview with psychologist Dr. Jill Barnet. I haven't explored California until now and am especially eager to see the beaches, Hollywood, Beverly Hills, and Disneyland. I don't know. It seems that after nearly three years of freedom, and after two long road trips around this great country, I'm feeling free spirited. It's such a drastic personality shift from most of my life, especially during the long years of incarceration. I feel like an entirely different person with a redeemed, revitalized, and renewed sense of being alive. But don't get me wrong. I'm still the same Lucy Davis at my core and I can never fully eradicate what's happened to me over the past fifty years, nor can I ever excuse myself for my crimes or forget about the lives I took or the second chance that compassionate people such as my aunt Lu and President Obama have given me.

Podcast Episode Six:

Women on Death Row, Chowchilla, California

Hi, Lucy Davis back again for podcast number six. This time I'm discussing California's condemned women incarcerated at the Central California Women's Facility in Chowchilla, which is halfway between Fresno and Modesto—home of Laci Peterson who was nine months pregnant with her son Conner when her infamous husband Scott murdered her because, evidently, he didn't want her or the baby around. Sort of reminds me of Susan Smith. Scott Peterson is currently serving a death sentence at San Quentin.

California executes both male and female inmates at San Quentin. The State transports the women from Chowchilla to the San Quentin execution chamber which is like what happened to me nearly five years ago. For twenty-two years Arizona had been keeping me housed in Perryville Prison and when they set the execution date, guards transported me nearly one hundred miles to the death chamber at Florence State Prison.

Over the years California has used different methods of executing its condemned inmates. The State first hung the condemned, then they put inmates in gas chambers. In 1995 the court ruled that the gas chamber was “cruel and unusual punishment” and the prison began using lethal injection. Since then, until 2006, San Quentin has executed eleven inmates by lethal injection. None of them were women. Since 1893 California has executed only four women, the last being fifty-eight-year-old Elizabeth Ann “Ma” Duncan in 1962. The court convicted Duncan of masterminding the murder her pregnant daughter-in-law.

Over ten years have passed since the last execution and currently more than seven-hundred men and women are living on California's death row. Governor Gavin Newsom has granted a reprieve to all the death row inmates but this doesn't change any of their sentences. These inmates are still on death row.

Many of the death row women in Chowchilla turn my blood cold. But they are all human beings and something caused them to commit the ultimate crime. How does someone, a woman in particular, develop into a force of such harm? Had men, or other women, battered, bruised, and harmed them? Is that the cause? Or is it simply something in their DNA? Has some demon god placed them on earth to kill?

Personally, I'm more prone to believe in the nurture theory, that there is a source, a cause for the woman's motivation or impulse to become the worst human being she could possibly be,

except maybe for Hitler or other masterminds of genocide, or flagrant psychopathic serial killers like Ted Bundy and the Night Stalker. Those types of people are beyond my capacity to understand or even discuss.

But they are all human beings, creatures of this Earth. And my focus is on the women now living on the Row and how they view themselves in their final days. They are not beyond anyone's empathy or compassion and if we think they are then we ourselves are flawed. One of my main objectives with my foundation is to help certain death row women realize a more positive view of themselves away from all the traumatization and negative conditionings since childhood and all the degrading labels society and psychologists pin upon them. In a sense, my aim is to help these "bottom of the barrel," thrown-away women find a certain amount of self-worth before our society puts them down like rabid dogs. If there is no hope for these women to find a better view of themselves, then I maintain that there is no hope for humanity at all.

This is Lucy Davis concluding my podcast about women on death row in California. Follow me on Facebook and Twitter #surviving life. Be a survivor and not a follower led astray. Be compassionate and understand that there are many lessons to learn along the treacherous path of surviving life.

The Dr. Jill Show in LA

We park our RV at Anaheim Harbor RV Park and spend a few days visiting Disneyland, Hollywood, and Venice Beach. I also attend book signings at the Bodhi Tree in LA and a Barnes and Noble in Calabasas. On Wednesday morning we put on our best clothes and drive to Paramount Studios to record our interview with Dr. Jill which the network has scheduled to air next month. As usual, the girls post the event on my social media sites and on my web page.

At the studio, security guards escort us to a waiting lounge where we meet with Dr. Jill Barnett, a middle-aged woman of average height. She wears a flowing blue dress that matches her eyes, and a yellow shawl that matches her stylish haircut accenting her oval face. Dr. Jill encourages me and Jewel to speak our minds. “I provide my guests with a safe place to talk,” she assures us as she shakes our hands.

Jewel wants Bev by her side during the taping, but Bev decides to sit with the studio audience because she wants the confrontation to stay between Jewel and her biological mother. Jewel agrees but plans to introduce Bev to the world during the taping.

When the episode begins, Jewel and I sit on stage in front of the studio audience, on high stools with Dr. Jill sitting across from us. Our host shows the video of me talking about my sister, then of Jewel talking about her biological mother’s rejection of her lifestyle and choice of a spouse. Lastly, she shows the audience a tape from my sister in which Tracy claims that both me and Jewel Anne misunderstand the situation. “I’ve never rejected either one of them,” Tracy claims on the tape. “Lucy’s my younger sister and Jewel’s the daughter I was force to give up when I had no clue about who I really was. Dr. Jill, I’ve agreed to appear on your program to clear up this ugly matter and let both my sister and daughter hear my point of view and not see me through their own shaded glasses.”

Dr. Jill asks me and Jewel about our foundation and she asks me about my books and my life on death row. She then introduces Tracy who walks onto the stage before the studio audience dressed in a maroon pants suit and pink silk blouse. Tracy greets Dr. Jill with a gracious smile and handshake but doesn’t even acknowledging me and Jewel. Dr. Jill points this out and Tracy admits, “I didn’t mean to do that. I’m just so excited to meet you in person. I’m such a big fan, I guess I wasn’t thinking of anything else.” She then turns to us, nods, and says “Hi, girls.”

I smile back and say, “Hi, Tracy.” Jewel does the same. Try to contain your enthusiasm, I’m thinking to myself.

Dr. Jill says to all of us, “Yours is an important story to tell. Be honest and forthcoming.” She then asks us about our trips to LA. Jewel and I briefly say this is our first time here and we describe our three days of sight-seeing. Tracy mentions that this is also her first visit to LA. “I came down with my daughter Tiffany Rose and my two grandsons Robbie and Todd,” she says with obvious love and pride. I look to the audience but Tracy doesn’t point anyone out. She then adds, “They’re at the Disney Hotel where we’re staying. I told them they could watch grandma on the show when it airs next month. The boys are having too much fun at Disneyland to break away and watch me on your show.” Tracy looks to Dr. Jill, as if she’s made a hilarious joke.

The host asks me why I’ve had such differences with my sister and I tell her it really began when we were children. “She said demeaning things to me probably because she was so popular and I wasn’t.” I give Dr. Jill a few examples and tell her the story of how I told Tracy I hoped to be dating like her when I went to high school. “You know what my sister said to me, Dr. Jill? She said that I probably won’t meet anyone to date until I’m middle-aged. Her words made me feel almost hopeless.”

“Oh, come on, sister,” Tracy says. “We were little kids. And you’re still holding grudges? People need to grow up, don’t they Dr. Jill?” The host says nothing. “And what about during your murder trial,” she seems to emphasize the word murder. “Didn’t I show up to give you a hug and moral support? Oh, how soon we forget.”

“No, I haven’t forgotten. And I’ve always wondered why you didn’t show up at my mitigation hearing. You said you’d testify that you saw Scottie touch me. But you didn’t! You went away and dashed all my hopes that I had a big sister who really cared about my welfare.”

“Look Lucy. That too, is years ago. And as I explained then and as I’m going to explain now, I had a six-month-old baby to get back to. I do have a life of my own.”

“You see, Dr. Jill. My sister is indifferent toward me. She always has been. How do I overcome that? I felt so abandoned by my family when I was on death row.” I look at Tracy and say, “It hurt me that you didn’t testify at my hearing. You chose not to be there for me when I needed you most. No one supported me but Aunt Lu.”

“Don’t feel sorry for yourself and blame me,” Tracy argues, practically leaning off her tall chair. “I never killed anyone or had a breakdown. Do you want closure? Want an apology? For what? And by the way, Lucy. If I remember correctly, which I do, you went along with our parents and called me a jezebel during the worst part of my life.”

“Oh, so now we have it,” Jewel breaks in. “I’m the worst thing that’s ever happened to you, aren’t I mommy dearest?”

“Let’s not bring you into this now. This is about me and Lucy.” Tracy looks directly at me. “Calling me a cunt (bleep) at the beach! That was demeaning. I’m not your mother. I’m not your parent. I can’t stop what I’m doing to be with you and hold your hand. Talk to me with respect. You’re fifty-five. Why complain now? Why am I even on this show? I came here in good faith.”

“That’s a good question,” I say, feeling anger percolate through my veins. I don’t want to lose it with Tracy but she’s pushing my every button. I take a deep breath, sit back on the awkward chair, and ask, “What motivated you to come on the show? Your husband? Tiffany Rose? Or was it merely so you could meet Dr. Jill and take your grandsons on an all-expense paid vacation to Disneyland?”

“No, I want to make amends. To set things right with you and with Jewel. And yes, my husband encouraged me to stand up for myself and my beliefs on this show. And that’s what I’m doing.”

Dr. Jill asks me if I feel a need to reconcile with Tracy because she’s my sister. Her probing reminds me of Dr. Beth on KZAM when I had called in years and years ago, before I ever committed crimes that led me to the Row. Dr. Beth had suggested that perhaps I needed to look at my own reaction to a family crisis, to my sister’s point of view. “Maybe you need to step into her shoes,” Dr. Jill suggests, just like Dr. Beth had done.

“No way,” I say defensively. “I could never step into the shoes of a bigot! And what about your taking my picture off my Facebook site without any kind of acknowledgement to me? The one with us kids at Christmas. You didn’t even have the courtesy to give me a ‘like’.” I turn to Dr. Jill and add, “Not only did she lift the picture from my page, she cropped me out of it so the picture on her site had only Tracy and her two brothers. Are you that ashamed of me?” I look at my older sister sitting at the edge of her seat.

“You cropped out Scottie,” she says then I can tell she regrets her stupid comeback. It’s over the board thoughtless on her part, and she knows it.

“Oh, come on,” I say. “You know why I did that. Did I molest you, big sister?”

“Ladies, ladies. Please,” the host intervenes. “I’m the least judgmental person I’ve ever met and no one’s here to judge you. Guests on my show can say whatever it is they must say as long as they don’t harm each other.” To change the topic, Dr. Jill turns to me and asks the same question Jewel and Bev are always pestering me with. Maybe she wants to turn down the heat. I’m not sure. “Are you looking for someone to love?” she asks. “Or do you already have a love interest?”

“No, ma’am.” I tell her. “I’m happy with the life I now live, as a cat lady, and I’m not looking for someone to love. In fact, I’m through with love.”

“That’s a rather stern position to take, Ms. Davis,” Dr. Jill says. “Especially from someone given a second chance at life. And I might add, you’ve done remarkably well with that new life. It goes to show that nobody really knows what will happen in the future. Especially when it comes to love.” Dr. Jill smiles at me and I feel quite energized and positive, as if she’s just given me a boon. It’s a strange feeling, one I’ve rarely experienced, although I did when my aunt revealed to me that Obama was granting my pardon. The president may have given me freedom but I’ve always felt that my aunt was the one with the magic powers to make my pardon happen.

I smile back at Dr. Jill but have nothing to say in front of the audience and camera crew. My thoughts are simply too complex at the moment and I’m sure that if I ramble them off, most people won’t understand what I’m talking about. Why? Because very few people get to have such a powerful turnaround in life and I suspect that very few people have their wishes come true. And besides, I’m not comfortable with my sister sitting across from me and staring at me as if she’s expecting me to explain myself--how a deranged serial killer was set free and to once again tell the world that I have no excuse for my crimes and that I feel remorse. To my relief, the host turns her attention away from me and asks Jewel Anne about her relationship with Tracy.

Jewel first introduces Bev as her wife. Bev stands in the front row of the studio audience and looks stunning in her white pants suit with a forest green silk blouse. Everyone applauds. Then Jewel says, “I didn’t meet my biological mother until I was twenty-five and our meeting didn’t go well at all. It was before I came out as gay and Tracy already had an attitude. She was hesitant to have me come to her house. As it turned out, her husband didn’t even know about me.

I was Tracy's dirty little secret and she was trying to protect the integrity of her family. Did you even tell your husband about me?" Jewel looks directly at Tracy. "He must know by now that you had an illegitimate child or you wouldn't have come on this show."

"No," Tracy declares, "John knows about you. I told him about you after our daughter moved out. Sometimes," she turns to Dr. Jill, "we want to leave our past behind. That's why I left home when I was seventeen. Sure, I agree with my sister, our childhood family wasn't all that great. Jewel Anne, hear me out. I was too young to have a baby and we found you beautiful parents. You told me so yourself when we first met, fifteen years ago."

"You were ashamed of me and didn't want me involved with your real family. And when you learned I wasn't straight, that was the last straw for you. Wasn't it, Tracy?"

"That's not true. I accept you. Maybe my husband has reservations because he's very religious and the Bible says a man and woman are meant for marriage, not people of the same sex."

"That's why we're estranged," Jewel addresses Tracy. "That's why when I brought my partner-in-life around to meet you, you acted repulsed, indignant. I decided then and there that I didn't need you in my life and I'm sure you're happy with that decision."

"But why would I show up here if I didn't want some kind of reconciliation with my sister and with you?" Tracy asks.

Dr. Jill smiles, kind of quirkily, and says, "I want to help you three ladies, truly I do. But each of you needs to take care of herself mentally and emotionally. Look, there are some tough decisions to make. Do you want to salvage your relationships? That's the 65-thousand-dollar question."

“I want to try,” Tracy admits. “See if we can find common ground. A way to make some kind of peace among us. Maybe nothing earthshattering. But something that allows us to send cards for birthdays and Christmas. I thought coming to this show was the right thing to do.”

Jewel and I both try to agree but I can tell neither of us means it. It’s just for show. Once we’re finished taping, my nieces and I will go our way and Tracy will go meet up with her daughter and grandsons for fun and adventure in Disneyland. It’s just as well. I appeared on the show for the publicity and I’ve accomplished that.

Dr. Jill interrupts my train of thought and asks the audience rhetorically, “Are these relationships fixable?” Then she addresses me, Jewel, and Tracy, specifically. “If it’s not reparable then I suggest you get a civil unwinding of these relationships. Have I been clear?”

We all agree, shake hands, and then Dr. Jill says, “I would say that in this mother daughter, sister sister drama, both sides need help. An individual’s perception becomes her reality. If she perceives she’s not loved and valued, that’s her reality. Take what I’m saying as true, or leave it. It’s up to you. I want to thank all my guests on our show today.” The host then stands from her stool and leaves the stage to shake hands with the studio audience on her way out of the auditorium.

Bev joins Jewel and I on the stage and we politely say good-bye to my sister with handshakes as limp as a dead fish. Or are dead fish stiff? Anyway, I’m eager to leave the studio and return to Mesa so my cats can run loose and enjoy their outside kennel and I can relax on my recliner with my Dell computer on my lap and the TV turned on to some mindless sit com. Maybe a rerun of *All in the Family* or *Mary Tyler Moore*. Jewel and Bev are also ready to head back to the cool weather and beauty of Sedona where they plan to set up my next book tour, livestream, or TV appearance.

“Perhaps we’ll persuade Oprah to select your books for her book club,” Bev suggests as we’re walking to the parking lot outside the studio. I see Tracy in her rental SUV eagerly driving away to meet with her brood. She politely waves a “ta ta” at us and I wonder if this will be the last image I’ll ever have of her.

The Metropolitan Detention Center, Los Angeles

Early the next morning we are on our way back to Mesa, via I-10. Bev is driving the RV and I’m sitting on a pulldown chair next to Jewel who’s sitting in the passenger chair helping me make new social posts with pictures of us on Dr. Jill. Before we even reach Pomona, however, two black, unmarked Crown Victorians appear from out of nowhere and begin flashing blue lights at us.

“Were you speeding Beverly?” Jewel asks and sets aside her tablet.

“No. I have no idea what this is all about,” Bev answers as she pulls the RV over at the next exit where there’s enough space for our big bus towing my Cadi.

The two Crown Vic’s stop in front of us and three men and one woman wearing black suits, even the woman, approach the RV door and ask us to step outside of the vehicle. I immediately notice the guns on their shoulder holsters which they seem prepared to use.

“What’s this all about?” I ask, afraid they’re abducting us because of my notoriety. That the wrong death penalty opponent, or anti-gay bigot, read our social posts and has come after us.

“Who are you?” both Bev and Jewel ask as we stand outside the RV in the bright morning sunshine. The suited woman asks us to place our hands on the RV. My biggest fear is that the current president has somehow overturned my pardon and clemency and that these are his secret service agents apprehending me to take me back to death row.

“We’re federal special agents,” the woman finally says and shows us her badge. “FBI, ATF, DEA, take your pick.”

“What? Are you kidding?” Bev exclaims, her hands against the RV.

Before I know what’s happening, the woman frisks me then cuffs my hand behind my back. Memories return of when the police cuffed me at Sky Harbor Airport, nearly thirty years before. But when they nabbed me back then, I knew I had done something very wrong. Now, I have no idea what this is about.

“No ma’am. This is not a joke,” one of the men says, a black man with a Marine cut. “You’re being remanded into custody for suspicion of federal crimes.”

“Crimes? What crimes? These cuffs are too tight,” I say as cars are whizzing past us on the freeway. I sense people staring at our little spectacle. But that’s the least of my worries.

“What do you think we’ve done?” Jewel asks the female officer who is frisking and cuffing her.

“Harboring an illegal alien. Transporting a fugitive across state lines. Transporting firearms, drugs. Take your pick.” The lady sounds sarcastic and that annoys me but I’m at her mercy.

“What are you talking about?” I ask while facing the RV.

None of the agents answers and Jewel asks, “Does this have to do with that pregnant girl, Consuela?”

“Maybe ma’am,” the black federal agent remarks as the woman agent grasps my upper arm and leads me to one of the Crown Vic’s.

“What about our RV? My Cadi?” I ask, filled with concern. This is so unexpected and it’s upturning our lives as if an avalanche or a tsunami or an earthquake has just hit us. Maybe all

three at once. But this isn't a natural disaster. This is something someone has contrived.

Somehow, I know someone is framing me. My mind runs through all the hate posts I've seen on my site and I even consider that Tracy came up with this scheme. But then I quickly reject this notion and try to reel back my imagination. This is no time to become manic. I have to keep a clear and steady mind if I'm going to get through this. To survive I must be calm, I remind myself.

"We're impounding your RV and car for the duration of this investigation," the lady says as she eases me into the car's back seat. The other agents are placing Jewel and Bev in the back seat of the other Crown Vic.

"What about my cats!" I scream. I can't believe what's happening to us and I feel sick with worry that these so-called Feds will release my cats onto the freeway and I'll lose all of them, like I lost Baldy.

"The animal welfare league will take care of your cats. Don't worry," the lady says with some semblance of compassion. She then gets behind the wheel and the black agent climbs in the passenger side. They are silent as she pulls onto the freeway behind the car with my nieces and the two other agents.

In the back seat, with my hands cuffed behind me, I have a bad feeling about what's going on. "Who are you, really?" I finally ask as the lady speeds along the 1-10 toward LA. As we pass the other cars, I feel like they all know I'm an ex-death row con recaptured.

"We're actually US Marshals," the lady agent finally admits to me, but says nothing more.

"Where are you taking me? What do you think I've done?" I ask.

"The MDC," the black agent says while looking at me in the rearview mirror.

“The MDC?” I ask.

“The Metropolitan Detention Center, in Los Angeles,” the lady Marshal explains. “It’s where we detain people like you who are under federal investigation for alleged crimes.”

“Crimes?” I ask. “I’ve been on the straight and narrow since Perryville.”

“Never mind,” the agent says as she weaves in and out of traffic closely tailing the lead Crown Vic. “You’ll find out soon enough. This is a matter for the U.S. Department of Justice.”

I say no more nor do the agents until after we arrive at the large concrete detention center where another Marshal places me alone in a cell that is larger than my home on the Lovely in Perryville prison. It has a desk, a shelf, and a cozy cot, along with the metal toilet sink combination. I ask the Marshal about my nieces and he tells me they’re together in a separate cell but I can’t have any contact with them until another special agent clears me.

After about an hour of sitting on the cot filled with concern about my nieces, my cats, my RV, and especially about my own fate, a prison guard escorts me to a small room where a pudgy elderly man in a blue dress shirt and navy-blue slacks, the special agent, begins hurling questions at me. “What’s your name? What was your business in Miami?” “What were you transporting? And Who?” Then he slides a picture across the metal table for me to see. “Do you recognize this woman?” he asks. I look down at the photo which looks like a mug shot of Consuela Sanchez, but I can’t be certain. She looks pale and pimply in the photo and nothing like the pregnant girl we hauled along from San Antonio to Miami.

“I demand an attorney,” I say to the special agent. “I know my rights. I spent 25 years incarcerated and I’ve been in this situation before! I haven’t forgotten a thing.”

The man tells me to sit tight for a guard to take me to a phone and he leaves me alone in the room where I’m now assuming this is all because Consuela is an illegal alien and a murderer

wanted by the Feds and we aided in her escape and foolishly posted pictures of her on my social medial page. We figured the public knew about her because of my radio interview with Mr. Chad Meyers. What an idiot, I'm thinking as I sit waiting. I had been worried about the girls posting those pictures and updating our progress to Miami, and even though I had them take down all the pictures with Consuela in them, I have a sneaky suspicion that it was too late. All this advanced technology that's snuck up on me while I lived in a cage turns out to be nothing but trouble. Big trouble. A person can't have a normal private life anymore. Everything has to be public. Social. Under the radar of crime fighters, both local and federal. What a shame. What a sham. And everyone seems to have an opinion they've got to share on the internet. At least now I have the resources to hire a good attorney familiar with federal law. I'm no longer a poor, muddle-brained and clueless girl of twenty-five.

A guard arrives and takes me to an old-fashioned wall phone at the end of a long corridor before the cells. He uncuffs me so I can page through a phonebook hanging on a chain--no high tech here—and I find a Mr. Frank Schriever, esq. who specializes in federal law. I use the few coins in my pocket to place the call and explain my situation to Mr. Schriever. He agrees to meet me in the morning after he makes a few phone calls to determine what is going on with my situation.

I spend a restless night alone in my cell listening to the eerie clink and clank echoes of a prison, which I remember quite well. At ten AM, I meet with Mr. Frank Schriever in the same questioning room I was in the day before. The guard uncuffs me and Mr. Schriever offers me a cup of Starbucks coffee which I thankfully accept. We arrange for his retainer and then I ask about the welfare of my six cats and the whereabouts of my RV and Cadi.

“Please don’t worry about that,” Mr. Schriever assures me. “Police impound is protecting your RV. As for your cats. . . I’ll check into that right now.” He makes a few calls on his Smartphone and is able to reassure me that the ASPCA California is housing them together. With everything that’s going on, I’m not so sure I believe him. He could be pandering to me, trying to bolster my courage about my situation. I’m deeply afraid my cats are roaming I-10 near Pomona and speeding trucks are running over them, one by one.

“Is this because of Consuela Sanchez?” I ask before he even begins the interview. “We thought we were helping a distressed pregnant woman escape from her abuser.”

“Her name is Felisa Espinoza,” he tells me. “And she was never pregnant.”

“What?” I ask with astonishment. “I could have sworn she was. Several times I tried to take her to a doctor but she insisted on going to Miami. She even had bruises on her arms where he grabbed her. At least that’s what I believed. I did feel uneasy about her and when she admitted to shooting her boyfriend while he sat on the toilet, we rushed her straight to her cousins in Olympia Heights. Four Latino men welcomed her and they all seemed suspicious to me. We got the hell out of there. It was so creepy. For one thing, it was the middle of the night when we dropped her off.”

“That wasn’t her boyfriend she shot. Those people in Miami aren’t her cousins. I’m afraid a drug mule has duped you. And now you’re in trouble for a series of federal violations. All because you kept posting your story on social media. With pictures of her.”

“But we took them down,” I protest and sip on my dark roast, savoring the aroma and taste, hoping the caffeine will keep me sharp and alert. I’m in deep trouble again, it seems, but this time for innocently trying to help out a young woman in desperate need.

“It doesn’t matter that you took down the pictures and posts. The Feds were casing your sites since you left San Antonio.”

“What? Consuela, or Felicia, had me convinced that she was a trapped and battered woman. Why are they investigating me? How long can they detain us? Where are my nieces Jewel Anne and Beverly Lee? Are they in trouble as well?”

“For now, the Feds are detaining only you,” Mr. Schriever tells me. “Your nieces are awaiting news about your situation at the Beverly Hotel.”

“I’m relieved that my girls are on the outside waiting for my release,” I say. “But why am I being held?”

“Because the RV is in your name,” Schriever explains. “And the pictures of Felicia were on your Facebook page and because of your criminal background, to be frank. The Feds are suggesting that you orchestrated the whole plot. They’re talking about charging you with harboring and transporting an alien across state lines.”

“What?” I’m astonished. My situation keeps getting worse and worse, like it had during my arrest and trial nearly thirty years ago.

“Yes, but that’s not the least of it,” Schriever continues. “They’re also saying that you obstructed justice by harboring a fugitive from a drug related murder. And that you helped in transporting drugs and firearms across state lines.”

“Mr. Schriever, let me assure you, I’ve never even taken any illegal drugs.”

“That doesn’t matter. You see, Felicia was carrying drugs and a firearm in her pregnancy disguise.”

“No way. This is too outlandish. Surely you can get me out of this mess. That’s why I hired you and am paying you an astronomical retainer.” I push my half drunken Starbucks aside.

I don't want any more caffeine. I'd rather fall asleep now and wake up when this whole disaster is over.

I hear doors clanging outside the questioning room and I'm wondering who else the Feds are interviewing. Their whole case seems flimsy and Schriever agrees but I still feel almost as helpless as I did during all those years on the Row, although now I do have shreds of hope and am completely innocent of any intentional wrongdoing. When on death row awaiting an execution date, my gut always told me *Well, girl, you did this to yourself, you are guilty of the crimes.*

"I am sorry, Ms. Davis. But a criminal complaint is currently pending against you and the Feds have thirty days from your arrest to indict you. That's just how it is. And in some cases, though rare, the Feds can extend the detention for another thirty days."

"My god. Is someone personally pissed off at me because Obama freed me from prison?"

"No," Schriever replies, putting his notepad back in his briefcase, preparing to end our meeting. "I suspect you'll soon have your arraignment. Meanwhile, I'm doing all I can to get the Feds to drop their witch-hunt investigation. I know you've done nothing intentionally. That much is obvious to me, based on all the circumstances I've uncovered during my own investigation."

Federal Marshals escort me back to my private cell where I listen to the voices of inmates and guards and smell the institutional odors of disinfectant and mold. After my pardon a few years back, I thought I'd never again see, hear or smell the inside of such a place because I knew I'd never commit another crime, not even a traffic violation, not even jay walking. But life is always presenting me with unexpected and unwanted twists and turns.

One spark of hope occurs that afternoon. Bev and Jewel Anne pay me a visit with positive news about my cats. They have retrieved all six of them. “They’re roaming freely in our hotel suite,” Jewel tells me.

“We’ll all go home as soon as my lawyer clears up this misunderstanding,” I say, trying to be optimistic. I tell the girls what Schriever said and they tell me they’re publicizing this injustice on social media, reaching out for public support.

“We were only trying to help a battered woman,” Jewel says. “We had no idea she was tricking us. And so far, lots of people are posting their outrage over your detention, Aunt Lu. Your followers are contacting their senators and congressmen. Even the White House.”

I’m so thankful for my nieces and I feel the same love for them that I felt for my aunt Lu during all those years she stood by me while I languished in prison. It’s a unique kind of true love, maybe it’s even Biblical. It’s a supportive love that doesn’t disappear during the worst of times. I guess, you might say, it’s the opposite of indifference which is what entails the sentiments of my childhood family.

When the girls leave and I’m once again left alone in my cell, I try to read a novel while feeling utterly empty inside. Then another unexpected turn for the better occurs when a petite female prison guard stops by my cell and enthusiastically greets me. She carries with her a yellow legal pad, a pen, and an envelope that looks like a personal letter of some kind. Her nametag reads Mia Trong and she tells me she’s been following my Facebook page for the past year or two.

“I’ve read both of your books, Ms. Davis,” she says with a slight Vietnamese accent. “I’m a big fan of yours and admire your devotion to women sentenced to death. I know you have

a big heart. I've even contributed to the Lucinda Bowers Foundation. It's such a beautiful gesture for you to name it after your loving aunt."

I thank Mia Trong, sincerely. She's appeared to me like an angel whose very presence is uplifting. "How long have you been working here, in this federal hellhole?" I tease.

"Five years. My family comes from Saigon and we're very proud to be American citizens. When I learned they brought you here, I wanted to meet you in person. I know you didn't do anything wrong and that your detention is a big misunderstanding. You were only trying to help that lady who lied to you. That's all."

"Thank you," I tell Mia. "What's that?" I ask about the letter she holds. I'm prepared to autograph it, if that's what she wants.

"Ms. Davis," she says. "My dear cousin Marvis le Tron Jackson is on death row in San Quentin. I'm hoping you can write him a letter." She places the legal pad and pen on the desk. "I've already addressed this envelop to him."

"I see," I say. "Well, I can probably do something like that. But I've really only been corresponding with women on death row. Your cousin would be the first man I'd be writing to. What was his crime?" I ask. It's always the first question when assessing death row inmates. I mean, I have to determine whether they're sociopaths like Ted Bundy, or unfortunate souls with a troubled background like Aileen Wuornos or Karla Faye Tucker. Abused women led astray. A drug related crime. A felony murder. A murder for hire, for insurance money. Anyway, that is usually my criteria for figuring out who to write and what I might be dealing with. Some people, men or women, are simply evil. But I don't say all this to Mia Trong. If she's followed me, then she already knows my point of view.

“My cousin was wrongly sentenced to death,” Mia says. “There wasn’t anything we could do to stop the jury from making this judgment. Marvis caused the death of a police officer, and that’s what condemned him. He wrote me this letter last month. And when I learned that you were here, I wanted to share it with you. Please read it and write him a letter. He knows about you and your work. A letter from you would gladden his heart, Ms. Davis. You are truly an Angel of Mercy.”

“Oh please. Don’t go that far. I’m just an average person who’s had her fair share of blows and setbacks. I’m no better and no worse than anyone else.”

“Except for true psychopaths motivated to inflict harm on the world!” We both laugh. She’s repeating something I’ve posted on my website.

“Marvis was always a good boy. He worked hard in school and was hoping to go to law school. But life didn’t lead him that way.”

She hands me the letter and says, “Please keep this. I’ve made a copy of it for my scrap book. I must go now and attend to my station on the other wing of the detention center. Please write my cousin, Ms. Davis. Please cheer him up with a glimmer of hope.”

Mia Trong then leaves me alone in my cell and I hear her echoing footsteps fade away. I sit at the desk and look at the letter in my hand. I pour myself a glass of water from the pitcher on the desk and begin reading the letter handwritten in a beautiful cursive script.

To my dear little cousin Miss Mia Trong:

Day and night I visualize a world that is parsecs beyond the darkness of the ignorant world we live in. The sun and moon shine so brightly there that I must squint my eyes to see the beauty of the landscape. In this world, the breeze stirs fragrant flower petals all around me while

bells chime dharma music and peacocks and swans trumpet the words of Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life who offers this paradise even to someone like me, a condemned inmate who caused the deaths of three noble beings.

Amitabha resides in a great assembly hall made of gold and jewels. Seated beside him on lotus thrones are the bodhisattvas of strength and compassion. One is the moon and the other is the sun. One holds the lotus flower of wisdom the other holds a water vessel containing the elixir of healing. Eighty thousand bodhisattvas, arhats, and ordinary people dwell in this paradise. They live without the distractions of our defiled world and develop pure minds that liberate them from suffering. Those who reside in Amitabha's paradise believe in the sacredness of life. Those who think otherwise are reborn into worlds that detract them from achieving the wisdom of a peaceful, wise, and happy existence.

You see, dear cousin, most people don't know the time of their deaths. But I do, or I will. In fact, I'll know the precise moment the world decides I will die. But when that time comes, I won't be afraid. At the last moment of my life, I'm prepared to chant the name of Amitabha Buddha and he will arrive at my gurney, along with Mahasthamaprabhata, Manjushri, Samantabhadra, Guan Yin, Maitreya and other great beings. Glorious light will fill the entire death chamber and no one will see this but me. Amitabha will carry me to his paradise where I will emerge from the pools of purity in a blue lotus flower.

I will be born in this land as a mid-level being because for several years now, I've been practicing the dharma and sending warm hearted thoughts to all those who harm or despise me. I have repented from my crimes and bad karma. It will not take me long to enter the final dharma door to liberation or return to this world to offer my awakened heart to those suffering from

delusions about themselves and this world. I have no doubt about this. I have no doubt about Amitabha and his pure land paradise which I think of as the pure land mind.

When the warden asks if I have any final words, I will say the name of Amitabha ten times and recite this prayer,

Homage to Shakyamuni Buddha

Homage to all great Buddhas and Bodhisattvas

In the ten directions of Maha Vairocana

Homage to Amitabha Buddha

May all sentient beings receive the peace, happiness, and wisdom of a pure, clear mind and may there be an end to all of their suffering.

Eternal love from your cousin,

Marvis le Tron

The letter deeply moves me. I understand it completely because I've lived on death row and have learned to clear away the clouds of delusion to find clarity of mind. I learned to have faith in myself, believe in myself and not in what the world tells me to believe about myself. And furthermore, I believe in living life with the purpose of helping those who are suffering from delusions about themselves and the world. The world would have me go to hell but I would have it otherwise. The world may have condemned me but I do not condemn myself and I won't condemn others like they are unsavory trash.

I spend the rest of the day alone at the desk in my cell writing Marvis a long letter. I briefly tell him about my time on death row but I mostly talk about my pen pal from India, Professor Cholan Muthukumaraswami who told me that if I pray to the many faces of the

Buddha, I will find redemption and forgiveness. After ten years, Professor Muthukumaraswami had stopped writing me and I always assumed he had died because he was elderly, but his religious philosophy inspired me and made me feel hopeful about myself, even in the pit of hell.

“Since my first year on death row,” I write in my letter to Marvis, “I haven’t prayed exclusively to Jesus, like my daddy taught me to, long ago. Instead, I’ve been praying to the world’s many gods and buddhas. I’ve never embraced any one religion, per se, such as Buddhism, but I’m intrigued by the various religious philosophies especially when they make sense to me and teach us ignorant people to be decent toward one another. It’s why your letter really impresses me.”

“My isolation on death row wasn’t really anything new to me. When I was a child, I spent most of my time alone because I had a horrible brother who tormented me and ignorant parents who neglected my needs. This pure land paradise you describe, with the three magical Buddhas, reminds me of one of the best times in my difficult childhood. My family used to go deer hunting every year in Eastern Oregon. Not that I have ever professed killing deer. It was just the family I was born into. Anyway, we camped beside this cool stony brook that flowed past juniper, pine, and Aspen trees in a marsh with cattail reeds. I would pick a cattail pod that was about to burst and pretend that I held a magic wand while I walked down the stony brook. I felt like magic had transported me to this wonderful place, away from all my torments. This is the place I thought about when I read your letter. Could you please tell me more about this paradise you describe where the three Buddhas reign among people who don’t harm one another? I believe it’s the place I’ve wanted to be since I was a little girl. I would also be interested to learn about the conditions at San Quentin and your life on death row.”

The next morning, when my nieces come to visit me, I hand them my letter addressed to Marvis le Tron and tell them to mail it right away. That very afternoon Mr. Schriever arrives at my cell to inform me that the Feds are releasing me because they have ended their investigation and found no proof of my having any illegal intent. Although he doesn't admit to anything, I believe that Mr. Schriever had something to do with my newly gained freedom.

The girls take me to the Beverly Hotel where I go nuts playing with my cats. A few days later, we retrieve the RV and Cadi from impound. Fortunately, the Feds didn't confiscate anything although they certainly shuffled everything around and made a few scratches and scuff marks. I can only imagine what went on. But I'm grateful to be free and heading home to Mesa with my girls and six cats and I'm thankful we're all intact.