

## The Desert's Edge

A memoir by Teri Ekland



### Chapter One: The Desert

(from my handwritten diary 2016)

Today is June 14, 2016, my husband Cecil's birthday; he's fifty-three. We'll celebrate at the casino. Maybe even swing a buffet. After not smoking pot for over ten years, I just smoked my husband's medical marijuana to see if it controls my mania. I believe it does. I believe it enables me to focus and write again.

About a year ago my VA psychiatrist quit. My sessions had been by video conferencing at the Kingman VA. At the same time, my meds were losing their effectiveness. Recently, I met with a VA psychiatric Nurse Practitioner in Kingman. She is adjusting my meds, tweaking the dosage, maybe more Risperidone, less Sertraline (too much can cause mania, she suggested.) I told her I was manic again. Told her about an incident that recently happened: Cecil was driving. We were at a busy intersection in Kingman. We were arguing, or he was being vitriolic. Traumatizing me. Impulsively, I jumped out the door and walked off. It was at a busy intersection so he had to drive on. I quickly lost sight of him and walked about until I sat a while at a bus depot. Like a homeless woman. Finally, I reached my husband after he got back home where he left his phone. He picked me up but said next time he wouldn't. It was a bad manic

incident. No thought. Pure impulse to get away from the stress and commotion the man was causing me. Another time I walked away from the cashier during a sale. I was stressed because Cecil, who was idling in the car, was being his impatient self. These are examples of why I need medication. It's a serious illness. But I face a dilemma. Too much medication causes me to lose my mojo, my inspirational fount. The truth is, I'd rather keep my creative drive and write than return to doing nothing but filling in the space of time. Idling in the parking lot: And then you die.

Thirteen years ago, I didn't finish writing this story which I titled *The Desert's Edge*. In part, it was simply too embarrassing to write about the consequences of my mental confusion and all the turmoil I had caused myself and others. But at sixty, I have gained some perspective. As I see it now, my ex-husband was more to blame than me for the fiasco of our divorce. In any event, everything was not always of my own doing or undoing.

When first writing this book back at the Yacht House B&B, I wasn't intact, mentally. It was before 9-11 and I didn't have the right perspective or control over my grandiose notions. My mind was a dust devil spinning in the stratosphere until my meds finally got right, circa 2003. My mind became calmer. Less fluttering. But I quit pursuing dreams and all my avatars left me. I took to reading novels not writing them. In fact, I doubted I'd ever write again or revive what I had written. I thought my days of self-improvement and avatars were over. I'd die childless and without any friends at my memorial service. Oh well. Que sera sera. But I am not such a glum person. In fact, I celebrate my life by writing these words.



Nearly two years ago, I moved to the Mojave Desert, after twenty-five years in the Sonoran Desert near Phoenix and Tucson. (absent two years in Florida and ten months traveling around the southern US in a Mallard Travel Trailer with two Doberman Pinchers, my jackals, and the man who brought me this story.) My home now is on two acres in Golden Valley, Arizona—an unincorporated rural community between Kingman and the Cerbat and Hualapai Mountains, and Bullhead City along the Colorado River. Because we're at an elevation of 2800 feet, it snowed in Golden Valley one morning last winter. (I hadn't seen snow since 2001 when I went on a Park City skiing trip, during my second year in Pensacola.) My Dobermans played in the falling snowflakes. It was before Cecil brought home the little Jack Russel.

The summer in Golden Valley is ten degrees cooler than the hellhole at the river. Ten degrees makes all the difference. Here, the summer mornings are pleasantly cool when I feed up and water my goats, chickens, dogs, and cats. Then I walk with my youngest Doberman Red and the little Jack Russel that my husband brought back on his last trip to Phoenix. The Russel took right to my Dobermans and they took to him. A dog thing. Red and Russel run and play every early morning when I'm outside. They're excited Mama's here and a bright day is upon us. We walk on rural dirt roads around the neighborhood, contemplating all the quail and cotton tails

dashing about. It's a peaceful time in clean desert air. Rarely a car goes by and I feel like a lucky chap.

Golden Valley is only twenty-five miles from the Colorado River, a river mighty enough to carve out the Grand Canyon. However, environmentalists predict that the river will soon fall short of the water needed in Arizona, Nevada, and California. The demand exceeds the supply. Could we possibly run out of water? What is this plague upon us? Drought, overuse? As it is, the Colorado evaporates in Mexico, never reaching the ocean. For me, it's beautiful to see the river flowing past Laughlin and Bullhead City, with the Newberry and Black mountains on each side of the wide valley. Mountains that shimmer orange and pink at sunrise and sunset. Some days the Colorado river is choppy; often it's calm and smooth. But always it's low. During summer weekends, jet skis speed by the parks and casinos from Davis Dam to Lake Havasu, and in Lake Mojave on the other side of the dam. The river shore reminds me of Egypt along the Nile with the palms, tamarisks, and the dry desolate terrain sparse of vegetation. All it needs are donkeys and fellahin at canals with irrigation shadufs (at least we have wild burros here in the Mojave).

Several times a month, Cecil and I drive along highway 68, the main thoroughfare of Golden Valley, to the riverside casinos of Laughlin, Nevada. And to my widowed mother's home at Riverside RV Resort in Bullhead City. Most often we meet her at the Aquarius. In part, I moved here to be close to my elderly mother. She's doing well at eighty-seven; she's physically capable and mentally active and sound. And she's in such a good situation. Under the auspice of a beautiful resort of small well-made manufactured homes and a large community pool, golf course, spa, and sauna, and she's just a few miles from the casino and their video poker and buffets which she loves. God bless her.

The thirty-minute drive to Mom's house passes through our rural valley community then climbs up the black mountains which are topped by tall crags that loom over both Golden Valley and the river far below. The highway peaks at Union Pass, 3571 feet in elevation. Then it's a steep curvy drive, 6% grade, for fifteen miles. Cecil puts the car in neutral all the way to the river. Except for the sparse vegetation, this little slice of the Mojave is a Martian-like landscape with red pink orange and brown hues of volcanic outcrops and a few cinder cones. Streaks of ivory yellow run through the hillsides. On the way down are views of the river and most of Laughlin's eleven casinos; among them, the ones we frequent—Aquarius and Don Laughlin's Riverside. (Laughlin put nearly everything in place around the river valley. He was an entrepreneur with dreams that went far. Laughlin is now eighty-two and living atop his hotel casino with helicopters and nearby planes that he once flew.)

There is no daylight savings time in Arizona so for part of the year the sun sets later in neighboring states. During this time, Nevada is an hour earlier which means we have plenty of time to get to the Aquarius VIP buffet after church service in Bullhead City (Cecil and I accompany my mother to her church, the Desert Shores Baptist Church with Pastor George Lyman.) The problem for us is when Nevada and Arizona have the same time and church lets out at about 11:45 and at exactly noon there are no more tickets for the free VIP buffets. During this time, Cecil and I drive to the Aquarius to get the ticket before church.

This all comes about because Mom has a green player's card. She plays often enough to earn tiers and points to have this esteemed card with lots of perks. Cecil and I are eager to get our green card so Mom doesn't have to pay for the extra buffets on the weekend. We're poor, she's rich, relatively speaking. "The machines keep me going," she admitted in jest at yesterday's buffet. I had just said that "the animals keep me going." She really enjoys her life of daily buffets

with friendly servers who are like her extended family, she likes to tell me. Mom plays video poker and even has a notebook recording the many thousand-dollar royals she's won. She's always happy and that's what matters. The casinos cater to people like her.

*Back to the deserts of Arizona*



In both the Sonora and Mohave Deserts, when the sun begins sinking behind rustic hills and buttes, the heat of the day tapers off. The cooler arid evenings are pleasantly scented by nothing but fresh scoured air. Except when the rains stimulate the tiny waxy leaves of the creosote and create a pungent medicinal aroma. The creosote is a ubiquitous shrub in the Mojave, Sonoran, and Chihuahuan Deserts. From my 2002 journal I wrote, “outside in the silky spring air, I picked a branch of a flowering creosote. A little yellow spider dropped down hanging from a gossamer thread. It lives on the creosote and blends in with the yellow flowers.” The Tohono O’odham use creosote as an incense for ceremonies. The Apache and pioneers of the Old West used it as a remedy for ailments, along with Mormon Tea, prickly pear, and the ocotillo’s roots, bark and petals. Lots of spa resorts in the Sonora and Mojave offer Desert herbal salves, tinctures, oils, and perfumes. The desert SW is a therapeutic place—a sanctuary for many ailments, including my own.

The VA claims I'm manic-depressive and suffer from PTSD and about fifteen years ago, they determined that I was totally and permanently disabled. They awarded me monthly compensation because my stint in the Army, 1974-5, exacerbated a preexisting condition. I was born with a manic mind. For me, mania is a constant mental seizure before the ultimate breakdown. The fizzle that ends a grandiose project. A manic-depressive person will either sky rocket to success or breakdown in despair over the self-created mess. The condition involves a lot of repeating. They say Isaac Newton and Beethoven had fits of mania. Other notable sufferers are Florence Nightingale, Edgar Allan Poe, Vincent Van Gogh, and Virginia Woolf, so I'm in good company. Mostly. There are lots of people who are destitute and homeless because of this mental trait. (33 percent of the homeless are mentally ill, they say. The rest probably live on the streets because of drugs, like my current spouse.) Criminal behavior and suicide are sometimes a consequences of the same disorder that has left me debilitated. I only want to stay settled. Intact.

There are so many avenues I could go down when I think about my past and present. Nearly twenty years with Cecil. Situations ruled by mental confusion, trauma, and lots of stress. Status quo was a term I used with a VA social worker in Casa Grande. "I have status quo," I said, meaning I accept my fate. A life with Cecil. At times, a difficult man to love. To live with. (The social worker wasn't much help anyway. She said to me, "If I wanted a man out of my house, he'd be out." As if it were that simplistic. I quit going to social workers after that, stuck to psychiatrists and their meds.)

I didn't have a handle on what went on around me during my fifteen-years of living in a medicated stupor. It wasn't until unpacking my trunks here in Golden Valley, that I noticed quite a few of my possessions were missing; mostly my spiritual souvenirs from Tibet, SE Asia, and the Middle East. Trophies from my world travels. Cecil had been bartering or giving away my

things to people he knew. He's a wheeler-dealer and was slinging deals behind my back in rural Maricopa with my brass Buddha bell, brass vase from Thailand, silver Tibetan flask, my kris knife from the Philippines, my mountain bike, and even my Schmidt Cassegrain telescope, to name a few things. Right under my eyes. Slick. Sneaky. "what's yours is mine," I know he justified.

When I accused him of taking my things, he had an immediate justification, like he always does. It's part of being a wheeler-dealer, I guess. "I thought you didn't want it," he claimed or he'd try to gaslight me and say things like, "Remember you told me you didn't want it," or, "Remember, you said I could have it." What can I say? At least on one of his trips back to Maricopa he brought back my brass Krishna statue, my treasured avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu. And I thanked him for that. It's a complex relationship. I'm a complicated person and we both suffer from plenty of disorders.

*Back to the desert SW in Arizona*



The desert is a sacred place. A hallowed ground. The ancient Egyptians along the Nile lived in the Sahara desert, the largest hot desert in the world. They called it the Red Land as distinguished from the Black Land of the Nile floodplain. The deserts on each side of the Nile separated ancient Egypt from the invading Hittites, Hyksos, Nubians, and Libyans—and provided



them with copper, turquoise and precious gems. Islam's final Prophet lived in the Arabian Desert when he received the revelations of Allah through the angel Gabriel—the angel who told Mary of her immaculate conception. Moses, beloved prophet of Islam and the Old Testament, led his people from Egypt into the Sinai Desert. In front of Mt Sinai, “God gave Moses his commandments and he gave the people of the desert manna to eat so they would survive their journey to the promised land.” And according to the Gospels, Jesus fasted for forty days and nights in the Judean Desert where the Devil tempted him jump from a cliff and let the angels catch his fall.

No, the desert is a holy sanctuary for me. I'm happy to be in either the Mojave or the Sonoran. I can't really say which one is my favorite. They're both worth describing. Anywhere you make your home is worth a description.

## Chapter Two: Corrective Action (Contingency) Planning

### *Shortly after Labor Day Weekend, September 1997*

My first spouse Don Ellis and I had been married eleven years when we moved from Night Hawk Way to rural Maricopa, in 1997. For most of our marriage, we had watched our subdivision become part of the Ahwatukee Foothills at South Mountain, one of the fastest growing communities in Phoenix. The subdivisions consisted of high-ceilinged houses refined with stucco in sunset and desert colors and with red tile rooves. The houses sat up against desert hills, beside golf courses or artificial lakes. In part, Don and I moved to our twenty-acre ranch to leave behind the gridlock and noise of Ahwatukee. Try meditating when a garbage truck loudly lumbers down the street. The rural desert is quiet, soothing, and peaceful—not a neighbor's voice or commotion to be heard.

My story really begins just after Labor Day Weekend, September 1997, when I went on a five-day writing retreat to Ramsey Canyon's Nature's Conservancy, near Sierra Vista, at Arizona's SE border with Mexico. I had stayed in these cabins before to work on a novel, watch hummingbirds hover at garden feeders, and hike in the oak scrub and pine forest. Among the cabins I saw many deer and once I saw a coati, a ring tail, long snouted racoon like mammal. I am a nature and animal lover.

I convinced Don to come down on Saturday, since he'd never seen the canyon. He drove the five-hour round-trip journey in one day.

We hiked along the ridge where red boulders rimmed the valley. A wild turkey clattered in the distant scrub, even a baby rattler appeared from rocks along our path. Eek.

While overlooking the canyon, Don and I talked. I discussed my novel—The Man from Sacaton—and he gave me relevant feedback. At that time, I felt at peace. A status quo thing. No rude awakenings, just plugging along trying to get somewhere. And I thought I loved the man who sat beside me on the ridge. He was my best friend, my emotional support, caretaker of my needs and wants. He had a good sense of humor and made me laugh. At almost any time, we could ease into like-minded conversations. I valued his opinion, most of the time, just as he respected mine (at least eventually). We were both progressive and environmentally minded. (Maybe not the type to commandeer a “stop the refinery movement,” but we recycled, contributed to charities, and we discussed the issues).

During his visit to Ramsey Canyon, Don graciously spared me his bad news. But as soon as I returned home from my retreat, he said, “I have something to tell you.” I sat on the sofa and he sat on the floor beside the coffee table, a typical station for him. Then he told me that he got a

bad review at Intel and that his boss had put him on a CAP (a corrective action plan), the catalyst of this story.

I was stunned, scarcely believing that Don had fallen into such a situation—and I knew nothing about it. He had worked at his current engineering job as professionally, diligently, and intelligently as he had at every other Intel position. But he had landed under a shrewd Bitch Boss who essentially busted him for his neglectful corporate eye. Don should have known better; he should have seen the writing on the wall. He already knew that to survive Intel, you had to BE POLITICAL. But his good nature failed to keep him “ahead of the game and as corporately visible as possible.”

We were in jeopardy, shock—what does a wife say to a respected technical man flung to the corporate gutters? Of course, Don was so ashamed he would tell no one about this predicament, especially not his parents. It was just too embarrassing, (worse, possibly, than failing to pass the bar exam, like I had.) Our lives changed forever all because Intel ranked and rated workgroup peers. While 80% of employees gain a humble “sufficient” or “you pass” rating and 10 % receive an “exceeds expectations,” 10% MUST GET a “needs improvement.” These people become the necessary scapegoats put on Corrective Action Plans.

As far as my contributing to our financial stability, if Don lost his job, we couldn't rely on me, I hadn't worked during our eleven years of marriage. In fact, I never even had any kind of long-term job. Or any kind of hard knock, for that matter. From high school, in 1973, I ventured to Europe with my best friend Kathi, then joined the “Two years in Europe” Army; went to college, traveled, wrote a little, dabbled in art, went to graduate school then taught English overseas. I married Don, wrote novels, went to law school, and worked on an Internet business. I guess I'm just a dabbler.

### *Happy Trails Realty, Casa Grande*

In retrospect, it's probably a good thing to face the mortality of your job (or to struggle through law school). Shake things up. It forces you to assess your life among the pack. Forces you to make contingency plans, which are always good to have. Unfortunately, job mortality brings a sense of urgency. "If we don't act now we won't have any financial backing to act later."

Like a monsoon microburst, sudden and on the spot, we made plans to move during Don's three-month CAP probation. Contingency number one, Don concluded, was to quit Intel even if he survived the CAP. Why? By this time Don HATED Intel. We would head out to the desert and build our Internet business, Arastar Internet. We were certain that we'd make it. Even without a source of income. It would be like quitting Intel to backpack around the world for a year. Other people took risks, why couldn't we? And for years I had wanted to move to the real desert and not live on a suburban landscape with rocks, a saguaro and a fake wash running through the yard.

"We're looking for a house with land," we told the first realtor we met in Casa Grande. He was about 60 and originally from Texas.

"Welp," Tex stood back in thought, placing his hands in his pockets. "Lots of doublewides out here."

A doublewide? I thought, unable to picture what Tex had in mind. There are no doublewides in the Ahwatukee Foothills.

Soon enough I understood that a “double-wide” was a prefabricated home, like a trailer, and that most people in the rural desert lived in one. “No,” I said. “We want a ranch house with land. We can pay up to two-hundred-thousand.” We had Don’s stock options in mind.

After a moment’s reflection, Tex said, “Welp, there is this old guy selling his place in Hidden Valley, in Maricopa, out toward Gila Bend. It’s a big ranch house on twenty acres. Probably what you folks got in mind. Even has a guesthouse the old guy rents out. And there’s a well too. Got to have a well out there. Otherwise, you have to haul water and you don’t seem like the kind of folks to be hauling water.”

This was exactly what we had in mind and we were practically willing to strike the deal, sight unseen, especially when he said the ranch was near BLM land, vast expanses of pristine Sonora desert. Since moving from Boston to Phoenix in 1986, and seeing my first saguaro, I’ve been in love with the Sonora. Unlike the dense wet and gray Pacific NW, where I grew up, the Sonora is under perpetual bright blue skies. And unlike Portland, where each yard contains over 50 varieties of plants, the desert is stark and simple. There are basically three trees: the mesquite, ironwood, and paloverde; four cacti: saguaros, barrows, chollas, and prickly pears; two plants: the Ocotillo and creosote; and about five bird species: the gila woodpeckers with their hindu dots, cactus wrens, curved-bill thrashers, Gambel’s quail, and the greater roadrunner dashing from California to Texas. (of course, there are also lizards, snakes, and lesser creepy crawling critters).

We waited a few weeks before Tex called and said he talked to the old man in Hidden Valley and that the place was still up for sale—having just gone down in price from 200 to 180K. That sounded affordable—a steal in fact, considering the small lots and half million-dollar prices of the Ahwatukee Foothills. Here was a 4500 square foot ranch house and a 1500 square foot

guesthouse on twenty acres for a mere 180K. And it had a well. Maybe we could even bring down the price! What a bargain.

The next Saturday, Tex drove us the 50 miles from Casa Grande to Hidden Valley in a Cadillac Seville lacking steer horns. Along the way Tex pointed out the John Wayne Cattle Ranch outside of Casa Grande. “Yep, old John Wayne was a real character in these parts,” he said as he pointed out the ranch house where John Wayne had lived.

We reached a series of dirt roads, passed saguaros, a pecan orchard, an orange grove, vineyards, and many shabby and new double, single, and even triple-wides. Finally, we turned down Barnes Road, named after a rancher from Hidden Valley. In the distance, foothills edged the BLM land that stretched for miles with pod trees, saguaros, ocotillos, hedgehogs, prickly pear, and barrel cacti. I saw nothing but the Sonoran desert in its full, majestic splendor.

When we turned down Quail Run Road, Hidden Valley unfolded with lacy mesquites and thorny ironwoods with twisted trunks and tiny lavender-green leaves edging wide sandy washes. Mountains and hills, dotted with green shrubs, tall saguaros and ocotillos, stood on every horizon. Then, past powerlines, the big ranch house appeared on the north side of Quail Run Road. When I first saw the big sprawling ranch house embedded in the raw desert it appeared like an institution, like a mission hospital. Tex turned onto a dirt driveway leading to the main house which was long enough to be a duplex. In the middle of the drive stood a four-foot log topped with a deerskin cape and antlers—obviously an old hunter’s idea of a trophy. The first thing to go, I thought as we drove around it to the wrought iron front gates. I was already thinking, “This is it. This is the place.”

*A Grotesque Old Man without a Shirt*

Masterminding the creation of our Hidden Valley ranch was the eighty-year-old obese and grotesque man (grotesque because he shamelessly walked around without a shirt.) He had five Pomeranian dogs ping-ponging before him when he met us at the front door and while he paused to catch his breath when showing us the property. He paid no mind to his dogs, although we could hardly hear him speak over their yapping.

I would later hear rumors that the old man was part of the Arizona mafia. Wouldn't surprise me. He either had Alzheimer's or he was mean and ornery by nature. His feeble wife lived off oxygen tanks. Clearly, they had to sell the house because of her. The place seemed too burdensome for an old man and his ill wife. As it turned out, he had been trying to sell the house for a few years. Then we came along, eager to move because of Don's CAP.

### *Slump block Construction, Cyclone, Wrought Iron, and Block fencing, and Rails*

In 1983 the old man, as he told us, had left his tavern in Phoenix and bought twenty acres of raw desert (perhaps for a hide away). Then he and his two brothers built the guesthouse (where they first lived) and then the main house. The slump block construction gave both structures a rustic and sturdy look. At the main house, broad eaves covered a veranda that ran from the front garage on the west end to the Arizona room off the back of the house. Northwest of the main house, was the guesthouse and the holding tank for well water (not far from a weathered and leaning barn that would have to come down). I never gave too much thought to fences and walls until encountering this property. The old man had inexhaustibly used a variety of fences.

Barbed wire ran from pole to pole around the entire twenty acres, much of it in need of repair (and that would come). A three-foot cyclone fence gave the main house a sizeable yard

within the acreage. Little wrought iron fences bordered the front walkway, restraining two garden beds—one with a tall Mexican Palm and two saguaros—another fence that blocked the view from the front room picture window. (The palm may dance beautifully at a beachfront resort, or along the river Nile, but it would have to be removed from my desert haven. Picture windows are meant for views of the landscape).

### *Outside Lighting Everywhere*

In addition to rampant fencing, the old seller adorned his retreat with excessive outside lighting. Light fixtures ran along the slump block walls and pillars, the broad eaves around the house, atop tall iron pipes off Barnes Road, even on the deer antler pillar. And much of the lighting was FLOODLIGHTS. At night, with all the lighting on, the house would shout its presence for miles, not exactly an obscure hideout in the desert.

### *A dark, wooden “tavern” interior with confined nooks and crannies*

The old seller was crazy about the dark tavern motif. The dark and cavernous inside of the house had four bedrooms, two baths on the east side. In the center was a high vaulted room, as large as a doublewide, with an enormous fireplace in the center. Beside the front door was a 1970’s wallpaper picture of an orange, yellow and brown sunset over a duck pond with reeds. I couldn’t wait to tear it down. Beyond the kitchen, we stepped into the west side of the house, an area that desperately needed surgery. Here was the garage, basement, and several makeshift rooms with several bathrooms. De Amatto had been a tavern owner so all the furniture was dark, kitchen cabinets were dark, light switches and outlets had dark wood covers, fake dark wood linoleum covered the kitchen and dining floors, a dark pea-green carpet covered the front room



and a brassy dark orange carpet covered the bedroom floors. Even the two skylights on the vaulted ceiling had been painted dark. And, most striking, dark wood paneling covered most walls. And, every nook, cranny and edge of the entire house contained tavern knickknacks. There were Elvis porcelain statues amid porcupine toothpick holders, waddling daffy ducks, “been to Coloradie” nut holders, beer mugs, “boob” coffee cup and condiment shakers, Glenfiddich shot glasses, and so on. One closet, by the kitchen door, had nothing in it but a functional toilet.

“In case you have to go while cooking,” Tex jested, though it seemed he thought it a good idea.

Despite the much-needed remodeling, I wanted that house. I wanted to live in the desert. I was smitten by the raw, open vistas of saguaros on the surrounding volcanic hills. For Don the real kicker was the guesthouse. He envisioned using it as our business office, or as housing for our international guests.

During the end of September, Don and I made several visits to Hidden Valley, both with and without Tex. We even drove down and sat in our idling car at the corner of Barnes and Sage, just to view our new ranch house.

**I was Smitten and had Great Visions for the place.** The landscape alone sold me on the house. And it had a guesthouse... with the home gutted and cleared of all dark paneling and knickknacks, we imagined a light airy “environmentally friendly” home.... We’d have recycle and composting bins, energy efficient light bulbs, a water purifier and HEPA air filters, CFC-free refrigerators, and solar panels providing clean efficient energy from the Arizona sun. Almost simultaneously, we both dreamt up, “The Desert Valley Bed and Breakfast.” it seemed the perfect plan... make a little income and write off all home improvement expenses... It didn’t

matter that there were no phone lines... use a cell and I could get an office in nearby Maricopa town.

Now here is a major question that both Don and I skirted when we bought the ranch. “How can you run an Internet business when THERE are no PHONE LINES?” (no satellite internet at the time.) We were just too taken away by the CAP and the need to firm up a real estate deal before Intel deCAPitated Don. And I thought the ranch house off Barnes Road was perfect for us.

Naturally, Don and I wanted to live comfortably, and that would not be in a doublewide. But rural Pinal County, fifty miles south of the Ahwatukee Foothills, was the place for doublewides. Along with, single wide trailers, beat up “Yosemite Vans,” rock houses for homeless boyfriends, and pigs named Wilber that would be butchered after a gunshot to the head. A place with old Mexican caballeros who castrate animals with homespun veterinary talents; where people named Mountain Mike, Plumber Dale, and Big John run around drinking Busch by the case, by the day. A place where redneck racists target shoot at discarded trash.

By November we closed the deal and began our move- in phase, which lasted well into the chilling winter nights of December. It took that long for De Amatto to get his junk out and for us to pack up and move down on the weekends, U haul by U haul. Meanwhile, every day I drove the 100 mile round trip, passing Harrah’s Ak Chin Casino, Maricopa town, the Gila River Reservation and Casino. I was eager to sort through the mess and make piles of interesting things to keep, such as rusty stuff that might look good in my gardens, of things to burn, such as all the dark paneling and unnecessary beams and piles of junk, and garbage to toss in the huge dumpster

we rented. Piles lay everywhere, an old abandoned freezer became a makeshift holding bin for trash, steel drums around the property ceaselessly smoldered; I even dug holes to rake in nails and glass, there was so much of it.

I first met Kyle and his Mexican friend, when the boys were helping De Amatto move out. He suggested the boys come around to help me move in. Of course, I wanted their help. I needed manpower. Don was never around and even if he were, he wasn't a handyman. he was a straight computer geek.

As it turned out, most of De Amatto's structures were difficult to tear down, but the boys worked with such enthusiasm I worried they'd get hurt and I'd be held liable. Both Don and I had some concerns about their admiring our \$90 Costco microwave, which I had brought to the ranch during the move in phase to cook my instant meals.

It sat on the kitchen counter and when Kyle first saw it, he gawked, "What an awesome microwave," as if it were very high tech. (Had he never seen a new microwave before?) I feared it might turn up missing, and I subsequently kept my things as much out of sight from the boys. We did not want them around when we brought down our first U-haul load. But Kyle appeared, detecting that we'd arrived with our big city stuff. I put him to work carrying boxes inside the house, but he'd always quickly return to the U-haul and carefully watch as we unloaded. It made us very nervous when he caught a glimpse of our \$1000 each mountain bikes. "Wow, totally too awesome..." From then on I tried to keep his eyes glued to cleaning tasks in the house.

The boys first ripped down a rectangular closet latched to the central wall dividing the common area. An obvious feng shui faux pas. With the Explorer and chain, we toppled the blasphemous deer antler pedestal, then, while I scraped off the duck pond scene with soap and

water, the boys carried panels to the fires and yanked and tugged the pea green and bold orange carpeting to the dumpster.

After making preliminary piles, I set out to destroy all unnecessary wood structures in the house, glad for the boy's help. After ripping down the dark panels, I was thrilled to discover slump block walls in the kitchen, dining area, and the entire living area. Painted a light color, these walls.... an open, light and airy touch unlike the plaster walls in my Ahwatukee home. The task was monumental. One that seem impossible but I simply jumped in to sort, pile and burn. It was an exercise in Karma Yoga where you work for work's sake on the path of doing good karma.

### **Chapter Three: Dwellers of Rural Pinal County**

Our friends in Ahwatukee questioned our decision to move and suggested that we weren't really desert dwellers. But I begged to differ.

#### **Neighbors**

In late December a violent storm passed over Hidden Valley one night, clashing thunder and torrents of rain, striking off the power, blowing the roof from the West Room and flooding the basement below. The next morning Don called a roofer from an ad in the Casa Grande Valley News. The roofer turned out to be our neighbor to the east, Henry "Tennessee" Garnett, a kind grizzly man in his fifties and a good, an old-fashioned neighbor to have. He offered the use of his well if ours stopped and he dropped by from time to time just to check up on things. We eventually hired him to rebuild De Amatto's poorly constructed **west room**.

We had two other neighbors in sight of our land who lived in single wide trailers against the BLM land where they had no electricity. One was a hermit man that I never saw. The other was a tall sun beat woman, Katy, in her late 40's. One afternoon, while I was burning in my front

yard, she pulled up and asked for the paneling (several panels leaned against the fence, waiting to be burned). Her boyfriend Jerry stood quietly with her. He was a strange thin young man with cold blue and piercing eyes. I did not like him or her on my property.

A few weeks later, Tennessee told me Katy kicked out her “crystal head” boyfriend Jerry. He went into the mountain about half a mile south of our spread and built a shelter out of rock and cholla skeletons. “He sits above the rock house and watches us,” Tennessee added. “He knows when you or I or Katy drive off.”

I subsequently spotted Jerry on the hillside nearly every day, and this made me very nervous. So, Don and I bought me a Smith and Wesson 357 Magnum and a black fanny holster which I carried around. To live safely on the frontier, I had already been taking pistol lessons at Shooters World, and I got a concealed weapons permit. For one thing, it would be useful if a rattlesnake cornered me. And the mere sight of my holstered gun would warn off those who would trespass and that seemed to happen frequently.

One morning, before we had actually moved into our new home, an old white Plymouth pulled up the drive. Kyle stepped out with a man in his early twenties with trim blond hair and dressed in pressed jeans and a Western shirt. Kyle introduced Arron and said he lived in a pickup camper at his parent’s plot of land neighboring Kyle’s. Arron was very polite, shaking my hand, speaking with a deference I had not seen since teaching English in Thailand where status distinctions exist in the very words you’re allowed to speak (as royalty, as an “accomplished” person, as a woman, a man, a peasant). I never experienced “class differentiation” in Ahwatukee, but in rural Pinal County, I was the Lady of the Fortress, “Ma’am,” “Miss Teresa...,” and sometimes, God forbid, “Mrs. Ellis.” No, I’m Ms Ekland, if you will.

When Arron claimed to be a handyman with experience in roofing, carpentry and sheetrock, he peaked my interest. I had planned to scour the Casa Grande ads for handymen and workers. I felt lucky. Here was an inexpensive guy to help me put the house right. I showed him around, described this and that project and at each turn he said he could do it. I asked Arron how much he charged, adding, "No more than \$200 a job, I hope." Arron's eyes lit up; he had discovered a gold mine. For the next few days, he proved to be a hard a worker, tossing junk into the dumpster for a twenty, then, for a forty, he tore down the fake plywood box ceiling beams in the main house. But Arron's own luck stopped late one morning when I pulled up the drive and found him working on my property, without my permission. He had trespassed, crossed the line, and that made me nervous. "What are you doing here?" I asked in anger.

He explained he had swept the veranda, straightened rails (that I intended to tear down) and tossed more garbage in the dumpster. "I've been at it since five o'clock," he said, as if his trespassing wasn't a problem.

"I think you need to go," I said. Once someone crosses the line, there's no telling what he might do next.

He turned to head toward the old Plymouth, picking up his handyman belt, walking downtrodden. "Ma'am," he then said, turning back to me. "I could sure use a \$50 spot for all my work."

To get rid of him, I suggested Don would stop by his camper with the payment. (I mean, I wasn't about to brandish my gun like a fool.) And after he pulled down the drive and onto Quail Run, I stood waiting a while, concerned he might return. After about twenty minutes, I locked the house and drove to the Tempe dog pound.

### *A series of watchdogs*

In Ahwatukee I had been a cat person for ten years. No kids. No dogs. When we brought our six pampered cats to the ranch house, they hid in one bedroom closet for nearly a month. For some reason the big, cold house was not inviting. Things were too out of order: unpacked boxes lined walls waiting to be painted, hammers, crow bars, scrappers and chisels lie everywhere, awaiting the next project, floors were bare concrete.

In rural Pinal county, watchdogs were a necessity, but I knew very little about what kind of dog to get. At the Tempe dog pound, I spent two hours selecting dogs. Not only was I investing in security, I was rescuing dogs from a lethal injection. I ended up with a Labrador Pit Bull mix, a Burnese Mountain Dog mix (she was simply too pretty not to rescue), and a German Shepard that I named Kali. She was Kali, the perfect watchdog. And we bonded immediately, as if I had raised her. She obeyed me and growled at anyone who came near me. Even Don. In fact, Kali would never stop growling at Don, a behavior that I felt sure would work its way out, after she grew to know him (but then why had she grown to know me instantly?) Rachael, the sheep dog, always ran off for hours at a time, but Kali stayed with me. And Bishop, well, he was Kali's lackey. Then Rachael and Kali began viciously fighting.

I told a friend from law school that my watchdogs were a flop, except for Kali. She said her sister had two six-month-old pit bull that needed a home. The puppies, with their broad faces, stubby noses and coal black eyes, instantly grabbed my heart. And, like Kali, they took right to me, jumping on my lap whenever I sat outside to watch the sunset or sunrise. I called them Ninja and Shaman. Shaman was completely black and Ninja had white on her chest, paws and nose.

Was I becoming a dog person? My cats would never forgive me.

For an interesting month, I felt calm and happy surrounded by an amazing kind of affection and loyalty. I felt a part of the desert, a part of the pack. But pits will be pits, shepherds shepherds, and bitches bitches. All my dogs except Bishop the lackey were bitches vying for my affection—for the number two position in the pack. First it was Kali and Rachael, then Rachael tried asserting herself over the pit sisters and they lit into her. I had to take a chair and pry the pits off Rachael. And then maybe a few days later, Rachael went at it again—either challenging Kali or the pits. I knew that Rachael would have to go, after I found her a home.

I never saw it coming that fateful night Don and I returned home late at night after watching a movie in Ahwatukee. As usual, I went straight to the back yard to check on the dogs. In the Arizona room was a sliding window that I used to let the dogs hop in and out of their pen. I went to that window and saw by the light from the room, the dead body of Shaman, lying breathless in the dirt, her sister walking around the pen as if unaware of the death. Kali and Bishop were standing by the window, ready to come in for a treat. I turned away, having, in that one instant, absorbed the entire scene and knew that Kali had killed the pit puppy. I had often observed Kali snapping at the pits, but I never saw a vicious fight break out—like those Rachael instigated. It seemed Kali was just showing the pits who was dominant.

“Shaman’s dead,” I told Don, stunned and upset. “Please bury her for me.”

Don put the lifeless dog in our wheel barrel and buried her in the desert. I was glad to learn that he had said a prayer for her and placed stones on her grave. I didn’t ask where he buried Shaman, but a few months later while I was wandering about the acreage, I found her grave, an open hole. A coyote had evidently sniffed her flesh and dragged her carcass away. Only a dog collar and license lay among toppled stones marking her grave.



After seeing her in that instant by the Arizona window, I could not look at Kali again. A dog's love and loyalty is all in the eyes. They have nothing to hide, no secrets, no lies, no cunningness that hurts and harms. No complications, no formulations. There is only the one truth that, "I am here now for you, the pack that is we. I am your dog." The next day, Don took Kali to the pound, a decision I agonized over. But I could not handle canine behavior problems like killing, not an easy behavior to cure. Poor Kali had crossed the line and broke my heart.

### **Teddy Bear Chollas**

Essentially, I faced the raw frontier on my own, with a 357 magnum and my assortment of watchdogs. Don was gone from seven in the morning until nine or ten at night, when I was asleep after an exhausting day. We saw each other primarily on the weekends when he got up past noon, and we then drove to the city to visit friends, see a movie, eat at Macayos Mexican or Lalibellas Ethiopian restaurant, shop at Trader Jo's, Costco, Petco and Whole Foods.

One warm sunny Saturday morning, Don and I rode our mountain bikes into the BLM land. It was probably the only time Don ventured beyond the ranch house outside of his Taurus. We took Ninja with us, my favorite watchdog after Kali and Shaman were gone. Ninja the pit bull *was* my sweetheart Amazon warrior, a Ninja.

Once on the BLM land, Don and I decided to challenge ourselves by clambering up a beautiful hillside garnished with flowers, saguaros and ocotillos. By the time we reached the top and took in the sweeping view, I noticed we were near a scattering of Teddy Bear Chollas, the most dangerous plant in the Sonora. The Teddy Bear Cholla is a small cactus tree with spindly joints. Each joint has long white fishhook spines that grab anything passing by. But from a

distance, these plants look fuzzy, like little teddy bears. As the plant grows, the outer joints drop onto the ground to produce new chollas. I looked down and saw spindly joints everywhere.

“We better get out of here,” I said just as I noticed Ninja struggling nearby. I dropped my bike and walked over to her.

Quills and spindly joints covered Ninja’s face, paws and tongue, because she agonized to bite them off. Although I had my gun in my fanny pack holster, I had no comb to flick off the spindly joints. Horrified, I fetched a stone and carefully pried off the larger joints. Ninja had quills all over the pads of her feet, so she could not walk. She would not let Don near her, only me, so while Don walked the two bikes I carried her home and spent the rest of the day prying out the most prominent quills with tweezers. Ninja would only allow one or two pulls before she growled. Sometimes a dog’s best remedy is its own licking and doctoring. It was for Ninja. After a few days, she had worked out most of the quills, even those on her tongue.

Ninja’s encounter with the cholla was one of many harsh incidents that **plagued** our stay in Desert Valley. Is this the pioneer experience? I kept asking myself. Or is some divine being testing my stamina to live where I want to live? Who wanted me out of the desert? Who kept hollering, “Go back to where you belong! This desert’s for natural desert dwellers. But where was I meant to live? In the artificial haven of Ahwatukee? NO. I was determined to live on our ranch, despite the *constant* difficulties that clock the weeks while we remodeled our “Green Acres” home.

### **Creepy Crawlers and Egyptian Plagues**

I quickly learned to wear thick gloves while working outside the house, especially when picking wood from woodpiles, or moving stones or clearing the washes of De Amatto’s trash.

Lurking reclusively in such places are the true dwellers of the desert. The creepy crawlers. They are **reclusive** and shy away from people, unless distressed or disturbed, and they mostly come out in the coolness of night, during summer. I spotted scorpions ranging from the six-inch yellow Desert Hairy Scorpion to the smaller Desert Bark Scorpion which inflicts a deadly sting to someone sick or allergic. A bark scorpion stung Don on the foot twice, when he casually walked to the well at night in his flip flop sandals. He said the sting had a nasty punch.

Most snakes are not aggressive and attack only when provoked. They see better at night and are deaf, but they feel ground vibration. On a few occasions, by the holding tank, I spotted a black and white cross-band king snake, and a lithe, pinkish coachwhip. I also saw speckled rattlers, sidewinders, and a tremendous diamondback. My first “close call” occurred when I was picking up stones near our third dumpster. I nonchalantly lifted a rock that had been shading a small curled Speckled rattler. I jumped back. It did not budge. I had not disturbed it. Throughout that day, the snake moved but a few inches into the shade of another rock. (and then our handyman killed it). My neighbor told me about A cowboy down the road got bit between his thumb and pointing finger as he reached into his tack room shelf. The pain, he said, “was chilling, like hell done froze.” I also heard about a woman down the road who walked right upon a rattler, got bit, and landed in the hospital with a dangerously swollen leg.

Twice, there came to our ranch Egyptian-style plagues unearthed from the desert soil. The first plague began with a thud on the window after nightfall, then another thud and another occurred until a constant pelting sounded throughout the house, all night. The next morning, millions of dead Pallid-winged grasshoppers covered the walkways and yard and the entire desert. There were a few Creosote Grasshoppers and some beetles too, as if they had joined in on

the frenzy. The only real damage was that my garden greens had been trimmed to the ground, and some of my newly planted mesquite and Palo Verde trees had been chewed away.

In early spring, a period of heavy rain flooded the small washes running through our land. These rains brought to life an exceptional number of desert wild flowers. And, the rains also brought to life the Colorado River Toad, the largest native toad in America. Evidently, the rains had filled breeding pools around our ranch.

It all started out with a very big frog—as big as a man’s hands held flat together. I was stacking the woodpile outside the front door when my pit bull started barking excitedly at something behind her dog house against the garage on the front veranda.

I fetched a hoe and hesitated toward the doghouse, fearing what might be there—a rattler, scorpion, rat, or even a cat. And when I finally moved the doghouse away from the corner, I saw a mountain of olive-green blubber bunched in the corner.

“Eeek!” I ran to my handyman and said, “There’s a big frog by the front door. Can you please remove it to the desert.”

“Yep,” he said, after seeing the frog bunched against the corner. “That’s a desert toad all right.”

From then on, toads reproduced with vigor. They simply kept appearing and “rivvitting – rivvit, rivvit,” specifically at night, but also in the day. When turning on the faucet by the back door, toads emerged from under the concrete walkway, up to twenty at a time, as if the water sprouted them. Big blubbery ones appeared, along with small and medium ones. At its peak, on a full moon night, I looked out my window to see, on the soft white-hazed earth, hundreds, maybe thousands, of rivvitting olive-green Colorado River Toads, all sizes, hopping in all directions. It was a sight nobody saw in Ahwatukee.

### **Other less venomous desert life**

From time to time I also spotted, lurking in the desert, harmless tarantulas and a few venomous centipedes as hideous as they were segmented. Twice I saw an orange and black Gila Monsters move like a turtle across the terrain. You'd have to stick your hand in its mouth to receive its venomous bite. And there was the time a fifty-pound javelina, also known as a peccary, scavenged for food around the guesthouse and corral. Later I found the pig-like animal with a long snout, thick neck and short body, legs, hooves and tail, dead by the corral. It turned out that our handyman tenant had shot the poor animal so it wouldn't tear up the garden or kill their rabbits. I was very upset. It seemed some desert creatures—rattlers, pigeons, coyotes and javelinas—were fated to die if they trespassed or disturbed the people living in the desert. They did not belong there! We did.

### **Chapter Four: Dust Devils, Horses, and the Handyman Moves In**

(written in the year 2000)

Don and I never shopped for groceries in the rural town of Maricopa, "Copa Town" or Hooterville as we began to call it. The town's main drag was a twenty-five minute drive from the ranch. Copa Town was busy with activity as if everyone around, Mexican, Indian, white trash, and plain good old rural folk alike, came to "town" for entertainment, necessities, and to hang out, often, as I would later learn, for drug related reasons. Two feed stores, a Circle K gas station, a shambled tire garage overburdened with stacks of tires, a hardware store, Headquarters Tavern, a Farmer's Grocery Store, and the county courthouse skirted the main road. From there, doublewide neighborhoods stretched onto the Indian reservation. I had a small office in town

where I went to work on web sites when I tired of the cleaning up my new ranch. It was in the same building that contained City Hall, Road Runner Travel, Sandra's hair salon, Old West Realty, Bill's Videos, and the Maricopa Chamber of Commerce.

Fred and Phyllis Hildebrand sold "recycled" furniture on one corner off Maricopa Highway, the main street through town. "e Furniture," the hand painted sign read, along with "Jack Russell Terriers and Giant Schnauzer puppies for sale." Fred Hildebrand was a big goofy man, bald with Mr. Green Jeans overalls (or was he a large Mr. Ziffle) and Phyllis was a modern-day Mrs. Ziffle in a baggy shirt and high water pants. Her stringy hair hung at angles and she ended each sentence with a nasal "umm hungh." I'd never before encountered such a filthy shop cluttered with make shift kennels for puppies, cans of paint, and dusty counters full of junk De Amatto would appreciate. The odor was suffocating.

But I loved their recycled, reassembled, and restored furniture. It would bring a unique rustic theme to our ranch house which I was thinking of converting into a bed and breakfast. There were old chairs and tables made new with a coat of paint, bureaus pieced together with an assortment of mirrors and handles, dressers decked in turquoise or yellow paints, and benches backed with bed headboards. We invited the Hildebrands to our home so they could see the kitchen and invent a SW style country kitchen. They were our first local visitors, except for Arron and Kyle. We made plans for a large bar with glass "old country store" style bins for my legumes and grains. Fred would paint the existing cabinets, patch the holes and apply a SW New Mexican trim. He would create a wooden countertop cutting board and make us a large pantry out of old ornate doors. My head began spinning with all the possibilities.

As with many of the locals we hired in Pinal County, Hildebrand seldom showed up for work and when he did, he slapped up uneven trim, hung crooked doors, and cut the hallway door

so narrow that a doorknob was impossible to turn. He ripped off our Formica kitchen counter and left us with a plywood surface for the rest of our stay at the ranch. He did manage to bring us our eight by six-foot pantry with lumbering doors without handles (we practically needed a crow bar to open it). In the end, the Hildebrands stopped showing up altogether, and after seeing the magnitude of his rustic quality, I never called them again or stopped by their little corner shop in Copa Town.

### **Don survived his CAP and stayed with Intel while I kept remodeling**

By mid-Spring, Don was released from his CAP. He had survived, but he didn't quit his job. We weren't ready for such drastic measures (to back-pack around the world for a year). One of the first things we did was bring Home Depot out to measure the entire house and guesthouse for carpeting. That was as far as we got with remodeling. We clung to our B&B environmental home ideas while unforeseen infrastructure problems and disasters kept popping up. The water pressure at the well failed and roofs kept blowing off and flooding the basement. We spent money on pool fencing for my dog pen, new 6-foot chain link fencing around the main yard and a new septic tank. It took a crane to set the two new air conditioners on the roof of each side of the massive house (Don had bought two huge air-con units for each side of the house. the existing swamp coolers just wouldn't do). At first, in our ecological minds, De Amatto's gray water system of drainage pipes running from sinks, the washer, and showers to the citrus trees, seemed a good idea. We even bought "realgood" laundry disks with non-toxic ceramic granules for the runoff water to the trees. Unfortunately, in less than a month, a thick gooey dark-green ooze found its way up the kitchen sink and showers, along with a rancid "something must have died" odor. We hired three different plumbers three different times to help us solve the gray

water problem. In the end, the house had to be re-plumbed to the septic tank. No, Don had to keep his job at Intel. We needed his income.

### **And the handyman moves in**

Because we had no phone lines, Don bought a cell phone that came in a black “planner” phonebook size packet with a bulky battery. It was like a war time military radio with a ring that blasted through the house and yard. We kept it plugged in at the living room table in view of the front drive and Quail Run Mountain. Every afternoon, unless I drove to my office in Copa town, which I did with less and less frequency because there was always too much to do at the ranch, I sat at the table for my break and phoned Don to tell him about the events of the day. There was always some new problem to discuss (either with the infrastructure or with someone we had hired). The phone was basically my only link to Don during the week.

Well, one afternoon, while I sat at the table discussing difficulties with Don, I an old van pulled up our drive. On the side panel was the cartoon character Yosemite Sam above the words “Yosemite Van.” Inside I could see distinctive country bumpkins, a man and a woman.

“Oh – my – God,” I said to Don. “I don’t believe what’s pulling up.”

I got off the phone and stood behind the front gate with my dogs (Bishop, Rachael and Ninja at the time). The thin driver in his fifties got out of the van. He was pure hick, straight from the old west. He had pepper gray hair in a long pigtail and a scraggly “old timer” beard to his chest. He wore worn army boots, hick baggy jeans, and a ripped black T-shirt.

I straightened my holster. “Can I help you?” I asked, meaning “what do *you* want!”

“Well yeah, Ma’am,” he politely uttered in high Texan. His front teeth were missing, the rest blackened. “I seen you was doing some re-con-struction,” he nodded to the west room,



which was under construction. “Thought you might want some help. I’m only asking \$5 and hour.”

To get rid of him, I said the job was already taken, and I sent him to my neighbor Tennessee. I then called Don back and we made plans to put in a front gate.

Early the next day, I heard a rumbling at the west side of the house. I hadn’t seen my neighbor’s truck pull in, so I went to investigate. There, outside the west room double doors, was that hillbilly man, clearing up roofing that Tennessee had cast aside the day before.

“What are you doing here?” I demanded, outraged by his trespassing.

“Oh, I’m sorry ma’am,” he stood slouched, and spoke calmly. “Tennessee done hired me as his helper. Guess he forgot to tell ya.”

As it turned out, the man was a craftsman when it came to stucco texturing, so in a matter of a few weeks, we hired him and his girlfriend to texture the west room walls. I call them Mork and Mindi. His girlfriend, a short rotund gal, helped Mork with the cleaning and painting. When I was outside picking up trash, she generally came over and helped me while trying to engage me in conversation (though we didn’t have much in common to discuss). “Lot of trash;” “yeah, lot of trash;” “hot day;” “yeah, hot day.”

Mindi at first asked about the guesthouse and what we planned to do. I mentioned we hoped to fix it up after we got the main house together. Then she began suggesting that her and Mork move in and fix it up and work around the ranch as payment for rent. At the time Mork and Mindi lived with cousins in old school bus with a Volkswagen van affixed to the top (an upstairs) “Just look for the bus with a van on top,” off Ralston Road, near Thunderbird Buttes.

At first Don and I were cautious, though it seemed a good idea. Still, these people were drinkers and hicks and who knows what they might bring to our ranch if they moved in. Already Mork had showed up for work with a black eye, a real shiner obviously from some racist remark in a local bar. But with an escalating need for “fixing up everything,” the idea of a handyman tenant took root. And Mork was very good at sheet rock and general repairs. We even felt Mork would protect our place with his backwoods Texan might. He was the type of man to grab a pigeon from its roost, snap its head and throw it in his freezer for tomorrow’s meal. When we agreed to the arrangement, Mork slavered appreciation, the guesthouse would be like a home in Ahwatukee for them. And they would build a large garden by the holding tank (not far from where, they suggested, a few gangster bodies lay buried. They are the ones who told me all the stories of De Amatto’s Mafia connection.)

The arrangement worked out all right, at first. Mork finished up the west side of the house and they were polite and talkative. Mindi seemed to view me as a sort of friend. But she had notions very strange to me, such as suggesting we sell the rocks in our yard, or build an outhouse by the garden. Generally, I made no response to her suggestions and eased my way back into the house.

Mork was also a Vietnam Vet who wore a devilish looking medallion honoring his white supremacy. He would annoyingly try to see where Don or I stood on racist issues, usually when he was drunk and caught us on the way to the well. Don hated this.

But because of Mork and Mindi, I saw real progress at the ranch, at least at first. And Mork roused up a few locals to help with the plumbing and wiring or whatever else needed to be repaired. Unfortunately, Mork and Mindi had friends that were perpetually drunk. They appeared, one by one (a day on Green Acres) even though we made clear that there could be no

hoopla parties on our property. Mork respected this, but his friends often dropped by to either help him, or make some kind of Mr. Haney deal with us (which always bothered me, but things were getting done). And everyone around seemed enthusiastic about the idea of a B&B. Mindi was planning on being the cook at the Desert Valley Inn (I guess they figured they'd still live in the guesthouse.)

### **The Man with a Wolf**

Mork's best friend was Roy, a short concrete-man who had a 90% wolf named Sheba. Roy drove an old beat-up green Dodge pickup with his wolf chained down in back (she was actually friendly when in Roy's presence, but intimidating. Roy generally wore baggy jeans, black work boots, and a ripped sleeved flannel shirt. He had a long scraggly black beard, but short black graying hair kept trim. His voice was raspy, crackly, and always uttering the same stories.

Every evening I sat on the west side of the house, an area unfenced, watching the sunset. A few times I saw the old green pickup come up the drive, when Yosemite Van was out and about Pinal County rousting up a drunken storm. I couldn't hide so I simply watched the sunset as the green pickup pulled up. Roy was unafraid of my dogs who were cautious of the wolf chained in the back.

"Hello darlin," came his raspy utterance as he pulled up right beside me on the dirt and leaned out his window. "What's ya doing?" He had totally ruined any tranquility I had had in the moment.

"Watching the sunset." I hardly wanted to "conversate" and it was always hard for me to be rude, especially to a drunken man with a wolf.

He turned as if to actually look at the setting sun. “Pretty sunset... by golly gee...” He asked about Mork, but before I could answer he had already launched into a conversation about being a “good” concrete man and having a “pappy” in the business for 40 years. Then he rambled about his pappy, his recently murdered brother, “did you see the news last night about my brother?” then, “Need any concrete work done around here, darlin?” Then he talked about a set of cassette tapes he ordered that explained how to buy land from under people who failed to pay their taxes. He didn’t care that I never responded and that I eventually got up to return to the house. “Got to get dinner started.” He just kept “conversating” before finally leaving, always ending on a note of wisdom from his pappy, “Well darlin, as my pappy always said, if you can’t do the job right, don’t do it.”

The last I remember of Roy occurred after I set out for my office in town one afternoon and saw his pickup in a ditch off Quail Run Road. I stopped to help, but the drunk man and his wolf were nowhere in sight.

### **Mountain Mike and the Palm Tree**

One of the fences De Amatto had created on his property was a saguaro, huge Mexican palm, and a saguaro row in front of our living room picture window, blocking much of Quail Run Mountain. For a week, we hired a back hoe to put in a new septic tank, dig trenches for wires from the well and guesthouse, bury trash, tear out shrubs, and level the yard. In the process I insisted we remove the palm tree pillar blocking my view. Mork evidently spread the word that there was a Mexican palm up for grabs.

“We know somebody who’ll haul off your tree,” Mindi said. I wanted \$75 for it (I hated giving away things because everyone around came crawling on our property to strike deals (e. g.

one hick got a hold of our junk and sold it to another hick or traded it for other junk.) Mike agreed to do \$100 worth of wiring in exchange for the palm. But neither Don nor I cared to argue with the man. He was 6 foot five, at least, with very broad shoulders, long blond hair and a scraggly beard. His gal-friend was a small sun weathered blond who wore heavy blue eye shadow and spoke in a rough smoker's voice. Mindi was her best friend.

It was a big weekend party when Mt. Mike arrived in his flatbed six-wheel truck, along with his galfriend, and two long-haired youths high on drugs and beer, "hey man, let's rip that palm out a here... cool dude... we can do it, cuz we bad..." The men chained the tree, which lay on our front drive, and hoisted it onto the flat bed. It weighed the truck down in back, so everyone rallied and decided to sit at the cab end of the flatbed to balance out the weight.

I also helped out, although Don stayed inside the house at the computer. As the truck pulled from the drive, Mindi and her best friend giggled because I, the lady of the house, had hopped on the truck. They offered me a beer, almost in jest—hey, let's offer the lady a beer, giggle giggle. I rode along until they exited the driveway. Though Mt. Mike never returned to do the wiring he promised, I was glad to be rid of the thoughtlessly placed palm.

### **two horses from a southern Arizona ranch remuda**

When summer arrives in southern Arizona, the sun torches the ground, spinning air into swirling dust devils. I saw my first dust devil in Ahwatukee, soon after Don and I moved there from Boston (where we lived a year before getting married. Just after I returned from teaching English at Kuwait University). Our house on Night Hawk was new and many houses on our street remained under construction. Crates containing rubbish sat in front yards. One day, I

looked out the window from my writing desk in the front office and saw a huge “Tasmanian” dust devil, travel to a container, and whirl paper and Styrofoam debris high above the roof tops.

Mirages also occur in the desert and on the streets of Phoenix under the intense heat. Mostly you see water in the distance, a wet road, even a pool. Early one morning, as I walked home from the BLM land beyond our new ranch, I gazed at the sunrise and saw a range of orange buttes, mesas, and mittens appeared. I hadn’t noticed them before. How could I have missed such a beautiful horizon? This can’t be real, I thought, squinting and rubbing my eyes. The mesas remained, leaving me spellbound until suddenly sweeping clouds drew the mesas into the sky, like ferries gathering magic dust. This is why I named my first horse Mirage: An image of the desert.

At the chamber of commerce building in “Copa Town” which the locals call Maricopa, I had an office with phone lines for our internet business. On most days, after cleaning and remodeling the ranch, I’d drive the fifteen miles to my office and dabble in websites for my international contacts and the few local businesses who signed up for our web building business Arastar Internet.

One day during the spring, I asked a lady at the chamber of commerce if she knew of someone who could give me horseback riding lessons. She immediately recommended Horseman Tom—a retired Pima County deputy sheriff from Tucson.

Down the dirt roads from our ranch, past an emu and ostrich farm, I went to Tom’s rural property to meet him and arrange for my lessons. His long gray hair was tied back in a ponytail and he was decked in awesome cowboy attire: snakeskin boots, burgundy wranglers, a long-sleeved gray-stripped cotton-percale shirt, a canvas vest, a Stetson hat (weathered by heat, rain and sweat). And he wore a holster with a pearl handled revolver and a hunting knife. His five

acres was as wonderfully decorated as Tom himself. Neatly placed whiskey bottles at the fork of the road to his singlewide and to the corrals, a noose, and posts with cattle brands. In corrals and at the stables, were mustangs, roan and chestnut horses, and an Arabian bay.

Horseman Tom had an arsenal of cowboy slang: a spunky horse was “full of piss and vinegar,” or “champing at the bit” and he’d say things like “hit the trail, and bite the dust.” I soon learned that a lot of authentic cowboys lived in Hidden Valley. A few owned huge industrial cattle ranches (such as John Wayne’s spread), others were plain hardworking horsemen like Tom. Many were old caballeros raising goats, hens, horses and doctoring their own animals. At some of the larger ranches, the local cowboys gathered for evenings of barrel racing and calf roping.

My horseback riding lessons started in the round pen and I took right to it. I had ridden horses before, especially in Wickenburg when my niece came down for a visit. But that had been trail rides, now I rode free range with a cowboy mentor. Tom gave me his best horse to ride—Star Flake, named because of the broken star on its forehead. I merely squeezed my legs and the horse galloped down the dirt road. Fun, as long as I could get the horse to stop without flying head over heels, like flipping over the handlebars on a mountain bike—something Don had done when we were biking in Telluride one summer.

I eventually paid Tom to find me a horse similar to Star flake, one that would do what I wanted it to do (gallop, trot, walk, stop). Not one that stubbornly puttered along like an old trail horse. Tom spent part of every month heading to ranches in south Arizona to buy, sell, and trade horses. He convinced me to buy two horses for \$2400—one for me and one for Don (who would never ride in the end). The horse for Don, Skeeter, was five years older than the 16 years Tom suggested. My gelding Mirage, who had no name when I bought him, was a good cowboy ride.

He wasn't familiar with personal attention. With affection. The ten-year-old bay had lived in a group of horses running freely on a southern Arizona ranch, in the remuda of saddle broke horses. When a ranch hand needed a horse, he roped one from the remuda. After being roped, a gelding like Mirage was ready for riding the range—"cowboy" style. (I doubt a cowboy would settle for a stubborn unpredictable horse.)

When I first encountered Mirage in Tom's corral, the horse was skittish and always swung his huge butt to my face. Tom assured me that all the horse needed was work to gain its trust. I wanted the challenge of learning about horses while I worked with Mirage.

Tom brought the two horses to our ranch and they settled in the corrals. We couldn't put them together because Mirage would kick Skeeter. Horses could be like dogs.

Morning, noon, and evening, I approached Mirage with a hand full of grass or food. Mirage was hesitant at first, always swinging his butt my way, spooking me. Horses have powerful hind legs that can kill with one swift kick. I even went so far as to call Tom and say I just couldn't handle the horse.

Tom came out and worked with me and the horse, building up my confidence. He sold me a saddle. Sure enough, in a matter of two more days, I was able to ease my way into the horse's world and toss a rope over his neck. I led him from the corral to grass growing in the wash near the house. Then to a horse post. Before saddling Mirage, I gently ran my hands on his head and neck, then walk slowly to each side while running my hands along his massive back. Calming him, reassuring him. Maybe he sensed I was vegetarian, a grazer like he was. I felt a sense of accomplishment with my first horse, like I was now an Arizonan horseman. I treasured sunrise and sunset gallops up and down Barnes Road. At first I didn't venture off into the desert



alone because I wasn't that daring. If the horse spooked and bucked me off, who would find me in time?

The horse would never completely trust me, like a dog, maybe a person because of predator, prey and herding instincts. I could see it in his huge eyes with the elongated pupils. He liked me, though. He liked my demeanor, my easy touch, and he especially softened to my voice. But in those eyes remained a spark of uncertainty. Predator Prey. I also knew that no matter how well trained a horse is, it might spook at a fluttering plastic bag, scurrying mouse, snake, rock formations, cars . . . I don't know. There are probably some horses so well trained they never spook.

### Back to the Dogs

By mid-summer 1998 I had three horses, a pot belly pig named Icky (rescued from slaughter), a Nubian goat (sent to me air freight from my niece—she worked on a 4H farm and wanted to give me a goat for my ranch). With the introduction of Icky to our yard, chaos broke loose. I lost any control of Ninja. She would ceaselessly bark, snarl and bite at Icky, who lived in his own pen but would come out to investigate the dogs, as if they were friendly neighbors. From the second she saw Icky, Ninja became unstoppable by water, leash, shovels of dirt or any screams from me. She had to kill that pig. Bishop, the lab mix, also changed dramatically because of Icky. Not only did he keep attacking Icky at the cage, and bite Icky's rump (the pig was fearless), Bishop also became a useless wimp. He quit barking at strangers the day the pig arrived. Icky solely occupied his mind.

At summer's end, I had but two dogs—

### *Minnie and Max*

By the time my handyman tenants took Ninja to the humane society and gave Bishop to a local yokel, I was ready to invest in a purebred puppy. I had to know what I was getting myself into. Purebreds are not dog pound potluck. Like Kali. She was a purebred German Shepherd. Breeders developed dogs for specific traits. With the Doberman, you get a working dog, a sharp and vigilant no-nonsense breed of protectors. They are the jackals of ancient Egypt.

First, the Solar eclipse at The Galapagos

I ended up with Doberman Pinchers after a trip to the Galapagos with my parents. A total solar eclipse occurred over the Ecuadorian islands in 1998. I had planned the trip well before our move to Hidden Valley. To get out of it, I would be penalized heavily. (I hesitated because so much had changed since I made the reservations. The ranch house and animals had consumed me. But I went. I didn't want to disappoint my parents who were eager for the trip of a lifetime (although they had been to many places). Besides, I wanted to get away and gain some perspective. I just didn't know where my marriage was headed. I felt stressed from remodeling, encountering rural riffraff, and wondering about our future prospects. (We weren't even sleeping together. No sex. No kids. Something was wrong.)

During the trip to the Galapagos, I talked to my parents about my foibles with dogs on the ranch and my need for a good watch dog. My Dad recommended Dobermans. He had worked for Northwest Natural Gas Company for forty years and had had experience out in the field, checking meters from house to house. He claimed that the Doberman stood above all other watch dogs as the most serious, alert, and well trained. My dad was right. I adore Dobermans. The Doberman Pincher is the most beautiful breed of dog I've ever encountered (at least on a par

with Kali, my German Shepherd). The Doberman is the Cheetah of domestic canines, a falcon of the sky. Jackals of the hearth. They are why I now love dogs.

In 1890 Germany, a tax collector Karl Friedrich Louis Dobermann developed the breed. He needed a good loyal guard dog when he made his rounds out in the field. Dobermans are a mixture of the German Shepherd, German Shorthaired Pointer, Great Dane, Greyhound, Boxer, Rottweiler, Weimaraner, Beauceron, German Pinscher, and Rottweiler. Traditionally, dew claws are cut away, the tail is docked and the ears are cropped to stand straight up. (One of my doxies now has all her natural parts. Cracker, my fawn front yard dog.)

After returning home from the Galapagos, I ran up to Phoenix and bought Minnie. When her owner brought her out, I was astounded. The black puppy with huge paws and a long snout, epitomized cute. She fell right into my heart. How could God create something so darling? I was smitten with the Doberman.

Spring break occurred that next week and my parents and niece Beth came to the ranch for a visit. Beth and I quickly concluded that Minnie needed a mate. A red doxie male, as a matter of fact. We drove for two hours up to north Phoenix and retrieved my son Max, a little red doxie from champion lineage. His sire was a \$1500 black AKA champ, his dam, a lovely almost Greyhound Boxer looking fawn, also from champion lineage.

Minnie and Max became the center of my life, replacing all anxiety over mishaps and miscreants at the ranch. My puppies were simply that adorable. Like the Pitts, both doxies would struggle to get onto my lap whenever I sat down inside or outside. And, they were naturally obedient, staying nearby when we walked to the well, stopping if they got too far ahead, checking where I was. They'd run circles around shrubs, Max chasing Minnie (which they still

do at two years). I'd let them outside and after five minutes Max would appear at the front screen howling to be let back in, like the hound dog in him. It was too cute.

Both puppies slept at the foot of my bed, which was now a mattress in the living room thrown behind my wooden screen from Bali. We were painting the east side bedrooms. Don was sleeping in the westside addition, snoring away. Max, especially, waited for me to hit the mattress. Then he would jump aboard and snuggle up to my feet.

About a month after I got the puppies, I gave them their shots. The local feed store in Maricopa, Chitwood's Family Feed Store, sold vaccinations for cats, dogs, horses, and farm animals. After inoculating my dogs, I relaxed on the front room recliner, perhaps listening to the fireplace hum. Before long Max jumped up on my lap and gave me his puppy dog look. He whimpered. His eyes were puffy. Suddenly, he began to swell up in hives all over his face and body. I freaked!

I grabbed the phone book to look up Chitwood's Family Feed Store to ask if it were a reaction to the vaccination. In the confusion, the lens of my glasses popped out, and I couldn't see the number through my tears of panic. I called Don on speed dial, barely able to talk. My baby was going to die. Don told me to take Max to our Ahwatukee vet. I promptly did. Dr. Heathman gave Max a shot to counteract the swelling.

Don and I then settled down to dinner at a classy Italian Restaurant, near the veterinary clinic (during the meal I kept checking on Max, reassured he was asleep in our car.)

After we returned to the ranch, I found Minnie vomiting green bile. She was so sick she could barely hold herself up. "Now what," I cried.

All that night I checked on Minnie, giving her eye drops of water so she wouldn't become dehydrated. The next morning, I ran her up to Dr. Heathman at the Mountain Side

Animal Clinic, Ahwatukee. She had Parvo. The most dreaded virus when you have a young puppy, or puppies before they're fully vaccinated.

Minnie stayed at the clinic several nights under expensive scrutiny. I hung on every moment, fearing a phone call telling me my beloved puppy was gone. I kept Max close by. After about five days, Max barfed up green bile. He had parvo, too. Shit.

I rushed him up to Dr. Heathman, and that weekend we put both puppies in an animal hospital. Minnie, hung on within inches of her life. Both dogs were given all kinds of tests and treatment for a cost of nearly \$2000. I was prepared to pay that and still lose them, but after eight days I was able to bring Minnie home. She was skin and bones, literally, but spry. She pranced out to the well with me. Two days later I brought Max home. Ever since, those dogs have been by my side, unaware, I'm sure, of what we all went through.

And finally, the man who lived in a car

One day I rode with Mork and Mindy in their Yosemite Van. They desperately needed gas (and beer) and I had no cash, only a check which I cashed at Farmer's Market.

After cashing the check, we drove down dirt roads past Thunderbird Buttes, so Mork could pick up his new helper Sonny. Across Mayer Road from an old black woman named Melvina, was a thicket of Mesquites and raw desert. Cecil Albert Newsom, Jr. (aka Sonny) lived here in a yellow Toyota Celica, a rusted-out junker with four flat tires.

I was astounded as Sonny clambered out of his car and into the Yosemite Van, like a forlorn and abandoned cat. How did he eat? Shower? Take care of himself? How could anyone end up living in an old car, especially this polite and virile man? He instantly became a curiosity to me, a character in a story. I didn't know he was dealing drugs from that car, to survive. Suffice

it to say I was one naïve city girl. And not very street wise. At the time. I lived within my own unengaged world of visions and dreams in places I may never go

## Chapter Five: He was Just Another Guy Mork Roused Up

(written circa 2000)

Sonny was just another guy Mork roused up in Copa Town during late May to help him hang sheet rock in the west side addition. Primarily, Mork had found someone to do most of his work, someone who desperately needed a job, a man who wasn't afraid to work. Every morning Yosemite Van fetched Sonny from his car. At the guesthouse Mindy fed him a breakfast of fried potatoes and eggs (occasionally bacon from the food bank), let him shower, then Mork put him to work.

In the salsa heat of early June, Mork and Mindy were sucking up Busch beers, a case a day, while doing fewer and fewer jobs in exchange for their free rent and gas for Yosemite Van. In desperate need of beer, Mork would claim he had watered trees—trees mostly in the desert outside my yard—and then he'd ask outrageous sums—\$150. Of course, I didn't pay him. Most of the time, they stayed in the guesthouse, occasionally appearing on the jobs I assigned. I don't know how else they got their beer money. Their food came mostly from food banks and the garden by the holding tank.

I didn't care who drank, who smoked what or who lived where. For all I cared, Mork could be a “bum,” as he admitted to being, just as long as THE JOB GOT DONE. And Sonny seemed to be working for Mork. It seemed understood that Mork was paying Sonny out of his own wages. I just hated people taking advantage of me. (something that happened a lot.)

One of my first encounters with Sonny occurred on the morning I planted a lime tree east of the house. In hard calash soil, I used water, a shovel, and pick axe to dig the hole. I was determined. I knew Don wouldn't help me but if I set out to plant the citrus, someone would help me—Mork or his new helper Sonny. I was rather far along when Mork happened by. He called for Sonny, who must have been eating breakfast at the front of the guesthouse.

Sonny said nothing to me as he formed a watering-well around the trunk. He had blond, permed, shoulder length hair. A red kerchief absorbed the sweat on his brow. He had a goatee and moustache (not a long scraggly beard). He wore a loose unbuttoned shirt with the sleeves ripped off . . . it fluttered open. He had a firm chest bronzed by the Arizona sun (he was native born, straight from the womb of Yuma).

The first time Sonny spoke to me occurred after I entered the newly reconstructed west side addition. Mork was hanging sheet rock. Sonny worked beside him, or more accurately, Mork was slugging a Busch while Sonny hung sheetrock.

I said hello, after Mork introduced me again to his helper. I asked Sonny if he knew of any good electrician, plumber, or carpenter. It was a question I always asked because our supply of local help drained through our hands like our savings. Most often people never showed up, or a guy worked one morning and never return. Everyone who did show up was SAUCED or tweaking.

Sonny politely addressed me as “Miss Teresa,” then enthusiastically said he knew an electrician he'd ask to stop by.

From that encounter on, a door opened between Sonny and me. He spoke more freely as we met about the place, “Good Morning, Miss Teresa.” Back in the day, he would have tipped his cowboy hat and called me ma'am. He was always polite. Never had a harsh or obscene word

(except I was taken aback one morning when I overheard Sonny cuss up a storm as he was working in the yard, cleaning up debris. He didn't know I was around. "Mother Fucker" this and that, I heard him say. At the time, I didn't know he had angry frustration even while tweaking.)

The day came when Mork suggested I hire Sonny for \$6 an hour. Probably Mork wanted me to pay Sonny (did Mork owe him money?). Hard work at \$6 an hour brought Sonny a new life and it bought me a right-hand man, a worker at my side. (The bane of my life.)

I first hired Sonny to tear down one of the last stupid fences on our property—a two-foot rebar holding up cable wire strung from the entry gate, along each side of the driveway. Dumb, real dumb.

Like a sledge hammer, Sonny charged through each task—to heave and haul, repair, paint and scrape, and blow insulation in both attics, helping me in the refurbishment. I had Sonny attack the main wash crossing through our back property behind the holding tank. I often walked along the washes on our land—finding both beauty and hidden trash. (all from the old mafia man.) I was constantly unnerved to discover more broken glass from target shooting, furniture, construction debris, an old rusted out chassis . . . I carried wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow of trash away from the washes. Then I set huge bonfires and watched the trash burn. Good exercise, and very therapeutic.

My new helper Sonny took a pick axe and broke concrete chunks. He had the use of our hauling trailer. Throughout the day, in the blazing sun, Sonny would sling chunk after chunk onto the trailer. When full, I would come out from my air-conditioned haven, and drive it to the dumpster. Sonny would then stand on the trailer and hurled chunks into the dumpster as the hot sun bore down on his naked back and I watched in awe.



On one occasion Mork came by, maybe worried that Sonny was outshining his lazy ass. He had a Busch in hand and he started talking as he often did about anything he thought might interest me—desert snakes and frogs, a book he might be reading, and Vietnam Veteran get-togethers in the neighboring boondocks. Bushwhack. He knew I was a vet.

Sonny paused from his slinging and politely joined the conversation, a moment or two, then he said, “We’ll it’s been nice talking and all, but I got work to do.”

Before long Sonny started landscaping my yard with desert cacti, mostly barrels. He darted into the desert with our wheelbarrow, returning with bigger and bigger barrel cactus. About twenty in all. One was nearly three feet tall! He planted most by the back gate along the path to the guesthouse. In about two weeks, some of the barrels had a crown of bright orange flowers emblazoned on top—desert glitter. It pleased Sonny to see my delight at what he had brought me. He often teased, “how do you like that barrel! Miss Teresa. Who got it for you?”

Three or four times I drove the Explorer out into the desert, with Sonny, to fetch rocks and cactus for the desert landscape around my ranch house (illegal. But I lived on the edge). One sunset, I went in Yosemite Van dragging our hauling trailer. We drove across the raw desert and stopped at a small hill. It was amazing to watch an enthusiastic Sonny single handedly carry boulders to the hauling trailer. Such strength and endurance. (He was hyped up. I had no idea he was tweaking and taking a hit of crack behind the van, whenever my head was turned. At the time, I didn’t even know what “tweaking” was.)

At Mork’s invitation, Sonny moved into the back of Yosemite Van. Someone had called the police on Sonny. Something about his abandoned car, and he had to leave it. He could’ve returned to Phoenix, but he wanted to stay in Maricopa and work for me. (He believed he was working for Don, the man of the house. When in fact, Don wanted nothing to do with Sonny.

Don didn't hate Sonny, he just hated encounters with him, just as he avoided Mork and Mindy when they lived on the ranch.) But Sonny would persistently run into Don when he was checking the well. "Hey, Mr. Don, did you see that big rock at the front gate?" or "Hey, Mr. Don, do you want me to get rid of all these frogs?" Don would always skirt away from Sonny. One evening, Sonny dramatically admitted, "The thing is, Mr. Don, I ain't got no money. And it's the weekend." Don gave him a twenty, came inside and told me about Sonny's acting job. He implored, "Explain to this Sonny that he deals with you, not me. Any money to Sonny, comes from you"

Sonny continued to approach the "man of the house" on his way to the well. And he continued making deals with both Don and me. Like a tumbleweed rolling along the desert ground, he would spin deals. (In the end, he had me buying things he would later deal away, buying things I had lent him, or just buying my own things back to later sell back to me again. (It made me dizzy. He may have been a hard worker, but mostly, Sonny lived by the deal, like an outlaw in the old west lived by his guns. Like the street hustler he was.)

He was nothing if not clever, resourceful, all learned by living homeless. By hustling. Slinging deals. Exploiting possibilities, weaknesses, resources. It was survival on the edge. Before long, Sonny was living in the back room of the guesthouse. He told Mork and Mindy that I gave him permission to move there (which I hadn't). He asserted himself with them and the next thing I knew . . .

things got really crazy . . .

One dark evening, Mork and Mindy drank a bottle of what Sonny called ripple. I believe it was some sort of brandy. They did this on occasion and always ended up "run amok" drunk. Before long, and as usual, things got out of control and Mork was chasing Sonny around our

property with a gun. They were both running around the guesthouse and in and out of the west side addition which was still under construction. Mork claimed that Sonny had made advances toward Mindy which Sonny vehemently denied claiming, “Your woman don’t excite me.”

On another occasion I sent Mork, Mindy, and Sonny in Yosemite Van, with our hauling trailer, to buy some construction supplies in Casa Grande. I always asked for receipts. The accounting was generally sound, minus a few dollars for gas money.

After their “wake up” beers, the crew drove down Casa Grande-Maricopa Highway and a brouhaha broke out over Mindy (as Sonny later told me). Through the rear-view mirror, Mork evidently saw Sonny looking at Mindy. He screeched the van to the side of the road and grabbed his gun, which always sat on the consul in plain sight. Sonny swore he wasn’t looking at Mork’s woman, “I told you, she don’t even excite me, dude,” he said as he stood beside the van.

Mindy was standing outside the front passenger’s side and she suddenly sucker punched Sonny in the jaw. Sonny swung back in defense and Mork jumped around with the gun.

Sonny gestured the loony man to stop his nonsense when, like Bonnie and Clyde, the couple jumped in the van and left Sonny stranded at the roadside halfway to Casa Grande.

When Mork and Mindy returned, I was furious when they told me Sonny had left for good. For me, there was a singular problem to all this. My handyman tenants, who had long overstayed their welcome, had kicked my right-hand man off my own property.

I was going to call around to see if anyone knew where Sonny was. I worried he’d left for Phoenix. Then that afternoon, Sonny snuck back onto the property avoiding Mork and Mindy. Another man we had hired for general contracting had dropped him off. I told Sonny he didn’t have to leave and that Mork and Mindy did.

My wishes were conveyed to the miscreant and mendicant couple. The next thing I knew, they were gone, off on a roofing job with Tennessee my neighbor somewhere back east and Sonny was living in the guesthouse again. Eventually, during the heat of summer, he slept on the roof of the west side addition in nature's air conditioning. It's something people have done in the deserts of the Middle East and the Holy Land since the beginning of time. Something desert dwellers still do.

Every morning, unless it rained, I saddled Mirage and rode around the west side of the house, in view of the sloping roof where Sonny lay curled up, like a cowboy 130 years ago, alone beneath dwindling stars in the blinking eyes of dawn. It was reassuring to see him there, sleeping on the roof. He'd be around that day, my right-hand man. Really, I wanted him around, to help me get the place in order. I just wanted him around. It wasn't desire, this feeling I first had for Sonny. No, no, not he, not then. It was more like motherly concern, he seemed so in need—so flung out in the raw desert living meagerly by the day. By the skin of his teeth.

At first I thought Sonny was slow, that is how I explained him to myself.

He was so simple, polite, useful, and vigorous. And he liked making me laugh. He did so more and more as we worked together day by day. He, always the gentleman worker. I, good-good "Miss Teresa." While working we talked all day long, about horses, about the desert, about what I could do with the ranch, about the hicks of rural Maricopa, and about me and about Sonny himself.

(written 2016 about Cecil)

Cecil invited his son Cameron to spend a week or two with him. They set up my five person tent and slept out in the desert on our property. Until they found a six-inch desert hairy

scorpion on one of their sleeping bags. Then they stayed in the guesthouse. Sonny's tall handsome son, perhaps 12 years old at the time, immediately impressed me as polite and sharp. He asked me a lot of good questions.

Cecil had been married to Cameron's mother, a beautiful black woman, for about five years. I think it was after his five-year stint in prison for armed robbery. (he admitted to being an ex-felon for an armed robbery when he was 18.) He had only known black women before me. That was his environment. That was his life. While married, he felt fulfilled and responsible, he told me. His apartment in the projects smelled of newness, he's said. He had bought on credit or got from Rent-A-Center, a stereo, furniture—new and fresh things because he had a job. He came home to his wife baby son, and stepdaughter. I think he was happy then. But Shangri-La didn't last longer than five years. Then his wife had miscarried a little girl during her last trimester and that pretty much ended the marriage.

Cecil had two daughters who are now both angels in heaven, along with his mother. His other daughter, Tanika, died when she was about five. She had a weak heart from a birth defect. Her mother was just a short fling for Cecil but he loved his daughter. After his wife left him and the death of Tanika, I think he just gave up on life. He became so distraught and apathetic he went homeless on the streets of Phoenix. Or he went to rural Maricopa in Pinal county and hustled. He lived a life of drugs and hustling.

He was an amazing character to me. Perhaps I was in awe of him because he was so unlike me. So unfortunate. So unbelievably in need of someone's intervention.

Back to writings from circa 2000

I once overheard Sonny saying to Don, “You’re lucky to have such a hard-working wife, Mr. Don. Ain’t many women like her. Not that I got any wrong intentions,” he quickly added.

A few times I mentioned to Don, “Don’t you think Sonny and I are working too closely together?”

“Nah,” he would shrug it off. “He’s not going to bother you.” (Don never said much more than that. I think he thought that Sonny was a simple polite guy who respected me as a “lady” and Don and I as good good people. Besides, Sonny didn’t want to lose his job by flirting with the boss’s wife.

Sonny constantly tumbled into making deals with us “good, good people”

Often, a deal from Sonny began with an expression of how Don and I were “good, good people.” We must have been the most “good good people,” in the county, although one Saturday afternoon Sonny came to our ranch with other “good good folk” from the area. He brought them to the ranch to give them some of our junk (as if we had given it to him to give away). Don didn’t care. It was junk: an old garbage compactor left by the seller (it still ran), feeble bookcases, lumber, paneling . . .

Sonny was generally hyped with enthusiasm especially when making deals. He was a wheeler dealer, quick with the tongue, fluent in story (more so than Mr. Haney) and acutely sensitive to a possible deal for a twenty-dollar bill. He played the middleman well, putting together this party with that party (one of them being Don and I), and taking his finder’s fee, usually keeping his cut secret even though he rightly deserved it. But Sonny wasn’t used to being straight and direct, for his own reasons. Even when he asked me or Don for a twenty, as he usually did before the weekend (a ranch hand heading to the saloons of town to drink and raise

hell), the request came with an unnecessary story, “there’s this gun I want to buy . . . need money for my son, for gas, owe this dude . . .”

It was nearing mid-summer, late one evening, when Sonny knocked at the west addition’s French doors where my husband slept. “Hey, Mr. Don.” Sonny entered the room all hyped up, paused, and held up and cocked a shotgun. “Miss Teresa wanted to buy this.” (I had mentioned earlier, my interest in a shotgun). I’m not sure how, but I’m sure quickly, Don directed Sonny back outside and away from the room. (Sonny had already nabbed his \$40 finder’s fee from the gun’s owner).

One weekend day, soon after the shotgun incident, Sonny drove up in a 1985 Honda Accord, along with his electrician buddy. He eagerly asked Don to buy the car for him on a work loan.

In the house Don and I caucused and decided that if I wanted Sonny around to help out, we didn’t want to be stuck with him always needing a ride. We bought Sonny the car for \$550 and subsequently, I watched Sonny zip off every evening, after finishing his day’s work. And every morning, when I rode Mirage, I looked for the Accord, reassured to see it parked by the guesthouse carport. Sonny would be there that day to help me get something done.

“Hey, Miss Teresa, I can get you some horse tack!” Sonny said to me one evening, early on. I had mentioned my desire to buy used tack and Sonny had found me a deal, or so it seemed. The clincher was he needed sixty dollars then and there because the guy selling the tack was leaving town, that evening.

“Oh, come on Sonny,” I said, “this really sounds like a story.”

Sonny stood outside the Arizona room door and insisted, “He’s got bridles, lead ropes, saddles and blankets. Some of it looks really old, Miss Teresa. Maybe valuable.”

I settled on risking \$50 for the tack.

Days passed and no tack appeared. Sonny claimed that the tack guy ended up in the hospital with cancer and Sonny couldn't get the tack until he came back home (Sonny had already given him the money, of course).

"Is the guy with the tack out of the hospital yet?" I'd ask. Of course, he wasn't. I added, "Sounds like a story to me."

"Oh no," Sonny insisted. "You wait, Miss Teresa. You'll apologize for doubting me."

Sonny would not confess that the tack deal was a ruse to get money for his fix. His drug use, which maybe I didn't know about at the time. Rather, Sonny kept adding to the story until we finally settled on him owing me \$50 worth of work.

One hot day, much later on, I confronted Sonny about his spinning tales with all these deals. I was in the newly built west room, sanding antique Mexican doors from a specialty shop in Tucson—solid cedar doors carved with ornate floral designs. Doors from an old Hacienda. *La Casa en el desierto. Mi casa es su casa.*

"Sonny," I called. He was outside the French doors, (old refurbished doors with leaded glass panes, from the same shop in Tucson). He was helping our hired carpenter Sammy lay rustic Saltillo tiles at the door stoop.

Sonny entered the large airy room where afternoon light streamed through the huge Pella windows. He wore jeans, his work shoes and a tool apron that hung like a holster and guns. He was my wrangler.

"I have something very serious to talk to you about," I said.

He waited, peaked on my words. Maybe worried.



Essentially, I told him not to lie to me anymore. I knew about the drugs; I knew he made deals. If he wanted money, just ask without attaching a story. He was entitled to a finder's fee; he deserved a twenty here and there—without a story. In fact, he deserved much better wages than I could afford, although he was getting a place to sleep, in the guesthouse (bunkhouse).

Sonny stood in thought a moment, “acted” relieved, elated in fact. Now he could be honest with me. “I can’t tell you what a relief this is, Miss Teresa. I was really feeling guilty about a few things.” He confessed to the “tack story” and to a few other things that I hadn’t even accounted for. Oh well, I thought, as long as we’re on a more honest path. He was, after all, an indispensable worker.

For whatever reason, by whatever design, Sonny and I clicked as a work force around the ranch. “If nobody can do the job right, then do it yourself,” became my “pappy” motto. And with a right-hand man, a polite, hardworking, attractive man, I planned to turn the ranch into a B&B business called the “Hidden Valley Inn.”

“Let me be the first to put in my application, Miss Teresa. As grounds keeper,” Sonny would say when the subject came up.

On a typical day, we made fifty-mile dashes to Casa Grande’s Home Depot or to Tucson to buy old doors—cowboy swinging doors, old glass paneled double doors, Mexican... All for the ranch house remodeling.

One time at home depot the clerk mistook Sonny for my husband. I quickly corrected her. “Well, your friend, or whatever...” she politely teased.

(No, no,) I smiled, (he’s my worker. My worker. Can’t you tell? It’s so obvious.)

One of my projects was stringing a barbed wire fence along the powerline easement (to keep people from entering our property that way). In a day and a half, we strung and secured

hundreds of yards of barbed wire. We could really work fast together (which I loved, being used to no one matching me at setting a goal and working toward it! In those days I did like hard work. Physically hard and challenging. Toiling in the desert heat with a drink of cold water to slake a desert's thirst.)

Sonny uncoiled vast amounts of barbed wire and rolled it down the easement road. I wore shorts, \$100 black cowboy boots, and a loose tank top over a sports bra—it was too hot to work in anything else. Sonny worked without a shirt, his smooth back bronzed beneath the Arizona Sun. And we worked closely together. He breathed on me as I twisted the barbed wire tightly, as he bound it to the pole. I could hear him breath, a slight rasp, the rustling of creosote under the golden sun. When he spoke, he whispered, “There, there, now twist tightly, like before...” “doing good, Miss Teresa.”

By noon the heat was too burdensome so we sat on the grassy wash under the shade of an old bending ironwood. The sandy wash was edged by desert brooms and palo verde and mesquite seedlings. From a jug in the wheelbarrow, we drank ice-cold water and rested in the shade, amazed at our feat. Then we talked. Talked about the job. About me. “I’m not a happy woman,” I said. It just came out. I wasn’t trying to make a point. We were discussing the fence and out of the blue I said it. He went on about the fence or the B&B. I repeated what I had said. There. It was firm in the air. He could not ignore it now. I didn’t have my eye on the man, that seemed absurd at the time. Sonny seemed like my only friend out there in the raw desert, and friends—because they are friends—pull out troubles. Provide an environment for venting.

The sleeping arrangement between Don and me had come about after we moved our bed (two twin mattresses) from the eastside master bedroom so Sonny and I could paint the walls and hang new ceiling fans, doors, and trim. I didn't feel like sleeping in the west addition with Don. What was the point? He snored like a bazooka and there were bugs there. So, with my Doberman Pincher pups at the foot of my mattress bed, I slept in the living room behind a screen I bought in Bali. It was carved with depictions of the Ramayana on one side and the Mahabharata on the other. Awesome screen. A find I couldn't pass up.

Besides, I wanted to be alone and Don and I slept apart for weeks, not knowing if we would reconcile in a finished bedroom one day. (did Eddie Albert and Eva Gabor ever get their bedroom finished? By the rural hicks Alf and Ralph?) Our lives had been unsettled since moving to the desert. Since the CAP, really. I wondered whether my life would remain unsettled indefinitely. It was a time of uncertainty and disorder. The chaos of the primordial green sea. The chaos of Apep, opponent of light, truth and order. It was just another dither I got myself into.

Anyway, Sonny had noticed that Don and I weren't sleeping together. I wondered. Had he peered in the window at night, to see me dance my way to bed in the living room (there were still no curtains). Had he watched me? Sonny had told me that he'd heard from Mindy that I didn't even do my husband's laundry. (this piece of gossip came from a comment I made after Mindy said something about letting me return to the house, so I could get the laundry done before Don came home. I had said, emphatically, "oh, I don't do his laundry. We each do our own." I had no clue that this would become front page news—"she doesn't do his laundry. There must be something wrong.")

I could not get him out of my thoughts

As the weeks passed I could not get Sonny out of my thoughts. I wanted him around. Just wanted him around. I don't know why. It wasn't lust, he hadn't invaded my mind with sexual fantasies. In fact, it seemed unimaginable to consider Sonny as anything more than my worker. But a growing obsession was at play, the same force that had me increasingly unable to leave the ranch for very long. I almost quit going to my office in Maricopa to work on web sites. Agoraphobia anxiety disorder?

Sonny intrigued and baffled me. He was the Magician incarnate, the trickster who wove his way in and out of situations—swinging deals. He was the Knight of Swords, daring on his quest through life, and resourceful, living on the edge. Even Sonny admitted to using drugs, though he promised not to smoke crack on our property. “I’ll never bring you any trouble,” he swore on several occasions. For the most part he didn’t, except on those occasions when he had a deal to swing.

Really. I needed Sonny and he needed the job. And as my need for him grew, I increasingly felt his gaze upon me. Once, while I watered potted herbs on the west side veranda, I looked up. Sonny had paused from watering a large citrus tree. In a flash, I saw a man staring at an attractive woman. He looked away, embarrassed. I smiled, flattered by the day’s memento.

Our days began to extend into evenings when we sat in the shade of the corral and talked. (He’d drive off in his car after I headed to the house.) I spent much time at the corral, either before or after a ride, to groom my horses or sit back and prop my feet on a railing. It was a nice place to be, when you love animals. Sonny would lean against the gate and tell me how much he appreciated the job, how he hoped to stay on as groundskeeper when I opened the B&B.

“This place is like a rehab, Miss Teresa,” he would say. “Thanks to you.” He would often make claims such as, “I haven’t smoked crack for a week. Because of you good people.” (It’s no wonder I believed I was his Bodhisattva.)

In the dwindling light of day, we watched the horses eat their pellets and bran, and my doxies play like well-bred children who would eventually settle in beside me. We talked sometimes about things like karma (we both could relate to the concept of “you reap what you sow.”) For me it was the wheel of karma. The unending cycle of stupidity. Repeating the same mistake over and over. For Sonny it was redemption.

I liked hearing his positive words, although I knew that so much of what he said was a wrangler’s cock-and-bull-story. Still, I had an inkling of hope that he was quitting a reckless life of drugs and drinking, because of my influence. I hated seeing such a virile young man toss his life away on a wild party at the salons of town.

Because of Sonny, I ended up buying a third horse.

After paying \$2400 for two bay horses from Horseman Tom, \$500 for a spry Palomino mare seemed cheap, especially when slinging a thousand here and there on remodeling projects.

It all began with Sonny enthusiastically telling me about Melvina’s horse. “There’s this horse this old black lady wants to sell. Her name is April.” Sonny had sentimental attachments to the horse; he had watched her birth nine years earlier (at a time when he lived with the black woman in exchange for doing work. She was actually his brother-in-law’s mother).

“You got to act now, today,” Sonny urged, “Or Miguel (one of the brothers who built our horse corrals and tack room) will buy her.” Sonny also took the “good investment” angle, which worked for me (although I admit, I was taken by his genuine affection for the horse.)

I bought April without even consulting Don. Like the pits, the pound dogs, and my precious doxies, Don learned about the new arrivals after the fact, usually after he returned home from work late in the evening.

He came in the door, settled his laptop bag on the coffee table. "I got another horse," I said.

"You what?"

"Well, it was actually a pretty good deal, a good investment."

"Who made this deal, Sonny?"

The horse deal ended at \$600 and included a saddle seemingly made of cardboard (part of Sonny's deal making with Melvina.) Before handing over the cash, in exchange for the hauling papers, Melvina ushered me into her house and said, "Watch out for Sonny," she took hold of my hand like an old Medicine Woman. "He's tricky, sly as a fox." (Mindy had similarly warned me.)

Sonny then appeared at the door (he was an avid eavesdropper). "Now why go and say something like that, Miss Mel," he then turned to me and said, without the formality of Miss Teresa, "Come on. Let's go."

I smiled, thanked Melvina and followed Sonny to April's rack-shambled corral. (I already knew Sonny was a tricky fellow. Already that I knew.)

The plan was simple. Sonny would walk the mare to my corrals, a few miles down Warren road. He couldn't ride April because she hadn't been broken for riding. You could saddle her up and sit on her back, as Melvina's grandchildren would do, but you couldn't direct April along. If you tried too hard, she would buck you off.

We bridled and saddled her up and Sonny led the horse away from Melvina's corrals, while I drove home to saddle up Mirage. We hoped to ride back together, me on Mirage leading Sonny on April.

Back at home, I put on long pants, threw on a long-sleeved shirt (sun protection), saddled up my horse and set out. After ten minutes of easing along so I wouldn't overheat the horse, the heat grew too burdensome for me (Mirage must have thought me a fool). As quick as I could, I returned to the corral, took care of the horse, then headed for the air-conditioned ranch house.

On the way to cool off in the house, I spotted Mork & Mindy sitting outside the guesthouse (obviously, this was before they got booted out). I asked them to check on Sonny, "He's bringing me a horse," I said. "In this heat." I then went in the cooled house, grabbed a few Coronas and changed back into summer clothes. I was planning to check on Sonny and the horse myself.

But before I could pull out of the drive, Yosemite Van pulled up. Mindy excitedly yelled that Sonny was chasing April up the road, back toward Melvina's.

I spun off in the Explorer and found Sonny leading April away from Melvina's place (when he should have been turning down Barnes Road). He angrily explained that Yosemite Van had spooked April and the horse dashed off. Sonny had finally caught April at Melvina's front gates.

He greatly appreciated the cold one I offered, although he found it exceedingly strong (compared to Busch). In my air-conditioned Explorer I drove behind Sonny leading the horse. After about twenty minutes, we tied April to a mesquite edging a wash along Warren Road, and sat in its shade, both of us enjoying a beer.

“I would’ve made it by now if (Mork) hadn’t pulled up.” Sonny was furious, frustrated, angry and exceedingly grateful for the beer.

We sat quietly drinking, April nibbling at grass clumps. Content. Shortly, an old pickup with a horse trailer happened along. It stopped. An ugly hick cowboy approached us. He was tall, skinny as a rail, and freckled darkly over pale skin. His non-missing teeth were buck. He had a fat wife and two dishwater blond little girls, who had been riding in the pickup bed with three barking mutts. They were all filthy and ripe. The girls stood by their mother, smudged faced and barefoot (buck teeth ran in the family).

“Need to haul that horse?” the man asked, (did he have a wheat straw in his mouth?) Certainly, he was hoping for ten or twenty dollars, although he never mentioned money. I stood a moment, looking at the man. Was he about to spit in his soiled hand and shake on a deal?

After a moment’s thought, the arrangement sounded good. It was just too hot that day and I was already depleted of strength. Misguided, I trusted that anyone hauling a horse trailer knew about hauling horses. I foolishly agreed and sat in the air-conditioned Explorer watching Sonny help the cowboy heave and pull at April’s rope—forcing her in the trailer.

After they finally got her inside, I was ready to cheer. But I had been so wrong. (I didn’t understand horses well enough to know you don’t force a horse into a trailer. It was another dreadful lesson to learn at the expense of an animal.)

Sonny appeared at my window; his face drawn. “Her legs got fucked-up, bad, Miss Teresa. I seen them. He shouldn’t a pulled her like that,” he said, feeling guilty because he had helped pull April into the trailer. Although he lived in Maricopa, Sonny had not been around horses or cowboys all that much. Caballeros, maybe, but not the real cowboy.



Back at our ranch, the ugly cowboy got April out of his hauling trailer and into the round pen.

The scrapped skin on her hind legs hung down, horribly. All because the hick had forced her into the trailer.

Aghast at the magnitude of her injury, Mork and Sonny drove off to get a local Mexican caballero who had doctored large animals for thirty years. Meanwhile, I left a frantic message for Horseman Tom, then ran back to the round pen where the hick cowboy and his family stood at the pipe rails, watching April grazing on hay. She didn't seem to be in any pain. Just terribly scraped up,

“You're horse people!” I shouted at the hicks, “What should I do?”

They probably felt bad, although they didn't show much concern. The bean pole man suggested hydrogen peroxide and Vaseline, then he said, “Welp, ain't much we can do. We'll be (moseying) along (bout) now. Baby's crying.” I realized then that there was a baby on the front seat of their pickup.

When the rural family left a trail of dust on our drive, Horseman Tom pulled up. He had with him a bag of horse medicine and he ran up to the pen.

About the same time, Yosemite Van appeared followed by a pickup of Mexicans, driven by an older caballero I call Dr. Bandito.

No need for two competing cowboys (vaqueros), Tom quickly discerned. He told me to apply a white powder I called magic dust, amusing everyone in the crowd, all drug users. “And be careful of proud flesh developing,” Tom said, then dashed off.

But he had also said the wound was “real bad.” Bandito concurred. Sonny winced with guilt.

Bandito and another vaquero applied the white magic dust powder and before he left he said, “I do this for you. But you no can have two doctors!” he referred to Horseman Tom.

“Fine,” I told him and gave him a twenty for his trouble (“Give what you want,” he had said, a lure I hate because you never give what they want, they’re always hoping for more).

Bandito and the same crew of vaqueros (two older men and three teen boys) showed up the next day to apply more powder and check on her legs. I also paid Bandito to castrate Icky, who was chasing my dobies around the yard like he too was a dobie.

I felt April needed Bandito’s attention daily, but he didn’t show up for a few days. Sonny and I stopped by his place to fetch him. He sat with his compañeros under the shade of a Ramada off his porch (very Mexican). He was friendly and showed me his prize stallion and mare, his Nubian herd of goats (30 or more). Then, as I idled in the Explorer with Sonny, ready to leave, Bandito came up to my window and promised to doctor April that afternoon. Then he asked me to go riding with him early one morning. “We go out, I show you how to ride like the vaquero...”

When we pulled away sonny said, “He’s flirting with you. He wants what you got, that’s all. They’re all after the same thing.”

“Really,” I said, finding an early ride with the old vaquero somewhat appealing. Not many people got up early enough to appreciate an Arizonan sunrise. And not many people could ride horses like an old vaquero.

As it turned out, Dr. Bandito simply stopped coming to check on April, as promised. Later, he told Sonny he stopped helping me because “that white lady, she no give me money. She want me to work for nothing.” I was furious to learn this. I hated when people weren’t up front. I

had asked him how much. He had persisted with the “as you like” bullshit. Besides, if a neighbor isn’t direct about a price, how am I supposed to know whether or not he’s just being neighborly? The sly deal making of rural Pinal county, distressed me. (The morning after I heard this gossip, I set bonfires at 6 am. A good way to clear the mind.)

Together with Sonny, I tended April’s legs morning and evening. (The vision was to have Horseman Tom break her, but that would fizzle out. April was my horse for about two months). From a feed store in Casa Grande, I bought penicillin, antibiotic Aerosol, and Magic Power.

We would first take a bucket of water and gauze into her corral. Then, while Sonny talked to the horse, holding her bridle, I eased to the side and swabbed her legs, applied the Magic Dust, and then wrapped bright orange stretchy, Vetrap™ bandage around the wound.

April turned around and bit me once. She also stepped on Sonny’s foot. Spirited. Full of piss and vinegar. I finally hired a vet from Casa Grande to make a house call. April bucked and nipped, keeping the vet from sticking the needle in her rump. We gave her some alfalfa, calming her, she ate like it was a drug. The vet stuck her butt. While standing, April fell asleep. The vet then cut off the excessive “proud flesh” skin and gave us bandages.

Her legs only began to fully heal when I was leaving Hidden Valley with Sonny in tow.

## Chapter Six: We Began Riding Horses, Sonny and I

Before taking medication, I had a habit of slipping into personalities that I call avatars. I’ve had many. The following was written by my bodhisattva avatar, circa the year 2000. I thought I was Cecil’s bodhisattva. His guardian angel, in a sense. This was Before 9-11. Before realizing I suffered from manic delusions that fizzle and crash and then repeated.

A Bodhisattva feels compassion for all sentient beings—dogs, cats, horses, pigs and even rattlesnakes. (In Thailand I knew a Buddhist woman who wouldn't even kill ants on her kitchen counter.) I won't kill unless in self-defense or the defense of another. I hate death, harm, injury and suffering. A life with animals takes me closer to the joy of living on this marvelous planet Earth in a universe of expansion and wonder.

In my philosophy, people are animals too. In this story when I speak of animals, I mean non-human animals. No doubt I enjoyed the friendships I had while in Phoenix and elsewhere. Companionship with likeminded friends brings reassurance to the spirit. Companionship with animals brings a spiritual state of mind. A state of meditation and prayer. Meditation clears the mind. A focus on the task of feeding and watering. Tending animals. The prayer is being thankful for what I have.

I am an old Buddhist spirit who believes in the 4 noble truths and the 8-fold path to enlightenment. 2500 years ago, the enlightened one, Buddha, held his first sermon at Deer Park near Varanasi, northern India. A place I've traveled to, after law school. When Don had his sabbatical in 1995 and we traveled three months in Asia—to Tibet, Vietnam, Nepal, India, and Bali where I bought my wood carved Hindu screen.

Anyway, Deer Park is where Buddha set in motion the Wheel of Dharma—an explanation that life is suffering, desire causes suffering, and people can end desire and suffering by following the middle way, the 8-fold path of right view, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right samadhi (meditative consciousness).

Well, I'm not so sure about ending suffering. (My heart was bruised after my German Shephard Kali killed the pit bull Shaman and I found the lifeless body on the cold dark earth).

As a Bodhisattva, my mandate is to ease the pain of those burdened by desire and suffering. This is my philosophy. I live by the middle way and avoid the extremes of being too good, or too bad. I don't eat meat, poultry, fish, sea foods, dairy products, or eggs. Whenever possible, I don't wear leather. I have been vegan for 10 years. A Buddhist, perhaps 20 years although really, all my life. And a Bodhisattva? Consciously. I'm always in the present. Not something you stamp with a date. I am a Bodhisattva realizing my spiritual fulfillment. I have blessed moments of clarity and joy that I am alive.

We began riding horses, Sonny and I

Don didn't ride horses and I rode almost daily. None of my city friends ever made it down for a ride and the only neighbor who ever offered to ride with me was lascivious Dr. Bandito. I considered joining a riding club but never got around to it.

Besides, Sonny was there every day, helping at the corral. In very little time I encouraged him to go riding with me. He claimed to know all about horses, but he hadn't a clue. He was a street hustler, not a vaquero. So, surreptitiously, I demonstrated how to bridle and saddle, mount and dismount, and ride with control over the horse.

At first, Sonny and I rode around the property—he on Skeeter and me on Mirage leading April so she'd get some exercise. But April was a spunky mare and she bit Skeeter's butt during our second ride. The old gelding bucked Sonny off into a creosote bush and meandered back to the corral. I wanted to laugh, the spectacle was so hilarious, but I knew he could be hurt.

“You all right, Sonny?” I couldn’t jump down because I still held April by the lead. We didn’t need three upset horses.

“Yeah,” he stood stretching, his bare back was scratched and embedded with grit and creosote debris. He was wearing untied sneakers, no socks, and long baggy jean shorts over boxers.

“You really have to wear long pants when riding,” I suggested. His legs looked red and raw from rubbing against the horse. “And a shirt,” I added.

From then on he wore faded blue jeans, black steel-toe working boots and a t-shirt with the sleeves cut off. He looked as fine as any rugged Arizonan horseman—today or 130 years ago in Arizona Territory.

Soon, Sonny was galloping Skeeter with me on Mirage and the dobies chasing after us up and down Barnes Road. He loved it and even rode Skeeter while I was away. I told him he could, although I worried that he might get hurt. Sonny was reckless. Too hasty and hurried. And for what? I could hardly guess. To get the task done? To move on to the next (fix)? Why would someone like him, who had been living homeless in a car, be in such a rush? I had to wonder time and time again. (was it his addiction to drugs?)

During that late August, Sonny joined me for my sunset rides, starting at about 6:30. We rode together perhaps ten times and each ride held its own magic. It seemed horses, dogs, and people all harmonized for these remarkable sunset rides into the desert. Everyone instinctively “got with the program,” whether it was to guide, ride, stay in line, or seek a trail. We all managed without catastrophe.

August is the heart of Arizona's monsoon season, which runs from June through September and there are lots of cumulonimbus cloudbursts and haboobs (huge dust storms) fueled by the heat of the day. Storms usually last an hour, and quickly pass by. In the desert, washes overflow and roads flood. The storms can spawn a microburst—a small tornado that can rip apart a trailer. Especially after long days of summer heat, monsoon storms are exciting times.

The downpours can be as vehement as those I experienced in Asia in the early 1980's. I remember being stranded at a storefront in Thailand as water flooded off the eaves onto the muddy street. I wrote the following poem about the Thai Monsoons. It somehow seems to ring true about what I was experiencing with Sonny:

Ah, cumulonimbus, do tell,  
What comes is imminent.

Creeping gages cross the land,  
Embedding shadows:  
Stretching, diffusing –  
Grains fallen into photons.

Sleepless anopheles begin to dance,  
And hover, inside.  
What comes is immanent.

Mynahs shout across the pond.  
Synchronized –  
They swoop over the land.

And, who is he?  
Careless about the imminent.  
Changing not in his direction.

He will take you in his arms,  
Under his body,  
Blurring your vision.

He will miss your charm,  
Your warmth,  
For he cannot miss his eminence.

Ah, cumulonimbus, so well,  
Shows us what is imminent.

On one of our sunset rides, a streak of pink clouds split across the blue sky, from the west hills to the east plateau where I once saw a mirage of mesas and buttes. A garland of peonies across the firmament. We were both awed and believed it was a divine sign. A sign about Sonny and me in God's orchestration of light.

a sherbet flavored sunset,  
In scoops of hard ice cream,  
With yellow cotton candy–pink,  
And marmalade between.

I felt very sexy those evenings, riding Mirage through the desert with Sonny and my dobies. I wore black cowboy boots with white trim, black jeans from L.L.Bean or Eddie Bauer, a black sleeveless bicycle top from REI, snug on my lean body (I was a vegan). I wore my hair back in a braid, always carried water, a Swiss Army knife, a red handkerchief, comb, and my Smith and Wesson 352 Magnum in its black fanny pack holster. I felt bold—the lady of the ranch



off to where only cowboys dared venture. (was I a wild west Calamity Jane avatar? Bold brave and beautiful. No worries with a gun, jackals, and a man of the jungles).

We eventually rode beyond Barnes Road onto BLM land, well beyond where I usually walked with the dogs. The dirt road wound around hills edging a tremendous wash, the main artery of the region. One evening, I steered Mirage off the road and started climbing a hillside with rocks, barrels, hedgehogs and creosotes. Horseman Tom had told me that Mirage could climb straight up a hill. I merely trusted my horse and sat tightly in the saddle, guiding Mirage to zigzag up the slope of crumbly desert scree.

“Come on,” I called to Sonny, stopping by an ocotillo. “The horses know how to climb a hill. Let Skeeter lead the way.”

Sonny followed, exclaiming “Dam! dam,” as we climbed the hillside like two experienced “cowpokes,” back in the day. Out of the wild west, hitting the trail.

Another evening we rode up Cholla Mountain deep in BLM land. “Are you sure we want to do this?” Sonny questioned when we set off. There was only twenty minutes before sunset so we’d be riding home in the moonlight.

“Why not?” I said, urging on my adventure. I felt invincible, unwilling to stop because the situation might grow more dramatic. “You lead.”

Sonny took the reins and headed up the road, proud of his horseman skills. (a focus other than drugs).

The dirt road on the BLM, seemed long forgotten, winding up the rocky mountain for perhaps two miles, ending at a jagged and abrupt peak. Here, in the diminishing daylight, stretched the desert’s vast uncultivated land. Rural land. Expanses of raw desert. We could see the Gila River Indian Reservation—which had up to 1000 wild mustangs running free and living

off the land. SW of the lights of Phoenix was Sierra Estrella, a mountain range partly within the Gila River Indian Reservation. To the southeast rose the lights of Casa Grande, silhouetting buttes and mesas along the east horizon.

Amazingly, Minnie and Max kept respectfully clear of the horses and never strayed from the trail into a cholla patch. Well behaved kids. If they got too far ahead, they both stopped and looked back at me. When one got a cholla spine on its foot, as each did at least once, my dog would stop and wait for me to climb off Mirage, hand Sonny the reins, lift the paw, and flick off the pod with my comb. I always carried a comb out in the desert after my pit bull encountered the cholla.

I wasn't too bothered when Sonny admitted to smoking crack. I already knew. His old boss and friend, one of our contractors, had warned me "Sonny smokes crack." Even cowboy Tom warned me, "Sonny's a drinker." To me, then, Sonny's habit was just another element of mystique, like his being a felon. I really had no idea about crack and what it entailed.

Occasionally, after we stopped in a wash or on a slope to kick back, he pulled from his boots a small glass tube and a foil of white powder. He would "rock up" the magic dust by holding a flame under the bottom of a Pepsi can cut for the task. Once rocked, he put the white granules in the end of his glass pipe, lit up, and sucked in. He then seemed calmer, easier in speech, really kicked back! And that was that, except for a stupid question or statement now and then, as if he were trying to act normal. Un-fucked up. Sober.

I never intended to join him with his little habit. At the time, I wouldn't have smoked pot if he had pulled that out. My only concern was to ride my horses, with my dogs, and with my *compañero*.

On one ride, when we kicked back in a wash under the shade of a bushy Mesquite, Sonny lit up his pipe while I talked about my goals as a writer. I pictured me famous. And him with me. My charge. Historic figures. (my mind was already way out of scope and into delusions.)

Suddenly, the dreaming broke. I heard my horse whinny. The cry was fearful and it worried me, as if I had just taken a hit of Sonny's magic dust.

I jumped up and walked around the small bend to where we had tied the horses to Mesquite limbs that overhung the wash. All the while I imagined an intruder, a rattler or the horses fighting.

Then I saw that Mirage had somehow caught his leg, his knee bent, in the loop of his reigns. He could not free himself. His large dark eyes spoke of panic.

Of course, I could not panic.

"Keep the dogs back," I yelled to Sonny, and the puppies went to him. They knew my commands. They obeyed. They were Dobermans!

I slowly approached Mirage, speaking soothingly. I really wasn't a seasoned horseman. Only recently had I ventured into the world of horses and just because I could ride fairly well didn't mean I understood the nature of this huge beast, especially if he panicked. In one swift instant, Mirage could easily crush my lungs or bash in my skull. That much I knew about horses.

"Hey boy," I approached, "got yourself all in a tangle, I see. Well, Mama's here to help you out."

Step by step I approached the frightened beast; his eyes were upon me.

I petted his face while gently lifting his knee and leg from the loop. Mirage, the skittish remuda horse, simply let me free him. Then I led him from the tree.

I sighed with relief, feeling accomplished. Proud of myself and of Mirage. We had grown a notch closer in our peculiar relationship—human and horse. Predator, herding prey. Although I would never fully trust the horse, he could spook at any time, we trusted each other slightly more that sunset evening in the wash.

### Caught in a haboob

In addition to the Monsoon downpours and flooded washes, Southern Arizona has haboobs, intense dust storms that occur in arid regions throughout the world. In 1985, when I first arrived in Kuwait to teach English at Kuwait University, I saw a haboob out the window of the Kuwaiti Hilton—a wall of dust soaring high and consuming the Desert metropolis of skyscrapers, mansions, and the Kuwaiti Towers. Very Middle Eastern. Very biblical. A city of ages. Because of the desert.

One evening, Sonny and I set off just before an imminent dust storm, which made me all the more eager for adventure. Besides, a cooling breeze swept across the valley leaving scoured fresh air in the Arizona sun. I insisted we ride, hoping to reach Cholla Mountain, again, before sundown.

When we stopped at the BLM gate, Sonny asked “Shouldn’t we turn back?” By this time an eerie light permeated the desert—soft pinkish hues, artificial-looking, as if God had filtered the setting sun with rose colored glasses.

I thought a moment. I would turn back only if a thunder storm ripped the valley open. “No, let’s go on,” I said and reached for Sonny’s reins as he dismounted to open the gate.

“We might not make it to the mountain,” he worried. The eerie light had intensified.

“But this is exciting, beautiful,” I eagerly insisted. “We’ll walk the horses back if it gets bad.”

“You’re the boss, Miss Teresa,” he teased and opened the gate.

We trotted ahead into the raw desert, pausing after 100 yards.

Sonny looked back toward the NE. “Hey, look,” he pointed out a tremendous wall of dust, billowing at its seams, rapidly overwhelming the land. A Kuwaiti haboob.

“Goodness,” I exclaimed. “It is time to turn back.”

It was too late. A wall of dust had already blocked our way back to the ranch and it was rapidly heading our way.

“We’ll hide out in the rock house until it blows over.” Sonny was referring to the rock shelter built by the weird neighbor, Jerry, whose girlfriend had kicked him off her property earlier that summer. Evidently, he had lived in the rock house a while, then he sold an old travel trailer to our neighbor Ken and caught a ride to Casa Grande. That was the last anyone heard about him. His girlfriend was now living with about 50 cur dogs to keep people off her acreage. Maybe to keep Jerry away.

“Hurry hurry,” Sonny yelled as he headed toward the southern hills on the BLM. “The rock house is up ahead.”

The haboob was nearly upon me when I pulled the red handkerchief over my mouth and trotted to catch up with Sonny as my dogs marched beside me. “We’d better walk,” I said and dismounted, leading Mirage. Sonny followed suit. I barely caught up with him when we were overtaken by swirling orange dust. A strange silence fell within the grit.

Until Sonny shouted, “Come, come.”

By looking at the desert around my feet, I led my horse and dogs to where Sonny stood, his forearm sheltering his eyes.

“Let’s just stand here” I suggested. “This isn’t really that bad.”

“Miss Teresa, there’s no telling how long it’ll last. And the shelter’s not far,” he insisted. “A lot closer than anything else.”

“But we can’t see!”

“Yeah we can,” he sounded calm now. “I’ve lived in Arizona all my life,” he reminded me, “and people ain’t going to die from dust storms.”

I grabbed the tail of his unbuttoned shirt and he navigated along, draped in grit. Because we were at the base of the hills, we managed by following the edge of the slope. I was so twisted around, I relied on Sonny to determine whether we were headed north south east or west. He pointed out that the intense light to the west was the setting sun.

“Are you sure this place is nearby?” I asked momentarily. “I’d rather wait it out.” I envisioned sitting on a rock, reins in hand, dogs at my feet, arm over my eyes, quietly waiting as the storm blasted past. Waiting it out, as I remembered doing when in the eighth grade in Portland, Oregon. For some reason I had walked home from a friend’s house during a blizzard with three-foot snow drifts, howling winds, and extreme cold. When I reached my house the doors were locked and nobody was home. I had to sit on the back steps, bundle up as best I could, and wait.

I kept walking, staring down at my feet and the desert ground, my arm shielding my eyes. I could feel the storm passing in **wisps of dust that sounded and felt like scratching sandpaper, that tasted and smelled like the breath of fire ants, I imagined.** “What if we startle a rattler?” I asked. “We won’t see it until we step on it.”

“You worry too much,” Sonny said. We walked on silently.

“Hey,” he stopped, I almost ran into him. “The rock house is just beyond those Mesquite trees up ahead.” The trees were about as far as we could see in the haboob. Sonny had an uncanny sense to navigate through the storm. As natural an inclination, as he had with horses.

I closely followed Sonny to the trees and we carefully tied up the horses. They whinnied, but otherwise seemed unconcerned. Since you can lead a blinded horse out of a fire, I imagined that the obscurity of the dust appeased their sense of being vulnerable prey. They probably found it comforting, despite the grit. Horses, like camels, could wait out a dust cloud.

Sonny walked up ahead and shortly yelled, “Yee-hee, found it!” He knew the place well because he been there many times before, mostly for target shooting with Mork’s guns.

I walk toward his voice; his figure came into focus. He held out his hand to guide me the rest of the way to the entry of the rock house. I was amazed that he found the hut in the storm. Under perfect sunshine, it stood hidden on the rocky slope. I could never find it again.

“Can you see Minnie and Max?” I asked before entering.

“They’re right at your feet.”

“In, in,” I commanded my dogs, but they were leery of the hut and would not enter.

“Go on, they’ll follow you. Here,” he handed me his lighter.

I got on my hands and knees, held up the flame and crawled inside the rock house.

The same eerie pink light reached inside through the many cracks and small openings. Dingy blankets lay wadded against one wall where Jerry had slept cozily, it appeared. Canned goods and dishes still sat haphazardly on a shelf wedged into one corner. A cooking pot remained on a fire pit in the corner, crusted from its many uses.

I sat in the corner on the bunched-up blanket, feeling grit in my teeth and film on my dry skin. Scoured. The storm blew all around emanating an eerie sound rather like the sound from my fireplace at the ranch where at times it felt like I was communing with ghosts. Only a little dust wound its way between the rocks. The nomadic shelter was relatively sound. I felt protected inside Jerry's abandoned hut.

"Sonny!" I called wondering why he or my dogs hadn't immediately followed me inside.

He didn't reply so I crawled back out the entry, squinting my eyes in the dusty light.

"Where are you?"

The storm grew more intense with swirls of powdered dust.

"Here go your dogs," Sonny said as he picked Max up and tossed him inside the rock house, then Minnie.

I crawled back inside and sat in the corner with my puppies, who seemed nervous about the storm and small shelter.

"Why are you still out there?" I asked. He entered and sat across from me. The rock house was just big enough for all of us to fit inside.

He spotted a candle on the shelf and lit it. We sat quietly a moment and watched the flame quivering in the storm.

It was still, except for Max whining against the eerie sound of the storm.

We tried not to stare at each other in the dim light, but there wasn't much room for anything else. I listened to the chiseling storm outside and inside the hut.

"Not a bad little hide out," he finally said.



“Yeah, hunh,” I replied, feeling uneasy all of a sudden. I felt drawn to him, sensually, as if he had cast a spell on me, had made me desire him. But under the circumstances, I could not let anything happen then and there. I was not ready for anything like adultery.

“How long do these things last?” I heard my voice flicker, like the candle. Was I trembling?

“It’ll pass soon.” His voice also had a tremble, I noted. “Hopefully before it gets too dark.

I noticed his tattoos: on one arm were the words “Sweet Gemini,” and on the other upper arm were two peacocks covering the name of an ex- girlfriend.

In the flickering light I looked at Sonny, he at me.

Suddenly, another feeling came over me, not one of lust, but something of spirit. An epiphany, the kind I experienced when hiking 14,000 feet in elevation on the Inca Trail, in the Andes, Peru. It was a moment of recognizing purpose. There was something about the man before me that sent shivers down my spine. I had been with him before. We were kindred souls. I had a feeling of elation—the kind that comes with finding the right solution to a difficult problem. I had been more on the science side of spirituality. Doctrines, such as resurrection, reincarnation, Heaven and even Nirvana, didn’t matter so much to me, but the sunset rides were convincing me otherwise.

I knew this man before, many times and probably in many ways. I thought. Did we weave through lives, always coming together to etch out karma. Were we helping each other grow spiritually so that we might become bodhisattvas, or whatever the ideal of existence.

I sighed at my enormous thoughts. My self-worth soared when I thought about the man and the desert around me: we had both been here before—in the old Arizona west.

“I swear, Miss Teresa,” he looked aside. “I’ve known you in some other life.”

This was the first of many times our thoughts fell on the same notion. Why would I be so connected to him? I actually had a book in mind for him. I was dreaming up the story I now lived, I was living the story from a dream that I'd write into a story. It was uncanny.

He said it was karma, then he talked about a program on TV, concerning Adam and Eve and some Biblical nonsense. Well, really, to me Christianity, or any Abrahamic religion, meant patriarchy. I respect the words of Jesus. (I really try to respect and appreciate most religions. If nothing else, I try to respect that a religious person is entitled to his or her spiritual beliefs, unless they're harmful and evil). However, too many insults and "you can't because you're a woman" are in the Abrahamic teachings. I don't like being degraded and I've ended up embracing Eastern Religions, especially Buddhism and the principles of compassion, respect for the Earth, respect for others, and living "the middle way" (no extremes).

When the storm stopped, it was dark. In the candle light I noticed a spider dropped from a ceiling stone not far from me. It crawled toward the hearth.

"I'm out of here," I said, scrambling back outside. My puppies followed.

As on many other nights, we got lost on our way home. By the faint light of the moon, we managed to meander by foot to the barbed wire fence around the BLM land. Once there, we followed the fence to the gate and on home down Barnes Road.

Naturally, I wondered if Don was home, and if he'd be frantic with worry (as he had been the time I got lost back packing with a friend from law school and spent eight hours into the night looking for the trail). Would he notice the Explorer parked in the garage? Would he have checked the corrals to see if the horses were gone?

As we rode up Barnes Road, the house appeared with all the floodlights on, beaming like a fortress out of the darkness. "Look," Sonny exclaimed.

“What?” His tone worried me and I looked more closely at the house.

I saw Don’s Taurus parked in front, as usual. “Oh well,” I thought. I had hoped he wouldn’t be home yet, to avoid his knowing I spend so much time with Sonny. Then I noticed Don himself standing on the roof, his hand over his brow like Captain Ahab surveying the sea. “Oh my God, what’s he doing?” I asked.

“Don’t matter,” Sonny said. “We haven’t done anything,” he paused, “yet.”

We hurried to the corrals as Don came down from the roof. I asked Sonny to put the horses away as Don approached.

“Sorry,” I said, walking back to the house. “A dust storm hit and we got lost in the hills.”

“I know. I saw it on the way home. I was worried.”

Don really didn’t say anything more that night. At least of substance. We ate pasta, he drank a Kloster nonalcoholic beer and I had a glass of organic Merlot from Trader Jo’s, mixed with nonalcoholic Cabernet. We hardly talked at all any more. He was always tired by evenings and the horse-riding adventures left me too exhausted for conversation. After setting my dishes in the sink, I said good night and went to my bed behind the screen. My cherub dobies quickly followed.

Don had seemingly accepted our sleeping arrangement. It was inevitable. Possibly, in his mind, the arrangement was temporary—imposed by the chaos of getting settled in a new rural home. A few times he asked to sleep with me, and I always convinced him not to. I wanted to be alone. Away from him.

When starting out, Don and I had been right for each other in many ways. Mostly, we were intellectual friends. Like a lot of modern couples we had trouble being spouses and we had trouble pursuing businesses together which we tried throughout our marriage. I was quick to

jump from task to task, trying to get something going. He felt guilty, I think, because he couldn't keep up with me, not with a full-time career at Intel. He went to bed at 2 am, I got up three hours later. No sex. No kids. And he did not ride horses with me.

I began daydreaming about Sonny. It just happened to me. He became the focus of emerging desires. Maybe it began after I found him sleeping on bales of hay, shirtless, or when we put up the barbed wire fence. Or after we started riding horses. In any event, I could not eradicate him from my thoughts. He would please me, I imagined. He would sweep me to places I had never been.

Then, I would chastise myself. Hit my forehead! Pull at my hair! Why am I fanaticizing about him??? Man of nothing, Man of the streets. Why do I think about you?

I chanted by corral. Chanted that he leave my thoughts, that I pull myself together. Get him out of my head. Get my thoughts out of this gutter; out of the ghetto. But I never took any action. I never demanded he leave or asked Don to make him leave. I just couldn't because I needed my right-hand man. How could I possibly get things done on my own? There were too many things I had to do.

It finally happened like this, as I knew it would, on the day after Don stood on the roof scouting for me.

Sonny and I were patching sheet rock that morning in the living room wall. After he took a break I mentioned smelling marijuana on him.

"How long have you been sleeping alone?" he boldly asked from atop the tall ladder reaching the cathedral ceiling.

We had both become uneasy that morning. It was that “just before it happens” time, before the commitment is made, or broken. Before it’s done and there’s no turning back. It was the time of knowing what’s about to happen but not being so bold as to launch right into it. I would not make the first move. I would not be the guilty instigator. The atmosphere tingled with impending desire. It felt like adolescence, full of possibilities.

The morning passed. We spoke again at the corral, Sonny leaning on the railing across from me sitting on a chair, my feet propped up. He seemed especially uneasy, about to make a difficult confession. Difficult because I was a married woman, difficult because I was a lady, difficult because I may just send him on his way. Give him his walking papers. His job with me, as he often claimed, was the best job he’d ever had. “This is like rehab...” he would say. “My prayers are answered.” He had told me before that after Melvina had kicked him from her house and he moved across the road into the rusted-out yellow Toyota Celica with four flat tires, and sold drugs, that he would sit on the hood at night and pray for a woman to come into his life, a woman who didn’t use drugs.

After Sonny returned to the house from his lunch that day, I told him that the next task was to sort through my boxes in the basement. I could tell he wasn’t too interested in the job. But I was still the boss. In the basement were scores of black garbage bags and boxes that had been tossed around during each rain storm leakage. I had always meant to get to this room, sort it out, and discard the unnecessary and the ruined. But this was a dreaded job. The basement, two solid cinderblock rooms with rafter ceilings, had spiders, even black widows and their distinctive chaotic webs and white round eggs that look like tiny yarn balls.

I had damaged slides, photos, floppy disks, old letters, sketches, and manuscripts. I salvaged what I could and tossed the rest in a new box. How had my life gotten so out of control

that I couldn't even place the irreplaceable upstairs in a closet, away from the flooding basement? Because we were not settled in our new house. We were just living here, moving it along in a vision of what the place would become. Our home, our business, our marriage, our source of enjoyment. Everything had been tossed in the basement. The irreplaceable hidden by the useless, the valuable cluttered with the easily replaceable. (sonny found Don's 10 years at Intel watch, which he exchanged for a hit of crack with the fat Mexican who built our corrals).

It was sultry in the basement, musty smelling because of the August monsoons. Don's air conditioners didn't fully reach the basement.

I felt flushed and sweaty as I began throwing whatever I could grab in garbage bags. I hurled coat hangers, office organizers, moldy books, old files, old clothes, shoes, bags of extra kitchen utensils, Tupperware and pans—I even toss out excessive camping and traveling gear (half used canisters of butane, corroded flashlights, moldy bags). I simply had too much stuff. “Here,” I handed Sonny a garbage bag already filled, “Throw this away, along with that, and that,” I pointed out a hose holder contraption, never used, and one of three Minnie vacuums (gifts from my in-laws, I believe).

Sonny took the bag and peered in it. “You're not throwing this away?” he pulled out a desktop organizer.

“Sure am,” I said and continued plowing through boxes and piles of debris. “Take what you want. Just get it out of here.”

Sonny set the bag aside and seated himself on the steep rough wooden stairwell to the west side kitchen. “Miss Teresa, you don't want to throw all this stuff away. It's all good.”

“Oh yes I do,” I continued sorting.

“Stop.” He looked calm, composed, sitting on the step. “I got something to say to you.”

I stopped what I was doing and remembered what had overtaken me lately, the feelings I had for him. The drama at play.

I sat on a folded tent near the steps. “Tell me.” He hesitated. “What, Sonny? What? You can tell me.”

“I think you know.” He wanted me to move first, across the line. But I wouldn’t. Perhaps I couldn’t; I was nearly out of breath anyway.

“Tell me Sonny. Is it about drugs?” I said, thinking it could be about drugs, it could also be that things were getting out of hand, and he had to move on. “What is it?”

“Miss Teresa, I want to make love to you,” he nodded in emphasis, “right now.”

(and then it became a thing of passion)

### The Decision

Light streamed through ceiling windows when we made love in the basement, on a mattress that happened to be down there, tossed amid the creepy crawlers and their webs.

I made the decision covering my face, feeling enormously shy. He noticed. This was new territory for me—betrayal. This would end my eleven-year marriage (why had our ten-year anniversary been so uneventful?) My marriage was probably over before we moved to rural Maricopa. How can love survive a lack of passion, sexless from day to day. He just didn’t have the appeal. But I guess he had the right words of encouragement that I needed at the right time. His encouragement got me through law school. And he had a good job. Stability. He had been a good prospect for me when I was teaching English at the University of Kuwait, and had just turned thirty.

Infidelity had never been a serious consideration before. I had just been plugging along trying to get somewhere as an individual in a supportive and calm relationship. But one void of excitement. One that had tumbled into enormous stress (as stressful as law school where I calmed myself at nights with images of sitting under a shade tree, on the cool Earth, deeply breathing fragrant air, jasmine and honeysuckle, listening to songbirds and feeling the gentle warmth of a mid-October sun).

I was numb, floating in clouds when I accepted Sonny as my lover. It's not that I was crazy in love with him, either, I was just freed from status quo drudgery. Into what? I did not care to know, at that moment. I cared not to know.

### The Breakdown

The next Saturday morning, early, when white winged doves and cactus wren began to stir, I went to feed the horses and saddle Mirage. Sonny's car was gone. He's been out partying all night, I thought, feeling distressed that he was gone. Worried perhaps, that he had left me, or that he might be in trouble.

By ten o'clock that morning he was still gone. I walked into the desert, a bundle of emotions. A man who had nothing to offer me but himself, was pulling my heart and soul. Obviously, I had to rid myself of this desire for him. He would only take me down or take me for everything I had. But I could not shed him from my thoughts. He had taken up residence and refused to move away.

By eleven o'clock, while I was eating lunch in the kitchen, the shoebox sized cell-phone rang. Don answered.

Don held out the phone. "Your son," he shook his head as if saying, "now what?"



I took the phone.

“Hey baby, I need \$45 to get an alternator. I’m stuck up on 39<sup>th</sup> and Van Buren. At a Circle K.”

“His car broke down,” I held the phone aside. “He needs an alternator.”

“So what? You aren’t his mother.” Don walked off.

“I can’t help you,” I said, glad to hear from him. He hadn’t abandoned me.

“Come on, baby, I’m stuck here and want to come home.”

Within an hour I pulled up to the Circle K in the worst part of town—on the fringes of Skid row, the homeless area, the projects. A dismal dirty area where lives dribble down the gutters. “You’re pissing your life away, just pissing your life away,” I once heard a derelict bum recount as he meandered the streets of San Francisco.

Sonny’s green Honda was parked to the side of the Circle K. I pulled up, remaining safely inside my car, assessing the situation. It didn’t even feel safe enough to unlock my doors.

Sonny sat at the passenger side of his car, leaning out the open door, slumped on his knees. His hair and skin were soaked with sweat.

“Sonny, Sonny,” I got out of the car and walked toward him. He did not budge. I thought he was asleep until I heaved him up straight and realized he was dead drunk, barely able to talk.

He slumped back down like a rag doll. “Sonny, Sonny,” I slapped his head. He was pickled and I despised his hideous bum-fuck skid row drunkenness. Useless trashy, obscene, behavior.

“Oh . . . baby,” he slurred. “I ain’t been with no other ho.”

“Ho!” I said angrily holding him up again, shaking him conscious.

I considered leaving on the spot, but after a moment, he came to and dragged out the words, “I need \$45 for an alternator. Been here all night.”

From nowhere a bum approached, a white man with a grizzly gray beard and sun battered face—a straight drunk who reeked as bad as Sonny. I looked at him unwelcomingly and he muttered testimony to the fact that Sonny had been with him all night, drinking (as if proclaiming his man here hadn’t been with a ho. As if I cared at that point).

“Go on,” Sonny stammered at the bum. “Go away, nobody’s talking to you.” Sonny managed to level himself enough to chase off the intruder.

I’d had enough. I handed Sonny the money, saying I knew it was for drugs and I got back in my car and started the ignition.

Sonny held up his rubbery neck to ask, “Going to wait for me, baby? I ain’t been with no other ho.”

Instead of spinning off and screeching out of there, I assured him that I’d wait until he got back with the alternator, which he claimed was down the street at some mechanic’s house. Such a ruse for drugs. Cock and bull. After Sonny walked far enough away, I pulled out from the Circle K and went home.

I told Don the story of bum- fuck drunk Sonny on Skid row and how disgusted I had been with the whole ordeal.

“What do you expect?” Don asked. “Why do you think he’s homeless. Why do you think bums are bums? And don’t go after him anymore. Leave him stranded. He’s NOT your son.”

Although I was outraged, Sonny was already engraved in my thoughts. I could hardly function the rest of the day, wondering if I’d ever see him again. Wondering if I even cared. But I did.

When Sonny returned I continued my relationship with him, listening to his music at the corrals; mostly “jams” by black women—*All I can do is think of you, You make my daydreams come true* . . . Sonny made me laugh. Made me desire him. Something did.

## Chapter Seven: The Flight from Barnes Road

Basically, Sonny stopped being a “hard worker” after being with me. He just didn’t care to do anything but make me laugh and make love. I didn’t really care because everything had changed. I was trying to figure out how to tell Don that our marriage was over and that I had to be on my way. I couldn’t stay around and live a lie, hide what I was doing. Bad karma in the wheel of dharma.

The weekend after we first made love, after his little episode at the Circle K in a Phoenix ghetto, Sonny and I went to Flagstaff for a few days. I told Don I was going on a writing retreat, camping with my dogs. Don really couldn’t do much, at that point, other than to let me go. Since his CAP and our move to Hidden Valley, hardly anything was left between us to glue the marriage down. Everything had faltered. Chaos ruled. Disorder. The piles of debris, the many projects at the ranch house. All the uncertainty about our future. My future. Had I become unhinged? Had he?

Before heading to Flag, I agreed to stop in the seedy Buckeye area of Phoenix, near a crack house. I waited for Sonny to make his purchase with the cash I had paid him for his work around the ranch. The essence of our excursion became about crack cocaine. For him. Not for me. I just had to get away from the ranch for a day or two.

Sonny returned to the idling Explorer, excited that the dealers had given him an 8 ball for a forty. I had no conception of what he meant or of what lay ahead. (Later, on google, I read

about the quantity of crack involved in an 8 ball is 3 1/2 grams and is about \$130. An 8 Ball is cheap, but a crackhead can smoke an 8 Ball in a few hours.) For the entire drive north, until we camped in the woods, Sonny sat in the passenger seat sucking up hit after hit in his glass pipe. It was dreadfully annoying, like being with a retarded man. I even pulled over a few times, demanding he stop. Or get out.

He quit for a while, then lit up again, always asking that I turn the outside mirror away from the car so he could watch for police. This annoyed me tremendously but I continued on with my trip, numb about the whole drug thing—about my own flight from a stable but vapid marriage. I was especially bemused about the out-of-control man with me. I just didn't have the presence of mind to sort anything out. My drive for new adventure reigned. It was the beginning of a cycle I had experienced many times before, throughout my life.

After searching along forest roads outside Flagstaff, we finally set up camp in the fresh cool mountain air under tall ponderosa pine whose furrowed bark gives off a distinctive vanilla scent. Our camp was secluded, cozy, a perfect retreat. But what came next was the paranoia of a hard drug user after an orgy of consumption.

As it grew dark, Sonny insisted on holding my Smith and Wesson revolver (why? because he's the man). At first, I wouldn't let him—we had the dogs and I was capable of handling the gun if any danger came our way. I had a concealed weapons permit. Had taken several lessons at Shooter's World. (I was Mattie, out on the frontier, with her gun. Afertiti with her jackals.)

Anyway, Sonny felt claustrophobic under the looming pines hovering around our camp. (A forest is not like the desert's open expanse.) Every sound made him jump. (The desert is mostly silent, unlike a forest of trees.) Finally, he took the gun as it lay beside me, before the

campfire. I didn't fight to get it back, not believing he would harm me. His begging to hold the gun and his tweaking behavior made me weary. Life seemed so exhausting, almost pointless. I had fled one chaotic situation into one that was, apparently, much worse. "Out of the pan and into the fire," I thought, shaking my head in disbelief.

Sonny sat across from me, rocking, the flames flickering on his ashen face. My weapon firmly in his hand. Throughout the evening, he'd suddenly jump up at a sound and say, "What's that? Quiet. Listen."

"The wind rattling the pines," I may have suggested. "Or a pygmy hoot owl. Maybe a fox or badger. Could be a black bear!" I sat quietly by the fire, trying to enjoy my venture into nature, despite the headachy disappointment. I had foolishly put myself in the company of a paranoid addict. This would have shamed me, if I hadn't been so out of it myself. Flummoxed in the head.

Finally, I'd had enough. I threatened to pack up on the spot and take him straight back to Maricopa and leave him at the Circle K.

He stood, winced around the fire like a heifer trapped in a burning barn. He stopped and looked at me, holding up the gun. "If this is a set-up, you'll be the first one I shoot, believe me."

I wasn't afraid. Just annoyed. "This isn't a set-up, Sonny. Calm down. Why would I set you up? As if you're that important."

He continued his panic dance, then settled back down. As he took another hit, I got hold of the gun and went inside the tent and emptied it. Then I lay down to sleep. The first thing in the morning, I was taking him back to Maricopa or to the homeless shelter in Phoenix, wherever he wanted to go. It wasn't going to be back to my ranch on Barnes Road.

After I went to bed, he seemed to settle down a bit. He entered the tent, took a hold of the empty gun by my pillow and proceeded to suck on his pipe again and again throughout the night. It reminded me of a night I spent in northern Thailand. 1984. I had trekked to a Hmong hill tribe village and slept on the sod floor of a hut with a fire pit in the center. I don't remember what the people did other than farm opium and raise chickens and pigs. What I remember is the Hmong man who owned the hut with his wife and kids, lay by the hearth and sucked on an opium pipe all through the night. Just like Sonny smoking his crack.

That night, instead of soundly sleeping in the pine scented air, I quietly feigned sleep while counting each passing moment in wait for an end to this tomfoolery.

The next morning, we scrambled back home. Sonny kept apologizing, begging for another chance, asking for a pardon because he had, after all, been under the influence.

"You chose to smoke that shit all day!"

"I can't help myself, sometimes," he admitted.

"That's not my problem," I assured him as I dropped him off at his friend's house, probably a drug dealer, in Copa Town.

Don was surprised to find me back so soon. I claimed it had rained. I didn't know what to do then. Confess my affair and hope to carry on with the feeble marriage. Probably not. I had to tell him that the marriage was over. But what then? I'd have to get a job, move back to Phoenix. I had put myself in a difficult dilemma.

To make matters worse, for the rest of that day, I could not get Sonny out of my thoughts. I was obsessed with the man. Maybe from a latent "need to nurture" that I had resisted all my adult life. I thought I was a renaissance woman. Not a nurturer. That changed now. I also had an

emerging desire for physical sensation, a need to fall in love with someone somehow somewhere, and Sonny was there and he really needed me. It was a conundrum.

When Sonny showed up at the back door that evening, apologizing once more, my heart soared. I instantly forgave him, feeling compelled to see him through his torment. I was bound for the ordeal of my life. I would not touch his drugs, I would rarely drink, but I chose to be with a homeless addict who would wear me down down down. It was my choice. Nothing forced me into anything. Simply, I tumbled into a difficult situation that may have been impossible to escape. (from part of a poem I wrote while traveling on the Yangtze River, 1983):

22 meters  
down I go  
slowly down.

Into fumes, (effluvium, miasma –  
Like high school wine made  
From Welch's grape drink)  
drenching walls  
slowly  
I go down.

#### An Apartment in Tucson, Today!

I could not play the adultery game and hide an affair from my husband. I couldn't disrespect Don that much, nor myself. Besides, Don must have figured out something was happening. Sonny was missing while I was gone to Flagstaff, then he showed up after I returned home. But my husband didn't seem to know. Or maybe, he just didn't care.

The evening we got back from Flag, at the corral, I told Sonny that we would look for an apartment in Tucson. "I need to get you away from all these drugs." And I needed to get away from my failing marriage.

That night I also told Don that our marriage wasn't going to make it. That it was time to move on. "I've known you weren't happy for some time," he said. "Maybe never really happy."

"It's just me," I wanted to soften the blow.

That had been very hard to do. Everything I said was true, except for the underlying unspoken truth, the lumbering lie. I had slept with our hired hand. I justified to myself that I had dropped hints, "Don't you think Sonny and I work too closely together?"

My husband and I weren't functioning properly. We hadn't slept together for months. No sex. No kids. And, when it came to our ranch in rural Maricopa, we could not tell up from down. I believe Don accepted the inevitable, although he suggested that we'd get out of our present situation.

But in my mind, divorce was the thing to do. almost all of my friends from the Unitarian Church (Don's church, really) were recently divorced or about to divorce. And most divorces happened because the woman wants to move on. Don had even said, "Well, I hope this doesn't happen to us." I knew he had been concerned.

I wasn't leaving just because of him, or Sonny, but because I wanted more from life than my husband had to offer. Maybe even have a baby before it was too late. I'd given up on having one with Don. We had talked about adopting a baby from overseas. But that went nowhere. Besides, I disliked being overshadowed by him, because he was male and I was female. It smothered me. It wasn't right. I hated the way my own friends revered him and asked his opinion. I noticed what they asked him and what they asked me. I felt like a Betty Crocker on the



side, not a JP Morgan industrial juggernaut, even though I had kept my name and had my own merit. The law degree helped until I failed to pass the bar. What a mess.

“I just don’t like being a married woman,” I sometimes said to Don, when explaining myself. He agreed that I wasn’t treated fairly, given the credit that he got. Possibly, he always knew I was destined to move on. And there was nothing he could do about it.

Soon after returning from Flagstaff, I got up early and went to the west side room where Don slept on a twin mattress. I woke him and said, “I’m moving to Tucson today,”

He tried to discourage me from moving out, “Take your time. Don’t rush into this,” he groggily said. “Maybe we should move back to Night Hawk,” he even suggested.

No, no, that wasn’t it. That wouldn’t help us. We were doomed. I was with somebody else. I had already made the decision that changed my life forever.

After Don headed to work that morning, I loaded up Minnie and Max and a suitcase of clothes. At the guesthouse I picked up Sonny and we drove an hour and a half down to Tucson, seat of Pima County. I was looking forward to living in the Old Pueblo. During my years in Ahwatukee I had made many visits to the city and surrounding areas.

### The Old Pueblo

Tucson is perhaps my favorite city. And I’ve been to a lot of cities in the world—Boston, Singapore, Lima, Hong Kong, Cairo, Santiago . . . Tucson is a desert oasis with the Saguaro National Monument on both sides of the city. Northeast of Tucson are the Catalina Mountains. The highest peak is Mt. Lemmon which has the southernmost ski destination in the United States. The resort opens sporadically in the winter. I hiked on Mt. Lemmon with my meditation friend from the Unitarian Church, Anne Sawyer. I think we stayed at a resort in the Catalina foothills, with our husbands of the time.

Historically, Spanish, Mexican, Confederate, and Arizona flags have flown over The Old Pueblo. The First inhabitants in the area were the Hohokam indigenous people who are known for their canals and petroglyphs. When Arizona was part of Spain 300 years ago, Jesuit missionaries arrived and founded the famed Mission San Xavier del Bac on the Tohono O'odham San Xavier Indian Reservation—a landmark of Tucson. There were lots of Apache attacks during the Spanish period. After gaining independence from Spain in 1821, Tucson became part of Sonora Mexico. In the Gadsden Purchase of 1854, the US gained from Mexico the Arizona land south of the Gila River. Tucson became a part of the United States of America and for ten years was the capital of Arizona Territory.

A few times I had driven down to the university of Arizona in Tucson to check out their bookstore and the Steward Observatory and Planetarium. I also went to the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum at the west side of Saguaro National Monument. The world class museum has the mission to “inspire people to live in harmony” with the Sonoran Desert. At times they demonstrate the flight of Arizona's native Harris's hawk, which I've often seen along a rural road, perched on a fence post. The raptors fly majestically as they hunt together in teams, like a pack of jackals. Hawks and Jackals. Very Egyptian. The souls of Nekhen (jackal) and Pe (falcon).

From the brittlebush in late winter, to the saguaros in late spring, the Sonora Desert magically blossoms with wildflowers. I often drove down to Tucson and its parks, via state highway 79, Pinal Pioneer Parkway, just to scout out and take pictures of the wildflowers. Along the route, among the cholla, barrel, prickly pear, and saguaro, the desert burgeoned in yellow, magenta, blue, orange, lavender, and gold—desert marigold, lupine, desert trumpet, California poppy, desert honeysuckle, Indian paintbrush, fairy duster, and owl clover, to name a few. the

saguaro has milky white flowers with yellow centers. The flowers last only a day and open at night when long nosed and long tongued bats pollinate the blossoms. When mature, saguaro fruit turns red. Traditionally, The Tohono O'odham Native Americans harvest the juicy fruit of the saguaro which, along with the pods of desert trees. The desert provides an abundance of nutritious food. Manna from God. The Sonora is a survivable terrain as long as you have a source of water.

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MAYBE HERE'S WHERE I MERGE SONORA SONORAN???

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#### Back to the story

We had no clue where we would be staying that night in Tucson. If nothing else, I planned to camp in the Catalina Mountains until we found an apartment. Catalina State Park was an idyllic desert asylum where I could ride my bike with man and dogs.

An apartment referral service located a place that would take two dogs, two big dogs, two Doberman Pinchers. It's always a problem with this breed. There's a stigma that they're vicious and unpredictable, like pit bulls. **(I've found this to be far from the truth, at least with the dobies I've had. I have to pay \$19 more annually for my current homeowners insurance because I have Dobermans.)**

I signed a three-month lease for an apartment on Prince Road, reasoning that I wouldn't stay in an apartment longer than that. Eventually I would rent a house or return to our house on Night Hawk, after the current renters moved out. An apartment was no place for me and two large Dobermans.

At night, in our apartment on Prince Road, we would hold each other, profess our love, and I'd feel revived, safe, and healthy. Every day, we returned to Maricopa to gather and pack my things and to manage the animals. I didn't have it in me to try to sell them, so I gave Sammy the horses along with icky the pig and my goat Gemini. He had done a lot of work for me—laying Saltillo tile, wiring, digging a septic tank for the RV hook up. He was truly a Jack of all trades.

With each trip back to rural Maricopa, Sonny convinced me to drop him by one of several trailer homes belonging to Mexican drug dealers from the Sonora Lopez family, I called them. Sonny called them by their name—the Sinaloa family, a Cartel of Mexico named after the Pacific Coast state of Sinaloa. El Chapo had been their drug lord from 1995 until his latest capture. Tucson and Phoenix are their major shipment and distribution points. The Sinaloa were spread throughout rural Maricopa. One morning, while walking in the desert near my property in Maricopa, I'd saw from a distance two Mexican drug runners carrying backpacks of either cocaine, marijuana, or meth. I was getting the impression that Copa Town was little more than a drug haven.

The idea of getting Sonny away from drugs was a fairytale. Every day I grew angry with him, but I still made the stops. Perhaps I believed he needed his magic rock until he could wean himself free. To avoid withdrawal symptoms. Because he still worked for me, helped with the horses, I owed him the little cash. But a twenty a day could easily turn into a 40, a 60, as he needed more and more rock. I was getting nowhere on my journey to the promised land.

After a few weeks in Tucson, I learned that not far from our apartment was a neighborhood familiar to Sonny. During several nights while he lived at my ranch, after he got the car from Don and me, Sonny had made drug runs to Tucson for the Sinaloa family. Or so he told me. This could easily be his sleight of tongue and opened to interpretation. It worked this

way. He would deliver the drugs, then someone else would deliver the money so if someone got caught, both loot and drugs wouldn't be lost. This was how Sonny got plenty of rock for his habit. I imagined him "tweaked" out of his mind while speeding dangerously up and down the I-10. I was surprised he managed to survive.

I thought about abandoning Sonny in Tucson or leaving him back in Phoenix with his mother, and be on my way. But for some unexplainable reason, I loved the man and wanted to see him out of his problem and ventured forth. I'm not sure how I found the strength to stay with him, except at the time my mind was floating in clouds. It was part of breaking free. Being on a new adventure. I could not bog myself down with "I can't do this or that." I felt invincible. I could do whatever my mind envisioned. I was on my own, with my right-hand man, whose serious problems would become my own. Maybe, in truth, I didn't want to face the unknown alone. It's very difficult to decipher my thinking when I Act a certain way. (poem written while I was teaching English in China, 1983)

I act a certain way  
Tis sensitivity  
And those who watch my drama  
Are unaware of me.

I fool them all because  
I'm wont to play their game  
A medley of performances  
Where not a line is real  
Nor the same.

I gathered Sonny back from the streets of Tucson one evening. He was drunk and mad at me. Here's my journal entry for that day, October 1998. "I almost let him go after he walked off

from me in downtown Tucson. I had confronted him about all the money spent on his habit and suggested that I drop him off in Maricopa until I'm ready to pull out. He angrily said he'd leave me right then and he walked down the dark street. I didn't want to let him go. I left the car and went after him and convinced him to come back."

## **Chapter Eight: Visions from the Magic Mallard Travel Trailer**

(written while on the road in the year 2000)

For ten months I lived in a new 1998 Mallard Travel Trailer, with two Doberman Pinchers and a man from the projects of Phoenix. Like two snowbirds, we drifted about Arizona, California, Texas, and the Great Dixie South—from southern Illinois to Graceland to the Civil War graves of Vicksburg, and from Pensacola to Key West Florida.

(journal entry December 28, 1998)

"We detoured to Carlsbad caverns on our way to Austin so sonny could see the caves. His fascination made me realize that part of my being with him is to show him wonders beyond the streets of crack cocaine. In some ways he is like having a child and sharing the marvels of this world. A child sees wonders for the first time and so does my sonny. (Although a child wouldn't be saying, 'mother fucker' this and that all the time.) It was gratifying to watch him take interest in something other than drugs as if I were redirecting him into something worthwhile—the sights of this great Earth. Sights other than rural or street drugs. Maybe Sonny is simply an exotic challenge to me, a project. Maybe I did fall in love with instincts to nurture. In any event, we live on the edge. At any turn I am prepared to move on without him. 'Can't break away, so you might as well just live,' he once said to me."

“In every city or town, however, Sonny found crack cocaine for sale. He’d spin tall tales and grind my soul. For him, our adventure was a ride on the magic bus of plenty—away from the streets, away from Maricopa, but never far from the next hit. For me, this was my Vision Quest—powerful and holy. A rite of passage. A time to decide my future now that my marriage was ending and I would need an income. Wrapped in manic thoughts, I scarcely recognized what I was doing—nomadically romping with a crackhead boyfriend.

(one of my Hong Kong poems, circa 1983. It seems to fit here.)

Anywhere

Nomadic Romping—  
A drifter through time,  
Endlessly wanders—  
In search of the mind.

Reason is home—  
But logic won’t stay—  
When factions react  
In an inappropriate way.

Lost in routine—  
By each morning wake—  
Prepared by the evening’s  
Reminder of fate.

Where are you going?  
Ancient spirit of man.  
Possessed by your efforts,  
Endless hours you ran.

We had nothing in common. Nothing at all. He was 37, I was 43. He spoke like a black man from the ghetto, I spoke in a learned manner, having conquered my Pacific NW accent (boughten, lookit, not distinguishing “cot” from “caught.”) I read tarot cards and was a vegan, he smoked cigarettes and played prison dominos or “bones.” He was Christian (men dominate women), and I revered the splendors of Earth and the skies at night, believing in equal rights to everyone on the path of good karma. He drank 40 oz beer after 40 oz, I drank Perrier with a twist of lime. He liked hip hop, especially Tupoc Shakur, I listened mostly to Tejano and Mexican music, to learn Spanish. And he watched Jerry Springer, I had never even heard of Jerry Springer until I met Sonny. For over five years I hadn’t watched television, and since moving to Hidden Valley, I had quit reading the newspaper. NPR was my main link to the world, and I don’t think they’ve ever even mentioned Jerry Springer.

If we had anything in common it was that we both came from pioneer, North European stock. And we both lived in a country of freedom. A motivated American could escape the social constraints of poverty and stupidity, although social expectations and standards sit on our laps, caress our egos and create lazy thoughts. I am this, you are that. I was born this, you that. And so on, tediously. Sonny had succumbed to the influences of the ghetto. He was street smart. I was not. But I had pulled myself along and pushed for better things. I swam against the current most of the time, against the norm, struggling, wondering why I was so out of sorts. But I did not succumb to believing what didn’t make sense. In following what was irrational (such as taking drugs). And I did not become needy and unable to cope. I had difficulties, of course, as I set goals and met life’s challenges. But I persevered to improve. He did not. I suppose, if the truth be told, I wanted to see him correct his ways. It was simply my nature.



Sonny had succumbed to the influences of his impoverished childhood. He grew up in the Phoenix projects, in a black neighborhood. A poor mother who worked as a waitress while raising four girls and her Sonny. He was the only white boy in his grade school. After class the other kids chased him and beat him up. Until he was clever enough to ask the teacher if he could go to the bathroom just before the end of the school day. Then he'd take off home or hide in a nearby cornfield. He begged his mother to move to a better neighborhood. But they couldn't afford to live anywhere else, she would tell her son.

He'd had enough by the end of eighth grade, I guess. Because he stayed home in the projects and tinkered with bikes, motor bikes, cars and such. Influences of the neighborhood tendencies of being an addict. I don't really know his story but in the simplest terms. And he's not one to ask a lot of questions. No less, I imagine his difficult childhood brought him to his dispossessed adult self. Childhood, death of two daughters, a divorce.

As for me, my childhood was blessed with good good people. My parents were hard working, took us camping and hiking—lots of trips to Fort Stevens beach to go clam digging, fishing for trout on East Lake. A good Christian family from way back. But I was probably born with a manic mind and that added stress and difficulties to my own childhood. I was shy but always struggling, feeling out of sorts with mood swings, pouting episodes, tantrums that couldn't be helped. Impulses. Synapses misfiring neurons, like a paintball war between Zombies and Aliens. (I understand you're more focused when all the synapses fire at once.)

High school was an especially crummy time (rather like law school). "Are you taking pills," my mom asked me once because I was sluggish and moody. I had no interest in sports or academics and I far from excelled. Got an F in freshman English. I was shy, embarrassed, upset, acting out, typical teenager, it seems. Got suspended once for truancy and forgery. I didn't go to

school for a week. Hid out at home. Wrote my own excuse letter, maybe that's how I got caught. And I hid out in bathroom stalls to avoid running into anybody. "These are the best years of your life," my mother would say. A dreadful sentiment that gave me no hope for the future. No wonder I tried to end it all with aspirin. A feeble attempt of acting out, I guess. My ears rang for months after.

Fortunately, after high school, I pushed for better things, for interesting things. Adventures. I did not despair. I did not become helpless, needy, unable to cope. I didn't surrender and commit that sinful act. Or fall into taking drugs, except during my military stint. Instead, I challenged myself and persevered with a manic drive propelling my self-expression.

### *The 1998 Twenty Foot Mallard Travel Trailer*

Soon after moving to Tucson, I decided to travel the country at the end of my apartment lease in search of a new place to live and a business to invest in. While we were on the road, I planned to work on my novels and write this story.

At Beaudry Trailers in Tucson, I made the deal, putting Sonny to shame, for a 1998 Mallard Travel Trailer for 11K. I parked it at the ranch in Hidden Valley and on the weekend brought it down to Saguaro National Park to camp for a few days in the desert. What happened was yet another nightmare in a long string of them. One story is the same as the next.

We camped at Gilbert Ray Campground in the Tucson Mountains near the Desert Museum—among the saguaros, ocotillos, prickly pears, chollas, mesquite, and paloverdes. From my journal at the time I wrote, "Now my parents and Don's parents know about the divorce. The reaction from my mother was a zero. What should I expect? She has never reacted to me my

entire life! No less, I am now on my way toward a new life. I'm moving on rather than stagnating in a limp marriage." (a poem I wrote while in Hong Kong, 1983)

I like my precarious plans –  
Allowing whomever I am –  
To take each day  
In an unknown way –  
(unresolved to the frisk of demand).

It was about six in the evening. We were sitting at the campsite's picnic table. I was enjoying my grape leaves and sushi dinner, from Trader Jo's in Tucson. Sonny had a Taco Bell meal. He had already been drinking from the cases of Costco Beer (his bud and my corona). He suddenly complained of a terrible toothache. Over the years, he had neglected his teeth because of the drug habit and he had cracked and broken teeth.

I offered to take him to a dentist the following Monday but he insisted that we drive to Maricopa so he could get a hit of crack. "It's the only thing that'll take away the pain," he insisted. He explained that he would cram a rock against his tooth and the pain would go away.

"Have you tried cloves?" I asked, unwilling to drop everything and take this little trek. He would not consider this remedy.

While popping open beers, he persisted and persisted, like a weasel weaving through a wheat field. In the end I relented.

It was dark when we left the campsite and drove to Maricopa. Until 4 am the next morning, I was on dirt roads, spinning around the desert because of my boyfriend. First, I got lost in the Tucson mountains off the I-10 near Marana. I was on dark rural roads for over an hour. And all the while I'd hear the snap and sizz of a beer can opening. He chugged and chugged. In

Maricopa he bought a 40oz from Circle K. He guzzled, threw up. (months earlier, when he first asked me for a “cold one,” I could have given him a “cold” Perrier.) I knew nothing firsthand about a drinking problem. When I was growing up, my parents didn’t even have alcohol in the house. (that’s not to say I didn’t sneak a drink of alcohol when in high school.)

Then we searched for a drug house. We’d stop and he’d ask a bum here and there about whatever. No luck in Maricopa and I refused to go to Phoenix. Then, on our way back to our camp outside of Tucson, I got lost again in the mountains. I could not find our campground in the dark. Sonny was so drunk he was speechless. I pulled to the side of the road and crawled into the back seat and slept. At dawn I asked a passing jogger where the campground was.

It was definitely time for Sonny to go, but I let him stay.

*Three AM a few mornings later back at the apartment in Tucson*

It started out as a romantic evening—candle light, flowers, music. Our dinner was Indian take out (he liked tandoori chicken and garlic naan). We dined on the small terrace of our 2d floor apartment overlooking Prince Road below.

He had a few beers, which seemed normal. And I had a glass red wine, a bottle of Cabernet. It was a romantic time in our bedroom too, the TV was on as we cuddled on the mattress on the floor and he lulled me to sleep by tickling my back.

Then, about three AM I jolted awake. Sonny wasn’t in bed next to me. He wasn’t in the bathroom either. I dressed and ran out the apartment with Minnie on her leash. I ran to my car to see whether he had taken off. Who knows what might happen when you’re with a wily man?

I ran back to the apartment and found Sonny sitting on steps. “Shit faced” drunk. Still, he had the presence of mind of accusing me of not trusting him. For believing he’d take off in my car.

Back inside the apartment I discovered he had gone through my case of Corona. If there’s one thing I hate it’s the kind of drunk Sonny was—a laughing bum fuck drunk. “Pissing my life away” drunk from skid row. Slobbery, pissy, slurring, drunk fool.

I didn’t even care about breaking the lease, or returning for my things. We were leaving. I would drop him off in Maricopa, retrieve my trailer from the ranch and head to California to begin my new life. I would survive on my own. Just me and my dogs.

As he lay flopped out on our bed, I rambled through the cupboards and drawers, Minnie and Max close behind me. By the front door, I tossed together things for the next leg of my journey.

At 4 AM I woke him and said, “We’re leaving, NOW.” And we did. The drunken fool protested, but laughed most of the way out the door, as if the whole thing were one big amusing joke.

October 4 journal entry. “Took off on a Sunday afternoon, almost by whim, by desperation. All to do with Sonny. If he hadn’t gotten shit-faced drunk the night before then I may not have had such an urge to leave—without even getting the divorce started.”

*Lake Morena County Park, California. Autumn 1998*

(letter to my website business associates and clients)

Dear Arastar friends and agents,

Greetings from Lake Morena, California, where I am now living in a nineteen-foot travel trailer, indefinitely and with my two dogs.

Yes, a lot has happened since my last letter, which is why I haven't been replying for weeks, months???

Suffice it to say, I am on my own now. I finally gave up on the bed and breakfast goal for the ranch house, as well as my marriage. I suppose the stress was too enormous and I just decided to leave Don and the house in Maricopa.

First, I moved to an apartment in Tucson with my two beloved Dobermans, but that lasted no more than three weeks. I broke the lease and set out in my new trailer, aspiring to travel in southern California, maybe Baja Mexico, working on my novels. I'm mostly writing about my experience moving to the desert in Maricopa, all the ordeals I went through, all the crazy people I encountered.

The lake I'm at is scenic and peaceful, until the weekend crowd of drunk fishermen arrive. I have a generator to provide electricity for my laptop and television (I watch videos in the evening).

During the day, when not writing, I paddle my canoe onto the lake. Or I ride my bike through the campground with the dogs.

San Diego is about an hour's drive from here and I travel into town regularly. I'm planning to get a Post Office box, if I'm going to settle here for a while. I'm close enough to Phoenix, about six hours away, so that I can return there to take care of business matters—such as the divorce and property divisions. Meanwhile, you can write to me at my old address. My husband, Don, will forward the mail to me.

I will let you know my PO Box in my next letter so please continue to write and accept my apologies for not responding sooner. But as you can imagine, I'm going through a transition. Writing is my passion and I have no plans to stop keeping in touch. Please write soon and wish me luck.

*Back to the story*

I did not leave Sonny in Maricopa. Maybe because he could hitch my trailer to the Explorer. I hadn't figured that out. And (sometimes) a pioneer woman needs a pioneer man to tend to the wheels of her wagon.

San Diego was my first choice as a travel destination, a nice place to begin my new life. From Maricopa we set off west on I-8 toward California. We stopped at a rest stop and slept a few hours. Let the dogs out. When we were back on the freeway in East San Diego County, I saw a sign for "camping" at Lake Morena Regional Park. On the spot I pulled off the freeway and headed to a beautiful lake in the Laguna Mountains. For two weeks we camped beside the lake in isolated serenity. In God's setting. Nobody was around until the weekends. In San Diego I bought Sonny a bike so we could go riding together with the dogs. We also bought a fishing pole so he could fish and a canoe from the REI. Sonny fished from the canoe (until he got caught in a strong breeze that took him to the other shore and he had to walk back to the trailer, upset).

"Morena lake was always good to me," Sonny would later say. "I always caught catfish." He took an interest in fishing, a healthy diversion from drugs.

I wrote the following about Sonny at Lake Morena

My love waxes when I wake feeling love for the man sleeping beside me. I may touch him, warm up to his body, and think about his presence and his being with me. I wake up early in the morning feeling happy. Comforted, reassured. I get up first. He went to bed late, after hours of cat fishing then watching a video movie. If I were to nudge him, we would make love and I would want to hear him say, “I love you.”

During the day when my love waxes, I think about him, visualize him entering me, making love to me. Then he stands behind me, hugs me, and I feel such great love for the man, my man—my soul mate.

He is a simple man, though the Tarot says his foundation is “the World.” The universe. Peculiar. How can he possess the world when he has nothing but my provisions. He owned a few pieces of old clothing. Nothing else. Nothing but the man himself. Yet, he offers more than any man has ever offered me. I have never felt “in love” like this before, when my love waxes. Even his thoughts are simple, though often profound. He lives life in the present. His goal is now. When he was living at my place in Hidden Valley, his bed was where he lay—hay stack, roof top, guesthouse. He enjoyed his food, enjoyed cooking. (mostly, he lived for the next high. All his earnings went to crack cocaine, then to food, then gas for his car.) Yes, he is a man living firmly in the present.

My feelings for him wane and wax. Why? I am not an 18-year-old in love. Rather, I have stretched into my 40’s, last chance for a baby with a man who has nothing but a few ragged clothes and whatever I scrounged up from my husband’s things—things that will go unnoticed because of our chaotic move to rural Maricopa.

Maybe that’s what love really is. A growing, changing thing, phasing in and out like the moon. Or does love linger, stretch with joy, beam with pain. Is love really a consistent thing or is



it perplexing moods? Is this my midlife crisis? But no. Love is more of a learning process. This new love that I now have, has been waxing and waning for less than two months.

My new love is in his mid-30's and he is so strangely charming for a man who's been on drugs and on the streets for 26 years, so he tells me. A crackhead. A skid row shit faced drunk. Yet, I fell in love with the man who worked for me at the twenty-acre ranch. I fell in love, I think, because this man, my worker, was falling for me. Well, maybe he lusted for me. How can you really know?

Now, as I write by Lake Morena, near San Diego, I watch him on the lake in the canoe, paddling farther and farther from where I sit inside the Mallard trailer. He took off because I left to pay the park fee. We had just argued about the stupid \$60 suit I bought him in Tucson. He asked me to buy it for him because he wanted to look "cool." Like a black thing. Well, I ended up buying it although it was really too big for him. Then that night in Tucson, while he was tweaking on crack because we had been to Maricopa that day, he put on the suit, slicked his hair back in Vaseline and we drove to an Indian restaurant where he bought my food (with my money). He was sweating profusely in the suit because of its synthetic material. I guess the "trying to look cool" he begging me to buy the suit, the fact that I didn't like it on him, left a distaste in my mouth. This morning he asked about the suit and I told him I got rid of it. That upset him and it probably upset him worse when I walked off to pay the campground fee.

I return to the trailer and he's out on the canoe. Doesn't even know how to canoe, really. What are my feelings for Sonny, my worker in Maricopa. This is a tough one. I was thinking about it on my way to pay the fee. I think I lusted and fell in love with him because I was very stressed in my situation with Don and the new house. I felt lonely. I felt disheveled.

Earlier this year, while in the Galapagos, I told myself I wanted to fall in love. Wanted to experience that magic. (a mid-life crises?). Of course, I imagined falling in love with a professor, a lawyer, or an ecologist. Hardly a crackhead felon.

What's the situation now? I have run off with this worker of mine, first by renting an apartment in Tucson primarily to get him away from drugs. It just wasn't working out for him to work at the corrals and run off at night to procure his issue. But it didn't work out in Tucson. I wasted \$2000 on a 3-month lease which I broke. Every day we returned to Maricopa and I bought his issue of crack. Some days two twenties. Tweaking. Beer. I hated it but I stayed with him. I even bought the Mallard, in part, to travel and get him away from the drugs.

Here we are camping. He is still far away, across the lake probably upset and thinking about his situation. I know it isn't a good situation for him. He is too dependent on me and my money and transportation. This leaves me in control and it's not good to have such control over someone. Especially a man. I refuse to buy him beer, which he wants because it goes hand in hand with fishing (a man's thing).

Anyway, now I sit in the Mallard trailer and wonder about my future with Sonny. I really don't know what we possibly have in common except we were both in undesirable situations. I guess. Sometimes he says he liked his homeless situation. A certain amount of freedom in it, I guess. No money worries. Just day to day survival through panhandling or sleight of hand. Deal making.

We both wanted a sexual relationship. Got that. But what else is there except maybe disappointment. Love? Love grows long and wide. It suffers with you, to the end. Love grows, sometimes annoyingly, creeping through the jungles of the mind. Love offers the most wonderful reason for being. I speak of flowers and moonbeams. I speak of compassion. Out of this

enormous love comes a magnificent bonus, love between two people—soul mates. But this is a working love, a karmic love, that requires attention. Maintenance. We are, after all, not stagnant. We struggle in some fashion toward the promised land, the tombstone “Eternity,” always wishing for better things to come. That is the hope of all ages.

### *Men from a Bear Cave*

The other night, while we were camping at Lake Marana, Sonny walked down the lakeshore to ask these campers about fixing his fishing pole. Mistake. These campers were two men out to “be men” for the weekend. Real Men, away from “nagging women”. Party time, lots of beer and hard liquor. Chest bumping. A rutting behavior. They were men from a bear cave.

I sat at my campsite waiting for Sonny to return. But he was staying with these two men at their campsite for too long, I decided. In the setting sun, I got in the canoe and rowed over to their camp down the lakeshore.

“Sonny,” I yelled as I pulled up in the canoe. The blazing campfire these two men had going illuminated all their hard liquor and coolers of beer.

Laughter bellowed. “Hey, go get us some more beer,” one of the men said to me.

“Fuck You!” I hollered back, irate.

“That’s my girl,” came Sonny’s drunken voice.

By the light of their fire, I pulled the canoe ashore. They were laughing and carrying on, rambling. Obviously, they had recruited Sonny into their drinking hoopla. Man cave. Bear men. The two men were out for the weekend to be with “the men.” They were assholes drinking, howling, and beating their chests.

Previously, from the window of my trailer, where I am writing this, I had even watched them wrestle in the water like real he-men who only lacked drums to beat.

Naturally, when Sonny had arrived at their campsite with his fishing pole, these men had offered him a beer, which my alcoholic Sonny couldn't resist. He had joined in on their hullabaloo, completely forgetting about me back at the trailer. I had even heard their comments about women float across the lake, "yee-hee, who needs them." It was outrageous and I knew I'd end up with a "shit faced" Sonny that night. I just knew it. And Sonny had been doing so well up to this point, spending quiet serene days with me, not drinking, not doing crack (that I knew about). We'd been enjoying quiet evenings by the campfire as he fished, and I relaxed with my Dobermans . During the day, we went canoeing on the lake in the cool breeze, with the dogs, or hiking up the hillsides to view the entire lake

"You coming?" I yelled at Sonny from the canoe. He must have thought it best to return with me even though he could barely stand because he had downed a cup of vodka and lots of beer. He slurred something to me as he stood at the shore, his new friends the bear men were laughing uproariously. I was furious.

"Well, get in," I yelled at Sonny. I suppose he knew, even in his pickled state of mind, that if he played along with the "fuck women" hullabaloo, I would leave him there. So, despite the protests from his new buddies, he clambered into the canoe.

"Get in, you fucking drunk," I yelled and roars of laughter soared from the Bear Men. I smelled putrid alcoholic breath from ten feet away.

As Sonny tried to get in the canoe, I shoved off. He was so wobbly that the canoe tipped over. But I was determined to get away before the bear-men who were approaching us to help out, which made me sick with fury. I quickly got the canoe upright, Sonny sat in his seat, and off

we went, back to my camp while the sound of laughter and yee-hees came from the bear men's camp.

Sonny was so drunk that he slept on the floor and urinated by the door. Inside the trailer. I was disgusted and did not sleep that night, thinking about how I would take Sonny back to Phoenix and be on my way or leave him with the bear cave campers and return to Maricopa on my own. I'd live in the west side of the house and rent out the east side and the guesthouse. It will work, I told myself.

### *The Truth about the Gun*

Before I retrieved Sonny from the bear cave camp, I had paddled out to the middle of Marana Lake and tossed my 38 Smith and Wesson into the murky waters, and it's a good thing I did. If I hadn't, I'd have either shot Sonny or myself, possibly both, before our journey got very far along. Besides, Sonny kept wanting to have the gun with him when he sat by the lake fishing, as if it were his, as if he needed the protection more than me. I protested that I had the gun for my protection. And he would give me the bullshit excuse, "but I'm protecting both of us." I didn't buy it. He wanted the gun because it was a cool thing to have. A dangerous thing to keep. Probably a symbol of prowess.

The next morning, I woke Sonny from his hangover and said we were heading back to Phoenix, and that, by the way, he had lost my gun. I led him to believe that when he toppled the canoe the night before, I lost the gun.

I even reported it missing to the park ranger, and soon a Deputy appeared at my campsite, so I could file a report. I stuck to the story that it was lost by the he-men's camp, where my boyfriend had toppled the canoe. It was really an easy story to tell.

Sonny, feeling hung over and guilty (he feared I might abandon him), told his two new buddies about my gun and they spent the morning wading the muddy waters beside their camp, looking for it. Drunken fools.

Then, while I was packing up and preparing to leave, the two he-men intruded my camp and accused me of lying. The nerve of some people.

“She did something else with the gun,” they told Sonny in front of me. “She’s a liar.” I could scarcely believe the audacity of these two men.

Sonny said nothing and went to the water’s edge, trying to draw the intruders away from me.

“I don’t think it’s any of your concern,” was all I mustered to say, livid with disgust over the “hate women” incident.

Sonny refused their offer for more beer, “No,” he said politely, “I don’t want to get my walking papers.” I had already said, “you’re welcome to stay here with your new friends. I don’t care.”

The men finally drifted back to their camp, continuing their revelry and search for a gun they’d never find.

I should have left Sonny at the lake with his “cave bear” buddies, or in Tucson, or at the homeless shelter during one of those many times I took him there so he could score a hit or some such nonsense. Especially when all I wanted to do was get on with my own life. But I was obsessed with him. Why else would I give up a good thing for an outrageously stressful problem? Why did I fall in love with a man who had nothing to offer me but his addictions? Truth be told, the man had become my own personal addiction.

### *Surgery at Good Sam's*

For perhaps a week, I don't remember when, we parked our Mallard trailer at Good Samaritan Hospital while I had my fibroid tumors removed so that I could have a baby with Cecil. I had very little time left for this. We would try while we traveled. I was hopeful.

From my journal: "This is a rather sad dilemma for me. The surgery ahead with no one knowing about it but Sonny, a man I must give money to so he can buy me something special. I feel sad. No one to send me flowers for my recovery, no cards. Just me and Sonny. Is his love really enough for me to go through all this? If so, why do I feel so sad deep inside? So lonely now? Perhaps because in many ways, I'm paying for someone—a homeless drug addict—to love me in ways Don never could."

(Now, from my 60-year perspective, my only regret in life is that I never had children. Sonny and I tried to make a baby, a little girl, but it was too late. I was in my mid-forties when we met. In part, I blame my ex-husband for not spending bed time with me during our marriage. I only remember his grizzly snores. But I also blame myself for not comprehending such an important matter, my window of opportunity. I should have had babies in my twenties but I was too preoccupied with other things. Until it was too late.)

### *Traveling with Doberman Pinchers*

My dogs were usually what I enjoyed most about my travels. They were my jackals in historic and serene places. I loved watching them play and so did Sonny. It was something we had in common. The dogs would romp and wrestle in Lake Marena, chase squirrels in Texas, run up and down the green cemetery hills of Vicksburg's Civil War Memorial. And they chased a herd of deer up a hill near Carlsbad caverns, NM. My dogs are awesome dogs.

Traveling with two dogs is no easy matter. Make them big dogs and it's more difficult, make them Dobermans and you have some barking at night in an otherwise quiet campground. Because my Dobermans' bark, we got flipped off a few times. At a campground in Lake Havasu, Minnie got off her leash and went for a run. Someone reported that a Doberman was loose. We were asked to leave the campground.

Twice, I was lucky because I had Doberman companions. At a trailer park outside of Austin, we were prepared to sign a month's lease. Then the landlord learned my dogs were Dobermans. Can't have Dobermans, Rottweilers, pits, et al, in the park. My dogs kept us from jumping into something we really didn't need at the time. Like service dogs for a bipolar master. Another time, when we went to Big Bend National Park in southwest Texas—partly in the Chihuahuan Desert—we were pulled aside at an immigration post by the Customs and Border Patrol officers. Maybe. It was some kind of forced stop. Anyway, a drug sniffing dog came up to the back end of the Explorer where Sonny had pot in his bag, maybe even some crack. I don't know. Before their dog could take a good sniff, Minnie went to town barking. Like a vicious Black Doberman Bitch. Everyone backed off and we were free to go.

No, I may have given up my ranch and my protected life, but I would never give up my dogs, my cherub pups. Maybe I couldn't give up Sonny as well. In North Carolina when we were camped at a roadside RV park, it was snowing. Don't remember what the fight was about, maybe his drinking and drug use, or his chauvinism. But he ran out the trailer into the blizzard and headed for the road, perhaps to hitch a ride. I couldn't let him do such a foolish thing so I convinced him to come back. It went on like that a lot. Quite the dynamics between two people. An all-assorted drama where not a line is real or the same.



### *Rush to the streets*

For ten months we traveled and rushed back to the streets, usually to Buckeye in Phoenix or to the homeless shelter by Arizona's State Capital where illegal aliens sat on the curbs selling "molta" and "piedra." All those times I sat in the idling car waiting, thinking he was buying marijuana, which didn't bother me so much. It was an herb and I was into herbs. (I prized my deck of Herbal Tarot). But, it was always crack cocaine. Always. Numerous times, as I waited by the homeless shelter, I nearly left him there, counting the minutes on the clock. I will leave in ten minutes, at six thirty, then six thirty-five, then six forty. He always returned with a story. And as I grew to understand addiction and tweaking, I despised everything about it. It's total insanity.

It was the same story everywhere, about getting crack, getting high, getting beer, getting drunk. When it was bad, it was the worst it had ever been playing out the game. One story is the same as the next. In Texas, on one street corner, a black man waved, we stopped and with \$2 Sonny had a hit (at least that's what he said). Austin was the same. I idled and waited as he walked off in El Paso, San Antonio, and in Memphis—a few blocks down from Graceland.

And I allowed it, went along with it, because it was so new to me. It was a different experience, a new culture. (My BS was in anthropology) not something I'd been through before, and I probably thought that he was easing his way off the stuff and that this took time, a lot of time. Did I realize I was an "enabler" in co-dependency? "Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive." Sir Walter Scott was right. Lies and dishonesty create complications and problems. Was I deceiving myself? Living in a delusion? Mine. His.

His stories grew tedious, far worse than the man selling "tack" story. He was fluent in spinning tales. Glib. Had immediate responses to any question. I found several crack pipes in his pockets, under the bathroom rug, by the sink. Each time he wiggled out an excuse, "Oh, I found

that on my way to a store and thought I might as well take it.” Or, “that’s old, from a long time ago.” Then he’d ceremoniously smash the pipe and swear off smoking crack.

He thought of anything for cash to buy his drug: he’d offer to buy me clothes, with my money, then he’d buy me some cheap clothes and kept the change. “I need money for my son, my mother, to pay my ex-wife’s daughter to perm my hair . . .” Even if I didn’t give him money outright, he figured out ways to get some, even if it were to simply keep the change when he went to pay for gas. Then he made excuses when I accused him of tweaking. “Some Dude gave me a joint of weed to try, ended up being a primo (which he bought for \$5).” A primo, he explained, is a marijuana joint laced with cocaine. He was relentless in his pursuit. I didn’t matter. I was there, a vessel for drugs.

As for me, I was wrapped up in my own quests and scattered thoughts and visions. Delusions. I was numb to reality most times but whenever I figured out he’d been up to no good, I reacted. I tore off the chain I let him wear because he had cracked my wedding ring, which he begged to wear. He cracked the earrings I bought him. My own emerald earrings. He was always asking for my things, then he’d either crack them or trade them in a deal.

At the worst of times, I begged him, if he chooses drugs, to move on without me. And although he could be rude in his obsession to find drugs, and the affect they had on him, he so cleverly convinced me that he would one day change. “Please have faith in me,” he’d say. “Give me a chance. I won’t let you down.” And perhaps I held out hope. I was with a man who had a difficulty, who needed me in order to overcome that difficulty (addiction). My bodhisattva fulfillment. Perhaps I was fulfilling my own need to be needed, really needed. I just don’t know. It was a confusing time and there was too much psychology involved. My psychology. His.

*And one story is the next*

An addict's single mindedness (not mindfulness) narrows all thought to "getting high." "Not being sober." It is a desperation, like a rabid dog run amok, as if survival depended on that next hit. A breath of air. Manna to quash the pangs of hunger and thirst. Even without drugs, people do stupid things, such as getting change out of a back pocket while driving, ending in an accident, or when people try to hurry something up, stupidly, and break a pitcher of milk, or break their neck. Yes, it is all about losing your life in the process of being stupid. The addict is so focused on appeasing his addiction that he will lie, steal, trick and play someone out of money or valuables to "crack" at the dope house. He will even play those he loves. Nothing matters more than the high, the escape from being sober, and falling into a fake interpretation of Nirvana and salvation.

*Tweaking*

Tweaking, for me, used to mean finessing something, giving it the last necessary twist to make it work. Even in feng shui. "This needs a little tweaking." "Let me tweak that for you." Tweaking the ranch house. Really, "tweaking" wasn't a word I used much at all.

Now the word means high on crack cocaine. (I can scarcely imagine that high from my own experimental drug use while in the Army. But that was 40 years ago.) Usually, after I dropped him off in a seedy neighborhood he would reappear at the car already tweaking.

In time, I recognized his tweaking: His face changed, especially his lips. They looked pouty in a way he could not reproduce when sober. He would say such stupid things, meaningless small talk that irritated me, "Are you all right, babe?" "Need some water, babe?" or he perfunctorily repeated the tail end of what I had just said. Sonny was gone. Did I even know

him? What had I fallen in love with? A shell of a man, the walrus and the carpenter. Lewis Carroll wrote that the walrus and the carpenter ate the oysters and left the shells, empty inside. There's nothing there. As Gertrude Stein said, There's no there there.

O Oysters," said the Carpenter,  
"You've had a pleasant run!  
Shall we be trotting home again?"  
But answer came there none—

Buddhist scriptures talk about the ideal "emptiness of the mind." I never could empty my mind. I tried to through meditation, but couldn't do it. Just thought of images and visions. So emptying the mind of all thought and attachments is difficult, maybe impossible, for a manic mind, and I don't think ending up an empty shell is what Siddhartha Gautama meant by his philosophy.

Did I really believe that Sonny, because of me, would change into a normal man without addictions? How cliché, if I did. There is no other way to look at it. I must have been completely out of my head. Off my rocker, full of marbles. Insane. Or was I on a great adventure, blinded to a lot of realities? Having a "pleasant run . . . but answer came there none."

*From my hand written memoirs, 2016*

While traveling in the Mallard, I had many ideas about my prospects. I wanted to write my books but there was no income in that. At least at present. ("maybe soon there will be," became my motto and the curse of my delusion.) I had never really thought about pursuing a law career. Law school had been a very difficult and stressful whim. I'm surprised it hadn't thrown me over the edge! (besides I'm not smart enough to pass the bar without several attempts, it seems, and one time was enough of that ordeal.) I had ideas of teaching English in Kuwait again,

or in Saudi Arabia where salaries are good. I would abandon Sonny or take him with me. At his own peril. Several of my Arastar agents invited me to their country. Meelan Suppa from Nepal, Wilson Yapa from Sri Lanka, George V. from Fiji, Partners Sarl from Togo Africa (although most of them wanted to come to the US at my invitation. Arastar was a registered corporation, so we had some standing.)

I thought about traveling down to Baja California or going up to Alaska and helping Sonny find a month-long job on a fishing crew. Well, at the best of times I viewed Sonny as becoming a good house husband one day, when I was successful. And I would not be lonely because I'd have a man with me. Mine was complicated reasoning. Difficult to decipher, like cryptic hieroglyphic picture words.

I finally settled on the idea of a B&B business. Don liked the idea. He didn't want me to get a lawyer and come after all his stock options and other assets. He got off cheap. A good divorce attorney would have cleared his slate. But not me. Instead, I wrote up our divorce decree with idealistic optimism. Don and I had been best friends through our marriage, so, despite my indiscretion with Sonny, I thought Don and I could continue as business partners and friends while I got on my feet. We could do one more project together.

It wasn't a rash decision, to settle on the Yacht House B&B. Sonny and I spent months drifting around the southern states looking for a turn-key business—viewing an old Victorian Inn along the muddy Mississippi in some desolated town, southern plantation with slave quarters, and a wooded park estate in North Carolina with a swimming pool open to the public, a stream running through the grounds, and a trailer court at one end of the property. Profitable. A good investment. It was even snowing that day we saw it. While I talked to the owner, Minnie and Max were playing with Cecil in the park by the pool. The dogs were catching

large snowflakes in their mouths. Enchanting. I decided against buying the place because I recognized that the trailer court of mostly old travel trailers, was a trailer trash ghetto. A place with drugs that Sonny would take. Sonny liked the place so was disappointed I didn't call Don to let him know I found a business to invest in. Even then, Sonny saw Don as head of the operation. In charge. But it was my deal to make. Mine and my business partner's.

We had no guide book, no smart phone GPS, no internet but somehow we went to interesting places while looking for that perfect hospitality business. We went through Kentucky, stayed at a horse farm with RV hookups, saw the National Corvette Museum, for Sonny's sake. He loves sporty cars. In Montgomery Alabama we happened upon the Hank Williams Museum. Hank Williams was the favorite singer of Cecil's mother, ergo Cecil's favorite all-time singer. In Memphis, we stopped at Graceland. In Nashville, at the Grand Ole Opry. With an interest in Civil War history, we made it to the Vicksburg National Military Park flanking the Mississippi and viewed the monuments, obelisks, statues, memorials and the graves of 17,000 soldiers in a green lawn wooded park commemorating the battle of Vicksburg, 1863.

Before buying the Yacht House we drove all over Florida. We saw Orlando, Disney World and Epcot Center. We stayed at Ocala National Forest, near Orlando. Ocala is the southernmost forest in the United States. The scrub pine forest has more than 600 lakes, rivers, and springs. We camped at an elite campground. In my journal I wrote, "I've been with Sonny about seven months. Lots of good times, many trying and difficult times. I generally feel a strong binding love for the man I ran away with. An obsession. I spend much of the day thinking about him, even when he's seated beside me in the car or trailer. Then there are times I want him gone—mostly because of his addictions and lack of monetary worth."

Being a dabbler in amateur astronomy, I really enjoyed Cape Canaveral and the NASA space center. Kennedy space center is where Apollo, Skylab and the Space Shuttles were launched. Fascinating structures, feats. We saw an enormous alligator in the waterway near the launchpad. Then we went to a health food store as we ziplined through Miami and on to the Everglades. We took the canoe out on a marshy channel where we saw lots of gar fish and some baby alligators with big eyes popping from the water. The mother was most certainly nearby watching us so we did not linger. In Florida, I had many good times with the man and my dogs and Sonny especially enjoyed himself, even in his haze of crack and beer.

### *Camping in Arizona*

During our ten months of travel, we kept returning to Arizona and spent a lot of time camping throughout the state so I could take care of my business with Don and because I loved Arizona through and through. It's beauty is overwhelming from the Grand Canyon to Organ Pipe and the Chiricahua Mountains to the Colorado River cutting the western edge of the state.

We camped at the Chiricahua National Monument, about 115 miles east of Tucson, off I-10 at Wilcox. Twenty-seven million years ago the Turkey Creek Caldera erupted. It was a thousand times greater than the Mount St. Helen's eruption that I witnessed from Portland in 1980. The monument was established in 1924 to protect the rock formations called hoodoos which rise hundreds of feet, some balancing on pedestals that are seemingly about to topple.

We went to the Grand Canyon and camped at most of Arizona's lakes so that Sonny could fish—Alamo lake, the best lake for bass fishing, Roosevelt Lake, Patagonia Lake, and Lakes Havasu, Powell, and Mead. We went to the Kitt Peak Observatory, one of my favorite places in Arizona. It's an hour's drive from Tucson, 56 miles on AZ 86 West, on the Tohono

O’odham Reservation. Kitt Peak is the largest, most diverse observatory in the world and has three major telescopes, a solar observatory and 22 other optical telescopes. With my interest in astronomy, I had the lofty goal of seeing all the observatories in Arizona—Lowell’s in Flag, Whipple Observatory on Mt. Hopkins, south of Tucson. and the controversial Mount Graham International Observatory, located in southeastern Arizona. I never made to Whipple or Mt. Graham.

I made changes in my life, because of Sonny. (although he often says, in fits of anger, that only he has changed.) I broke my strict vegan diet and began eating the fish that he caught in order to share a meal with my man. It seemed the right thing to do. And sometimes he ate vegetarian burgers with me. (a poem written when traveling, at Superstition Mountain, shortly before heading to Florida):

I have known the Bodhisattva

And we had vegetarian

Tamales by a Coleman fire.

By now we were having soy

Burgers as well . . .

“How do you like the smell?” he asks,

the man of “Wat sup” town.

“Make it as you like it,” she says,

the divorcing woman,

still friends with her spouse.

The woman

Who ran away with he –

Man of the jungle, the wilds of the streets

And other curiosities rather unknown,



To her.

He –

The third great adventure of her 43 years.

He –

Who would not leave her.

. . . the times were hard . . .

a time of learning each other's dance.

We are each other's avatar –

bodhisattva,

in two,

I have known the Bodhisattva

I became.

(written 2016)

During our crazy travels in Arizona, Sonny's son Cameron often camped with us. It was nice to see father and son together. We went to Tombstone, Roosevelt Lake. spent two nights at a camping resort Beaudry RV awarded us for buying the Mallard Travel Trailer. I enjoyed watching father and son shooting hoops in the basketball court at the resort. I was having a nice time watching them and writing on my laptop. It's a faded memory now but I well remember that Cecil was proud of his tall handsome son. At the lakes, father and son went fishing in the canoe. We even took Cameron to Las Vegas and Bullhead City but I can't remember how that came about. They fished at the Colorado River while I visited my parents. It was always nice having Cameron along and was a distraction from Sonny's drinking and drug use and my own manic delusions. That's what family is for, I suppose.

### *Three Arizona Mountains*

In the Tarot Cards, The Lovers stand in the sun, beneath Gabriel—the Lord’s messenger angel. The Abrahamic Gabriel, angel of judgment who revealed the Koran to Mohammed and who told Mary she was pregnant with Jesus. Behind the lovers, under the sun, rises a mountain. A monument where lovers find vision. A place for a life changing quest.

I was often tied up with divorce and property matters in Phoenix or Maricopa and consequently Sonny and I camped at one of three Sonoran mountains near Phoenix—Usury, the Superstitions, and Picacho Peak. These mountains were my home for many weeks and many nights.

*Usury Mountain Regional Park of Mesa* stands near Apache Junction. During law school, I hiked to Wind Cave with law school friend Linda Hykes. Smart woman. I’m sure she’s gone far in her legal career. Sonny, dogs, and I hiked the trails that are equally available to mountain bikes and horses. We stayed so often at Usury that the camp host suggested we become campground hosts ourselves.

Sonny often drove the Explorer from camp to get a soda or cigarettes at the nearest gas station. I’d stay at camp with the Minnie and Max, perhaps relaxing at the campfire. Each and every time Sonny pulled back into camp with the car’s cassette was blasting Tupac’s *Dear Momma*. (she was a crackhead but he appreciated her.) That soured me on Tupac and rap and I can’t stand to hear that song to this day. It reminds me of a crack user with sentimental emotions.

One night while camping at Usury I wrote, “I do not want to spend my life with a man always ‘up to something.’ He has to be as normal in pursuits as I am. Yet, I always want him close to me, never far away.”

*The Superstition Mountains* are farther east from Usury. I had been there many times before. For two days back in 1996, I had backpacked from Peralta Trail Head to Weaver's Needle with a friend from law school, a Korean woman named Wonsook. I know she went far in her legal career. It was early or late summer—no way can you hike in mid-summer heat. We barely had enough water on our way out of the wilderness. It had been a tense situation.

Sonny and I camped at The Lost Dutchman State Park located on the west side of the Superstition Mountains. Not in view of Weaver's Needle. The mountains are as beautiful as Saguaro National Park outside Tucson. Early during my first marriage, I went with my parents to the Superstitions. It was late afternoon; the sun was shining on the stark mountain, and yellow brittle bush wildflowers were vibrantly in bloom. We did not hike far into the mountain. It was too hot. But I wrote the following poem at that time.

Shadows play against the old—alit like gold—on sunset nights  
Brown volcanic rock, deeply creviced  
Standing tall,  
Fingers holding up the blue sky.

Here,  
Legends wind around each cove,  
For here,  
a Dutchman lost his mind.

In the 19th century an immigrant named Jacob Waltz discovered his gold mine in the Superstitions and kept its location a secret. Over the decades, many people have sought the Lost Dutchman's Gold Mine to no avail. Some have lost their lives in the process.

*Picacho Peak* stands prominently on the way from Phoenix to Tucson, off the I-10 freeway, 50 miles northwest of Tucson. The saddle mountain is celebrated for its early spring

wildflowers—gold poppies, blue lupines, orange globemallow, white desert chicory, and everywhere, the yellow brittlebush. A few times, while I was living with Don on Night Hawk Way, I took my telescope to the safe haven of the state park, by myself. Stargazing in the desert with no one else around. Me in communion with the universe. I had been inspired to write this Poem:

In the World of Outer Space

I wonder, while gazing into night  
I wonder, while seeing with averted vision  
the Andromeda Galaxy—  
Our sister city in OUTER space.  
I cannot help but think  
“it must be”  
that others exist like me —  
gazers of the night —  
seeing with reflection, awe, amazement  
Our dark and speckled home.

Andromeda, M 31 —  
Our sister casts faint light in my averted eyes.  
But what of her neighbors next door,  
Nearby, down the street, across town?  
Are they spying on me  
wondering who I am? Whether I exist?

For me,  
God is but my reverence  
For the all mighty world of space,  
For the myriad stars at night,

Treasures of my eternal sight.

I had climbed Picacho Peak at least twice. Once, all the way to the summit with my cousin Barbara who is ten years older than me and a good Christian woman. Another time with law school chum Beverly and her girlfriend. (Bev's sister had given me the two pit bulls. And in Phoenix, I had chanted with Bev at her temple, a Japanese branch of Buddhism.)

At least twice, I saw the annual Civil War reenactment that commemorates the skirmish at Picacho Peak Pass on April 15, 1862. Confederate rangers had claimed Arizona, to increase their confederacy and Union troops from California encountered them at Picacho Pass. This had been the western most battle of the Civil War. After the reenactment, both Johnny Reb and Yankee relic soldiers stood in a line for photo opts. On one occasion, Don and I took Chinese friends. Squeegee we called her at first. But I think her name was Gui-gi. We met her and her husband through a service at ASU that connects international students with American families. One of my many international pursuits while at Night Hawk Way.



Minnie and Max at Picacho Peak, in the setting sun

*Organ Pipe*



A week before we packed up and left Maricopa for Pensacola, I took sonny to the Yuma Desert section of the Sonora where organ pipes grow. I had been there a few times before, in May and June when the Organ pipe has white funnel flowers tipped with purple or pink. Like the saguaro, the blossoms open at night and close in the morning, after bats pollinate them. Organ Pipes live over 150 years.

The organ pipe area is along the border with Mexico and is a dangerous place because of the illegal aliens crossing the remote desert. Numerous Customs and Border Protection agents patrol the organ pipe desert, on foot, by horse, or on ATVs, SUVs and motorcycles. They are constantly on the lookout for Coyotes smuggling people from south of the border and for drug runners smuggling marijuana and drugs for the Sinaloa cartel. At the Port of Entry towns, CBP officers welcome legitimate travelers and commerce but their top priority is to keep terrorists out of the U.S..

Twenty miles south of the Organ Pipe campground is the Port of Entry town–Lukeville. across the border is Sonoita, Mexico, gateway to Rocky Point, Arizona’s closest beach where the volcanic Sonora dips into the ocean with long wide beaches. Puerto Peñasco, Sonora, Mexico, is

an hour's drive from Sonoita on Mexico Highway 8 and about a four-hour drive from Phoenix. Puerto Peñasco is part of the Altar Desert, one of the driest and hottest regions of the Sonora. The town is a Mexican fishing village and a tourist attraction with resorts. A place where local Mexicans sell ironwood carvings and shell jewelry. A foreign country that takes dollars and speaks English in most restaurants. I went to Rocky Point on a few retreats with a group of Unitarian friends. Lots of cervezas, margaritas, salsa dip and chips. We camped in tents at the Playa Bonita campground. A fun time was had by all, my first husband probably said.

But Sonny and I had no intention of going into Mexico because of an incident that had happened a few months. I think we were near Big Bend Texas, or it could have been around El Paso, when we drove into some Sinaloa downtrodden pueblo with Minni and Max. All I remember are the caustic stares from the “gente del pueblo.” We turned around and quickly returned to the U.S. with no more desire to venture south of the border.

Sonny and I tent camped in the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument because we were preparing to move to the Yacht House B&B and had already sold the travel trailer. This trip to Organ Pipe wasn't just for Sonny. I wanted to be in the desert one more time before going to Florida—in one of the most beautiful deserts in the world, although all deserts are stunning, in my opinion. I wanted to hear the coyotes howl at full moonrise, after a breathtaking sunset. I wanted to feel alive. Feel at peace in a tranquil setting.

In the early mornings at our camp, Sonny and I lounged on lawn chairs and spent hours watching and feeding the gambol's quail and white winged doves, ravens, thrashers and cactus wrens, and cotton tails. We relaxed amid the organ pipe forest, where cardinals fluttered about and the Gila woodpecker flew from organ pipe to organ pipe staking out his territory while I was saying in thought, “No. This is mine. All mine. I am a desert dweller.”

A forest of organ pipe surrounded me with clean fresh, creosote scented, arid air that is easy to breath. Everything around me was a remedy for my good health. I was in a place on Earth, where ocotillos, organ pipes, and the saguaro, dance and play God's holy music. To be in the midst of such a desert is an entire Andrew Lloyd Webber opera, *Phantoms of the Desert*. It's three Pavarotti encores. A glitzy spectacular production played over and over again, for me and for the man I tried to hurl from the gutters of life.

**At night, when I heard the lullaby of singing stars, I set up my Schmidt Cassegrain telescope to show my wrangler boyfriend the sights of the night sky. Nebulas, the Sagittarius star clusters, Andromeda's spiral—our sister galaxy two million light years away. As far as you can see with the naked eye. And the Messier objects—the Pleiades M45, the ring nebula in Lyra M57, and of course, I showed Sonny the brightest stars in the heavens—the 42 judges of ancient Egypt. I showed him Vega, also in Lyra, and said it was only 25 light years away. In the tail of the swan Cygnus flying down the Milky Way, I pointed out the bright star, Deneb, and said it was a distant giant at 1500 light years. The fact that these two bright stars are so very different in actual size and scope is an astounding revelation to someone new to astronomy. I showed my right-hand man most of the constellations that I knew, the historically bound configurations, although in reality each star was as unbound as my heart.**

We were both, after all, just a couple of old west cowpokes under the stars.

## Chapter Nine: The Yacht House Bed and Breakfast

The following was mostly written while I was at the Yacht House B&B in Florida, circa the year 2000. Part is about Cecil who I then called Sonny. He was 37. I was 45. I believed I was



Cecil's bodhisattva. During my two years in Florida, I never came to terms with my condition. I hadn't seen a psychologist since childhood or a psychiatrist since the Army. The Army doctor had prescribed Librium and I overdosed on the pills in combination with another drug floating among the troops. Mandrax. Quaaludes. The troops called them Mad Dogs. And that was that. But after the Army, I was uninhibited by meds. Had a zest for big things. The first year at the Yacht House was good. Great, in fact. A euphoric year for me. We were prosperous enough to survive. *Was it me or him that caused my disorientation?*

### *A Bodhisattva's Story*

(my bodhisattva avatar writes)

**This story is the third major adventure of my life, a turning point at my middle years in a universe of expansion, chaos, and uncertainty. When you put your mind and actions on far reaching goals, when you forget about the human frailties that boggle progression, the possibilities are limitless. In the past my quench for adventure has taken me to Urumqi, China and atop the Andes on the Inca Trail. What exactly have I been after on these quests? Truth. Love. Money. Rewards. Fame. Respect? Or am I just on adventures, living my life. When questing, I'm not thinking about the quest. I'm just on an adventure, living my life. Then, in the end, I discover there's a reason for everything that I do and all that comes my way. On my present quest (with Sonny at the Yacht House B&B), I am reaching as far as I can with all I have to offer. This is the most wondrous expansion I've ever had.**

My favorite Buddhist sutra concerns the Bodhisattva Vimala-kirti of 2500 years ago; he was a contemporary of the Lord Buddha. In 1983, I first encountered the Vimala Kirti sutra in

murals on grotto ceilings and walls in the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, or the Mogao Caves, near Dunhuang, China. After teaching a semester at Wu Han University of Science and Technology, I traveled in China for three months with a British colleague, a red-haired woman named Sara Hunglebe (or something like that). She said I spoke like John Wayne and that she loved to correct my vocabulary. Sara and I clambering by train and rambling by truck or bus down dirt roads, through dust-bowl adobe towns with fly-infested goat meat hanging from posts and eaves. The caves were especially hard to reach at that time and I grew very claustrophobic going in and out of the grottos. There are about 600 caves, about 30 were open to the public.

The Grottos of 1000 Buddhas was an oasis between the Gobi and the Taklimakan deserts, a frontier stop along the ancient trade route, the Silk Road which featured Bactrian camel caravans and Marco Polo. The northern and southern routes of the Silk Road merged in Dunhuang, or diverged, depending on the wayfarer's direction. Entering China, the traveler came to the Gansu Corridor. Leaving, he encountered the Taklimakan Desert—the most desolate windblown sand region of the world also called the “sea of death” because if you enter you won't come out. The Taklamakan reaches minus 20 degrees in the winter when the entire desert may be covered with snow. It lies in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of Northwest China. In Urumqi—the capital this region, I was sick in a Uyghur hospital with bacillary dysentery. The Uyghurs are Muslims and speak a Turkic language. My Uyghur doctor would ask me every day, “she have blood in stool today?” I digress.

From the 4<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> century, Buddhist monks dug the caves in the eastern slope of Mingsha Mountain, outside Dunhuang. The monks carved Buddha statues and painted frescos that portrayed the wisdom of their sutras. Like the proverbs of Jesus. Glory be to the revelations of God.

One mural—a soft pastel fresco—was called a “visit of the bodhisattva Manjusri to the bodhisattva Vimala Kirti.” Vimala is a wealthy and corpulent layman. A jolly fat Buddhist. An enlightened man. In the fresco he is lying in bed, feigning illness.

Commoners, bodhisattvas, avatars, and celestial beings are surrounding Vimala Kirti. I imagine archangel Gabriel and the avatar Krishna were also present and waiting to hear Vimala speak of Dharma—the truth and wisdom of Lord Buddha: The right path. Life lessons that open the gateway to heaven. In Christianity, the way of Jesus (John 8:12). “I am the world’s light. Follow me in the light. Have the eternal light of life.” The bodhisattva ideal is saving all beings from destruction and despair. For followers of Jesus, life’s purpose is being saved from the fires of damnation, and living in “eternal peace.” Salvation and nirvana. Holy endeavors by Buddha and Christ.

The teachings of the Vimala Kirti sutra include: Ask and you shall receive. God provides. Vimala put it in these words, “the universal vessel (of manna) cannot be exhausted.” The gospels tell of Jesus feeding the multitudes gathered to hear him speak when he took from a boy five loaves of bread and two fish, gave thanks to his father, and distributed as much food as the crowds wanted. God provides. And when Moses led his people through the Sinai Desert, the Israelites received manna from God who said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day.” Exodus 16:4.

His silence is thunderous . . .

In the sutra, Vimala asks the bodhisattvas around him, “What is the gateway heaven? (to nirvana, to salvation). Each bodhisattva gave an explanation. Then the bodhisattva of wisdom, Manjushri asked Vimala the same question. Vimala said nothing. His answer was “silence, emptiness.” Absolute non-duality in the mind. Non bipolarity. Freedom of speech. Freedom of

mind. Freedom from the woes of idle chatter. Empty thy mind of chafe. Winnow all thought, ideas, visions, dreams, memories...duality. Be still. Be silent. Be empty.

Manjusri says, “Excellent! Excellent, noble sir! This is indeed the entrance to heaven. Here there is no use for idle chatter. Chafe. Empty oyster shells.”

“Why are you sick?” ask the angelic beings surrounding Vimala.

He replies, “My sickness comes from ignorance and desire. It will last until all living beings became free of sickness and suffering.”

I fell in love with this sutra, this parable because compassion makes sense to me. The compassion of Jesus. The compassion of Buddhist philosophy. Probably, I have always been compassionate, maybe even as a child, certainly as a responsible adult. Rational or not, compassion is a gift of God’s wisdom. It’s not a justification for my illness, for the condition I have suffered from all my life. Compassion is an “in the trenches,” “learn from the bottom up” kind of love. Compassion is about integrating with the world. The Vimala Kirti Sutra teaches that the bodhisattva will become enlightened—reach heaven—after being involved with the tomfoolery, delusions, and whims of the human world. Bodhisattvas with “inconceivably great compassion” must be fully immersed with the “wild and uncivilized”—those who live “like wild horses.” Those who cause hardship and difficulties are actually spiritual friends. They shatter illusions (Maya) and help us progress on our spiritual vision quest.

The bodhisattva teaches, “Be mindful about the impact of decisions—understand the results of actions—and choose to help rather than harm.” Jesus said, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself; Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,’ commonly known as “The Golden Rule,” No other commandment is greater than these. The Quran says, “Wish for your brother, what you wish for yourself” or “Love your brother as you love yourself.”

Emily Dickinson put it this way: “I shall not have lived in vain, If I can ease one life the suffering, cool the pain.” Emily Dickinson was a Vimala-Kirti Bodhisattva (and so, most likely, am I).

Back to the story

(written at the Yacht House B&B in the year 2000)

**That is really the thing with him. The Trickster. If I trust him, will I want to stay with him anyway? Even if he *gets it right*, by my standards—not lying to me, not losing control because of addictions; not landing me in trouble or bringing around something offensive like “drunken rabbleroxing men hoopla’ing,” do I want to spend my entire life with this one man? I often think not. One day, when times are better, when we don’t have to rely on each other to survive, then I will force him to leave.**

**And this is the thing, too. Did we really reach a higher level of understanding just now? Or did he simply win his way with me? Once again. Another trick? Another flashy card he’s played. And I fell for it. Didn’t fold.**

**Ours is not the greatest love story ever told. Ever since the Corrective Action Plan (CAP) in 1997, I’ve been moving from house to house, room to room, place to place, unsettled. Most likely, this CAP was an intense challenge to nudge me along the path of good karma, a path less artificial than law school. I needed fuel, a charge before moving on. Maybe the key lesson to my story is learning how to live at the heart of life itself. Maybe here is where we learn how to really love. And this is what life must be all about. Everything else seems petty and dimwitted.**

**We stay together, he and I, although sometimes I demand he leave. Even during hard times, I hope for good times. (a manic-depressive optimist). The man I speak of is my very story here. He is the storm of my nature, (no one has ever angered me more); he is sentinel of my heart, instigator of these words. He is the man who will not leave me and the man I could never make go.**

(I'm stuck in a decision not to get stuck! written in Thailand 1983-4)

I'm stuck,  
In this choice I made,  
Not to be stuck.

It fell on me,  
Full and leafy.  
I stood uncrushed.

Instead, I sprouted  
And grew  
Becoming that tree  
Stuck  
In the same horizon.

The taller I grew,  
The thinner the air became,  
But the broader  
My particular view.

(from my writings, summer 2016)

The three years I traveled in a Mallard Trailer and ran a B&B in Florida are far away and unreal to me now. Sixteen years have passed since a time of big dreams. Hopes beyond belief.

Dreams that would fade away and leave me broken in the desert. When I wake from sleep, it's always from a dream. I think the manic mind is constantly in motion. Even when sleeping. Most often the dream snaps away from my subconscious mind, disappears, and I don't remember it. But some dreams stay, perhaps in the psyche and drive us on through the years. Unless we completely give up. Suicide. I've always been too optimistic for that

Phantoms Of The Marshland (written in Thailand 1984)

Phantoms of the Marshland

Evading to be seen

Leaving trails – glimpses

Demarcating where they've been.

By way of fading marsh's gleam,

In splash! A phantom shown.

What mystery behooves my soul –

Taut hours away from home?

Phantoms of the Marshlands –

I know not why you be –

Before I ever grasp you –

You're snatched away from me.

Much of this Yacht House chapter is written in my present memories—during the spring and summer of 2016 when I resumed my writing career after thirteen years of silence, of idling in a stupor on VA mental health meds. I did find on a floppy disk, scattered ideas about the Yacht House written in the year 2000. I also had some jottings on pink legal pads, notes that rambled about my turbulent relationship with Sonny. An insane relationship. Some writings were scathing. About his outrageous behavior. About his trickery and drug use. Disparaging notes I

didn't want to keep—for his sake. Perhaps for my own. Whimpering women are just not admired. I'm not sorry I burned the many pink legal pages of words against Sonny. He didn't like that I had such notes about him. I guess he had seen me write some of these notes. Just as well. Memories are sometimes better than disgruntled notes—evidence about a loved one's poor behavior. That is, if memories help rather than harm.

One day while on Candlelight Road in Maricopa, I swept manically through my trunks, boxes, and rooms and cleared away a lot of excess stuff. Lots of rat-shredded old letters, newspaper headlines collected since president Kennedy's assassination—headlines of the deaths of Mao, Bobby, Indira, Sadat, Elvis, and every Arizona Republic edition of the 1990 Gulf War because Kuwait was one of the countries where I had lived. And I had lots of international correspondences from my Import/Export and Internet business. Lots of interesting stamps.

I had hundreds of books. Collections for my own writing interests—ancient Egypt, old west Arizona, Maya, Inca, Spanish language . . . I didn't have the internet and Google when I first wrote novels so I had to collect books. I spent a lot of time at the ASU library. A few years ago, on another manic sweep, I got rid of most of my books (Bookman's wouldn't even take in trade my three suitcases full of books because they were not in good enough condition or they weren't needed anymore. All information is now on the Internet. That is how I write my books now. At 60, in my recliner with my laptop and Wi fi, I write.

Anyway, I gave to charity anything worthwhile that I didn't want. Lots of books. The rest went to a burn pile in the yard. This is where most of my pink legal pad writings went, the scathing notes about my boyfriend who is now my husband. Fortunately, I kept the poems I wrote while at the Yacht House. Poems mostly about Sonny and me. About being an innkeeper host.



## Deciding on the business

(The following was partly written in the year 2000.)

Somehow, while in the trailer traveling, I pulled through the worst of times and decided on the Yacht House B&B in Pensacola, Florida **which was directly across Cyprus Road from the Pensacola Yacht Club. The Inn had green lawns, gardens, a majestic magnolia tree in the front yard, a koi pond in the back yard between the main house and the guesthouse, and fragrant honeysuckle vines grew on the stone fence around the estate. Down the road was Joe Patti's Seafood store near the white sands of Sanders Beach where pelicans, cranes, and seagulls flew about the piers standing in the Gulf's Inner channel, the many sailboats in the bay, and the tugboats in the channel. The salty moist scent of the sea was not the arid desert, but it was a beautiful setting for a quaint B&B.**

The previous owner, Bob, had bought the estate and converted its two houses to a B&B with a nautical theme. The Mariners Room, the Captain's Quarters, Skipper's Cove . . . I don't remember the rest. (Maybe there was a buccaneer room). Bob was a sailing man who had even sailed to Cuba and back, alone. He was a good standing member of the Pensacola Yacht Club which sent a lot of business his way.

Before meeting with Bob on my first visit, I dropped Sonny off at a nearby gas station to wait for me. Don didn't realize Sonny was traveling with me and I wanted to keep it that way during the deal making process. By the time I returned to retrieve Sonny, the station owner had chased him off for loitering. Fortunately, I found him nearby and we headed back to some campground where we had parked our Mallard Travel Trailer and probably left my Doberman

Pinchers. Don't ask me why I hadn't left Sonny there as well. I don't remember. Maybe I thought my meeting with Bob would be brief.

The Yacht House seemed a very good investment. Profitable. Promising. Don flew to Florida to sign the mortgage papers with me. We were still married at the time. Our credit scores were excellent but we needed Don's Intel salary and perks to mortgage half a million dollars in real estate. Bob put Don and me together in the Mariner's Room; he was unaware that Don and I were divorcing. We slept together. Nothing happened of course. Rather like our marriage

Don was swept away with the Inn in such a beautiful setting. He had his own dreams for the business and during the first year I was running the Yacht House, he made several trips to Florida. He would stand on the veranda gazing at the estate and say that the Yacht House would be his retirement home in ten years. (Like me, he was a dreamer. When we were dating years before, back in Portland, he said he wanted to marry me as soon as he became a millionaire. He had a few prospects going. And he wanted a wife to help him with his business projects. So goes that story.) That year, we were on the phone at least once a week discussing the Inn, its new décor and the remodeling. Everything was up front and friendly. **He seemed happy with his investment. His last project with me. But all this was before Don's new Chinese bride arrived; then he became edgy about our 50-50 joint ownership, per the divorce decree, and tried to weasel out of the deal and dump everything onto me, including all the blame for the situation he was in with his new wife.**

From my handwritten memoir, May 2016

Because of my law degree I thought I could draw up a good divorce decree. In truth, I wrote that crazy decree because of mania--my jack of all trades ethic. I felt invincible. I was a

renaissance woman. Besides, Don urged me not to get a lawyer. I didn't. My mistake. But like all my Unitarian friends, I still held Don in high esteem. Believed in his judgement. At least the divorce decree brought me the Yacht House in a 50-50 partnership with Don. With the proceeds from my new business venture, I paid the Florida mortgage while my ex paid the ones in Arizona (the ranch on Barnes Road and our house on Night Hawk Way where he moved back in as soon after I left him). I was too fair with him. He was a lucky guy who got off easy and then he would turn around with a vengeance, which I'll describe later. Oh well, que sera sera.

Sonny and I returned to the desert to get my belongings. Don was renting out the ranch duplex so my things had been moved to a spare bedroom at Night Hawk. Along the way, I had lost some of my valued souvenirs and mementos probably from rural pillagers down in Hidden Valley. (Funny how memory brings back the little tidbits we've owned and lost. If I had all the things lost along the way these past twenty years, my house now would be cluttered with many interesting possessions. The relics of my life.)

With all this in mind, my storage room at Night Hawk was still completely full. I had piles of books, my grandmother's old trunk, mementos from world travels, my own manuscripts, and computer equipment. Suit cases. Duffle bags. Boxes. Lots of stuff.

In Tempe, I finally filed for divorce. I heeded Don's urges not to get a lawyer, very stupid of me. Instead, I enlisted a legal service called "Why pay a lawyer." A big mistake. For one thing, a disbarred attorney was running the outfit. After I hired them, they were rude and of no help to me. They just filed the paperwork and set the decree in stone. It couldn't be changed now. Too late to hire a lawyer to advise me on where I stood with Don.

Sonny and I sold the Mallard for 4k to a trailer lot in Mesa. Then we drove up to Las Vegas to pick up a short Sri Lankan man in his fifties. Wilson Yapa was going to help me out at

the Yacht House. He was actually one of my international correspondents, an Arastar Internet agent for import export opportunities in Sri Lanka. His standing as an Arastar agent and a letter from me, got him into the US where he worked in Las Vegas and lived with Sri Lankan friends.

When I asked Wilson if he'd be a part of my new business venture, he said yes, it was his duty. In a large U-Haul truck Sonny, Wilson Yapa, and I headed back to Florida while towing the Explorer that held Minnie and Max. It took two days, twenty-six hours, to drive across Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and into the subtropical panhandle of Florida. It was a long drive but I was pumped with excitement for a new promising life in sunshine on white sandy beaches. Was my vision quest over? Was I setting out on a new one? (I was out to sea chasing whirlwinds with flowers. A poem written years ago, perhaps at Night Hawk, maybe earlier in Thailand.)

A small town,  
Can be any town –  
Even New York City

If you were there  
Born and raised  
But cannot stay,  
For reasons left unclear to say.

People will advise–unfortunately:  
“There’s no place like home.”  
“You can’t run away forever.”

Since early childhood,  
I heard my own voices,  
Inside my head

And to me they said,  
“Go out to sea,  
and stir up whirlwinds  
with flowers.”

(The following was mainly written when I was at the Yacht House)

Pensacola is the beachfront property of my desert home, although Maricopa is nearly 2000 miles away. The city's named comes from the Panzacola Native Americans who had lived in the region for centuries. It sits on the Gulf Coast with Santa Rosa Island offshore, across the bay bridge. Beyond Santa Rosa stretches the Gulf of Mexico. In the movie “Contact” Jodi Foster landed in Pensacola where palm tree were swaying over the surf on a stretch of white sandy beach. The water tower on the way to town proclaims that Pensacola has “Florida’s Finest Beaches.” It does. I have been all over Florida and have seen beaches around the world (bought a bungalow business on a beach in Thailand). Pensacola beaches stretch beyond sight with sand as white as salt edged by the blue ocean clashing along the shore in waves that are both calm and vehement. Sometimes the skies have soft wispy clouds, sometimes the clouds are dark ominous and billowing. Most often, the skies of Pensacola offer pure golden sunshine over the warm sultry beaches.

(Poem written in Thailand: There’s Nothing Like The Sea)

There’s nothing like the sea,  
Expanding out in front of me,  
While evening rays of liquid gold,  
Catch the splashing surf unfold.  
And westward winds blow soothing air,  
Around my breasts, through my hair.  
And I upon these porcelain sands,

Eat yellow mangoes from the land.

The Blue Angels based at the Pensacola Naval Air Station which is also home to the world's largest naval aviation museum. Most people go to Pensacola beach, over the bay bridge, to watch the Blue Angel's fly their McDonnell Douglas F/A-18 Hornets. On occasion, the squadron appeared in formation over the Yacht house. A very patriotic sight, a Star-Spangled Banner affair to behold.

Near the Pensacola Naval Air Station, a Spanish conquistador founded the first settlement in the new world in 1559; hurricanes and tsunamis eventually washed it away. (Florida is the most hurricane-prone state in the US, I soon learned). One hundred twenty-five years later, an explorer wrote about Pensacola, "I saw a bay, the best I've ever seen." Pensacola's Fiesta of Five Flags represents the power struggle over the area: Spain, France, Britain and the North and South armies of the Civil War.

When the Inn was empty of guests, Sonny and I sometimes drove across the Bay Bridge to Ft Pickens, an old Civil War fort guarding the entrance to Pensacola Bay on the western tip of Santa Rosa island. Florida join the Confederate States of America but Fort Pickens remained a Union stronghold. Today, the fort is part of Gulf Islands National Seashore. It has lots of isolated beaches and was a great places for my dogs to run freely. In 1886, Geronimo and his wives were brought from Arizona and held prisoner in Fort Pickens. Geronimo was the leader of a band of Chiricahua Apache who, for thirty years, conducted raids and warfare in the Mexican states of Chihuahua and Sonora, and in New Mexico and Arizona Territories. The Apache remained at Fort Pickens until 1888 and became a famous tourist attraction in Pensacola. (Arizona. Pensacola, Florida. It seemed a connection to me. And I had camped in the Chiricahua mountains.)

As the SW culture of Mexico, Sante Fe, and the wild west grips Arizona, Southern hospitality holds Pensacola in its clutches:. Mardi Gras was a big deal and so was the sentiment of “Come sit under the fans on our screened-in veranda and sip sweet iced tea. Be still. Relax.” I felt “Southern” in Pensacola, sitting on the screened-in veranda of the Yacht House in view of an enormous magnolia tree where blue jays and cardinals fluttered. Under the ceiling fans, I’d sip on a tall glass of iced green tea with ginseng and lemon. The subtropical humidity of the Gulf Coast made me feel sluggish and very relaxed.

**My guests who came from Southern States, the South, were the most charming people I’ve met. I met a law student from Memphis who quoted Faulkner, and an elder woman who was polite, poetic, and proud of her distinctive heritage, “The Great Dixie South.” The Southern etiquette sends chills down my spine, especially the mellifluous accent Southerners have. Maybe it was all about their accent.**

(from my handwritten memoirs of 2016)

When I walked into the hospitality business, I thought, “I can do this.” Even with the help of a little Sri Lankan man, and Sonny--a clumsy, rash, and moody man prone to using drugs. It was a teetering act. But as with my ranch house in Arizona, I was sprung loose in all directions with big ideas for decorating, remodeling, and running a business.

The yacht house grounds spread over an acre with many gardens and trees from the magnolia to the quince by the honeysuckle vines that scented the yard. Hydrangeas, irises, lilies, and hyacinths bloomed around the crystal-clear koi pond. When we inherited the Inn, the pond had been green and had a swimming pool slide for the waterfalls fountain. With the help of my business partner, Don, I bought the right equipment and made the pond clear. We also built a

more natural looking rock waterfall. Sonny hooked up colored lights around the pond and although the wiring wasn't kosher, the result was an attractively lit pond under the moonlight.

(a poem I wrote in China, 1983, when the Chinese wore blue Mao suits or Army greens)

I am a stranger at this pond,  
Where stranger sounds brought me,  
To sit and gaze and think upon  
The wonders that I see.

Beyond the banks in essence lies,  
Entwining water grass,  
from deep below effervescence rise  
Up through the twisted mass.

Old gossamers ornate the twigs  
That winter left behind  
Reflections of the moments  
I thought had gone with time.

I am a stranger at this pond  
And strangeness is of course  
A weapon used against the mass  
That's caught up by its force.

Because of my world travels, I gave the Yacht House more of an international motif. Too keep with the nautical theme, Bob had suggested that I re-name the rooms as "ports of call." I changed all the room names except for the Mariner's Room on the ground floor of the guesthouse, across the hall from the Bengal Room. The Mariners' room had a hot tub on the veranda, sailboat paintings and a hand painted seascape coffee table. I added a decorative



seascape table and a copy of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, an epic poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, written in 1797. “At length did cross and Albatross, Through the fog it came . . .”

There were six rooms to rent, seven in a pinch (my office was converted into a bedroom once during a busy weekend). Rooms went from 90 to 150 dollars a night; the Shanghai Suite was the most expensive, the Bengal Room the least because it had no hot tub. (But it was a nice room with an armoire, two double beds, and French doors onto the verandah. I decorated it with tapestries of tigers and jungle scenes and my Nepali, Indian, and Sri Lankan imports).

The main house had a large living area that included the kitchen and a dining area with Don’s piano that he had never played for me. (He let me take it to the B&B because he never played it anyway.) The large front doors had leaded glass panes and on each side I placed a dolphin fountain bought from domestications.com. Large picture windows overlooked the veranda and yards. Off the veranda were French doors to the Amazon Room where Sonny and I slept, when not staying in other guest rooms. It was the room we rented out least. It really had no décor. Just the basics.

At the end of the veranda of the main house was a door to the east side room which became Wilson’s room. It had been Bob’s old canvas shop where he made sails and awnings to subsidize his B&B business. I had plans for making this large airy room into a souvenir store. Don supported me on this project and sent me several nice souvenir pieces fitting the nautical and my world travels themes—Model ships, ships in bottles, Chinese sculptures, art pieces of African animals . . . I even hired the “rent-a-hubby” handyman team to put in a restroom and build shelves and a large store counter but the room never became a souvenir store—it had been another fizzled out project and a big waste of money. After Wilson left we used the room for many purposes: Minnie nursed her puppies by the huge counter, we rented the room out to a man

who died, and Sonny's son Cameron stayed with us for a while and had in the room a bed and a desk with a computer I bought for his young mind.

Bob's Captain's Quarters upstairs in the main house, became the Shanghai Suite. It had three rooms with a loft and a terrace partly shaded by the huge magnolia tree in the front yard. In addition to a hot tub, the terrace had a claw foot tub that my lady guests tended to love. I decorated the suite with my décor and paintings from China, and a Chinese calligraphy scroll made for me in Wu Han, China. I ordered panda bedspreads and shams for the king bed and panda night tables. I even painted a Chinese dragon on the sitting room's wooden floor. (I had great visions of using my artistic talents to enhance the Inn. Wild ideas! I thought I would paint the entire wooden floor of the kitchen with a seascape.)

On the stairwell wall up to the Shanghai Suite, I hung a poem about magnolia trees that I wrote in China in 1983.

Magnolia trees,  
Adorn library lawns:  
Flowers full and white,  
Like lilies on a pond.

Today, I have read too much.  
And now I stand and gaze  
From the third-floor gallery.  
I think about white flowers

I could make a garland,  
And wear it for you –  
A visual velvet  
(and you shall desire my love).

But, where are you—my love?  
Who will you be?  
I have prepared a fresh garland for your hair.  
Oh, when will you come for it to wear?

On week days, when there were no guests, Sonny and I slept in the Shanghai Suite, especially toward the end of our stay at the Yacht House. We would enjoy the hot tub on the terrace then relax on the wooden chaise lounges handcrafted by Miller's Swings and Things, Pensacola. (Bob had smartly furnished the indoors and outdoors of the B&B with lots of wooden outside pieces like Adirondack chairs and swings on the verandas). Even in a downpour, we slept on the Shanghai terrace, listening to the rain on magnolia leaves and the canvas awning overhead. The refreshing smells and cooling winds of the intense subtropical weather, was as excitingly as a clashing monsoon storm in the Arizona desert.

The guesthouse had four bedrooms, each with its own bathroom, phone, TV and small refrigerator. The upstairs Sahara and Nairobi rooms, had hot tubs on wooden decks with stairs leading to the back yard and pond. From the eaves above these decks, I hung coleus plants and sword ferns that thrived in the subtropics. I watered them every evening; it was a pleasurable task.

We sometimes slept in the guesthouse rooms. The Sahara Suite was my favorite and was a popular room to rent out. The décor included a large ceramic camel, brassware and Bedouin woven pillows from Kuwait, and my coffee table painting of the ancient Egyptian goddess Nut. The bedspread shams and curtains were covered with red roses and on a wall cove behind the bed, I placed a copy of *The Prophet*, “even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you” by Lebanese-American philosopher and writer Kahlil Gibran, and a copy of the Rubaiyat, poetry by

Omar Khayyam, a Persian mathematician, astronomer, philosopher and poet. “A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou.”

I got several compliments in the little guest diaries placed in each room placed on the writing desks Bob had furnished. One woman wrote that the Nairobi Room with its African décor was too masculine. It had a black panther coffee table with a matching lamp, a giraffe lamp, an elephant and a giraffe mirror, and elephant decorative nightstands. From my import/export business, I had lots of African tapestries and wood carvings of water buffaloes, lions, and elephants. One guest requested we remove my wooden statue of a bare breasted African woman carrying fruit over her head. He was making reservations for his elderly parents and had inspected the room. A bare breasted African woman wouldn't do.

#### The Navigator House next door

For 70k, I bought the house next door to the Yacht House, beyond the concrete stone fence. It was a solidly built house painted white with a large front porch. Beautiful wooden floors and high ceilings, three bedrooms, and one bath. I got a mortgage on my own because at the time my credit rating was still excellent. Don wired me 20k for a down payment (he claimed it was part of my alimony—a dispute for the courts back in Phoenix. I was entitled to our stock options, the ones he got from Intel when I had been his wife when.)

I configured the house as an adjunct to the Yacht House and called it the Navigator House, as part of the nautical theme. Sonny even tore down a section of concrete wall between the two properties, for a direct walkway access. I furnished the house with excess furniture I had from the Yacht House. A few times I rented out the entire house to families. It seemed a profitable investment, at first and I felt like I was really on a roll with my business savvy.

## Innkeeping: Those thirty plus jobs

(jottings from the Yacht House, circa 2000)

I often do many things at the same time. I'm not condoning this behavior, it's out of focus. But I have vast interests and I need to survive so I multitask. It's not easy. How many faces do I wear? business entrepreneur and partner, innkeeper host, writer, artist, girlfriend, daughter, friend, socially responsible citizen, responsible member of the world. Most difficult to slip on is the face of a host and problem solver.

God meant for me to be an Innkeeper Host, along with Sonny. It's a horrendous challenge and actually entails about 30 jobs. I hired Lawyers, hired accountants, but I was housekeeper, receptionist; and host. (in the hospitality business, Taking reservations is an important job. Both sonny and I took reservations. Never Wilson Yapa.)

Law School and the Army were one thing, but how did I drift into being an Innkeeper Host? Am I like the stereotypical innkeeper in Sedona—earthy, well dressed, well mannered, probably white, middle aged (kids grown. re-married couples). Don't think so. Not Sonny and me.

I am not a cook, unless you're willing to experiment. I am not a housewife, although now I clean rooms and make exquisite beds as tight as an Army cot. I neatly fold towels, almost like my mother folded towels when I was a little girl. They were so well folded! During my marriage to don I never chose to be a stay-at-home wife even though my work was at home on business projects and writing books. I'm not very domestic. Maybe I haven't the patience for it. Most likely it's the distasteful gender thing. "You can't tell me what I'm supposed to be doing, how I'm supposed to behave. I'm not my grandmother. Or my mother. And you are not my Pope."

I've traveled a fair amount. Been in the military, Darmstadt, Germany. Been AWOL to Sitges Spain. I Studied international law at Tel Aviv university, studied Spanish in Guatemala and Costa Rica. Seen the Great Wall, the Taj Mahal, the Galapagos. Been to France twice, have correspondences in France, write basic French letters. Got business associates in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Madagascar, Togo, Uganda, Russia, Fiji, and PNG. Have a BS: Anthropology, MA: English: and a JD from ASU. Member of Mensa because of my high LSAT score on my third try (I became good at the spatial puzzles). Am an amateur astronomer (since 1978), read tarot cards (since 1985). My business is Arastar Internet website developing and marketing. And, I can hold a good conversation and be involved with the topic. Or I can pour orange juice and leave the room.

#### Business is Business—Hosting

“Oh, my God. Don't stress me now, let me take my time before going out there and facing guests.” I'm in my office off the kitchen, beyond French doors with paned windows. I sit at the computer and write my book or work on Arastar Internet websites. When guests gather at the counter in the kitchen, I adorn my host face and slip into the job. “Good-morning, coffee?” We served a Caribbean breakfast of cut cantaloupe, honeydew melon, pineapple, fresh rolls or doughnuts, and always coffee and Florida orange juice.

#### 12-31-99 A Good Conversation at the Yacht House B&B

A good conversation,  
No matter who you are,  
Or what you do,  
A good conversation is  
True to view:  
A “toss the ball” suit; a

“listening and learning session.”

A good conversation

Is meant to be had –

By me.

A bad conversation goes

Straight down the toilet

After a flush,

There is silence.

A mediocre conversation

Is a short toss of the ball,

Or really,

A “handing over of the ball,”

Slowly and steadily . . .

Ho hum, “Did I leave my clothes in the washer?”

“Where’s the cat?” ho hum.

But a splendid conversation,

Well,

I have met my match.

Running a business, being a writer, creating art, is like training Doberman Pinchers, an ongoing process if you want a sharp dog. (although Dobermans are naturally trained. Naturally sharp. Just need to command them.) A good piece of advice I read somewhere suggested, “Treat your dog like you are always training him. Otherwise, he’ll think it’s time to play.” Dogs NEED to be trained. Cats prance the world in slippers, self-absorbed. People are probably a mixture of both. Run your life like you are always in training. Run your business with an open mind to learn. Remember you have influence as an innkeeper, over your guests.

## Guests

I don't remember my first or last guest, but I remember a few in between. Sometimes, someone said something polite and gracious. Probably in a southern accent. Or French. And the whole room lit up with magnolias. Then I liked being a host.

“Sign in please. Where are you coming from?”

(I should know. Took down their reservations. I could know, but I don't rehearse for guests. I know people are coming for this or that room, or for all of them. If ordered, we'll get the anniversary package ready. But I don't study the names, or where they're from. I'm not standing at the door prepared to say, “Oh, you must be the Johnstons, all the way from Shreveport.” Maybe I should, but I don't. Besides, it's nice to ask, “Where are you from?” It's a good conversation starter and that's my job. Helps me understand the guest. Are they friendly, boring, disgusted with the place, ready to leave. Then again, if I did say, “Why hello Mr. and Mrs. Johnston from Shreveport” maybe those who are disgusted with me would feel they couldn't let me down. I'm their new friend. But I've never been quite that fulsome. Sometimes I just go to my office for a moment and write things down with a blunt pencil, not on the computer. Then return for more conversation with my esteemed guests.

## A visit from Molly and Paul Wasswa from Uganda

We had the pleasure of having two guests from Uganda, Africa. One of the websites I worked on and maintained was for an orphanage in Africa. Molly and Paul Wasswa were devoted Christians who ran the orphanage and school to help neglected, abandoned or



impoverished children (many orphaned by the AIDS epidemic sweeping through Africa). They stayed a few days with us during their US travels, in the Mariner's Room.

In 1983, Molly and Paul had founded the Pearl of Africa Children's Choir from children at their schools and they were traveling the US to set up venues for the children's choir. They planned to tour the US the following Christmas.

I met them through an international correspondent from Uganda. Peter was also an Arastar agent for websites in Uganda. Before he died of AIDS, he gave my email address to Molly and Paul so I could set them up on the Internet.

Before they left, I gave them \$500 and the computer I had bought for Cameron while he was visiting his dad at the Yacht House. But I was never able to help Molly and Paul set up a place for their children's choir. By the time of their request, I was on my way out of Pensacola.

(from my handwritten memoirs, 2016)

When guests arrived and checked in, they signed their names in my ledger on the front kitchen counter. Most were very nice people, the kind you'd expect at a quaint B&B in Florida. Across from the Pensacola Yacht Club. When the yacht club across the street hosted sailing regattas the inn filled up. Once it was a children's sailing regatta. Nice, well-off moms and kids stayed with us. It had been a good week.

Many guests were passing through on their way to New Orleans from Orlando. Once two friendly French women stayed with us for a week. They were teachers in the south of France. I was too rustic to try out my French but they graciously left me their business cards and welcomed my visit anytime. Very nice ladies. Very memorable guests.

L

Lots of gays and lesbians stayed at the Yacht House especially Memorial Day weekend during Pensacola's Gay Memorial Day Celebrations, across the bay. It was our biggest, full house weekend. Reservations months in advance. No refunds.

Lots of lovers came to our inn for a romantic getaway. I'd prepare their room with chilled Champaign and flowers. Once I left a poem in calligraphy on the pillow, *Wild Nights - Wild Nights!* by Emily Dickenson. On another occasion in the Shanghai Suite, I set out a teddy bear with a heart on its chest. A gift from my boyfriend. The young woman took it with her. She probably thought it was part of the romance package. Not what I intended. But no matter. I'm not sentimental.

There were a few weddings held at the koi pond. Limousines at the front parkway. Lots of honeymooners stayed with us, making noise in the Shanghai Suite above the Amazon Room. One honeymoon couple, a man and his Russian bride, stayed a month in the Shanghai Suite. Sonny made them bacon and egg breakfasts to break the monotony of our Caribbean fare. Everyone seemed happy.

Not all guests were happy with the inn. Or with me. The worst guests expected me to clean the room and the change bedding and towels daily. A B&B is not a hotel and I thought these were fastidious expectations for an inn. But I did try to accommodate even the fussiest guest. Except one. A retiring captain and his wife had reservations. They arrived in the late afternoon while Sonny and I were perhaps at the channel watching the red tugboat make waves and stir the pelicans, cranes, seagulls, and ducks. The captain and his party of about seven people made themselves at home and threw his retirement party on the veranda of the main house. Lots of ice, booze, and snacks. When Sonny and I arrived, the captain demanded to know where I had been. He was pissed because they had to accommodate themselves. He said that no one was here

when he arrived except for a “little Pakistani running around.” (he was referring to Wilson Yapa.) Early the next morning, he left (snuck out to avoid us. Didn’t stiff us, though. Guests pay up front). Either the captain was embarrassed by his rude behavior, or he was just too disgusted with us and the little “Pakistani” man. Can’t win them all.

### Wilson Yapa from Sri Lanka

Wilson Yapa was a lot like Sonny the wrangler. He was a hustler too. He got all he could out of his trip to the US. He played the credit card lenders and got a computer, jewelry, and other charged bounty to take back to Sri Lanka. The day he was returning to his country, he even tried to cash a check on a closed account. Lucky he wasn’t arrested. Yeah, he was a schemer but he was our friend for a good part of the first year. A few times Wilson, Sonny, and I drove two hours to Mobile Alabama to eat at an Indian restaurant, the only one in the vicinity of Pensacola.

Wilson and I had Buddhism in common, although he wasn’t a zealous Buddhist. As a Sri Lankan, Wilson followed Theravada Buddhism, the more conservative of the two major Buddhist traditions. Sri Lanka is home to ancient Buddhist scriptures as sacred as the Bible or the Koran. The Pali canon contains Theravada scriptures written in the Pali language in Sri Lanka, 454 years after Buddha’s death. Theravada Buddhism is found in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. If a woman touches a Theravada monk, she defiles him and he must undergo purification rituals. While teaching in Thailand, I told a Thai friend about my idea of becoming a Buddhist nun when I finished my contract. At the time, I was going through culture shock and wavering between Christianity and Buddhism. She emphatically advised me not to because nuns were former prostitutes, battered woman, and woman who had a hard life and sought refuge in the order.

Anyway, my version of Buddhism was more of the Tibetan Mahayana variety. The big wheel. The path of the bodhisattva seeking enlightenment for all sentient beings. Mahayana Buddhists believe anyone can attain enlightenment during a single lifetime. Both versions of Buddhism believe in karma and reincarnation. And of course, the teachings of the Buddha—the enlightened one.

After Wilson was happy with what he had accumulated in wages and merchandise, he packed up and returned to his wife and home on a banana plantation in Sri Lanka, island Paradise in the Indian Ocean. Expanses of beach, jungled hills, and lots of Buddhist ruins and temples. Two monsoon seasons. In the great Hindu epic, the Ramayana, the hero Rama, avatar of Vishnu, flies to Sri Lanka from India and rescues his wife from the king. It is a story of dharma, living a virtuous life despite the devil's schemes and ploys.

Wilson called me once on the land line, while I was at Candlelight Road. Can't imagine how he had the number. Unless I had written him. He was well and wanted to talk to me more than that rascal Sonny, who by then I was calling Cecil. That Wilson wanted to speak to me naturally irritated Cecil. In 2005 I wrote to Wilson to see if he had survived the 12-26-04 tsunami. He wrote back that he was fine. It was the last time I heard from him. Maybe he's still a dreamer schemer, in his 70's, on his beautiful island nation. A Buddhist Paradise. Don't know.

I never joined the yacht club. It was too expensive and I didn't have a boat. When I could no longer pay Wilson a thousand a month for his help at the Yacht House, resourceful Wilson got a janitorial job at the yacht club (could be they wanted a "little Pakistani" guy running around).

It was through Wilson's connections at the yacht club that Sonny met two yacht club employees. The groundskeeper and a member of the kitchen staff. Both were drug addicts,

perfect for Sonny. A connection for drugs. for a few months the yacht club's groundskeeper became our tenant in the store room. It brought extra income that probably went to Sonny to support his habit. He insisted on handling the tenant. No problem. I had too much on my plate.

The tenant died, probably from years of doing drugs. He was a small, liver damaged man. It was just as well. It vacated the side store room for Cameron's arrival which gave me a break from Sonny. I remember a time when Sonny, Cameron, and I were in the back garden by the quince tree and pond. I offered Cameron \$50 to go in and serve and talk to the guests in the kitchen, at their Caribbean breakfast. He did it graciously, probably would have without the incentive. Sometimes I felt out of sorts and was thankful when Cameron was around because his "daddy from the womb of Yuma" wouldn't jump into the role of hosting for me when I was feeling out of sorts. But Cameron could, and I thank him for that. I was having a difficult life, at times. Because of my condition. Because of my man.

Wilson Yapa burst the bubble. (written at the Yacht House, circa 2000)

For several months after we moved into the Yacht House, I was too swept up by projects and duties to realize Sonny hadn't quit smoking crack. Like he swore he had. Time and time again. I knew he smoked weed, but I had a blind eye to his use of crack. He just wasn't my focus. And he was always sneaky. I must've been really distracted and numb not to notice my boyfriend tweaking. By his words and actions. His acting stupid. It was Wilson who told me, "I know you want to correct Sonny, but he does the white stuff" in the huge add-on side room, where Wilson slept in a longyi sarong on Bob's old plyboard work table.

When Yapa told me the secret, I was furious with Sonny. "The son of a bitch!" I knew Sonny had issues. I had traveled with him for ten months and saw him procuring drugs the entire

time. But that didn't stop me from bringing him on board the Yacht House and believing in him. He was my boyfriend and I always felt like I owed him the benefit of the doubt. But I was wrong, every time. Fool me once shame on you, fool me a 1000 times. And I'm sure that part of the man's trickery was to gaslight me or make me feel guilty if I didn't believe him. What an ass! What a conundrum!

Sonny in turn scolded Yapa for betraying a confidence between men. One story is the same as the next when it comes to drug addiction.

Even after I knew the truth, Sonny would come in my office, stupidly chit chat to make sure that I was parked in front of my computer so I wouldn't notice when he slipped off to get his fix. Or he'd leave while I was talking to guests, or making up the rooms. Off he went for crack. When I realized his ruse I became irate. I'd run outside and see his bike was gone. He was off riding to the poorer neighborhoods or fetching beer or hard liquor. Wilson often sent him for a bottle of hard liquor. It became a joke between them. "Papa Yapa wants a bottle," Sonny would tease.

Sometimes, I'd brazenly hunt Sonny down like I did while traveling in the trailer. As if he had robbed a bank. Once I found him at a beautiful home by the bay, up Cyprus street near Sanders beach. He was with a group of men drinking beer. As I approached, I heard Sonny bragging, "Her husband was a founder of Intel." That added to my ire. Bragging. Making up impressive stories. A product of the ghetto. He was drunk, as usual, and I insisted he come back to the Yacht House and do his grounds keeping work.

Our relationship fell into a pattern (then, not so much anymore). Sonny would rile me with misbehavior, I'd yell at him, scold him, rant and rave. He'd get very angry at me. For my abuse. He'd become emotionally and verbally abusive, not unlike me. Then I'd forgive him and

cry for his forgiveness. Pathetic. He was a hard man, rarely soft. A wrangler from the old west. I don't know what made me so emotionally insecure. I wasn't doing drugs and I wasn't really drinking at the time. I don't know where such insecurity comes from. Its fount is perhaps in a dark place of despair. One night, Sonny and I were sleeping at the Navigator House in a bedroom across from the Yacht House guesthouse. It was such a situation. Here's how the cycle went: I'm fed up with him and try to evict him from my life. My house. Then I can't be without him. He makes me feel guilty. I whimper and simper. He always wins. It was all so terribly pathetic.

Our bedroom window was open when this went on and I was practically begging for his love a bit too loudly. The guest next door must have overheard the crazed woman. I could tell by her less than friendly reaction to me the next morning when she checked out. That was not a good recommendation.

There were at least two police callings at the Yacht House. One was by my friend in San Francisco. Clairene Sturgess. I was on the phone with her when Sonny and I began arguing. After hearing Sonny yell at me, she called the police from SF. Police came and left. No charges were made. The other time I called the police for some reason. I was fed up with him and his abuse, I guess, when I had some clarity of mind. He fled on his bike but the police caught him and found some marijuana he had tossed. It was the end of their shift so they let him go. He was lucky that time.

In exasperation, I finally got a restraining order against him, stating that Sonny interfered with my running the business. His crass anger could turn away guests. Not to mention his crack use, drinking, and a need to be in control of me, his woman. He was Christian and that means in his mind that the man rules. Eve sinned and tempted Adam. Eve came from Adam's rib and was God's gift to his creation, man. If nothing else, Sonny was manly, the man.

Police came to the Yacht House. He had to leave by bike. Was told not to come back. That didn't last long. He had nowhere to go. I'm sure he was back that evening. I may have even drove around looking for him. All was forgiven. Then I felt guilty for putting him through the ordeal. I was his bodhisattva. (His codependent). I needed him in some complicated emotional way. From childhood insecurities, maybe. Or is it an organic disorder. My mom said my birth was especially difficult. Something went wrong.

When the court hearing came for the restraining order, both Sonny and I stood before the judge. The room was crowded—lots of other disputes and restraining orders. The judge asked if I wanted to keep the order in effect. I had already made that decision. Filing the order had been rash on my part, I felt at the time. I could not abandon Sonny to the streets of Pensacola.

Journal entry 1-2-00, "Maybe I've met my match in Sonny. Who am I standing up to? A lot of times he's a mere reflection of myself—the anger, moods, fussiness, fears. Both Sonny and I have similar headstrong dispositions. I need to go chant...."

1-9-00

"Every day I face gut level misery. Seldom is there any joy and often when I am enjoying myself he causes misery. I accept it. I'm obsessed with him. He is a simple man, a childish man—impatient, as though he is in a hurry to reach an appointment (with the dope man). He is a man believing he must be in control. I obsess, not from a feeling of great love, but from how much he bothers me. It's almost as if I need to be bothered. Made miserable. As if I revel in it. What are we supposed to aspire for in life? Happiness? That's not quite right. Because how can we sustain happiness when there's so much suffering to face—sickness and death. And general human abuse."



5-21-00

He will not leave me short of force. What does my deepest heart say? I'm in a conflict. Sometimes I think about my love for him. Yes, I care deeply. But am I in love? I don't know. Maybe his Christian devil bombards my thoughts—slings my moods across the room! I become livid with him. Fortunately, we have been controlling some of that anger, both he and I. But we don't loosen the grip we have on each other. We've lassoed each other by the riata. What's wrong with me? Don't I know who I want to be with? Could it possibly be I'm with him to "correct" him, as Wilson says? It's just too stupid. Vapid. So why remain in a relationship I want out of much of the time? Is it really because he won't leave, or do I really mean that I will not let him go? What is this psychology? This Shakespearean madness. Love's Labor Lost. Sonny puts it like this, "Why don't you just accept that we've been dealt our cards, and play out your hand. We're together for a reason."

"That reason has probably passed," I argue.

But he will not leave.

He has a vision here too (at the Yacht House), now with his son. I'm not sure of my part in it. Sometimes I think I'm just the rich lady Sonny likes to bed. Dual benefits! It's hard to see great love for me from him, although he says he loves me. But he's a crackhead! An angry man. Maybe what's really important, what speaks above all else, is believing that he does love me, does want to be with me. Not doubting this. And realizing that this is something to cherish, not toss away.

(from my handwritten notes May and June 2016)

Before I further explore Sonny's misgivings, or my own, I want to write about nice things that happened while we were at the Yacht House. There were memorable moments among the times of upheaval. Good times with my boyfriend and dogs. I was still Buddhist. Still thought I was his bodhisattva—spiritual guide. Very manic indeed.

Sonny had a good side to him that came out during the best times. When he wasn't aggressive, moody, and angry (which especially happened when he got hooked on meth, back in Maricopa.) At the Yacht House, he was a help to me most of the time—cleaning the hot tubs, mowing the lawns, blowing the Magnolia leaves off the driveway and parking lot. He was my groundskeeper.

Almost every evening, after the guests were checked in, Sonny and I walked to Sanders Beach with Minnie and Max (and eventually with their pups Runyan, Biggie, and Tuffy). Other times we turned right on Cyprus street and walked a few blocks to an inlet channel with palm trees leaning over the water. A red tugboat passed by every evening. There were dancing cranes, pelicans seagulls, ducks, and ducklings. Everything but alligators and manatees.

As the sun set over the water, we discussed visions for the Yacht House, smoked a j-roll. the dogs played along the water's edge, or protectively stayed by our sides. These were evenings like our horseback rides back in the desert, months before, in a vastly different setting.

Everything was beautiful, scenic and I was filled with anticipation.

Some evenings we'd drive to Escambia Bay on the western side of Pensacola. We climbed down a hill, through woods and shrubs and over train tracks to reach the beach along the wide bay. Usually, we brought takeout Chinese food from China Wok on Cervantes Street. We ate on a blanket spread on the beach and had the dogs sit calmly beside us. At rest.

After a meal of perhaps vegetarian fried rice, turnip cakes and taro balls, my favorites,  
Sonny would wade into the bay with his fishing pole and cast out. Minnie and Max followed and  
frolicked in the water. Sonny caught a sting ray once, maybe twice. I sat on the shore watching  
him and the dogs. Took pictures. Maybe read. I wrote a poem about it once when his son  
Cameron was visiting us.

Here I sit,  
An evening cool breeze,  
Off Escambia Bay.

They walk out,  
Father and son,  
And the dogs,  
Minnie and Max.

They parade out to fish,  
Wading, Waltzing,  
Then casting lines  
Far into the Bay,

(As the Dobermans dance  
In their idle play.)

The dogs are now chased  
back to my shore.  
I hear delightful calls,  
(like the howling of jackals)  
Father and son,  
They are catching fish!

We also camped at Lake Stone, near Century, in NW Escambia County. We canoed around the wooded lake, Minnie and Max following along the shore. Or they swam out to us and climbed into the canoe. We camped in a tent at the lake, no Mallard trailer, but we had Sam's Club camp chairs and sat around the fire at night frying up the fish Sonny had caught. During the day, the dogs loved to play in the woods. We'd hide from them, somehow, and they'd come running down the road looking for us. It was a game we all enjoyed playing.

From 9-15-00 (at the lake)

"Now here's a good question. Who's the more complex--he or I--the male ego or the female pride?" At the lake that night I wrote the following poem -- Astronomy, In communion with the Cosmos.

Very incredible  
I have Vega overhead in her 27 years  
Rising to the east--The Harvest Moon  
At first, the moon appeared like  
The rising sun in a purple veiled face--

A brighter pink-orange  
Than an eclipse moon.  
A promising sign for me--  
my sight  
Has reached far tonight.

the Harvest Moon  
Began her dance across the sky  
Here at Zenith  
About 2:30,

She follows her trail down to the West  
Where I belong.

Remember when gloomy –  
I am chasing dreams  
As far as the stars  
And building a monument to my cat

The lake is like a woodland painting –  
Some mist  
All calm  
A mirror for the Harvest Moon.

No, there were a few nice times at the Yacht House, but hell to pay for being with Sonny.  
“Even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you” Kahlil Gibran wrote in The Prophet. My  
decision-making was poor when I lacked presence of mind. Common sense. This happened a lot  
during my time in Pensacola. During my time with Sonny.

### Remodeling and other projects

I suppose now's as good a time as any to revisit my myriad home-improvement projects  
and business plans for the Yacht House, the Navigator House next door, and eventually the three  
cabins that I would purchase. To help with the remodeling I used handymen found in ads. First, I  
hired the “Rent a Hubby” team of long-haired southern rednecks, then an Aussie named Lloyd.

When we first moved in, the main house was pink and the guesthouse was robin egg blue.  
I liked that color better than pink. Why have pink anyway, when blue is so much more nautical?  
I hired Lloyd to paint the main house robin egg blue. It was a project never finished. In part,  
because we kept pulling Lloyd away from the task to help with other projects. Or, I should say,

Sonny would pull Lloyd away and cause conflict with me. Who's the boss of the handyman? Of course, I was, but Sonny was my boyfriend and he had a man's ego. And, I never felt quite right "putting him in his place." Or embarrassing him in any kind of way. If I did, all hell broke loose anyway. We were the odd couple at the Yacht House. "You can take the boy out of the ghetto," Lloyd told me once, "but you can't take the ghetto out of the man." I believe Lloyd found a fruitful situation and took advantage of this confusion.

I paid Rent-a-Hubby to install pull-down steps to the loft in the Shanghai Suite then build stairs from the front veranda to the Shanghai terrace. Only to later have Lloyd tear them down because of the overhanging eave which was a potential hazard to guests. Before I started crashing from all the mania, I was soaring high in the sky like a hawk, running the hospitality business, writing my book, working on websites, and doing all sorts of jack-of-all-trade projects. (I can't even keep up with myself thinking about this time in my life.)

I even read tarot cards at the Yacht House and planned to integrate readings for the guests into the business plan (even put it on a fanciful brochure I made). I read the cards for Wilson once at the kitchen counter. His question was whether or not his wife would get a US visa so she could join him at the Yacht House. But the reading was not promising, though I tried to give a good spin. his wife didn't get the visa and Wilson never asked for another reading. Oh well. I did read the tarot for a few guests. People like dabbling into the future, hoping for the promised land. It seems to be human nature. Could be what sets us apart from other animals. I doubt that jackals think about becoming millionaires. **(I would eventually toss away all my tarot decks—maya hieroglyphs, ancient Egyptian deities, herbal cards, Chinese tarot, Sante Fe variety. Tarot reading, like astrology and other New Age endeavors, just wasn't proper for a Christian. I got rid of them when I gave away much of my stuff. When I was especially Christian**

**because I thought that would help me better relate to Cecil. Or help him respect me more. It was convoluted thinking and Cecil didn't respect me even an iota more than he ever had before. A Misogynist, even a Christian chap, does not respect women. Period.)**

Yes I'm manic. Among other endeavors, I built brick steps to a veranda screen door at the main house. I painted artwork on floors, pots, coffee tables, created a desert mural on my office wall and oversaw all renovating projects (when I could). In my mind, the Yacht House and neighboring properties would become a fabulous resort and I would be a famous writer. Sustainability. Me at the center. And the visions grew even bigger than that. Mega-mania. And ,u visions (delusions) were so close to me that I knew them to be true. So, act now, think later or never at all, seems to have been my philosophy. It was mostly manic delusion. And such delusion causes trouble—taking out too much credit thinking “my ship’s about to come in.” I’ll pay everything off and prosper. What do they call it in Buddhism? The cycle of Maya, the cycle of suffering and rebirth. It’s the Magician’s illusion in Tarot.

Beyond chasing Moonbeams in Asia and going AWOL from the Army, the Yacht House B&B was one mantic episode that’s taken me years to revisit in the old caverns of the mind. Boarded up mine shafts. It was an unreal time, now that I’m settled and 60 and living quietly in the Mojave desert near Mom and the casinos. Still with Cecil, aka Sonny. He’s been part of the deal for nearly 20 years now

I drew up a business plan that included my many many visions. I showed it to a counselor at the SBA in downtown Pensacola, on Garden Street. The SBA is a federal agency that helps entrepreneurs, like me. A little guy trying to make it in a big world. The mission of the SBA is “to maintain and strengthen the nation’s economy by enabling small businesses and by assisting in the economic recovery of communities after disasters.” The agency offers both capital and

counseling. I was hoping for a loan but after evaluating my lofty plan, the counselor suggested, “You might want to start with simpler goals.”

At first I considered her advice. But soon I was buying more real estate, remodeling my new acquisitions, and wildly extending my credit. Everything was not my own doing. Creditors wanted my business because I hadn’t yet ruined my rating. Home Depot extended me a line of credit at for 15k. I bought lots of tools and a riding lawn mower for the Yacht House grounds. On credit. Sonny had been using a push mover so he was proud of his new sit-down mower. In the end, however, Aussie Lloyd—who steadily worked for us—mowed the grounds with the riding mower, then loaded it onto his flatbed trailer and we returned the ridiculous purchase to HD. I just didn’t have the money for such an extravagance. Besides, I was mad at Sonny. He wasn’t mowing the grounds often enough. In fact, towards the end of our stay at the Yacht House, I was maintaining the hot tubs, watering the yard, and blowing magnolia leaves off the front drive. Wilson was gone and Sonny became less and less interested in helping me out. Probably because of drugs.

### Cabins on the block

I just couldn’t resist acquiring the three cabins that came up for sale on the Yacht House block. I already had the Navigator House, so this purchase would give me most of the block. Besides, the blue cabins were on an acre with lawns and magnolia trees. They were quaint and would be the perfect addition to the Yacht House enterprise. The makings of a spa resort in Florida. I was over the moon!

I was able to get 6k from mom and dad (which I regret doing). And I convinced my partner and ex-husband to co-sign on the mortgage. This must have been into the second year.



He was reluctant at first, but it was before he completely pulled out of the Yacht House and things grew nasty between us. An added plus to the deal was that the cabins already had renters. I reasoned the cabins would pay for themselves.

One renter, Terry, was nice lady about my age, mid-forties. She was also an artist and drew a Monet like garden scene mural on her kitchen wall. We became friends and I even asked if she'd like to help me with the B&B. She drew up pictures for the brochure, but typically, nothing came of it. I fizzled out. Eventually, everything crumbled and I returned to the desert.

#### Dogs and cats

During the second year at the Yacht House, Minnie and Max had puppies which was a big event for Cecil and me. All the puppies were black. We sold four and kept three—Runyan, the runt, Biggie, a big chested large dobie, and Tuffy, also a large chested dog. I kept Tuffy because Max growled at him once and the pup yipped and hid beside me. He was just too adorable to sell. His entire life, Tuffy adored me beyond anything I've ever experienced; perhaps like a cult devotee adores his swami.



We had the ears of the three puppies cropped for \$500 each. (Minnie and Max had natural ears in part because they had parvo during the crucial time to crop the ears. Around 11 weeks.) Runyan and biggie's ears took beautifully. Tuffy's never took.

Journal entry 12-17-00

“Let me talk about my wolf puppies. Cuddled and humming in a corner, sleepy and sleeping. They are pure innocence, a joy to watch. Though messy. They are playful now at six weeks. I am outside with the three puppies. The boys and Runyan. The ‘kids.’ They are liter mates and, unless separated, will always have a liter mate bond. There are two kinds of bonds: the liter-mate and the mother-child. Cecil and I have both bonds and in all directions.”

When Don and I split up we had seven cats. They moved with him back to Night Hawk Way while I was on the road. About a year into our Yacht House partnership, Don wanted me to take the cats. His new Chinese wife was on her way and she didn’t like cats. I took the cats—a black and white tuxedo cat named Andrew and Mai Tai and Ginseng, my two Siamese seal points from Boston (Don and I had lived there a year, before we married and after I returned from Kuwait). I drove the 3000 plus miles round-trip to fetch them. Consequently, I had nine cats at the Yacht House. (the previous owner left two behind).

The Siamese had been a good part of my life and I was glad to have them back. Unfortunately, Mai Tai was 17 years old. Within weeks, he deteriorated because of kidney failure. I was distraught to lose my first Siamese cat since Thailand. I finally had the cat put down, he got so bad. His eyes weren’t big and blue anymore. They were speckled with kidney failure.

I wanted an appropriate monument for my cat and found a large three-tiered lion fountain for 2k. I put it on layaway and had our current handyman, Aussie Lloyd, build a round fountain foundation over the grave of Mai Tai. The fountain would be an asset to the Yacht House grounds, I had convinced my partner. And a monument to our cat. That idea fizzled and crashed.

Eventually I got part of my money back from the deposit for the fountain. The round foundation probably still sits in front yard, over Mai Tai's grave.

On one of his visits to the Yacht House, my business partner Don admitted his fear that I'd run off and abandon the Yacht House to its fate. Leave him in the lurch.

"Oh no, I'd never do that," I said, believing this, at the time.

Don began complaining about the projects costing him. He'd say things like, "Why would you spend 2k on a fountain for a cat?" He was probably right but he shouldn't have been so supportive and friendly in the beginning. A divorce should end the relationship—at least as far as doing projects together. We had no kids to share. No connections. The partnership and divorce decree was a big mistake.

In any event, without my partner, I couldn't keep the business afloat. In the end he no longer wanted to be in business with an extravagant and crazy ex-wife, as he saw me. His new Chinese wife didn't like him being in business with me. "She'll take an axe to your head," he told me she said. My business partner had no more dreams of a future in Florida. He was settled with a new wife on Night Hawk Way.

Although Don wanted to put the blame entirely on me, everything was not my own doing. I had enablers along the way. My ex-husband with his initial financial support built up my dreams and visions, then he backed off. Not that I blame him for wanting to move on with his life. Still, I was left in a difficult situation. He tried to pull out of the partnership by offering me the Yacht House entirely in exchange for our two properties in Arizona. A great deal for him, a terrible deal for me. By the time this exchange could occur, the whole enterprise in Florida would be in foreclosure. I saw the writing on the wall. His suggestion clinched my decision to return to the desert.

“I thought you hated Maricopa,” he stated over the phone. “I thought you had a breakdown there.”

“No, I love the ranch house and the rural desert. It’s where I want to live.”

“You’ll just end up getting it foreclosed. Like the Yacht House,” he said after I insisted I was returning to Maricopa. (he had good premonitions). Besides, there was no point in our discussing much of anything anymore. It became matter for attorneys.

There were in fact lots of reasons for vacating the Yacht House. The income from guests and renters still didn’t cover all the mortgages and our monthly living expenses. Forget remodeling projects. Now we were giving Lloyd a home depot ladder and tools to pay for his handyman work.

I never liked the subtropical humid heat. You could actually feel a front coming in. I liked the arid climate of Arizona. I also didn’t like that hurricanes passed through the panhandle every year or two. There was still damage to the docks at Sanders Beach from the previous storm. By the end of two years in Florida, it all added up—my preference was for a desert life. On my office wall I even created a mural of the Sonoran Desert. In great detail, I painted saguaros, a rattlesnake, dust devil, an ocotillo with its fiery flames, a Gila monster . . . It was an elaborate mural I never finished. We moved away before I could

Perhaps most of all it became nearly impossible to run a business under the stress and confusion of my relationship with Sonny. Drama. I had to get out of the situation. He was a tough man to be with—I’m sure I wasn’t a gem either—but I had had enough of his alcoholic and drug driven antics and stupidity and I had to get away from the exhausting emotional abuse. Yet again, I had intentions of leaving him while I moved on. At first I went so far as asking my

childhood friend, Carrol, to help me with the move. Then I changed my mind and he came with me on my scouting trip and all the moving trips back to the desert.

From my journal 5-10-01, 6 months before 9-11. "I'm moving back to Arizona. To my twenty-acre home in the Sonora desert. This has been firm in my mind for perhaps a month now. This B&B is driving me mad—as is my relationship with him. He says he's coming with me. However, I'm after peace of mind and that doesn't seem to be a part of our relationship. He tears at me rudely day after day. We tear at each other—a catalyst for going to the place that suits me most favorably. I love the Sonora desert."

I have made my direction  
And now I must go.  
I am on my way now already  
In my mind and heart —  
I must go  
I must find... PEACE OF MIND.  
I don't believe in the adage  
"Don't run from your problems."  
I believe we must know  
When it is time to  
Move on.

Journal entry: 5-19-01 "I feel so tormented now (as he and I are at stress). I have a psychological problem that has to do with him—my being with him. He plays my cords high to low. But he will not go when I am fierce with anger over the injustice of his manners toward me. i.e., he is too often rude and I am angry. 'Rude and Angry' there you are—Rudy and Andy. A stupid cycle for tarot analysis. He makes my heart palpitate, my blood boil. I cannot make him go. No, he will not go. Am I mentally ill? Brilliant? Needy?

Scouting trip towards the end of our two years at the Yacht House B&B

My ex-husband was living at night hawk. he had rented out the ranch house as a duplex to different families who didn't get along. Anyway, they had to leave when I decided to abandon a listing ship and head back to the desert. My plan was to live in one half of the ranch house and rent out the other half and the guesthouse. A sound business plan. I'd also rent out the site for a trailer hookup. Lots of plans even during the Yacht House crash. I still believed in a destiny of greatness. That manic seizure didn't go away until I was medicated and quit all my pursuits, except for Cecil. He'd never let me forget his presence

As the house of cards tumbled, I became determined to return to the desert. But before putting it up for sale, I closed the Yacht House and went on a scouting trip back to the ranch on Barnes Road. I wanted to be sure of my decision to move back to the desert SW.

We traveled the 52 hour round trip along I-10 three times. a scouting trip and two moving trips with five obedient Doberman Pinchers—Minnie, Max, and the three puppies we kept that were close to a year old at the time. On command the five dogs, all at once, jumped in the back end like disciplined soldiers, and went to their respective stations—front, back, and end of the Explorer. Very slick.

On our scouting trip from Florida to the ranch in Arizona, I wanted to meet the tenants and see if the remodeling had been completed. It had. There was new carpeting throughout the house and the uncovered cinderblock walls were all painted. The yard was cleaned up. (My ex had hired our Mexican friend, Sammy Soto, to finish the house and tidy up the place so he could rent it out.)

Yacht House guests had to wait when we went on the scouting trip. A man even called our cell phone while we were in the desert. “Why is the Yacht House closed? I need a room,” he asked. Oh well. It was a static call that cut off anyway.

I was back on stunning land in an arid climate. No dank humidity. Here were expansive views of saguaros spread throughout the hilly desert. It was not of the Gulf Coast Seashore. Around the ranch house property, the dogs ran, played, and enjoyed their freedom. (At the Yacht House, they were confined to a pen outside the back door.) I felt the freedom too. In a quiet therapeutic place. Nature’s given remedy.

We returned to Pensacola, to put the Yacht House up for sale, pack up, and return to the desert for good. I found a realtor who specialized in B&B sales. He warned me that it could take some time to find a buyer. I wasn’t concerned, I planned to leave in a few weeks regardless.

The realtor put a for sale sign by the white picket fence that surrounded the front yard of the Yacht House, facing Cyprus street and the yacht club. But only a few potential buyers came by. It wasn’t promising for a quick sale. And, as the realtor warned, the for-sale sign frightened away potential guests. (and it didn’t help that the lawn was in need of a mow.) Two elderly women who had reservations, saw the for-sale sign on Cyprus street and hurried to the Pensacola Chamber of Commerce. They had put down money to hold their reservation, and were concerned about getting a refund. Of course, I gave them a full refund even though I needed the money. It was time to bail.

## Chapter Ten: Return to the Desert

### The Sonora Desert

(from my handwritten notes 2016)



The Sonora is the hottest desert in North America. It stretches through Arizona, California, and Sonora and Baja Mexico. Plants thrive in the Sonora, despite summer's blazing heat and the cold nights of winter. The saguaro—the mainstay of the Sonora—often “nests” under a desert pod tree for warmth in winter and shade in summer. Eventually, the saguaro replaces the tree. Saguaros are slow growing and can live more than one-hundred-fifty years and reach over forty-feet tall. When I lived in Phoenix with my first husband, we planted a six-foot saguaro in our front yard. After about ten years, it was over twelve feet tall with emerging arms. That was over twenty years ago. I imagine the arms of that suburban plant are fully formed now. Saguaros hoard water, especially a plump, abundantly watered suburban saguaro.

Cholla, barrel, hedgehog and prickly pear cacti thrive in the Sonora, along with tiny pin cushions lodged into rocks, and lanky green ocotillos with branches ten to twenty-feet tall. When in bloom, red flaming blossoms grow at the tips. You have to be careful when venturing near the cholla's barbed spines. The thorny joints jump from the plant, like a magnet to iron. The worst is the teddy bear or jumping cholla. Their fish hook barbs are impossible to dislodge.

The Sonoran trees are much smaller and daintier than the bombastic evergreen and deciduous trees of the Pacific Northwest where I grew up. In the Sonora are trees with edible pods. The green barked paloverde grows on foothills and along washes as scrub like the mesquite



and the desert willow. In the spring paloverdes adorn the desert with yellow blossoms abuzz with pollenating bees.

The thorny ironwood has soft lavender-gray blossoms and lives almost exclusively in the Sonora Desert. It is the slowest growing and the tallest of the desert pod trees. It's also considered endangered because of its excessive use as firewood, mostly in Mexico, and in Mexican handicrafts. My mother has an ironwood dolphin on one of her knickknack shelves. Ironwood bark is rough and crusty and the tree grows twisted and gnarly, as if some kind of desert troll lives inside. Even an ironwood log lying in the desert is worth putting out on display in the front yard.

The mesquite is the most common pod tree in the southwest and is found as far as Mesquite, Texas. My favorite desert tree is the velvety mesquite with its dark green and lacy leaves. There are mesquite seedlings in my front yard, volunteers that I'm helping along. With plenty of water, their dainty greenness unfurls quite fast. I have velvet mesquites in my back yard. They don't really blossom like the paloverdes and ironwoods, but there are lots of fallen pods in the summer. My goats bleat for the mesquite pods I throw them every morning. Near the end of the month when money is short, I let the goats out in the back yard to clean up the pods on the ground. I also collect mesquite pods, roast them, and grind them in a blender then add the sifted powder to my coffee drink. I understand it's a superfood and a traditional food of the native O'odham.

### Back to the story

My mind was a dust devil spinning in the stratosphere near the end of my stay at the Yacht House. I took out lots of credit to pay for the several U-Haul trips back to Maricopa. No

matter, I was bound for the promised land. (In the end I had so much credit card debt, and no income, that I let it all lapse and started getting collection letters from perhaps 10 agencies: Home Depot, Citibank, Chase, Sam's Club, Walmart, Costco, to name a few. Then calls from collection agencies. Lawyers. Service of process papers for foreclosures: The consequence of uncontrolled mania and impulsive consumerism.

In a U-Haul truck we pulled the Explorer with the five Dobermans. The trip took two days. We drove past places in Louisiana called Atchafalaya Swamp Freeway, over an 18.2-mile bridge across a vast river basin swamp, the largest in the US. Then through a lot of Texas. Fort Stockton, Pecos County, and El Paso. After 16 hours or so on I-10, we'd find a campground or pull over at the nearest rest area, usually in Texas, and sleep in the open air by a picnic table with five Dobermans stationed around us. Obedient watch dogs. Jackals of Afertiti. I had no fear of an intruder during these nights.

On the last trip back to the desert, when we were passing through Tucson, I told Sonny to get out of my car. Hit the road. Good luck to you, brother man. I may have caught him smoking crack. Don't remember. Just know I wanted him to go. And this time, I wouldn't collect him back. But Sonny wouldn't go. He probably knew I really would abandon him to his fate. He stayed with me. Is with me now. The time we've spent together after returning to the desert has been as difficult and challenging as the Yacht House years. Two dreamers. An anger prone addict and a manic-depressive woman with multiple avatars and a mind that never quits.

#### At Barnes Road for a year

I was elated to be back in my beautiful hacienda in the Sonora. Away from humidity, dankness, hurricanes, and a sinking ship in Florida. Definitely far away. But a lot went on, in my

mind and in my situation. My ex-husband filed bankruptcy and stopped paying alimony. I barely eked out survival, but God always provided. Manna from Heaven. Deus ex Machina?

After we moved in at Barnes Road, Don quit paying the mortgage. At the same time, I filed for VA disability compensation. I was beginning to recognize my own mental health dilemma—whatever that meant. It occurred to me while Sonny was back in Florida collecting rent and holding an estate sale (I had sent him there to take of matters), that something wasn't quite right with my head. Neurons misfired deficient serotonin and dopamine. I had returned to the desert broken, with an emotionally charged man who often abused my frailties. It wasn't easy to forge ahead but I persevered. Me, the rainy-day optimist. A trait I inherited from Mom. Look on the bright side of life. It's not quite same thing as seeing through "rose colored glasses" because being positive is not necessarily delusional. My Mom had a gloriously blessed life, (is having one now) rather like my grandmother and great grandmother. They had hardships, but I doubt they suffered from mental delusions. Like I do. They never went through all the eccentric odysseys I've been through. They were steadfast, resourceful, and hardworking women. Happy with life. And so am I really. I have the gene.

I think at 60, at least for me, you can look back at your life as though it were a product. A mechanism that has a lifetime span. It putters and spits, encounters lots of obstacles, like the traveler soul on his way to heaven, to the Circumpolar stars, in Egyptian cosmology. But it's an interesting life. My point. Why be gloomy and sad even in the worst of times. Live life sunny side up. I think that's why most of my avatars were very spiritual, calm, and well centered beings.

I decorated the ranch house rooms with my world travel decor. Feng shui. I draped saris over the cinderblock partition between the kitchen and living room. Set out all my Hindu and

Buddhist statues of deities and avatars collected during my world travels (Krishna and Nataraja from India, the goddess Tara from Nepal, Guanyin from China, my wooden Buddha from Bali . . .) And I amply furnished my home with sofas, beds with spreads and shams, decorative nightstands, dressers, hand painted coffee tables—all from the Yacht House.

When my parents came to visit—along with my niece Mary Beth—my rooms were like a bed and breakfast. It was a nice family visit in my adorned ranch house. During their stay, my Mom and niece really loved on my Doberman Max. He was their baby. Always had been. Beth drove up to northern Phoenix with me to buy the little red dobie pup and my mom likes telling the story of how, when we first brought Max home, the puppy whimpered for his dam and mom held him over her shoulder, patted him, and he calmed down. Neither Mom or Max ever forgot the comfort of that moment.

I felt lucky, privileged really. I was where I wanted to be. In familiar land. Family around. But all was not roses and sentiment on that visit from my family. One afternoon, while we were outside on the desert grounds, possibly looking at the colorful rocks I had collected from Vekol's wash, I snapped. As I had done when a child—threw tantrums that couldn't be helped. An organic misfire in front of Mom, Dad, Mary Beth, and Cecil. I took a hoe and broke the windows of an old travel trailer I was fixing up—making crazy artistic adjustments to the interior. (I bought the trailer for \$500 and planned to rent it out after “fixing” it up. It was parked near the holding tank, at the site Sammy Soto hooked up with electricity, water and a septic tank. I probably knew The project would fizzle out anyway. As Shakespeare would have me say, “There's method in my madness.”) My dad was so distraught over my outburst, everyone left the next day. He was ill from Parkinson's and couldn't take a lot of stress. I would've felt bad about this, but I was too emotionally (mentally) traumatized to care about my actions. “Up and then

I'm down . . . still I keep on searching for those things I never found" comes from one of my earliest poems that I wrote while AWOL from the Army, in Sitges, Spain.

I later told a VA psychiatrist about the incident and suggested it happened because of my ill-mannered boyfriend on drugs. Also, I was having money problems. I had no job and didn't really think about getting one. (And Cecil didn't work. He was a wheeler dealer. A homeless hustler, rustler of the old west. He had only worked for me and I was no longer hiring him for the odd job. That ended long ago, with the romance.) I also faced an ongoing lawsuit from Don Ellis with court appearances. He seemed almost desperate to have me pay for the situation he ended up in and he didn't think I deserved any alimony. Very stressful. On top of it all, a service processor for the Yacht House foreclosure served me at the front drive on Barnes Road. (The Dobermans were on it and I had to call them back). I couldn't avoid him. The bank was suing for 70k from me and Don because Florida, unlike Arizona, allows the lender to sue the defaulter.

The VA psychiatrist agreed that my tantrum probably hinged on problems with my boyfriend, "There are lots of other fish in the sea," she advised. She also suggested that when I was a child, my mother—who had worked—simply hadn't had the time to devote to a special needs child who threw tantrums and pouted. I never got the attention I must have craved. I was a manic child, an affliction undiagnosed at that time. (1950's–70's) No meds to calm my childhood mania and depression. My parents took me to a child psychologist at the University of Portland, a Mr. Stevens. To no avail. Mr. Stevens made some very bad suggestions. He said that when I **throw a tantrum to put me in the bathroom and throw glasses of water on me. My mother followed this advice and I'd simply ripped off my clothes as she traumatized me with her water method of punishment. In any event, everyone remained oblivious as to what caused my fits of displeasure. Maybe it was a bit of indifference on the part of my parents. They**

**never got very involved with my life, my academics, my goals. But that's all water under the bridge. They were, after all, loving parents who provided stability and interesting camping ventures. After I got out of the Army, I asked my mother about Mr. Stevens and, for the first time, she told me he had said that I was brilliant. Thanks Mom. I could have heard that little tidbit of information when I was a child, distraught in school, thinking I wasn't very smart.**

The story tumbles and I lose focus. 6-29-16

Medical marijuana is a gift from God for people like me and Cecil. It does two things for me: puts my focus on my literary works and softens my aches and pains. Back in 2001-3, when I was the avatar Afertiti writing the ancient Egypt part of my novel "Ten Years Past Cairo," I smoked a joint before writing, early in the morning. It helped me write then, as it does now. Helped me search through the patterns of my mind and channel manic energy.

Patterns in My Mind (Thailand 8-28-84)

Seldom enough do I watch the setting sun.

Today I've arrived,  
Where the distant sea,  
Meets a muddy marsh,  
Stretching to me,  
And beyond me –  
All around me.

I've arrived in time to view,  
The glowing yellow sun,  
Bounce light  
off Minute waves –

Patterns in my mind.

Swallows are black,  
They clutter the sky, at times,  
Like flying ashes from a  
Newspaper bonfire –  
Like patterns in my mind.

A Kite glides the air,  
Majestically,  
Unlike the swallows.  
I'm not sure  
For what they search –  
But he knows  
The patterns in my mind.

And cirrus clouds wisp  
Soft and mellow –  
A creamy subtle yellow.  
They are exaggerated  
Reflections of the  
Minute waves.

The sun takes a while to set,  
When you arrive at full glow.  
But when it goes  
It quickly leaves  
a fading past.

They go to sleep a while  
These patterns in my mind.

Today was a Good mood day. We got \$50 from title loan company and went to Aquarius for \$10 free play plus a few dollars. First, of course, we went to the Nevada dispensary across from the Colorado Bell. After no luck at the casino, we went home and watched the Young and the Restless, TV on demand. Cecil made tostadas. I boiled corn on the cob. We had a good day. The kind I live for. Humor is always a part of our good mood interaction. That and very few words from me.

Yesterday was a bad day. We were out of money and medical marijuana and couldn't get any advance from our current title loan. We were both craving marijuana to help ease the day along. What happened yesterday was bad moods. Cecil's bad moods are caustic. And when he's hungry or jonesing for a joint of medical marijuana, or just plain mean natured and ornery, he can bring out the worst of me.

I'm generally a tolerant person. Que sera sera. Status quo. But even I, subdued by medications, have a breaking point where I unleash. Maybe not with as much venom as Athena the Hun. But I did get upset with his bad mood. Don't remember much about it. What he was yapping about? too hot, nothing to eat, no money, no ganja. But I let loose and said I moved here (to Golden Valley) to get away from him. To get on with my life. And he tagged along. He was a burden. God I was pissed.

Then he compared me to the one-armed vixen he'd slept with. I didn't explode, although I didn't like it. I had the presence of mind to know it was a losing battle to spar with my husband. I've known him nearly 20 years. I have hated him and wished him gone. I have loved him like no other.



But he goes too far with his bad mood, far enough to upset me. In the end, I pull back and try to get a night's sleep or stay in bed reading, away from him. Otherwise, he himself stays in bed all day when he's in a bad mood. When in a good mood he's pumped up and anxious to get to the casinos. Win the bet. Get nine quick hits. He feels lucky. He's too positive at times. Wearing rose colored glasses. This is what I mean when I say there's a difference between veiled glasses (double poor vision) and sunny side up. Foragers vs. pure hearted people who follow the right path.

### Back to the year at Barnes Road

I traded the Explorer for a 10k blue GMC pickup truck. Impulse buying—houses, horses, and the pickup truck. Buying the first thing I see or am shown. Is this a cycle in the Wheel of Dharma or a parable in the teachings of Jesus?

We were on a trip to the Tucson VA when the Explorer gave out. AAA towed us to a Ford dealership in Tucson. Their service center said it was the transmission. Instead of paying 3k to fix the problem, I elected to put 2k down, lose the Explorer for the truck, and take out a loan of \$200 a month. The salesman really wanted us to make this deal. I'm sure the Explorer was worth more than the truck. But I needed transportation then and there, to get back home to Maricopa. Besides, I needed a pickup to haul dog food and hay for the goats and horses. I made the brilliant deal. The not so brilliant impulsive decision. Back in Maricopa, Sonny remarked to a friend what a bad deal I'd made. "Need a hammer now, you'll pay \$50 on the spot for one," the elderly friend Old Jim spun his rural wisdom.

Nevertheless, we had that truck for a few years. Eventually, my life became so ridiculous, I stopped making payments. They came to repossess it but Cecil had already swung a deal on it,

with his Mexican buddy Sammy Soto and the truck was already gone when the repo man came.  
My credit score spiraled down.

22 meters  
down I go  
slowly down.

Into fumes, (effluvium, miasma –  
Like high school wine made  
From Welch's grape drink)  
drenching walls  
slowly  
I go down.

Mom came to the rescue, yet again. God bless moms. She gave me her Windstar van when she bought a Honda CR-V SUV. Then, a few years later in 2009, she bought me a Ford ranger truck for 20k. (her brother had left her money from his estate. He was a millionaire and retired engineer from Boeing. And Mom did well in her retirement planning with my dad. She's had a very blessed life, both she and I often say.)

Cecil has probably gone through 30 cars since Don and I bought him that \$500 car. Since he lived in the yellow Toyota Celica under mesquite scrub across from Melvina's place. He's had a Mercedes, Jaguars, Cadillacs, an El Camino, Corvette, 05 Malibu, a Volkswagen Beetle, a Grand Marquis . . . They're old cars and always in need of repair. Not long after acquiring one, he finds a better deal and makes a trade. He likes classics and knows a lot about them. Rims, Dayton wire wheels, are equally important to him. So is an excellent stereo system to play his country classics or Tupac and Biggie Big rap.

## Outings into the desert

When we first returned, Cecil and I drove in the desert with the five Dobermans nearly every day. After writing about Egypt or drawing Egyptian pictures and hieroglyphs, or fixing up the guesthouse, or the old travel trailer, I anticipated our treks into the raw terrain when the heat of the day softened. We often drove from our property up the powerline easement or to Vekol's Wash, the main artery of the valley.

Max and the three big-chested Dobermans—Minnie, Biggie, and Tuffy—had doggie back packs. Runyan was too little. Along the wash were colorful and interesting rocks—rustic red, pinkish, a few grays and greens. The rocks had tumbled from the volcanic hills down the channel, during the raging cascades of a monsoon storm. Many rocks had a brown black coating called desert varnish.

We'd put a few rocks in the Dobermans' backpacks to carry to the car. Then we'd sit a while at the wash, under a mesquite, and smoke a j-roll. The dogs lie around us, at rest. Nothing but tranquility and the fresh therapeutic scent of desert air. I was home again and there was no place else I'd rather be.

Sometimes we'd hike to remote places as the dogs freely scouting about. We encountered an old watering hole for cattle and a remote acreage of a hoarder's haven with piles and piles of wood and metal junk. In a few different places we found Hohokam Indian petroglyphs of animals, people, dust devil spirals, circles and geometric shapes probably of astronomical significance. The Hohokam were early Native American farmers who lived in the desert SW two millennia ago until the time of Columbus. (the time span of the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, China). Throughout southern Arizona, they pecked images onto the stone hillsides. (like the monks painted Buddhist frescos on grotto walls). Hohokam is a Pima word for "those who have

vanished.” Oral traditions believe that the Tohono O’odham descended from the Hohokam. They venerate their ancestors and see the petroglyphs as spiritual etchings, echoes of past voices on hallowed ground--ancestors who found sanctity in the Sonoran desert.

We went tent camping during the first two years we were back, especially during our time at Barnes Road. I craved the desert, with a calmer Cecil and my five watch dogs. My guardian jackals. I was back to nature, the great outdoors, back to the base of existence. This meant something to a wildly manic-depressive psyche. I’m realizing now.

Besides, thirteen years ago I still had a camping side to me. My parents and grandparents took us camping nearly every weekend during the Oregon summers--the Pacific beach, Cascade Mountain lakes. This part of my childhood was enchanting. And then throughout my twenties, thirties, and forties I went hiking, backpacking, and camping. My fifties was a time of stupor. and now my sixties is entirely a different age, where camping is out of the question. My glimpse of scenery now happens on our drive through the Black Mountains down to the Colorado River casinos.

On one outing into the raw Sonora we camped on BLM land in that blue GMC truck--not far from petroglyphs on a hillside of saguaros, ocotillos, a few barrels, and lots of volcanic rocks with desert varnish. With us were Cameron and Cecil’s nephew, KeeKee. He too was half black. Nice looking young men, stylish and polite. A pleasure to have them along--three men and five Dobermans to protect my wilderness camp.

That afternoon, while the men were probably target shooting, I explored the desert with my dobies. Jackals of Afertiti. I loved doing that. Walking in the desert with my dogs. At camp that night, Cecil, Cameron, and KeeKee were enjoying one another’s company around the campfire. Father son, uncle nephew. Cecil’s nephew called him Unk or Sonny (I was calling him

Cecil by this time). Kinship. Quality family time among men. A secret society. Probably something a woman can only hope to know. They were by Kee Kee's car, away from the blue GMC pickup where I had made my bed. I retired early, as was usual for me.

I lay in the truck bed under the stars feeling a soothing breeze and breathing the fresh arid air. Everything was fine until at some point I suddenly became agitated. Why was Cecil not in the bed of the truck? In some manic way I thought he should be with me. Always me. Maybe the kinfolk were drinking beer and smoking marijuana—without me. Sometimes my mind just didn't work right and I had impulsive responses.

What I remember is bounding up from the truck bed, raging at Cecil. Yelling profanities. I demanded he return to bed with me. I raged shamefully calling him a cunt, MF and the N word. His son and nephew were within hearing range. And they are both black. But they remained quiet during my outburst. They probably thought I was drunk. I wasn't. I was perfectly sober. Athena the Hun had awoken.

In the confusion I remember Cecil saying, "I'd better go take care of her before she hurts herself or someone else." (did this wrangler suspect I was mentally deranged?)

I stormed into the desert. Cecil followed to look after me. Don't remember how I calmed down, what pacified Athena's rage. But the camp was a family outing into my holy ground. And I was having a good time. So why would I lash out at Cecil like I did? Was it due to some mentally chaotic jealousy issues. Manic possessiveness. He was no longer my charge. But this is psychology and who knows what drives such madness? A pure emotional breakdown. A twisted spasm.

Sonny went back to Florida before 9-11

Before leaving the Yacht House we had scrambled to get renters for the Navigator House and the cabins. (some of the renters had left). It was a source of income, even though the mortgages consumed most of it. I got a REMAX realtor, Paige, to manage the properties and, in the end, try to sell them. No point in keeping them when I'd probably never return to Florida. I was where I belonged. At home in the desert.

Before the CAAI flight to Chungking— 1983

If death you know,  
I've come to meet,  
Before my days aspire –  
Please—settle down,  
And sit with me,  
And let's let life retire.

Away from you,  
I've gone to stay,  
But as I write this poem –  
I tell you all of Modern Times,  
On Earth I made my home.

A few weeks after we were back in the desert, Cecil took a bus to Florida. (he may have done this twice). His mission was to collect the rent money, check on all the properties, and hold an estate sale to sell the hot tubs, armoires, beds, kitchen appliances, and other accessories I'd left behind. Don had quit paying my alimony and I needed money and no buyers had been found for the Yacht House. The 3K a month mortgage hadn't been paid. The Yacht House was doomed. (All my Florida real-estate was doomed to foreclose. The rent money wasn't enough to cover the mortgages. It was a quagmire quandary, the story of my life.)

While Cecil was in Florida, Paige the REMAX realtor called me to report that “my drunken boyfriend was trying to collect rent.” As if I’d be shocked he was intoxicated. Despite being drunk, or doing whatever it is he does on the loose, Cecil/Sonny succeeded to collect the rent and hold the estate sale. He came home with over \$2000. That was pretty good for my Arizonan wrangler. This was a few days before 9-11, when my world suddenly seemed very small and unengaged.

On the morning of 9-11, I failed to turn on the TV news, for some reason. I almost always had it on in the mornings. Consequently, I heard about the planes flying into the World Trade Towers after the many people, police and firemen had died when the towers crumbled. I heard the news on the car radio on the way to Costco in Phoenix. We still did our shopping that day, although the attack left me as stunned as everyone else in the nation. In the world. It was one more bullet in my discombobulated life. My mind was already a dust devil spinning in the stratosphere. But I’ve already said that. I was stressed, depressed, manic. Then the terrorist attack happened. It’s no wonder I slipped into avatars.

The night of 9-11 we slept on the roof of the west side addition. Except during monsoons, we had been sleeping there that summer. The ancient Egyptians slept on the rooves of their two-story mudbrick houses in the cooling breezes coming from the Nile or off the Sahara desert. People of the deserts throughout the world sleep on their rooves. Anyway, in the dark, I’d teeter up a ladder to where it was cool and pleasant. We were just two cowboys sleeping under the stars (although we had a small TV and a radio with us.) I knew most of the Constellations—Scorpius, Sagittarius, always the dippers among the never setting northern stars. The circumpolar stars. The place of heaven for ancient Egyptians. On full moon nights the white fairy dust of moonbeams covered the quiet desert. Like a fresh powdering of snow.

It was different the night of 9-11. The Earth had quaked. But we went on with our routine of sleeping on the roof. We listened to Radio Delilah—a Christian woman who embraces nice things like love and faith. During her show, callers relate their stories—relationship issues, family problems, sometimes good sentiments and then Delilah selected an appropriate song. On 9-11 she was very gentle and soft. As soothing a voice as could be on such a night. Though I don't remember her words or the songs, she saw me through that dreadful night. Thank you Delilah.

Due to a doomsday fear from the terrorist act, I thought of being a survivalist. (another manic seizure). In that fervor, I stock piled dry goods and water and, among other things, bought a small dc television we could take to the desert and plug into the car lighter. If Armageddon erupted, we'd have a connection to the news.

One evening in October 2001, while camping near the Hohokam petroglyphs, we watched the world series on the dc tv with the dogs around us. We were back in the desert. I don't remember any argument or drug use that night. We slept in a two-person tent from REI. Man, dogs, and me, abed at camp. A good thing.

I'm not a sports fanatic, like my parents and siblings, (another reason I was kind of the odd one in the family, the middle child) but Arizona's team had made it to the world series and everyone in the country felt patriotic because of 9-11. Baseball is a national pastime—part of America's soul, I guess—and we'd been attacked. The 2001 world series was supposedly one of the best games ever played. I haven't a clue as to why. Or care. It was probably the most patriotic game ever played. The whole series of seven games was emotionally charged. The Yankees verses our own Diamond Backs. Randy Johnson, Curt Schilling. Mayor Rudy Giuliani was perhaps at each game rooting for the Yankees, his home team. NYC. Ground Zero. Extremely patriotic. And President Bush pitched the first ball during the third game. At one game, don't



remember which, four USAF F-22 Raptor stealth fighters flew over the stadium, in formation. Then, outdoing even the blue angels over the yacht house, a Northrop B-2 Stealth Bomber flew overhead like a futuristic triangular alien airship that took up half the sky (at least in my mind). It was a most awesome sight. Cecil and I watched all this, out in the desert.

### Cowboy Ken and Stevie and the Police

Shortly after returning to the desert in the summer of 2001, I hired Cowboy Ken, “Tennessee” our nearest neighbor, to fix the roof of the guesthouse. The ceiling in one room leaked after a monsoon storm. I had been manically working at the guesthouse, painting a huge saguaro on the kitchen floor, painting floors like Mexican Saltillo tiles, caulking walls and window sills, building a brick wall in the kitchen, using bricks I found piled in the desert left over from the old mafia seller. I was Jack of all trades, yet again. Was there no end to it? No. I think not.

In a pristine and new doublewide on 20 acres next to our land, Ken lived with his 60-year-old wife Stevie and she became a sort of friend to me. She knew of my mental health issues, or at least my pursuits with the VA. Ken was a veteran too and used the VA in Tucson.

Ken often hired Cecil as his helper and Stevie and I talked together here and there while the men were at work. Then, one night, a wild incident happened. That day, Cecil had helped Ken with roof repairs after monsoon storms. They had toiled all day in the hot sun and we were gathered at Ken and Stevie’s doublewide for beers, barbequed chicken, and comradery of the rural kind. This was before Cecil quit drinking like an alcoholic suckermouth fish.

Matters soon got out of hand, although I don’t remember how. We were out in the desert on their acreage. Sonny was screaming angrily; Stevie was screaming back at him. Somebody

called someone else psychotic. Was it me? Previously, I had confided in Stevie that Sonny took advantage of my good nature. I'm guessing it all came out that night--four drunken people. Hicks rabble rousing. Finally, Stevie called the police.

The police arrived and asked Stevie if she wanted Cecil to go to jail for disturbance. She asked my opinion, but I was numb about the matter. In cuffs, they hauled off Cecil. I stayed with Ken and Stevie an hour or two discussing my predicament with the rascal wrangler. I would kick him out, once and for all, I concluded. I felt determined, empowered, when I was on my way back home.

That night, however, I dreamed about my man in peril. I had to rescue him. I got up early and drove to the Florence jail to fetch him. It was about a hundred miles roundtrip, on the other side of Pinal County. He came out of jail furious at me and reluctant to come home. He blamed me for the whole incident, as usual. But I convinced him to get in the car.

Stevie dropped charges against Cecil but he held this incident against me throughout the years—he swore he had a domestic violence charge on his record because of me. Which wasn't even true. Additionally, he didn't want me to have any friends like Stevie. He feared I'd grumble about him and stir up more trouble. He may have been right. (The man always tried to blame me, gaslight me, and make me feel guilty. There was no end to this pattern until I achieved clarity of mind and learned to completely disengage from his caustic, psychotic behavior. All along, through the years, it wasn't my mental health issues causing all the problems, I've concluded. It was him traumatizing me like my parents and older brother had traumatized me when I was a small child. I suffered from childhood PTSD and this is why the VA awarded me disability compensation. What a cycle. Life.)

No matter, I wasn't in any condition to make or have friends. I stayed home except for errands to stores or VA appointments. Or visits to my mother's place in Bullhead City, across the state, in another desert. Anyway, how do you introduce a wrangler drughead hustler, as your boyfriend to your Buddhist and Unitarian friends? New friends were impossible to make and old friends were hard to keep after a divorce from a good respectable man. Friends went by the wayside, fizzled away while my life revolved around this man who ravished my heart and turned my world upside down.

(Poem I wrote in China, 1983)

If I could only find my friend  
Invite him up for tea  
We'd talk about a journey's end  
And what was meant to be

But all my friends have gone away  
By time or distance take  
(I really can't remember now  
what kind of tea to make).

In all, I only could enhance,  
To free my errant fire,  
Through all my self-indulgence  
I forgot a friend's desire.

And now has passed from arcane whim  
To a home where youth is old.  
I sit a while to think of him,  
One more story never told.

Things became difficult for me. I couldn't use my Schmidt Cassegrain telescope. Forgot how or didn't have the patience to figure it out. And I could no longer write to pen pals around the world, keep up with Arastar Internet. Just didn't have it in me. Besides I've learned, often the hard way, friends don't understand mental health issues. Not many people do. How can a perfectly operating person suddenly be mentally challenged? No matter. Cecil in all his tomfoolery, deals and flourished tales, became my only friend. And he's so vitriolic, a quagmire quandary.

(from my handwritten version of this story. circa May 2016)

Soon after I moved back to Barnes Road, the divorce settlement became a long-drawn-out process (like a short sale on a house). Back in Pensacola, to kick it along, I had hired a lawyer. After returning to the desert, I hired another one in Tempe. A very good attorney. He worked for me a year or two. I wanted to secure my rights as a disabled spouse who had never worked during the thirteen-year marriage. Never really worked since the Army, except for English teaching jobs overseas. But my mental state didn't matter because the decree was chiseled in stone. That's what my Tempe attorney had to work with. He was clever enough to win my side and I got some money (they ruled against Don's claim that the down payment for the Navigator House, 20K, was my alimony).

During the court sessions, there were unpleasant encounters with my ex and his new Chinese wife. They were very sided against me, but my case was stronger. I was the enemy and they hated me, laughed at me during court, or at least when our GMC truck pattered and spit as I pulled into the courthouse parking lot. Don even wrote a scathing letter to my Tempe attorney railing about how I had caused harm to him and his properties. He even claimed I had committed

fraud because I had put his name down as my husband on a credit card application. The creditors called him. I didn't remember doing this, and if I did, he could've still been my husband. His stupid letter had been uselessly sent to my attorney. I should've hired a good divorce lawyer from the beginning and, as Cecil's said, "took Don to the cleaners." I would've ended up with a lot more assets than I did. But I was a creative divorce decree writer. A manic-depressive woman with fits of delusion.

On top of everything else, Don filed a court motion that compelled me to sit for six hours in a deposition under the scrutinizing questions of his attorney. Very invasive on my life. "Why aren't you working? What was your breakdown? Bipolar people work . . ." A stupid waste of time. But Don cleverly used up my savings by forcing me to pay attorney fees.

Unfortunately for me, Don also weaseled out of making the court ordered \$900 a month alimony payments. He wanted absolutely nothing to do with me. He disappeared from Intel where my alimony was garnished from his salary. I couldn't pay my attorney to hunt him down. I lost out on some assets that rightfully belonged to me—stock options, alimony, probably hidden offshore accounts. (Several years later, however, I did track the weasel down on the internet. I found him working at Grand Canyon College and I went to the courthouse in Phoenix and filed a new request to have his wages garnished. I bet he was surprised to find nine-hundred a month taken from his paycheck!)

### Barnes Road and Night Hawk up for sale

When I returned to the desert, Don and I were still joint owners of about a million dollars' worth of real estate: the properties in Florida along with Night Hawk Way and Barnes Road in Arizona. That would all change because of foreclosures and forced sales.

In time, the ranch became just another sinking ship because the mortgage wasn't paid. I tried to find renters for the guesthouse and duplex. But it didn't happen fast enough. I wasn't especially organized at this time. I had too many avatars and grandiose notions. But at least I saw the writing on the wall, again. I got a realtor and put the ranch up for sale.

Weeks went by and I heard nothing from the realtor or from Don. My ex of course knew about the realtor, he was joint owner. And the realtor knew about him. Unfortunately, when she found buyers, she contacted Don, not me. Perhaps she figured the man was the one to tell. Don't know. Nobody told me so I didn't know about the buyers until it was too late. I had no job, no alimony, so I asked Cecil to make deals on the fencing, fans, and anything else of value at the ranch house. I was sure the ranch was about to foreclose. *Déjà vu*. When the buyers saw the house had been stripped of things, they wanted to renegotiate the deal for less money. But it was too late. There was no more time for renegotiating. The bank was ready to foreclose on the property.

Everything is not of my own doing. If only I had been told about the buyers in a timely manner, Cecil wouldn't have sold things from the house and I would've earned money from the sale. Yet again, Don blamed me alone for the foreclosure. He believed it was entirely my fault.

Fortunately, I still jointly owned Night Hawk where my ex lived with his Chinese wife. But I couldn't get Don to buy me out. My Tempe attorney worked his magic. By court order, my ex and his wife were forced to move from Night Hawk so the house could be put up for sale. I got the money from the sale, don't recall how much. But it helped me through difficult times and I bet my ex-spouse and his new bride were livid.

I am reclining now, having thoughts about my past and present while trying to tame what makes me manic and foolish. During my life I've made lots of thoughtless choices (lack of mindfulness). After I moved to the rural desert in 1998, my choices were even more foolish than average. Was I out of my mind when I got together with Cecil/Sonny? Was he one of my foolish foolish follies? Could I even write these words if our paths hadn't crossed? Is he my inspiration, my poem of the desert? The following poem was probably written at the Yacht House.

From the shadows of this word  
Appeared my inspiration  
As the spirits laughed with joy  
For we all had waited a long time.

But there is a twist, an edge –  
When inspiration comes.

It–inspiration–is not an easy thing.  
No oh no  
With it comes betrayal and loneliness.

We, after all, every one of us all,  
are from the shadows of this world.  
And for within these shadows lies  
“the heart awaiting”  
To be pierced, awaiting to laugh  
A great laugh  
Waiting to be loved  
For a long long time.

### Back to the story: the Move to Candlelight Road

While the ranch was up for sale, I took my retirement money from Intel (thirteen years of marriage to an Intel employee—about 75 grand) and bought 3.3 acres on Candlelight Road, not far from Barnes. The property was entirely enclosed with cyclone fencing and had a singlewide trailer within a fenced-in front and back yard, a covered workshop fenced-in, and a quality playground equipment made of sturdy pipe (swings, teeter totter, monkey bars. The previous owner had been a fencer and built the playground equipment as well as put in the fencing). Beside the wash that ran through the property was a large fenced in area with three covered corrals and a chicken coop, all in good shape. Perfect for animals. Best of all, the property had beautiful vistas in all directions of volcanic hills with saguaro, ocotillo, and barrels et al. and not a neighbor's voice or clamor to be heard.

I admit the property was the first one the realtor showed me. Impulse buying again. I practically made the deal on the spot--50k of my retirement money. What a deal! I was blessed and fortunate to have a new desert home. A place to live. "People like you end up homeless," my mother had said, in all her wisdom, after I told her I was mentally disabled and applying for VA compensation. That may have been during her visit to the ranch, when I had an outburst.

My VA claim stated that I had a preexisting condition, PTSD, that was exacerbated by my stint in the military. For support letters concerning my mental health as a child I asked my mom and sister. I also asked my ex-husband don (there must have been a thread of communication between us, before total ill will occurred), and my high school chum and Army buddy Kathi. "But Teri, you don't fit the profile," I remember her saying. But I convinced her she could tell the VA how, while visiting me at my base in Darmstadt, Germany, she had



personally witnessed rampant drug use among the troops. An out-of-control environment. Where I lost control of myself, my very young susceptible manic self.

Barnes Road, where we were living at the time, still had no phone lines. Tenants were still living in the single wide trailer at Candlelight Road, so I had a phone line installed at the covered workshop in the far corner of the property. This is where I called my friend Carrol and asked if she could support my claim. After all, she had been in the military herself, the Navy, and a few times she had mentioned she thought something was wrong with me. And we had been friends since before kindergarten. I assumed I could rely on her support.

Previously, at the Yacht House, I had called her from time to time and complained about my boyfriend's poor behavior. Cecil was a liability. I couldn't run a business with all the drama. (dharma or karma). She called him a leech and a con. "get rid of him," she'd say.

Back at Candlelight, on the phone in the workshop, Carrol turned on me and it became a surreal, one-sided conversation. Carrol was furious with me for changing my mind back at the Yacht House, after I had asked for her help. Do I blame her? She had bought a nonrefundable airline ticket to Pensacola. Then, when the time to move neared, I told her my boyfriend was helping me after all and I wouldn't need her help. Consequently, she lost money on the air ticket.

"You almost caused me a divorce," she claimed during the phone call. (she married at 40, and I had been her matron of honor. But that was when I was married to Don, the engineer, and friends respected me. After I hooked up with Sonny, they didn't. How can you respect what appears to be bad karma.)

"And, I don't like anything New Age," Carrol also proclaimed. She was an avid Christian and I had sent her and Kathi letters that included a list of the books I had written and intended to write (a manic effort). Two of my intended books were spiritual. I suggested they could go to the

New Age market. (Wolf spirit—about my Dobermans, and the Man from Sacaton—a native American and the spirit of a bear.) My childhood friend took great offense at this. My only intent was to share my endeavors with my two best friends. Stupid idea, I guess.

Then she said the clincher, “No. I won’t write you a letter because you’re taking advantage of the system just like you took advantage of Don.”

I was stunned, having had no idea she felt this way about me when I made the call. In all probability she had called Don to bare her concerns about me. I was, after all, out of my head. Don hated me and he probably influenced her, saying I took advantage of him at the Yacht House. I guess he felt he should’ve gotten off free in the divorce. Too bad I didn’t heed Cecil’s words and “take him to the cleaners.” Then Carrol might’ve had some leverage for her anger towards me. And the thing is, really, Carrol had met Don only once before and she and I had been friends since early childhood. Yet, she took his side. Maybe because he’s a man. I don’t know. But it seemed unfair.

I told Carrol I had to end the conversation and hung up. After the rebuff, I scratched her name and address from my journal, address book, and off the computer. Fair weather friends aren’t needed. That’s what happens to people as they age and become increasingly subjected to a disabling and stigmatized condition. They lose friends along the way.

Got a well, got my VA compensation.

“a spring of water welling up to eternal life”

The first few months we lived on Candlelight Road, Cecil hauled water to our holding tank from the well at Barnes Road. The Barnes Road property wasn’t yet foreclosed and off limits, so we had access to the well. It was a chore he happily gave up.

After perhaps 6 months or a year of waiting, the VA determined I was 100% totally and permanently disabled by a condition preexisting when I joined the Army in 1974. Exacerbated by my military experience. The VA also awarded me about 15K for the months since I first applied. This time I made a prudent choice with the money. I had a well drilled on our property. How can you live without water, in the desert? It's Manna from Heaven. It offers eternal life. I find John 4 an especially inspirational verse to read: New International Version (NIV):

“...and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” She said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” Jesus answered, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?” Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Vimala Kirti put it in these words, “The universal vessel (Of manna. Of water. Of wisdom.) cannot be exhausted.”

From my handwritten notes, May 2016: Avatars, Past Lives, and Channeling

For perhaps a year, we lived in the old singlewide trailer and had only cats and the Dobermans. Minnie, Max, Runyan, Biggie and Tuffy. My jackals. Biggie killed one of the three black cats I brought back from Florida. Mai Tai's Shadow, named after my Siamese cat buried in

Pensacola. At the back window of the trailer, we had rigged up a cat kennel out of chain-link fence panels. The cat got out and into the back yard where the dogs stayed. Oh well, Afertiti mourns her cat, carries out mummification. Then she entombs her cat at the Bastet temple. But I carried Mai Tai's Shadow into the desert and offered him to the turkey vultures and coyotes. The natural thing to do. (Zoroastrians practice this funerary method in the desert province of Yazda, Iran).

Journal entry, 9-5-02, "Almost lost Biggie from an infection caused by his killing my cat. The cat really fought back. I took Biggie to the vet after labor day for antibiotics and penicillin because he had a big abscess at his throat from the cat. So sad about Mai Tai's Shadow. But happy to save my dog. Life is hard."

During 2001-2002, before the meds got right, or put me in a complete stupor, I went through spells of creativity which is a good thing some of the time. It's what artists do. I created dozens of saguaro frames for copies of my artwork (which I consigned to a store in Maricopa, the Stage Stop. Nothing ever came of it and I lost all my crafty frames. I just didn't have it in me to pursue things.) Then I decorated dozens of cardboard boxes and made collages on placards with my collections of international stamps, business cards, letters and pictures. I even had a collection of antique cigar label stamps from Japan during WWI that I glued onto a box and shellacked. I inherited these stamps from a childhood neighbor, Mr. Fernet, an old man then who had served in the Great War. But when you're on a manic roll, having a seizure, everything is fair game. Even making Afertiti slippers out of old sandals and thongs.

One day I became especially unhinged and burned Yacht House furniture—a wicker rocking chair, the hand painted sea scape coffee tables. Had a huge bonfire. (Patterns of my

mind). I did this because Cecil said we had too much stuff from the Yacht House. I was always reactive when it came to him, as he is to me.

At this time, I bought a small video camera and a tape recorder—for posterity. I was terribly under the spell of mania. Grandiosity of the mind, influenced by my life's many projects, pursuits and travels.

### Symbols and messages from heaven

I began seeing symbols and messages around me. Like a catholic sees the Virgin Mary in objects, I saw buddhas in trees, saw a vision of little Hanuman on a car at a passing glance. I thought of Shiva, and Hanuman appeared. One day I became especially possessed. I saw symbols in the clouds, in the dust on my Explorer, on a dumpster at the dump. It was April 11 because the dump was free. That day I saw Egyptian hieroglyphs and Chinese characters, even Mayan numerals everywhere, on the hills, in the sky, in the dirt. I felt I was seeing messages to me that I had to decipher. I tried to jot down these celestial inscriptions in my manic journal, which I always had with me. (Now, I don't have the patience to study what I scribbled that day).

From my manic journal, "On the way to Candlelight, I just saw Madonna in the desert, with blue robes. She became a plastic bag. But she is appearing to me to give me strength."

My grandiose self believed I was the receiver of a universal code from heaven. But in truth, I was out of sorts. That's how mania works. There was a malfunction in a trillion synapses. Too much dopamine—a neurotransmitter that increases signals during the manic phase. I've read that this condition is mostly genetic. But I am certain my parents, grandparents, and great grandmothers weren't manic. It's possible, but unlikely. I don't know of any family member with traits and behaviors like mine. I've always been eccentric, the odd man out. Everyone else

in my family seems right on track although somewhat plain, boring, and indifferent to me and my life's nuances. Oh well.

Before the meds got right, I went through a series of psychiatrists, social workers, and psychologists. When I first returned to the desert and realized I needed help, I saw a civilian psychiatrist because I still had Cigna insurance coverage from Intel. That psychiatrist was an old grizzled man resembling Freud. During the session I cried while discussing my pitiful situation.

(poem I wrote in Thailand, 1984)

How deeply falls a hidden tear,  
When heedless voices cry.  
Left amid all that we hear,  
How aimlessly we try.

If waters only could flow free,  
Out from the wells dug deep,  
Alas, but then we just might be,  
Unbound by what we keep.

Dr. Freud declared me clinically depressed and prescribed Paxil but my Cigna coverage lasted only three years after the divorce, then I went to “old reliable,” the VA health care system and got a variety of meds I don't remember. Paxil. Zoloft. Now it's a daily dose of sertraline and risperidone. (their potency is waning though, and I still don't have a VA psychiatrist. The one I had in Kingman by video conferencing, quit nearly a year ago. What's wrong with the VA in northern Arizona? The Phoenix VA has a lot of bad publicity as well: Vets dying without prompt treatment. A few times, early on, I went to the Phoenix VA Health Care System (PVAHCS)—Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center—to see psychiatrists about my meds. I need a psychiatrist to monitor my meds! In Casa Grande at the Southern Arizona VA health care system, I had my best

psychiatrist ever, Dr. Burke. He was just a nice friendly doctor who seemed concerned about my welfare. But that was the Southern Arizona VA which I've found to be excellent. There's a big difference among the VA systems.) I digress . . .

Avatars, past lives and channeling, reincarnation or redemption?

Don't know how I ended up at the VA in Mesa (at the old Williams Airforce Base) when my VA claim came through back in 2002 or 3. My psychiatrist then, Dr. Davis—a jolly enthusiastic doctor—kicked my application along by suggesting I had multiple personalities, in addition to bipolar disorder (a term I adamantly detest) and post-traumatic stress disorder (a term I wholeheartedly accept). PTSD was my first VA diagnosis. Wonder if the VA hands that out a lot. Although my ailments aren't combat related, I've been at war with a complicated psyche often under duress, all my life. Who knows? Maybe I do have a touch of PTSD.

But the term “multiple personalities” is very disparaging and people don't tolerate or accept the mentally ill, as it is. Then people, such as Cecil, weaponize these psychological terms. He would start claiming that I did things I wasn't aware of doing because I was in another personality. But I was fully aware of myself every second of my life and he was just blaming me for some mishap that he probably caused. It is all nonsense. I'm not Sybil or the Three Faces of Eve. I'm aware of my actions despite the delusions and I believe this Dr. Davis, along with a lot of “psychiatrists” is full of shit. I'd never claim to have multiple personality disorder, also called dissociative identity disorder, which is defined as a condition caused by severe trauma during early childhood. It's thought to be a coping mechanism. The sufferer disassociates from a traumatic situation and slips into alter egos.

Yeah, I think this describes me after all. But I was me all along, fully aware of me, and was simply slipping into wonderful wonderful avatars (except for Athena the Hun) to shed myself of all the upheaval and stress surrounding me. To distance myself from the main cause of my trauma, the man himself, a volatile boyfriend who pulled and tugged at my fragile emotions and psyche. (He was my environment, my major source of stress).

During 2002, I kept with me at all times, in all places, my manic journal. It was a standard unused 1988 diary that I had found among the things left at the ranch, by the previous renters. Carrying around a Manic Journal is the kind of thing crazy people do. In fact, I've been asked in public places, at times, if I'm all right. Must be my look. Anyway, it became my 2002 journal of scattered ideas, drawings, poems, to do lists that soared high, designs drawn to depict my mental state, words from my channeled avatars--lots of notes from my ancient Egyptian avatar Afertiti. I didn't have rituals or rites to bring up past spirits. They just happened to me. I wasn't really a new ager, didn't follow any of that stuff (despite what my childhood girlfriend believed). I followed the ways of the Buddha, then I became Christian for a while. For a time, I believed I was a reincarnation of Emily Dickenson. My mind was a bucking bronco! Kicking up all kinds of themes for my life. But I wrote some interesting poems. (I could never write such poetry now. Just don't have the spiritual flow, for it.)

How can I conjure up the past?  
When the past is what I be.  
And this I know by all our rhyme,  
Belonged to Emily.

From my 2002 journal I wrote, "I've been rather freaked out since Dr. Davis's diagnosis of multiple personalities. At the depths of my psychosis, I am more than Manic Depressive. I am all broken up. I never expected this to be my outcome."



There were times I'd find peace of mind and go out into the desert to meditate, as Shiva. He soothed my soul, appeased my tormented psyche. Shiva is the ascetic yogi in the Himalayas, on Mount Kailash. In a loincloth. The Ganges is flowing from his dreadlocks. The crescent moon is lodged in his tangled hair. The third eye of wisdom is on his forehead. A trident at hand. He breaths, "Om." Letting go of material things, of form, like the Buddhist concept of emptiness. Like Vimala Kirti's thunderous silence.

Had I really channeled the spirit of this Hindu God? Maybe. It's doubtful. That was a long time ago, A far away time. But back then, when my mind expanded to eternity, I became awesome avatars like Shiva in Samadhi (enlightenment, nirvana, salvation—the goal of our spiritual journey). I wrote about Shiva in my manic journal:

Because I have never been a devotee to one way  
I must find my own way  
I am Rishi Shiva  
I wander the earth.

Oh, Shiva Lord Shiva  
Father wisdom  
Mother time unfolded  
We reap what we sow  
Then wonder what we know.

O Shiva Lord Rishi  
Wanderer.  
I'm in your hands as you walk  
Our world.  
Lord Nataraja  
I am overcome by your  
Wisdom. By your dance of eternal fire.

“I have a great many  
Truths to teach  
Illusions to stop.  
I am destroyer of Maya’s cosmic delusions.

Preserver of wisdom, truth and righteousness  
I bear the world on my shoulders, this is my  
Nataraja rishi dance.”

Other times, after the man had traumatized me with his outrage, blame, guilt laying anger, I became the essence of (or channeled) my maternal great grandmother Mary Elizabeth Shearer. Her parents, Jason and Annette Huntington Fry, came to Oregon on a covered wagon. “Lizzy” is a very religious woman, intact on her farm in Forest Grove, Oregon. “She picks strawberries, logans and black caps, heart caps, and her many children (descendants) surround her with love that extends to neighbors, community, and her God.”

Lizzy’s life was such a contrast to my own. I was alone in the desert without any friends. Nobody but me and Cecil. When I became Lizzy, I would pace the yard singing hymns—“I walk through the garden alone, the old rugged cross, how great thou art, rock of ages...” old hymns from my grandmother’s days, not mine. Love for Jesus calmed my soul (as it had during my culture shock days in Thailand). Lizzie calmed my nerves. My disposition.

While living in the singlewide trailer on Candlelight Road, during great wild fires in northern Arizona, I transcribed on computer the diaries my great grandmother wrote before during and after WW II. Ten years on her sheltered farm, until the day she died at 73. Often, her entries were written in pencil and hard to decipher. Rather like my own pink legal pad jottings at

the Yacht House. I love my maternal great grandmother, matriarch of a large Christian family, although I've only known her in spirit and by the words she left behind in her diaries.

From my manic journal: Lizzy said to me, "You live in layers of predicament, troubles and woes beyond my dreams. Beyond my family farm in Forest Grove, Oregon. It is by design that I come to you now."

When I was really soaring in the stratosphere, as I often was, my ancient Egyptian avatar Afertiti emerged. She was the most wondrous of all my avatars. I wrote about her in my novel, "Ten Years Past Cairo." I (or she) hand painted a Nut coffee table. An Isis coffee table. She drew and colored gods, goddesses, pharaohs, cobras, vultures, and bees. Bucolic apple picking with monkeys and a military depiction from the era of Hatshepsut—female pharaoh of the New Kingdom (centuries after Afertiti. My avatar came from the time of Pepi II in the Old Kingdom. In my novel her name is Seshet Akeru). My office was full of my artwork and pictures I scanned from books on ancient Egypt. I had all the E. A. Wallis Budge collection of books on ancient Egypt. I tore pages from my many books on Egyptian art and artifacts, on Nile boats (it's before I got rid of all my books but a few.) And I practiced writing hieroglyphics, using "Egyptian Grammar: being an introduction to the study of Hieroglyphs," by Sir Alan Gardiner. It's a large tome that I've had since the tour of King Tut in 1978. Amazing to keep a book that long. But it's a classic. During the Tut tour, Portland State University, where I pursued a degree in anthropology, held summer classes on ancient Egypt. I took all the classes including the hieroglyphics classes which is when I bought the Gardiner book. I watched everything on TV concerning ancient Egypt. Still do. Took baths with ground barley, flax and honey, made face masks of the same. Even Cecil partook in the baths and facemasks, totally accepting Afertiti (in fact, he's the one who coined her name). I wore my white dishdasha from Kuwait and in the

backyard I'd relax on the wooden chaise lounge from the Yacht House. The desert around me became the shores of Egypt. I was sailing on the Nile. It was astounding being this wonderful avatar. It's no wonder I love living by the Colorado River whose shores remind me of Egypt along the Nile.

(from my very manic 2002 journal, 3-26-02),

“On the way to casa Grande an egret (ibis) stood along the roadside, in a scrub brush, reedy marsh. The ibis looked at me as I passed. And I remembered the Nile. Afertiti longs to see the canals where buzzards take flight. Where the ibis will speak its divine message. To the jackals she is their spiritual mother. This is in their eyes, which rarely part from the sight of her. They sit at attention, her guardians of the real world. Sentinels over the other world in the circumpolar stars. Before the bad ones of both worlds dare even look toward her, they first have to face her jackals. Who, on command, will tear apart their flesh and soul.”

But all my avatars were not serene and wondrous. When outraged by Cecil's inappropriate, traumatizing behavior, I became Athena the Hun. I called her Athena and so did Cecil. And so did my Mesa psychiatrist, Dr. Davis. In fact, it was after I told him about her rage at Cecil, “She called him a cunt and (the N word)” that he decided I had multiple personalities.

One time, Athena ran from the trailer and knock over all the rocks and saguaro skeletons Cecil had placed along the driveway. (But in reality, I was trying to get away from him, his outrageous anger spewed upon me.) Another time, to get away from him, Athena ran to a neighbor's house, screaming for the police. I don't know if Athena came from my childhood traumatizations but I do know, Cecil brought her out. (Unfortunately, at my worst times, when Cecil was especially difficult to be with, I called my mother and told her I was fed with the

boyfriend. She didn't need to hear this and I regret discussing my woes with her. I never told her all the dynamics of my relationship. What could she possibly do but pray for me? But I had no one else to turn to in my most dire times, but my mother and avatars. I'd already lost all my friends.) I was already in a quagmire quandary.

From my manic 2002 journal:

Athena cannot tolerate Injustice, NON-TRUTH

A leech is a man who lives off a lady

Then BLAMES HER

And abuses her.

I can't even hold it together in

Walmart.

Athena is here to defend Herself  
against injustice.

Trumpets blow –

Colors flare sparkle dance

Whistle, and the orchestra

Takes away all mortal

Breath.

She is born.

Athena is born.

From the Head of God.

And she's fully armored with the armor of her father.

She is defender of WISDOM against INJUSTICE.

(upholder of Ma'at)

Let the music begin!!!

Chapter Eleven: A Sante Fe Doublewide on Candlelight Road

(from my handwritten journal 2016)

I think the Sonora and my animals—cats, doxies, goats, and horses, grounded me in some kind of reality. I didn't kill myself during this time. Didn't die. I survived and so did Cecil. I was grounded, yet far flung. Uncanny.

I never had a garden on Candlelight. Just cacti, mesquite and paloverde trees that grew big in a few years. I germinated many mesquites and paloverdes and planted the seeds in the front yard and along the wash that ran down the property. In monsoon storms, murky waters rampaged down the wash, sometimes flooding the areas beside it. Even Candlelight Road flooded during monsoon storms. You couldn't drive anywhere. But the storms were exciting and didn't last days like the rains of my hometown Portland, Oregon. The Dobermans loved to splash around in the flood waters. I even Filmed Biggie at play in the flood by the corrals. seeing this also grounded me for a while.

09-25-16 I'm getting to the end of my book, praise be. No more on-goings of our lives. I think my meds are getting right again, and I still have my manic drive to write, with the help of my husband's medical marijuana. a blessing from God.

Fortunately, I'm not so emotionally triggered—quick drawn from the holster—as I was last weekend. Things seem good anyway. Why stir up a hornet's nest in any kind of emotional way. Why demean anyone else? Why demean the self? Not that I'm detached. Just settled. Anyway. Spent the night at Mom's. She seems well at 87. church. Then VIP buffet at the gambling casino. I wanted to talk about today's sermon at church. Ephesians 10—Paul identifies six pieces of armor with which God supplies His children. I don't know, but I think the words of Paul speak for themselves. I thought about Athena and her armor. *"Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against*

*the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”*

back to the story circa 2003

With the correct dosage of meds all my grandiosity and avatars faded away. That’s what medication does. Takes away the mania. I quit writing. Quit drawing. Athena quit rampaging at Cecil, for the most part. Great-grandmother Lizzie left me. No more Shiva. Afertiti sailed away on her barque (until now 2016). Status quo reigned despite the histrionics from my only friend. The man who would not leave me. Alone.

The Sante Fe doublewide

Maricopa changed dramatically since I first moved to the rural desert in 1998, since the Ak-Chin Indian Community opened Harrah’s Ak-Chin Casino and Resort in 1994 (while I was in law school). except for the dirt road area where we lived, Copa Town grew from rural Hicksville to an Ahwatukee-style subdivisions with supermarkets. What began as a watering hole oasis in the 1800’s, officially became incorporated in October 2003. Between 2000 and 2015, the city’s population grew from a thousand residents to over 43,000. During this boom, doublewide sales lots appeared along John Wayne Parkway, State Route 347, the main drag through Copa Town. In the outlying desert there were still a lot of rural folks, on rural lots, in double, triple, or singlewide trailers. Our neighborhood on Candlelight Road hadn’t changed since we moved there. We were still firmly embedded in the rural desert.

When I decided to buy a new doublewide Cecil wanted one that was Sante Fe style. I agreed. Why not have a little desert flare? Not surprisingly, we took the first one we saw on the sales lot. The thing was, I had lived in a nice suburban house in Ahwatukee for eleven years, then I had a dream ranch house on twenty acres. (not to mention the Yacht House estate). An old singlewide trailer didn't suit me. And now I had the newly awarded VA disability compensation so I could afford a mortgage. The problem was, my credit was shot. Missed payments and foreclosures, all the bad stuff that ruins any chance for a loan.

It was a manic episode with little thought, when I asked my parents to take out the mortgage for me. They had excellent credit. I'd make the payments from my compensation money. And the realtors pushed for the sale. "Sure, Mom and Dad can take out the mortgage. Why not add 30k to the loan so you can buy things for your new home. I'll even throw-in a large screen TV . . ." Cecil and I were easily convinced, an ongoing story. (I wonder if sales people easily recognize a couple of dupes?) Anything for a lump of cash. My parents were reluctant to help out their daughter on yet another whim. But I convinced them to sign for the mortgage. God bless parents. What they will do for their kids. That I'll never personally know. I'll only know about parents and husbands and Doberman Pinchers.

In any event, we lived in a cheaply made manufactured home for ten years or more. The "Sante Fe" pre-fab house literally came apart at the seams. (I'm glad to be in a more solidly constructed home in Golden Valley.) Over the years, cabinets and drawers fell apart—hinges broke, trim around doors came off. Everything was stapled on, not securely fix. Doors themselves disintegrated, windows cracked, some broke (a few Cecil broke in his stupid fits of anger, that of a frustrated addict who grew worse towards the end of our years on Candlelight Road. I simply lived with his temper tantrums, his Tasmanian devil tearing up the house looking



for something he undoubtedly misplaced. Blaming me as the cause of it all. Horrible times. But I lived with his rough edges As he had lived with mine. The ones he had always caused.)

(Poem written at the Yacht House)

Don't even bother me  
If it's just for blame  
Don't ask me,  
Don't nudge me,

DON'T DRIVE ME INSANE.

Don't ask my opinion,  
If it's only yours  
You care to hear

Just leave me alone  
Go on! Scram,  
Get out of here!

(I knew I still loved you,  
despite all of this,  
when you entered my room now,  
with a soft subtle kiss).

### Horses Again!

After I got the settlement money for my property at Night Hawk Way, I told Cecil we'd buy horses. He agreed. I thought horses would bring us a hobby to share, remembering the splendid horseback rides when we first met. Cecil had a way with handling horses and he needed an interest other than drugs (at this time it seem that Meth had surpassed Crack). We went to

Southwest Arabians, a horse ranch not far from where Cecil bought weed from a Native American family. An old Pima man he called "Pops." Who liked the turquoise jewelry Cecil bartered with him for the weed.

The horse ranch was huge and had lots of top-of-the-line barns corrals and stables and a big ranch house where the owners lived. Most horses were Arabian. Maximus was their prized Arabian stud of champion lineage. What I remember most about that place is a caballero showing us two young Arabian colts at play in a pen. Heads and tails held up. Beautiful. Frisky, like any baby animal--play and play then tucker out and rest. It impressed me. I wanted horses again.

We foolishly paid 7k for a big pinto mare. It was just another whim. No foresight. No mindfulness. We never even got her hauling papers. But we kept her for about three years, until she became too expensive to feed and too destructive to the corral fences. While I had her, I liked going to her corral and petting her, in awe that I had such a magnificent beast in my presence. In the end, Cecil sold the big pinto mare to a local Mexican for 1k. We never even named her or rode her. But at least she had a colt (the horse ranch owner let one of his studs impregnate her) and that colt would eventually have a colt.

The years passed and the horse craze never took hold of Cecil or me. We never recaptured those sunset horseback rides in desert foothills and washes. We were no longer Arizonan horsemen. In the end, our neighbor, a caballero named Manny, took both mare and colts to train and break. Manny took care of the horses in exchange for water from our well, another deal Cecil made. A type of bartering. Cecil is very good at bartering. The old west wrangler. The street hustler. In the end Cecil sold the mare and colt for \$500 and gave the older colt to Manny.

Manny Tellez was a great neighbor to have while living on Candlelight Road. Very Mexican. Very Sonoran. On many weekends, his compañeros came over to ride horses and sing melodic Mariachi songs while playing guitars, trumpets, accordions. They sang love songs, songs about mom, god and Mexico. *La Gloria Eres Tu, La Mano de Dios, Mi Linda Esposa, Novia Mia, Perfume de Gardenias, Serenata sin Luna, Si Quieres . . .* Most times the desert around me was quiet. Not a neighbor's voice or dog's bark accosting my tranquility. But the Mexican music from my neighbor's yard drifting across the desert was as therapeutic and soothingly as an arid breeze. Despite the Gadson purchase, the Mexicans never went away. They're still enriching the SW culture with Mexican food, caballeros, vaqueros, and the fluid sound of spoken Spanish. When hearing my neighbor's music and songs, I couldn't have felt more at home in the Sonora Desert.

## **Chapter Twelve: From the Womb of Yuma, Mary Love**

**What does one know, really know, about someone's background? It becomes a story, here and there in adult life, in relationships. Some are entertaining to remember. Some not. Some have a moral. Others don't. Some are obscure and badly told while others pop right from the tongue like flapjacks off the griddle.**

**He was born straight from the womb of Yuma, Arizona, not much of a place to even be, by today's standards. The town is a desert cross-road to San Diego, a border town, a stop for gas or a quick meal at the town's one Sizzler (where a Mexican kid sneezes on the salad bar under the plastic guards meant for adults).**

**Yuma lies in the heart of the Lower Colorado River Valley, Sonora Desert. Below the great Mojave Desert. The name, "Yuma," calls from the past, like a mantra "Ahom" it**

echoes through historic time to 1540 nearly 70 years before Jamestown. A Spanish Captain, Hernando de Alarcon, led an expedition along the west coast of Mexico and up the Colorado River. The best Colorado River crossing, back in the day, was just below the Gila River. Missionaries and soldiers built Ft. Yuma which the Yuma Native Americans destroyed. Yuma was pretty much left alone until the Mexican War. Kit Carson came to Yuma in 1846 to guide one-hundred soldiers to secure the lands. Colonel Cooke blazed the first transcontinental road across the region (soon followed by the 1849 gold rush to California.)

He has gold fever . . .

At a time of mule-drawn freight wagons and miners, Yuma was a thriving riverport town along the Colorado where steam boats named Mohave, Gila, Cocopah, and Esmeralda hauled people and supplies up and down the river. A first-class ticket from San Francisco to Yuma cost \$90. These days, snowbirds and rock hounds in their RV's flock to Yuma in the winter and park along the Colorado.

He chose to live independently but he was a complainer. He is not Buddhist, but the man lives for the present moment. If he has money, he gives and buys and spends on dope. If he has weed, he'll smoke it all up. No conservation, no savings, no budgeting, no goals. It's all living for the very moment. He has a rabble rouser's temper because he is actually a sensitive man under it all. He doesn't have much learning and has many faults, many fragilities. He is a man who lives by illusion. His guide the Magician, the Trickster. He is a man who like to "whoop it up," "Yee-heeee!" He does not drink to enjoy a beer; he drinks for the high, to get shit faced drunk.

**Streetwise and clever, he became a man who could lasso a woman's heart, even her soul. He is a mean and ornery man, at times, unable to see beyond himself, and is rude to whores and to a lady. For five years he lived in Riverside California with a black prostitute named Touché. (He was an old west wrangler).**

**The man liked gold and there was gold along the Colorado. Money slipped through his hands like honey through water. When he had a wad, he counted it again and again. He spent money on women, drinking, the white magic dust, and gold for himself and for his mother. He always thought about his mother. If he was nothing else, he was a man who loved his mother.**

#### Cecil's Mother, Mary Love

A positive thing to write about at this point is Cecil's mother, Mary Love (her maiden name). Unfortunately, she died of ovarian cancer within a year or so after we returned to the desert. I only had a short time with her. Mary Love was a beautiful woman. She died at 60, my age now. She told me she had a tough life, probably because of abusive men and her struggle to make ends meet with five children.

"She worked as a waitress most of her life, carrying 9 plates at a time," Cecil recently remarked. He's very sentimental about his mother so I tend not to ask him many questions about her, or about his own life. I just make subtle suggestions when he's in a good mood and glean a memory from his mind.

The first time I met Mary Love was shortly after Sonny and I got together and I lived on Barnes Road, well before the Yacht House years. I was still married to my first husband. Sonny wanted his mother to see him driving the Explorer when he pulled up to her apartment in the

projects. I was seated next to him, his new girlfriend who had a JD from ASU. I had told him I had a doctorate.

Anyway, she didn't see him pull up. We knocked on her apartment door. The door flung open and there she stood—a small woman with a pretty face and hands. With gray hair up in a bun. “What do you want now, Sonny. You can't stay here.”

Her youngest daughter who lived with her in the apartment, echoed the sentiment. Obviously, Sonny had been a recurring problem for them. A bane. I guess he often crashed at his mother's house, doing drugs and having a temper.

When Mary Love noticed me she smiled. I caught her attention. I don't know if Sonny had already told her about me. Probably not. He had no cellphone in those days. And he was homeless. He probably just showed up randomly, seeking money or a place to sleep.

“This is my girlfriend, Mom,” he said, trying to appease her, calm her down. This time he wasn't there to burden his mother with his needs. He had some good fortune in getting together with me. He wasn't just a saddle bum anymore.

She kindly invited me inside probably offered me a soda or tea and asked me about myself. She possibly saw her son on his way to being settled and freed of wild streetwise ways. His girlfriend was a good and prosperous woman.

From then on whenever we went to Phoenix, we'd visit Cecil's Mom. Once, after we returned to the desert and before we knew about her illness, I stayed in the parked car while Cecil went to visit his mother and give her a twenty. I had taken new meds that made me feel edgy and antisocial. My meds hadn't stabilized me, yet. Ergo, I was out of it.

Mary Love walked out, slowly with a cane (she had knee problems) and greeted me at the car window. She asked me inside and said not to worry about my reactions to meds. She had style and poise, especially when facing her demise.

Her story begins on a farm in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Don't know much about it except Cecil went to his grandfather's farm when he was a boy. He flew a kite with his grandfather, Mary Love's dad. "The kite flew alone a whole day--tied to a white picket fence," Cecil's recalled.

At 16 Mary Love left her Oklahoma farm, perhaps with Cecil's father. She ended up in Yuma and gave birth to her only son. She named him after the father, Cecil Albert Newsom. But she always called him Sonny. That was his name until after four years with me and I decided to call him Cecil. I just couldn't stand "Sonny" anymore.

After learning of her illness, we spent time with her at her apartment where she lived with her youngest daughter and two beautiful grandkids--half African American. We brought her roses on each visit and we decorated her room and apartment with remnants from the Yacht House--a dolphin fountain, brass seagulls, a panda from the Shanghai Room, a sunset bedspread, and flamingo night tables from the Amazon Room in the Navigator House. We hung tapestries on her walls and put-up a cross I made from saguaro wood. On the cross was a bookmark with a picture of Jesus and the beatitudes. She seemed to especially like that, being a Christian woman. During the memorial service, one of Mary's daughters mentioned how much her mother liked having that cross by her bed.

Mary Love may have had difficulties in her life, but she loved her Sonny. At her death bed, Sonny apologized for all his misdeeds toward her. "I love you all the way," she said, holding his hand, happy to see him doing so well. During her final moments, she forgave her son.

The last time we saw Mary Love, she was comatose and under the care of hospice and her youngest daughter. She died too quickly after we first learned the news of her cancer. But at least I got the chance to meet with her a few times. I believe she liked me. Thought I was good for her son. A rich white woman who didn't do drugs. A woman who could influence her son to change his waywardness. A woman who would take care of her son.

The most memorable time I had with Mary Love was just before she went to her sick bed. We had a little party at her apartment. Sonny and I brought some Chinese food for everyone. Throughout the evening, Mary played Hank Williams songs and gestured to the music. She loved Hank Williams and had a large collection of his records, the originals when they first came out back in the 50's and 60's. Her entire collection included many other classic country singers and songs—Johnny Horton, Gene Autry, Martie Robbins, George Jones, Conway Twitty, Eddie Arnold, Charlie Pride, Patsy Cline, and Tammy Wynette. Mary in fact promised her son this prized record collection, after she died. (But it didn't work out that way and Cecil never got them.)

After dinner we drank peach brandy or peach schnapps. I don't recall what she called it. But she had wanted to get together like this and drink her peach liquor. At the time I wasn't a drinker so I had only one glass.

Mary Love seemed so happy that night with her son and his girlfriend. Lots of promise. Sonny hugged her and they cried together. She tried to ease her son's fears about her illness. I think she remained positive for everyone, as though she wasn't going to die from the cancer.



One memory stands out about that party with Mary Love. Either Cecil or I brought up the Yacht House. Mary Love smiled and pulled from the pocket of her house coat, a picture of the B&B and its grounds. We had sent her the picture while we were there.

She was proud of her son and his B&B in Florida. His life with a woman who didn't do drugs. Mary Love's gesture of pride was a nice parting gift to her son. It's what a man needs from his mother.

The things Mary loved, her classic country, especially Hank Williams, are what Cecil loves to this day. And he likes having his back tickled at night because his mother would gently tickle him to sleep when he was a boy. My husband is an emotionally sentimental man. Unlike me.

The funeral was a memorial service somewhere in south Phoenix. It was financed by a carwash the youngest daughter and her friends organized. That day was very difficult for both Cecil and me. He lost his mother. Me, I went out of my mind.

From my Manic Journal 2002, "Athena, an angry little girl with a strong spirit, was abused. Why is she angry? An injustice. She has severe insecurities. At the funeral she came out. (he was ignoring me.) I stood at the back of the small chapel. My mind stirring. He's ignoring me! This is wrong. Athena stomps up to the front of the small chapel before the urn with the ashes of Mary Love amid flower displays. He is sitting with his son and ex-wife. I demanded the keys. She (Athena) marches out to the car. He follows. She finds enough control to apologize, 'I won't leave you. I'm just looking for shade.'"

Cecil was devastated. I was beside myself, distraught because of Cecil's immense grief. And his attentions to his ex-wife and their son Cameron. It could have been the meds, or a manic-depressive melt down. It was too much emotion and stress for me. I jumped in my

Explorer and drove away from the chapel, then back. Around the block on busy city streets. I think the youngest daughter was watching me while I drove around. Perhaps she went outside for a smoke. In any event, she knew that Sonny's girlfriend had a "nervous problem."

I further wrote in my journal, "I'm led by "Mary" to go back inside and be right. But along the way I stop. Athena rips off the gold chain and throws it in the grass. It was a gift he had given to his mother, then to me. Athena returns to the memorial and sits beside him as he grieves. Tries to console him. My presence of mind told me not to abandon him now. I came back and watched the service—torn apart by my attempt to flee from him. A beautiful memorial to a Guardian Angel—his mother. Now in heaven with his two cherub daughters. Then another "she" comes out. I see my hand reach out to his son. (Athena had ignored them. She doesn't know how to be polite.) Athena's been with me most of my life. She's rude. Perplexed. Trusts nobody. They're all out to abuse her, use her because she is pure at heart, a little girl. She is confused. What has happened to her before, is happening now. Is she selfish? She needs love and proper guidance. Her soul has already been bruised. The world is depressive, for some reason. Things make her feel sad. I am sad lashing out. We didn't do this intentionally. Scary times. Reality."

Mary Love's daughters spoke about their mother. About love. Maybe a nephew or an in-law spoke. A friend. What I remember most about that day is Cecil standing before the people in the chapel and speaking about his mother. I don't remember his words. Just that he loved her and she had been good to him. He appreciated her.

Mary Love's untimely death affected him emotionally. He cried from time to time. And he wanted to follow her last requests and be good to me and to his sisters. But Cecil's rough edge didn't go away. Not hardly. He couldn't shake the drugs. It was meth at this time, I think.

After Mary Love passed I didn't know if I could handle Cecil's grief on top of every other mood. I had my own distraught mental health issues. But time passed and we made it through the difficulty of grief by listening to Hank Williams tapes from time to time or other country classics.

It wasn't long after Cecil's Mom passed that my father died in 2004. He had heart complications and Parkinson. My dad was in his mid-70's when he died. I grieved but was emotionally numb. On the right dosage of medication perhaps.

In fact, I didn't see my father the last year of his life. During his deterioration. The last time I saw him was at the Ak-Chin Harrah's Resort Casino, in Maricopa, on the Ak Chin Indian reservation about 15 miles from Candlelight. My parents stayed at the casino when they came down from Bullhead City for a visit. No room to accommodate them at our Sante Fe doublewide. Cecil is a hoarder of what I'd call junk. He'd call bounty. Our home was cluttered. And I wasn't a housekeeper. I dared not disturb his stuff.

I remember hugging my dad good-bye and wondering if this would be the last time I'd see either of my parents. A couple of times, I planned to drive to Bullhead to see Dad. But I bailed out each time. I just couldn't do it. I was under the stress of a difficult boyfriend—caustic and demanding. High maintenance. Especially when it came to the care of my Dobermans. One morning when I was about to head off to see Dad, Cecil fought with me about my dogs so I didn't drive to Bullhead. I was emotionally incapacitated. Around that time, I also didn't send a card to my niece for her wedding. I was broken, distraught and dismayed about my life. How did I end up with this guy? How did I get into such a mess?

7-1-16 payday! Here I am with a complex husband, in the Mojave, by the Colorado river casinos and by my elderly and thriving mom. And I have much more to say about my return to the desert SW. Everyone is in a good mood today. Busy day. We first ran to the bank on Beale, dashed up Stockton hill road to Hana dispensary. Then straight to the casinos across the river. Cecil was lucky at video keno and won 200 dollars. Saved enough to buy some more medical marijuana at the Nevada dispensary. I urged him to do this, thinking ahead for the month. But he is a man living for the moment. (A wee conflict between us. Aesop's grasshopper and ant. Another delicate matter where I carefully tread.) He doesn't think about future needs and the consequences of not budgeting. I think this is part of the addictive behavior. The disorder he has.

He's impulsive and obsessive compulsive. He has no patience for the simplest things. He becomes easily frustrated. These are mental problems. Reasons for disability. He's unable to hold a job. It could be drug related. Though doing drugs is a mental condition in that it strays from being on the right path. Being responsible. Upholder of Ma'at. Cecil's anger toward me (I'm his punching bag at times) is the crux of the problem. I thought it was just the meth that made him angry. But now I know it's a mental problem. He's been off meth over a month now. Per drug testing. Per terms of probation.

Meth made him impatient angry and stupid. While on meth, or as he came off a high, he'd grow outraged with me, beside himself, and say cruel things. Bitch. Tramp. These were horrible times especially when bunted against my own condition. Meth is a terrible problem if it brings out such rage. It seems the whole while I've been with Cecil, I've been anesthetized to his drug addiction. Simply too wrapped up in my own mental world. At the same time, I know when he's spinning a tale. I just don't want to confront him, or his afflictions. How can I? I haven't even confronted my own puzzling mind.

## Chapter Thirteen: The Move to Golden Valley because of His Indiscretion

### The Mojave Desert



North of the Sonora in NW Arizona lies the Mojave Desert. It's mostly in California and is the driest and smallest desert in North America. Las Vegas is in the Mojave. So is Zion National Park, in southwest Utah, and Death Valley, California where temperatures reach over 120F. At 282 feet below sea level, it's the lowest elevation in North America. The lowest point on land is the Dead Sea that borders Israel, the West Bank, and Jordan. It's 1378 feet below sea level.

The Mojave doesn't have the variety of plants found in the Sonora. Creosote, brittle bush, tumble weeds are found in both deserts. But there are fewer variety of cacti in the Mojave. Not the magnificent saguaro or the organ pipe. The Mojave has yuccas, mesquites, ocotillos, barrels and teddy bear cholla although I haven't seen any. No matter. I don't ride my bike out into the desert anymore. I no longer even have a mountain bike. My spouse gave it away many years ago, probably before we were even married.

The Mojave's unique plant is the Joshua tree, a tall spikey yucca plant with branches. I know of two dense Joshua tree forests in the Mojave. The Joshua Tree National Park, between Primm and Searchlight, Nevada, is a forest of Joshua trees for about twenty miles. Mom and I pass through it on our way home from Las Vegas where we go maybe four times a year. (Mom gets perks at the Sunset Station Casino in Henderson).

The other forest of Joshua trees is the Joshua Tree Parkway along highway 93, between Wickenburg and Wikiup. When moving from Maricopa to Golden Valley, I drove this highway of over one hundred miles of scenic Sonora and Mojave landscapes. Saguaro cacti phased out and Joshua trees began appearing. Highway 93 is the route Cecil takes on his monthly trips back to his stomping grounds where he visits his son and grandkids. Where he might wheel a deal or two in Maricopa. I really don't like to travel anymore. I'm more or less settled. Like a pioneer woman on the vast frontier. Surviving. Making due with what I got. Content with tending animals and putting up with an old west, wrangler man. Gambler. Slinger. Brother man. And now I'm more in control of my dreams and despairs. Thanks to medical marijuana and maybe thanks be to God.

#### Back to the story

Arizona is the last of the lower continental states to be admitted to the Union. On the centennial of Arizona's statehood, valentine's day 2012, Cecil and I were married in Maricopa by a JOP who turned out to be corrupt and crooked. Cecil rustled up two Mexicans to stand in as our witnesses. That was fine. Who knows? They could've been connected to the Sinaloa cartel. But they were nice and took pictures of the casual ceremony with my phone. It was indeed an auspicious day, but, as I've told Cecil, time and time again, I got married for the benefits—VA compensation increase and Cecil having access to the VA health care system as the spouse of a

100% disabled Vet, death benefits. I've told him I'm not "wife material." And I'm really not. But I manage to take care of us. Though I rarely cook for him and only occasionally do his laundry. I don't know. Perhaps we really did wed to be united under God.

(the following is a yacht house poem:)

I need him

Really need him

To make me a go.

I am proud

Of him

(there's that too)

proud of his efforts

and accomplishments

here at the Yacht House

all that I feel is hard to deal

and he is really trying now

to please me

to be with me

to stay himself,

a man

a father.

(what is this husband thing?)

So now I know

If he were to go

That would cripple my heart

(like watching my old cat die)

he and I  
need much space  
individually.  
at the same time,  
We must be  
Very close together  
I and he.

Can I find peace with this man?  
Maybe, if I leave him in his space  
And gently nudge him from mine.

On his last trip to Maricopa from Golden Valley, Cecil's Grand Marquise conked out. He asked me to come down and get him. I told him I can't make such trips anymore. Too stressful. I'm comfortable here. It's a four-hour drive, one way, and through frantic Phoenix traffic. I insisted he take the bus from Phoenix to Kingman. I'd pick him up there.

It took several trips over two or three months to move to my new home in Golden Valley. Cecil found a canopy for the task. (they call him, "Cecil Gets" in Copa Town because he seems to get things people ask for, or some such thing). I moved a load of five goats, then cats and two doxies at a time—I had six dogs and five cats. Each time, I left Maricopa at 3 am to beat the heat and the Phoenix traffic. I took the I-10 LA freeway to the 303 to the 60 to Wickenburg, the 93 through the Joshua tree forest to I-40 past Wikiup, and on to Kingman and Golden Valley. Meanwhile, Cecil stayed in Maricopa doing whatever he does.

On one of my moving trips back to Maricopa, I found my oldest male dobie dead on the property. Oh well, he was circa 12 years old. His name was Akhenaton after the rogue pharaoh



of ancient Egypt's New Kingdom. (nearly a thousand years after my Afertiti). My old dog probably did me a favor. I wasn't supposed to have more than 4 dogs on my new property according to a Mojave county ordinance.

Back in Maricopa, Cecil had two pit bulls because he just had to have his own dogs. I insisted he couldn't bring them to our new place—because of the ordinance and because the female pit, Mama, killed my ram, my first Billy goat. Years earlier, I started out with two goats, a Billy and nanny, probably brother and sister. Goat gestation is about 150 days, much longer than that of a dog, which is almost exactly 2 months. Anyway, after ten years or more I ended up with a lot of goats. I put ads up at the feed stores, "Goats \$20 apiece." They went fast. Unfortunately, at one of the sales, while the buyer was leading a nanny goat past the wash to her truck, a terrible incident happened. Cecil's pit bull Mama was chained up by the wash, at a doghouse under an ironwood tree. That is how Cecil kept his pits (I feed and water all the animals). I had previously let the ram out of the corral so he could run freely around, but mostly because, when I fed the goats, Billy Ram wouldn't let anyone else eat.

When the buyer was leading the female goat, it bleated. This caused the ram to appear on the scene. He ran right to where the pit was chained up. Male goats and roosters are concerned about their harem, male hormones. I imagine my ram butted the pit and that was it. The pit's jaws grasped the ram's neck. Locked. I was helpless, breathless. I tried to hit the dog with a stick, but to no avail. A pit has a vice grip. Finally, the buyer, a young country woman, was able to pull the dog, by the chain, off the goat. The ram ran off. But he was severely hurt. I put him back in with the other goats, his brood. But he didn't make it more than another month. Sad.

On one of his trips back to Maricopa, Cecil finally took his pits to the animal shelter.

Whenever I was in Golden Valley, relaxing, living the life of Riley, and Cecil called me from Maricopa or Phoenix, I worried he was in trouble. In addition to his own shenanigans Cecil seems to have lots of bad luck. I think that was another Tarot Card character. But I don't remember. My cards have been packed away or thrown out, long ago. After I chose the Christian path.

Bad luck brought Cecil trouble these past two years. He has traffic fines to pay, mental health classes, drug testing. Probation fees he hasn't paid because he has no job. My income only goes so far. He has community service he hasn't done. He's hoping to convert it to fines. He just doesn't want to work for nothing. A lot of trouble and bad luck. Sometimes, in his worst moods, he blames me for all his woes. Difficult times.

Twice, since I moved to Golden Valley, I drove across the state to bail Cecil out of jail. Once, he was on his way home to Golden Valley, speeding through the desert expanse between Wickenburg and Wikiup in Yavapai county. He was pulled over, cuffed, and hauled off to jail for the possession of rolling papers (drug paraphernalia). His Grand Marquis was impounded. (this was before he got his medical marijuana license). He called me from jail. The next morning, I drove for the 209 miles to Camp Verde, south of Flagstaff. Picked him up after hours of waiting for his release. We spent the night in Camp Verde. Then drove the winding road from Prescott to Wickenburg where we got his car out of impound and spent money we don't really have. God always provides. Still, Way too much unnecessary stress for me. And this wasn't the only time I got him out of jail.

His real trouble came from the woman of his fling. The one-armed, bipolar hick. This is why he's on supervised probation. While Cecil was in Maricopa, she called the police on him and he was charged with domestic violence for knocking down her door. Don't know the full

story. Don't want to. When the police caught up with Cecil he had some meth on him. Domestic violence, trespassing and meth.

He called me from jail—a cumbersome collect call service. “Will you stand by me?” he pleaded. I told him I would. And that was a pivotal point. Like the moment I decided to accept Sonny in my Boudoir. Maybe I'm very forgiving. My positive nature. To take back a man after his dalliance landed him in jail. Domestic violence against another woman. I hadn't even gone that far in all my rages. But I retrieved him, accepted him, and carried on. Atonement, I think it's called. Jesus died on the cross to atone for our sins. So that we might reconciling with God through the blood of Christ. Through his sacrificial death and resurrection. The biggest lesson of Jesus is Forgiveness. If you forgive others even after they sin against you, god will forgive you of your own fragilities and wantonness. I digress.

I made the 270 mile drive all the way to Florence and bailed him out with the last bit of savings I had. As always, I was happy to see him and know he was all right. Always happy to have him back. But there comes a limit when you're 60.

He went to jail a third time, to Florence. His friend, Terry (where he camps out when in Maricopa), picked him up when he was released the next day. It was for a suspended license. We had missed making payments on a traffic fine and so his license got suspended. And we didn't know about the fine or the suspension. We had to return to Casa Grande to get his impounded car. We first had to stop somewhere in Phoenix—stress—and pay 200 dollars to get the car released. Then on to the Casa Grande impound lot and pay another 400 for the impound fee. Every day it's in impound, the fee increases. (and now the car's sitting at Terry's in Maricopa. There's a title loan out on it, Cecil's doing, and I doubt we'll be able to pay it. I'm trying. It's kind of hard living with my condition and an addict always after nine quick hits.)

No, my husband's had a lot of bad luck these past two years. Some from his own doing, some purely bad luck. Lots of fines, lots of citations. If I were Buddhist I'd say it was karma from past deeds, past lives. But I'm Christian now. Instead of rebirth, I believe in the teachings of Jesus.

#### Back to his indiscretion

Those four years he was having his fling were well into our years on Candlelight Road. I didn't really confront him about it, although there were plenty of hints. I would go to my mom's without him and when I returned home, the bed wasn't right, shampoo had been moved (he had a shaved head), a woman's hair clip was on the bedroom floor. Not the least of which is when I overheard him say, "I miss you and I love you," on the phone. I asked him about it and he made a quick explanation, "That was my daughter-in-law." Then he got mad at me because I put him on the spot. I left it alone. There's no challenging him in his angry mood. I hear his explanation then let it go. Besides, I always want to believe him. It's my nature to be positive. Turn a blind eye to the negative. Live in a stupor. Don't confront him. Anger and threats—Athena the Hun—are a bad idea.

But for several weeks, months, his "lady" kept texting me about his indiscretions. I told him this over the phone once. He came stomping home outraged and tossed me and the recliner over. I changed my phone number four or five times, often under duress from Cecil. She always seemed to figure out my new number. (because she was around Cecil and his phone. He kept seeing her even though she was as mentally ill and as volatile as him, a powder keg ready to explode. And it did.)

After my STD proved his infidelity, I said I wanted a divorce. Cecil grew so upset and angry he tipped over me in the recliner again. I was threatening his Maricopa lifestyle of slinging deals, snorting meth, and having an affair. He was not rational enough to calmly agree to my departure.

His indiscretion, the fling, the STD was a big insult to me, if I'm really that offended. It's a difficult memory of a difficult time and it was less than two years ago. The major reason I moved away from Maricopa to Golden Valley was to get away from him once again. But that didn't happen. He's here with me now, in Golden Valley. Maybe I've just grown used to having him around, despite his moodiness.

In all fairness, Cecil has his POV and explanations for the infidelity. I was post-menopausal and didn't care much for the discomfort of sex. Although I always loved my union with him. For that matter, I hadn't really had much sex during my first childless marriage in the doldrums, blah. Blah. Blah. The problem: Cecil is a basic man driven by urges for fulfillment. The "I'm going to win big" inspiration. He's driven by his passions (for hard drugs, gambling, something appetizing to eat, and sex.) He's just an old west wrangler going to the saloon in town to gamble at a game of poker and bed down with a whore.

Anyway, Cecil had this fantasy about us having a threesome. I never relented. Not interested brother man. An area of disagreement. I wasn't interested in being lustful. The point being my present husband had needs that I couldn't satisfy. Turns out he found a woman who was mentally ill (bipolar?) a meth head and disabled. He would claim she was meant to be a member of our threesome and then claim that his infidelity was my fault because I let everyone down by not having the threesome. It's a pattern. The never-ending cycle of blame. Cecil never takes responsibility for his own actions and behavior and I think a lot of the people living in

prison are the same way. What about the verse in the Bible saying to put away childish things. “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” Sometimes, Cecil needs to hear these words more than me, at least while I’ve been on the right medication. I just need to survive, be mindful, and settled enough to write my stories.

### The problems with selling the Candlelight property

The decision to sign off on the mortgage for the Sante Fe doublewide came back to haunt my mom when I put Candlelight up for sale. I didn’t have the foresight 10, 12 years earlier when I got my folks to sign on the dotted line. My entire 3.3 acres came under the Sante Fe mortgage. I couldn’t just sell the derelict doublewide and have it hoisted off the land. It was attached. And the mortgage was under my parent’s name. I just made the payments. Everything had to go through mom. She was 85, spent lots of play time at the casinos, and really didn’t want to be troubled by anything. I had no choice. I was moving and I didn’t want Mom to have a foreclosure on her record.

When I told Mom I wanted to move near her, she was a bit apprehensive about my making another whimsical and flighty move. I wanted a place where I could keep my animals, and she suggested rural Golden Valley, up the mountain from her place in Bullhead. (a few years before, she had wanted me to move in next door to her in the Riverview RV Resort. She even offered to buy the place. I just couldn’t bear giving up land and animals for a small lot and tiny home, even though there are a lot of resort amenities.)

Getting my house in Golden Valley was easy, I made my offer on the first property the realtor showed me. It was a good deal. A fenced in solidly constructed house (not a ramshackle

pre-fab). Since it was sold in a foreclosure, I got it for about 10k less than the appraised value. A very nice loan officer got me a VA loan with no money down. Another blessing from God.

The real problem with moving came when I quit making the 1k a month mortgage payments for the Sante Fe—outrageously high for what I got! I found a realtor who specialized in short sales. Brian Petershiem was an excellent realtor. I had to do a short sale because the mortgage was \$119,000 and the property appraised at \$59. Because of the extra money we added when taking out the mortgage and because the doublewide was in poor condition.

The short sale was an ordeal and took about a year of pilfering through mom's personal finances and getting her signatures on documents. Lots of email documents. Facebook Messenger messages from Petershiem. Lots of hurdles. Brian quickly found buyers, but that was just the beginning of the process. Then there were more hurdles set up by the bank. The bank wants to make sure the mortgagor (borrower) is worthy of a short sale. After all, the bank was losing money. Lots of money. At least Brian dealt with every matter that came up, advising me how to proceed. (that's why he's an excellent realtor for the short sale). I worried we wouldn't finalize the sale before the bank decided to foreclose. Déjà vu. I was so hopeful to finalize the deal and quit bothering mom. She had only been doing me a favor all those years ago.

We were down to the wire when the realtor called, concerned that the doublewide was in such a shambles that the sellers would back out and it would be too late to get new buyers. In the end, the bank renegotiated the loan down to 45k. 3.3 acres of Sonoran landscape with a well. Somebody got a good deal despite the condition of the house.

The short sale damaged mom's credit score (a foreclosure would've been worse). But she's unharmed because she makes her purchases and plays her video poker games in cash.

Our time in Golden Valley has been rough at times, although I feel settled now and even fulfilled. Sunny side up. New home. New desert. Casinos. Mom. Animals. Man. Lots of openness in the desert. But it has been stressful, despite the meds, chasing down my husband across the state. And until more recently, he was a grizzly bear to be with in our new home. He hated the house. Hated our new temperpedic mattress. Too hot. Too cold. Nothing to eat. The worse of the worst is when he rages that he hates “all these dam animals.” I can’t possibly tell him that they bring me peace and keep me grounded. That it’s spiritual for me. No dialog with a raging lunatic. He’d rant and rave about having had to leave his familiar life in Maricopa. His stomping grounds for 30 years off and on with the streets of Phoenix. “Married people talk about things,” he’d say. “Make decisions together. You just up and moved on your own.”

“I moved to get away from you!” I’d say back. But there’s no arguing with him.

At his worst, he goes to places of despair, when he sinks into boredom, lays in bed all day because there’s nothing better to do in life. Dismal dark places I never visit. (ever. Maybe it’s the medication or the positive spin I have on life.) The promise of nirvana and salvation. In my life. Living is a spiritual matter. But I cannot wake him from this miasma of wretchedness. And I am beside myself to get him back to the living. Back to me. Mental disturbances are a difficult fate. No silver spoons here. During these darkest times, his most wretched moods, my only hope is he’ll soon come out of this and join me in my optimism.

On one such occasion, just after he got back from Phoenix, he came out of the bedroom opened the refrigerator and threw a fit that I had eaten his pickles. I flipped out. Drove off and got an order of protection against him. (he had threatened to hit me in his rage.) A constable came to my house with me and kicked Cecil out. He had to go back to Phoenix and stay with his son or with his friend Terry.



That night I went to Mom's, as the constable suggested, I stayed away from my home at least for the night. "You never know what might happen in these situations," the constable warned. I told Mom I finally kicked him out and was going to file for divorce. "You're better off without him," was her only comment. But I don't think that's true. In fact, I know it's not.

After a week and several pleading phone calls, I took him back. Realized I had been a little rash, manic. And he too had mental issues. Maybe we could work out our little problems. Maybe he could finally become a sensible companion for my retirement years. Always hope and optimism. Looking for the best side of things.

present writings (2016) I feel like a pioneer woman

Got a lot accomplished today. It took a presence of mind to do this. First of all, my husband's situation. He was stranded in Maricopa because of his non running car. My writings were interrupted throughout the day with frantic calls and callings. I wanted to resolve my current problem, and get on with it. (Life at its fullness) recapture my recent goals, manic goals. My mind now allows such folly. And I did resolve the problem. I sent him the money to take a bus from Phoenix to Kingman. I picked him up and brought him home. We'll survive our many foibles. I miss him when he is gone, his rocking recliner is empty.

We've stayed together for nearly 20 years. He's mellowed from taking the hard drugs. Forced to drug test by terms of his probation. And he's away from the romp of Maricopa, all the drug addicted hicks and Sinaloa cartel (at least for most of the month. He usually returns after payday, for a week or so. Most likely, he snorts meth during these times. Que sera sera). He doesn't know anyone here in Golden Valley but me and my mom. He grows bored. And that brings on bad moods but more and more his anger abates and we seem to be enjoying our retired

lifestyle (especially going to the casinos). I thank God for my piece of land in the Mojave. As for Cecil—it's mood dependent. I only want to deal with him when he's in a good mood. Then I find life delightful.

It's been a pleasant evening. A retired couple getting along because we're settled in. we know each other, Cecil and I. We've been through a lot of strife. But all is well tonight. No strife this evening. No conflict. If I get agitated, he's there in a good way with humor and wit. Good natured. At his best. On this night, he came back.

9-13-16 How do you end a book about an ongoing life. About a fluttering soul who's settling down with her side kick, another such soul. I need to fill my mind with lots of mental activity. That is why I now transcribe on the computer the ancient Egypt part of "Ten Years Past Cairo." I've re-embarked on the odyssey of Old Kingdom Egypt. My mom returned the 3 manuscripts I gave her to read about 12 years ago (Dreams along the Upside-Down River, And You Learn How to Kill, and Ten Years Past Cairo). I thought they were lost because she didn't even remember having them. And I couldn't find any computer disk with my Egyptian writings for my novel. I thought I'd have to rewrite the whole episode of Afertiti (Seshet Akeru) on my zip disks. But on her trip to my sister's this past summer, they found my manuscripts in Linda's attic. Another gift from God. And I've set out to finish all I have started over the years.

### The changes we've made during the past 20 years

We made many changes in our lives, he and I but when I think about it, the changes I've made since I left a sheltered marriage and chose to be with a wrangler man are superficial. Not changes to the soul. My basic optimistic and compassionate nature never changed.

I never gave up on him. Tossed him away. Fed him to the sharks. Perhaps we are kindred spirits. Settlers in Arizona Territory. Cecil says, “You’re stuck with who you’re with. You play the cards your dealt.” Years before we met, I had written about us (a premonition) in my novel “Dreams along the Upside-Down River.” I am Mattie, peculiar, introspective, and prone to have premonitions. A woman alone on the frontier has to accept the God given man she has, despite his gruffness and ill manners. The settlers survive hardships with no one but each other appreciating what God has provided. It’s all Manna from Heaven. Life is a gift from God. Therefore, life is a spiritual thing. And the land where we settle is a spiritual place. Echoes of the Hohokam petroglyphs. Echoes of all the ancient desert dwellers.

Sonny became Cecil—supposedly, to be the better version of the man. But sometimes I wonder. Calling him Cecil was something he wanted to do as well. He wanted to change. Get rid of that “saddle bum Sonny.” (his words). Now everyone but his nephews and sisters call him Cecil. By God’s grace, Cecil quit drinking beer (alcohol) and he quit smoking crack. But he then took up snorting meth. He has an addictive disorder. Compulsive behavior. Anyway, in Maricopa most local yokels he knew in his daily wheeler dealings did meth. Smoked it, snorted it, or shot it up. Or so said Cecil. I had no personal contact with the drug. I wasn’t friends with anyone local. Or anyone at all.

I don’t remember when it happened, but shortly after we returned to the desert from the Yacht House, I quit being his bodhisattva avatar. In my mind. Because of Cecil I renewed my faith in Christ. He was Christian, so I became one. It’s easier in a relationship to accept the man’s religious POV (among many other things). A matter of managing life. Maybe it was simply God’s mandate that I settle-in as a Christian. A writ from the universal court—the 42

judges of Ancient Egypt who are bright stars, constellations, and asterisms. Who sit at the gateway to Heaven and weigh the pilgrim's heart for its purity, justice and truth...

I am his wife. Christians both of us. Although in the heat of summer I don't drive to the Baptist church in Bullhead City. We do that with my mother in the fall, winter, and spring. I don't even really pray anymore. Not like I did when I was a zealous Christian in Thailand living under the influence of missionaries. When agitated and upset, I turned to the teachings Jesus. Read the Bible. Had Bible study with my cousin Barbara. Watched TD Jakes, Joyce Meyers, Paula White, John Hagee. Christianity is a beautiful vessel to hold. I love the guru Jesus Christ who is like Buddha, a Bodhisattva of Compassion. This is apparent in the eight blessings from the Sermon on the Mount found in the gospel of Mathew. The beatitudes are like the 8-fold path set in motion by the Buddha—sacred wisdom.

On the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, on the side of a mountain, Jesus preached to a crowd of hungry people:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn: for they will be comforted

Blessed are the meek: for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness: for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

In most Asian religions, meditation brings you to Shiva Samadhi. Nirvana. Or a life of karmic merit opens the gates of heaven. In ancient Egypt it was a matter of weighing the heart against the “feather” of Truth and Justice. There was a laundry list of virtues to keep, an arduous system. In Christianity, accepting Jesus as the Christ is all that need be done for entry into the Pearly Gates of Heaven.

Patriarchy is part of Christianity. Having a man in charge seems the natural order of things now. Twenty years ago, I was behind the rights of women to have equal opportunity with men. I still am. I’m all for a woman warrior, if she proves herself. But it’s a tough course to follow. I’ve changed. I prefer men to women in most things. They instill a sense of stability, if they are stable. Women just aren’t as commanding and serious as men. Their voices are mousey. Women become giddy. I prefer men to women singers, newscasters and writers (too much needless sex scenes in a woman’s novel). My favorite actors are men.

I am still vegetarian, but I eat fish on occasion, eggs, and cheese. I’m not a vegan. And now when an animal dies. Well, it’s just the way of the world. No need to heavily mourn. Not so any more. (when I was in Ahwatukee I mourned the stray cat we had rescued, Gus, for nearly three years. He had been killed by a coyote.) It’s the time they have on Earth that’s important to honor. Even if that time is brief.

08-30-16 I went for a walk this morning, around the neighborhood loop. With Ruby Two and the little jack Russel. Red ran off one day. All the dogs did. And all came back, even if early the next morning (Cracker). But Red never came back. She was a beautiful dog and I imagine someone adopted her. When you’re battered and bruised over the years, (self-inflicted turmoil most often) you’re not so sentimental. You accept what fate dishes out. Move on. That’s all you

can do. This is what I mean about being a “pioneer.” I don’t imagine Mattie out alone on the land near Wickenburg, “fretted over the comings and goings of life.” Torment reduces you to basics. Basic training, like the Army. The crux of my life.

So now I walk Ruby Two. I met with a nice lady out tending to her immaculate yard. “Your yard’s so nice,” I say as I greet her, happy we meet. “Why are you out here?”

“Oh, I don’t want to sit all day. It’s activity.” (gardening, that is.) We had a nice long conversation. She is so like me. Must be in her 60’s and living with a husband out in the Mojave Desert. That’s all it is. We are all pioneers with pioneer husbands, in my case a wrangler. This is a nice neighborhood of many retired folks, no obvious Sinaloa cartel. It’s so nice to have good neighbors out on the frontier.

I wrote the following poem while in Thailand 1984. I think it was meant for me to read now... (as well as when I turned 47).

To myself in 20 years  
I dedicate this poem.  
If still around—how far away,  
Have you really grown?

Remember me at 27<sup>th</sup> place  
Life here is a poet’s soul,  
Idealistic visions often come,  
Before another goal.

How is your life in 20 years?  
Have you reached my dreams today?  
Perhaps no more nor even less,  
Than those that slipped away.

My friends today, so clear to me,  
Can they still be found?  
Who's lost along the way of time?  
What new friends are around?

These days of mine are like the gull's  
Up, soar, then down to earth,  
But after all the scathing styles  
I return to nature's worth.

Away from you are 20 years,  
What is (one year, one day) the truth?  
It must seem strange to come across  
A moment from your youth.

The babies now, that I love dear,  
Blood of loved ones, blood, my blood.  
How do they look? How do they act?  
They love you? They're still loved?

To myself in 20 years  
I'd like to sing this song,  
I love myself, I love you too,  
No matter what's gone wrong.

The old ones now  
How long ago, did they end-up dead?  
Remembering now in twenty years,  
The simple lives they led.

Have you at least one lover found

For you because of you?  
How many ins and outs beyond  
A weight to carry through?

By now I've come to realize  
My spirit hates to rest,  
And you who's grown away from me,  
Which time do you like best?

I call myself in 20 years  
And if you've gone away  
I hope someone remembers me  
By the words I've tried to say.

There's one thing more, before I am through,  
A favor, I ask of thee,  
If still around in 20 years  
Please write your words to me.

Honestly, I never wrote back to my youth. Don't know that I'd do it now. Write to myself just before I met Cecil. When I was unleashed at the ranch house with my first husband. What would I say? Don't be a bodhisattva. Slow down, step back, be mindful of what you're doing. That's difficult to do when your mental capacity is ransacked by stimulating alpha waves. When your mind races with thoughts, ideas, and visions, you can lose your stepping. Perhaps that's really it. A manic person is living in a dream. The dream you had last night might be the life of a manic person.

My mania is the same now as it was at the Yacht House B&B and during 2002 when I kept a manic journal. Except now I don't have the zest for artwork and other projects. I'm not



ripping through books for pictures of my perfect world for Afertiti. On my humble wall hangs the Nut coffee table top I painted, a few Buddhist thangkas from Nepal, a painting from China, and some tapestries and pictures from Cecil. And I don't keep a manic journal. I'm reigned in. Medical marijuana and my meds, the task of writing, revising and publishing on the internet my life's works--novels and poetry, biographical stories--keep me focused. It's an enormous undertaking but I love it.

## Chapter Fourteen: Epilogue from my 2023 Perspective

### How to achieve clarity of mind

I had to add this chapter because I have a lot more to say to wrap up this story. Especially after reading through the manuscript and seeing how religious I was seven years ago. I am not that anymore. Many sweeping events have changed me back to my essence. Finalized who I really am and brought me true clarity of mind. Centeredness. Mindfulness. And peace within myself and with the world. With Cecil? Well, that's still an ongoing process because although he has changed in many ways (no drugs, alcohol) he is still a contentious, religious, and moody man. But he is not my master. He does not control or command me, even if, in his religious mind, he thinks that is what he should do. No one is my master but me. No god. No psychiatrist. No guru or swami. I am the only one who can know, master, command, and control my mind. And to achieve this has taken a lifetime of struggling through traumas, challenges, and a whole lot of chaotic delusions that come from the human mind. My own and that of society, culture, family, and religion. It's a lot to sort out especially if you are born a dreamer (manic) and have a wildly powerful spirit.

What were the events over the past seven years that helped me achieve clarity of mind?

My first step toward mental clarity happened about the time I turned sixty and decided to stop taking useless mental health meds and seeing useless mental health care practitioners. I think it came to a point where I just didn't see how all the VA meds were benefiting me. They caused side effects and put me in a stupor. And what's the point of that? I lived an isolated life with Cecil and did I really needed meds just to deal with him? No. I told myself. (And as it turns out, Cecil needs sertraline to calm down his anxiety, as an aside.) I wasn't getting depressed, wasn't normally anxious, and all the other symptoms the meds were supposed to tame. And as for the mania. I was settled and no longer running rampant trying to create a fabulous dream. So, I quit the meds, the sessions, and came out the better for it.

I began to find myself, to finish my novels and books, and this story. Then I stopped smoking the medical marijuana and drinking any alcohol. I didn't need it anymore. And I didn't want to take any mind-altering substances because I like my sober mind. It serves me quite well when I let it. These days, in fact, I eat minimally and only eat superfoods and take super supplements except for the hydroxychloroquine I seem to need for my rheumatoid arthritis. My primary concern is to keep my body going and my mind sharp, calm, and filled with potential. The creative potential I was born with, the manic mind I've been discussing in this story.

The second motivation for my crawling out of obscurity into clarity of mind probably occurred when my mother miraculously returned my three lost novel manuscripts and I jumped into action and started finishing (revising) my stories. This gave me direction, purpose, motivation for doing something I loved, my art. It focused me and my manic mind and gave me meaning to my otherwise seemingly fickle life.

The third and maybe most driving force behind my mental health recovery occurred a year or two before the pandemic. It's a story I fully disclose in my memoir "The Trouble with

Brass.” In essence, the VA decided to declare me “incompetent” and place my disability compensation in the hands of a fiduciary. This was a disaster and caused me and Cecil endless grief. For maybe a year, I fought tooth and nail to get my funds back in my hands. I had to hone and discipline myself during this process like an Inca warrior:

*“An Inca warrior knows that when he dies in battle he will transform into a hummingbird and fly straight to the sun; he will not crawl through the nine Aztec hells. He has already lived them.”* Quote from my novel: My Brave Inca Dove.

In the end of this grueling ordeal with the VA, I learned that the only way I could get back my funds was to see a psychiatrist outside the VA system and have him declare that I was competent. I found a wonderful doctor in Las Vegas whom Cecil and I call Gandhi. He was spot on in getting to the heart of my mind, my competency. And his most poignant question, and the catalyst for my own recognition of my mind, came when he asked, “Is there something wrong with you?” I thought only for a nanosecond when I said, definitively, “No. I am very intelligent and talented.” Gandhi agreed and I got my disability money back in my hands. And I realized that the truth of the matter is, and has always been, there is nothing wrong with me. This really gave me a jolt toward achieving complete mental clarity.

The fourth impetus on my road to self-awareness happened because of my age. Physical ailments were overpowering any mental confusion I might have. I couldn’t get upset liked I used to. Could no longer allow the man’s trauma to traumatize me. Or, my blood pressure would soar and I’d have a stroke or heart attack. It became that simple.

I would say that the global pandemic in the Trump era brought forth another push for my mental clarity. Being secluded and isolated wasn’t too big a deal for me because that already described my lifestyle. But I suffered through the pandemic like everyone else and feared dying

because of my vulnerable age and health. And it brought my attention outside of myself and onto the world stage. It almost seems Armageddon is upon us, if I were a religious person, which I am not. But it does sometimes feel like we are at the end of days and if so, why would I dwell on being conflicted with this or that mental disorder. Who cares?

During the pandemic the next major inspiring force occurred when I began finishing my novel “Key to 1000 Doors” which is my exploration of Buddhism and Asian philosophy. (I have always been more in tune with the Asian way of thinking than the Western). During this time I viewed endless videos of Sadhguru and the Dalai Lama, among others of like minds, and spent maybe a year or two meditating on and visualizing different Buddhist and Hindu images and statues, many my own artwork renditions. Nataraja, Shiva, Krishna, Buddha, Medicine Buddha, Manjushri, Vajrapani, Vajrasattva, White and Green Tara and so on. The focus was on health and mental clarity. Calmness in a chaotic world (the environment of my moody spouse). Centeredness. Mindfulness. Peace of mind. And so on. I chanted, dinged my bells, bowls, chimes, magic sticks, lit incense and really centered myself away from all the worldly delusions and those I had created for myself. And this brought me to where I am today.

The causes of delusions I had to shed:

Religion was the biggest cause of delusion and misperception that I had to shed. I am no longer religious. Spiritual, maybe, but not religious. Why? Mostly because nearly all religions but especially Abrahamic religions are patriarchal and that brings about a whole lot of misogyny. And I get enough of this from spouse. And just what is misogyny? Seeing the female of the human species as inferior in all ways to the male and dictating how the female must behave what she should be: nurturing, a sexual vessel, and a mother. What else? Very little. And if a woman isn't nurturing she is selfish. Thinking only of herself. This all comes from the religious belief,

indoctrinated into the heads of the misogynist, that god created the female to serve the male. I respect myself too much to succumb to all this belief in being something other than who I really am. I have never been a mother, I am nurturing only in my own way and when I want to nurture. And I've never been promiscuous. No body else is superior to me and I am not superior to anyone else. Or inferior. Yes, I am selfish in the sense that I take care of myself, look out for my interests, but I am also a very compassionate person. Just not everybody's mama.

I am not a religious Buddhist who believes in gods and supernatural beings although I am foremost a follower of the Buddha's teachings (the middle way, spread compassion, obtain an uncluttered mind). I am not a Christian anymore although I find wisdom in some parts of the gospels. I am not anything but me. Who I am. Not who you say I am. Or how you determine I should be. I do appreciate the philosophies and teaching of Earth's spiritual teachers, but not the baggage that comes from religious bigotry, misogyny, patriarchy and so on. This baggage is all too often ugly and demeaning and far removed from the wisdom the spiritual gurus were trying to teach us human beings. And religion becomes very ugly when people proselytize, weaponize, nationalize, and politicize it and when people believe they are the only ones in the right and all others are wrong or inferior. Based on what? On categorizations such as gender, creed, and race. This seems to be what's happening in the world today. Maybe it has always been happening. It brings about hatred, anger, and ignorance which are the biggest sources of evil. And evil intent to inflict harm on others is the true source of mental illness. Not mental confusion labeled with psychological terms.

That brings me to another important decision I made on my path to finding clarity of mind. I rejected psychological terms and labels. I disown them and no longer claim them to define who I am and how I think. (maybe I'm a scientologist, I gest.) I especially reject and

detest the term “bipolar.” Although for many years I claimed it for myself. Believed that something was “wrong” with me and that was that I was bipolar. On the internet I found people actually reveling in being bipolar, as if it were a badge of honor, made the something special. One site was “two bipolar chicks,” as if. I disown this ugly disparaging term. I am not “special.” I am as normal as the next schmuck. Why should I denigrate myself and claim this stigmatizing term? It does nothing for me. Proves nothing to me. And, the moody spouse weaponized it against me. If ever I grew angry at him, and in almost all cases I had every right to do so, I was being bipolar. I was a “bipolar bitch.” It was an endlessly degrading cycle that I climbed out of. And let me say something about the term “multiple personalities” that I at first accepted about myself because some shrink declared it about me. I don’t claim it at all. And the man, my man, when he got a hold of this little psycho gem really weaponized it against me. “You did this...” “no I didn’t...” “Yes you did. one of your personalities did...” and he was angry and blaming me for something he did but forgot he did it because he is absent minded. I am not. I have never been unaware of what I was doing except during a colonoscopy when I blacked completely out. My point. All these denigrating psycho terms do nothing for the person. They did nothing for me but bury me deeper in the quagmire quandary. Made me feel broken, like something *was* wrong with me, and left me unable to find any sense of my self-worth, let alone any clarity of mind. And by the way, clarity of mind means all the terms, labels, definitions, false beliefs, and so on, have been shed. Only true reality remains and this is a clear mind empty of all the degrading notions that come from the human world.

All this being said, I would give Cecil a lot of psychological terms, if I believed in them. Jekyll and Hyde is a good one but like I told Gandhi, I can’t possibly analyze my spouse’s psychology or anyone else’s but my own. All those years of living in a stupor and succumbing to

mental confusion, I have determined to be mostly about my reactions to the man traumatizing me. Because of my weak spot, my inner frailty, my childhood PTSD from having been traumatized as a little girl. You cannot lock a child in the bathroom, throw water on her, watch her rip at her clothes and scream and think you are being a good parent and correcting her aberrant behavior. But that was the 60's.

There are two general terms that I do accept. PTSD because I know, firsthand, how trauma and being subjected to traumatization affects the mind, especially as a child. And I use the term “manic” which for me means possessing an artistic mind that thinks beyond the normal barriers of convention and in a positive way. Nothing ugly or evil. Harmful thoughts, evil notions, are ways of thinking that tumble down the toilet. And need to be flushed away

Where does this leave me? I no longer need to medicate or even meditate to find my center. But I practice qi gong each morning as a breathing and movement meditative exercise. I disengage from my moody spouse when necessary, when he is in a dark place. I have my own room. It was impossible to share a room with him and disengage. And the biggest part of my life now is to finish up my stories, such as this one. And the thing is, I am not doing it for a “dream” goal in mind, although I hope to get somewhere. But I’m not delusional anymore. I may get nowhere and that’s not important. What’s important is that I am living with a task and a purpose. The process of doing that meaningful task is what’s important. Without dreams for the future. Regrets over the past. Just day by day purpose with a task. And, at the same time, I enjoy the little simple things about my life—my animals, gardens, the desertscape, writing my stories drinking morning coffee and power smoothies, watching the Y&R, quiet times with the man, knowing he is here and not hating him for his human frailties. The simple, little things of life. My philosophy now has always been my philosophy because it is who I really am. It’s just that

all the world's trauma and my own misinterpretations have taken me off balance here and there throughout my life.

Stopping for the moment

Stopping for the moment  
Can only be done  
When time is still.

It's the little things –  
You see –  
Coffee with a friend, the landscape,  
An empty thought,  
Empty time.

Stopping for the moment,  
Can only be done,  
When thoughts are cleared.

And then  
In the wake,  
(observeth me)  
I am alone  
Yet,  
Surrounded by the sea.

I don't think I could relate my personal philosophy any better than in this poem I wrote when teaching English in Thailand forty years ago. I have always been optimistic, filled with hope. Still am. Just a bit isolated. And this is the end of my story of living at the desert's edge.