

TRAGEDY, TRUTH, TRIUMPH

A Woman'S Personal Battle with Loss

PROLOGUE

If you have been victimized by a traumatic experience, be it through a serious affliction, the death of a loved one, a motor vehicle mishap, a broken relationship, rejection, abuse, or even rape, my story may possibly give you strength and hope. However, if you are one of the fortunate ones who has not been forced to live such an experience, you may just learn and begin to understand in a very small way, the insecurities, the agony, and the deepest perplexity of those who have.

It takes a lot of courage and strength to transcend such pain. This courage and strength can only come from one's spiritual side. Pain can be a pathway to our spiritual growth. Physical courage and strength are one thing, but once you redefine your purpose in life, the Power within allows you to emerge and to gain mastery over whatever obstacle is placed on your path. The transformation of self can be very frightening at times, but the victories and rewards are innumerable and comforting. Without pain God would not accomplish all that He desires to do in us and use us as his instruments in the life of others.

Pain is a precursor to change.

CHAPTER 1

In preparation for ...

As I read the first thoughts in my diary and leaf through the pages of our photo album, I get the feeling that maybe this dream was never meant to be, at least not at that time. One sentence in the very first entry turned out to be a lie. As we had said our last good-byes, I had written under the date of December 27, 1986, "That was the last of our tears, (we hoped)." The irony of it all, is that I've been crying ever since: eight years of tears!

This dream I'm referring to, was for me to be accepted in the Teacher Exchange Program for Australia; and for John, my consort who was to become my husband once we settled in Sydney, it was his wish come true. He had wanted to travel there since his high school days. Having gone through all the red tape and two years in the planning, I was accepted to teach in a private catholic school in Sydney, Australia. Even at this time, I should have sensed the timing was off. To this day I still question it.

I was filled with mixed emotions: ecstatic about the opportunity to teach in a different culture, yet troubled by our families' and friends' reactions to this one-year commitment. They all thought we were being extravagant and selfish. Extravagant because it was, according to their opinion, going to the other side of the world, and selfish because we were leaving behind our three boys who were at the time, 24, 20 and 17 years old. They had been invited to come but did not appear to be interested in accompanying us on this educational and exciting adventure. Each had a different reason to decline. Had these been clear signs, and I simply gave them a blind eye?

Even before we arrived at our destination, we experienced some problems. Our flight from Honolulu to Nadi, Fiji, was delayed two hours because the pilot announced that he had to file a new flight plan so that we could manoeuvre around a typhoon. We were in Fiji on New Year's day 1987, but we weren't able to participate in, let alone enjoy the festivities, as we had become the same color as the island's fiery red flowers: we had relaxed by the hotel pool in the afternoon, not realizing we were still getting the sun's rays through an overcast sky. We felt disappointment more than we did the burn.

We landed in Sydney on January 4, 1987. The Australian teacher with whom I had exchanged teaching position had made temporary living arrangements for us in a motel. John and I had agreed beforehand to look for an apartment ourselves. We were on a budget and knew what we could afford. It wasn't that I had expected the best, but this place was a dump! Two teachers from St. Charles school, Louise and Kerri, who had cordially greeted us at the airport waving a welcome sign, offered to drive us around the city in order to find a more suitable place. A little worried about not finding one that same evening, we reluctantly decided to leave our luggage at this motel along with a \$100.00 deposit for the room. It hadn't been too difficult in finding another hotel a little better than this one. Nevertheless, trying to retrieve our luggage along with our deposit had not been so easy. The police had to be called in to sort out the matter. Once we had more or less settled into another hotel, we thought of relaxing over a quiet

dinner in the hotel's dining room. It had been a long and frustrating day! It's a good thing that John thought of asking before ordering the meal if they accepted American money because we would have probably ended our evening by washing dishes. The working staff would not accept our currency because they couldn't calculate the exchange. They were even less interested in plastic! We ended our first night in Australia sitting on a bed in a hotel room eating a take-out meal with plastic utensils that the receptionist was kind enough to scrounge for us. Although a minor one, it was still another let-down.

The next day, we started flat hunting. We looked at a few, but there was no way we could have lived like this for an entire year, (or so we thought at the time). Some places were run-down and not too clean. The ones we did like were too expensive. That night, as we walked back to the hotel, John must have sensed my disappointment. He stopped under a tree and he kissed me. I was crying. He told me that things would only get better. If only he had known our fate!

We moved to another hotel the following day, closer to the city, and resumed our search for an apartment. We found a place in Maroubra. It was dingy, and because it had a speck of an ocean view, it was \$130.00 a week. That was a lot of money for us at the time (considering this was 17 years ago) and we were reaching a point of desperation. We would have taken this one, had we been allowed to paint it. The landlord refused it. We decided against it. Another blow!

We were realizing that renting in Sydney was not cheap, and besides that, we didn't have any furniture nor cookware. All we had brought with us were our clothes. A few apartments we had looked at were more or less furnished --- less was more like it. We then looked into the cost of renting furniture and basic items of some cookware. We took a taxi to PABS Renting Place on the other side of the city, only to learn that we would have to pay \$1800.00 for 4 pieces of furniture. This was just for renting them for a year. It had not been a good idea after all.

Back in the hotel room that evening, I received a telephone call from Marie, one of the mothers from St. Charles school where I had been assigned to teach. She was kind enough to offer us two single mattresses once we found a place to live. Apartment hunting went on for a few days, and even though we had met some very nice people, always ready to help us, we were getting very tired and dispirited. We had been in Sydney for six days now, we still had not settled in, and the school's first semester was just around the corner. Hotel prices were getting too steep for our budget. It was on January 10, 1987 that I became very worried and started second-guessing this adventure. What had I done? What was I doing here? I was very homesick that evening. I cried myself to sleep.

Finally on January 12, (thanks to Marie and her husband Chris) we found what was to be our home for a year. It was a furnished apartment on Ocean Street in Bondi. Our rental problems were over! Our carefully-planned dream was to begin, or so we thought. After being approved by the rental agency and paying the required security bond on the flat, we moved in and started cleaning the place.

We wanted to give it a fresh scent and we rearranged the furniture to suit our liking. What a big mistake that turned out to be! It just so happened that on that same evening we had been invited for dinner at Keith's and Marilyn's house (a great couple with two nice kids, Sharne and Keiran, who all became our good friends). On our return from their place, at the flick of the hallway lights, we found ourselves in "Cockroach City!" We were later informed that by cleaning our apartment, we had disturbed these ugly, repulsive creatures. They were all over: in the carpet, climbing up the walls, crawling on the kitchen counter, even flying in as the windows didn't have any screens. I covered my head, in fear of having some of them land in my hair. John must have killed hundreds of them with some leftover cleaning spray and with the two swords he had been conned into buying as souvenirs from Suva, Fiji. By pure coincidence, we discovered they rested when the lights were off. Needless to say I did not close my eyes that night. I thought out loud, "This must be one of the drawbacks of living 'Down Under'." After lodging the complaint with the rental agent by showing him a dustpan full of the tiny beasts, the apartment was fumigated the next day.

Back home in Canada in 1984 John and I had traveled through the majestic, breathtaking Rocky Mountains on our Harley motorcycle. What a thrilling way to see, to feel, to smell, and to experience nature! As both of us felt that it was an excellent and more economical way to do our touring of Australia, we decided to ship our bike to Sydney, It took a lot of doing but we got it there. Once it arrived, John had to put up with a few hassles: running around to different freight shipping yards before locating the right one to claim the bike, going through the red tape of its identification and registration, also purchasing motorcycle insurance, as well as New South Wales license plates. Finally, the bike was released, ready to be picked up in Yagoona. Ross and Marcelle, who today are some of our best friends "Down Under", offered to drive us there to unpack the crate, and John would ride it back to Bondi. He was a little concerned about riding it on the opposite side of the road as that is the way it's done over there.

On January 21 we picked up the Harley. It was raining of course ... that's the way our course of events was unfolding. That day was the beginning of the end of our dream, and the birth of an incessant nightmare!