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Becoming Conscious

One Woman's Story of Spiritual Awakening

Chapters 1 through 4
an excerpt

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Chapter One

The Wake-Up Call

I'm afraid of heights and we didn't have a gun; an overdose might leave me alive, but mentally incapacitated. A razor to my wrists was way too grizzly, and I'd heard that a person looked *really* ugly, all bloated and purple, from carbon monoxide poisoning. *I wonder how long it would take to starve to death?*

It started subtly enough on January 16, 1999, our 17th wedding anniversary. Ignoring Dave's apparent lack of concern of a Y2K catastrophe that was supposedly going to make all the computers in the world fail at exactly midnight triggering multiple disasters like airplanes falling from the sky, I'd bought a bicycle to provide alternative transportation in case gasoline was unavailable for periods of time.

"There are lots of things that can happen that could cut off supplies," I'd said. "Y2K is just the catalyst to start disaster preparedness. Better safe than sorry," I'd defended myself against Dave's thinly-disguised derision as I pointed out that it was easy for him to hold a superior attitude since I was doing all the prudent things.

It was a purple Canondale hybrid mountain/road bike with a bell, side view mirror, rear fender rack to attach a *panier* to each side that would each hold a full grocery bag—even a computer that showed the date and time, miles per hour, and accumulated miles. The only thing missing was a flag on a flexible pole to alert automobile drivers that a senior citizen was loose on two wheels!

It had been more than forty years since I'd been on a bicycle, yet I was surprised by how unstable I felt. Dave's admiring glances got him an offer give it a test drive. He raced up and down the street (without a helmet) with all the verve and brashness of a ten-year-old, grinning widely, eyes twinkling as he braked to a halt in the driveway. "Want a bike for yourself?" I'd asked, and we were off to the bike store where he bought a shiny, black, twin to mine, without the sissy options, of course.

My last bike had been a Schwinn, long before bikes had gears and when braking was done by reversing the pedals! This would take a bit of getting used to. The following Saturday we took our first bike ride together, almost five miles, stopping at Bob's at the Marina for coffee on the return home. Being able to perform independently, riding our own style, side by side, not needing to control each other was heaven . . . no arena for power struggles! Coming home from our second ride the following day, I dismissed the nascent discomfort at my left shoulder blade as muscles complaining of overuse.

The next day the pain had spread to my back, intermittently severe and mild. A few days of mild pain lulled me into thinking I was on the mend. By the following Saturday, the pain was escalating; aspirin had no effect, and I'd noticed a few raised red areas on my skin under my arm and on my back. I called Kaiser Permanente, our HMO.

Dr. Taylor had a headful of white hair and a kind face. I guessed him to be about 70, probably semi-retired and working as a fill-in on the weekends. "Shingles," he said, with sincere sympathy. "An outbreak of a latent virus associated with chicken pox." I didn't know what I was in for. His compassionate manner foreshadowed that he did.

He prescribed antiviral medication and Tylenol. Four days later I called Kaiser and complained that the pain was unrelenting. I asked if Kaiser had a pain clinic and was told yes, but I needed a referral. She made a same-day appointment with Dr. Taylor again. I asked him for a referral to the pain clinic. He told me Kaiser didn't have a pain clinic. I assured him they did but that I needed a referral from him. He wrote a prescription for Motrin, then excused himself to arrange for the referral. By the time he returned I was in tears wondering how much longer I could hold on. He was sympathetic and said he had referred me to the pain clinic, but they were closed for the weekend so it would be Monday before I heard from them.

The pain was at its worst at night. I'd wake up feeling my back on fire accompanied by a deep, penetrating pain under my shoulder blade. I'd go into the former guest room that had been converted to my meditation room so I wouldn't disturb Dave as I cried into my pillow. I pleaded with my spirit guides to help me, to tell me what I needed to learn from this so I could heal. I began an Internet search for information. I was alarmed to find that the older a person at the onset of shingles, the more likely it would be a lifelong condition! The longer it lasted, the more likely it would never be cured!

Nancy Gardner, my massage therapist told me she had an 80 year-old client that has been living with shingles on his face for the past four years! How could people live with this kind of pain? I couldn't even imagine! It felt like someone was holding a steam iron to my back, and no matter how I twisted or turned, the pain was unyielding. By Monday I was exhausted.

"I need a shot of something," I said to Dave and he called the Kaiser Patient Advocate asking that I be allowed to go to emergency for something more effective, like Demerol. The nurse said the relief would last only four hours and she would do what she could to get me help at the pain clinic. I steeled myself to hold on.

Hours later Dave called again and was told the pain clinic had only one doctor and there were no appointments available, but I'd be receiving papers to apply for an appointment. *Papers to fill out? How long was this going to take?* She assured Dave she was doing the best she could. I got a call later in the day telling me I had an appointment with another doctor that evening.

Dr. King told me he had just gotten over a case of shingles. He was sympathetic and also let me know he never took time off from work while he had shingles, which I took to mean that I should buck up and ride it out. He prescribed Prednisone, another week's worth of antiviral medication, and Elavil, a mood elevator. For God's sake, I was not depressed! I was in excruciating pain! Feeling like a wimp, I asked for stronger pain medication. He said it would require a triplicate prescription pad which he didn't have with him; they were in his Manteca office. "Why can't I have Demerol or something that will work?" I appealed.

"With shingles there was no certainty how long the pain will last. Can't take a chance on addiction." He asked me what I wanted: Talwin, Darvocet, or Tylenol3. I'd had Talwin when I'd had wrist surgery. Useless. I'd had Darvocet when I had my second wrist surgery. Useless. Exhausted and defeated I settled for Tylenol3.

How could this happen to me? Hadn't I been diligent and purposeful on my spiritual path for the past ten years? Wasn't illness a wake-up call?

* * *

Chapter Two

Judy

It was in the spring of 1989 that I had met Judy Reis and within days I was curiously probing the spiritual realm, more commonly called New Age.

"Things have been happening really fast since the Harmonic Convergence in 1987," Judy had said over lunch.

Hmm, I had a vague memory of that; something about a bunch of nuts that held hands in a circle on a mountain top and chanted for peace, or something dumb like that. I mean, really! What effect could a pack of people chanting Om, or whatever it was, have on anything?

But Judy, her body vibrating with passion, was so sincere it would have been very impolite to share my inner commentary. She talked of her spirit guide and how *blissed out* she'd become when she channeled her guide for the first time in her channeling class. I kept my polite face in place when she said she'd had to pull her car off to the side of the road because it had filled with a light that she knew was the presence of Jesus, and that he had asked her to commit to her spiritual path—to be a Lightworker to help humanity evolve into love and peace, or something like that. I don't remember exactly, it was all so weird.

I found Judy fascinating—so fascinating that I'd let her channel for me within a week of first meeting her. Oh, I'd been to psychics before—hoping to find out when Mr. Right was going to come along. I'd been told that when Mr. Right came along I wouldn't be able to "beat him off with a broom." That was Dave, alright. (More about him later.)

At first glance Judy was just another dress-for-success business woman. Attractive, in her mid-thirties, she had short brunette hair framing her face in gentle waves. It was the intensity of her deep blue eyes and the way she squinted when she "read" people that suggested that she might be an extraordinary person.

When she channeled for me, her guide, (she said her name was Tricella), had told me I should follow my heart and that I should read the book, *Spiritual Growth*, by Sanaya Roman and Duane Packer, the two people from whom Judy had so recently learned to channel. When I questioned Judy after the channeling about what “follow my heart” meant, and she said it meant I should start doing what I wanted, I’d snorted at the absurdity of it.

“I can’t just be doing whatever I want. I have a business to run. If I don’t stay focused I’ll be *out of business*,” I’d said. The very thought caused my stomach to knot. Judy had simply smiled and urged me to consider little ways to pay attention to my heart’s desire and look for ways to satisfy them. *What is it that she knows that I don’t?* I wondered, mesmerized by her genuine sweetness and unwavering faith in her beliefs about the unseen world of spirit.

* * *

The next day, while picking up the office mail from the post office box, I impulsively stopped at the bookstore to buy a copy of *Spiritual Growth*. Back in the car I opened the book to take a quick preview peek. As the nuns had taught me, I started with the Preface.

Orin and I welcome you to this book . . . I have been channeling Orin, a spiritual guide and teacher, for more than ten years. He tells us he is a being of light. . . .

A shiver ran up my spine and my stomach did a flip-flop, like it did when I was a kid and my dad would lift his foot from the accelerator of his second-hand Pontiac just as we reached the crest of a hill, where I would float in space for just an instant before he accelerated again.

Anxious that I really should get back to the office, I still couldn’t make myself put the book down. I ignored the perspiration dripping beneath my silk blouse as it puddled in the waistband of my pantyhose. Who can be comfortable wearing pantyhose, anyway? The resonating chord that was holding me in place seemed to have transported me to a place outside of time and space, overriding my commonsense that was urging me to get back to the office. Yet a vague, nagging sense of something being familiar anchored me in place.

I raced through the pages transfixed by the ideas about being my Higher Self . . . connecting with the Universal Mind . . . moving into higher consciousness . . . choosing my reality! It was as if I were discovering something new, but at the same time like I

might already know it, and was excited to be rediscovering it. *Maybe this is what they mean by déjà vu!*

After an hour the guilt finally won out and I forced myself to head back to the office. I was relieved to find no disaster had occurred in my spontaneous absence. When Judy called a few days later to see if I was free for lunch, I told her that I rarely took a lunch break.

“Well, how about making an exception and having lunch with me tomorrow?”

“Oh, I don’t think I can get away,” I said glancing at the piles of papers scattered across my desk—half-finished projects set aside to handle more immediate challenges. *Problems* had become *challenges* since I had read the article in *Entrepreneur* magazine about positive thinking.

“Take a second and tune in,” said Judy. “What does your heart want?”

Pretending I knew what she meant by tune in, I closed my eyes and took in a slow breath and let it out, trying to relax. Knowing I should beg off, when I opened my mouth “Let’s meet for lunch,” jumped out. As soon as I had hung up I thought, *I must be crazy! I can’t afford to take time off! So much to do, so many bills to pay, and not enough money to even come close to covering them!*

To top it all off, at lunch, Judy handed me a brochure about a class called *Awakening Your Light Body*. “This class is by invitation only,” she’d said leaning forward over her menu, gazing intensely at me, “and this is the only time they are going to teach it! It’s about learning how to activate vibrational energy centers that are sort of like chakras, only one level higher,” she said.

“Chakras?” I said.

“You know. Chakras. The energy vortices that connect the physical body to Life Force energy.”

Wanting to be polite I looked over the first page of the brochure.

This course is for those of you who want to experience expanded states of consciousness and to grow spiritually. . . . You will learn how to sense the subtle energies of your soul and how to transform your life with light. You will make a quantum leap in your spiritual growth and have more joy and abundance in your life.

Hmm. Joy and abundance were definitely lacking in *my* life. I don't know why, because it was all gobbledygook to me, but I felt *compelled* to agree to at least call for information about the Light Body class.

Judy was ecstatic.

* * *

"Do you channel?" asked the warm and friendly voice at the LuminEssence office when I told them Judy had invited me to join the *Awakening Your Light Body* class. Boy, was I relieved when she told me that being able to channel was a prerequisite to taking the class!

The relief didn't last very long because a few days later, responding to Judy's impassioned request, I found myself parked at the curb in front of her house. I checked my reflection in the rearview mirror and made a mental note to call for a hair-cut appointment when I got back to my office. *I really don't have time for this*, I thought, but my curiosity had become an irresistible desire to know more.

I reached into my purse and took out a breath-spray, squirted two shots on the back of my tongue and sucked the intense peppermint vapor to the back of my throat. I dropped the spray into my purse, zipped it shut, and grabbed my steno pad.

I made my way to the front door and hesitated as I took in a breath and let it out with a rush. *Here goes nothing*, I thought, as I pressed the small white button. The chimes echoing from behind the door sounded like a church carillon. *How appropriate*.

Judy opened the door wide, her face beaming with anticipation. "Come in," she said. "I'm all ready for you." I followed her upstairs into her tiny meditation room nestled in a sunny corner of the house. Sublime music emanated from the tape player. She adjusted the volume to a soft, background level and said, "Sit here," pointing to an upholstered straight-backed chair with carved cherrywood arms and curved Queen Anne legs. "Make yourself comfortable; take off your shoes if you like. I'll be right back with our tea," she said as she disappeared down the hall.

Flickering white candles of various shapes and sizes were placed around the room, and a stick of incense was burning in a wooden holder. I slipped off my shoes and planted my feet in the plush carpet.

Judy returned with a white china teapot and two delicate tea cups and saucers on a wooden tray. She poured the steaming tea and set my cup on a small lamp table next to my chair. "Better let it cool," she said as she sat forward on her chair, facing me.

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"I've tuned into the guides and this is going to be so great!" Her eyes glistened as she clapped her hands together with the enthusiasm of a child on Christmas morning.

Not knowing what to say, I took a whiff of the incense-filled air and let out a sigh. "Um, that smells good. What is it?"

"Frankincense. It helps slow down and deepen the breath and calm the emotions, making meditation easier. That's why it is so often used in religious ceremonies."

"And the name of the music?"

"*Fairy Ring*. It's by Mike Rowland. Don't you love it?" I opened my steno pad and wrote, *Frankincense, facilitates meditation, and Fairy Ring, Mike Rowland*.

"So how do you feel today?" asked Judy, her smile revealing her eagerness.

"I don't know . . . well, sort of . . . I mean . . . I don't know quite what we are doing, or what to expect, or if I'll be able to do it right, you know?"

Judy giggled as she nodded her head. "I know. I was so nervous when I went to the channeling class. But, trust me, this is going to be *majorly* great. You'll love being able to channel. Just relax and let me guide you through the process. Simply let it happen. You don't have to do anything except follow my directions, so put away your notepad because there is nothing to write down. This is totally experiential, OK?"

"OK."

We chatted a while and drank our tea and I had begun to relax when Judy asked if I had any questions.

"How do you know I'll be able to do this?" I asked, trying to keep my face neutral to prevent a worry frown from emerging. I had lived with an underlying sense of apprehension most of my life, instilled by my Catholic upbringing, no doubt. It manifested in a pervasive self-conscious focus on doing things right, so I hardly noticed my body tense as my autonomic nervous system disbursed a little of its fight-or-flight chemicals, moving me again into a state of physical and mental alertness.

"Because anybody can channel. In fact, any time you have had an inspiration or given wise counsel to a friend, you were probably channeling. We are bombarded by thoughts from the higher realms all the time. Channeling is learning to access this wisdom consciously. All we are doing today is making that conscious connection to

your guide. Once you have experienced the channeling state, it is easy to remember it and return to it, then it will be up to you to practice to get comfortable with it."

"Practice?" I said, feeling the frown coming on.

"Just take some time every day to tune into your guide and get answers to questions you have. Really, it is no big deal. OK?"

"OK." But my fingers tightened on the arms of the chair.

"Ready?"

I sucked in my breath and blew it out. "Ready," I said with the sinking feeling that I was about to be walked off a plank.

* * *

Chapter Three

Opening to Channel

Judy set aside her tea cup and adjusted the window shades to slightly darken the room. "Get comfortable," she said as she slipped off her shoes and settled into her chair.

I sat back in my chair and folded my hands in my lap.

"Gently close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose," said Judy. "Hold your breath for the count of three, then gently, but completely, blow it out through your mouth. Do this three times, slowly."

I drew in the slightly camphor aroma of the incense, savoring its penetrating fragrance. That, coupled with the celestial music, began to have its relaxing effect. Judy explained that she was opening her own energy field with her steady, unhurried, breathing and would easily make the connection with her guide, Tricella.

"You are beginning to reach upward with your mind . . ." said Tricella through Judy, "letting the light of the higher dimensions surround you . . . lifting you . . . and drawing you higher and higher into the realms of light where life is joyful and effortless . . ."

In just a few minutes I drifted into relaxation enveloped by a soft, fluffy cloud of soothing energy generated by her slow and deliberate speech.

". . . where all limitations fall away . . . where there is serenity and peace . . . leaving behind the denser levels of energy . . . like a bird, flying higher into a place of great light . . ."

The sensations in my body, the slight tingling in my legs, a buzzing in my head, barely perceptible at first, slipped into an awareness of weightlessness and a feeling of fading into a soft cocoon of deep space.

"Your spirit is soaring and you are going to the natural level of light that you have known is possible to live in. . . . There is a crystalline quality to this light . . . a radiant clarity . . . your soul is beginning to shine through you more clearly as you move higher and higher . . ."

I felt as though I was hovering at the edge of that moment just before I fall asleep at night. It seemed as if my body was expanding and disappearing at the same time. Judy got up and stood behind me, placing her hands a few inches from my ears when all of a sudden I felt the right side of my head expanding like a balloon. Brilliant light streamed into me, filling me with the most exquisite, indescribable sensations. Tears brimmed in my eyes and I had a sense that the denseness of my physical body had melted and been replaced with pure joy and serenity.

"What is your name?" Tricella asked. Overcome with the ecstasy of the experience, and unable to take in anything more than the physical sensations, I remained mute, unable to hold back the unexplainable tears.

Tricella said, "*Mentally thank your guide for having made this connection and bring your awareness back to ordinary reality . . . back into this room . . . coming back slowly . . . taking all the time you need to reconnect to earth plane reality . . . slowly coming back . . . and at your own time and your own pace, stretching your body and opening your eyes.*"

I blinked a few times to refocus my eyes. I was feeling light and expanded and not quite all there. I searched for words to describe my experience, but all I could say was "Wow!"

Judy quickly came out of her trance, took my hands in hers, squeezed them, and said, "You are positively glowing!" She bent to hug me, and I could see from the huge smile on her face that she was delighted at having connected me to my guide.

Judy continued her instruction. "To channel you must develop the ability to use your right-brain and left-brain at the same time. It is going to take practice to learn to let go and receive the higher flow of information and at the same time, speak or write. The more you channel, the more light you bring in, and the more you will think in higher ways even when you aren't channeling. Let's take you back into the trance state and ask your guide to answer some questions, OK?"

"Uh, OK, I guess. I feel sort of fuzzy though."

"That's good, it will make it easier to get back into the trance," said Judy.

When I reconnected, Tricella asked me to speak as my guide. "*What is your name?*" she asked.

The first word that came into my mind was *Gabriel*. The cells in my body surrendered to a coherence of a sense of rightness about the name. "Gabriel," I said,

awe-struck at the experience of straddling two dimensions at the same time. I was fully conscious, aware of the warmth of the room and the incongruous crashing sound of the garbage truck outside, and yet, I was in another world as well—one of wonder and buoyancy and brilliant light.

"Welcome, Gabriel." said Tricella. She asked some general questions about the nature of the universe. I spoke the words that came into my right-brain, astonished to notice my own thoughts running along side in my left-brain as I received words and impressions, both bewildered and enraptured by what was happening.

Tricella continued asking questions of Gabriel for about ten more minutes before she brought me out of my trance. *"Thanking Gabriel for this connection you've made today, bring your awareness slowly back into the room. . . . taking your time . . . stretching your body and slowly opening your eyes."*

"You did great! How do you feel?"

"Wonderful," I said. "I feel like I've had a double dose of Valium."

Judy smiled a knowing smile and said, "That's enough accessing alternate reality for your first time. It takes a lot of practice to receive your guide's messages clearly. He has to get used to your energy systems and make adjustments in his transmission method. The people who get good at this are those who practice with diligence."

"OK," I said dreamily, feeling as though I had not a care in the world.

Judy looked at her watch. "It's almost 12:30 and channeling makes me so hungry. Let's go to Santiago's and I'll buy you a burrito."

"Yeah, I'm hungry too." I wiggled my feet into my shoes and slowly stood up. She turned off the tape player and blew out the candles. I gathered my purse and steno pad and followed her out of the room. It felt as if there were a cushion of air between my feet and the carpet. *I guess this is what they mean when they talk about being on cloud nine, I thought, or maybe I'm in seventh heaven!* Seeing my reflection in the hall mirror I thought, *My God, I am glowing. I guess this is what Judy means by being blissed out.*

It looked to me like Judy was on cloud nine herself, her smile as radiant as the afternoon sun. "I want you to practice every day," she said, holding the car door open for me. "That's the only way you'll maintain your ability to verbally channel."

Lunch did little to diminish my glow and I still felt like I was floating when Judy drove me back to my car. As we hugged goodbye in the driveway she said, "Call

LuminEssence as soon as you get to your office and tell Georgia that you have channeled and you want to sign up for the *Awakening Your Light Body* class."

"Well, I need to talk to Dave. It's a lot of time away. He doesn't like to be alone. It's a lot of money, too. We can't afford it right now." Even though I had no idea what it meant to awaken my light body, my stomach quivered with excitement.

Judy waved away the objection. "The Universe always supports spiritual growth. The money will show up; don't worry."

"Right," I said, "anything is possible," not totally believing it.

Driving home my thoughts turned to my husband, Dave. I wondered what he would say when I told him I got blissed out at Judy's today, and that I want to take a class called *Awakening Your Light Body*, and that it takes place in the Bay Area, and that it is one, 4-day weekend per month for three consecutive months, and that it costs over \$1500—plus meals and lodging!

Chapter Four

Dave

Dave is my third husband. We'd met in November of 1981 when his sister, Sylvia, introduced us. Dave's wife of twenty years had served him with divorce papers three months earlier, and hating to be alone, he visited Sylvia frequently.

Just a few months before, on my forty-third birthday, I had torn up my list of "Mr. Right" requirements:

6 feet tall
curly hair
drives a sports car
an entrepreneur or high level executive
a feminist
emotionally sensitive

I'd made a passionate plea to the Universe: "Young or old, short or tall, thin or fat," I had tearfully implored, hugging my pillow to my solar plexus, "bring me a man who will love me intensely and deeply."

It had been almost seven years since I'd ended my sixteen-year, second marriage. I never thought I would be single for so long. Elmer Drennon was a nice man who had adopted my daughter, Kaydee, from my first marriage, and with whom I'd had three more children. When I had read *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, then subscribed to *Ms Magazine* in the late 60s, a pinpoint of light had entered my consciousness that changed everything. Until then, I was a typical 50s housewife who believed that men were superior, and that my job was to get a man and keep him happy. I'd divorced, not to be single, but to find a mate who could be happy with the self-actualized woman I was struggling to become.

* * *

Sylvia and her significant other of fourteen years, Brian, had bought their Palo Alto bungalow through me three years earlier. I'd often spent evenings in their redwood hot tub, drinking wine, talking about my romantic relationships or lack thereof, and

lamenting that “all the desirable men were already married.” They were anxious for me to meet Dave.

Brian greeted me with a hearty hug. I could hear Sylvia's laughter coming through the kitchen as Brian ushered me into the living room. I tried to look calm as I prepared myself for the small talk game.

Sylvia came into the room carrying a pair of green, polyester slacks. Dave was a half-step behind.

“Jennifer, meet Dave. Dave, Jennifer.”

“Hi,” we both said at once. Of average height and stocky build, Dave had dark brown, straight hair that was neatly parted on the right and plastered with Brylcreem.

“We've been doing laundry and I told Dave I'm gonna do him a favor and toss these out,” said Sylvia, waving the green slacks in the air. “I don't think even the Goodwill would take them!” Sylvia's laughing eyes supported her gentle teasing.

There was something about Dave that I liked; something very subtle that I couldn't put into words.

We chit-chatted about Sylvia's Hamburg Steinway Concert Grand piano that had just arrived from Germany. Brian served us wine and then retreated to the kitchen to help Sylvia get dinner on the table.

The meandering dinner conversation settled on the difficulties Dave was having with his twenty-year-old step-son who remained at home after Dave's soon-to-be ex-wife had moved out.

“Tough love is the only way to deal with him,” I said firmly. “You've got to let him suffer the consequences of his actions. If you keep bailing him out, he'll never learn to be self-sufficient.” I told him about the trials I'd had when my older son was a senior in high school. A short time after I'd booted him out, he got a job, a car, and his GED and was now married with two kids and a well-paying corporate job.

“I see what you're saying. But it's hard to see him suffer, and it seems mean not to step in and fix things for him.”

“Believe me, you'll be doing him a favor. Your faith in his ability to solve his own problems is not mean. You're recognizing his adulthood. It's time to become his mentor instead of his keeper.”

"You're right. I know you're right. Thanks."

"You're welcome." I picked up my wine glass. "To Dave," I said, "a man who recognizes hard-won wisdom when it is offered." Dave smiled and picked up his wine glass. We made eye contact as we clinked our glasses. *He's a nice guy, but not my type. Anyway, he needs time to find himself,* I thought as I returned his gaze.

While Sylvia was in the kitchen whipping the cream for the chocolate mousse and Brian was making the espresso, Dave said, "As soon as the house sells I want to buy something on this side of the bay to be closer to work. Maybe you could help me find a good buy."

Always eager to acquire a new client I gave Dave my full attention. He continued, "We could meet for lunch and talk about the real estate possibilities here in Palo Alto. It would be nice to live closer to my office and to Sylvia."

We made an appointment for a few days hence. We finished the evening with Sylvia playing the piano and with me singing along, my shyness overshadowed by the effects of the wine; Dave and Brian sat on the sofa sipping their espresso and applauding after every number.

I hugged Brian and Sylvia goodbye, shook Dave's hand and said, "See you at noon on Wednesday."

* * *

Dave arrived at 11:45. I smiled and waved him into my office, cradling the telephone between my chin and shoulder, hastily making order of the pile of open files on my desk. I pointed to one of the two armchairs facing my desk. Holding up my index finger, I mouthed, "I'll just be a second," and brought the telephone conversation to an end.

"I guess I'm a little early," he said. "I wasn't sure about the traffic around here at lunchtime."

"No problem," I said as I came around my desk and shook his hand. I directed him to my car, a one year-old, white Ford LTD with a maroon hardtop. I drove to the restaurant where I had made reservations, and over lunch, asked him the standard qualifying questions. His answers revealed him to be a middle-manager, with stable employment, and a good salary, making him a qualified buyer, though he had no idea of what he was looking for. I offered to do a computer printout of listings in his price range and to take him on a drive-by tour to get a feel for what appealed to him. Checking my Day-Timer I asked, "How about Friday afternoon about 3 o'clock?"

"Sounds good," said Dave. He emptied his coffee cup, swiped his napkin back and forth across his mustache and placed the crumpled linen on the table. He pulled his wallet from his back pocket as the waiter placed the lunch check in front of him, but I deftly reached across the table to claim it. "It's a business expense," I said.

"Please," he said with such sincere intensity that I hesitated, "let me get it." Before I could object, he had it in his grasp saying, "Really . . . I insist."

I withdrew my hand. "Well, um, thanks," I said thinking, *How quaint, at 41, he is a gentleman from the old school.* I was used to splitting the tab during these early years of feminism.

When we returned to my office, he pointed out his car in the parking lot. "It's the pumpkin over there," he said of the yellow-orange, three-year-old Toyota Corolla with the crinkled right front fender and slightly askew bumper. I parked my car next to his and turned off the ignition. When I turned to him to say goodbye, he said, "As my Realtor, it would probably be a good idea for you to see the house I am selling in Hayward. We could go after our drive-by tour and while we are on that side of the bay, we could go to Jack London Square for dinner."

Momentarily stunned, I felt as if I were in freeze-frame mode. *Did he just ask me for a date?*

"You could give me your opinion about whether the Hayward Realtor has the house priced right," he coaxed.

Well, he is Sylvia's brother, so he's not a regular client. Anyway, he seems very nice. Maybe I am reading it wrong. Maybe he really does just want me to see his house so I can help him get it sold.

"Hayward is out of my area of expertise. I have no idea what the property values are there."

He responded by asking me if I'd ever been to Jack London Square and when I said "no" he described the setting. "It's right on the bay. The restaurant overlooks the docks where the sailboats are moored. It is really pretty this time of year. I'd really like to take you there."

He was asking me for a date!

"Besides, I do need to sell the house before I buy something else. I'm sure you could speed up the process if you could just see the house."

Something inside me spontaneously overruled my common sense and I did something I had never done in my three-year real estate career. I agreed to a social engagement with a client I had not yet sold. *I must be crazy*, I thought, *what made me say yes?* Smiling to mask my conflict I said, "Well, I guess I'd better get into the office and start the computer search so I'll have something to show you."

"Yeah, see you Friday," Dave said. His smile made the ends of his mustache curl up and his hazel eyes twinkled behind his horn-rimmed glasses.

* * *

After a two hour tour of potential properties, we drove back to my office so we could get Dave's car for the trip across the bay. "Oops, sorry for the mess," he said, as though noticing the disorder for the first time. I patiently waited while he tossed the out-dated copies of the *Wall Street Journal*, piled haphazardly on the passenger seat, into the back seat to join the fast-food wrappers, squashed Styrofoam coffee cups and bundle of dirty clothes to be washed at Sylvia's.

He had reserved a window table at an elegant, linens-and-crystal-and-heavy-silverware, Italian restaurant on the waterfront. We could see the lazily swaying sailboats and hear their rigging lines clang, clang, in rhythm with the slap, slap, of the waves against the pier.

We fell into easy conversation, first talking about Dave's love of boats, and how his ex-wife was getting their boat in the divorce settlement, then what it is like being single, me the veteran and he the neophyte. I was surprised when he shyly confessed that he had been bowled over by how together I was and wondered if he could keep up with me! I told him how much that was not the case! That underneath I was scared and anxious about doing the right thing and being able to survive. "I can't believe it," he said. "You look so confident, and I have never met anyone like you! You're bright, and literate and can talk intelligently about so many things, and all your business knowledge . . . you have vision and life experience and seem so at ease!"

"Well, I can assure you, I'm not," I said. "I'm just doing the best I can to survive."

After dinner we strolled to the end of the dock to watch the clouds turn pink, then orange. "I love these Indian Summer evenings," I said and then turned the conversation back to business, offering a few suggestions to make his Hayward house more saleable.

On our drive home he mentioned that he and Brian and Sylvia had gone to Ashland, Oregon, to the Shakespeare Festival a few months earlier, "Do you enjoy live theatre?" he asked.

"I love the theatre," I replied. "I used to have season's tickets to the California Actor's Theatre in Los Gatos when I lived in San Jose."

"What a clever pun," laughed Dave.

"Pun?"

"Gato means cat in Spanish and the initials for the California Actor's Theatre are C.A.T."

This guy is smart!

Two days later he called me at the office to ask if I'd like to go to Ashland with him to the Shakespeare Festival two weekends hence. More than somewhat taken aback, I nevertheless mentally reviewed my bank balance and told him I really couldn't afford a trip right then. He responded that it would be his treat, and besides, he had already booked a flight, reserved the theatre tickets and he really hoped I would accept!

Confusion spun through my head. Much as I enjoyed his company I had no romantic feelings toward him, yet I didn't want to hurt his feelings, either. I stuttered and stumbled and tried to find the words to tell him I'd consider going for the adventure of superb live theatre, but that "I . . . uh . . . um . . . would need to have my own room."

"Of course, I've booked separate rooms!" he said with rush of words wrapped in sincerity. "I just wanted to share my joy of the theatre with you!" Relieved, I said, "in that case, I'd be delighted!"

He began stopping by my office most every evening about 5:25, the end of his corporate workday, but several hours before my normal quitting time. He'd ask if I'd like a glass of wine at The Gatehouse Restaurant, which was a few blocks away. Sometimes I'd say "yes." Most days I was too buried in paperwork.

The following week he had a dozen long-stemmed, red roses delivered to my office, timed to arrive when I was conducting my weekly staff meeting.

"Who is that nice man who keeps following you around?" asked one of the agents in my office.

"Oh, that's no one. It's just Dave. He's the brother of one of my clients. He's newly single and lonely. I've been showing him some property."

“Well, he’s the nicest guy we’ve ever seen hanging around you.”

“He is? Hmm.” Those comments from a neutral third party, the roses, and his genuine interest in me and my work, caused me to begin to take Dave seriously. *Throw away the Brylcreem, take him to my hair stylist for a mustache trim, haircut and lesson in blow drying his hair, trade in the horn-rimmed glasses for gold frames, replace the bargain basement shoes with a nice pair of Florsheim’s. . . .*

One day, while waiting at The Gatehouse Restaurant for a client to arrive for lunch, I ran into Sylvia who took the opportunity to ask me how I felt about Dave. “He’s a really nice guy and I enjoy his company, but he is so newly single, and his divorce isn’t even final. I really don’t want to get deeply involved . . . you know, be the transition woman . . . don’t need to do *that* again! Anyway, he needs to get out and explore the single world.”

“Dave’s divorce was made in heaven,” said Sylvia. “He’s been miserable for years, but he takes commitment very seriously. Divorce was never an option for him. Our whole family is so grateful that his wife left him so he could have a chance to find someone he can be happy with. He’s just a really nice guy.”

I’ve known Sylvia for a few years, and have even met her parents when I went to her piano recital last year. Even though I have just met Dave, it’s not like he is a total stranger, and I like Sylvia a lot. Besides didn’t I just plead with the Universe to bring me someone who would love me?

When we’d go out for a drink or dinner we’d often end up at Brian and Sylvia’s for lively discussions on intellectually challenging topics that also included lots of humor of the dry wit variety. I loved being so completely engaged in stimulating conversation. It reminded me of watching my parents indulge in their friendly battle of wits with which they entertained themselves. They had an intense relationship that was sexy, romantic, and totally excluded me and my younger sister. When I turned sixteen and got my driver’s license, they often had me drive while they smooched in the back seat. I had felt invisible to them all my years growing up, longing for the day I would be a grown-up and could have someone who paid as much attention to me as they paid to each other.

A few days before our scheduled Ashland trip, Dave and I had gone to dinner and then to Brian and Sylvia’s. In the midst of a spirited conversation about the sexual freedom of the 70s and 80s, and about Brian’s and Sylvia’s rationale that marriage is nothing more than a piece of paper that they had chosen to eschew, I, the only smoker in the group who would have to go outside to indulge my habit, flush with the glow of too much wine said, spontaneously and from out of nowhere, that I either wanted to have a cigarette or make love!

Brian and Sylvia sprang into action. They tossed the couch cushions to the floor, Brian flipped the sofa into a bed which was already made up with sheets and a blanket, Sylvia tossed two pillows on it, dimmed the lights and closed the door behind them leaving Dave and me alone. It had been too long since I'd been in a love relationship, and Dave had been sexually estranged from his ex for a year before she filed for divorce. The passion that had been dormant in both of us, combined with the copious wine we'd consumed, dissolved my reticence as I eagerly slipped into Dave's embrace. We talked softly as I cautioned Dave to not expect too much from his performance, given how long it had been (not to mention the wine!). He kissed me with vigor, his hunger for love voracious, and tenderly made love for the longest time. This was no ordinary man!

We lay together, talking, I don't remember about what. I just remember feeling very special and cared for. Now I really *did* want a cigarette. We dressed and tried to quietly put the sofa back together, but came up short one couch cushion. Oh well. It was long past midnight as we sat on Brian and Sylvia's front porch, me smoking a cigarette, talking with Dave, and in the back of my mind processing this new information about his prowess and capacity as a lover.

For more information or to purchase the book please visit:
<http://www.jennifergrainger.com/book.htm>

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